

JewishTimes

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JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

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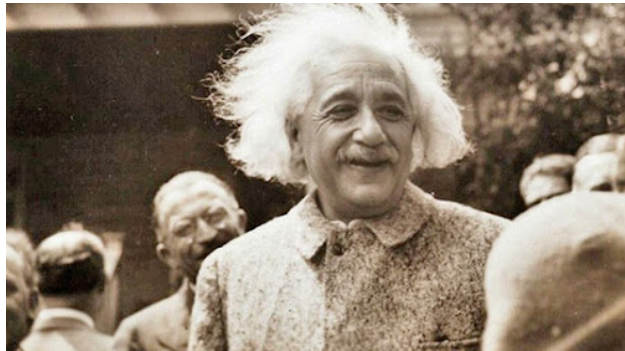
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"A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received, and am still receiving."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

THOUGHTS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

God Knows Best: Don't Alter Torah

A friend asked the following:

Deuteronomy 4:2 says, "You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it." Ibn Ezra comments: "You shall not add on your own and think that it is in the service of God...similarly you shall not diminish." The question is on Ibn Ezra's word "similarly": how is detracting laws from Torah similar to adding laws? Meaning, it is understandable that by adding—although prohibited—one wishes to increase his worship of God. But it is counterintuitive to suggest that detracting laws is being equally religious, as you're doing "less" than what God asked. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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But perhaps quantity is not the issue. One thinks that by adding, one is faithfully worshipping God, as he's being "more religious." But we can reject this: whether one adds or subtracts, he can equally feel he is serving God. How so? The crime of adding to Torah is in assuming one's subjective man-made system equates to God's will...that "devotion" to God is more important than formal adherence to mechanical laws. (This was Korach's flawed argument.) Therefore, not only via adding, but even via a detraction can be construed as true service. For even through subtracting, one can think that lesser and easier laws enhances worshipping God. For example, one feels justified permitting car travel to temple on Sabbath, as opposed to missing temple and abstaining from violating (fuel) ignition on Sabbath. This is how subtracting is similar to adding. Both adding and subtracting assume one follows God's will. But that is impossible. Ibn Ezra's words "don't think that it is in the service of God" emphasize this very point, that we must not guess what God wants.

From here we must explore what causes this corrupt thought. How does a person justify this? It's similar to this verse: "And it will be when you hear the words of this curse (for Torah violations) that you will bless (defend) your heart saying that you will have peace (I won't be cursed) because I am going in the direction of my heart" (Deut.29:18). One's ego and self confidence, teamed with one's "religious emotions" deceive one into believing he is fulfilling God's will. Throughout the millennia man's religious emotion has justified his atrocities like Crusades, pogroms, and the Holocaust. How many innocents have been slaughtered because their oppressors felt they were divinely inspired and that their religions were the only true religions and all must follow or die? This might be a gross example, but adding and subtracting from Torah shares the germ of religious justification. ■

Parsha: Success & Unhappiness

When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage (Deut. 8:12-14).

How does success breed contempt and rebelliousness against god? These verses identify the sinner's lack of recognition for all the previous factors that contributed to his current well-being. Einstein used to say the following:

A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received, and am still receiving.

These verses speak to a person's myopic view which is fueled by his ego. One overlooks his dependence on factors other than the self, for it is humbling and contrary to the ego. One's ego causes him to forget God who performed all the great deeds for his ancestors, allowing him to have his present bounty. But if a person does not forget and maintains his attitude of appreciation, this can contribute to his happiness and can counter the destructive forces of his ego. The following is quite a potent verse, as Moses reminds us that our wherewithal to become successful is God's own creation:

Remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers, as is still the case. (Ibid. 8:18)

Thus, one's feelings of greatness regarding his successes is a lie, for God created our very capacity to succeed.

Verse 8:19 below goes on to show how the person's need for security is not lost—even though he forgets God's goodness—for then he is compelled to follow idolatry:

If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve them or bow down to them, I warn you this day that you shall certainly perish.

9:4 is another expression of ego:

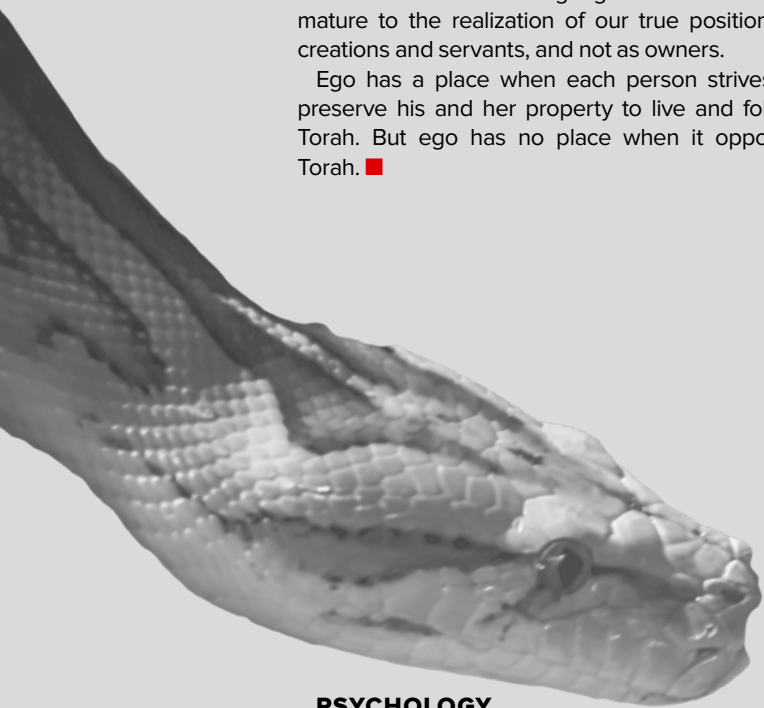
And when the Lord your God has thrust them (other nations) from your path, say not to yourselves, "The Lord has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues"; it is rather because of the wickedness of those nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you.

To correct us prior to rebelling against God, God commands us in charity, tithes, Shmitta, Jubilee, and other forms of charity from our earnings and

THOUGHTS

crops. In this manner, we are constantly reminded from Whom we receive our wealth and harvest, as we constantly give back to Him what is His, and not ours. King David said, “But all is from You, and it is from Your Hand that we have given to You” (I Chronicles 29:14). God commands us not to act as owners during Shmitta and Jubilee. And we must give from all our hard work to the poor. Recognizing God’s will and His ownership, we defend ourselves from caving to our egoistic drives. Mere gasping of God’s ownership is insufficient, we must regularly act to restrain our strong egos until our minds mature to the realization of our true position as creations and servants, and not as owners.

Ego has a place when each person strives to preserve his and her property to live and follow Torah. But ego has no place when it opposes Torah. ■



PSYCHOLOGY
The Snake’s Rider

How does a person transition from a sinful life towards a perfected life? What are the steps and changes we undergo? As one learns what is truly good and beneficial, his mind cannot deny these new truths he has grasped. He abandons his previous flawed values as he sees that they are false and cannot provide happiness. A person cannot knowingly harm himself and choose something bad and unhappy over something good and fulfilling. Rabbi Israel Chait called this the “reality

principle.” One must follow what he sees as being the true good; it’s impossible to do otherwise. With this new found knowledge his values naturally attach to the good and his actions follow suit, which is what we refer to as “perfection,” our goal as humans. This is the transition. This teaches that with greater knowledge, one can live a happier life. The more one dispels fallacy and acquires greater knowledge of truth and the good for man, the more one advances towards living the good life and increases his happiness.

When discussing Eve’s sin, Maimonides says (Guide, book II, chap xxx): “The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samael. Samael is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan.” Samael means “to blind one from God.” And Satan means to “turn one away.”

But Genesis does not mention any rider on the snake. What was this rider? Eve’s desires and fantasies about the fruit blinded her from following God’s command: “The woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6). Eve’s words about the value of the fruit (in her imagination) convey that it was her value system that misguided her and which employed her instincts into action to sin. Metaphorically, her value system is referred to as the snake’s “rider.” The snake is her instinctual drives, but they do not to choose where to apply their energies; this is based on one’s values. And as Eve (incorrectly) valued the forbidden fruit, her instinctual energies followed her values at that moment and she sinned. Our values are controlling, and why they are viewed as “large as a camel” while the instincts are not as large. But if we study Torah’s truths, our values adapt to what is good and we redirect our instincts towards following Torah. Our values (camel) direct our drives (snake). The snake alone is neither good nor bad.

Maimonides also says the following: “It is especially of importance to notice that the serpent did not approach or address Adam, but all his attempts were directed against Eve.” Here, Maimonides hints to the truth we stated: the snake represented Eve’s instincts, a faculty that can communicate only with Eve. Eve’s instincts have no pull—no communication—with Adam or others. ■

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PARSHA

40
DAYS
on MT
SINAI

WHY?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

And the glory of God dwelt on Mt. Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days, and He called unto Moses on the seventh day from the cloud. And the appearance of the glory of God was like a devouring fire at the summit of the mountain in the eyes of the Children of Israel. And Moses came in the midst of the cloud, and he ascended the mountain, and it was that Moses was in the mountain 40 days and 40 nights.” [1]

What is the importance of Moses’ 40-day stay on Sinai? In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Jews that he fasted during these first 40 days on Sinai. (The omission here is of interest.) Ibn Ezra states that Moses’ fast of 40 days and 40 nights is a “great, unprecedented wonder”.[2] But we must learn whether this fasting was Moses’ idea, God’s command, or was it unplanned? And what would be lost had Moses not fasted? He would still have received the Torah, as it says, “Ascend the mountain to Me and remain there and I will give you the Tablets of stone, and the Torah and the Mitzvah which I have written to teach them”[3]. What difference would it make, had Moses received the Tablets, without fasting?

Let us review the order of Moses’ ascensions on Sinai. Moses first received and wrote the Torah, commencing with Genesis and concluding with the present-day, the event of Revelation on Sinai, parshas Yisro. This means that all of the Torah’s historical content subsequent to Sinai was not yet given to Moses at Sinai.[4] Moses then descends Sinai and informs the Jews of this Torah, which they accept. On the 7th of Sivan, Moses ascends Sinai for his first of three 40-day periods on the mountain, to receive the first Tablets. On his last day – 17th of Tammuz – Moses learns of the Jews sinning with the Golden Calf. He remains there on the mountain that last day, prays for the Jews not to be destroyed, and receives a favorable reply from God[5]. But keep in mind that during these 40 days until the Jews sinned, Moses’ abstinence from food was not on account of any sin, since no sin was revealed to him until day 40[6]. On this 40th day – the 17th of Tammuz – Moses descends, breaks the first set of Tablets, punishes the wicked Jews, and ascends to pray for the Jews. He prays for 40 days and nights, until the 29th of Av: although God rescinded His initial decree to kill the nation, the Jews still bore the sin[7] of the Golden Calf which Moses wished to remove during this second 40-day period. At God’s command to receive a replacement set of Tablets, Moses descends and quarries a new set of sapphire Tablets on which God will inscribe the original 10 Commandments. He then ascends for a third and final 40-day period dwelling on the mountain, and received complete atonement for the Jews on Yom Kippur, forty days after the 29th of Av. (Rashi)

When describing the actual events at Sinai in Exodus, the Torah omits any mention of Moses’ abstinence from food or drink, “...and it was that Moses was in the mountain 40 days and 40 nights.” Not a word of his abstinence. Why then does Moses tell the Jews about his fasting when he rebukes the Jews in Deuteronomy? The Torah is silent about his fast until this point:

“And in Horeb you angered God, and God was angered with you to destroy you. When I ascended the mountain, to receive the Tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Treaty which God forged with you; and I dwelled on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink.”[8]

During those first 40 days to receive the first Tablets, the Jews had not yet sinned. Why then did Moses include this ascent in his rebuke? Additionally, why now does he mention his abstinence from food?

Moses continues his rebuke, “And I beseeched God like at first; 40 days and 40 nights, bread I did not eat and water I did not drink.”[9] Here, Moses refers to his second ascent upon Sinai to obtain forgiveness for the Jews’ sin. But we wonder, why did Moses commence with the rebuke “And I beseeched God like at first”? What does Moses mean by the words “like

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

at first”? We are surprised to read this, since we already proved that Moses’ first ascent was not for any sin of the Jews, but to receive the original Tablets at God’s command. This ascent predated the Golden Calf. So what is Moses’ equation between his second ascent to gain forgiveness, and his first ascent? We are forced to say that Moses’ abstinence during his first 40 days is somehow akin to his subsequent ascension and prayer for another 40 days after the Jews sinned, where he again did not require any nourishment. What is the equation?

Abstinence: Moses’ Lesson

What was Moses responding to with his second ascension on Sinai? The answer: the Golden Calf, the Jews’ sin of idolatry. What is this sin?

Idolatry is man’s attempt to gain goodness in his life, but does so through the misconception that animals, man, inanimate, or imaginary objects possess powers and can offer goodness. Humans are indeed dependent beings: we require food, clothing and shelter and have a myriad of insecurities. We sometimes become feeble, unsure that we can provide for ourselves, also in doubt about our future. Therefore, we succumb to hearsay regarding “powers” that can guarantee our needs. We create idols; seek out palm readers, even those as great as King Saul sought to resolve insecurities by inquiring of the dead[10]. Unless we arm ourselves with truths, we will be no different. Parshas Shoftim clearly prohibits all such false practices, as Ibn Ezra says, “the Torah prohibits that which is false.”[11]

This very need expressed in idolatry, is precisely what Moses emphasized, and desired to address. Moses teaches that we can obtain not only our needs, but so much more...but only with adherence to God. He tells the Jews that God “did one better” by removing any of his human needs. Idolatry attempts to secure the needs one has according to his natural disposition, that of an organism in need of food, clothing and shelter. And these, an idol cannot accomplish. In stark contrast, not only can God deliver those needs, but also, He can sustain man without needing to satisfy these natures...God can override nature. This is why Moses tells the Jews that he did not eat or drink for 40 days and nights, even during his first ascent, which had nothing to do with the Jews’ sin. During that first stay on Sinai, Moses attachment to God and His system procured such

Divine Providence, that his normal needs were miraculously suspended. Revealing this great wonder to the Jews, Moses wished to awaken the sinful Jews to the exact foolishness of their sin. As an educator, Moses decided to unveil the Jews’ underlying notions that led to their sin: “You sought protection from gold which is inanimate, while God completely overrode my very needs.” In this manner, Moses wished the Jews might realize their falsehoods, and abandon them. In this manner, they can truly repent. Informing the Jews that God removed his need to eat, Moses contrasted their idolatrous motivations, which never succeeded, against God’s manifest proof of His complete control over all. This should make an impression on those seeking security, that it could only come from God.

Earlier in Deuteronomy[12] Moses states, “And He afflicted you and hungered you and fed you the Manna that you and your forefathers did not know, in order to make known that not on bread alone does man live, but on all that comes forth from God’s mouth does man live. Your clothing did not become worn from upon you, and your feet did not swell these 40 years.” Again, Moses teaches the Jews how God sustained them with a miraculous food, how their clothing miraculously never wore, nor did they show physical symptoms normally met with those who traveled for so long.

Moses’ message is not that we should abandon natural law, for Moses himself would not do so. Moses’ entire life was spent educating the Jews about a land that would provide sustenance, for the very reason that we must live in accord with our natural needs. So what was Moses’ goal in mentioning all God’s miracles, and his endurance with no food for 40 days and nights?

Moses’ lesson is that while we witness natural law to be constant, we must have greater conviction in He who created and guides this law. If God says that Torah adherence will earn us all our needs, we must not abandon Torah because we feel this loss of work hours will lessen our income. We don’t know how God will assure our needs are met, and truthfully, we don’t need to know, nor can we know. God created this universe...do you know “how” He did so? No man ever did. God’s knowledge and providence are unknowable, but His words are clear: He will provide, if we live the life He commands, for our own good. So if we are convinced

that God exists, and that He does in fact control all, and that He promises to care for our needs if we follow Him, then other considerations must not take priority. Creating Golden Calves we assume will protect us, is an extreme illustration of the same falsehoods we harbor today: we work tirelessly, assuming everything we earn, is a result only of how much we work. God is not in our equations, just as God was not in the equation when the Jews created the Calf.

God addresses this insecurity in Malachi[13], where He says that we may test Him when giving our charity: “...and test Me please with this, says the Master of Hosts, (see) if I do not open up the storehouses of heaven, and empty out (for you) a blessing until you have more than enough”. God is guaranteeing that by giving tzedaka, we assure for ourselves financial security, and not an average income, but “until we have more than enough”. Our normal disposition is that when we part with money, we have less. But God teaches the opposite.

So what will you follow: human thinking based on natural law, or God, who created and controls those very laws?

Moses had no plan to abstain from natural law while on Mount Sinai. It happened that while there, engaged in prophecy and Torah study, God suspended natural law so that Moses endured for 40 days and 40 nights, awake, and not eating. Moses’ attachment to Torah earned him God’s providence. Our attachment to Torah will earn us providence as well. ■

[1] Exod. 24:16-18

[2] Exod. 24:18

[3] Exod. 24:12

[4] Rashi, Exod. 24:4,7. This is reasonable, since all subsequent events recorded in our Torah from Yisro through Deuteronomy had not yet transpired. And even if God had included these future events comprising the Jews’ future sins in this version of the Torah, free will would be affected, which violates God’s will.

[5] Exod. 32:14

[6] Deut. 9:11

[7] Deut. 9:18 states that Moses sought to remove the Jews’ “sin”, since he already obtained pardon from their destruction, as seen in Exodus 32:14.

[8] Deut. 9:8,9

[9] Deut. 9:18

[10] Samuel I, 28:7-19

[11] Lev. 19:31

[12] Deut. 8:3,4

[13] Malachi 3:10

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Does Chosen Mean Superior?

A fundamental principle of Judaism which disturbs many Jews and gentiles alike is that we are a Chosen Nation. Hashem singled out the Jews from all the people of the earth and gave them His Torah. This idea is not just hinted at, but openly proclaimed in the Books of Shemot and Devarim (and numerous other places in Tanach).

The idea that the Jews have been selected by G-d has been a source of misunderstanding and grief throughout history. It is a major cause of the pernicious disorder of Anti-Semitism which afflicts the world to this day. Indeed, both major world religions acknowledge that, “originally”, G-d chose the Jews. However, they maintain, He subsequently rejected them and now they (the Christians or Muslim) have taken our place. (It is not difficult to detect the psychological motivations behind this theological manipulation).

However, the doctrine of chosenness poses a potential pitfall for the self-image of the Jews themselves. For it is almost inevitable that many will take it to imply that the one’s whom G-d has chosen for an exalted mission must be on a higher plane than all others.

It is not only non-Jews that have a problem with the notion of Jewish racial (or any other) superiority. The entire world (but most specifically the Children of Abraham) has endured extreme suffering at the hands of those who regarded themselves as the Master Race. So that the very notion of such a phenomenon is abhorrent to most people who will condemn any group that puts

forth such a claim.

Yet, it seems to me, that many Jews, while they will not say so out loud, do feel on some level that it is because the Jews are in some way better that they have been selected by the Creator to be His People. Is this the correct understanding of this complicated concept?

Moshe Rabbenu addresses himself to this issue in Parshat Eikev. He warns the people not even to imagine that Hashem will drive out the inhabitants of Canaan before the Jews because of their superior stature:

Do not say in your heart, when Hashem pushes them away from before you, saying, “Because of my righteousness did Hashem bring me to possess this Land and because of the wickedness of these nations did Hashem drive them away from before you.” Not because of your righteousness and the uprightness of your heart are you coming to possess their Land but because of the wickedness of these nations does Hashem, your G-d, drive them away from before you, and in order to establish the word that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And you should know that it is not because of your righteousness that Hashem gives you this Land to possess it, for you are a stiff-necked People.

It seems clear from this that Moshe sought to disabuse the Jews of the erroneous understanding that they

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The Jews must make it clear that they do not hold themselves above anyone else and the rest of mankind should not accuse them of the sin of arrogance.

possessed some sort of moral elevation which entitled them to certain divinely ordained advantages. He is not disputing that Hashem has chosen the Jews but is making it clear that it is not because they are on a higher spiritual plane. In fact, he actually criticizes them because of a certain type of stubbornness that he had detected in them.

It is absolutely imperative that both Jews and gentiles realize the implications of Moshe's declaration. The Jews must make it clear that they do not hold themselves above anyone else and the rest of mankind should not accuse them of the sin of arrogance.

(It must be mentioned here that everyone acknowledges that the intellectual achievements of Jews and their vast contributions to mankind which are way out of proportion to their numbers do indicate that this People has some kind of "edge". I would say that this does not stem from some innate superiority but is testament to the great benefits of living according to the dictates and ideals of the Torah. In my opinion any other group that adopted the Torah as their governing constitution and assiduously fulfilled its intellectual and moral demands would attain similar results.)

However the question persists, how should we understand and relate to the reality that the Creator has chosen us to be a "Kingdom of Priests and Holy Nation?" After

providing a list of the numerous transgressions of the Jews which bolsters his assertion that they are stiff-necked, Moshe explains, "Only your forefathers did Hashem cherish to love them, and He chose their offspring after them—you from all the Peoples, as this day. And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart and should no longer stiffen your neck."

Our forefathers achieved the highest level of human existence and were worthy to be chosen by Hashem to sire the People who would be His. We, their descendants, were chosen because we are their children and most likely to mold our personalities after their teachings and example. So if we are to be proud it should be because we recognize the great nobility from which we are descended. And we should strive to raise ourselves to their level so we become personally deserving of our great distinction.

The concept of "Chosen People" cannot be dismissed or ignored for it is a vital component of our national identity and constitutes our collective mission and reason for being. But what are the practical consequences of accepting upon ourselves this designation?

I believe that it should impel us to achieve the highest level of behavior as outlined in the Torah. Of course, we must proclaim the divine origin of Torah and its command-

ments. We must guard them, study them and perform them. We must live by them.

But the way we understand the Mitzvot and the philosophy of life we derive from them is crucially important. Regarding this the verse states; "You shall guard them and perform them, for it is your wisdom and in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these statutes and will say, 'Surely a wise and discerning nation is this great People!'"

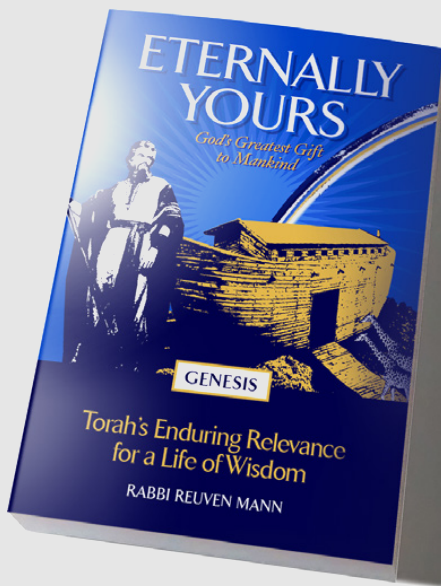
The goal of the Chosen People is to sanctify Hashem's Name in the world by demonstrating through their wisdom and behavior the special and unique character of Torah. We must understand and expound the Mitzvot in such a meaningful and compelling manner that intelligent people will take notice and express their admiration. This is our national mission and goal which we must be conscious of and motivated to attain.

The way to move forward is to acknowledge our flaws especially the "barriers" of irrationality that separate us from a genuine and truthful perception of what Hashem is instructing us to do in His Torah. We must remove the moral blinders that cause us to have a distorted understanding of reality so that Hashem's truth can shine through and enlighten our lives. May we merit to achieve this.

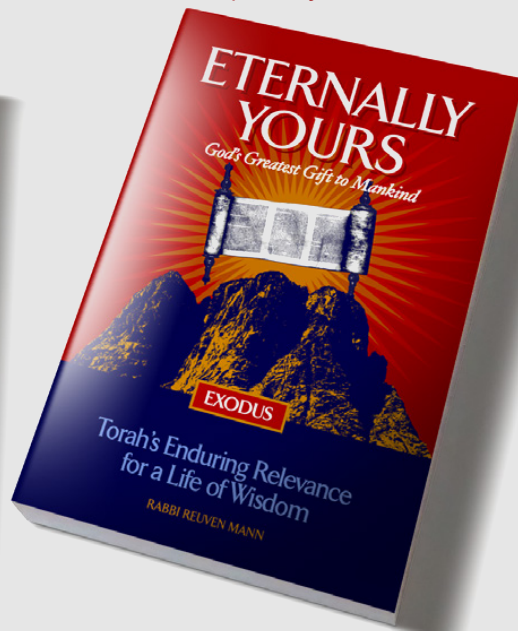
Shabbat Shalom ■

RABBI MANN ON AMAZON

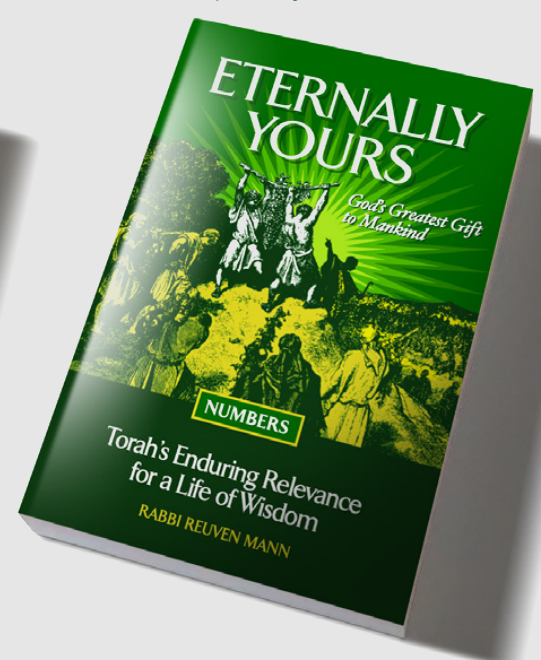
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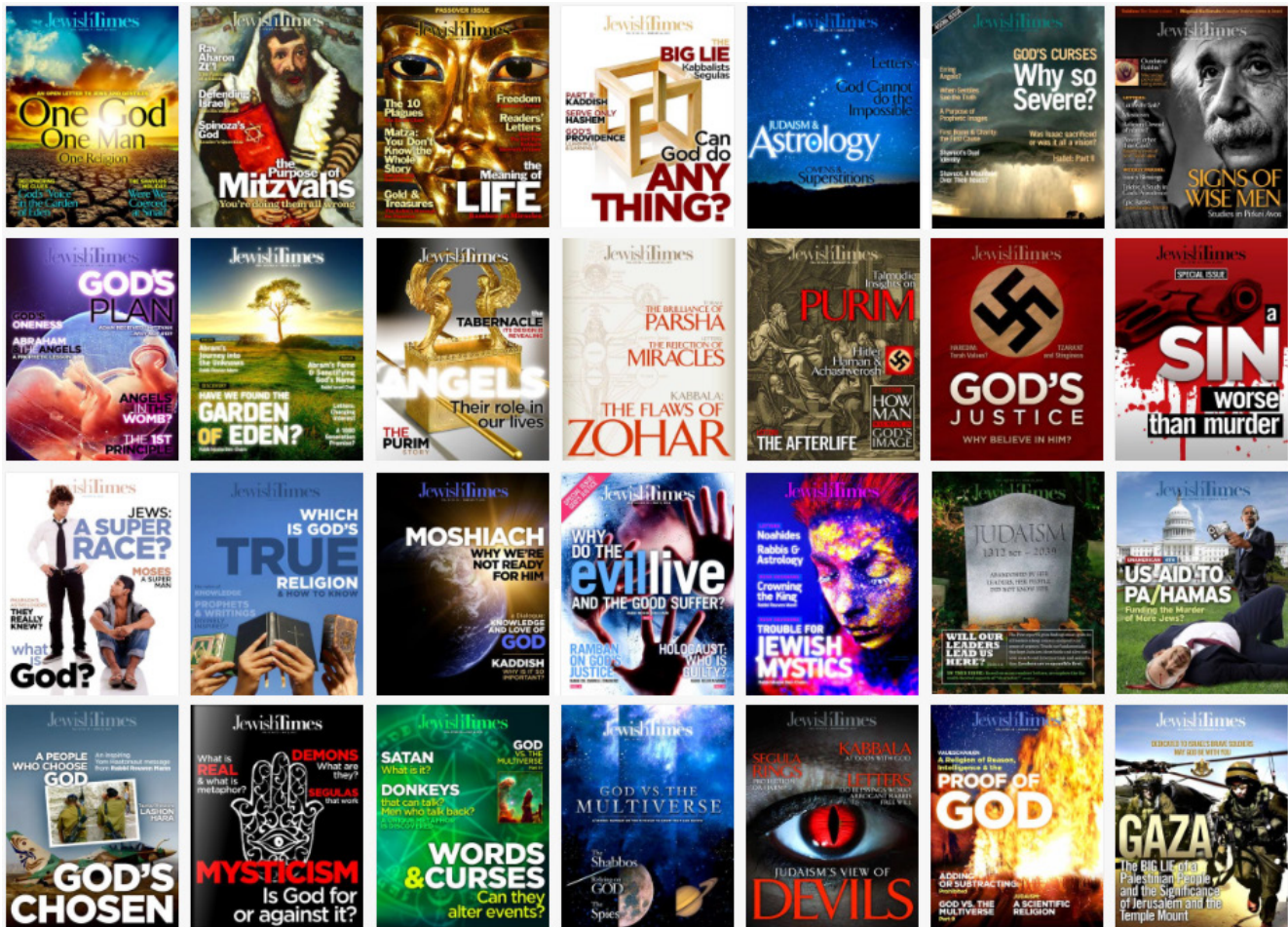
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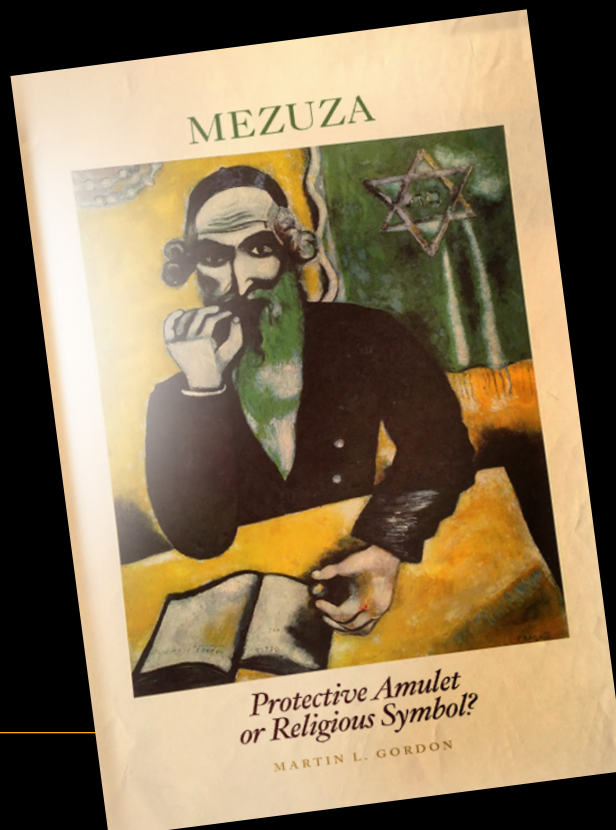
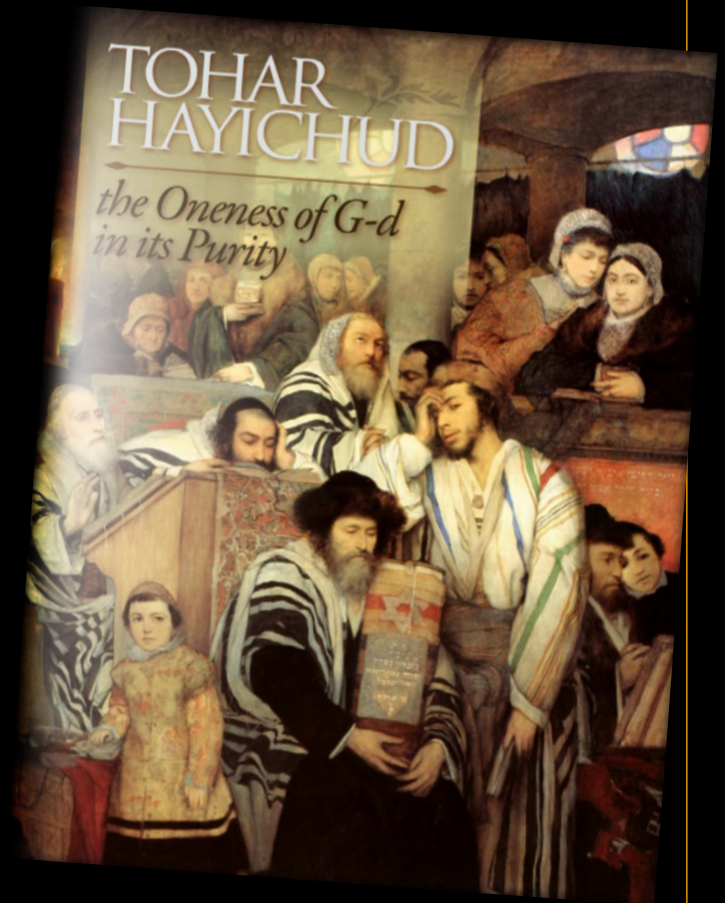


2 MUST READS THIS SUMMER

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“Most of us take advantage of people’s weaknesses instead of helping to strengthen them.”

Integrity

Kenyan runner Abel Mutai was only a few meters from the finish line, but got confused with the signs and stopped, thinking he had finished the race. BA Spanish man, Ivan Fernandez, was right behind him and, realizing what was going on, started shouting to the Kenyan to keep running. Mutai did not know Spanish and did not understand.

Realizing what was going on, Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory.

A reporter asked Ivan, "Why did you do this?" Ivan replied, "My dream is that one day we can have some sort of community life where we push ourselves and also others to win."

The reporter insisted "But why did you let the Kenyan win?" Ivan replied, "I didn't let him win, he was going to



win. The race was his." The reporter insisted and asked again, "But you could have won!" Ivan looked at him and replied: "But what would be the merit of my victory? What would be the honor of this medal? What would my Mother think of it?"

The values are transmitted from generation to generation. What values do we teach our children and how much do you inspire others to earn? Most of us take advantage of people's weaknesses instead of helping to strengthen them. ■

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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.

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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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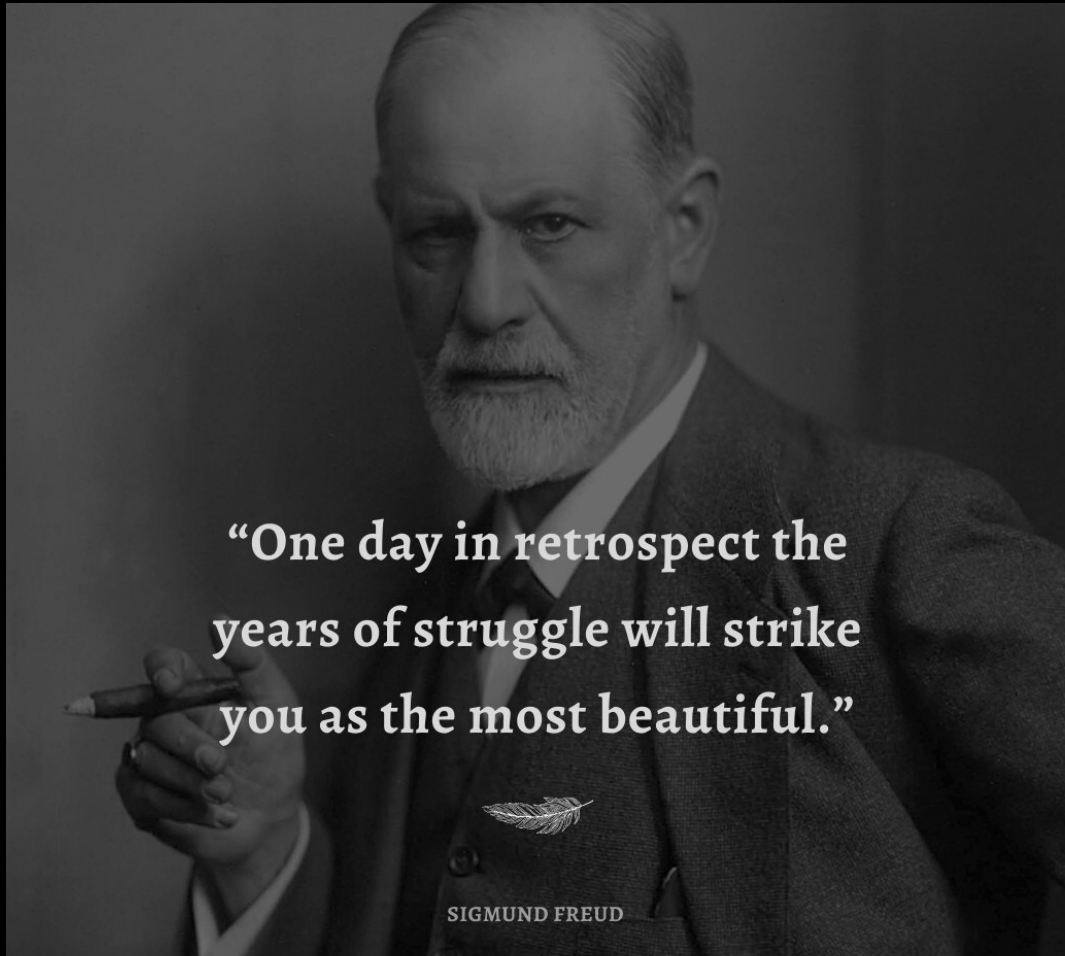


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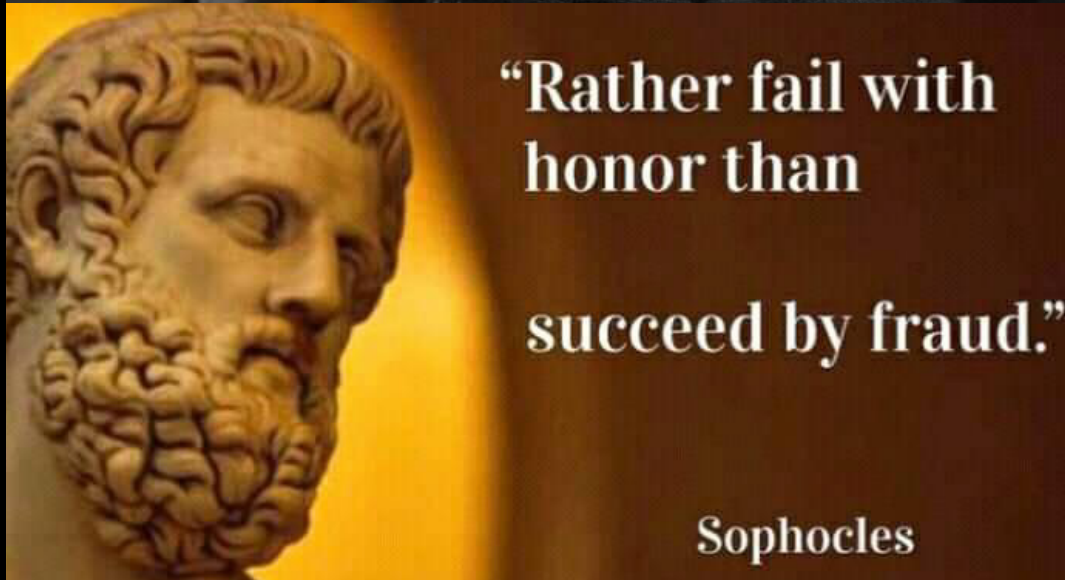
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