

# JewishTimes

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MYSTIC LIES

KABBALA'S  
HERESY

MEZUZA  
CAN'T  
PROTECT

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

GOD'S  
PLAN

&THE  
9TH  
OF  
AV

LETTERS

VERY REAL  
DEMONS


LETTERS

MESSIAH MUST  
FOLLOW TORAH





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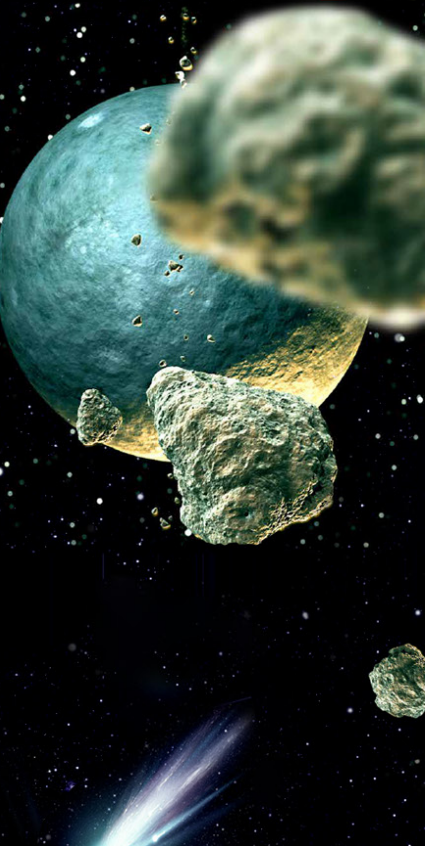
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### 3 False Beliefs

**LETTERS**

Reader's questions on instincts, Messiah, demons, Kabbala and superstitions.

### 11 The Avengers

**RABBI REUVEN MANN**

Rabbi Mann explains the personality of those who treasure God.

### 6 God's Plan

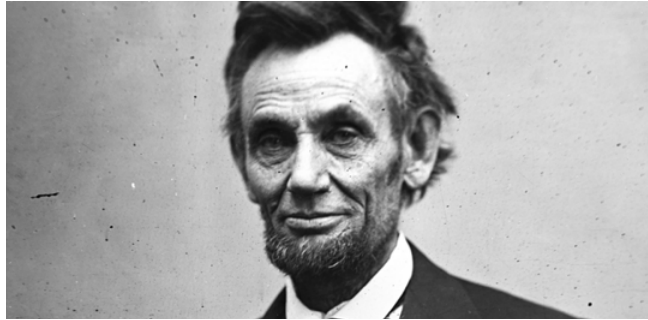
**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

An overview of God's relationship with mankind: why and when He guided us, and what were are flaws.

### 14 Mezuzah: Helpless

**OUR GREAT RABBIS**

Our Rabbis—and reality—teach that mezuzah is not a protective device. It intends to remind us of God and His unity.



**"In the end, it's not the years in your life that count, it's the life in your years."**

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

# Managing Our Instincts

**READER:** "If a snake endangers [encircles] a person, if he has another [person] with him, let him ride [carry] him four cubits. And if not [if the snake still chases him], let him jump over a ditch. And if not, let him cross a river. And at night let him place his bed on four barrels and sleep outside beneath the stars" (Talmud Shabbat 110a).

Can you please explain to me what this section of Talmud means? It's extremely puzzling and I'm not sure how to understand it? Thank you.

—Jack H.

**RABBI:** As the Talmud doesn't suggest to kill the snake—the wisest way to eliminate this danger—this talmudic portion cannot refer to a literal snake; this must be a metaphor. To decipher this metaphor, we must ask what reality a snake might parallel? What is dangerous? What sneaks (slithers) up on a person, which pursues a person, but is not a living creature? I explain this metaphor as follows:

**"If a snake endangers a person, if he has another [person] with him, let him ride [carry] him four cubits."**

(I suggest sexual as the subject matter, as this is the strongest drive.) This means if one's sexual urge starts to swell and overcome him, he should expend energy by carrying his friend on his back. This exertion drains the strength from the sexual urge, to make it subside and not sin. As Rabbi Israel Chait taught, there is but one energy source in man. That same energy that fuels the sexual drive, also fuels our Torah study. The Talmud says, "Rabbi Yishmael said, 'If the wretched one [sexual drive] overcomes you, drag it to the study hall. If it is stone it will melt, if iron, it will break it to pieces'" (Kiddushin 30b). As we study, all our energies are directed towards Torah's brilliance and we have no energy left to expend in other areas, like prohibited sexual activity. But when outdoors and not in a situation conducive to Torah study, this Talmudic portion suggests alternative measures to extinguish the sexual drive.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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**“And if not, let him jump over a ditch.”**

This means if carrying his friend is insufficient to drain his energies, expend greater energy through jumping over pit. This transfers energy away from the sexual urge.

**“And if not, let him cross a river.”**

This requires even greater energy and is longer in duration than a single jump...and the river also cools him down.

**“And at night let him place his bed on four barrels and sleep outside beneath the stars.”**

Now, even though he might temporarily calm the urge with any of the above cures, at night one is alone and the urge will return, as night’s removal of daily distraction allows temptations to resurface. The rabbis say he is out in public and then he won’t come to sin due to shame.

Additionally, we learn that when addressing more abstract matters like philosophy and psychology, Torah chooses to cloak its lessons. The reason is because many people are not ready to accept abstract concepts due to unfamiliarity with the area, or because the ideas oppose personal wishes. By cloaking the message, people will dismiss the matter, accepting they don’t know what they’re reading. At a later date they might be ready to revisit it. And at the same time intelligent people will be able to decipher what the rabbis intend to share. Our case above with the snake, Bilam’s discussion with his donkey, Jacob’s wrestling with the man and the flaming sword and cherubs in Genesis are such cases. ■

## Is Torah Applicable in Messiah’s Era?

**READER:** When Messiah comes, will Torah be in effect?

**RABBI:** Talmud Niddah 61b states that garments made of kilayim (prohibited mixed materials) may be used as a shroud for the dead. Meaning, as the dead no longer follow Torah laws—mitzvahs—there is no violation to dress their bodies in kilayim. Rav Yosef said [Ibid.] “That is to say that the mitzvahs will be nullified in the future.” Rav Yosef suggests that as the dead will again live at resurrection, clothed in their shrouds, they will then not be in violation of kilayim upon awaking and wearing these garments. From here, Rav Yosef deduces that Torah will not apply in the Messianic era (Rav Steinsaltz).

But I wonder: God commands not to add or subtract from the Torah (Deut. 13:1) and God did not say kilayim or any law will be for a limited time. Thus, Torah applies unchanged, always, even after Messiah arrives.

Rashba [Ibid.] addresses this problem:

*There are those who explain this according to what is written in Ketubot, that in the future the dead will be resurrected in their clothing. This is difficult for me because [in another story] the dead that Ezekiel brought back to life were obligated in mitzvahs. As it says in perek Challah (Sanhedrin 92b), “My father was from them [those resurrected] and these are the tefillin that my father gave me.” [Thus, descendants of those resurrected followed Torah—they wore tefillin.] It appears to me that in the coming age means from “the time of death” [the dead will be exempt from mitzvahs]. We learn that the living cannot cause the dead to violate a mitzvah, just as a parent cannot cause a child to eat something forbidden. The reason is because it says, “the dead are free.” Since the dead are free from mitzvahs from the time of death, in the time to come (may it come speedily in our time) we do not want to lead the person astray in the time to come [so we should not robe their corpses in kilayim].*

Rashba proves from a previous case of resurrected people who were commanded in tefillin, that future resurrected people too will follow Torah. Thus, Torah does not expire in the Messianic era. ■

## Very Real Demons

**READER:** Talmud Pesachim 111b cites a demon “Ketev Meriri.” It resides between sunlight and shade and is active during a certain time period of the day, and in certain locations. One of the reasons why Jews are extra careful during the 9 days is because of this supposed demon being active during this time. How do we explain the effects of this “demon” during the 9 days, and why do we need to be careful from potentially harmful activities?

—Jack H.

**RABBI:** Let’s read that talmudic portion:

*There are two types of “ketev” demons: one that is before noon and the other one is in the afternoon. The one before noon is called Ketev Meriri, and it appears in a jug of Babylonian spice, and continuously revolves around inside it. The ketev in the afternoon is called Ketev Yashud Tzaharayim (Psalms 91:6), and it appears inside the horn of a goat and revolves around inside it like a sifter (Pesachim 111b).*

“Ketev Meriri” (Deut. 32:24) means “bitter destruction” (Ibid., Ibn Ezra) during morning time. The second demon, “Yashud Tzaharayim,” means “slaughter in the afternoon,” derived from Psalms 91:6. There, King David refers to dangers one need not fear as he follows God, and God protects him. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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So we have a bitter destruction in the morning associated with spices, and some danger that slaughter's man in the afternoon, which is associated with a goat's horn.

The Gemara continues, providing more clues:

*Abaye was coming and walking along the street. And Rav Pappa was walking on his right and Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua was on his left. Abaye saw a certain ketev meriri coming on his left side and he switched Rav Pappa to his left and Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, he switched to his right. Rav Pappa said to Abaye: "What is different that you were not concerned about any possible harm to me?" Abaye said to him: "The time is in your favor. You are wealthy and fortunate, and therefore I believe that you will most likely not be harmed by the demon."*

A number of questions will lead us to the interpretation:

As Torah endorses the fundamental of Reward and Punishment (good people are not harmed), how can righteous Torah scholars as these be harmed?

Why wasn't Abaye concerned for his own harm, or Rav Pappa's harm?

What are demons?

What's the distinction between "morning" demons and "afternoon" demons?

One must know that God is just; for justice is His nature. And human justice is His creation. He did not create destructive entities—"demons"—and certainly He did not do so and hide their existence from man! What then are these "demons" which the rabbis discuss?

They are psychological phenomena: they can be imaginary, like mirages, or phantom people seen by those when alone; images of people conjured-up to alleviate loneliness. Talmud Gittin 66a actually says demons are seen only in places of isolation. Meaning they are not real, but are imagined, to offer isolated lonely people a sense of company.

Demons refer to our psyches and our instincts. In the morning, man anticipates his day and is alert and full of ambition, like a spice's effects on a person where he is made acutely alert to the effects of that spice. In the afternoon, man's ambition wanes, as the sun starts leaning towards evening, one's ambitions recoil to a more relaxed state of mind where he is more indifferent towards ambition. A goat's horn is used for drinks when one relaxes.

This talmudic portion is sharing psychological insights into 2 emotions we experience each day: morning ambition, and afternoon recoiling. Morning ambition is sharp as spices, while afternoon recoiling is represented by a goat's horn used for drinking alcohol, to relax. The Talmud wishes to educate man on his nature. We are to be aware of our varying emotional attitudes.

This answers why great rabbis like Abaye, Rav Pappa and Rav Huna could be subject to these "demons," as these demons are truly nothing more than emotional attitudes possessed by each and every person. When Abaye saw Rav Pappa was on his right—right is a favored position—Abaye felt the lesser successful Rav Huna might be jealous of Rav Pappa taking the favored "right" side of Abaye. This disappointment might depress Rav Huna during that morning, when ambition is a good instinct to nurture for achieving success, which Rav Huna needed. As Rav Pappa was successful expressing strong ambition, Abaye had no concern that Rav Pappa would

succumb to any disappointment generated by a left-side position to Abaye. So Abaye switched Rav Pappa to his left side. This also explains why Abaye was not concerned about himself: primarily, he was the center of attention and not the one vying for it. Additionally, he was aware of these moods, and therefore, in control of them. Had he been in Rav Huna's shoes his knowledge of these moods would enable him to control himself from succumbing. Knowledge of any emotion offers one the ability to resist it. Only one blind to an emotion is controlled by it.

How does all this relate to the 9 days? Just as parts of the day evoke unique emotions, parts of the year too have this effect. During the 9 days we are conscious of the Temple's destruction and the loss of Jewish lives. We focus on God's disapproval of the Jews. It is a mournful period. As such, one's emotions can be compromised and this in turn can effect our daily affairs, be it business or social dealings. Our worries compromise how sharp and alert we are, in contrast to when we are in better moods. In this depressed state, minimizing dealings will minimize failures. The harm is self-inflicted.

There are no evil "powers" God made without informing man about them. That would be an evil god. Just as we don't drink and drive, we should not undertake activities if we sense our energies are compromised by the 9 days. ■

## Torah vs. Kabbala, Heresy & Superstition

**READER:** You wrote in your last JewishTimes "Any act that has no demonstrated effects, and people act expecting effects, is Nichush: a form of idolatry." What does that constitute? Do some or all acts of mysticism fall into that category? For example, is putting a cup out for Elijah and shouting "welcome" while the door is opened, constitute as sympathetic magic, which is doing something on earth that causes heaven to act? Or, for example, the "Indian rain dance"? Or when mystics dip bread into salt to cause heaven to rejoin the upper and lower disassembled parts (Sefirot) of G-d? Is prayer a form of sympathetic magic? How can we dispute mystics who do magically mystical acts when we insist that prayer works?

—Turk Hill

**RABBI:** Superstitions are imaginary and prohibited. But prayer is a real mechanism which God and the rabbis endorse throughout Torah. For in prayer, one relates his needs to the real God. But in superstition, one imagines causes and effects, when in fact, no demonstrated cause and effect is proved. No superstition ever worked. The cup for Elijah is not meant to cause his appearance; that would be superstitious. Rather, it is a demonstration of our belief in God's promise of Messiah. "Rejoining the upper and lower disassembled parts (Kabbalistic Sefirot) of God" is pure heresy; God has no parts.

How do we dispute mysticism? Torah deals with reality: what is sensed, based on reason or on Torah texts. Mysticism conflicts with reality, reason, and Torah, like God's indivisible metaphysical nature. Mysticism imagines nonsense that cannot be explained and demands blind faith like Christianity...the opposite of Torah. You won't find mysticism in Torah, only in Kabbala and in man's flawed writings. ■



# GOD'S PLAN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I recently had a discussion with an intelligent person. She shared her desire to seek out God so as to live the best she could. Having experienced other religions and recently learned elements of Judaism and Torah, she was very impressed by its wisdom. After researching, a family member may have found evidence of Jewish lineage. We spoke for a while, and to assist her journey, I decided to write this article which I hope offers her a cohesive structure of Judaism, significant historical events, Torah's defining truths and values, and God's plan for mankind.

Tisha B'Av is a fast day in commemoration of the many tragedies God visited upon the Jewish nation throughout time, and for our own sinful state, as conveyed by today's absence of the third and final Temple.

It is a time of reflection and repentance. And repentance cannot be performed unless we each understand exactly what God commands mankind, thereby realizing where we each have failed, why we failed, and how to correct ourselves. When we learn God's will for ourselves by studying His Torah from our great Rabbis, we can attain the most fulfilling lifestyle.

To appreciate God's will, it is vital to briefly review mankind's history and God's involvement in human affairs aimed at correcting our distortions. We have but one life; God wishes that each person He created benefits to the greatest degree. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

## & THE 9<sup>TH</sup> OF AV



## In the Beginning

God created a perfect world, containing all that man needs, and in their correct proportions. Air is most vital, so it is everywhere. Water is next in vitality, and is almost as abundant as air; also designed in a manner that it can flow to remotely-inhabited regions. And for those inland peoples, rain delivers their water. Vegetation is inexpensive and easily reproduced. This sustains our nutritive needs, as well as our clothing. Homes and heat are necessary, so wood is abundant, and inexpensive. All else man pursues are unnecessary distractions.

God created Adam and Eve with perfect minds. He gave them one command: to accept Him alone as the sole force in the universe; the “Creator.” This command was necessary, as this Master/servant relationship might not be derived from studying nature. Nature teaches there must be a Creator, but not that man is to serve Him. This one command fills that gap.

But for all other discoveries, man could engage his mind to and uncover the sciences, math, and justice.

5781 years ago, Adam’s creation (billions of years after creation evolved) no Torah was given. It was unnecessary, and still largely inapplicable, as man-made religions had not been fabricated; the subject of many Torah laws.

The tools needed to unlock continued insights are planted in the patterns of natural human thought. Truth, false, deduction, induction, equality, comparisons, a fortiori arguments and others, are all natural, not learned disciplines. (For example, no child need be taught comparison: he intuitively compares, recognizing that black is not equal to white, or that this person is not his mother.) Our senses combined with these disciplines enable us to grow in knowledge, and in our appreciation for our Maker. God created the world permeated with His wisdom, as He desired that mankind enjoy life, and the pursuit of wisdom offers the greatest life.

God needs nothing, so His act of creating one intelligent species—man—was purely so this creation could ponder the universe and become amazed and awed by the Creator. Countless intellects were infatuated by the workings of our universe, and this continues to be true for all mankind, Jew or gentile.

## Human Equality

It makes no difference whether we are born to Jewish or gentile parents. What is relevant are the choices we make. And if one chooses to follow God, regardless of how he or she commenced life, then that

person is cherished by God. The greatest people began life as children to gentiles, like our patriarchs and matriarchs, Ruth, Unkelos, and many Rabbis. And the worst villains had Jewish parents, like King Mennashe. You notice I do not refer to the child as “Jew” or “gentile,” for these are choices, not birthrights. We cannot ask why God determines that one person is born to a specific set of parents. Only God in His wisdom knows why this is best. Abraham was born to an idolatrous father, while King David and Moses both had fathers who never sinned their entire lives. Perhaps specific people and events influence us differently, depending on each of our unique psyches. One personality type will have better opportunities if born to gentiles, and another person will do better with parents who are perfected themselves. Abraham was not a Jew, he was born to an idolater, and yet he reached the highest level a person can reach, as he was a prophet. What Jew today can say that?

Be clear on this, God does not create Christian, Catholic, Muslim, or Jewish infants. God creates “humans.” Just as He created Adam and Abraham before Torah was given, and they were simply humans (not Jews, since Torah was not given yet), we too are all equal at birth. After the Torah was given, God made no changes to how humans are created. We all possess the identical potential to follow God’s will. We all have the same soul, despite foolish Jews claiming their souls are better. How distasteful this must sound to a gentile! What a low estimation of God will gentiles have, thinking a Jew is favored, and given a better soul at birth, when no merit yet exists at birth! In fact, it was the “gentile” Abraham who earned his perfection, and only thereafter did God create a Jewish nation from him. Judaism is actually founded by perfect gentiles. It is only the ignorant and arrogant Jew who claims the nonsense that he has a superior soul. We should be mindful that the role of the Jew is to serve all others, sharing God’s Torah with the world. In this manner, the Jew is actually subservient to the gentile.

If a Jew follows God completely, he is loved by God. If a gentile follows God completely, she too is equally loved. Of course, a complete following of God means His 613 laws. Those Jews who look down upon gentile or converts violate God’s words. For God says numerous times in Torah, “One Torah for the Jew and convert” (Exod. 12:49, Num. 15:16, Num. 15:29) thereby proving complete equality among each and every soul. Not only this, but Talmud Sanhedrin (59a) states, “A gentile



who engages in Torah is like the High Priest”—meaning this gentile is greatly exalted. And this is only in reference to a gentile who observes the minimal seven Noachide laws. How much more praiseworthy is a gentile who converts! Such a gentile appears to surpass even the greatest Jew. And rightfully so, for how humbling must it be for a gentile to accept his or her very being is not on par with the highest level, of one obligated to observe all 613 laws. When a gentile converts, this person willfully accepts a burden of laws, while the Jew did not make this conscious decision. The Talmud also states (Brachos 34b), “Where a penitent person stands, wholly righteous people cannot stand.” There is no difference between a person who repents, or a gentile who converts. Both have abandoned a life without Torah, and have accepted God’s complete will. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

## **Mankind's Descent into Idolatry**

Over time, man abandoned the life of intellectual pursuits, and instead, chased after lusts, passions and imagination. They veered far from the plan that they use their senses and reason to determine what is real and what is true.

Part of this emotional lifestyle is the succumbing to human insecurity. Mankind realized his mortality, he feared death. He also feared the unknown: "What will be tomorrow?" many people worried. The need for the parent or guiding figurehead was retained, instead of God's plan, that man mature, and recognize that his infant view of powerful parents be abandoned, and they be viewed as simple humans as himself. But those who could not escape the infantile dependency on parents, coupled with the baseless view that the cosmos were deities, invented gods. They felt that figurines shaped as the planets and stars drew their powers down to Earth. The idols, they felt, became repositories of power, deserving worship, and in reciprocity, worshippers would realize success in all they desired. They accepted liars claiming to know how to worship the stars and idols, and soon enough, generations lost all knowledge of the Creator, as numerous religions flourished. Additional ceremonial rites and superstitions were invented that offered mankind a false security and promises of success and health, until the world was predominantly composed of stone gods and witches.

## **Abraham**

One unique man, Abraham, was raised in this world culture of idolatry. He too worshiped. But at a young age his mind started to probe, as Maimonides teaches in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Idolatry, chap I). He began to use his intelligence, which became sharper over many years of thought. With no teacher or books, he extricated himself from the false beliefs of all others, and realized the Creator. He started forming arguments and writing texts, teaching the masses that idolatry was false, and there is but one God. When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. He soon amassed tens of thousands of followers.

God revealed Himself to Abraham, and promised to establish his offspring as His nation; a people who would possess and transmit Judaism to the world. God gave to Abraham Isaac, and to Jacob, the Twelve

Tribes. Due to famine, the tribes descended to Egypt where Joseph was ruler and provided sustenance. Joseph originally came to Egypt due to the divine dreams of leadership God gave him. His brothers deemed him dangerous, and sold him. Joseph's buyers sold him to Egypt, where he was framed and imprisoned. But his mind pondered his dreams, and over the many years, he became a great psychologist and dream interpreter. This knowledge helped him advance from prison to viceroy. We appreciate God's plan that the original dreams caused both: Joseph's descent to Egypt, and his emancipation from prison so as to sustain his family and the country years later. God's hand was clearly at work. But God had greater plans...

## **From Egypt to Sinai**

The twelve sons of Jacob died. Their offspring living in Egypt absorbed that idolatrous culture. They were punished with slavery for 210 years. To offer Egypt and the Jews a chance to abandon their idolatrous ways and realize the true God, God sent Moses and 10 Plagues: clearly miraculous demonstrations with precise predictions of their onslaught. They were a message that one God exists, and all Egyptian idols and deities are powerless against Him. Pharaoh refused to heed the Ten Plagues and the numerous lessons contained therein; each one a testimony to a single God who alone controls the universe He created. Egypt was destroyed (as were many Jews) and their army drowned in the Reed Sea.

God delivered the sons of Jacob, the Israelites, from Egypt, to Mount Sinai where they would receive a divine religion as contained in 1) the Ten Commandments, 2) the Written Torah scrolls, and 3) in the explanatory Oral Law or Mishneh that God communicated to Moses.

## **A Religion of Proof & Reason**

Revelation was the seminal event in forming the nation of the Jews. For it was Revelation that proves God's existence, and rejects all other religions as impostors to this day. Had revelation at Sinai never occurred, and Moses lied to any of the 2 million Jews, telling them they heard a voice emanating from a fiery mountain, they would laugh at him. They would not replace their true histories with Moses' fabrication without evidence. Nor would the world today be in unanimous acceptance of the Torah (Bible).

No one could ever succeed at making masses accept that they witnessed



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miracles, when they had not. The only explanation for the world's acceptance of the Torah, is that it is true. The Jews did in fact witness Revelation at Sinai. They did see a mountain on fire, and hear intelligent speech emanating from fire, which is impossible, unless the source of that speech is not of this world. Had Revelation never occurred, there would be at least one other version of Jewish history today. But there isn't. It is impossible that only one account of Jewish history exists, and that it is false. That cannot occur. Therefore, we know that what we have received unanimously transmitted from all Jews is accurate. God gave mankind only one religion, Torah. It applies to all peoples. Jews must observe 613 commands, and gentiles must observe 7 Noahide laws. If a gentile wishes, he or she may accept the other 606 laws, and become a Jew; identical to a born Jew.

No other religion claims mass attendance at a miraculous event, since it never happened to those religions. And this is reasonable. For God created only one mankind, so only one religion makes sense. Only one revelation of one perfect system could occur. There can be only one best way for mankind to live, since we all share the identical design. And as God knows all, and the future, His Torah never expires. He knew how to create a system that applies to man throughout time. Changes in culture over the millennia, do not change man's make-up. Torah is applicable forever.

Despite their attempts to validate their historical or miraculous claims, all other religions are at best, a belief or a blind faith, not based on any evidence of truth. We are not concerned that other religions largely outnumber Jews. We understand that appealing notions like being forgiven for one's sins attracts millions of followers to Christianity. A man-god is very appealing, and so is a Golden Calf. But the intellect reveals the gross errors of their religion: one god cannot be three gods, just as the number 5 cannot be greater than 10; God does not become a man, and other idolatrous nonsense.

After God gave the Jews the Torah, the Tablets and the Mishneh, He included the command to follow the Rabbis' rulings on law (Deut. 17:11) formulated in what we call the Talmud and written over hundreds of years, about 2000 years ago. The Talmud presents tremendous insights into the precise and abstract structures of Jewish law that are like beautiful mathematical equations, also including philosophy and allegories. From the Talmud, the Rabbis formalized Jewish law that we follow today, the Shulchan Aruch, or Halacha.

Originally determined by God's Torah verses, and elaborated by the Mishneh (Oral law) all aspects of life are governed by Halacha. This includes idolatry, Torah study, morality, charity, dietary laws, prayer, speech, holidays and Sabbath, monetary laws, worship and marital laws.

Torah was given at this point, 2448 years since Adam, partly due to man's need to be warned against man-made religion and the numerous idolatrous practices that had risen over time. Many prohibitions like copying Egypt's ways could not be commanded before Egypt was formed. And as we said, originally man had all the tools to live intelligently without a formal Torah system. Of course, we do not know the final answer why Torah was not given in part earlier; this is God's knowledge.

It is important to know that Torah contains laws of varying degrees of importance. Realizing certain ideas are more vital than others, imbues us with Torah's primary identity. As the Rabbis teach, "One who rejects idolatry is as if he kept the entire Torah. And one who commits idolatry is as if he abandoned the entire Torah." Thus, the knowledge and laws relating to what God is and is not, worshiping God and the error of idolatry are most crucial; they carry far more weight than laws governing the placement a parapet on one's roof, or kosher laws.

The greatest law (mitzvah) is the study of Torah itself. This surpasses giving charity, setting up courts, prayer and all other laws. The Talmud derives this from King Solomon's words (Proverbs 8:11): "All desirous things do not compare to it [Torah study]" (Moade Kattan 9b). That is, all desirous things (i.e., all other commands) do not equate to the command of Torah study. The intellect, our distinction over all created things, is to be our primary pursuit, and affords the greatest fulfillment. This explains why the greatest minds were absorbed in Torah and the sciences.

### **The Tragedies of the Ninth of Av**

Now we come to this holiday. What is the theme of the tragedy of the Ninth of Av? Talmud Taanis 29a recounts the Spies' sin: the ten corrupt leaders who had no faith in God's promise of the Jews' conquest; they wished to spy out the land first. God did not instruct the Jews with any need for spying the land. God told them they would be successful: "Just go in and I will guarantee your victory!" The spies and the Jews should have trusted fully in God's capabilities and promises. Instead, the Spies scouted Israel for forty days and returned with an evil report. They told the Jews the

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current inhabitants were invincible. Despite God's promise, they said the Jews would fail, had they tried to conquer the land. The Jews became frightened. As a punishment, God prohibited that generation from entering Israel to enjoy its great goodness. They were sentenced to travel the desert for forty years until they perished. Their children would inherit Israel. The day of the Spies' sinful report and the Jews' fear was the Ninth of the month of Av.

Rabbi Yochanan said, "God said to the Jews and the spies, 'You cried a cry without justification; [therefore] I will establish a cry for you for generations.'" Rabbi Yochanan referred to the destruction of both Temples that took place on the Ninth of Av; this would be the cry for all generations. God did not say these words, they are Rabbi Yochanan's metaphor. Rabbi Yochanan meant that just as the Spies and that generation had a specific sin—they rejected God as omnipotent enough to vanquish the enemies—so too, future generations in both Temple eras continued in to sin, and were punished on the same date to indicate the common flaw.

The first Temple fell due to idolatry, and the second due to baseless hatred. Idolatry is a clear expression of man's failure to view God as omnipotent. Disbelief in God drives man to other means of securing his wishes; idolatry. And baseless hatred towards others only occurs when we seek social approval, and fail. We hate others as a means of saying, "I don't really need your approval." But if we don't, we should not care enough to expend energy hating someone. Hate only exists when we care enough to hate, when we truly want that person's recognition of our existence. Jeremiah chapter 17 teaches that seeking man cannot coexist with seeking God. If one seeks human approval, he thereby says this is to be valued, and rejects a life where God determines his fate. Here too, man does not view God as omnipotent. If he did, he would care less about what people say, he would not focus on himself, but on God.

So God didn't predetermine that future generations would sin with idolatry and hatred, and that the Temples would be removed as a response. God didn't say that phrase, it was Rabbi Yochanan. Man sinned of his own will. Rabbi Yochanan scripted this "quote of God" to link a few sins, as he saw the dates of the tragedies were linked.

These two tragedies occurred when man is not pursuing Torah knowledge. Had the Jews adhered to God's Torah truths, they would not view idolatry as offering any value, nor would man seek social approval over the pursuit of God's wisdom.



### Application to Ourselves

Today, mankind still falls prey to both crimes that destroyed our Temples: idolatry and social dependence. In Jewish and gentile circles, the world still seeks baseless security in false religions, amulets, the dead, astrology, superstitions, and idolatry. People still crave human accolades, laboring to keep up with the Joneses, keeping in style, and talking behind the backs of others to elevate themselves...in their imaginations. So the third and final Temple must wait. Man is still not ready to follow God; to make Him our focus. Only very few people truly desire this.

May it be, that soon, we all abandon idolatrous practice—in all its "Jewish" permutations—and social approval. Only through dedicated study, where we seek the truth in all its forms do we live happily and fulfilled, the way God planned we each live. These include the search for truths in areas scientific, mathematical, philosophical, moral, and of course through Torah observance.

I thank my friend in Texas for inspiring many of these comments. ■





# The AVENGERS

RABBI REUVEN MANN

**T**his week's Parsha, Pinchas, introduces us to a new type of religious personality, the Zealot. He is an individual who "takes the law into his own hands" and executes his own brand of justice.

The context for the actions of Pinchas was the breakdown of moral restraints when the Jewish men yielded to the temptations of the Moabite women. At the instigation of the wicked Billam they sought to seduce the Jewish men into idol worship in the belief that the punishment of Hashem for that egregious transgression would remove the need to engage them in war.

It is hard to imagine a more cynical, diabolical undertaking. The point here is to defeat your enemy by having him violate his own religion and thus bring down upon him the wrath of his deity. It does not seem that such a thing was ever attempted before this incident or since.

Billam believed that the Torah was from Hashem and that the punishments listed in it would come to its violators. So he sat back and said, how can I use this religion to serve my own purposes? And he concluded that if he could get the Jews to commit a heinous enough aveira (sin) it would kindle the wrath of the A-mighty and cause them to suffer a great blow. To me that type of reasoning is just mind-boggling.

In this atmosphere of moral degradation even leaders were not immune from sin. A prince of the tribe of Shimon, named Zimri Ben Salu, had a liaison with a Midianite Princess named Kazbi bat Tzur. The two of them

consorted openly and entered Zimri's tent to gratify their lust.

This was an act of immorality by a Jewish leader which constituted a profound Chillul Hashem (desecration of G-d's Name). But sometimes the sinful action, no matter how severe, is not the worst aspect of the matter. What is even more tragic is the silent acceptance of the "bystanders."

Indeed, many of history's worst calamities might have been averted if the bystanders had acted differently. At the outset of his regime Hitler was very concerned about public opinion both German and international. He always acted cautiously, testing the waters and gauging the reaction to his "brutal" policies.

From whence did he obtain the conviction that he could get away with the most inhumane crime in all of history, the cruel eradication of six million innocent men, women and children? Hitler believed that the so called "civilized" Western nations secretly agreed with his ideas about the Jews and would not stand in his way when he implemented his plan of annihilation against them.

This was confirmed for Hitler by the incident of the German cruise ship, the St. Louis. In 1939 Hitler allowed 937 Germans, mostly Jews, to leave Germany bound for the shores of the U.S, Canada and Cuba. They did not receive a friendly welcome. As Hitler had correctly intuited, nobody wanted them.

The U.S. would not let the ship disembark and refused to admit any refugees. President Roosevelt showed no mercy refrained from

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

intervening on behalf of the Jews. Nor would the other countries involved. So, unbelievably, the ship was forced to return to Europe where the Jews were taken in by France, England, Belgium and the Netherlands. These were countries that were destined to be occupied by Nazi Germany. Of the 937 Germans who had travelled to freedom on the St. Louis 254 were killed in the Holocaust. Throughout this ordeal no Mordechai donned sackcloth and ashes and took to the streets to utter a "loud and bitter wail." No Pinchas came forward to shock the conscience of the nation through dramatic if unconventional actions. Hitler's belief that the Jews would not be missed was completely validated.

Pinchas was not an anarchist who wanted to bring down the establishment. He was dedicated to the rule of law and the duly constituted institutions of Jewish society. However, he also recognized that there are unique situations which call for extraordinary measures.

He realized that the sinful behavior of Zimri and Kazbi could not be accepted as just another violation which due process could deal with. No, it required a demonstration of outrage for the desecration of Hashem's Name and summary justice against the perpetrators. So he acted boldly and unhesitatingly and his great deed was acknowledged by Hashem who rewarded him by appointing him as a Kohen.

The word "zealot" has gotten a bad reputation in contemporary society. We prefer an attitude of moral neutrality in which the prevailing ideal is "live and let live." Is that a matter of great tolerance or just a result of the fact that we don't have very powerful convictions about abstract matters of right and wrong?

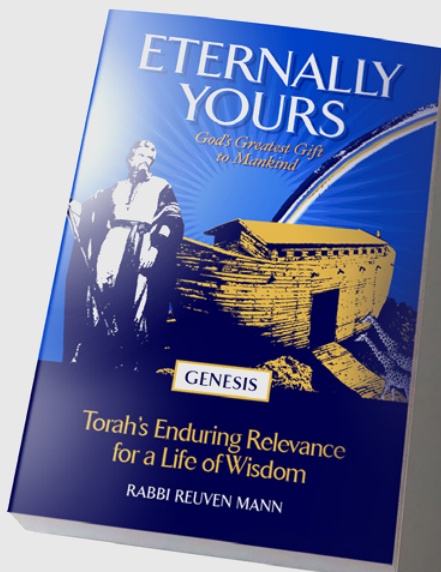
There are times when it is sinful to sit back and do nothing. There are situations which require immediate and dramatic action to negate a terrible crime or to assert a great principle. Not everyone is qualified to make these decisions. One has to be on the level of a Pinchas to act in a zealous manner which earns the favor of Hashem.

Let that never justify passive acceptance in the face of great evil. The Holocaust taught us about the colossal consequences of moral indifference to the suffering of our brethren. As we experience the period of mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temple and all the subsequent catastrophes of Jewish History let us resolve to learn the lessons of our past and to emerge as righteous activists zealous to do all we can for the welfare of the Jewish People and all of Hashem's children who suffer from brutal oppression.

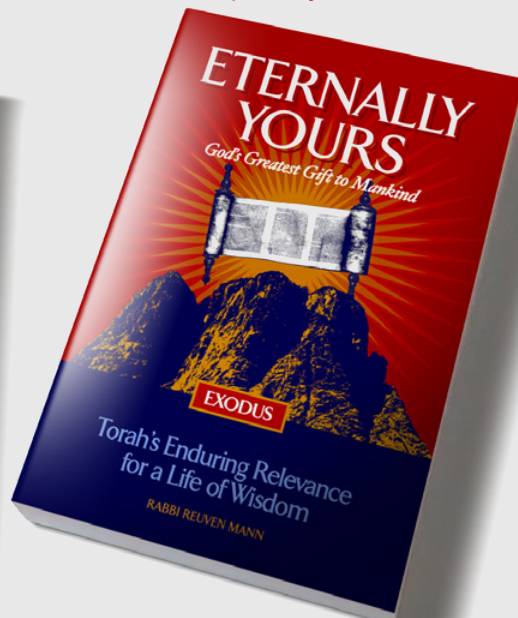
Shabbat Shalom ■

## RABBI MANN'S BOOKS ON AMAZON

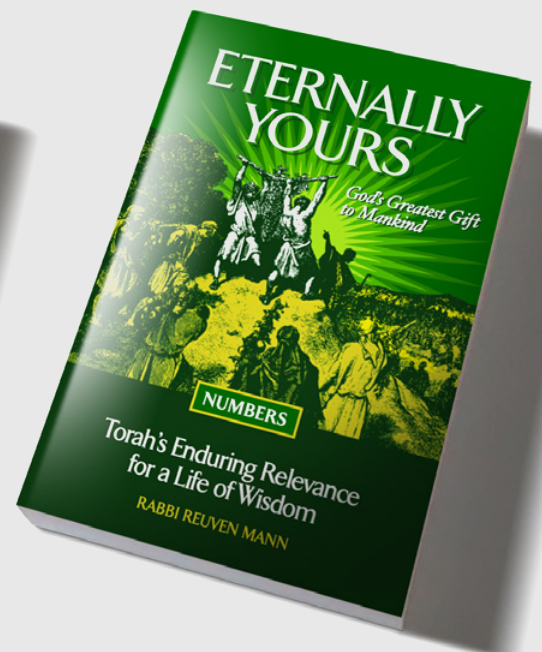
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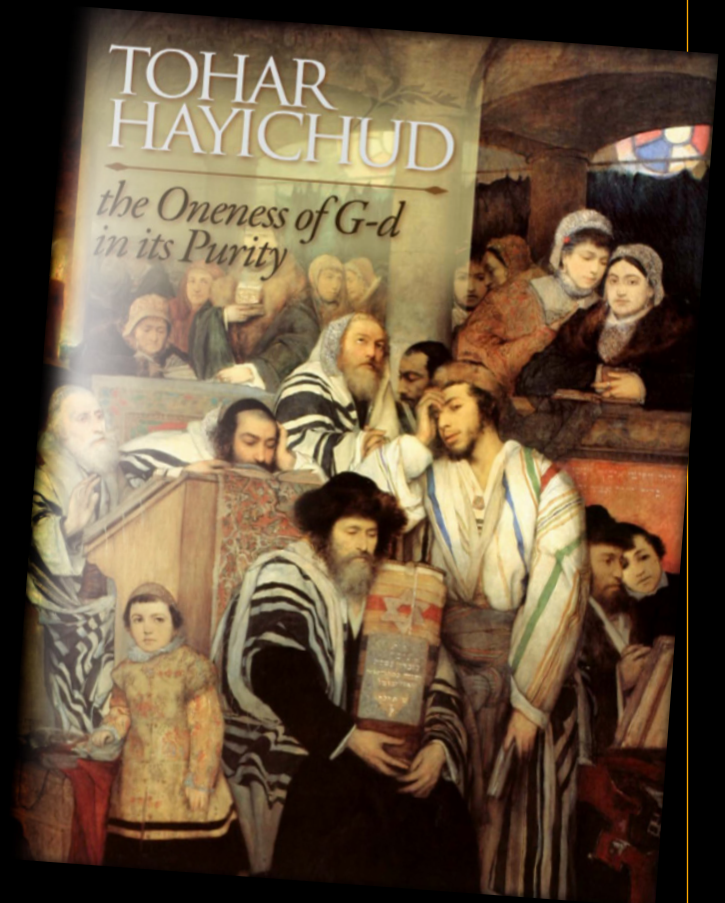


# 2 MUST READS THIS SUMMER

*Tohar Hayihud* is a masterpiece of intelligent Torah thought. The Rabbi cites authentic Torah sources, Rishonim and great minds who, over the centuries, have rejected Kabbala's claims as contrary to Torah.

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Missiles destroyed this Israeli's home, despite the mezuzah

# Mezuzah Does Not Protect

**Follow our  
great Rabbis,  
not misled  
masses...**

## Rambam

"Those who write inside the mezuzah names of angels or holy names or a verse or engravings, they are included with those who have no share in the world to come. Because these fools, it's not enough that they are nullifying a mitzvah, but they are making a great mitzvah—which is the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His love and His service—into an amulet for their own benefit as it occurs to their foolish hearts that this kind of nonsense can benefit them."

(Rambam, Hilchos Mezuzah 5:4)

## Meharsha

"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 G-d. 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 Meharsha, Yoreh Daah, 289)





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## OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

[MORE BELOW](#)

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

**Racism: A Lie:** Man descends from Adam. [Black/white twins](#) unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

**Insecurity:** Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

**Happiness:** Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

**Pleasing Others:** Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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## ASK THE RABBI

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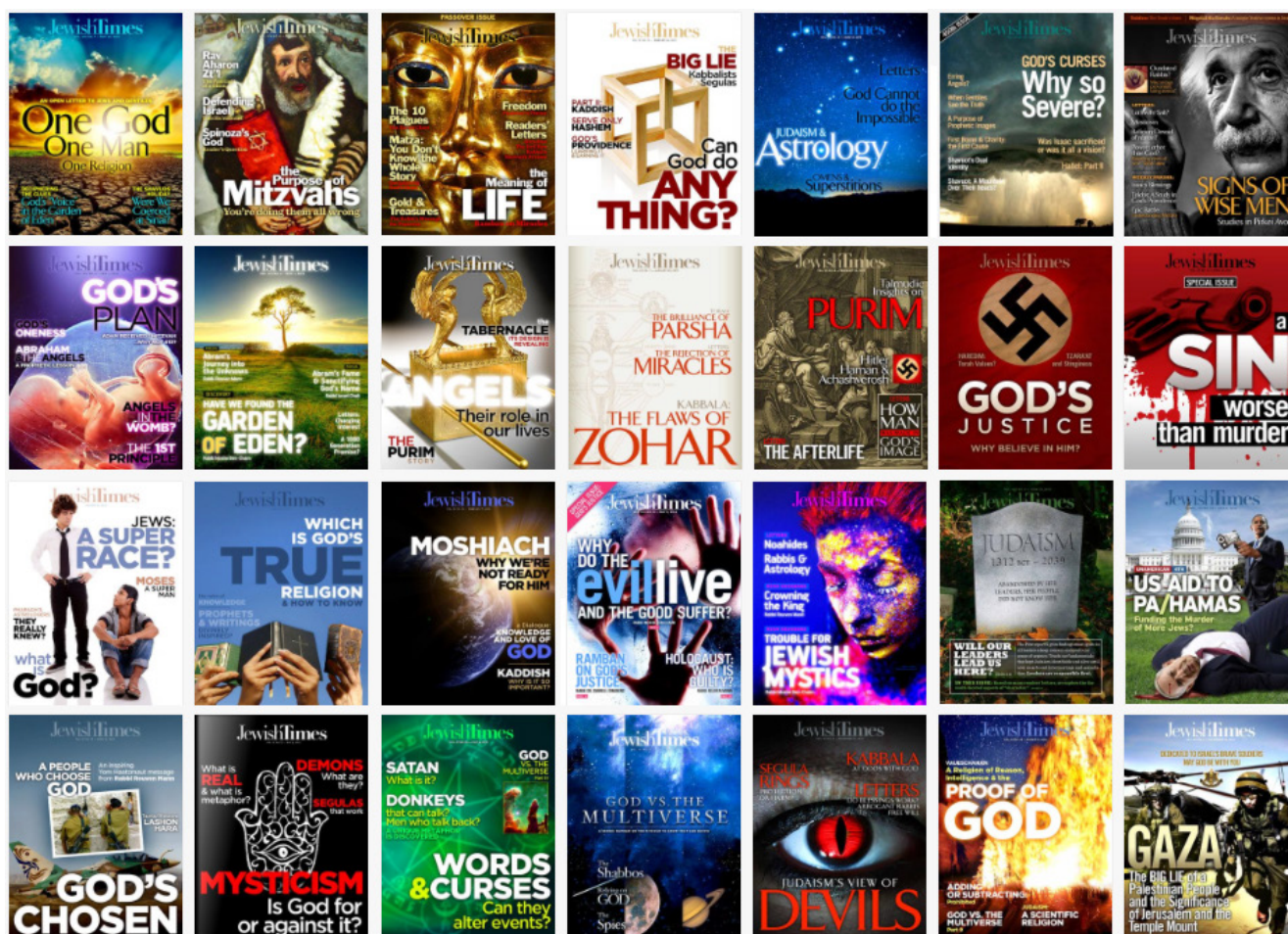




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