

JewishTimes

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ASTRONOMICAL men ARE THEY TRUE?

ABRAHAM

His Search for God

LETTERS

Purpose of Mitzvah
Souls Existed Prior to Life?
Which Religion is Right?
Thoughts of Sin, are Sins?



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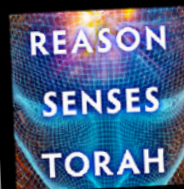
The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

MESORA
Summer 2020

EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a major offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the only time God communicated a religion to man. Masses witnessed this, which is the only validation of any historical claim, and why the major religions accept the Bible. Mesora's mission is to share God's Biblical religion with all who seek it. As every human descends from that first couple; all humans are equals. Jews boasting "Jewish Superiority" and those who discriminate against any race violate the Bible and reason. Nearing a quarter century, Mesora helps others realize God's will for us all, sharing the beauty of Biblical wisdom. Search our 1000s of original essays, publications and audio, and write us with your questions. God determined the Jew's role is to share Torah's history, wisdom, laws and moral code with all mankind. As God created all mankind, He loves each person equally. As science has defined laws, God's will for man also has defined laws and principles, and they delight the soul. The greatest minds spent their lives studying God through Torah and science, as they found nothing that compared to its enjoyment. Let us humble ourselves before Moses, Kings David and Solomon, Maimonides, Aristotle, Newton and Einstein who taught that a life of wisdom is the most fulfilling life. We too can partake of this pleasurable existence.

THOUGHT FUNDAMENTALS

"WHAT IS UNDETECTED BY THE SENSES, REASON OR TORAH, MUST NOT BE ACCEPTED AS TRUTH." MAIMONIDES



FEATURED CONTENT



CHARACTER PERFECTION

"PERFECTION" REFERS TO ONE WHOSE VALUES AND ACTIONS COMPLY WITH TORAH PERSONALITIES AND LAWS: THE MOST PLEASANT LIFE.



KINDNESS

As equals, all humans must fully treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal or selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness to us.



RACISM: A LIE

Mankind descends from Adam. Black and white twins unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from a Moabite. "Better is the day of A'sub'el, (Isa. 60:1, 7-9). Birth doesn't define us, but how

JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

| Authors may not have been advised of reprints of their essays |

3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Multiple topics are addressed.

8 Avraham's Search

RABBI REUVEN MANN
Avraham's breakthrough, rational approach to religion and discovering the Creator.

6 Omens

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
The talmud's subtle treatment of omens, and the absolute truths of Prophets.



"Thus said the LORD: Do not learn to go the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed by signs in the sky; because the nations be dismayed by them! For the laws of the nations are delusions..."

JEREMIAH

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Which Religion is Right?

READER: The argument of Catholicism is that the Church precedes—both chronologically and in precedence—the New Testament, and constitutes a living tradition going back to the Apostles of Jesus, eyewitnesses of his life, ministry, death and Resurrection, and whom themselves were inspired by the Holy Spirit. I am not saying this is what I believe. But the point is that Catholicism rejects the Sola Scriptura approach of Protestantism, and its conception is of a divinely instituted, living tradition, guarantor of the truth of the Gospel accounts, of the correct interpretation of all the

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Scriptures, complete fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, and Divinely guided and protected from doctrinal error. As much as Israel sees itself as a Living Tradition and People, the Church does too. Both accuse the other of doctoring scriptural texts and adopting polemical positions for historical reasons. Both seem self-authenticating to those looking from a distance. I am totally lost and confused now. Quoting Bible verses doesn't impress me, as anyone can put a spin on anything. Liberals question the historicity of not only Gospels but the Torah. How does one evaluate competing historical claims?

RABBI: Truth/history is validated only with mass witnesses, which exists only at Revelation at Sinai. Jews—by tribe, family and numbers—were transmitted unanimously and identically by all Jews. Those Jews exiting Egypt arrived at Sinai and witnessed revelation, they totaled 2 million Jews (Num. 1:46 numbers males over 20 years of age at 603,550. Add males younger than 20 plus all females to arrive at 2 million who witnessed Revelation at Sinai). But no masses witnessed Jesus' miracles or the divine claims made about him. We accept Caesar existed for this reason but reject Jesus' resurrection or miracles. We accept the 10 Egyptian Plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea but reject divine claims surrounding Mohammed. The date of the claim is also irrelevant; earlier-claimed events don't make them more real, nor do written documentations of such claims. Many are duped by books, thinking what's in books must be truth. ■

Noach's Imperfection

READER: An explanation (Hebrew) is needed of Rashi on Parsha Noach 7:7: "Noach only entered the ark due to being pushed inside by the force of the waters" ("mipnei mei haMabul"). Most people would read this Rashi as follows: "Even Noach had a low level of faith in God; he doubted the flood would come" (he entered the ark not due to God's promise of the Flood, but only to save himself from drowning). How can Rashi be saying that Noah was a man of low faith? We know that he was a tzaddik, and he spent 120 years building the Ark!



RABBI: Rabbi Israel Chait addressed this question this week: "The Rabbis dispute: One Rabbi said, 'Had Noach lived in Abraham's generation, he would have been even greater.' (He was influenced externally, not internally. The latter indicating true independent perfection) The other Rabbi said, 'Had Noach lived in Abraham's generation, he would be considered as nothing.' But both views agree Noach was not on a level like Abraham. Thus, Rashi suggesting that he was of little faith is commensurate with his lower level." ■

Purpose of Mitzvah

READER: Rambam writes that his sefer Ahavah includes the mitzvot that are constant which cultivate love of God. Yet he also writes that love is based on knowledge (presumably of other mitzvot as well). So how do those mitzvot (in sefer Ahavah) cultivate love of God more than others?

RABBI: Performance is not the essence of any mitzvah. Rather, the purpose of mitzvah is the "understanding" of their philosophy, how they perfect us, and in the appreciation of their beautiful halachic structures as Talmud highlights. Meaning, we benefit only when our primary faculty of our soul benefits, and a soul exists only in the world of wisdom, of intellect. Thus, a mitzvah benefits man when he understands the mitzvah.

Sefer Ahava contains these mitzvahs: Shema,

Prayer, Priestly Blessings, Tefillin, Mezuzah, the Torah Scroll, Tzitzis, Blessings and Circumcision.

The first 6 focus on the very concepts, they are texts: Shema Prayer, Priestly Blessing, Tefillin, Mezuzah and the Torah Scroll. Tzitzis reminds one of all the 613, a focus on the mitzvot as a whole system. With Blessings, one addresses God before each mitzvah to recall the Creator regularly, as we recite blessings throughout the day. And with Circumcision one subdues instinctual drives to be free to love God.

All these mitzvahs generate a love of God more than other mitzvahs, since one focusses on either texts, the Torah system, God, or he subdues his passions to enable all the above.

But waving the lulav, returning a lost item, not speaking lashon hara, etc. have a focus on something other than God. They target a proper aim, but do not love of God per se. So, all mitzvahs do offer wisdom that increase our love of God. But not all mitzvahs have "love of God" as their primary objective. Some mitzvahs targets a harmonious society, our emotions, or the joy of a holiday. ■

Overcoming Fears

READER: What does the torah say about overcoming fears? I have some anxiety in my life at the moment, a relationship has come to an end and I've started a new job in construction where I've discovered I have a bit of a fear of heights and I need to push past it. I was wondering if anyone knows some wisdom that could help me? Thank you so much.

RABBI: Living properly, one should, be confident in God's unlimited abilities to help in literally any situation. Of course this is predicated upon one having the correct idea of God, so one prays to the "real" God, and not a fantasy (fantasies cannot answer our prayers). Torah offers real examples of people like Jacob, David, Moses and others whom God helped when in dire need. These examples should instill in you trust in God. Desperation or fear disable our proper functioning; we must be on guard not to cave to them. So, learn who God is according to Torah, focus on God's abilities, and this should mitigate your fears to the point that you can take intelligent steps to plan ahead. ■

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Thoughts of Sin

READER: I always love your emphasis on Judaism being the only true religion revealed by God: it is the absolute truth. If only all peoples would recognize this. My question: Is the thought or memory of past sin wrong? Since memories right or wrong [sinful] cannot be erased, is it against the torah to remember the past sin in a positive way but not repeat that sin? An incident between me and my friend who is a Christian, even though he stopped eating pork, and never eats it now nor does have the desire to do so due to the biblical prohibition, always argues with me that its taste was very good and he cannot erase its taste from his mind. To which I replied: "Thoughts could lead to sinning or eating swines flesh again," he said that would never happen. But his question to me was if speaking fondly about the taste of pork or the memory of eating pork is wrong or not according to Judaism as long as one does not repeat the sin? Thank you.

RABBI: Rashi on Leviticus 20:26 addresses your question below:

AND I HAVE SEPARATED YOU FROM THE PEOPLES THAT YOU SHOULD BE MINE — If you hold yourselves apart from them then you will be Mine, but if not, you belong to (become subject to) Nebuchadnezzar and others like him. Rabbi Eleazer ben Azariah said, "Whence do we know that one should not say, "My soul loathes swine's flesh", or, "I have no desire to wear clothes which are a mixture of wool and linen", but one should say, "I would, indeed, like them, but what can I do since my Father in heaven has imposed these decrees upon me"? Because Scripture states: "I have separated you from the peoples to be for Me", which your separation from them (from their doings) should be for My sake — that one should keep aloof from sin and take upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven (Sifra, Kedoshim, Chapter 12 23).

The principle is not to deny what is true, and if pork is delicious to someone, denying it is a violation of reality. Judaism embraces reality, as God designed it this way for good reason. So one should admit to his desire, but follow the command in action. The thought is not sinful, as one cannot change what naturally smells pleasant. Thought of sin is not rendered as a sin. Kiddushin 39b: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not render a bad thought as an action." However, if one has thoughts of

murder and slander, here the thought indicates a distortion in one's values, and although not a sin, such thoughts should not be tolerated. Unlike enjoying pork which isn't under our control, values can and must be corrected. One must explore his values and emotions, and perfect himself, removing himself from the ego and competitive drives that generate such aggressive thoughts. ■



\$upport for Learning Torah

READER: Can one get paid to learn in Kollel according to Rambam?

RABBI: On Pirkei Avos 4:5 Rambam opposes taking money to support one's learning. Rabbi Israel Chait elucidated this in his lectures on Pirkei Avos (www.mesora.org/avos1.pdf pg 153). Rabbi Chait wrote:

A profession is performed for ulterior motives, whereas Torah cannot be engaged for any other purpose. The great sages considered it a travesty to engage Torah for financial means and not for the sake of study itself. And when Torah is studied without compensation, it creates a sanctification of God; there is no ulterior motive in this case. Despite their abject poverty, many sages engaged their lives in Torah study. Maimonides teaches that profanation of God's name operates on both the societal and the individual level. The societal level includes two forms: 1. It creates the impression that there can exist

a Torah benefactor, and 2. It gives the idea that Torah is a "profession" where one can earn money like other professions. On the individual level, the story of Rabbi Tarfon depicts how he forfeited the appreciation of Torah purely for itself [he used his Torah reputation to save his life]. Rabbi Tarfon benefitted from his fame as a scholar. This plagued him all his remaining years. Rav Yonasan teaches how careful he was not to render Torah into a commodity [he didn't use his Torah reputation to gain necessary food]. Although Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi was within his rights to make his offer [to finance Torah scholars], Rav Yonasan refused to use his status as a Torah scholar to earn anything. This would have destroyed him. King Solomon wrote, "Better is he that is of lowly status and works as a servant than he who acts too important [to work] and lacks bread" (Prov. 12:9). There is a certain type of ego that expresses itself in the inability to work: "It's too low a job for me." Maimonides' point in relating these stories teaches that the rabbis never felt work was degrading. These rabbis were authors of our Oral Law, yet they accepted menial labor that others would look down upon.

I will add that Yissachar and Zevulun had this arrangement: Zevulun worked and provided for Yissachar who sat and learned. One should not seek compensation but should work, as Rambam discusses. But one Rabbi ruled that one can seek support for his basic needs so he can learn and teach. ■

Where were Our Souls Prior to Life?

READER: Are all human beings SPIRITS before they were born? What does the Bible teach?

RABBI: I don't know of a verse in the Bible where God talks about a soul before it is in man. The Bible says, "God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). God created souls from nothingness, just as He created the universe from nothingness. Nothing demands us to say that a soul was "with God" prior to the soul being in man. ■



ASTRONOMICAL RABBI MOSHE BEN CHAIM omens ENDORSED BY GOD?

On the one hand, gemara Succah (29a) says that solar phenomena are signs of impending evil...surprisingly echoing the idolatrous notion of astrology. But later on the gemara says that if the Jews follow God's will, there is no need to fear these phenomena. So which one is it?! If they are signs of doom, why shouldn't Jews fear them even when obeying God? And if they are not signs, why do these eclipses occur when the Jews obey God? This later case rendering them not ominous, questions their very appearance if astrology is true! Furthermore, Jeremiah 10 compares fearing solar phenomena to idolatry, suggesting that it is inherently wrong to attribute value to any solar phenomena, just as idolatry is inherently wrong. This strengthens the question as to how the talmud can suggest an eclipse is an omen. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Rabbi Israel Chait taught as follows:

This gemara must be interpreted. There is a saying that an eclipse has a bad affect on a person; one feels as if something bad is about to happen to him. [But] this is all in his imagination. He cannot protect himself from this [these baseless fears]. Only Torah can remove him from this idolatrous state of mind. The language of the prophet Jeremiah expresses this idea: "From the signs of the heavens do not fear because that is what the gentiles do" (Jeremiah 10:2). The entire chapter 10 of Jeremiah is very interesting.

Rabbi Chait means that this gemara's statement "solar phenomena are signs of impending evil" is a prevalent incorrect attitude. The gemara teaches that due to his great insecurities, man forecasts good or evil based on meaningless phenomena. The rabbis who said heavenly phenomena indicate doom, didn't refer to objective reality, but that insecure man subjectively views these phenomena as forecasting evil. This gemara is a discussion of human insecurity connected with rare heavenly events. Man doesn't say that nightfall indicates impending doom, since man considers nightfall as natural. But eclipses are rare, evoking idolatrous thoughts that play on human insecurity. Due to man's need to know his future, he seeks indications in his day to make his future certain by removing the fear of the unknown. Even if the indication forecasts some evil, man prefers that evil forecast over no forecast at all; uncertainty is intolerable to the infantile, idolatrous and superstitious mind.

Jeremiah (10:1-9) corrects idolatrous notions:

Hear the word which the LORD has spoken to you, O House of Israel! Thus said the LORD: Do not learn to go the way of the nations, And do not be dismayed by signs in the sky; because the nations be dismayed by them! For the laws of the nations are delusions: for it is the work of a craftsman's hands. He cuts down a tree in the forest with an ax, he adorns it with silver and gold, he fastens it with nails and hammer so that it does not come apart. They are

like a beaten [sculpted] palm tree, they cannot speak. They have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Be not afraid of them, for they can do no harm; nor is it in them to do any good. O LORD, there is none like You! You are great and Your name is great in power. Who would not revere You, O King of the nations?! For that is Your due, since among all the wise of the nations and among all their royalty there is none like You. But they are both dull and foolish; [their] doctrine is but delusion; it is a piece of wood, silver beaten flat, that is brought from [the land of] Tarshish, and gold from [the land of] Uphaz, the work of a craftsman and the goldsmith's hands; their clothing is blue and purple, all of them are the work of skilled men.

Jeremiah teaches by association that heavenly phenomena must cause no fear, because the nations who fear them also value idolatry. The same idolatrous mindset that accepts idol worship, also attributes meaning to heavenly phenomena; it's the same error. The breakdown is that idols are mere crafts made from a tree in the forest. Just as one would not look at one tree as more significant than others, one should not view this carved tree as a deity. The craftsman intends to raise its value through silver and gold adornments, he must use tools, indicating the idol's need for man's construction. The idol is dependent. It is no more than a molded palm tree. Man's modifications haven't elevated the tree stump to any greater value than the tree from which it was cut. It doesn't have life or speech, and it can't walk. Man must carry it. Jeremiah exposes the idol as a lifeless log. "For they can do no harm; nor is it in them to do any good." "But they are both dull and foolish; [their] doctrine is but delusion; it is a piece of wood, silver beaten flat, that is brought from [the land of] Tarshish, and gold from [the land of] Uphaz." The whole of the idol seems impressive, but it is merely lifeless components shipped in from various lands.

Eclipses and other natural phenomena must carry no more weight than sunset or a rainy day. Both are equally natural, they are unrelated to man's activities and bereft of any consciousness or will that can affect man. The talmudic rabbis discussed man's baseless fears regarding the heavens, a realm out of man's control and often

deified, as seen in star worship, from which idolatry commenced. Jeremiah and all the prophets present God's absolute truths. Once we know from Jeremiah that the heavens are inconsequential, we interpret this talmudic portion accordingly. Torah sources have a hierarchy: God's words are most authoritative, and these comprise Bible, Prophets and Writings. We are dedicated to truths found in these books, and apply their truths to decipher the rabbis. The rabbis cannot contradict Jeremiah who dismisses astronomical phenomena as natural as a leaf falling from tree. Omens are a false idolatrous belief. Man must escape the infantile mindset, and as Rabbi Chait said, use Torah to guide him towards truth. Here, Jeremiah is our guide. ■

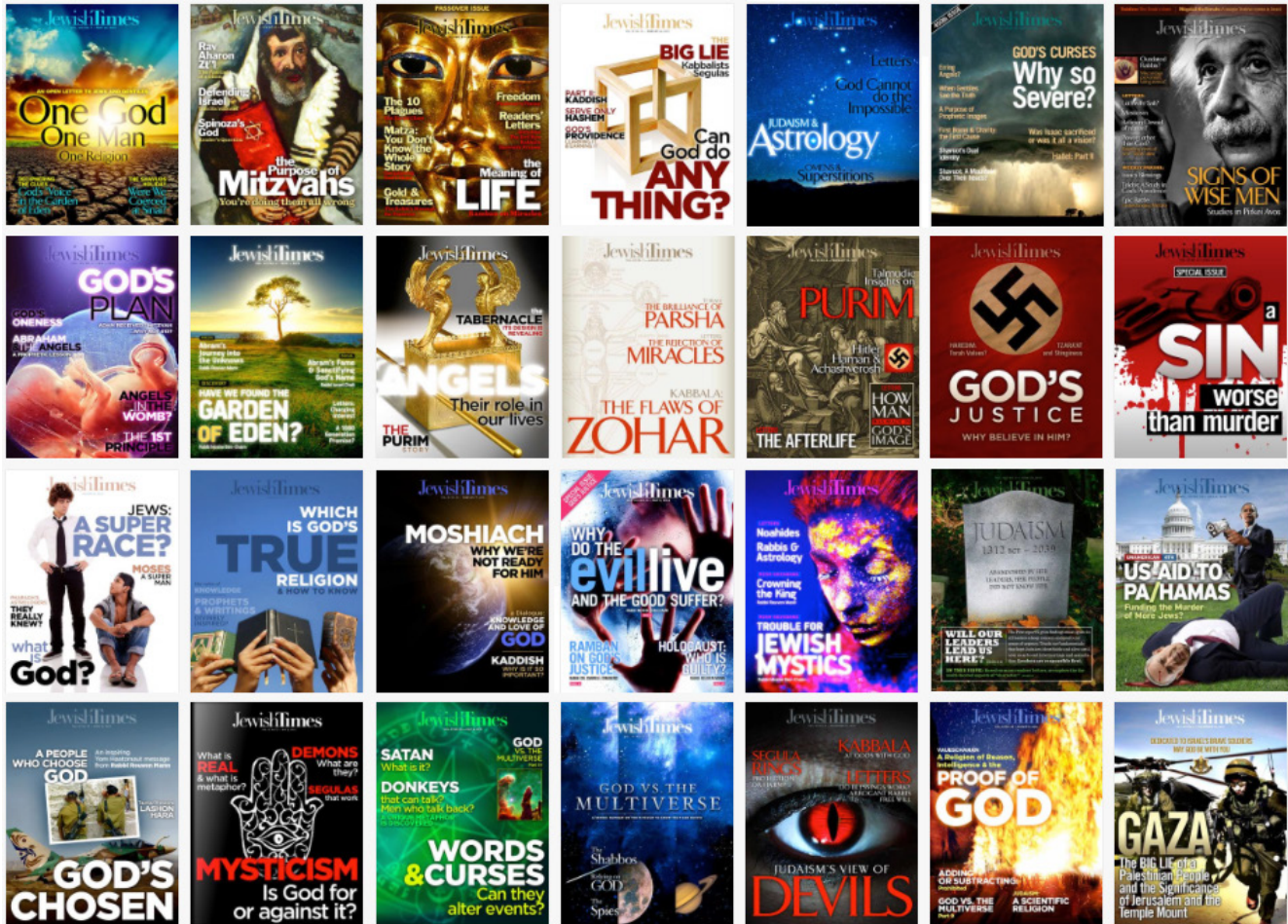
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JewishTimes

Avraham's Search for GOD

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Lech Lecha, introduces us to a highly consequential figure in Jewish and world history, Avraham Avinu. This is not to overlook or minimize the contributions of other great figures such as Moshe Rabbenu, who led the Jews out of Egypt and brought down the Torah from Mount Sinai. But remember that, without Avraham's groundbreaking activities, there would not have been a framework for Moshe's achievements.

Avraham was a unique innovator. Raised by idol-worshipping parents, he went along with their religious ways. The entire world at that time was immersed in the worship of wood and stone.

What saved Avraham was his own mind. Hashem has endowed man with a divine soul that enables us to use reason to arrive at a knowledge of reality. According to Rambam, Avraham was a prodigious thinker who contemplated profound spiritual matters by day and by night. He was the quintessential searcher seeking to understand whence the world had emerged and the nature of the "power" that kept it going.

The Rambam states that Avraham began his quest for the true G-d at the precocious age of 3 and made his discovery when he reached 40. This may strike us as a very long period to decide to become a believer. Usually the religious transformations of spiritual people take place much more quickly. Typically, such people report that they undergo some profound experience that causes them to "see the light."

The fact that Avraham tarried for 37 years until he made up his mind says a great deal about him. The Rabbis exhort judges (in Pirkei Avot) to be "deliberate in judgment." They should not rely on instinctive conclusions, but only on the result of unhurried deliberations. Does this apply to the realm of religious choices?

Avraham believed that it did. He thought through all the issues pertaining to theological truths slowly and carefully. This clearly indicates that he wasn't following the



inclinations of his heart or waiting for certain emotions to overwhelm him. He did not experience a dramatic religious "conversion."

Rather, he employed his profound intelligence in the study of nature and arrived at the irrefutable conclusion that the world had to have a Creator Who existed eternally, outside of space and time incorporeal, and Who was unlike any being in the universe He had created.

Having discovered the G-d of reality, Avraham did not keep it to himself, but regarded it as his responsibility to share this knowledge with all of mankind. He realized that, as long as they were steeped in the worship of physical objects, they could never recognize and extol Hashem, the actual, not the imaginary, Deity.

Avraham went forth to become the teacher, not the preacher, of mankind, seeking to explain the error of idolatry to them and introducing them to the one G-d, Hashem, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Is it possible to change the deeply seated beliefs of a long established religious order? Avraham was optimistic that, with proper rational instruction, people could renounce the false convictions that they had unwittingly accepted out of convention.

Perhaps this sense of confidence stemmed from his personal experience, in which he was forced to evaluate the veracity of the doctrines he had been raised to follow. Avraham manifested the courage to use his mind and to live by the logical conclusions he had arrived at.

This gave him a unique insight into the reasons why idolatrous people adopted and

clung to their religious beliefs. He understood the mentality of the idolater and how to undo the attachment to mistaken religious practices.

The heritage of Avraham Avinu is of great relevance to Jews today. Our task is to make known and to glorify the Name of Hashem for our fellow Jews and all of mankind. This requires a great deal of knowledge and clarity about the profound ideas of Torah. "You shall safeguard and perform them, for it is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of peoples, who shall hear all these decrees and who shall say, 'Surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation!'" May we have the merit to attain this exalted ideal.

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.

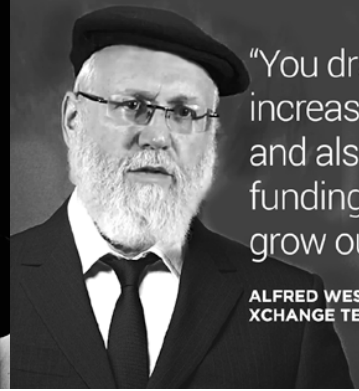
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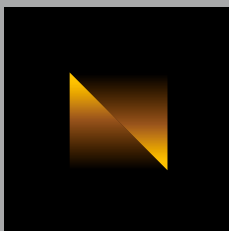
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