

TODAY'S *Jewish* IDOLATRY

Notes in Rabbis' Graves
Checking Mezuzas
Tehillim Recitals
Red Bendels
Challa Keys

**Sinful
Desire:**
Encouraged?

When troubled,
do you rely on
God, or resort to
amulets?

Can amulets
protect if your sins
deserve God's
punishments?

If a person is righ-
teous, won't God
protect him...
without amulets?

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Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

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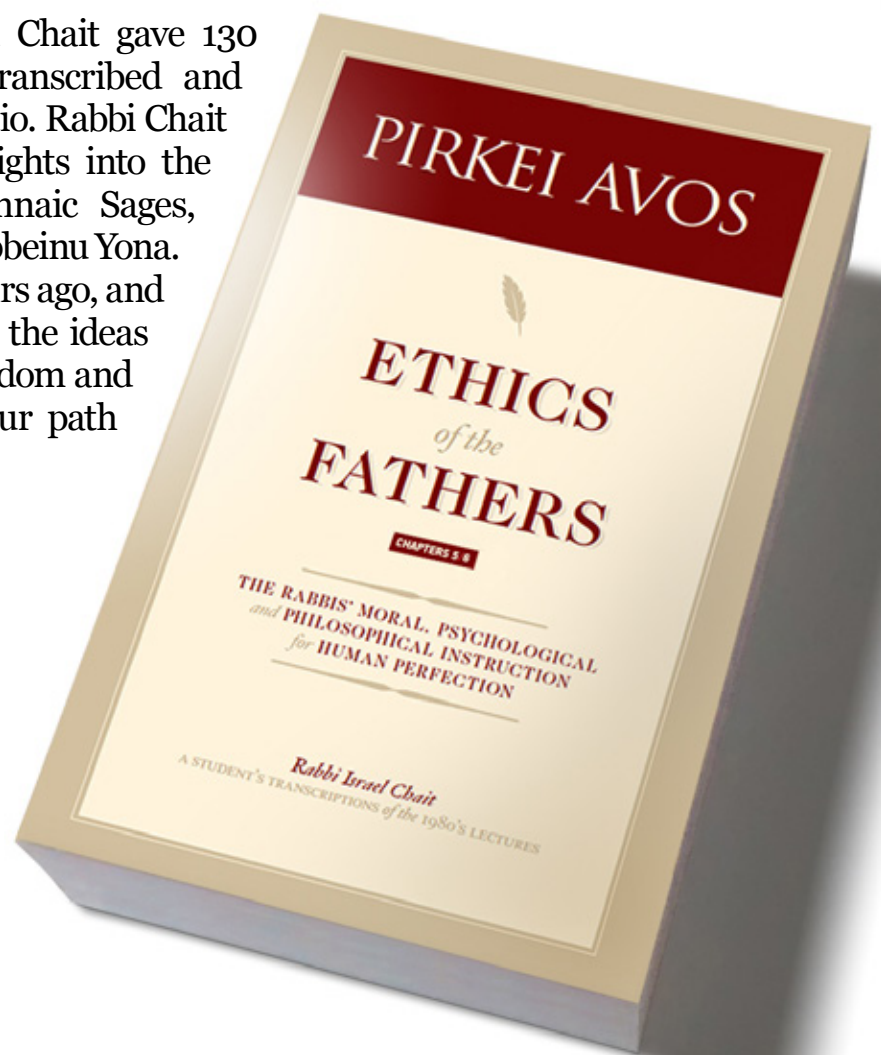
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3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Torah is for all mankind.

6 Today's Jewish Idolatry

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The prophet's words unveil a method of thought which correct fallacy. Their lessons remain relevant today.

8 Chosen People

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The world accepts the Bible, but ignores God's eternal selection of the Jew and Israel.

8 Religion of Mind

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The rabbis' brief words reveal profound principles.

10 A Higher Standard

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Not only the High Priest, but all Jews must rise to a higher standard.

LETTERS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Torah: For All People

Reader: In your recent Jewishtimes (April 24, 2020) you claim, "All mankind should follow Torah, as we all share one design, as witnessed in the COVID-19 pandemic: the virus doesn't distinguish between races. Torah too doesn't distinguish: what benefits one person, benefits all."

You stated that the Coronavirus teaches us of one human design as it affects all classes of humanities irrespective color, race and religion with more fatal outcomes in the elderly. You interpret this as a proof that there is only one religion for all mankind. The question is, since all mankind descend from Adam and Eve and it is even proven in DNA studies, it may not translate that Hashem wants the same religion and tradition for all mankind, for it was stated in Genesis that the Almighty was the one that split mankind into different languages, bringing human diversity into existence. As long as humanities do not speak the same language, there can be no way our mentality will be the same as it was before Babel.

Rabbi: You make a step that is wrong. God's separation of languages is the "only" change He made. Therefore, in all other ways, all mankind is identical. One religion is God's only will. Please think about this: the reason God confounded

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

the peoples' languages at Babel was to halt their corruption, precisely to revert them back to following God. This means that all peoples shared the identical capacity to follow the same monotheism, both before and after the change of languages.

Reader: However, even if we say that G-d wants all mankind to follow one religion, which let's say is Judaism, what version of Judaism should we follow?

Rabbi: There is only one version of Judaism from Sinai 3332 years ago: Orthodox. Conservative, Reform and Progressive were all created in the past few hundred years.

Reader: There have not been organized efforts by World Jewry to bring the light of the Torah to the heathen and idol worshippers of Asia and Africa. The standard teachings of Jews is that the righteous of the world have a share in the world to come, in contrast to the Christian teaching that the "word of G-d" can make a difference and heathen culture must be converted as a mission by Jesus. The only times we see Jews interacting with the rest of the world is through the world of business and money. Israeli companies are in virtually every country where business opportunity arise, but they do not spread the light of Torah. In fact, there are articles that were published sometimes ago in Israel that shows how Israeli companies are responsible for selling many of spy gadgets to repressive regimes in the world, not to talk of arms sales. The article was published by Haaretz a Liberal Jewish Newspaper in Israel. In some communities like the Ugandan Jews that have showed interest in the Torah and formally disengage themselves from the

missionary Jesus religion, there have been little or no support from the Orthodox Judaism. A number of Conservative Judaism congregation send Torah scrolls and helping out, but the Traditional Jews have failed to even look at the community. Before this coronavirus shutdown, young men from that community that came to Israel for rabbinic training were denied visas. The attitude of Judaism has been that it is a religion not meant for the whole world, unlike Christianity and Islam. Rabbinic Judaism prescribed two sets of standards for humanities, a set of moral codes: the 613 Commandments (for Jews) and the Noachide rules for non Jews, not even the Ten Commandments that have made the West great. The question is how can the same G-d creating the same humans create two sets of standards for the same humanities who all die and return to the same dust irrespective of the race and religion? Are there two types of heaven: one for the Jew another one for the Gentiles? Is the Almighty not running the risk of corrupting the afterlife, letting people in who are used to the easy and relaxed rules of the Noachides? How can a gentile in other religions, no matter how righteous, spend eternity with the G-d revealed in the Torah if he dies in his idolatrous religion, giving how strict and holy Hashem of the true Bible is? Thank you. Sincerely asked to clarify the points Sir.

Rabbi: As I wrote, God gave only one religion to mankind. The Jew is at fault for not sharing Torah with the world. But each member of mankind too is at fault for not investigating the religions to discover which one is God's will, and which are false. Every gentile can obtain the same books as a Jew and study Torah if he wishes to convert. There are righteous rabbis willing to help gentiles. But all Jews

should make themselves available to gentiles to teach them, as is God's will.

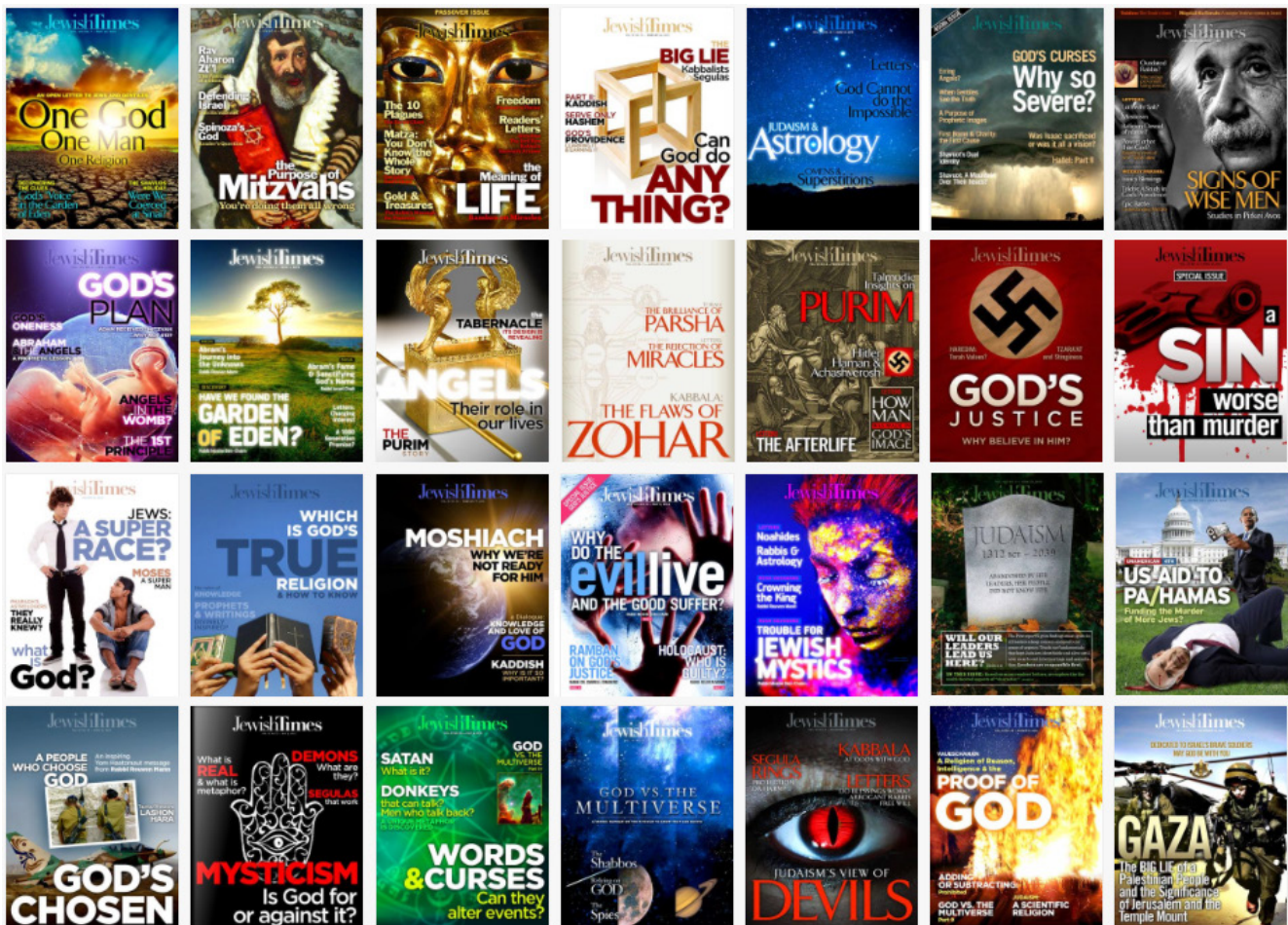
Abraham was idolatrous, but he used his mind to discover the falsehood of alien religions and the truth of monotheism, and God helped him. God will help any human seeking Him. Abraham demonstrates to the world today that every man and woman has the innate capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood, no matter his upbringing or culture. No one is without blame for following Christianity, Islam, and the others. They each fail to prove their claims, but blindly follow the emotional appeal of these baseless religions. While it is true that 613 Commandments are for Jews alone and the 7 Noachide rules for non Jews, the best life is for one to convert to Judaism and observe all 613. It's simple: the more commands one observes, the greater is his/her perfection. There is one heaven, which is attainable by every human.

We must not judge Judaism based on what Jews do, meaning the failure of today's Jews to assist gentiles. We judge Judaism based on God's Torah, which is replete with examples of gentiles and gentile descendant whom God loved and helped. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the matriarchs, Joseph, his wife, the 12 Tribes, and Moses and his wife were as gentile as the rest of the world, until God have His Torah and created the Jewish nation. These people were all righteous, and most were prophets. They were all gentiles. Kings David and Solomon and the messiah all descend from a gentile: Ruth the convert.

As Abraham and Moses taught monotheism to gentiles, we follow these examples God highlighted in His Torah, as we follow God's Torah instruction, not Jews today who might be uninvolved with teaching gentiles. ■

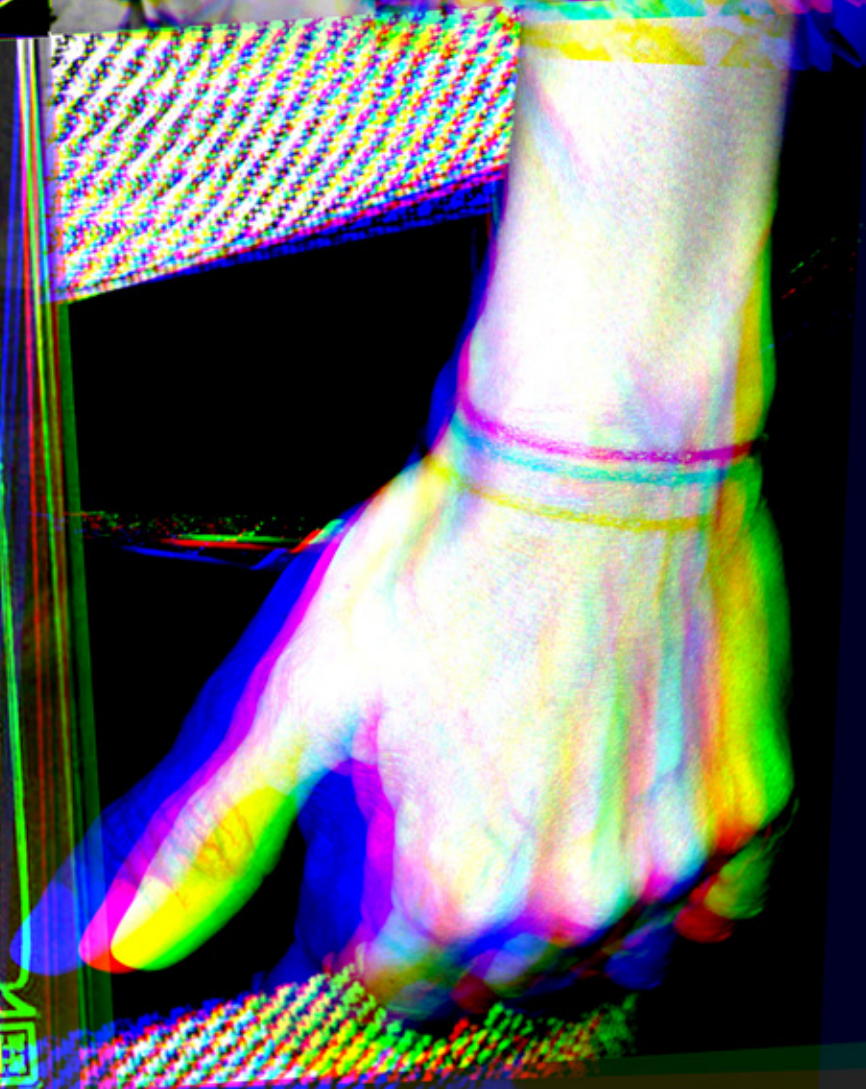
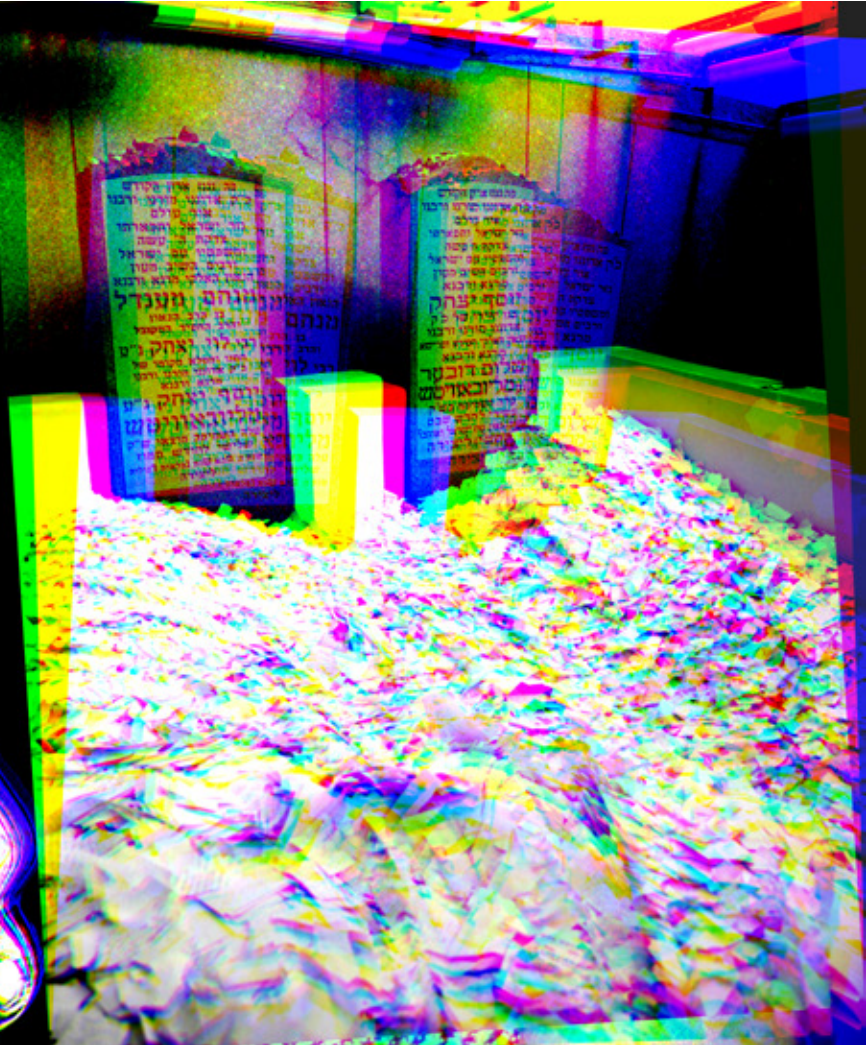
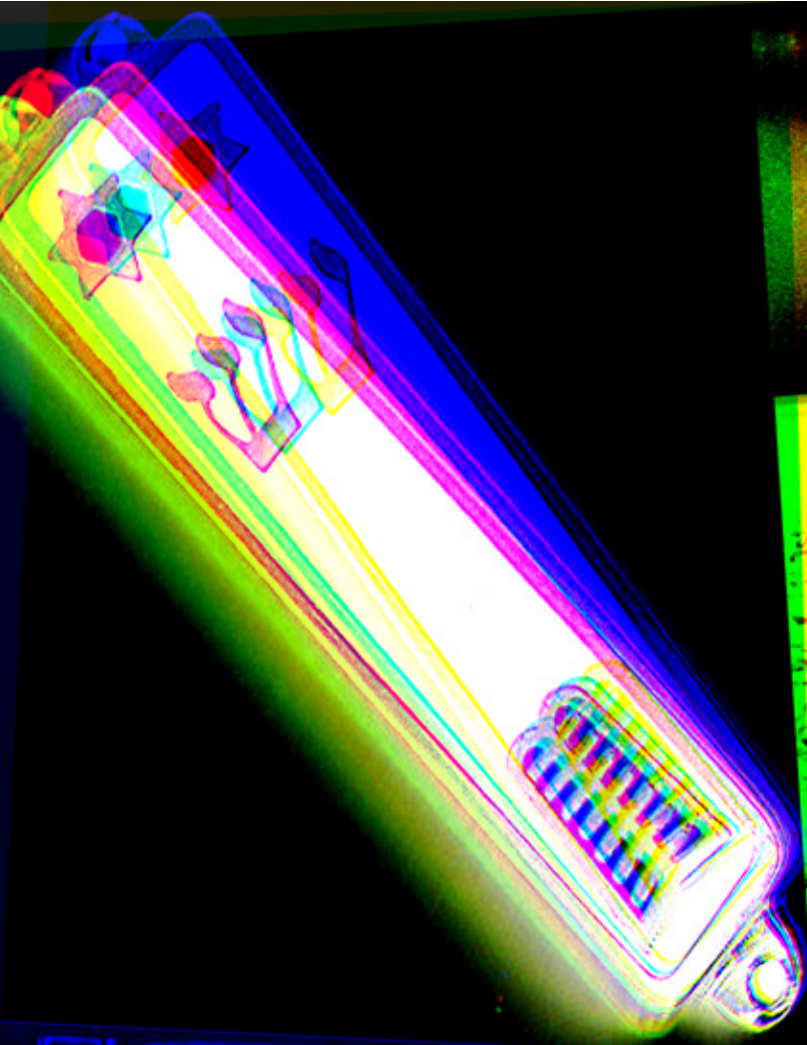
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TODAY'S Jewish IDOLATRY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I, I am the one who wipes away your sins for My own sake and remembers your sins no more (Isaiah 43:25).

This verse forms part of the haftorah of Vayikra, where later on God rebukes the Jews for their idolatry:

The makers of idols, all are empty; and the things they treasure can do no good, as they themselves testify. They [idols] neither see nor think, and so they shall be shamed (Ibid. 44:9).

In 43:25, we wonder at the double use of God's self reference "I, I." There is a profound lesson here in God's message that He wipes away sin.

How is sin defined? It is only through communication. When God says He wipes away sin, He means that He also defined sin: He alone communicated a religion to man. Immediately, one reading these words must suddenly realize the harsh, dead silence of his carved and molten gods. He must realize these lifeless sculptures have not communicated; they have not "prohibited." The Jews' belief that failure to serve idols elicits from them an evil fate, must immediately vanish. Their inanimate gods never "communicated," telling them what is sin. When God says He "wipes away sin," He exposes idols as false. Had God said, "I wipe away your sin," the reader would understand this to mean that forgiveness is one of God's traits. But by saying, "I, I am the one who wipes away your sins" the focus is not only that God forgives, but that it is "God alone" who wipes away sin: "I, I am the one who wipes away your sins." This is a potent statement, which exposes the lifeless nature of idols, which never communicated what sin is. God alone communicated a religion to mankind; He alone defined sin, and can wipe away sin. Idols and all other religions are without basis.

This rebuke equally applies to superstitions and violations which today permeate Jewish life. Jews still wear red bendels, they pray to the dead and place notes on graves, they check their mezuzahs and they recite tehillim thinking these objects or recitals

magically secure good fortune. Torah's prohibitions of omens and superstitions aren't limited to secular practices, but even religious objects can be used in violation of God's words. Great Rabbis have said this:

If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by God. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes. (Gilyon M'harsha, Yoreh Daah, 289, page 113 on the bottom)

It is a universal custom to write the word Shaddai (Almighty) on the other side of the Mezuzah, opposite the blank space between the two sections. As this word is written on the outside, the practice is unobjectionable. They, however, who write names of angels, holy names, a Biblical text or inscriptions usual on seals, within the Mezuzah, are among those who have no portion in the world to come. For these fools not only fail to fulfill the commandment but they treat an important precept that expresses the Unity of God, the love of Him, and His worship, as if it were an amulet to promote their own personal interests; for, according to their foolish minds, the Mezuzah is something that will secure for them advantage in the vanities of the world. (Maimonides, Laws of Mezuzah 5:4)

The Rabbis above are clear. God is too:

Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. (Deut. 18:10,11)

Like all holy books, Tehillim is to be studied to realign ourselves with God through increased knowledge of truth, and improving our ways. But reciting Tehillim as a means to heal, violates "casting a spell." When his infant was sick, Tehillim's author fasted and prayed, he did not recite Tehillim. If King David did not recite Tehillim as a healing device, we certainly must not. And one must not inquire of the dead, expressed today by placing notes in rebbes's graves.

All these practices contradict God's justice and His system of Reward and Punishment, one of Maimonides 13 Foundations of Torah. A wicked person will not be healed by reciting Tehillim, wearing a red string, or by checking his mezuzah; he will be punished until he repents. And a righteous person will not suffer by not wearing some amulet. If you ignite a red bendel or a mezuzah, it burns. As it cannot protect itself; it cannot protect you. The evil and good that befalls man is due only to his sins and perfect actions. If we suffer through coronavirus, Tehillim will not remove it; only our repentance will. Maimonides writes:

When we see that some men escape plagues and mishaps, whilst others perish by them, we must not attribute this to a difference in the properties of their bodies, or in their physical constitution, "For by strength shall no man prevail," but it must be attributed to their different degrees of perfection, some approaching God, whilst others moving away from Him. Those who approach Him are best protected, and "He will keep the feet of his saints," but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen (Guide, book III chap. XVIII). ■

The Eternally Chosen People and their Eternal Land

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Those claiming that Israel is no longer the Jews' possession, contradict God. God also named the Jews as His eternally-chosen people, with Israel as their eternal land. It is a third error that Christians assume authority to interpret the Bible, a book which God gave to the Jews and not the Christians, who did not yet exist at Sinai. God's words trump human opinion:

Israel: The Eternal Chosen People

"Indeed, you shall observe My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you that I have chosen you from among all the nations, throughout the generations, that all the nations may recognize that I, the Eternal, have sanctified you. (Exod. 31:13)

You shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and I have set you apart from other peoples to be Mine. (Lev. 20:26)

For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be His own treasure, out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. (Deut. 7:6)

For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be His own treasure out of all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. (Deut. 14:2)



God Promised Israel to Abraham's Descendants Eternally

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: (Gen. 15:18)

I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God." (Gen. 17:8)

And, behold, the LORD stood beside him, and said: 'I am the

LORD, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. (Gen. 28:13)

Go, take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to them and to their heirs after them. (Deut. 1:8)

The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac I assign to you and to your offspring to come will I assign the land." (Gen. 35:12) ■

A Religion of Mind

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

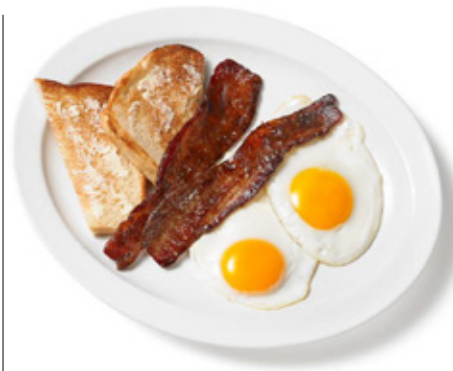
*And you shall be holy to Me, for I am holy,
and I separated you from the nations to be unto Me. (Lev. 20:26)*

Rashi comments:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said, "From where do we learn that one should not say, 'I despise pig flesh, I don't desire to wear mixed species (wool and linen)' but instead, one should say, 'I desire these, but what can I do, as my Father in heaven forbade them?' We learn this from our verse, 'And I separated you from the nations to be unto Me,' that your abstention from these is [performed] for My sake; separate from sin and accept the yoke of heaven."

With the words "to be unto Me," Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya says Torah identifies the proper motivation for avoiding Torah prohibitions: one must not render pig into a taboo and associate disgust with it; one should not project negative qualities onto prohibited garments. For God said all creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), which includes pig and mixed species. If a person abstains from eating pig due to disgust, he then does not abstain due to God's will, but due to his own emotions. "Following God" means that one acts due to God's will, and not due to his own feelings.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya teaches the lesson of this verse: by not creating false



negative projections, we retain our honest desire to enjoy pork, but we abstain due to God's authority. Following God—"accepting the yoke of heaven"—refers to man accepting real desires, but restraining them. In this manner we are distinguished from other nations who satisfy every instinctual desire, and don't follow God's authority. They don't choose the treasure of Torah to uplift them from a life of unrestrained physicality, to a life of restraint and wisdom. Physical pleasures are short-lived; they don't translate into happiness. But when man's higher element—his soul—is engaged in the wisdom God revealed through nature and Torah, he is fulfilled and truly happy. God designed man to find the greatest happiness when using his mind.

By restraining our emotions from certain satisfactions and pleasures, we can redirect those energies towards a life of wisdom. We don't live as ascetics, but we also don't

overindulge. For with overindulgence, our energies cannot be free to engage thought and wisdom. Rabbi Israel Chait explained that overindulgence is a symptom man's inability to attain satisfaction; he exerts more energy into a desire assuming happiness is a quantitative issue. But as satisfaction was not achieved with man's first indulge, overindulging cannot satisfy man; he's repeating his error.

From Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's principle, we learn that even when we follow Torah and see the benefits of abstaining from pork, this does not eliminate the natural pleasure one would derive from eating a delicious cut of pork; our senses are still intact and we still enjoy smelling bacon. We don't deny a pleasant aroma. We desire to eat what smells delicious. This never changes. But we abstain as we recognize God's plan benefits man. He is the authority. He created us, and directs us towards a higher, more pleasurable existence in pursuit of wisdom. Recognizing God's superior wisdom helps us fight the emotion to violate.

Abstention must be due to following God, with our intellect's restraint of our emotions. Otherwise, if we create taboos, our minds are absent and we simply trade one emotion of violation, for another emotion of taboo or disgust, with no spiritual growth. To "be unto God" means we act due to our intellectual acceptance of God's rules, we recognize Torah's wisdom, and we abstain not for emotional reasons. ■

A Higher Standard

Rabbi Reuven Mann



This week's parsha, Emor, begins by delineating the special laws that govern how the Kohen Gadol (Chief Priest) must conduct himself. Simply put, he must live according to a higher standard of sanctity than the "ordinary" Jew. For example, he is prohibited from coming in contact with a dead body.

Thus, if one of his closest relatives passes away, he may not participate in the funeral. He must retain his state of holiness and ritual purity at all times. Interestingly enough, there is one exception to this restriction, the case of the Meit Mitzvah.

The rule is that we are obligated to mourn for the death of our seven close relatives: parents, children, siblings, and spouses. Those who must mourn are also bound to assume responsibility for the interment of their deceased relative. Thus, virtually everyone has a family member who will see to it that he is respectfully put to his "final rest."

There are exceptions to this rule. Some people may outlive all their family members, and when they die, have no one who is bound to arrange their burial. This could be the case with someone who converted to Judaism and died soon after.

The Talmudic principle is that "One who converts is like a child who has just been born." This means that he has no Jewish family and hence, no person who is obligated to see to his interment. [It should be noted that, once the convert marries, his

spouse has the obligation of the "close relative," and when he has children, they too must mourn for his death.]

The deceased individual who has no one to bury and mourn for him is called a Meit Mitzvah. Then it is a commandment upon every Jew to arrange his funeral, and the first person to come in contact with him is charged with this responsibility. What if that individual is the Kohen Gadol? Judaism maintains that this special person, who may not expose himself to contact with even his dead parents or children, must do so for this total stranger. The chesed (lovingkindness) involved in honoring the deceased, who was created in "the image of G-d," is so consequential that it overrides the serious injunction against the Kohen Gadol becoming ritually impure. That is an awe-inspiring statement about Judaism's concern for the dignity of all people.

However, besides the Chief Kohen, others must adhere to a higher standard of holiness. The verse exhorts, "You shall observe my Commandments and perform them; I am Hashem. You shall not desecrate My Holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem."

If we are performing Hashem's mitzvot (commandments), then we are obviously respecting Him. Why then must we be warned not to desecrate His Name?

It seems that the command not to disgrace, but to sanctify G-d's Name is addressed precisely to the community that scrupulously adheres to the Torah. What is the reason for this?

While performance of the mitzvot is extremely important, that alone does not guarantee religious perfection. We might view the mitzvot as binding responsibilities that must be fulfilled, albeit in a technical and perfunctory manner. Our ritual observance can become a narrow compartment of our lives that does not spill over into other areas of endeavor.

The mitzvot should not be regarded as arbitrary and incomprehensible demands with no rhyme or reason. There are people who believe that the value of religious performance resides solely in demonstrating our obedience to Hashem. In fact, such individuals resist the attempt to find meaning in the commandments, for to do so (they imagine) would diminish the value of their "obedience."

This type of religious outlook leaves one prone to danger. For the person holding it may behave in a manner that earns the condemnation of society. It is crucial for observant Jews to be cognizant that their conduct is scrutinized by others, nonreligious Jews and gentiles alike.

They will not be judged by their conscientious attention to every detail of the ritual code. Religions are evaluated by the overall behavior of their adherents, especially in

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their treatment of others. It is expected that religious people should be kind, considerate and compassionate. When such individuals exhibit wisdom, emotional control, and concern for the welfare of others, they evoke admiration and respect.

In contrast, when these same people are seen to be unreasonable, uncaring, and generally ignorant, they turn others off. Observers of the scene associate the unattractive behaviors of a theological group with the religion they represent, and the Name of G-d is not exalted.

It is particularly important that those who keep the Torah's commandments act in a manner that inspires admiration. Once we become identifiable as Jews, we automatically come under a demanding public scrutiny.

The Jewish people are supposed to be unique and holy. This idea is clearly expressed in the Havdalah blessing recited at the conclusion of Shabbat. In it, we praise Hashem, Who differentiated between the holy and profane, light and darkness, Israel and the nations...."

Hashem has separated us from the other peoples of the earth, to be a light unto the nations. We must adhere to a higher standard of living that manifests wisdom, honesty, justice, and compassion. We must therefore strive to understand the moral teachings embedded in the commandments, internalize their meaning, and implement their wisdom in all areas of our lives.

The mission of the Jewish people, especially those who scrupulously observe the mitzvot, is to display, in its most attractive form, the lifestyle of Torah Judaism. May we merit to achieve it.

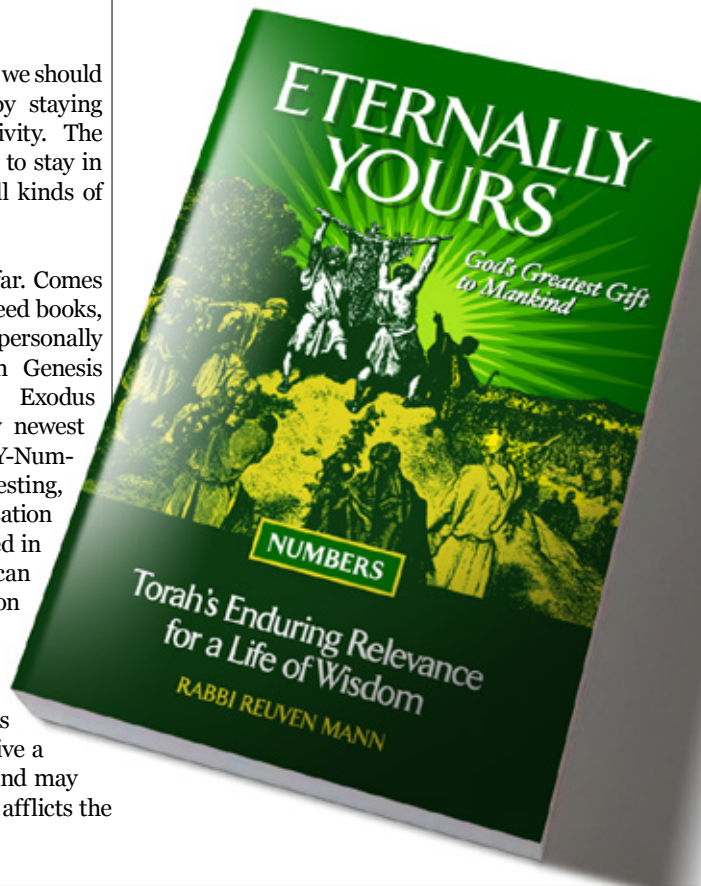
Shabbat shalom.

Dear Friends,

In this time of "social isolation," we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online.

But that can only take you so far. Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.

Please stay safe and observe the necessary precautions at this time. May those who are ill receive a complete and speedy recovery. And may Hashem remove this plague that afflicts the whole world.



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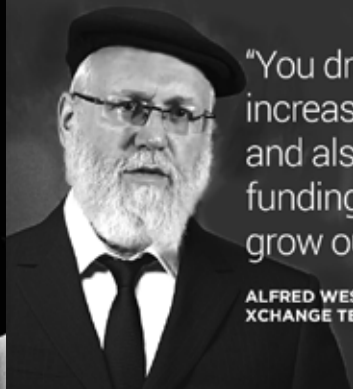
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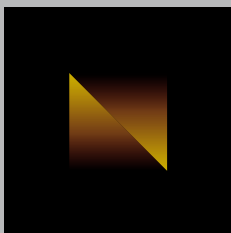


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