

# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

Published by OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL • Jerusalem, Israel

6 Cheshvan 5760 • October 16, 1999 • Parshat Noach • No. 56

## Light Insight

### WorldView

*"Let Canaan be a slave to [Shem and Yafet]" (Genesis 9:25)*

**W**hy did Canaan, offspring of Ham, have to be a slave to the descendants of both Shem and Yafet?

The name Yafet connotes beauty and aesthetic appreciation. Yafet was the progenitor of Yavan — father of Greek civilization. Thus it is that Greek civilization emphasizes "Beauty" as an absolute value.

Ham means "hot." It implies wild, unbridled animal energy.

On one level of meaning we learn from the early narratives of the Torah how G-d created our human psychological make-up, and how G-d wants us to conduct ourselves. Our Sages teach us from this verse the following insight: The civilizing effects of

a e s t h e t i c s  
(Yafet) can raise us to dominate

our physical desires (Ham) to a level where we can make the leap from the sensual to the aesthetic; from "the world is what I can feel" to "the world is what I can think."

Only then can we ascend to the level of "the world is beyond what I can think." That's the level of Shem.

That's why it was necessary for Canaan to be yoked to both Yafet and Shem. For without an "apprenticeship" under Yafet, our baser natures find it hard to make the great leap from the physical to the spiritual.

The Jewish People are descended from Shem. It is our purpose to proclaim to the world not only that faith is not contradictory to intellect, but that Man can aspire to that which is beyond intellect. As Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch put it:

"An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to comprehend truth does not make it untrue."

### Jewish Dietetics

*"Come all who are thirsty...go to the water...get wine and milk."*

*(Isaiah 55:1)*

**J**ust as water, wine and milk keep best in plain inexpensive containers, so Torah, which satisfies the thirst of all who learn it, stays with one who is humble.

The revealed part of Torah is like water: Just as the human body cannot exist without water, so the Jewish People cannot survive spiritually without the revealed Torah.

The secrets of the Torah are like wine: They must be imbibed with care and are not equally tolerated by all.

The *midrashim* of the Torah are like milk and honey: They are sweet and nourishing, instilling love and fear of G-d.

*The Ohr Somayach  
International  
Twenty Seventh  
Anniversary Dinner*

*wednesday November 17, 1999  
at the pierre Hotel, New York*

*Honoring*

*— Judy & Paul Konigsberg  
— Barbara & Paul Seidenberg*

*Peter Madoff Seymour W. Zises  
Dinner Chairmen*

*For reservations contact Ohr Somayach International  
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## ETHICS of the FATHERS

*“If someone’s fear of sin takes precedence over his wisdom — his wisdom will survive. However, if wisdom takes precedence over fear of sin — then his wisdom will not survive.”*

**W**hat if the two are equal? The Talmud teaches us that whether one is wise or foolish in Torah is predestined. The ‘fear of sin’ mentioned in here enables one to annul that prenatal decree. It enables him to achieve wisdom even if he was destined to be a fool, in accordance with the Talmudic dic-

tum that retaining Torah wisdom depends on the Heavenly assistance one receives.

If a person’s ambition for wisdom takes precedence over the fear of sin which earns him Divine assistance, however, and he learns Torah for selfish motivations rather than for the purpose of fulfilling G-d’s Will, he will be thwarted by Heaven in his efforts to achieve true wisdom. Even if he was predestined to be a wise man, perhaps it will manifest itself in other areas, outside of Torah.

Where the two have equal significance for him, he is left to his predestined fate and will be wise or otherwise as was decreed.

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## Response Line

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### Raven Maven

*Kalman Estrin wrote:*

*In a conversation a few months ago, a friend raised the following question. The raven is specifically identified in the story of Noah as the first bird that Noah sends out in search of land. The Raven is also given special prominence in the dietary laws concerning which birds are clean and which are not. Is there a special significance and symbolism connected to the raven?*

Dear Kalman,

Noah sent the raven to find out the state of the world. Since the raven is a bird of prey, it would return with carrion of man or beast if the water had abated to that degree. The raven failed, however, flying back and forth time after time.

Why did Noah send a raven specifically? According to the Talmud, G-d forbade procreation on

the Ark, but the ravens.”

the raven violated this prohibition.

Therefore, Noah reasoned that of

all the birds, the raven was the safest one to send out on this dangerous mission. That way, if the raven didn’t survive it wouldn’t mean the extinction of its species.

Also, the ancients considered the raven a portent of the future. They would build special cages where the priests would study the motions and flying formations of the ravens. They interpreted these movements as divinations of the future. In this sense, the raven’s mission was successful, since Noah could discern from the raven’s flying patterns something about the future.

Also, the raven reminds us of G-d’s kindness to even the most helpless of creatures. How? Ravens are cruel to their young, leaving them to die of starvation. But G-d has mercy on them, and provides them with insects to eat. Thus, sending the raven may have been Noah’s way of asking G-d “Please provide for us, just as you provide for the poor helpless young

### Another Day!

*Evan Libeskind wrote:*

*Why do all Jewish Holidays start at sundown?*

Dear Evan Libeskind,

In the Jewish calendar, the day begins with the evening. This is true not only for the holidays, but for any calendar date. For example, a baby born in the evening has a different birth-date than a baby born before sundown. Why is this so?

In describing the order of Creation, the Torah says “There was darkness on the face of the deep; and G-d said ‘Let there be light’ and there was light.” Clearly, the darkness existed before the light. Similarly, the description of each day ends with the phrase “and it was evening, and it was morning...” Again, the evening precedes the morning. Thus, the Jewish day begins in the evening.

This symbolizes classic Jewish optimism: If it’s dark in the beginning, don’t despair! It will end in great light!