

## Rabbi's Article II -Lik" S Vol 20, Noach (I)

### *The Absolute Certainty in Knowing is Based Upon Faith*

On the very first verse of the Torah-portion, "Noah was a righteous man he was perfect in his generations," Rashi quotes the word, "b'doraisov -in his generation," which is seemingly superfluous, and quotes the Talmudic argument in the meaning of this word: *Some of our Sages interpret it favorably: How much more so if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had been in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance.*

The technical question here is: Noah lived<sup>1</sup> 1056-2006 (2225 BCE - 1755 BCE), and Abraham was born 1948 (1813 BCE). Meaning, that Abraham was 58 years old when Noah passed away. How then can Rashi state, "but if he had been in Abraham's generation"?! And even though, we may say that in the start of Abraham's life, he had not yet reached the level of, "Complete Tzaddik<sup>2</sup>," however, according to all opinions (see further), at the age of 58 Abraham, "knew his Creator," and (-Maimonides, Laws of Idol Worshipping, 1:3), "He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him," but through his own searching --unlike Noah, who was taught by his ancestors, hence, by the age of 58, it would already be of, "Abraham's generation"?! More so, even if we are to define, "Abraham's generation," not by the era of Abraham's personal development, but the era of his beginning to work with others, the time of (-Genesis 12:5), "and the souls they had acquired --Rashi: Whom he had brought under the wings of the Shechinah. Abraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women," which our sages state (-Avoda Zora 9a), "we have received that Abraham at the time was 52," and hence, Noah was still alive!?

To understand this, let us understand Maimonides', (a) opinion of at what age Abraham found G-d, and (b) starting his *Laws of Idol Worship* with an entire chapter of world history. The opinions concerning the age at which Abraham found G-d are (1) (-Nedarim 32a; Bereishit Rabba 30:8, according to *Reish Lokish*) 3<sup>3</sup> years old, (2) (-Bereishit Rabba 30:8, according to *Rabbi Chaninah* and *Rabbi Yochanon* in some manuscripts) 40, (3) (-Bereishit Rabba 30:8, according to *Rabbi Chaninah* and *Rabbi Yochanon* in most manuscripts) 48<sup>4</sup>, and (4) (-First opinion in *Pesikta Rabati*, Chapter 21) 50<sup>5</sup>. Maimonides states that it was at the age of 40, upon which the RABaD (-[Link](#)) comments, "There are homiletics that state 3 years old." Upon which Rabbi Yoseph Karo (-[Link](#); in his *Kesef Mishneh* on Maimonides) explains that they are not arguing, for Maimonides states, "After this mighty man was weaned he began to explore and think. Though he was a child," nevertheless, Maimonides continues with, "Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator," being that at 40 is when Abraham fully recognized G-d. And then Rabbi Yoseph Karo continues that we must say that in Maimonides' manuscripts it the number 40, "And not 48 as it is in the books." Hence, the question, why did Maimonides not follow the more widespread manuscript that it was 48? Likewise, why does Maimonides state, "After this mighty man was weaned<sup>6</sup>," and not clarify that this is at the age of three, hence a resolution to the argument between *Reish Lokish* ("3 years old") and *Rabbi Yochanon* ("40 [or 48] years old")?!

And to understand this, we will turn to Maimonides' opening chapter of the *Laws of Idol Worshipping*, in which Maimonides has three laws:

1. During the times of Enoch (-[Link](#)), mankind made a great mistake... Their mistake was as follows: They said G-d created stars and spheres with which to control the world... Accordingly, it is fitting to praise and glorify them and to treat them with honor. This was the essence of the worship of false gods, and this was the rationale of those who worshiped them. They would not say that there is no other god except for this star.
2. After many years passed, there arose people - false prophets - who told [their nations] that God had commanded them to say: Serve this star - or all the stars - sacrifice to it, offer libations to it, build a temple for it and make an image of it so that all people - including the women, the children, and the common people - could bow to it... As the years passed, [G-d's] glorious and awesome name was forgotten by the entire population. The Eternal Rock was not recognized or known by anyone in the world, with the exception of a [few] individuals: for example, Chanoch, Metushelach, Noah, Shem, and Ever. The world continued in this fashion until the pillar of the world - the Patriarch Abraham - was born.
3. After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think... Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth... He realized that there was one G-d... He began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them... Until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him...

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1. [Link](#) to timeline in Jewish History from Adam 1 (3760 BCE) to Israel signing the "Abraham Accord" with UAE and Bahrain in 5780 (2020 ACE).
2. Chassidus explains that a *Tzaddik* is defined --not only by complete righteousness of his *Thought, Speech* and *Action*, but also-- of a total absence of any *Evil Inclination*. Even more so, concerning Abraham, upon which the verses states (-Nehemiah 9:8), "And You found his heart faithful before You," we are taught that not only had Abraham accomplished (-Psalms 109:22), "And my heart is a void within me," but that he had transformed his *Animalistic Soul* into total holiness.
3. A play on the word Eikev עֵקֶב (numerical value: 172=2+100+70) of the verse (-Genesis 26:5), "Because --Eikev עֵקֶב=172: for 172 years of his 175 years of life-- Abraham hearkened to My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My instructions," meaning that he started at the age of 3.
4. Abraham was 48 at the time that the people built the *Tower of Babel* (-[Link](#)), and did not join them, meaning that he already recognized G-d --See also *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* (-Chapter 24), that at that point Abraham said the verses (-Psalms 16:6-8), "Portions have fallen to me ... I will bless the G-d, Who counseled me... I have placed G-d before me constantly."
5. A play on the first word of the *Ten Commandments*: *Onoichee* (אֶנֶכִּי), in which the *aleph* (=1) stands for Abraham, who (-Ezekiel 33:24), "One was Abraham," the *nun* (=50), for at the age of 50 Abraham find G-d, *chof* (=20) for Abraham was the 20<sup>th</sup> generation from Adam, and Abraham introduced circumcision, and the *yud* (=10), for Abraham past the 10 tests given to him by G-d.
6. We can answer that using the words, "has weaned," Maimonides is (i) giving us the reason, being that at this point Abraham was weaned, and began to explore, and (ii) being that a child is weaned at 24 months old, hence, Maimonides is pointing out that *Reish Lokish* means at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle, composed texts about it, and taught it to Isaac, his son. Isaac also taught others and turned [their hearts to G-d]. He also taught Jacob and appointed him as a teacher... [Jacob] taught others and turned [the hearts] of all those who gathered around him [to G-d]. He also taught all of his children. He selected Levi and appointed him as the leader. He established him [as the head of] the academy to teach them the way of G-d and observe the mitzvot of Abraham... When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, however, they learned from the [Egyptians'] deeds and began worshiping the stars as they did, with the exception of the tribe of Levi... Within a short time, the fundamental principle that Abraham had planted would have been uprooted... Because of G-d's love for us, and to uphold the oath He made to Abraham, our patriarch, He brought forth Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets... After Moses, our teacher, prophesied, and G-d chose Israel as His inheritance, He crowned them with mitzvot and informed them of the path to serve Him, [teaching them] the judgement prescribed for idol worshiper and all those who stray after it.

The question here is: Why would Maimonides, in his book of laws, go to such lengths in telling us the history of how idol worship began, and how monotheism was restored?!

Therefore, we must say that with this first chapter of the *Laws of Idol Worship* Maimonides is teaching us a fundamental introduction to the laws (of both, the positive commandments and the prohibitions) of idol worship --and of all the commandments, being that the prohibition of idol worship (-ibid 2:4), "Is fundamental to all of the mitzvot": Albeit that the sin of Idol Worship is also comprised of actions of worship, nevertheless, its primary essence is connected to thought. Meaning, that one must establish within his the thoughts of his mind and heart that no creation is an existence of its own.

This is the foundation that Maimonides sets up in two stages:

Law 1: "Mankind made a great mistake... Their mistake was as follows: They said G-d created stars and spheres with which to control the world. He placed them on high and treated them with honor, making them servants who minister before Him. Accordingly, it is fitting to praise and glorify them and to treat them with honor... they began to construct temples to the stars and offer sacrifices to them. They would praise and glorify them with words, and prostrate themselves before them, because by doing so, they would - according to their false conception - be fulfilling the will of G-d."

The thought here was not that G-d is not G-d, and that they created a false G-d. Rather, here Maimonides is laying the foundation that we must deeply root within our thought that there is no broker or middleman between G-d with us, nor between us with G-d! Therefore, Maimonides begins the first law in the second chapter with, "The essence of the commandment [forbidding] the worship of false gods is not to serve any of the creations, not an angel... Even if the person worshiping knows that 'n is the [true] G-d and serves the creation in the manner in which Enosh... The Torah warns us about this... This implies that the thoughts of your heart should not lead you astray to worship these and make them an intermediary between you and the Creator."

Then comes the next stage:

Law 2: "There arose people - false prophets - who told [their nations] that G-d had commanded them to say: Serve this star... This image is the source of benefit... As the years passed, [G-d's] glorious and awesome name was forgotten by the entire population... they no longer knew Him... The wise men among them would think that there is no G-d other than the stars and spheres"

The thought here was that there is no G-d, and that the "stars and spheres" were the only G-d.

Then Maimonides goes on with:

Law 3: "This mighty man (Abraham)... he began to think... wondering How is it ... without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve... Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one G-d... He knew that the entire world was making a mistake."

Meaning, that Abraham's denouncing idols, and coming to believe in G-d, came through Abraham's logic! The world itself obligates and reveals that, "there was one G-d who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other G-d among all the other entities."

With all this, Maimonides set the foundation to all of not serving idols, and of having one G-d, be intellectually perfectly clear, that there is nothing other than G-d that has its own existence, being-ness, or worth. And now we understand why Maimonides (i) chooses the age of 40, and (ii) makes no direct mention of the age 3. To have stated the age of 3 would be to allude to some form of an unnatural miracle, while the age of 40, which is (-Ethics 5:22), "At the age of 40 (one reaches the capacity of) understanding," lets us know that the mitzva is specifically of the person's intellectual capacity.

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2. For through the service of, "Conquering the world of the domain and transforming it, and thus, broadening the boundaries of holiness," one draws the, "Garments of the King," while through the service of, "Torah-study and Mitzvot-observance," one draws the, "Crown of the King."

3. Thus, our sages teach us (-Pesikta DeRav Kahana, Portion Shuva), "(-Psalms 25:8), "G-d is good and upright; therefore, He leads sinners on the road." ...They asked the Torah what the punishment is for a sinner?' She said to them, 'He will bring an Guilt Offering --which is only for an unintentional sin-- and it will atone for him.' They asked G-d, 'the sinner what is his punishment?' He said to them, 'He will do penance and it will atone for him.' This is what the verse states, 'G-d is good and upright...."

And upon this foundation, Maimonides continues in *Law 3*:

*"He began to formulate replies... and debate with them... When he overcame them through the strength of his arguments, the king desired to kill him... gathering them in city after city and country after country... he would explain to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth... He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle."*

Thus, --by stating that Abraham brought the people to denounce paganism and to embrace monotheism through logic-- Maimonides is emphasizing again, that this must be done through one's logical understanding.

This then is the meaning of, *"but if he had been in Abraham's generation..."* that Noah, in comparison, not to Abraham himself, but to Abraham's generation, *"would not have been considered of any importance."* And by calling them, *"Abraham's generation,"* we are speaking of the time when the people were going in Abraham's path of intellectually becoming crystal clear of the truth of monotheism, to the point of, *"planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle,"* within the logic of the individual himself, which was only when (-Maimonides *ibid*), *"he came to the land of Canaan (in his 70's) - proclaiming [G-d's existence the entire time] - as (-Genesis 21:33) states: 'And He called there in the name of the L-rd, the eternal G-d,'"* which was after Noah passed away.

However, let us return to Maimonides and understand, being that we explained the point of Chapter 1 being that we must logically understand monotheism, then why does Maimonides then go on in *Law 3* with, *"Descendants of Jacob... a nation within the world which knew G-d. When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, however, they learned from the [Egyptians'] deeds and began worshiping the stars as they did... Within a short time, the fundamental principle that Abraham had planted would have been uprooted, and the descendants of Jacob would have returned to the errors of the world and their crookedness..."* Meaning the opposite of the chapter's message, where now, the nation who intellectually knew G-d now learned from the Egyptians the ways of paganism?!

The answer lays in the closing of the chapter, *"Because of G-d's love for us, and to uphold the oath He made to Abraham, our patriarch, He brought forth Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets, and sent him. After Moses, our teacher, prophesied, and G-d chose Israel as His inheritance, He crowned them with mitzvot and informed them of the path to serve Him, [teaching them] the judgement prescribed for idol worshiper and all those who stray after it."*

With this Maimonides is telling us that even though the falsehood of paganism, and the truth of monotheism, is, and must be, logically understood, nevertheless, we cannot rely and build on intellect, and have intellect alone be the entire foundation, as we see that, *"a nation within the world which knew G-d learned from the [Egyptians'] deeds and began worshiping the stars"*! Rather, the way to avoid this possibility, we need to, *"He (G-d) crowned them with mitzvot and informed them of the path to serve Him,"* that the denouncing of paganism, and our faith in one G-d, be based upon it being a commandment from G-d.

Thus, in this chapter one of the *Laws of Idol Worship*, Maimonides establishes (a) the sin of idol worship is refuted also by human intellect, and that this needs to be certain in man's thought, while (b) on the other hand, the foundation to actual observance of these laws must be founded --not only on intellect, but,-- upon, *"G-d informed,"* through, *"Moses our teacher, prophesied,"* to us, *"the path to serve Him."* Meaning that actual observance must be based upon faith in G-d.

And just as the *"affirmative commandment"* of recognizing and knowing G-d's existence, cannot be based only on human intellect, --being that human intellect can only grasp the level of G-d's existence as, *"a Primary Being who brought into being all existence,"* --which happens through G-d's contracting Himself,-- but not G-d's, *"truth of His being,"*-- so too concerning the *"negation commandment,"* of *not serving idols* cannot be built upon human intellect alone --which after, *"extended their stay in"* being sunken into worldly matters, one's intellect is numbed and effected, additional to human intellect being finite creation on its own, cannot fully negate the existence of creation. Rather, the certainty of, *"nothing other than G-d exists,"* must be based upon it being a commandment from G-d, in the way of faith, for us to fully absorb this truth.