

JewishTimes

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Last week's Haftarah (Jer. 2) identifies the Jews' sin. We analyze God's prophetic rebuke.



"Keep your eye on three things and you will not come to sin: know what is above you—an eye that sees, and an ear that hears, and [the book in which] all your deeds are written."

PIRKEI AVOS 2:1

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Does God Know All? Part II

READER: Dear Mesora,

In a recent issue of Jewish Times, a question was asked regarding the Ralbag and Ibn Ezra's understanding of Divine knowledge. It was answered that no Jewish sage could possibly deny Hashem's knowledge of particulars. I do not believe this to be entirely correct; the Ralbag's position is quite nuanced.

In the third section of his *Milchamos Hashem*, the Ralbag develops his theory of Divine knowledge as an intermediate position between that of the "philosophers" (Hashem can have no knowledge of earthly facts) and that of the Rambam (Hashem has perfect knowledge of all the facts of this world, particular and general.) For many reasons which he enumerates there, Ralbag does not believe that it is possible for Hashem to know particulars qua particulars. Hashem cannot know what I had for breakfast, nor even that I exist. What Hashem does know is the divine order of creation, the "source code" which dictates all aspects of reality.

The best metaphor I can imagine is that of a computer programmer who has perfect knowledge of his program. For any given set of inputs into the program, the programmer knows exactly what the outcome will be. But he cannot know how the program is being used at any given moment. Hashem's knowledge of any conceivable possibility within his world is what allows prayer and providence to remain meaningful. If I change myself in a certain way, the Divine program will cause me to be benefitted in a specific manner, and vice versa. But for Hashem to know the actual "facts on the ground" would be a violation of Hashem's unity for the Ralbag and Ibn Ezra.

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I hope I have presented this information clearly. If you have not yet studied the Milchamos Hashem, particularly the third section, I highly recommend it. If you have studied it and believe that I have misread it, I am very interested to learn how you understood it.

*Kol tov,
David Campbell*

RABBI: Wherever there are two opposing opinions, either one is wrong, or both or wrong. But both cannot be correct. This applies to your question as to whether God has knowledge of everything, or is His knowledge deficient, and you cited Ralbag as referring to the latter. Maimonides maintains the former, that God is omniscient and nothing escapes His knowledge (Guide, book iii, chap. XX). Maimonides explains: the error in assuming God's knowledge as deficient is due to equating human knowledge to God's knowledge (Ibid.); the only similarity is the name "knowledge." In my opinion, man also errs about God's knowledge because he assumes that God exists in time. With that error, man makes another error that God can't know what does not yet exist—just as man cannot know this—and that God cannot know the number of possible events that might occur in the universe.

However, as all that exists is due to God's will and His creation, He cannot be ignorant of what he creates! This truth alone suffices to disprove claims that God is ignorant of anything.

It is crucial to recognize that time too is a creation (Maimonides). Thus, God is above time: He has no past, no present and no future. There are arguments that as the future has alternative possibilities and multiple variables, there exist almost endless possibilities for almost endless causes and effects. Does God know which possibility will occur? The answer is "possibilities" exist only in a frame of time, of which, God is not part. He knows the universe's future, in every detail. He knows every outcome, and for Him, there are no alternatives or possibilities. He knows all causes and effects, and all man's choices. Therefore, He knows all precisely. He created every atom and molecule. He created how they interact. He knows every minute detail. As He created everything, He is knowledgeable of all that transpired, transpires and will transpire in our time/space system.

Some suggest that God's knowledge is deficient regarding what is yet non-existent. Meaning, as X is not yet real, can God possess knowledge of what is non-existent? But this too is an error made by the assumption that God exists in time. In truth, as God does not exist in time, He knows what will come

into existence and what will occur (in the universe's time framework) either by His will, man's will, or by natural law. The future is as real to God as is the past and present (in human terms). That God created the universe from nothing clearly teaches that God knows what is not yet in existence. He knew what He would create. Man cannot have such knowledge, as human knowledge depends on observation. But God's knowledge is of a different type. We don't know how God created the universe from nothing, or how He knows. But He must know all, as He created all.

A meteorologist can know future weather, although he does not cause it. It is no more difficult for God to know man's actions without causing them Himself. Also, God's foreknowledge does not remove free will. For although God knows man's future actions, He also knows that man will choose those actions with free will, and nothing coerces man's will. Despite His certain knowledge of man's future choices, He does not cause them. When I select my actions, I am not coerced. As Maimonides teaches, God's fully certain knowledge of the future does not cause that future.

By acknowledging that God created time and is not governed by His creations, we remove all these questions regarding God's knowledge of the possible, the future, and man's choices.

Ralbag also writes, "God lacks the apparatus for perception, and it would be denigrating to attribute such a lowly form of apprehension to the Creator." But this contains a contradiction: God created the apparatus of perception, and He created all that which can be perceived. Thus, He knows the limits of perception, i.e., what is beyond the sensory capacity of every sense. Which means that He knows all. But primarily, God does not need perception to create everything. As He created everything without senses, He knows everything he created...without sensing. His knowledge does not require senses.

Finally, you write that it is Ralbag's opinion, "To know what I chose to eat for breakfast, Hashem would need sense perception in order to observe me." This is false as stated above: God knows without sense perception. But there is a fundamental truth this notion hints to: It is a grave misconception that all that exists, exists of its own nature. Although God created everything, it cannot exist with God's "constant" will. Thus, all that exists and transpires is all by God's will. Otherwise, once God created something, if He does not sustain it, it would vanish, as we read, "Who renews in His goodness each day the works of creation" (Siddur, morning prayers).

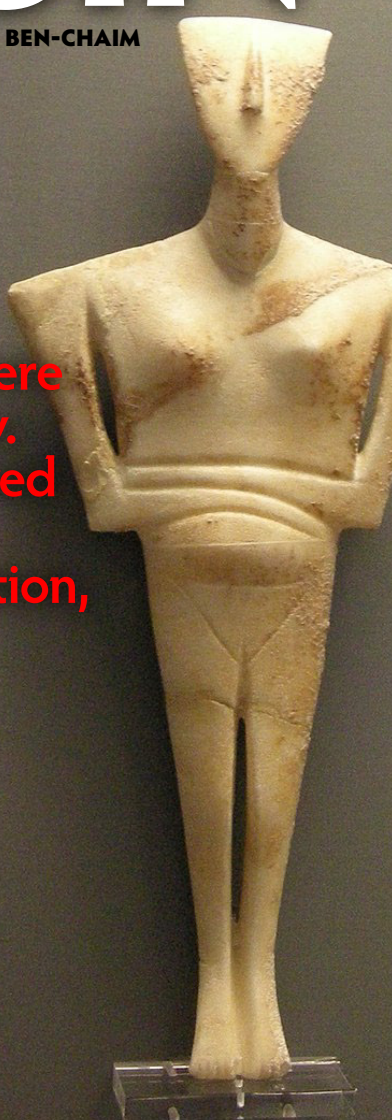
And God told us the following: "God knows the thoughts of men" (Psalms 94:11). "For the Lord searches all minds and discerns the design of every thought" (I Chronicles 28:9). ■

TISHA B'AV

HOW & WHY WE SIN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Temple was destroyed and we were killed due to idolatry. The red string believed to protect from the "Evil Eye": 1 superstition, 2 errors.



Jeremiah chapter 2 outlines man's sins. It is appropriate that we read this chapter (Haftoras Massai) during the nine days leading up to Tisha B'Av, as this period is a time of reflection on our flaws, and repentance.

Jeremiah delivers God's rebuke:

What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they abandoned Me and went after delusion, and they were deluded? They never asked themselves, "Where is the Lord Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, a land of deserts and pits...where no human being had dwelt?" I brought you to this country of farm land to enjoy its fruit and its bounty. But you came and defiled My land... The priests never asked "Where is the Lord?" The guardians of the Torah ignored Me...and the prophets prophesied by Baal and followed what can do no good.

This first rebuke identifies man's fantasy as his flaw. God said man followed "delusion." There was no flaw in God, as reality testified to His greatness by taking the Jews out from Egypt, traversing them sustained in desolate places, and bringing them into a lush land of Israel. Thus, reality demanded the Jews not veer from God who fully provided. Therefore the cause of abandoning God was not God's reality, but man's fantasy. But how did this fantasy work?

Man seeks sensuality which an abstract God does not offer. Man also sees the nations' idols and their religious rites. These tangible views



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catered to the Jews' infantile recollections of parents: physical protectors. Jews of the greatest status sinned. An abstract God does not offer the emotional security provided by physical idols. The Jews caved to infantile insecurities instead of using their minds and following reality. The infantile insecurity compelling people to replace the parent is seen in man's creation of Jesus, and idols formed as humans.

Just cross over to the isles of the Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe carefully; see if anything like this has ever happened: Has any nation exchanged its gods? But they are not gods. But My people has exchanged its glory for what can do no good.

Jeremiah rebukes the Jews for an exchange never witnessed in other nations; they exchanged the true God with idols. He says to "ponder this exchange well." What is his point?

Jeremiah stresses that the Jews followed fantasy, "they are not gods." Other nations never veered from their traditions, to exchange their traditional gods with emptiness. The other nations operated with some methodology: they viewed authority (their ancestors) as intending good and benefit for their offspring. This is the basis for the transmission of traditions from one generation to the next: offspring assume their ancestors bequeath only goodness. (This is rejected in Jeremiah 16:19: "Nations shall come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers bequeathed to us utter delusions, things that are futile and worthless.") So the nations operated with some value system; they following traditions. They also would not accept the idolatry of other nations since there was no force of ancestral authority. And furthermore, even their simple minds saw no cause-and-effect relationship with alien idols, so they did not accept alien idols. But the Jews abandoned what was proven in reality, namely God, and followed after idols that were not of their fathers' tradition (Jer. 44:3) and that also presented no validation of powers. Jeremiah now identifies these very 2 errors:

My people have done a twofold wrong: they have forsaken Me, the fount of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which cannot even hold water.

God equates Himself to that which gives life, "a fount of living water." And he equates fantasy to that which is incapable of any goodness, "broken

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cisterns that can't hold water." Jeremiah beautifully identifies and reiterates two flaws: leaving reality and following fantasy.

Though you wash with natron And use much lye, your guilt is ingrained before Me —declares the Lord God. How can you say, "I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baalim"? Look at your deeds in the Valley, consider what you have done! Like a lustful she-camel, Restlessly running about, or like a wild ass used to the desert, snuffing the wind in her eagerness, whose passion none can restrain, none that seek her need grow weary. In her season, they'll find her! Save your foot from going bare, and your throat from thirst. But you say, "It is no use. No, I love the strangers, and after them I must go."

The metaphor of a lustful she-camel and the statement about passion underlines the Jews' flaw as emanating from instinctual drives. Additionally, Jeremiah identifies the desire to follow others as he says, "I love the strangers." For millennia the Jews succumbed to the need for approval from other nations. In Egypt, while the 12 sons of Jacob were still alive, the Jews did not succumb to Egyptian idolatry. But once those formidable authority figures passed on, the Jews accepted Egyptian idolatry, which is truly a desire to assimilate and gain approval from Egyptians. The Prophet teaches this was the sin which earned them 210 years of enslavement. Moses too saw this as the Jews' flaw when he said, "Now the matter is known to me" (Exod. 2:14). Rashi comments: "[Moses said] I have been puzzled: how has Israel sinned more than all the seventy nations, that they should be oppressed by this crushing servitude? But now I see that they deserve this (Exodus Rabbah 1:30)." Moses was commenting on how his killing the Egyptian to save the Jew had become known, for before he killed him, Moses looked all around and there was no one present. But Moses deduced that the only way his killing became known was through the Jew he saved (Rabbi Israel Chait). For there was no one else present but Moses, the saved Jew and the Egyptian, who was now dead. Moses realized the Jew, although saved by Moses, felt greater loyalty to Egypt and informed Moses. Moses now understood the poor character trait of the Jews that earned them servitude. That poor character trait was the need for approval from other nations. Egypt's enslavement of the Jews (by God's will), an enslavement by those whom Israel previously revered as an authority, is God's intentional method of causing the Jews to despise

Egypt's harsh labor and abandon their unconditional respect for that Egyptian authority. (God's punishments intend to correct the sinner.)

They said to wood, "You are my father," to stone, "You gave birth to me." While to Me they turned their backs and not their faces. But in their hour of calamity they cry, "Arise and save us!" And where are those gods you made for yourself? Let them arise and save you, if they can, in your hour of calamity. For your gods have become, O Judah, as many as your towns!

God's rebuke through Jeremiah's words is that reality is the test of what is true. As stated above, the Jews abandoned reality, the God who took them out of Egypt, Who traversed them through desolate plains and brought them into Israel. The Jews were so full of fantasy that they "talked" to inanimate stone and called it "father," and felt the idol birthed them and gave them life. God echoes Elijah by saying that the Jews cried out to their idols: "Elijah mocked them, saying, 'Shout louder! After all, he is a god'" (1 Kings 18:27) But God identifies their idols' silence to invalidate them.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot touch, feet, but cannot walk; they can make no sound in their throats. Those who fashion them, all who trust in them, shall become like them. (Psalms 115:4-8).

King David criticizes those who create idols as sharing with the idol's dumbness. Again we see that man's sin is abandoning reality and following fantasy.

As God has not rebuilt the temple, the Jewish nation still follows fantasy. This is expressed in the belief of powers outside of God such as the evil eye. Jews also believe red strings on their hands—although destroyed with a single match—can protect a person from all harm. The fundamental that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked has been rejected outright, as amulets take the place of God. People think mezuzah has a power to save. Jews pray to the dead despite God's hiding of Moses' grave to avoid such atrocities. And these superstitions are accepted one generation to the next, as people seek peer approval instead of truth, a flaw Moses understood to be why the Jewish nation deserved servitude. ■





Image: Contributed by Yojebed Ayelet Martinez

JEREMIAHS' MESSAGE

God provided the Jews with all goodness. But fantasy of something more satisfying compelled them to open a dangerous door of superstition and idolatry. The Jews had a perfect life but stepped out of that life into death.

Fantasy cannot satisfy us. Imagination of superstitious forces and idolatrous practices must fail. They are not real.



UNFINISHED BUSINESS

RABBI REUVEN MANN

There are a number of Fast Days on the Jewish Calendar all of which are of Rabbinic origin except for Yom Kippur. All Jews are obligated by the Torah to abstain from food and drink (and other bodily pleasures such as bathing and applying lotions etc.) on the Day of Atonement.

Interestingly enough a significant amount of Jews including the non-religious take this obligation seriously and refrain from eating and drinking on Yom Kippur and even make efforts to visit a Synagogue on this day.

I believe that the reason for the popularity of this Fast is because it is associated with atonement from sin. Judaism believes that yes, there is such a thing as sin and that (if left untreated) it taints the soul. The key question is; can sin and its effects be expunged from the soul? Is there anything which can make it go away as if it “never happened”?

Judaism is founded on the notion that it is virtually impossible for humans not to transgress as errant behavior is built into man's nature. However no other religion affirms the spiritual efficacy of Teshuva as much as Judaism. It maintains that no sinner is so evil and despised that he is beyond the realm of repentance.

The Rambam teaches that one should do Teshuva as soon as he becomes aware that he has sinned and should not put it off until tomorrow. However there is no statute of limitations regarding this matter. Even after many years one does not forfeit the opportunity to return to Hashem. Even if he has been a sinner all of his life but does Teshuva at the end it is accepted

and he has a place in the World To Come.

In my opinion it is this feature that provides the reason for the widespread observance of the Fast of Yom Kippur. Even non-observant Jews are mindful of the fact that their behavior is not always morally acceptable and they are troubled by a consciousness of guilt. They may not be ready to initiate sweeping alterations of their lifestyle in order to conform to Judaism's religious requirements but they don't want to miss the opportunity to take advantage of Judaism's “special” Day of Atonement offer.

However the summertime Fast of Tisha B'Av is not a popular event for those who are not Torah observant. It simply does not have the same “curb appeal” as the Day of Awe. The main theme of Tisha B'Av is mourning for the destruction of the Holy Temple which took place over two thousand years ago, an event which does not disturb the tranquility of most Jews.

Indeed we should ask; why is that calamity so important that we have to spend so much time and energy remembering and mourning it? Isn't the Holocaust so much more devastating and closer to home and yet we have no public Fast and day of mourning to commemorate it?

Rabbi Soloveitchik explained that, indeed, Tisha B'Av is the day on which we afflict ourselves and engage in Aveilut (mourning) over the tragedy of the Shoah. That is because the Genocide of the Nazis and all the other major calamities of our history can be traced back to the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion from our land.

One of the Kinnot (elegies) that we recite on

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Tisha B'Av says that (in destroying the Temple) Hashem "acted first and later regretted" and called for public crying and eulogizing. At first glance this seems strange. The Torah attests that "Hashem is righteous in all His ways". If His wisdom decreed that the Churban had to happen then how is it possible that He "regretted" it?

According to the Rav this is asserting that Hashem's intention was not to break His connection to His chosen nation. This is a significant point because the other world religions maintain that the Jews, although once favored, have subsequently been rejected by Hashem. Indeed they justify their historically evil persecution of the Jews on the basis of their contention that they were rejected by G-d.

But the Kinna is refuting that. It is saying that Hashem regrets what He had to do to His children because He still is attached to them as the covenant He made with them is unbreakable. And that's why He called for "crying and mourning" to mark the great catastrophe. For He is still their G-d and waits for them to return.

If it were Hashem's intention to cast away the Jewish People there would be no point in mourning for, in effect, the Jews would be gone from history and we would simply have to accept that and move on. What

would be the point of mourning?

Mourning for the Temple is rooted in the idea that the "game is not over" because we are still G-d's People. We are temporarily estranged and in exile but are destined to return. Therefore we mourn, and search for the severe moral and ethical failings that brought down Divine punishments upon us. So that we can repair them.

We can now understand Rabbi Soloveitchick's assertion that we must mourn the Holocaust on Tisha B'Av. It is based on the understanding that the real tragedy of the Churban was that it caused an estrangement between Hashem and His People which is the real source of all the tragedies which befell us. Estrangement yes but divorce no!

It would be beneficial for the leaders of the world's religions to take special note of the passage in the Book of Leviticus which comes at the end of the section which lists, in gruesome detail, the terrible sufferings (including exile) which will befall the Jews for disobeying Hashem's commandments. Can they be understood to mean that G-d wants nothing further to do with the Jews? Says Hashem: "And in spite of all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not have despised them nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them, to annul My covenant with them- for I am Hashem

their G-d." This verse should be required reading, three time a day, for all spiritual leaders of whatever religion who are troubled by the fact that we are still here!

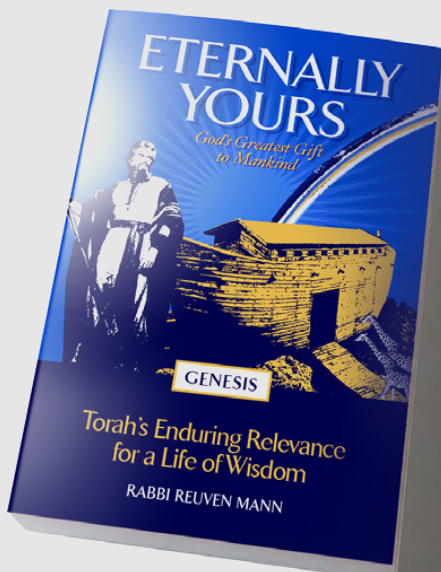
But we cannot be complacent. We must make every effort to return to our rightful place in Hashem's scheme of things. The road to recovery begins with the recognition and acceptance of our identity as the chosen nation of Hashem. We have been handed a special mission by the Creator of the Universe which is irrevocable. The purpose of Tisha B'Av is to remind us that there is unfinished business between ourselves and Hashem. Our task is to mourn and strive to honestly and wisely discern our sins, those between man and G-d and those between man and man. And to repair them and thus merit to restore our rightful eternal relationship with the Eternal One Of Israel.

In that sense Tisha B'Av should be seen as a day of great, though muted, joy as it celebrates the fact that we are an eternal People whose covenant with Hashem can never be revoked. Since that is the case we should strive to render our relationship to Hashem into a positive one. If we renounce our sins and return to righteous performance of His commandments He will return to us and "renew our days as of old." May this happen speedily and in our time.

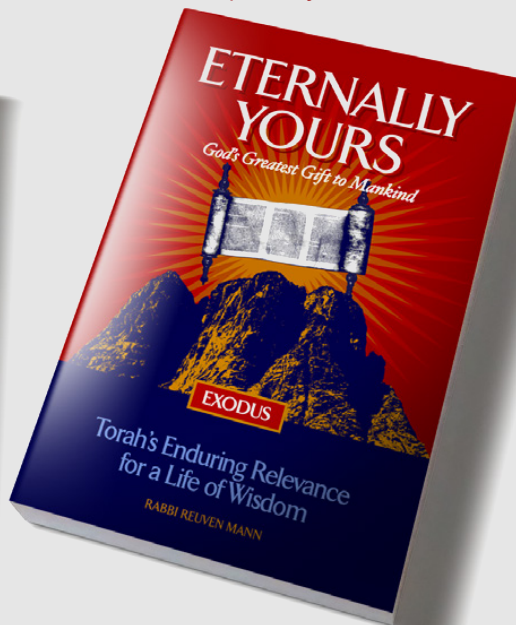
Shabbat Shalom V'Tzom Kal ■

RABBI MANN ON AMAZON

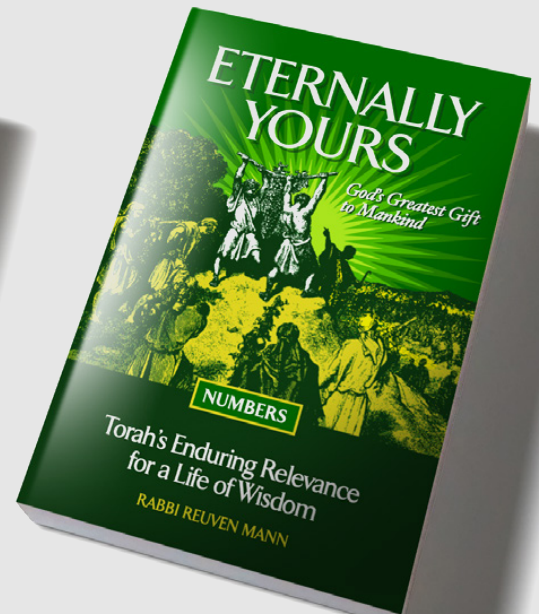
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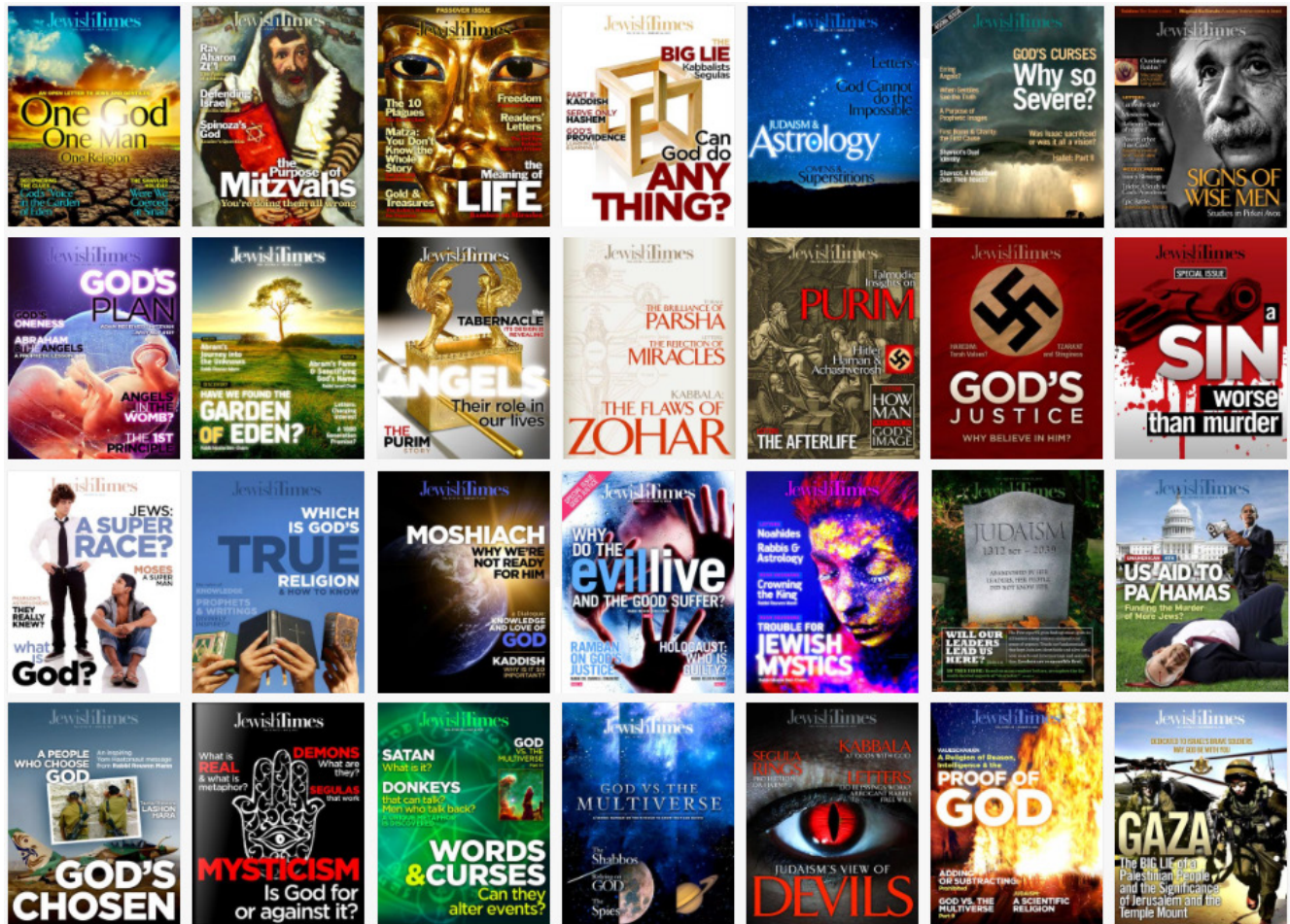
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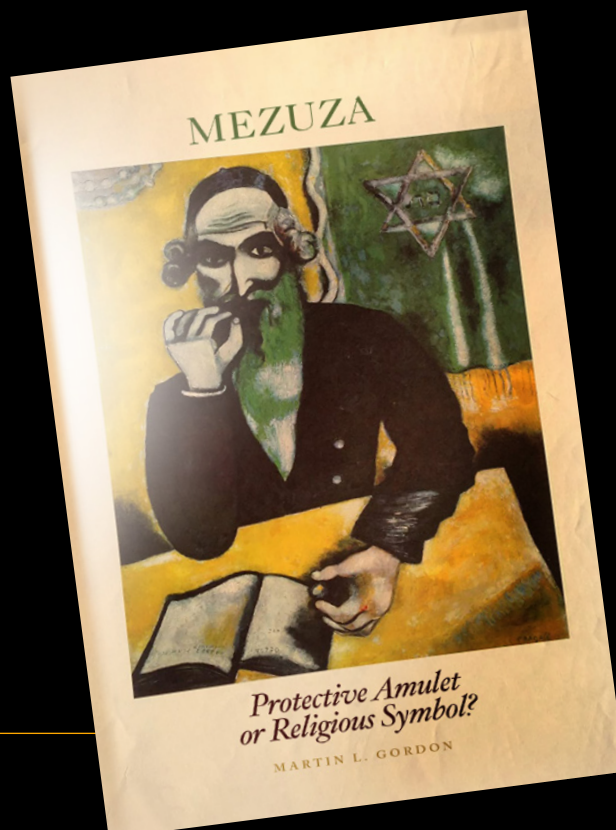
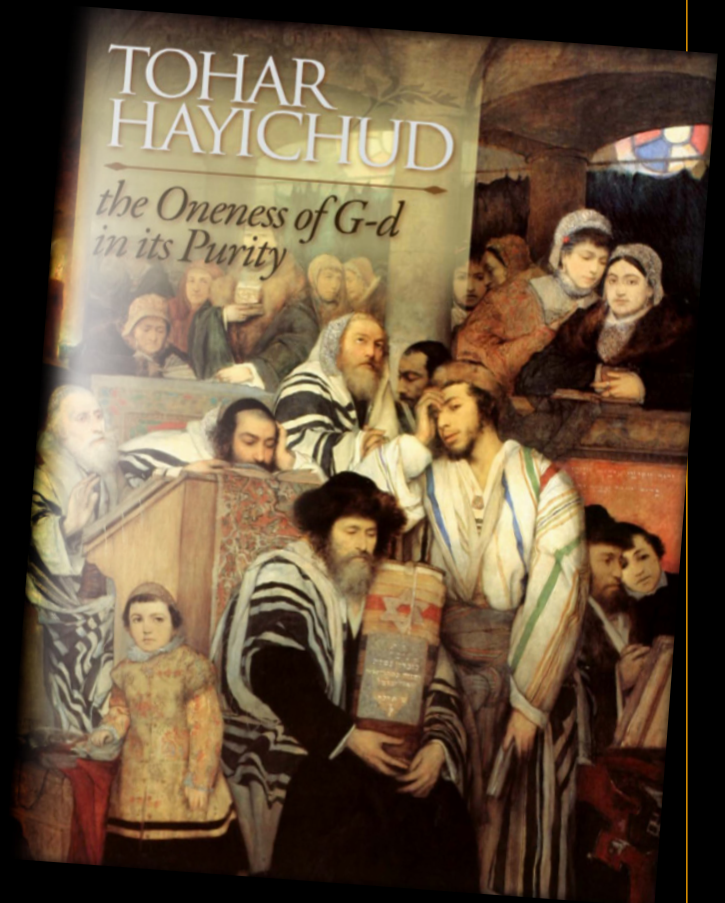


2 MUST READS THIS SUMMER

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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 How Judaism Differs
 Maimonides' 13 Principles
 Rules for Accepting Truths
 What is the Big Bang?
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 What is the Afterlife?

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" (Eccl. 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. 1:17). "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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