

UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM

by Rabbi
Benjamin Blech



Companion Workbook to the
original text and
six-part video series

Created by the
Orthodox Union

Workbook written by
Rabbi Eliezer Gevirtz



מצבת זכרון

ר' אליהו ב"ר אליעזר ז"ל
נפטר כ"ח שבט
וזוגתו יעטע בת ר' משה הכהן
נפטרה י' כסלו

.....

ר' יוסף ב"ר שמעון
נפטר י"ג מנחם אב
וזוגתו בילא בת ר' גדליה
נפטרה ח' אדר

.....

הילד אליהו צבי
ב"ר יוסף שמעון נ"י
נפטר י"ב מנחם אב

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Copyright 1995
All rights reserved

Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
333 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001

No portion of this work may be reproduced for
any reason without the express written permission
of the Publisher.

INTRODUCTION (PP. XVII-XXII)

CAPSULE SUMMARY

Judaism and Christianity take different approaches to the definition of the term "religious". Whereas Christianity emphasizes the primacy of creed (specifically, belief in Jesus), Judaism stresses the importance of deed (through the performance of Mitzvot). In the view of Christianity, the Torah laws given at Sinai are no longer applicable, and all that is essential for admission to heaven is simple belief in the deification of Jesus. Judaism, however, firmly rejects this assumption, and states that God's laws are eternal and still binding. Therefore, a Jew is judged on the basis of not only his belief in God, but also by the deeds he has performed.

CONTENT QUESTIONS

(Based on the Text)

1. What is the basic difference between the Jewish and Christian responses to the question, "Are you religious"? What is the philosophical basis for this difference? (pp. xvii-xviii)
2. How do Christianity and Judaism view the concept of suffering for the Original Sin of Adam and Eve? What practical differences result from these divergent views? (p. xviii)
3. What impressed George Foot Moore about the traditional Jewish view of Revelation at Sinai? (p. xix)
4. On what basis are Jews judged on the High Holy Days? (p. xix)
5. What specifically was Naomi's reaction to Ruth's wish to convert to Judaism? How can her response help point out the different approaches taken by Judaism and Christianity to potential converts? (p. xxi)
6. What role does belief in God play in determining whether one is a good Jew? What is the relationship between creed and deed in Judaism? (pp. xxi-xxii)

THOUGHT QUESTION

(Designed to Encourage Independent Examination of the Ideas in the Text)

1. Why do you think Christianity abandoned the laws found in the Torah (what they refer to as the "Old Testament")? Were all such laws rejected? What difference did it make in the history and present status of Christianity as compared to Judaism?
2. Do you feel Christianity could have come into existence if Judaism had not preceded it? Why or why not? If the answer is yes, then how might Christianity have developed differently from the way it actually did?
3. Which do you feel is more logical and spiritually nourishing _ an emphasis on creed or an emphasis on deed?
4. Can someone fulfill the Torah laws and still be a "bad Jew"? If so, how? Do such "bad Jews" exist? If so, why?
5. What role should motivation play in determining whether one receives rewards or punishments for deeds? Is it better to serve God out of love or out of fear? Why?

UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM- A STUDY GUIDE

Part I - Which is the Most Important Mitzvah? (pp.5-22)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 1: If You Had to Choose Only One Mitzvah

It is inappropriate for anyone to consider any one mitzvah as being more significant than others. This concept is underscored by a Mishnah in Ethics of our Fathers: "Be as scrupulous in performing a 'minor' mitzvah as you are with a 'major' one, for you do not know the rewards given for mitzvot." In fact, the very terms 'major' and 'minor' mitzvot are misleading, for we cannot be certain that a more difficult task is inherently more meritorious than a simple one. Only God can evaluate the value of each mitzvah, and it is our duty to perform mitzvot solely because God commands us to. It is for this reason that the Torah does not specify the reward given for performing each mitzvah: We must serve our Master not for a reward, but because it is the correct thing to do. However, the Torah did stipulate the reward of "long life" in regard to two disparate mitzvot-the most difficult act of fully honoring one's parents, and the much simpler task of shooing a mother bird away from a nest-precisely to point out that, as far as we should be concerned, the reward for both the most difficult and the easiest of mitzvot is exactly the same.

Chapter 2: If You Are in the Middle of a Mitzvah

The concept that all mitzvot are to be considered equal leads to the halachic principle that one does not have to interrupt the performance of one mitzvah in order to fulfill another one. The Talmud's source for this rule is the verse referring to (and recited in) the Shema prayer: "And you will speak them (the words of the prayer) when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way." It is only when one is occupied with his own affairs that he must stop to recite the Shema. However, if he is immersed in affairs of God (i.e., the performance of a mitzvah), he is temporarily exempt from the recitation of the Shema or any other mitzvah. For if all mitzvot carry equal weight, then it is illogical to abandon the performance of one for the performance of another.

Chapter 3: The Big and the Little

The above concept is alluded to in the Torah's statement, "And it shall come to pass as a consequence of your listening to these ordinances ... and He will love you and bless you and multiply you" (Deuteronomy 7:12-13). The Torah employs the unusual Hebrew word "eikev" (literally, "heel") here to represent the expression "as a consequence of", prompting Rashi's comment that one will gain God's blessings even if he observes a "simple" mitzvah that people normally "trample upon." Thus, it is clear that the seemingly "easy" mitzvot should be considered as weighty as those that are apparently more difficult. As a result, Judaism requires potential converts to affirm their willingness to keep all the Torah's mitzvot.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 1

Question 1. What dilemma is the Jewish prisoner confronted with? What are some of the options he might select, and what mitzvot would he be able to perform under these options?

(p. 5)

Question 2) What option did the Radbaz actually suggest? Why does the author call this a "startling" choice? What was the Radbaz's rationale for his decision? (p. 6)

Question 3. How does the Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers serve as a basis for the Radbaz's decision? What is the apparent contradiction in this Mishnah, and how can the contradiction be resolved? (pp. 6-7)

Question 4. What reasons does the author give for the statement that all mitzvot should be viewed on an equal basis? Explain the statement, "If a law comes from God, then its jurisdiction is absolute." (p. 7)

Question 5. What is the Torah basis for the belief that one is rewarded for performing mitzvot? (p. 8)

Question 6. Why might the Torah not promise specific rewards for each mitzvah, according to the Ethics of the Fathers? As a result, what word in the Shema prayer must be pronounced very carefully, and why? (pp. 9-10)

Question 7. Who were Zadok and Boethus, and how did they misinterpret Antigonus's words in the Ethics of the Fathers? How does the Torah help one to avoid their error? (p. 10)

Question 8. What are the two exceptions to the general rule that specific rewards are not guaranteed for individual mitzvot? Why were these two mitzvot singled out? (pp. 10-12)

Question 9. What event caused Rabbi Elisha Ben Avuyah to abandon his faith in the Torah's veracity? How can the term "longevity" be interpreted in an alternative way, and how can this offer a response to Rabbi Elisha Ben Avuyah's dilemma? (pp. 12-13)

Chapter 2

Question 1. According to the Talmud, what should one do if he is in the midst of performing a mitzvah and he suddenly has the opportunity to perform another mitzvah? In what specific cases does the Talmud (Mishnah) illustrate this principle? What does the Rashba add to this ruling? (pp. 14-15)

Question 2. What is the rationale behind the above principle? How does this rationale relate to the concepts emphasized in the previous chapter? (p. 15)

Question 3. From which verses in the Torah does the Talmud derive the concept that one who is in the process of performing one mitzvah is exempt from attending to another? How exactly does the Talmud derive this ruling from the Torah text? (pp. 16-17)

Question 4. Why does the Talmud specifically add that a groom is exempt from performing mitzvot? How does the ruling for a groom extend beyond the already-mentioned principle? How does the Talmud learn this from the Torah's wording? (pp. 17-18)

Chapter 3

Question 1. In what context does the word "eikev" appear? What is its literal meaning? Why is Rashi bothered by its use in the text, and how does he therefore interpret the passage in which it appears? (p. 19)

Question 2. To what does the numerical equivalent of the word "eikev" correspond, and why is that significant? (p. 20)

Question 3. Why does Judaism discourage the conversion of non-Jews? How does the rationale behind this again relate to the central theme behind this section of the book? (pp. 21-22)

Question 4. What is the parable of the Magid of Dubno, and what lesson can we derive from it? How did a recent tragedy in American history provide a similar example? (p. 22)

THOUGHT QUESTION (Based on the Text but Extending Beyond It)

Question 1. What is your definition of a mitzvah? What is the ultimate purpose in our keeping the mitzvot? How might Jewish society (and, in turn, the world at large) change if every Jew observed all the mitzvot applicable today?

Question 2. What are the various ways in which you can classify the various mitzvot (e.g., positive vs. negative commands)? Is there any significance, in your opinion, to the fact that there are more negative commands than positive commands in the Torah?

Question 3. If you were to meet a Jew or a potential convert who had no knowledge of Jewish law but who sought to learn about the mitzvot, which ones would you teach him/her about first? Why? How would you go about doing so?

Question 4. Is Judaism pro- or anti-conversion? Why yes, and why no? Is a non-Jew better off as he is, or would he be better off as a Jew? Would it be better for Judaism as a role model for the world if a majority of non-Jews convert, or if the Jewish people remain a small minority in the world?

Question 5. Do you agree with the author's assertion that the mitzvah to honor one's parents is an especially difficult one? Explain. Do you feel that the performance of this mitzvah has become easier or harder in recent years? What, in your opinion, are the most effective ways of honoring one's parents?

Question 6. What, to you, is a "difficult" or an "easy" mitzvah? In what ways are your choices based on your own personal values and characteristics?

Question 7. The author notes that, aside from two exceptional cases, the Torah does not indicate the rewards or punishments for mitzvot. What, in your estimation, would be the appropriate rewards or punishments for those who observe or transgress the following:

- The commandment to give charity to the poor.
- The prohibition against killing others.
- The commandment to observe the Shabbat.

d) The prohibition against spreading false rumors.

Question 8. When you perform a mitzvah, are you truly preoccupied with it? What should one be thinking during the performance of a mitzvah? In your opinion, does the value of a mitzvah decline when it is performed without proper intentions? How can one diminish distractions and increase one's concentration on the mitzvah?

Question 9. Rabbi Akiva explained the story of the boy who died by referring to life after death. How does the concept of life after death allow us to deal with the question of "tzaddik ve'ra lo, rasha ve'tov lo" (why do bad things happen to good people, and good things to bad people)? How are people rewarded and punished in the afterlife? How does the Jewish concept of Hell differ from its Christian counterpart?

Part II What About the Ten Commandments? (pp.25-42)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 4: There Are No Ten Commandments

In the previous section, the author had concluded that all of the Torah's commandments carry equal weight. However, the very fact that God apparently highlighted ten specific commandments (the Asseret Hadibrot, or Decalogue) seems to belie this contention; for if the mitzvot are indeed equal, why were these ten singled out? The author's basic response is that the Asseret Hadibrot are not, after all, ten separate commandments. Rather, they are general principles in which all 613 Torah laws are incorporated. It is precisely because some misconstrued the meaning of these principles that the Asseret Hadibrot are no longer recited as part of the daily prayers; for there were those who mistakenly took these principles as individual laws which were more important than the other mitzvot. Furthermore, the traditional view that God originally declared all Ten Principles simultaneously, in one instant, offers additional proof that no part of the Asseret Hadibrot is inherently more important than any other.

Chapter 5: Why Were the Ten Given?

In further examining the Asseret Hadibrot, the author wonders just why we should accept them as coming from God. Should we simply accept Moses's word for it? Maimonides says no. This, in fact, provides an essential difference between Judaism and Christianity. Whereas the authenticity of Christianity is based on claims of miracles performed by Jesus before a chosen few, Judaism rejects such claims as being woefully inadequate and quite probably misleading. The Torah specifically warns against accepting a false prophet who makes unverifiable predictions. (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). Miracles can be deceptive, and individuals proclaiming themselves prophets can be wrong. The miracles in Jewish history were performed for pragmatic purposes, not to prove the validity of Judaism. Why, then, should Jews believe that the Asseret Hadibrot are Divine? Because they were revealed at Mt. Sinai before the entire Jewish nation, who thereby became witnesses to their Divine origin. God then appointed Moses to be His agent in explicating the details of the Torah's laws to the Jewish people. The Asseret Hadibrot, therefore, not only contain the basic principles of the entire Torah, but also provide proof of the Torah's Divine basis.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 4

Question 1. In what ways did the presentation of the "Ten Commandments" differ from that of the other Torah mitzvot? (p. 25)

Question 2. How does the answer to the question above present a challenge to the author's thesis that all the Torah commandments are of equal importance? (p. 25)

Question 3. Why does the Torah state that the Jews at Mt. Sinai were afraid of dying after they had heard the first two Commandments? What does this tell us about the method in which the Commandments were presented at Sinai? What four confirmations of this idea does the author give? (pp. 26-27)

Question 4. How does the author interpret the term "Asseret Hadibrot"? How does this differ from the usual translation; namely, "Ten Commandments"? How does the author use this concept to answer the challenge outlined in question 2 above? (pp. 29-30)

Question 5. Give two examples of how specific laws are contained within the framework of the "Ten Principles" revealed at Sinai. (p. 29)

Question 6. Why are the Asseret Hadibrot no longer included as part of the daily prayers? Why did God utter the words of the Dibrot simultaneously? How does the reasoning involved in these issues provide backing for the author's argument in regard to the unity of the Torah laws? (pp. 30-32)

Chapter 5

Question 1. Why does the author reject the notion that Jews should believe in the divinity of the Torah

because of Moses's statement that it came from God? (p. 33)

Question 2. Why does the Torah, in various locations, keep emphasizing that Jews should not accept false prophets? (p. 34)

Question 3. What is meant by the author's statement, "Miracles prove nothing?" In what ways do Judaism and Christianity differ in their reliance on miracles to sustain their religious foundations? What is the role of miracles in Judaism? (pp. 35-37)

Question 4. What is the point of the Talmudic story involving Rabbi Eliezer? (pp. 35-36)

Question 5. According to Maimonides, what is the ultimate basis for the Jewish people's belief in God? How does this compare to the basis of other major religions? (p. 37)

Question 6. How does the lettering used by the Torah when inscribing the Shema prayer substantiate the idea that all the Jews in the desert witnessed the Revelation at Sinai? How many Jews were present? How long ago did this occur? (pp. 38-39)

Question 7. What was the "quandary" faced by God, so to speak, in regard to the best method of transmitting the Torah to the Jews? How did God "resolve" this quandary? (pp. 41-42)

THOUGHT QUESTION

Question 1. How do you visualize the Revelation at Mt. Sinai? How do you think you would have reacted to the events at Sinai had you been there in person?

Question 2. According to mystic tradition, the souls of future generations not yet born were in fact present at Sinai. How does that affect us in terms of our responsibility to observe the mitzvot and to reach out to estranged Jews whose souls were also present at Sinai?

Question 3. Try to associate as many of the 613 Mitzvot as possible with the Ten Principles of the Asseret Hadibrot. To which principles would you attach kashrut and other chukim?

Question 4. How far can one carry the analogy between the laws of the Torah and the makeup of the statutes in the American Constitution?

Question 5. How can one identify a true God-sent prophet? What message do you feel such a prophet would bring to meet the problems of today?

Question 6. Why do Jews feel that Jesus was not a true prophet of God? How has the difference between Judaism and Christianity over Jesus's divinity helped define the practical differences between the two religions?

Question 7. What is your definition of a "miracle"? Do you feel that you personally have experienced any miracles? If so, why might you have deserved them, and what purposes did they seem to serve? What miracles do you feel the world would benefit from today? Under what conditions might God allow these miracles to occur?

Question 8. If miracles are too clear a manifestation of G-d, what problem would they cause with regard to religious belief? What is the significance of the Hebrew word for miracle-nes-and its companion word, nistar (hidden)?

Question 9. In this section, the author makes use of the technique of Gematria (mathematical significance of Hebrew words). What is the basis of Gematria? Do you know of any additional examples of Gematria that provide religious messages? What comment does the use of Gematria make on the essence of the Torah?

Part III - The First Exception (pp. 43-78)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 6: Why Did God Give Us Two Tablets?

God presented the Decalogue on two stone tablets, each consisting of five commandments. Jews, Catholics and Protestants differ as to exactly which "commandments" were inscribed on each tablet; nevertheless, the arrangement of the "commandments" into two sections bears significance. One tablet contains declarations referring to our relationship with God, while the other focuses on our relationship with our fellow humans. However, the fifth commandment, to obey one's parents, seems to be in the wrong category. The author responds that parents belong to the section centering on God, inasmuch as they too, in a sense are creators, like the Almighty; which is one reason they deserve our gratitude. The duality of the two Tablets, which still create one complete set of "laws", is designed to impress upon us the realization that one is truly pious only if he acts ethically towards both God and his fellow humans.

Chapter 7: Which Comes First, Man or God?

The Torah's account of the three angels' visit to Abraham is significant, because in Abraham's eagerness to extend hospitality to his visitors, he left behind a supreme Guest—God. In short, he placed top priority to

aiding Man rather than serving God. From this episode, the Talmud derives the rule that when there is a simultaneous need to perform a mitzvah honoring God and a mitzvah assisting humans, the latter takes precedence. There are two basic reasons for this. Firstly, unlike God, a human is mortal, and any delay in coming to his aid could prove fatal. Secondly, by helping others, one is also honoring God; therefore, any mitzvah focused on aiding one's fellow man is also performing a mitzvah focused on obeying God (thus giving it double value). This is why the punishment for the generation of the Flood was far greater than that meted out to the generation of the Tower of Babel: the latter rebelled solely against God, while the former sinned against man and therefore also against God. The ranking of these two categories of mitzvot also explains such decisions of Jewish law as those involving *met mitzvah* and not making a blessing for interpersonal mitzvot. Likewise, the exile following the destruction of the first Temple (caused by sins against God) lasted far shorter than that following the destruction of the second (caused by crimes against humans). Finally, the *haftarah* read on Yom Kippur, the holiest of days, was chosen to emphasize that full repentance cannot be achieved unless one assigns centrality to laws enhancing people-to-people relationships.

Chapter 8: Aren't All Mitzvot Created Equal?

Returning to the question of whether all mitzvot are considered equal, we can now conclude that an exception to the general rule exists. The people-to-people mitzvot enjoy a higher status than those that pertain solely to man's relations with God, for the simple reason that the former incorporate acts that aid others and show fealty to God. This is what Rebbe meant by the Mishna in Avot: "Which is the right course...? That which is glorious in the eyes of the doer, and in the eyes of his fellow man," for these mitzvot please both God and other people. It is necessary, then, to divide mitzvot into two unequal categories: those between man and God, and those between man and man. However, within each category, the individual mitzvot remain on equal footings.

Chapter 9: Why is God First on the Tablets?

If it is true that, as indicated above, mitzvot of a person-to-person nature take precedence over those of a person-to-God nature, then why do the first grouping of the Ten Commandments relate to man's relationship with God? In actuality, there are only five basic principles contained within the Ten Commandments. Each of the first five Commandments can be paired with a related Commandment in the second grouping. (For instance, the first Commandment, "I am the Lord your God," can be linked to the sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder," in that one who does not fear God is likely to lead a life of moral chaos.) However, before a person can fully appreciate and adhere to the moral principles that form the basis of the second Tablets, he must first accept the omniscience of God. Only through a realization of God's existence and ultimate goals for humankind can one ascertain the Truth (*emet*), and thereby comprehend the rationale for laws relating to fellow humans. This is why the Commandments calling for recognition of God were given before those involving other people.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 6

- Question 1. What does the author mean by the saying, "The exception proves the rule" and what bearing does it have on his earlier thesis? (p. 45)
- Question 2. In what ways do the religions of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism differ in regard to enumerating the "Ten Commandments"? What basic issue caused Catholic and Protestant thinkers to begin the Decalogue with what the Jews consider the second "Commandment"? (pp. 45-48)
- Question 3. According to the Jewish version of the Decalogue, what is the chief distinction between the "Commandments" on the first tablet and those on the second? (p. 48)
- Question 4. What problem arises in regard to separating the commandments into two distinct categories of five "commandments" each? How does the author answer this question? (pp. 48-49)
- Question 5. How does the author deal with the question of how it is possible for religious Jews to behave improperly towards others? (pp. 49-50).

Chapter 7

- Question 1. What was the uniquely special trait associated with Abraham, and how did he display it in the passage quoted here? What practical implications for the prioritization of mitzvot does this episode suggest? (pp. 51-52)
- Question 2. What is the story of Hillel and the heathen mentioned here? How does the author interpret the expression "teaching Torah on one foot"? How does Hillel's response to the heathen reinforce the author's contentions about the priority given certain categories of mitzvot? (p. 53)

Question 3. What two reasons does the author present for giving preference to performing mitzvot aiding others over performing mitzvot serving God when the need to do both occurs simultaneously? (pp. 53-54)

Question 4. In what ways did the rebellions of the Flood generation and the Tower of Babel generation differ? What was the punishment in each case, and why was one case dealt with more severely than the other? (pp. 54-56)

Question 5. What is a "Mel Mitzvah" and why is it mentioned here? (pp. 57-58)

Question 6. Which mitzvot do not require blessings, and why not? How does this application of law support the author's arguments? (p. 58)

Question 7. What were the causes for the destruction of both the first and second Temples, and why, according to the author, did the duration of the ensuing exiles vary so dramatically? (pp. 58-59)

Question 8) How does the method of achieving full repentance on Yom Kippur support the idea that mitzvot relating to human relationships enjoy supreme importance? (pp. 59-61)

Chapter 8

Question 1. How does the author qualify his earlier conclusion that all mitzvot are equal? (p. 64)

Question 2. What problem does the author then encounter in regard to the Mishnah? How does he deal with it? (pp. 64-66)

Question 3. What did Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi (Rebbe) really want to determine in the Mishnah? What is his conclusion? (p. 65)

Chapter 9

1. Based on his conclusion in the preceding chapters, why does the author find the order of the "Ten Commandments" a problem? (p. 67)

Question 2. Explain the author's concept of "linkage" in regard to the "Ten Commandments". How exactly do the first five "Commandments" pair up with each of the final five? What is the common principle in each grouping? (pp. 68-75)

Question 3. In what sense was God's giving the Torah to the Jews a "marriage" between the Almighty and the Jewish people? (p. 69)

Question 4. What is the point of the tale of the Englishman and the cannibal? (pp. 74-75)

Question 5. What is the problem with trying to determine the definition of Truth objectively? How does the author go about defining it? (pp. 75-78)

Question 6. How does the author finally resolve the problem presented in Question 1 above? (p. 78)

THOUGHT QUESTION

Question 1. How do Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism differ in their views of God, and how might these differences have a bearing on the variances in these religions' spiritual practices?

Question 2. If one's father, one's mother, and God are all partners in a person's creation, what features in a person's character can be attributed to each of them?

Question 3. How is our Creator part of our being? What agent of our "humanness" is best a reflection of our Divine Creator? Did God create us with a genetic predisposition for purity? Why or why not?

Question 4. Why might otherwise "religious" people treat others improperly? Imagine an encounter with such a "religious sinner", and determine how you might go about "setting him straight."

Question 5. If you were in Abraham's place, talking to God when the visitors arrived, what would you say to God in order to excuse yourself and turn to the visitors and their needs?

Question 6. If someone came to you and asked to be taught on the spot the most important ideas of Judaism, what would you respond?

Question 7. If the second temple was destroyed because of humans sinning against their fellow humans, what practical actions might you deem appropriate to help undo the damage and thereby help bring about the end of the exile?

Question 8. Try to construct a list of commandments that one might make up even if one does not believe in God, and explain why the commandments would not be workable under these conditions.

Part IV-The Negative Commandments (pp. 79-100)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 10: The Three Kinds of Punishment

Although, as Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi noted, we do not know the rewards due for specific actions, the Torah

does indicate the punishments meted out for negative acts. There are three basic punishments, listed in order of increasing severity: Mamon (monetary penalties) are given to those who perform civil crimes, in which property is taken but physical suffering is not caused. Malkot (lashes) applies to those whose actions indicate that they are reshaim (wicked people), e.g., those who inflict personal injury. The lashes are administered as quickly as possible following the crime, to impress upon the criminal the negative consequences of his action. At the same time, the lashes are meant not to kill but to rehabilitate the criminal. Finally, the ultimate punishment in this world is mitah (death penalty). This includes karet, in which God Himself administers the punishment, and the person dies on his own prematurely. Jewish courts were empowered to administer one of four methods of carrying out the death penalty: sekilah (stoning), sereifah (burning), hereg (decapitation), and henek (strangulation).

Chapter 11: Does Judaism Believe in Capital Punishment?

Seemingly, the listing of the various types of court-prescribed deaths for criminals proves that the Torah supports the concept of a death penalty. Yet, the Mishnah criticizes a Jewish court that issues death penalties too frequently (either once in seven years or according to Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaryah—even once in seventy years). Furthermore, the Torah stipulated numerous conditions (such as the need for two reliable witnesses, a warning that immediately precedes the crime, and the criminal's acceptance of the warning) that must be met before a death sentence could be handed down. The point, then (as indicated by the Oral Law), is that the Torah wants to issue strict warnings to potential criminals, in order to make them reconsider performing negative acts. The educational impact of these severe warnings is a preventive one. However, once a crime has been committed, the law calls for a compassionate approach to punishment, and the death penalty is carried out only in the rarest of cases, and when unusual conditions warrant it.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 10

- Question 1. What are the two basic kinds of mitzvot, and how many of each are listed in the Torah? How do they differ in regard to consequences (reward and punishment)? (pp. 81-82)
- Question 2. What are the three categories of punishment? Into what two categories can the punishment of death be divided? (p. 82)
- Question 3. Explain the concept of "measure for measure". Cite several examples of how this concept was operational in specific Torah stories. Explain how "measure for measure" is the ideal methodology for Divine punishment. (p. 83)
- Question 4. What is the meaning of kefel? In what way does this penalty relate to the "measure for measure" idea? (p. 83)
- Question 5. When does the Torah stipulate that lashes (malkot) be administered? How does this punishment compare to the punishments of mamon and mitah? (p. 84)
- Question 6. Why does the Torah consider a jail sentence an ineffective punishment? When was slavery permitted, and how does it differ from jailing? (pp. 84-86)
- Question 7. How many lashes were administered? On what did the exact number of lashes given depend? (p. 86)
- Question 8. According to the author, how can death sometimes be a "blessing"? What crisis was addressed by the story about the worker leaving the field early, and how did it attempt to deal with it? Who was Enoch, and how does his story provide an example here? (pp. 87-88)

Chapter 11

- Question 1. How does the Mishnah in Makot define a "murderous court"? How does the Mishnah's statement seemingly contradict the Torah's sanctioning of the death penalty? How can this paradox be resolved? (pp. 89-90, 98-100)
- Question 2. What are the requirements needed before a Jewish court can carry out the death penalty? (pp. 90-92)
- Question 3. What question arises from the wording in the verse, "And these are the ordinances which you shall set before them," and how can this specific wording be explained? (pp. 92-93)
- Question 4. How does the Written Law interpret the verse, "An eye for an eye"? Why, then, does the Oral Law use this phraseology, if it is not interpreted literally? (pp. 94-95)
- Question 5. What are the two names for God found in the Torah? When is each of them used? (p. 95)
- Question 6. What is the legal definition of a mamzer? According to the author, why does the Torah call for such severe restrictions on the apparently innocent mamzer? (pp. 95-97)
- Question 7. Why are Jewish children taught apparently outdated legal cases, such as those involving oxen

goring other oxen, according to the author? (pp. 98-99)

Question 8. Under what conditions would the Sages apply the death penalty in a strict manner? (pp. 99-100)

THOUGHT QUESTION

Question 1. What significance can you apply to the fact that the Torah's negative commandments outnumber the positive commandments? Could Judaism exist without negative commandments? Explain.

Question 2. What should the role of punishment be within a society? Can it be replaced by positive reinforcement, and if so, under what conditions?

Question 3. Do you agree with the author's assessment that jail is not a viable option in reducing the crime rate? Explain. Under what conditions might jail be an effective deterrent to crime?

Question 4. Do you feel that corporal punishment at home or in school is ever justified? If so, under what conditions? If not, what forms of punishment for youngsters could take its place?

Question 5. Should the death penalty be used today in Israel? If so, for what crimes?

Question 6. If you were a teacher, how would you go about impressing upon students the concept that crime is wrong?

Part V-The Three Laws of Martyrdom (pp. 103-153)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 12: For What Shall a Jew Be Willing to Die?

Another way of classifying the mitzvot is by identifying those commands for which one must give up his life rather than violate. Normally, the obligation to preserve life supersedes all Torah commands, but three laws run counter to this principle: those involving sexual immorality, bloodshed, and idolatry. Bloodshed and idolatry must be avoided, even at the cost of one's life, because they totally reject man's relationships with God and his fellow humans, respectively. Likewise, illicit sexual acts debase the very basis of humanity's spiritual claims.

Chapter 13: The Torah Source for Idolatry and Martyrdom

The basis for the rule that a Jew must choose martyrdom over idolatry is found in the Shema prayer. This prayer includes the statement, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (The Sages explain "your might" as referring to one's wealth.) The methods of expressing love for God were exemplified by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham exhibited supreme faith in God; Isaac was willing to offer his life for Him; and Jacob showed how one can use one's material possessions for the sake of God. These three methods are also symbolized by the Tefillin of the arm, the Tefillin of the head, and the Mezuzah. The prayer, then, makes it clear that a Jew is commanded to love God and not exchange Him for a false deity (i.e., an idol), even at the cost of sacrificing his life.

Chapter 14: The Torah Source for Immorality and Martyrdom

The rule that one must be willing to die rather than perform an immoral sexual act is derived from the Torah by means of a hekesh (a legal comparison). The Torah declares that if a man rapes a woman in a field, where her screams for help will not be heard, the man is killed. On the other hand, the woman is blameless because she cried out, "and there was none to save her." This implies that if someone could save the woman, he is impelled to do so, even at the cost of killing the potential rapist. In a like manner, someone who is about to murder another person can be killed. The comparison also has the reverse effect: Just as one should agree to die rather than kill someone else, so should one accept martyrdom rather than commit a sexually immoral act.

Chapter 15: The Torah Source for Murder and Martyrdom

What, however, is the derivation of the ruling that one must accept martyrdom rather than commit murder? The Talmud bases this on a point of logic: "Who knows that your blood is redder than the other person's?" In other words, one has no right to kill another person to save himself, for the other person's life is just as valuable as yours. One cannot make a true value judgment as to the worth of anyone's life, and the dictum of "Thou shalt not murder" holds firm. However, a seeming contradiction arises from the Talmudic case of two travelers stranded in a desert with only enough water for one to survive. Rabbi Akiva concludes that in this instance one's own survival takes precedence over his companion's. This, though, is a vastly different situation, for here one has done nothing directly to cause his companion's death; rather, he has only taken action to save his own life. On the other hand, one is not allowed to actively bring about the loss of ano-

er person's life.

Chapter 16: But There Is a Time to Kill

However, there are indeed several exceptions to the rule that one should die rather than actively end another's life. If one encounters a thief by night (when the thief would normally expect opposition and is probably prepared to fight), he is allowed to kill him. Selfdefense is sanctioned. To take an opposite approach is tantamount to committing suicide. Likewise, if one person is pursuing another one with intent to murder, you are allowed to kill the pursuer. Moses himself took such action to stop an Egyptian from killing a Jew. Finally, a Jew is allowed to kill the enemy during an obligatory war, for in doing so he is defending the survival of the Jewish nation.

Chapter 17: Why Jacob Became Israel

Though "turning the other cheek" is a byword in Christianity, it does not represent the true Jewish response to adversity. This is evident from the story of Isaac's son, Jacob. "Jacob" means heel, for when Rebecca gave birth to the twins, Jacob emerged holding the heel of his older and more aggressive brother Esau. Jacob eventually bought the rights to the birthright from Esau, and received his father's blessing, but then left home to escape his brother's wrath. After his lengthy sojourn with Laban, and the establishment of his family, he returned to his homeland, knowing that he would have to once again deal with Esau. On this return trip, Jacob had a strange encounter with a mysterious assailant—his brother's angelic representative. Jacob did not flee this time. After a lengthy struggle in which he suffered harsh blows, Jacob gained the upper hand and received a blessing; he was renamed "Yisrael", signifying that he had fought for his beliefs. It is a Jew's task in life to complete God's work in this world, and to act with determination to reach this goal. This is why the Jews are called the nation of Israel, after Jacob's new name. Nevertheless, the Torah goes on to refer to Jacob not only by his new name, but, at times, also by his earlier one. This is because a Jew must always be a fighter in the face of adversity, as indicated by the name of "Yisrael", but also kind and compassionate, as denoted by the name "Jacob".

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 12

Question 1. When can the restrictions of Shabbos be superseded? Give two reasons why an exception must be made in this case. (p. 104)

Question 2. What is the meaning of the expression, "Yehoreig ve'al ya'avur?" (p. 103) What three laws fall into this category? Why does the Talmud note that the Rabbinic decision in this instance was rendered in an attic of a house? (pp. 105-106)

Question 3. In which of the three cases of "Yehoreig ve'al ya'avur" does the author consider the ruling for one to accept death rather than commit the crime surprising? Why? (p. 107)

Question 4. According to Ethics of the Fathers, what are the three pillars of human existence? In what ways are these basic principles associated with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and with the holidays of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot? (pp. 107-109)

Question 5. What relationship is exemplified by the expression "bein Adam le'chaveiro? How does this relate to the Patriarch Jacob, and to the concept of teshuvah (repentance)? (p. 109)

Question 6. How does the relationship of "bein Adam le'azmo" contribute to an understanding of why one should choose martyrdom rather than submit to acts of sexual immorality? (pp. 111-112)

Chapter 13

Question 1. Where are the words "Love your God ... with all your soul and all your might" found? Why are both expressions "soul" and "might" needed? What does the word "meodecha" really mean as it is used in this prayer? (pp. 113-114, 122-124)

Question 2. In what distinct ways did the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—express their love for God? (pp. 115-120)

Question 3. How did Rabbi Akiva display his love for God, and which of the Patriarchs did he emulate in this manner? (pp. 116-117)

Question 4. How does a ladder (sulam) figure into the life history of Jacob? To what other Hebrew words is the word sulam connected, and what is the significance of this connection? (pp. 117-118)

Question 5. What is the meaning of the term "coin of fire" as used in the Midrash? According to the author, what is the ultimate purpose of money in the view of Judaism? (pp. 118-119)

Question 6. What are the three "love mitzvot" that the author refers to? To what aspect of a love of God

does each one correspond? (pp. 120-122)

Question 7. What, ultimately, is the source for the ruling that one must accept martyrdom rather than succumb to idolatry? (pp. 123-124)

Chapter 14

Question 1. What is the difference between these terms: Na'arah and ketannah? Erusin and nisuin? Why was sexual intimacy between an intended bride and groom forbidden during the interval between erusin and nisuin in the time of the Talmud? (pp. 126-128)

Question 2. Under what circumstances is a "damsel that is betrothed" liable for the death penalty for sexual relations with another man? When is only the man guilty, leaving her blameless? (pp. 126-128)

Question 3. Explain the legal term hekesh. What linkage is applied in our case? (pp. 129-130)

Question 4. What, then, is the derivation of the ruling that one must accept martyrdom rather than agree to perform acts of sexual immorality? (pp. 129-130)

Chapter 15

Question 1. Why does the author consider martyrdom a "logical" act as an alternative to taking another person's life? (pp. 131-132)

Question 2. What is the source for the ruling that one must give up his own life rather than take the life of someone else? (pp. 132-133)

Question 3. Explain the situation of the two travelers lost in the desert. Present the views here of the son of Patura and Rabbi Akiva. What is the final legal decision in this case? (pp. 133-134)

Question 4. What conflict does this decision create with regard to the author's earlier comments, and how can this conflict be resolved? (p. 134)

Question 5. How does Rashi explain the ruling that one must accept martyrdom rather than kill? How can this interpretation explain why the Torah said that Jacob was both "afraid" and "distressed" before meeting Esau? (pp. 134-136)

Question 6. What blessing did the Jew make in the concentration camp? What was his underlying purpose in reciting this blessing? (p. 136)

Chapter 16

Question 1. Describe three instances in which the rule that "it is better to be killed than kill" does not apply. Why are exceptions made in these cases? (pp. 137-142)

Question 2. What is the Jewish attitude to the Christian belief in "turning the other cheek" to an attack? (p. 138)

Question 3. Explain the verse "If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood guilt for him" according to the Rabad. (p. 138)

Question 4. How can Moses's murder of the Egyptian who was beating a Jew be justified? (pp. 139-140)

Question 5. What is Judaism's view of the statement, "God is opposed to war"? (p. 141)

Chapter 17

Question 1. What is the literal meaning of the name "Ya'akov"? Why did Jacob receive this name, and how did it reflect on his personality? (pp. 143-144)

Question 2. Compare the reactions of Esau and Jacob to the latter's receiving Isaac's blessing. How did Jacob's actions reinforce his identification with the name "Ya'akov"? (pp. 144-145)

Question 3. In what other instances did Jacob choose to flee rather than fight? (pp. 146-147)

Question 4. When was Jacob's name changed from "Ya'akov" to "Yisrael"? What was the significance of this change? (p. 148)

Question 5. According to the author, why didn't the omnipotent God create a perfect world? What is man's role in this world, then? (pp. 149-150)

Question 6. Why does the Torah revert to calling Jacob "Ya'akov" even after his name had been changed to "Yisrael"? (pp. 150-152)

Question 7. What significance does the author see in the Jewish state being named Israel (Yisrael) after the Holocaust? (p. 152)

THOUGHT QUESTION

Question 1. Define sin. How can one determine whether one sin is more serious than another one?

Question 2. For which of the three cardinal sins discussed here would you feel most reluctant to give up your life? Why?

Question 3. How can you explain the concept of "kiddush Hashem"? What should be the ultimate goal of creating a kiddush Hashem? How can one create a kiddush Hashem without giving up one's life?

Question 4. During the Holocaust, the opinion was expressed by several Torah giants that kiddush Hashem at this time demanded not martyrdom but survival at all costs. They felt that the best weapon to defeat an enemy bent on the total destruction of Judaism was keeping as many Jews as possible alive. Can the meaning of kiddush Hashem change in different generations? Which aspect of kiddush Hashem is needed most in our times?

Question 5. Discuss whether you feel Judaism agrees with the concept of gaining an assured spot in heaven for giving up one's life while killing the enemy in war, as believed by some Muslims, or by some Japanese pilots in World War II.

Question 6. How do you define "love of God"? How do you try to express it?

Question 7. Which of the three Patriarchs do you try to model your behavior after?

Question 8. Why do you feel that some Jews choose to become Baalei Teshuva? How can one best encourage these Jews to further their sense of Jewish identity?

Question 9. Which do you find easier-serving God through material goods or through effort? Which do you consider more worthwhile? Why?

Question 10. What do you feel was the author's purpose in including Chapter 17 in this book?

Question 11. How would you respond to those who claim, "The Jews of Europe offered no resistance to the Nazis"? What obstacles did the Jews of the Holocaust face in fighting back against their oppressors? What other means, aside from fighting back, did they use to resist? If such a situation would recur, God forbid, how do you feel Jews would react this time?

Part VI-Life Above All (pp. 155-171)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 18 : Health is a Mitzvah

A cardinal rule of Jewish law is that the preservation of life takes precedence over all else. This indicates that a Jew has an obligation to treasure his life in this world, and to preserve his health. This is why Abraham did not observe the mitzvah of circumcision (because it might have jeopardized his health), until commanded to do so by God. Death, therefore, should be viewed not as a desired chance to pass to a better world, but rather as the end of opportunities to achieve one's goals in this world. This is also why Maimonides, in his law code, emphasizes the need to take good care of one's body. In this sense, Judaism rejects Christianity's stress on the spirit at the expense of the body. Rather, both body and spirit must combine to serve God and humankind.

Chapter 19 : Enjoy Life on this Earth

Judaism rejects the notion that this world is irrelevant and that its pleasures should be rejected. Rather, God created the world for humans to fully utilize; they should concentrate on life, not death. Thus, Judaism disagrees with the Christian view that a holy person is one who seeks to isolate himself entirely from the world and live in seclusion. Instead, a holy Jew is one who actively seeks to help his fellow Jew and utilizes the world's resources for the benefit of others. Judaism is therefore opposed to asceticism. At the same time, it also takes issue with the epicure whose sole aim in life is sensual gratification. What Judaism seeks is the middle road—a life that does not turn away from the world, but limits one's appetite to those actions that are sanctioned by the Torah.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 18

Question 1. Explain the meaning of the expression, "Pikuach Nefesh Docheh Et Hakol." (p. 157)

Question 2. How did Abraham know of the Torah's commandments? Which mitzvah did he not observe at first, until commanded to do so? Why did he delay? (pp. 157-158)

Question 3. Why was Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi crying? How did Rabbi Hiya try to console him? How did the philosophies of these two Rabbis differ in regard to their views on death? (p. 158)

Question 4. In the story about the man who died, how did he try to compensate for his failures in life? What was the response of the Heavenly Court? What is the point of this story? (pp. 158-159)

Question 5. What are two reasons for Maimonides's emphasis on one's maintaining good health? (p. 160)

Question 6. How do the views of Judaism and Christianity differ in regard to the importance of the body and the spirit in one's stay on earth? (pp. 160-161)

Question 7. What is techelet and how was it utilized in Jewish observance? What is the symbolism involved in this, according to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch? (p. 161)

Chapter 19

- Question 1. Why isn't the concept of an afterlife mentioned specifically in the Torah? (p. 163)
Question 2. What service is forbidden for a Kohein (Jewish Priest)? Why is this so? (pp. 163-164)
Question 3. What will a person be asked at the end of his life, according to the Talmud in Kidushin? Why is that so? (p. 164)
Question 4. What is a Nazir (Nazirite)? What is the reason for his bringing a sin offering? (pp. 164-165)
Question 5. How do the approaches of Hillel and Saint Anselm in regard to serving God differ? (p. 165)
Question 6. Contrast the views of Judaism and Christianity in regard to celibacy, solitude, and wealth. Compare the way these two religions regarded Mt. Sinai. (pp. 165-166)
Question 7. What is the parable of the Magid of Dubno in regard to the attitudes of the three men towards wine? How does this comment on the Jewish attitude towards how one should make use of the world's resources? (pp. 167-170)

THOUGHT QUESTION

- Question 1. Describe how you picture a Judgment Day for those who have died. What question do you feel might be asked, and on what basis would the final judgment be made?
Question 2. Look up the Mishna in Ethics of the Fathers (4:17) containing the comment, "Better is one hour in the World to Come than all the goodness of a lifetime here on earth," and find the companion statement. How do they seem to contradict each other, and how can this apparent contradiction be resolved?
Question 3. What would you say (if anything) to a Rabbi who smokes? Could there be any justification to his doing so?
Question 4. If someone asks you whether he should spend his brief amount of free time before work doing exercise or learning Torah, what would you reply? Why?
Question 5. What specific limits would you place on enjoying the world's resources? Where does one draw the line between permitted enjoyment and forbidden gluttony?
Question 6. If the Torah is against asceticism, how do you explain the act of avoiding food and enjoyment on days like Yom Kippur?

Part VII-The Seven Universal Laws (pp. 173-198)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 20: Does God Care About Non-Jews?

Although God entrusted the Torah laws to one nation—the Jews—He is concerned about the spiritual well-being of all humankind. Thus, even non-Jews are bound to observe seven Noahide Laws designed to enhance the ethical standing of all of His human creations; and non-Jews who are righteous gentiles are guaranteed a share in the World to Come. Gentiles who go further and decide to fully accept Judaism are welcomed and granted full rights as Jews. At the same time, Jews (unlike certain Christians) do not proselytize, because non-Jews are not encouraged to take on the difficult laws of Judaism unless they truly wish to on their own. The role of Jews throughout history has been to serve as a "light (of ethical behavior) to the nations," which may be one reason that Jews have been exiled around the globe. The ultimate goal of Jews should be to have all people recognize the fact that the Lord of Israel is the One God of the entire world.

Chapter 21: The Source of the Seven Universal Laws

The seven Noahide Laws—prohibiting murder, idolatry, immorality, robbery, cursing God, and vivisection; and calling for the establishment of a judicial system—can be derived from the Biblical verse, "Va-yetzav Adonai Elohim 'Al ha-Adam Leimor Mi-Kol Etz Ha-gan... (And the Lord Commanded Adam Saying, Of Every Tree of the Garden...)" Each of these words carries an implication that there exist certain universal laws designed to guarantee that God's basic prescription for sanctity should be adopted by all humankind.

Chapter 22: The Two New Years

The first day of the Jewish month of Tishrei is celebrated by Jews throughout the world as Rosh Hashanah, their New Year. However, the Torah commands the Jews to observe New Year's on the first of Nisan, the month in which God freed the Jews from Egyptian slavery. Although Nisan certainly should be recalled as the period in which the Jews emerged as a nation, the fact remains that Rosh Hashanah—the Day of Judgment—is commemorated on the first of Tishrei, the traditional date of the creation of the world. This

serves as a reminder that God, the Creator of the entire universe, is the Father of all people, not just the Jews.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 20

Question 1. What is meant by the Noahide Laws? Give an example of a Biblical person who was punished for transgressing one of these laws. (p. 175)

Question 2. Present two possible views regarding the question of how God might regard non-Jews. Which view does the author claim as the correct one? (p. 176)

Question 3. What reward is bestowed upon the righteous Gentile? How does this reward differ from that given the righteous Jew? (p. 177)

Question 4. Why was the Torah presented to the Jews in the desert of Sinai rather than in the Holy Land of Israel? (p. 177)

Question 5. Who was Yitro? What special honor is he accorded in the Torah, and why was he deserving of this? (pp. 177-178)

Question 6. When is the story of Ruth recited publicly in the synagogue? Why then? What is the significance of the numerical equivalent of her name? (p. 178)

Question 7. How are Jews told to view converts to Judaism? (p. 179)

Question 8. In what sense are Jews the "Chosen People"? (p. 179)

Question 9. What reason is given by the Talmud as to why Jews have been exiled throughout the world? (p. 179)

Question 10. What is the Jewish attitude towards missionizing among non-Jews? How does this compare with the Christian approach to this matter? (pp. 179-181)

Question 11. What is the theme of the Aleinu prayer? What seeming contradiction exists between its two parts? How can this be resolved? (pp. 181-182)

Question 12. What is the meaning of a "Mamlechet Kohanim"? How can the Jewish nation earn this title? (p. 183)

Question 13. What is the significance of the holidays of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, and the seasons in which they occur, in regard to the role that Jews are to play in this world? Why does the festival of Simchat Torah occur right after Sukkot rather than during Shavuot, when the Torah was given on Sinai? (pp. 182-186)

Chapter 21

Question 1. What are the seven Noahide laws? What mnemonic device can be used to remember them? (p. 187)

Question 2. Why might one think that non-Jews are not obligated to observe these laws? What is the actual source for the laws? (p. 188)

Question 3. How exactly can the laws be derived from the words "Vayitsav Hashem Elokim Al Ha'Adam Leimor Mi-kol Etz Ha-gan"? (pp. 188-195)

Question 4. Define the relationship between the Oral Law and the Written Law. (pp. 188-189)

Question 5. What is the literal meaning of the word "Elokim"? What problem is raised by the form of this word? How does the Torah make clear the fact that there is only one God? Why, then, is "Elokim" expressed in the plural? (pp. 189-191)

Question 6. When were humans first allowed to eat meat during Biblical times? Why then? What is Judaism's attitude towards vegetarianism? (pp. 192-195)

Question 7. At what point did God deem it necessary to assign all 613 Mitzvot to humans? Why then? (p. 195)

Chapter 22

Question 1. What is the Hebrew date for Rosh Hashanah? What event does it commemorate? (p. 196)

Question 2. What is the "second" Jewish New Year referred to by the author? What event does this holiday commemorate, and in what sense does this mark a "New Year"? What is the difference between the two New Years? (p. 197)

Question 3. If the Torah refers to this second holiday as the true New Year's for Jews, then why do we still observe Rosh Hashanah? What lesson about the Jews' role in the world is this meant to teach? (pp. 197-198)

THOUGHT QUESTION

Question 1. How can a Jew best explain the concept of the Jews being God's Chosen People to a non-Jew?

Question 2. Are there non-Jews who lead more moral lives than observant Jews? If so, why might that be?

Question 3. How would you define the term "righteous Gentile"? Name several examples of righteous gentiles throughout history. What might have accounted for their righteousness? How would you explain the acts of Oskar Schindler in this light?

Question 4. What do you feel is the best way to make a convert to Judaism comfortable within his new religion?

Question 5. What arguments would a Christian missionary present in order to convert Jews? How might you respond to these arguments? How would you convince a Jew who has been attracted to Christian missionaries to stay within the Jewish fold?

Question 6. Are there limits to associating with Gentiles? Where would you draw the line? How would you explain this to the Gentiles involved?

Question 7. What is your definition of "law and order"? How do you feel law and order can best be established in today's society, without it leading to fascism?

Part VIII-Is Study the Greatest Mitzvah of All? (pp. 199-216)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 23: Study or Deed?

One of the 613 Biblical mitzvot is the study of Torah, and the Sages debated the question of whether Torah study or the practice of mitzvot has higher priority in Jewish law. Their conclusion was that study takes precedence, because study is a prerequisite for and leads to the proper practice of mitzvot. However, neither study nor practice is sufficient in itself; both are needed for every Jew who wishes to observe Judaism properly.

Chapter 24: The Three Crowns

The Sages have spoken of the Jewish people being honored with three crowns: those of Torah, Priesthood and Kingship. While the last two are gained through heredity, the crown of Torah is accessible to all Jews. Torah study should not, however, be an exercise in abstract thought simply for intellectual pleasure. It must be viewed as a means to an end; namely, to the proper performance of Jewish laws and ethical acts. Every Jew is obligated to study Torah as best he can, on his own level; and the obligation should not be deferred to a later time, lest one find out too late that he has no time left. Furthermore, Torah study should not be used as an excuse to isolate oneself totally from work and support of one's family. Rather, one should study with the intention of using his knowledge to go about life's tasks in a Godly manner.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 23

Question 1. What question is raised by the Talmud in Kidushin? What are the answers of Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva? Whose opinion is ultimately accepted? What is the underlying point of the question? What is the significance of the fact that the question was posed in an attic? (pp. 201-2)

Question 2. Why didn't the Mishna specifically state, "The law is like Rabbi Akiva"? (p. 202)

Question 3. What contradictory statement is found in a Mishna from the Ethics of the Fathers? How is this contradiction resolved? (pp. 202-3)

Question 4. Why is Torah study needed? (p. 203)

Question 5. Explain the expression, "Talmud Torah Keneged Kulom" in light of your response to question 4 above? (p. 203)

Question 6. How is the interplay between knowledge and deeds reflected in the symbolism of the Tefillin? (pp. 203-204)

Chapter 24

Question 1. Who are considered the members of the aristocracy in Judaism, and why is this so? How is this different from the makeup of a royal aristocracy? (p. 205)

Question 2. What is the "crown" referred to in this chapter? What are the "three crowns" for Jews mentioned in Ethics of the Fathers? Which of these crowns is considered the most majestic, and why? (pp. 205-6)

Question 3. When is one permitted (and even expected) to stop his Torah learning? What comment does this make about priorities within Judaism? (p. 207)

Question 4. What cause does the author give for the popularity of Hasidism among the Jewish common-folk in parts of Eastern Europe during the 18th century? How is this sentiment conveyed by the Baal Shem Tov's story? (pp. 208-9)

- Question 5. What question is one asked immediately upon appearing at the heavenly court after he dies? Why can this question be answered in the affirmative by all Jews, even those less learned? (pp. 209-10)
- Question 6. What was Rabbi Salanter's response to the Jew who said that he could not remember what he had learned? (p. 210)
- Question 7. How did the ignorant shepherd express his prayer? In what similar way did the Hasidic movement counter the trend towards over-intellectualizing the service of God among some Jews? (p. 211)
- Question 8. Summarize the Tolstoy story. How does this comment on the statement, "I'll study when I have time." (pp. 212-3)
- Question 9. How does Rabbi Yoshiah interpret the symbolism of matzah versus bread? (p. 214)
- Question 10. What does Maimonides caution those who make learning their top priority not to do? What source in Ethics of the Fathers supports his view? (pp. 214-5)

THOUGHT QUESTION

- Question 1. What texts would you suggest be studied by an unlearned person who wants to study about Judaism? What texts would you suggest for a more advanced student? What about a person with a basic knowledge of Judaism who wants to know more but has very limited time to study?
- Question 2. What would be your reaction if a child of yours just graduating high school wants to devote his time entirely to Torah study? What if he or she were a college graduate? A person with a family?
- Question 3. What course of study would you suggest to ensure that someone who learns about ethics and morality truly develops into a moral person?
- Question 4. Consider ways in which you can make more efficient use of your daily time, and in this way find additional time to study.
- Question 5. What occupations would you consider best for those who need to work but who want to maintain a Torah-true lifestyle? What occupations would you advise the person to avoid?

Part IX-Summing Up (pp. 217-220)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 25: The Deeds That Define Us: In Retrospect
 Because Judaism emphasizes deed over creed, the book has thus far concentrated on the practical requirements of Jewish law. We have established that, essentially, all mitzvot are to be considered equal, although there are three unique mitzvot that one must accept martyrdom for rather than transgress, for life is meaningless without them. At this point, the book will focus on the principles of Jewish belief, which provide the background to the deeds discussed to this point.

CONTENT QUESTION

- Question 1. Summarize in your own words some of the basic categories of mitzvot established thus far. (pp. 219-220)
- Question 2. What topic does the author still wish to examine? (p. 220)

THE WAY OF CREED Part X-Must A Jew Believe? (pp. 223-250)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 26: The Thirteen Fundamentals of Belief
 Punishment within Judaism is meted out not for improper intentions, but for improper actions. Nevertheless, Judaism emphasizes the need for Jews to internalize a system of theological faith. This provides a framework and rationale for the performance of mitzvot. One such set of theological precepts is Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith, which includes expressions of belief in an omnipotent, omniscient and incorporeal Creator, in the immutability of the Torah, and in the coming of the Messiah. Other commentators, like Radbaz and Rabbi Yosef Albo, disagreed with Maimonides' exact listing (either because they considered it too restricted or not sufficiently sensitive to human limitations). However, Maimonides' principles have gained widespread acceptance among Jews and have been incorporated in the prayer book used by Jews around the world.

Chapter 27: All of Israel Have a Share in the World to Come, Except...
 The tractate Sanhedrin states, "All of Israel have a share in the World to Come (Olom Ha-ba)." (Olom Ha-ba can refer to the return of the soul to its Maker after death; life in the Messianic Era; or the resurrection

of the Dead-or all three.) Yet, the Talmud also excludes from this sweeping generalization those who reject the principle of resurrection of the dead, those who deny the divine source of the Torah, and those who are heretics. These statements may seem contradictory, for if all Jews have a place in the World to Come, how could some be denied this right? However, the point is that all Jews enjoy at birth the opportunity to gain entry to the World to Come. A Jew can then forfeit his right to Olam Ha-ba by abandoning his belief in resurrection of the dead and the Torah's divinity, and by becoming a heretic. Maimonides sees a Jew who does this as also rejecting the Thirteen Principles of Faith, which are incorporated in the basic belief in God, the Torah, and the body's resurrection.

Chapter 28: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People

This question-why the righteous often suffer and the wicked often prosper-seems to challenge the notion of a just God, and must be addressed. According to the Talmud, Moses raised this issue with God Himself, and was told, "You will see My Back, but My Face will not be seen." Our Sages explain this response as meaning that humans, with their limited perspectives, cannot possibly comprehend all of God's actions ("His Face"). However, what may seem an unfair act of God at first often becomes comprehensible in hindsight ("God's Back")-though this realization may take considerable time. And even if such clarification never seems to come, we must bear in mind that, in Judaism, a person's story does not end with his death. Judaism believes in an afterlife, in which all apparent injustices will be redressed, and in which the righteous will obtain their deserved reward; and the wicked, their ultimate punishment.

Chapter 29: Amen

The word "Amen" (Truth) can be viewed as an acronym for the words "Aif Melech Ne'eman (God, trustworthy King). This single word thus incorporates each of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles. The concept of "Aif"-a declaration of belief in one Almighty God-covers the first five principles; the concept of "Melech" an affirmation of the belief that God maintains a close relationship with His Creations-covers the middle four principles; and "Ne'eman"-a confirmation of God's ultimate justice, through Resurrection of the dead-covers the final four principles. Thus, the word "Amen" implies not only a belief in God, but also summarizes exactly what that belief entails. This is why the words "Aif Melech Ne'eman" serve as an introduction to the privately recited Shema prayer, for the Shema likewise summarizes the Jew's essential beliefs.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 26

- Question 1. Explain what the author means when he says that Judaism emphasizes "commitment to deed" over abstract faith. (p. 225)
- Question 2. What is the law of the "Rebellious Elder", and how does this substantiate the author's position on what Judaism considers essential? (pp. 225-226)
- Question 3. Contrast the views of Moses Mendelssohn with those of Maimonides and other traditional Jewish leaders in regard to the importance of a Jewish creed. (pp. 226-227)
- Question 4. What are the Thirteen Principles of Judaism as enumerated by Maimonides? Where are these contained within the daily Jewish prayers? (pp. 227-228)
- Question 5. What are the objections posed by both Radbaz and Rabbi Joseph Albo to Maimonides' list of principles? What are some practical effects of the differences between Maimonides and these other two scholars? (pp. 228-230)
- Question 6. What question does the author remain with at the end of the chapter in regard to Maimonides' principles? (p. 230)

Chapter 27

- Question 1. According to the Talmud, who has a portion in Olam Ha-ba? What does the acronym derived from the word "Kol" represent? (p. 231)
- Question 2. What are the exceptions to the above generalization about Olam Ha-ba? What contradiction does this pose to the Talmud's generalization? How does the author deal with this contradiction? (pp. 231-232)
- Question 3. What are three ways of defining Olam Ha-ba? Why does a mourner recite Kaddish for only 11 months rather than a full year after the loss of a close relative? (pp. 233-234)
- Question 4. Which of Maimonides' principles are included in each of the three definitions of Olam Ha-ba? Explain how these principles are contained within each definition. (pp. 235-236)
- Question 5. Why did Maimonides reverse the order of principles as indicated by the Mishnah? What is the Mishnah's perspective on the matter? (pp. 236-237)

Chapter 28

- Question 1. What did Moshe request of Hashem, as noted here? What was the full significance of the request, and what was the meaning of Hashem's response? (pp. 239-240)
- Question 2. What story of Rabbi Akiva's experiences does the author relate here? What is the point of the story as it relates to the central idea of the chapter? (p. 242)
- Question 3. What parable was provided by the Lubavitcher Rebbe? What was it meant to demonstrate? (p. 242)
- Question 4. What response does the author suggest to those who would doubt God's justice upon hearing of a righteous man who died without experiencing prosperity? (pp. 242-246)
- Question 5. How does the blessing, "...Who forms light and creates darkness" differ from its source in Isaiah? Contrast the approaches taken by Judaism and Zoroastrianism in regard to the concept of the source of Evil. (pp. 244-245)

Chapter 29

- Question 1. What acronym is contained in the word "Amen"? (p. 247)
- Question 2. How does the word "Amen" contain intimations of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles? (pp. 247-248)
- Question 3. Why do the words "El Melech Ne'eman" serve as an introduction to the Shema prayer when recited in private? (pp. 249-250)

THOUGHT QUESTION

- Question 1. What might be some practical differences resulting from the different approaches between Judaism and Christianity towards the issue of belief vs. action? Who do you feel would generally become a more religious person: one who places greater emphasis on faith, or one who places greater emphasis on action?
- Question 2. Why do you believe that traditional Rabbinical leaders rejected Mendelssohn's view that Judaism is not a faith, and that one may believe anything as long as he lives by the law? Can a Jew who does not believe in God but who keeps the Torah laws be considered a good Jew?
- Question 3. How do you imagine Olom Ha-ba? Have your thoughts on the topic changed over the years, since childhood?
- Question 4. What do you feel the Jews of the world must do in order to bring about the coming of the Messiah?
- Question 5. Think of an example from your own experiences in which an event seemed to have an unfair outcome. Can you, in retrospect, offer a response to the experience that would make it appear justified?
- Question 6. How might you explain to a young Jew how a God Who is righteous permitted evils like the Holocaust?

Part XI-All About God (pp. 251-289)

CAPSULE REVIEW

Chapter 30: Can We 'Prove' God's Existence?

Though various proofs of God's existence have been offered, none is without its detractors. There can be no incontrovertible evidence of God, for this would force humankind to accept Him, thus eliminating our free will to choose whether or not to believe in God. However, arguments offering convincing demonstrations of God's existence have been advanced, for these help to strengthen one's belief. One such argument, based on Abraham's "discovery" of God, is that only an Almighty, omnipotent God could have created such a complex and intricate world. The question of a "first cause" for the creation of the universe is one that will hound any self-proclaimed atheist; in this sense, science substantiates religion. This proof indicates that God must exist, because who else could have been responsible for the existence of all matter? However, how do we know that God is still involved in the everyday operations of the world? The author points to God's direct intervention in worldly affairs, such as in the story of the Jews' exodus from Egypt. The Biblical account of God's Revelation allows all generations to try to know God in the way that the generation of Sinai did. Jews are reminded of the themes of Creation and Revelation by the first two blessings of the daily Shema prayer.

Chapter 31: Who is Satan?

Many cultures throughout history have believed that the universe is controlled by a duality of forces: those of good and of evil. Judaism disagrees. The Ten Commandments specifically state that Jews should believe in one and only one God. Satan exists as the incarnation of the evil impulse and as the Angel of Death-but

only under the control of God, and not as an independent entity. It is Satan's function to challenge humans, and allow them to overcome obstacles on the path to moral perfection. As such, Satan is solely the agent of God.

Chapter 32: Are We Really Created in God's Image?

One of Maimonides' Principles is the belief that God is not a physical being, for this would subject God to the limitations of a body. The fact that the Torah speaks of God in physical terms (referring to "the hand of God" and the like) is no contradiction, for this was done to allow humans to comprehend Him (anthropomorphism). What, then, does the Torah mean when it says that humans were created in God's image? This refers not to God's appearance, but to His essence. Maimonides felt that humans best resemble God in terms of intellectual capacity, while Nahmanides emphasized their Godlike spirit. As for the question of why God is referred to as being a "He" rather than a "She", the author writes that, in reality, God has the qualities of both men (in His stance of strict accountability) and women (in His capacity to be compassionate).

Chapter 33: Do We Really Have Free Will?

Maimonides is among the Jewish philosophers who raise the question of how humans can possess free will in light of God's omniscience: If God can foresee everything, then how is one free to choose the direction of his life? Maimonides' response is that humans do, in fact, have free will, despite God's ability to know everything in advance; but humans cannot truly comprehend this divine ability. The Rabad feels that Maimonides should not have raised the question if he did not have a satisfactory answer to it. Nevertheless, once the issue has been raised, Rabad deals with it by suggesting that God's omniscience is, in fact, limited in regard to the future. The author suggests that Maimonides' true point was that to God, Who is of a stature incomprehensible to humans, Time does not necessarily consist of the separate dimensions of past, present, and future. Rather, He is elevated above Time, and knows everything that is happening or will happen, without necessarily influencing these events.

Chapter 34: No Middleman

The Jews who made the Golden Calf during Moses' absence were not seeking to eliminate worship of God. Rather, according to Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, they intended to have the Calf serve as a reminder of God; and when they would pray to the Calf, they would in effect be praying to God. Their error was in thinking that they required a middleman to come between them and God. All Jews-Priests, Levites, and Israelites have the opportunity to pray directly to God. A Kohen (Jewish priest), however, does have greater responsibilities, meant to make him a representative of holiness to the rest of the nation. Thus, he may not marry a divorcee and cannot come in contact with the dead (for Judaism is a religion of life, not death). Nevertheless, he serves as a reminder only that all Jews can aspire to holiness. Likewise, even though Jews pray at the graves of departed relatives, they pray to God, not to the dead (though the merits of the latter may make the prayer more efficacious). When one asks a Rabbi or righteous person to pray on behalf of an ill loved one, he is similarly not asking the Rabbi to be an intermediary to God. Rather, he requests that the Rabbi hear of the person's plight and make it his own. Therefore, the Rabbi will pray that his many merits will ease his own suffering by convincing God to remove its source: the illness of the other person.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 30

Question 1. Why does the author contend that all proofs about God leave room for disagreement? Why does he disagree with the statement, "Seeing is believing"? On what, then, does he say one should base his acceptance of God? (p. 253)

Question 2. According to the author, why might God not reveal Himself more conspicuously to humans? How does this help explain how the mission of humans in this world differs from that of angels? (p. 254)

Question 3. What problem is raised by the Torah's statement that God hardened Pharaoh's heart before the Ten Plagues? How does Nahmanides resolve this problem? (pp. 254-255)

Question 4. How does theology define the word "proof" in regard to God's existence? (p. 256)

Question 5. What proof of God's existence originated with Abraham? Summarize the quotes of Jeremy Taylor and Howard Shaughnessy. (pp. 256-257)

Question 6. Explain Sullavan's statement that "the best proof of God's existence is what follows when we deny it"; and Pasteur's statement that "a little science estranges men from God; much science leads them back to Him." (p. 257)

Question 7. Summarize the way in which Maimonides proved the existence of God to the skeptic. (p. 258)

Question 8. How can the study of anatomy help bring about a greater belief in God? (p. 258)

- Question 9. Explain the question of "First Cause". (p. 258)
- Question 10. How can one accept the commandment to believe in God if one doubts the existence of God? What is the point of the commandment? (p. 259)
- Question 11. Even if one accepts the teleological and cosmological proofs, what question about God still remain? How does the author address this? (p. 260)
- Question 12. Why did God reveal Himself so fully at Sinai? (pp. 260-261)
- Question 13. What are the first two blessings of the Shema prayer, and how do they relate to the chapter's discussion of proofs of God? (pp. 261-3)

Chapter 31

- Question 1. What is the second of the Ten Commandments? Why was this commandment necessary? (p. 264)
- Question 2. How did those who did not believe in God account for the phenomenon of wicked people enjoying success? (p. 264)
- Question 3. Why did the Talmud Berachot state that one who gives thanks to God twice is silenced? (p. 264)
- Question 4. Is there a concept of Satan in Judaism? Explain. How does Judaism differ in this regard from other religions? (p. 265)
- Question 5. What role does Satan play in the story of Job? (p. 266)
- Question 6. Why does the Talmud say that the creation of the Evil Impulse was a positive development? (p. 267)
- Question 7. What is learned from the construction of the word "le'vavecha"? (p. 267)
- Question 8. Why did Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi admonish the person who tried to prevent the Angel of Death from functioning? (p. 269)

Chapter 32

- Question 1. Why can God not be a physical entity, from a logical standpoint? What parts of the Torah seem to contradict this view? What is the response of Bahya Ibn Pekudah to this apparent problem? (pp. 270-271)
- Question 2. In what sense are humans created in God's image? What is the difference between tzelem and to'ar? (p. 271)
- Question 3. What is the difference of opinion between Maimonides and Nahmanides in regard to the interpretation of "man is created in God's image"? How is this difference reflected in modern-day divergences of attitude among segments of the Jewish world? (pp. 271-272)
- Question 4. What words in the Torah indicate that God can be viewed from both a masculine and feminine perspective? How does the author explain this? (pp. 273-274)

Chapter 33

- Question 1. What is the central problem discussed in this chapter? (p. 275)
- Question 2. How does Maimonides deal with the problem? What was the Rabad's reaction to this? What problem results from the Rabad's comments? (pp. 276-277)
- Question 3. How might recent scientific insights help resolve the apparent paradox between God's omniscience and man's free will? How did Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav explain it? (pp. 278-280)

Chapter 34

- Question 1. How does Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi explain the reason that the Jews made the Golden Calf? Why then was it considered a sin? (pp. 282)
- Question 2. What were the origins of paganism, according to the book? What is the relationship between paganism and the Jewish ban on an intermediary between God and man? (pp. 282-283)
- Question 3. If Judaism has no need of a middleman between God and humans, what then is the role of the Kohen? (pp. 284-285)
- Question 4. If intermediaries are unacceptable, why do Jews speak to the dead in prayer? (pp. 285-286)
- Question 5. What is the rationale for asking a Rabbi to pray for someone's welfare? (pp. 286-288)

THOUGHT QUESTION

- Question 1. How might you go about trying to convince the following of the existence of God:
- A youngster turning Bar/Bat Mitzvah?
 - A college student?

c) A college professor?

Question 2. How can having belief in God lead to a practical difference in one's life? Why might some believers not behave in a moral manner?

Question 3. Suggest how you feel the world would react if God did actually appear to humankind today.

Question 4. How would you define a miracle? Based on your definition, do miracles actually occur today? Do they provide evidence of God's existence?

Question 5. Discuss societal infringements on people's power of Free Choice. Do you feel this is a positive or negative development?

Question 6. Give examples from your own life of how the Evil Inclination works. Does everyone have one? How are some able to resist it more than others? Should those who have stronger Evil Inclinations but master them receive greater rewards than those who are righteous from birth? Has the Evil Inclination ever helped you meet the challenges of life?

Question 7. Have you tended to picture God as a man, a woman, a mixture of both, or neither? Does this really make any practical difference?

Question 8. When praying, do you truly feel that you are speaking directly to God? If you were to compose your own personal prayer, what would it be?

Part XII-The Divinity of Torah (pp. 291-316)

CAPSULE SUMMARY

Chapter 35 : Does God Speak to Man?

Dreams have traditionally been considered a means of communication between God and humans. The chosen few—even non-Jews like Pharaoh—received messages from God in this manner. Moses, however, reached such a high level of prophecy and such intimacy with the Almighty that he was able to communicate with God directly and in daytime, when fully awake. Furthermore, Moses was able to speak to God when he wished, and did not become enteebled when doing so. Some Sages, like Rashi, were of the opinion that Moses was destined for his remarkable role at birth; while others argue that he was a normal human being with defects, who overcame these to emerge as the ultimate prophet. In this sense, as Maimonides' Seventh Principle states, Moses was truly unique, and "there arose not in Israel another like unto Moses, a prophet who perceived God's countenance."

Chapter 36: The Whole Truth

The Torah portion proclaiming the Ten Commandments at Sinai is followed immediately by the portion commanding the observance of the Sabbatical year (Shemittah). The Sages derive from this juxtaposition the lesson that just as all the laws of Shemittah were given in all their minutae at Sinai, so were all the details of the other 612 mitzvot presented at Sinai. The Torah guarantees that, if the Jews allow the land to lie fallow during the seventh year, they will be blessed. Likewise, if the Jews observe the Torah, and accept it in its entirety as the word of Truth—in the same manner that the laws of gravity and of agriculture are accepted as truth—they will be guaranteed God's beneficence.

Chapter 37: Now and Forever

The Torah specifically states that the law given at Sinai is an "everlasting statute." No leader could come along later and declare that the Torah's rules are outdated and in need of revision. It is because Jesus did just this that Judaism rejects him for being a false prophet. However, there is one exception to the rule that the laws of the Torah are immutable: those that are introduced in the Torah with the word *ki* : "when" or "if". One example is the matter of polygamy. The Torah states, "If a man has two wives..." This implies that polygamy is permissible. However, because of the fact that the Torah introduces this passage with the word "if", it indicates that the rule is subject to later change. And, in fact, Rabbeinu Gershom did ban polygamy in the 10th century, because societal norms had changed, and people were now able to accept the ideal monogamous relationship, as practiced by the very first humans, Adam and Eve. Likewise, the Torah contains laws involving slavery—not condoning the institution, but redefining and limiting it as a temporary condition. A further example pertains to the laws of a Jewish king. As the prophet Samuel noted, a Jewish king who acts like a non-Jewish ruler and disregards the Torah is anathema to God. Nevertheless, the Torah did not ban the monarchy outright, in light of the people's strong desire for a king. It did, though, put limits on the king so as to prevent him from becoming a ruthless dictator. Aside from these exceptions, though, the Torah's laws remain fixed for all time.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 35

Question 1. What is the role of dreams within Jewish life? (pp. 293-294)

- Question 2. In what four ways did Moses achieve the highest level of prophecy? (pp. 294-296)
- Question 3. Was Moses destined at birth for greatness? Give both opinions and cite their sources. (pp. 296-297)
- Question 4. Which of Moses's acts caused God to select him as the leader of the Jewish nation? (p. 298)
- Question 5. Why does the Torah give details of the manner in which Moses's parents were born? (p. 299)
- Question 6. What are the first, middle, and final letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and what significance is there in this? (p. 301)

Chapter 36

- Question 1. What is the general rule of the Sabbatical year? Why does the Torah mention laws pertaining to the Sabbatical year right after the account of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai? (pp. 302-303)
- Question 2. Why was the law of the Sabbatical year specifically chosen to teach the above observation? (pp. 303-306)
- Question 3. How do the directions to a G.M. car relate to the Torah? (pp. 304-305)

Chapter 37

- Question 1. What argument changed the mind of the Jews for Jesus member? (pp. 307-308)
- Question 2. In what ways did Christianity alter the laws of Judaism? Why were these changes rejected by Judaism? (pp. 309-310)
- Question 3. What are the "ki" group laws? What principle applies to them? (pp. 310-311)
- Question 4. What was Rabbenu Gershom's ruling in regard to marriage? What gave him the right to institute such a ruling? (pp. 311-312)
- Question 5. What is the Jewish perspective on slavery? Why didn't the Torah prohibit slavery? When did slavery become abhorrent? (pp. 312-314)
- Question 6. Why was Samuel upset when the Jews asked for a king? Did his anger contradict passages from the Torah implying approval of a Jewish king? (pp. 314-316)

THOUGHT QUESTION

- Question 1. Can you detect any religious or spiritual significance to any of your dreams?
- Question 2. If a true prophet were to appear today, what role do you think he would assume? What would he warn people about, and how would he be received by society?
- Question 3. Whom do you consider to have attained a higher level of achievement: a scholar and/or teacher who was born religious, or a simple religious person who was raised in an irreligious home? Why? Why do you think some Jews who were raised in a religious home abandon religion as adults?
- Question 4. Contrast the personalities of Moses and Jesus as seen by Judaism and Christianity respectively, especially in terms of claims to Godliness.
- Question 5. Conjecture on what the world would be like today if the Torah and Ten Commandments had never been given.
- Question 6. How would you explain the concept of Shabbos to a non-practicing Jew or a non-Jew? How would you explain why one cannot flick on a lightswitch, even though this does not involve much work?
- Question 7. Why would some Jews accept the claims of Christian missionaries? Would they be won over more by their intellectual or emotional arguments? How can these Jews be kept within the Jewish fold?
- Question 8. What response can be given to someone who claims that the Torah laws are outdated and must be altered to keep Judaism up to date?

Part XIII-The End of Days (pp. 317-331)

CAPSULE SUMMARY

Chapter 38: Are We Close to the Time of the Messianic Era?

The principle of equitable rewards for the righteous and punishment for the wicked, which seems to be contradicted by the reality of life, can be understood only through the concepts of the Messiah and the World to Come. Their belief in the arrival of the Messiah and in the ultimate rewards of the World to Come has helped Jews overcome the abysmal oppressions they have faced throughout history. The paradise of Eden, from which the first man was ignobly exiled, awaits the return of Adam's descendants. However, the Jewish nation must first show that it deserves the Messianic Age, through repentance and good deeds. If Jews act in a worthy manner, then God will hasten the coming of the Messiah. Yet, Jewish tradition contends that even if the Jews are not deserving, the Messiah will arrive before the Jewish year 6000. Some have seen the Holocaust as a sign that the Messiah's arrival is imminent; for the Messiah will arrive in stages, and the calamities of

World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel may be seen as necessary stages for the ingathering of Jewish exiles during the Messianic Era.

CONTENT QUESTION

Chapter 38

- Question 1. Which of Maimonides' principles can serve as a response when reality seems to contradict the concept that the good are rewarded and the wicked are punished? (p. 320)
- Question 2. What significance is there to the fact that a Jew is called a "Yid"? How does this help answer the question of how Jews have survived throughout the ages despite constant oppression? (p. 321)
- Question 3. In what way will the Messianic Era be a return to earlier times? (p. 322)
- Question 4. What does the author say about the timing of the Messiah's appearance? (pp. 323-331)
- Question 5. What is the maximum time we will have to wait for the Messiah? What is the source for this? (pp. 323-324)
- Question 6. What are the Three Ages of the world? (pp. 324-325)
- Question 7. Why did some Rabbis say of the Messiah, "Let him come, but let me not see him"? (p. 325)
- Question 8. In what way is the "Chad Gadya" a summary of the history of the Jews? (pp. 326-327)
- Question 9. What parts of the Biblical prophecy concerning the Messianic Era have already been realized, according to the author? (pp. 327-329)
- Question 10. What is the difference between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua in regard to the timing of the Messiah's arrival? How does this relate to their disagreement about what will prompt the coming of the Messiah? (pp. 328-329)
- Question 11. What does the author mean by his statement that "we are like no generation that went before us"? (p. 331)

THOUGHT QUESTION

- Question 1. What do you imagine the Messiah to be like? Is the Messiah a person or merely a concept? Is the Messianic age a movement or a process? Do you feel that most Jews today would forsake their current lives and follow the Messiah to Eretz Yisrael? Explain.
- Question 2. How would you go about trying to make world Jewry worthy of the coming of the Messiah?
- Question 3. What is your personal picture of life after the arrival of the Messiah?

UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM

A six-part Video Series for individual and group Torah study

Sponsored by the Orthodox Union, this unique collection of six, hour-and-a-half long, high quality tapes, form a complete foundation for an introduction to Judaism. Together with the workbook by Rabbi Eliezer Gevartz and full original text, Rabbi Blech's comprehensive view of Judaism will be available to all, from beginner to advanced student, for individual and classroom or group viewing.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech is a nationally recognized educator, religious leader, author and lecturer. He had served with great distinction since 1966 as an associate professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University. Author of three best selling works - Understanding Judaism, Secrets of Hebrew Words, and More Secrets of Hebrew Words: Holy Days And Happy Days - each one was chosen as the main selection by the Jewish Book Club.

Rabbi Blech has lectured extensively around the world and was special guest for Jewish communities in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Israel as well as serving as Scholar-in Residence at hundreds of synagogues throughout the United States and Canada. Rabbi Blech has appeared on national television, written for Newsweek, New York Times and Newsday, as well as numerous scholarly publications.

Rabbi Blech is the recipient of the American Educator of the Year Award for dedication to the highest level of Jewish education over a lifetime of service to the Jewish community. Rabbi Blech had served as President of the National Council of Young Israel Rabbis, as well as President of the International League for the Repatriation of Russian Jewry. A tenth generation Rabbi, he has formed thousands of Rebbe-Talmid relationships through his warm and caring style, as well as his unique and unforgettable approach to teaching.

Rabbi Blech is an unusually eloquent and gifted speaker, as well as a profound contemporary theologian and religious spokesman who has made a major impact on every audience that he has addressed. Rabbi Blech has currently completed 37 years of service as spiritual leader of the Young Israel of Oceanside.

Regular Price \$94.⁹⁵

**Available from the Orthodox Union
333 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001
Call (212) 613-8226 to order**