



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Of Mice and Men

The prophet Isaiah refers to the flood as the “waters of Noah,” implying that Noah bears at least partial responsibility for the flood. If Noah had taught his generation to emulate G-d’s character traits and live properly, they surely would have corrected their immoral behavior and the flood would have been averted.

Maimonides once had a dispute with a non-Jewish philosopher as to whether instinct or behavioral training governs the

behavior of an animal. The philosopher held that an animal can be trained so completely that it can be made to do almost anything. To prove his point, he painstakingly trained a number of cats to stand upright, balance trays on their paws and serve as waiters. He dressed them for the part in white shirts with little black ties, and conducted a banquet with the cats as the waiters. As these feline waiters were serving the soup, Maimonides, who had been invited to the banquet, released a mouse. The banquet room was turned to pandemonium as the cats, forgetting all their hours of

training, let their trays crash to the ground, rushing about on all fours after the mouse.

Without training, a person’s baser instincts and desires will drag him onto all fours. However, a human being is different from the animals because he can perfect his character so that it controls his baser instincts. One who has not yet worked on perfecting his character will, like the trained cat, be able to put on a show of discipline for a time, but only so long as no “mice” are released in his path. With effort, practice and the guidance of Torah learning, the character can be developed to a state of sanctity that can save the world.

Love of the Land

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

What’s in a Name

*“Malki-Tzedek, King of Shalem, brought out bread and wine.”
(Genesis 14:18)*

“Abraham called that place G-d Yireh.” (Genesis 22:14)

son of Noah — and his descendant Abraham, were referring to the site upon which stands Jerusalem (whose Biblical name is Yireh-shalem).

The Midrash relates that when G-d wished to name His holy city, He faced, as it were, a Divine dilemma.

These two verses, which mention both Malki-Tzedek — otherwise known as Shem,

“If I call it Yireh like Abraham did, the righteous Shem will feel slighted, and if I call it *Shalem* like Shem did, the righteous Abraham will feel slighted. I will therefore call it *Yireh-Shalem* like both of them called it.”

Shaleim means both peace and perfection, while *Yireh*, as the commentary *Targum Onkelos* translates, means human service of G-d. Only when man serves G-d can he hope to achieve the peace and perfection symbolized by *Yirehshalem* - Jerusalem.

The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

In the Heat of the Moment

I study in Jerusalem, where in the summer months it can get really hot. Up until a few years ago, the study hall had no air conditioning. They had two fans, one at each end of the hall and one ceiling fan in the center of the room. In those days I used

to sit with my study partner right under the ceiling fan. The fan was old and hardly worked, but right under it you felt some breeze.

Every morning an elderly man came in who always wore his hat and jacket, even on the hottest of days. One day he walked in, with his hat and jacket, sat down next to my table and started to study. A short time later he got up, went to the switch of the ceiling fan and shut it off. I began to fume inside and said to myself “What *chutzpa!* He’s not even part of our yeshiva and on such a hot day he

shuts off the fan?” One minute later he got up and turned it on again, and only then was it clear to me what had happened.

It was an old and slow working fan. He must have mistakenly thought that it was on the lowest setting and that he was turning it higher. Afterwards, when he realized that he had turned it off, he went and turned it on again. The fan story taught me again to judge others favorably and oftentimes simply to wait a bit to try and understand other people’s behavior. Jumping to conclusions or losing one’s temper could embarrass another person unnecessarily, or make a hot day even hotter.

Response Line

Ephraim from Jerusalem wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Time magazine (March 25, '96) had an article about a six-year old girl, or two six-year old girls rather, with two heads and one body. They're like 2 totally different people with different personalities and preferences. They have separate urges to eat, sleep and go to the bathroom. What if anything does Judaism say about such a situation? Is there any source in the Talmud that talks about this? Would they be considered one person or two?*

Dear Ephraim,

Ever hear the phrase, “Nothing’s

new under the sun?”

The Talmud records an exchange in which Phlimo asked

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, “A person with two heads, upon which head does he place the tefillin?” Rabbi Yehuda thought Phlimo was merely jesting, when suddenly someone arrived and announced, “My wife had a baby with two heads! How much must I give for the redemption of the first-born?”

The Talmud concludes that the father must give double the normal amount. The Torah says that the first-born must be redeemed at “five [*sela'im*] per head.” So for a child with two heads, the father must give ten [*sela'im*].

Of course, from the above case, you can’t necessarily extrapolate to other cases, because there are two different ways to understand it:

- Since the father gives double, they must be considered two people, or
- they are one person who simply pays extra for the extra head.

According to the Midrash, a two-headed man lived in the time of King Solomon. He fathered six normal children and a seventh with two heads like himself. When the father died, the son with two heads came before King Solomon demanding a double share of the inheritance. King Solomon covered one head and poured hot water on the other. “Ouch!” both heads cried out. From this King Solomon meant to show that genetically they are one, and should be judged as one regarding inheritance. The Talmud, however, does not record this incident.

There’s really nothing new under the sun: Adam and Eve, says the Talmud, were created as a single male/female being with two faces. The subsequent creation of Eve was actually the splitting of the male and female into two separate parts.