



Parashat Vaera 5770

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10 Relationships between Maran Ha-Rav Kook and Various Gedolei Yisrael that the Yeshiva World Should Know Part 5

[Collected by Mordechai Friedfertig.

Ha-Rav Aviner Shlit"a encouraged spreading its message]

7. Ha-Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik: The Glory of the Generation

The Brisker Rav wrote to Maran Ha-Rav Kook requesting help for a yeshiva student beginning with these words: "Great blessing for the honor of Ha-Rav Ha-Gaon, Ha-Gadol, the Famous One, the Glory of the Generation... The Prince of Torah, Our Teacher, Ha-Rav R' Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Shlit"a Kook. The Chief Rabbi in Jerusalem..." And Ha-Griz ended the letter: "I conclude with a blessing for all goodness for the glory of his genius Shlit"a, I respect and cherish the exalted nature of the glory of his genius with all feelings of respect and value."

Ha-Rav Yosha Ber (Ha-Rav Berel Soloveitchik), Ha-Griz's son and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Brisk following his father, once spoke harshly against Zionism. He was asked: And what about Ha-Rav Kook? He answered: "He is a Gadol." (from Ha-Rav Zalman Baruch Melamed).

[Ha-Rav Eliezer Melamed in the article "Ha-Rav Kook and Beit Brisk" which appeared in the newspaper "Be-Sheva" 5767 and Igrot Le-Re'iyah #373]

On the Parashah The Plague of Blood

Question: "The sorcerers of Egypt did the same by means of incantations, and Pharaoh's heart was strong and he did not listen to them, as Hashem had spoken" (Shemot 7:22). Why did Hashem choose to bring plagues which the sorcerers knew how to perform?

Answer: Some explain that this is exactly how Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart by giving him the chance to think that Hashem did not perform this act, and that Moshe Rabbenu was a sorcerer. In this way, he truly did not take away his free choice. Similarly, the fact that each plague ended after a specific time was in order to provide Pharaoh with the opportunity to err as to whether it was the result of sorcery or a natural phenomenon which ended. Thus, Pharaoh was given free choice, and Hashem hardened his heart. This is like the opinion of Rabbi Yosef Albo in Sefer Ha-Ikarim, that hardening Pharaoh's heart was providing him with the opportunity to err. And Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin explained homiletically: The wonder of drowning humanity in a valley of blood, non-Jewish magicians always knew how to perform this.

Rav Aviner on... "Supernatural Power – Is There Such a Thing?"

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Parashat Vayechi 5767]

Question: Recently, a man who professes to have abnormal powers enabling him to uncover secrets, read people's thoughts, influence objects from a distance and other para-psychological acts, has been looking for an heir, and most of the candidates are demonstrating their wonders on Television. It looks very convincing. Is there any truth in this? What kinds of powers do they possess?

Answer: Our great master, the Rambam, enumerates three reliable sources for a man's knowledge: intellect, experience and prophecy. The rest, he says, is nonsense.

By "intellect" [Hebrew "sechel"] he means clear theoretical proofs. By "experience" [Hebrew "nisayon"] he means phenomena we encounter through our senses, without any possibility of it being a delusion. As for "prophecy" [Hebrew "nevu'a"] he includes "Ruach Ha-Kodesh", divinely inspired intuition (Igrot Ha-Rambam, Ha-Rav Shilat Edition, 479).

As far as the abnormal powers mentioned above, (1) obviously there is no source in the Torah alluding to any of them. (2) Logically, such powers contradict well-established laws of science. For example, parapsychologists argue that telepathic brain waves operate with the same intensity at a distance of one meter or a thousand kilometers, which contradicts Coulomb's Inverse Square Law, which states that an electromagnetic or gravitational force decreases in accordance with the squaring of the distance. Likewise rays are blocked by a wall of lead or by a mesh of conducting material, i.e., a "Faraday Cage".

What remains is the empirical or experiential aspect, yet let it be said right away that anecdotal evidence, no matter how reliable it might be, has no value as scientific testimony. Such evidence provides nothing more than a point of origin for scientific research. Science has no prejudices. It rejects nothing. Yet it accepts nothing without proven arguments, and it is systematically suspicious if something contradicts the known laws of nature. Generally speaking, parapsychologists tend not to cooperate with scientific researchers. Indeed, the more systematic and critical is the research, the less parapsychology passes the test.

In any event, one-time incidents have no scientific validity, because “reproductibility” is the cornerstone of the scientific method, in other words, the ability to recreate an attempt in any laboratory.

Parapsychology is not a new claim. Rather, it is thousands of years old. For over 120 years it has been researched scientifically, including by scientists with a sympathetic bent for it, but in the meantime nothing has been proven.

There are performers who recreate all the phenomena of parapsychology by way of known tricks, and they earn a living entertaining people in this way. This, as well, requires halachic deliberation (see Chochmat Adam, Klal 89:6 and Shut Yechaveh Daat 3:68). Yet there is a serious problem when people believe they are encountering extrasensory perception, and they lose their ability to be critical. For someone devoid of scientific education, telepathy seems no more strange than a radio. Quite the contrary, it seems simpler, because it requires no apparatus.

Unfortunately, there is a widespread phenomenon at work here which is called the “flight from reason”. This is causing a nationwide renaissance for parapsychology. The Society of American Magicians has taken upon itself a permanent challenge: to recreate any act whose perpetrator claims to have performed with supernatural powers. So far, they have met the challenge. Their achievements include mind-reading; telling the future; bending spoons by non-miraculous means; psychological and technological pranks and sleight-of-hand. The magicians have had impressive success, pulling rabbits out of hats; cutting people in half and attaching them back together again; guessing people’s I.D. numbers and then pulling the I.D. card out of the neck of its owner; levitating objects without touching them; making an elephant disappear; or even the Eiffel Tower...

In 1964, the magician James Randi, an expert at deceiving crowds, offered a thousand dollar reward to anyone who could prove, under scientific scrutiny, the existence of abnormal, supernatural forces. In the meantime, the reward has grown to a million dollars, and no one has won it. When candidates become aware that they must be tested by scientists, most of them refuse to sign their consent to those stipulations. Even those who have gone ahead, numbering more than a thousand, have not passed muster.

In 1976, CSI was founded, for the scientific investigation of supernatural claims. The organization includes university scientists, magicians and even the Science Fiction writer Isaac Asimov. It has exposed attempts to deceive the masses, such as “paralyzed” persons who suddenly rose from their wheelchairs when they really had never been sick; or spiritual healers who know the secrets of their patients, but who

gain their knowledge through trespassing the patients' computers, or by way of a disguised assistant who talks with the patient and then informs the healer of the information behind the scenes.

The one Israeli most famous for such pranks was investigated by researchers and did not succeed in deceiving them. They exposed his deceptions and documented them with the aid of a video camera. He then sued CSI for libel, lost the case, and was slapped with a large fine. He then sued his own lawyers for inferior defense, and lost once more. One has to wonder how someone who professes to know the future didn't know in advance that he would lose the case.

In general, those who argue that supernatural powers exist do not dare to bring back the dead or to guess what will succeed in the stock market or the number that will win the big lottery number. They also do not create money out of nothing. Otherwise, they wouldn't need to work in this profession.

Here are several examples of how it works: Bending spoons is a simple deception. The spoon is bent to begin with, and it seems to slowly bend out of shape through its being held in a particular manner, employing circular motions. Another method is this: Hold the spoon between the thumb and the index finger in such a manner that the handle will be concealed by the hand, and such that through finger movements the spoon will look bent. Anyone standing nearby will immediately discern this.

What about those wonder workers who bend the spoons of television spectators with the help of their thoughts? Indeed, later on hundreds of spectators call up after finding bent spoons in their homes. Certainly, out of a million spectators, there will always be several hundred with bent spoons in their homes.

The same applies as far as watch-fixing through the television. The spectator is requested to pick up and to put down his broken watch several times, and to move it right and left several times. If the watch is mechanical, sometimes a speck of dust that was stopping it up falls out. If it is battery operated, sometimes such a watch can start working again for a short while if you move it around. If a million people are watching the show, several hundred will call up, swamping the studio with their success stories, and this makes a big impression. When this happens, those who did not succeed, accounting for 99%, attribute their failure to not have concentrated sufficiently.

I will not tire the readers by elaborating on the methods of counterfeit telepathy, counterfeit telekinesis, etc. Let me just say this: Please! Do not lose your ability to be critical. Believe in the miracles publicized in the Written and Oral Torah. Believe in miracles that science has proven. But don't be like the fool who believes everything he hears.

Family Matters

Ha-Rav writes weekly for the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

"And he will rule over you" (Bereshit 3:16) - Part 2

Question: Why does the man rule? Is he more "equal"?

Answer: No, both members of the marriage are equal. The wife being "ruled" over by her husband is a curse, which appears after listening to the snake. Since then the world has been "manly". It is an unhealthy world and has lead to much distress. Not only do women suffer, but the men do as well. The remedy is reunification. Return to "The bone of my bones" and "the flesh of my flesh" (Bereshit 2:23). This remedy is found among the Nation of Israel: Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Rachel and Yaakov and Leah. We must not be enticed by the corrupt snake which crawls on the ground, but we must repair with love and brotherhood, peace and friendship.

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