

**JewishTimes**

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# Life

**If not eternal, it's worthless.  
Make yours eternal.**

**Ego**

and our  
Downfall

**Kosher**

A Surprising  
& Brilliant  
Purpose

**Mitzvah**

The How & Why  
are Crucial

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Are they Real?





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# JewishTimes

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**SOCRATES**

## THOUGHTS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

### True Consolation

After Tisha B'Av, we read a weekly series of 7 Haftoras addressing our consolation: our punishment has been paid in full. But the consolation is not what we would expect, as the victims—the Jews—are not the focus. The following is an analysis of the first of the 7 haftoras (Isaiah 40:1-26):

*"Comfort, comfort My people," says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and declare to her that her term of service is over, that her iniquity is expiated; for she has received at the hand of the Lord double for all her sins. A voice rings out: "Clear in the desert a road for the Lord! Level in the wilderness a highway for our God! Let every valley be raised, Every hill and mount made low. Let the rugged ground become level and the ridges become a plain. The presence of the Lord shall appear, and all flesh, as one, shall behold—for the Lord Himself has spoken."*

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Redemption of the Jews has an objective: that God's word be revered. Upon redemption, God tells the prophet to announce that the land be prepared for God. But as God does not travel, and certainly not "on land," the above metaphor means that God's presence is recognized on Earth as His word comes true: both in His threat of punishment for violation, and in His deliverance of the Jews from punishment, as sin is expiated. The prophet says openly, "The 'presence' of the Lord shall appear." Therefore, redemption seeks to elevate the former sinners with an increased realization of truth, "God's presence." This higher level of wisdom of God will avert future calamities.

The redeemed Jews are not the focus, as we read next:

*A voice rings out: "Proclaim!" Another asks, "What shall I proclaim?" "All flesh is grass, all its goodness like flowers of the field: grass withers, flowers fade when the breath of the Lord blows on them. Indeed, man is but grass: grass withers, flowers fade—but the word of our God is always fulfilled!"*

The prophet makes clear that man is like grass and blossoms that wither and fade. But God's word comes true. The danger in redemption is that man focuses on his redemption—on himself—and not on God. The prophets aims to correct this.

*Ascend a lofty mountain, O herald of joy to Zion; raise your voice with power, O herald of joy to Jerusalem—raise it, have no fear; announce to the cities of Judah: "Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God comes in might, And His arm wins triumph for Him," see, His reward is with Him, His recompense before Him.*

Now the prophet shifts focus from the Jewish "people," to Jerusalem, which was devastated during its exile. The fame of the city, the capital, and the renewed foot traffic and historical fame all threaten to obscure God. Therefore the prophet calls the "cities" to focus on God, "Behold your God!" Furthermore, God is supremely powerful and unopposed, "coming in might and triumph." This is now further emphasized:

*Like a shepherd He pastures His flock: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom; gently He drives the mother sheep.*

God validated as mighty and triumphant as He cares for His flock, but there is a primary reason behind God's might: He is the Creator:

*Who measured the waters with the hollow of His hand, and gauged the skies with a span, and meted earth's dust with a measure, and weighed*

*the mountains with a scale and the hills with a balance?*

God is omniscient; no one taught Him:

*Who has plumbed the mind of the Lord, what man could tell Him His plan? Whom did He consult, and who taught Him, guided Him in the way of right? Who guided Him in knowledge and showed Him the path of wisdom? The nations are but a drop in a bucket, reckoned as dust on a balance; the very coastlands He lifts like motes. Lebanon is not fuel enough, nor its beasts enough for sacrifice. All nations are as naught in His sight; He accounts them as less than nothing.*

God is incomparable:

*To whom, then, can you liken God, What form compare to Him? The idol? A woodworker shaped it, And a smith overlaid it with gold, forging links of silver. As a gift, he chooses the mulberry—a wood that does not rot—then seeks a skillful woodworker to make a firm idol, that will not topple.*

This expresses the feeble dependency idols have on their makers. None compare to God:

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? Have you not been told from the very first? Have you not discerned How the earth was founded? It is He who is enthroned above the vault of the earth, so that its inhabitants seem as grasshoppers; who spread out the skies like gauze, stretched them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings potentates to naught, makes rulers of the earth as nothing. Hardly are they planted, hardly are they sown, hardly has their stem taken root in earth, when He blows upon them and they dry up, and the storm bears them off like straw. "To whom, then, can you liken Me, to whom can I be compared?" —says the Holy One. Lift high your eyes and see: Who created these? He who sends out their host by count, who calls them each by name. Because of His great might and vast power, not one fails to appear.*

Consolation must target man's recognition of God, and we understand God as the sole creator and ruler: the prophet emphasizes the "founding of earth" and that God "makes rulers of the earth as nothing." These two praises of God are as we said: he is Creator and Governor, He makes and maintains.

Consolation is not a reprieve for the exiled Jews. Consolation intends to imbue man with truths about God and His word. This will truly maintain people in a consoled state, as this knowledge earns them God's consolation. ■

# Success Ruins Us

*Take care lest you forget the Lord your God and fail to keep His commandments, His rules, and His laws, which I enjoin upon you today. 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; who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its seraph serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end. [Beware lest your heart grow haughty] and you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.” 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.*

*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; like the nations that the Lord will cause to perish before you, so shall you perish—because you did not heed the Lord your God (Deut. 8:11-20).*

Man transitions from success, to haughtiness, to rejecting God and finally to idolatry. What is the sense behind this psychological progression?

God created man with many instinctual drives; some are more powerful and present than others. For example, sorrow exists only in response to an undesired event or loss. Otherwise, one does not experience that emotion. Love as well requires the presence of another human. But ego is different. From youth, one is keenly aware of the self, and views the self as the center, as more important than others. Kids say, “mine” when grabbing a toy from another child. Ego is not learned, just like chewing, swallowing and breathing. It’s innate. And many adults don’t abandon the competitive egoistical drive to prove their superiority. They slave for

decades to have the finer car, the larger home and the more elaborate wedding. It’s one big competition in their fantasies, where no one stops to realize that he isn’t taking all his “medals” to the grave. The wise person is different, and takes to heart his mortality. He invests time in what is truly a pleasure, and what is eternal: Torah.

Thus, as ego is ever-present and always seeks expression, one’s success granted by God is hijacked and utilized to bolster one’s ego. He rejects God as this depletes his ego. But why does he then turn towards idolatry? Didn’t he just reject God as he desires to view the self alone as the cause of his success? Won’t idolatry now risk his ego, and he might think the idol is granting his wishes? We wonder why, if one rejects God, that he pursues idolatry. As one rejected God due to one’s inflated self-estimation—“My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me”—he should equally reject idolatry. For in idolatry one again would be admitting to a need for that god. King Solomon answers in Koheles.

One can serve a deity or an idol for a number of reasons. The most dominant motivation behind idolatry is the desire for success. However, this motivation cannot apply here, as Moses tells the Jews their egos will dominate and they will attribute their success to themselves. But there is another motive that is activated by one’s very success: insecurity at losing his wealth.

*A worker’s sleep is sweet, whether he has much or little to eat; but the rich man’s abundance doesn’t let him sleep (Koheles 5:11).*

This is why the Jews are warned that they will follow idolatry: as a means to protect their abundance from others or from imaginary forces of evil. This is why Jews today wear red bendels, as they fear the “evil eye” and other imagined powers. Today’s Jews make 2 errors: that forces exist other than God (evil eyes) and that red strings can defend against them.

The wise person values God’s wisdom and the pleasure he derives from his learning. He is not egoistical, so he does not suffer the stress and problems with peers that competition breeds. His life is pleasant, and he is thankful to God for his portion. He remains focussed on God, and would never abandon the only true power for wood or stone idols. ■


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PARSHA

# Kosher

## A Surprising and Brilliant Purpose

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



**M**ore than most laws, kosher is iconic of Jewish observance, and not without cause. Many times in His Torah[1], God commands us to abstain from eating and touching certain creatures. Like all other commands, the benefit in following any law lies in understanding how it perfects us. And as always, God provides clues. The following are God's words as He concludes the section on permitted and prohibited species:

*Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified, and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified (Lev. 11:43-45).*

God's objective for us in our abstention from these creatures is to become like Him: "sanctified." The avoidance of loathsome behavior is a path towards sanctity. But how does this sanctifica-

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tion work? What is “sanctity?” How does eating prohibited animals harm us? More precisely, how does eating physical objects harm our metaphysical souls? Rashi says[2] abstaining from loathsome creatures alone sufficed for God to take us out of Egypt. What is Rashi’s point? Why are we also told many times (Lev. chap 11) to additionally “abhor” (shakeitz) those creatures prohibited from our diet? But why isn’t abstention from eating sufficient? Oddly, Moses omits this abhorrence when he repeats the section of kosher and non-kosher animals in Deuteronomy 14:3-21. Why this omission?

We can eat literally all vegetation without restriction. But when it comes to animals, certain species are not to be eaten. Why this distinction? And what is significant about “creeping” things that renders it a dominant consideration among prohibited creatures? Finally, what is it about the act of eating per se that is harmful? Other peoples do not follow kosher laws, yet, they have existed as long as we have. Eating non-kosher apparently does not wipe out civilizations.

### Deciphering God’s Clues

In Leviticus chapter 11, God offers us signs that indicate permitted and prohibited animals: fully-split hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, knees (locusts), multiple legs, belly-crawlers, paws, and things that creep upon the ground. Even the Rabbis say[3] that although in the Torah birds are not signaled by a sign but by species, there is yet a sign relating to their legs. Notably, most signs indicating a species’ kosher and non-kosher status are based on its means of locomotion...an idea worth pondering.

### Locomotion & Kosher

What is significant about locomotion? Unlike inanimate vegetation, animate life—beings with locomotion—engenders human identification. We don’t identify with inanimate objects, like plants,

rocks, mountains, or oceans. But animals move. This element of animate life awakens in man our identification with that creature. We are drawn to animals and visit zoos. We obtain pets and mourn at their deaths. We develop systems of animal rights, in which, man draws distinctions: killing insects or even reptiles and birds is not met with the same crime as killing dogs or cats. This is because man places greater value on those species with which he identifies greater.

Identification exists with moving creatures, unlike inanimate objects. Signs of prohibited species inhere in their means of locomotion, the feature wherein man identifies.

### Kosher is a Barrier

God wishes man to not identify with the prohibited species. By eating snakes, rats, spiders, etc. man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and dulls his sense of what is to be loathsome. However, God wishes man to preserve this disgust. This is why He created man with this emotion. By preserving our emotion of disgust, our behavior in all areas benefits by these “barriers.” In contrast, people who eat whatever they wish and engage in unbridled lusts, and worse—eat disgusting species—forfeit their purpose as an intelligent being. They are no longer “sanctified.” Sanctified refers to man operating on the highest level humanly possible. This level is when he is most engaged in intellectual pursuits, studying the universe and Torah, as God designed humans to do. Caving to desires without limit, and breaking the barriers of naturally-reviled things, man loses a critical boundary. (As vegetation offers man no dangers of identification, no restrictions apply. All fruits and vegetation are permitted as they were since Adam the First.)

We now understand that God wishes man to retain certain barriers. The emotion of disgust is dulled by eating/identifying with certain creatures. Rabbi Israel Chait stated that things that creep on

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the ground remind us of death. Perhaps it is that close proximity to the underground—the grave—that we find abhorrent in these species. This can also explain why God created man upright, unlike most other creatures...distancing us further from the Earth. “Also the world [God] planted in their hearts so man should not discover the matter that God has done from beginning to end” (Koheles 3:11). This verse refers to God’s design of man’s immortality fantasy (Ibid. Ibn Ezra). God does not wish us to be preoccupied with death. Anything that reminds us of the grave is disturbing. These ground-crawling species disgust us due to their association with the ground, with death. This disgust is reinforced through the additional prohibition of contact with their carcasses, possibly bearing out this idea of distancing us from death.

Eating is one of our two primary drives; sex is the other. The rabbis and leading psychologists are in agreement on this. God limits the Jew’s involvement in satisfying these core instincts so we may become accustomed to controlling our instincts. The goal is to enable our intellects to rule our instincts, and ultimately engage in pursuing wisdom, the greatest pleasure. A person who has no limits on his appetitive and sexual activity will find great difficulty in advancing, or even engaging his intellect. His pursuit to know God will never be realized. For he will incite cravings that only grow as he feeds them: “Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘There is a small limb in man: starve it and it becomes satiated, feed it and it becomes hungry’” (Succah 52b). Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the more we satisfy the sexual drive, the greater the urge, and thus, less energy is available for fulfilling God’s Torah. This applies to all drives.

Abstaining from lusts and from eating certain creature suffices to control our emotions on one level. By not eating “disgusting” creatures, we break identification with that species, and we additionally maintain the emotion of disgust, which can then be applied to other forbidden areas. God desires we maintain a minimal level of abhorrence in the area of the appetitive drive. Retaining this disgust for certain species, we don’t only control one emotion, but all of our emotions benefit. We will find avoiding detestable behaviors easier since we strengthened our overall emotion of disgust.

By our very nature, we cannot be overindulgent in one area, without our entire



emotional makeup sensing this relaxation. This explains why the Jews worshipping the Gold Calf also arose to engage other instincts (Exod. 32:6). The satisfaction of one emotion—idolatry—causes other emotions to seek satisfaction. In contrast, barring instinctual expression—not eating disgusting creatures—controls other emotions.

### Increased Mercy

Leviticus 11 categorizes mammals, then fish, then birds. It is interesting that pawed animals are not initially identified in the first group of mammals[4]. Also interesting is that mammals alone are the one group in which we do not find the word “disgusting” (shekhetz). Instead, they are called “tammay” or impure. Perhaps this is because God wishes to teach another consideration within kosher laws. One aspect is what we answered: to sustain a barricade of disgust. Another benefit—in abstaining from pawed creatures—is that it engenders mercy. Pawed animals offer man more identification than other creatures. They are more like man: paws closely resemble human hands, our tools of creativity. We even ascribe intelligence to species that express greater tactile dexterity, like monkeys. The more an animal resembles man, the greater the identification. It’s a natural human response. The prohibition to abstain from pawed animals may serve the opposite benefit: to retain a level of mercy towards God’s creatures. Therefore, God also

prohibits animals that more closely resemble man. It is then not surprising that our pets are pawed. Our relationship to animals is then twofold: 1) abstention from disgusting creatures to maintain the necessary emotion of abhorrence, 2) to engender mercy toward beings that are not disgusting. Good and bad emotions are thereby kept in check. Therefore, as pawed mammals are not eaten due to a reason different from impurity, they are not included in the first mention of impure mammals.

God created man to naturally sense a feeling of abhorrence. We could have been designed to find all creatures equally appealing, but God deemed this harmful. He instilled in human nature many emotions, including disgust for many creatures. This disgust may be towards their outer appearance like rats and many insects. We also are designed to revile things that crawl on the ground like snakes and spiders, which recall the grave. God created us with disgust, and additionally commanded the Jew to reinforce this disgust through abstaining from eating or touching many creatures. Disgust is the natural wall between man and his instincts. By abstaining from instinctual gratification according to Torah parameters, God intends that man raise himself to the life where his intellect is not compromised, but rather, free to engage in studying the Creator. This is how man is sanctified, and resembles his Creator. This is Rashi’s point, that the path to living an intelligent life is

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paved by controlling our instincts. Abstaining from certain species accomplishes this goal, and alone, warranted God's Egyptian Exodus.

### Summary

At first, we wonder at the various species; why are they all needed? What is kosher all about? Is it a health law? But we then appreciate that God permitted us to enjoy flesh in all corners of the Earth, since man is mobile. We travel. God provided food in all regions: land and sea, valleys and mountains. By analyzing the signs that indicate kosher and non-kosher species, we realize they address our rarely examined emotional makeup. But God teaches us through kosher laws that we must have one eye on our psychological health and strive toward the perfection of our instincts. We also must recognize the species as God's will and show them mercy, as in sending the mother before taking the young, thereby sparing her pain, and perhaps also via abstaining from eating pawed species. This reinforces the mercy we are to show people. With our emotions in check, abstaining from eating certain species and even going so far to abhor them too, we control our instincts and become in some small way like our perfectly intelligent Creator who is bereft of any human quality and emotion. We too can partake of wisdom, the pursuit that God designed that offers us the greatest satisfaction.

As Jews, our mission differs from all other peoples. As teachers of God's Torah, we must condition our instincts through restraint, allowing our intellects to be

untarnished from urges that cloud our thought. In this pristine manner, we can study clearly and accurately teach God's single system for mankind, in a manner that impresses all who observe us. God's will that we impress the world with Torah will then be fulfilled, as the nations remark, "What a wise and understanding people is this great nation" (Deut. 4:6).

### Addendum

"Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified" (Lev. 11:43-45).

Parshas Shmini concludes by clearly identifying the prohibition as "Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps" and "do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth." Clearly, the prohibition against these species is not to a physical concern, but that our "souls"—our intelligences—should not become compromised through association with death, embodied in creatures that creep on the Earth's surface close to the place of our graves. Perhaps even the signs in kosher mammals—split hooves—and the signs in kosher fish—fins and scales—cause those creatures to move in

a way dissimilar than the non-kosher creeping creatures. We are left with the question of how chewing cud plays a role in this theory.

### Addendum II

Why did Moses omit any reference to "shekktetz" in Deuteronomy 14:3-21? Perhaps Torah contains 2 sections of kosher laws to address 2 distinct objectives. One objective<sup>[1]</sup> is to retain a level of disgust, as stated. But when Moses omits that term, he thereby teaches that even without retaining disgust, a restricted diet serves another purpose: distinguishing the Jewish nation, which Moses states just before discussing kosher: "For you are a holy nation to the Lord your God, and you God selected to be a treasured nation from all peoples on the face of the Earth" (Deut. 14:2). Thus, Moses teaches the Jews that even without preserving the emotion of disgust, some level of diet contributes to the Jews' role as a treasured nation. We are treasured, as we exhibit control over our most base instinct of appetite. Only one who masters his instincts can elevate his intellect and partake of the Chosen People's role as Torah students and educators of mankind. ■

[1] Exod. 22:30, Lev. chap 11, Deut. 14:3-21.

[2] Lev. 11:45

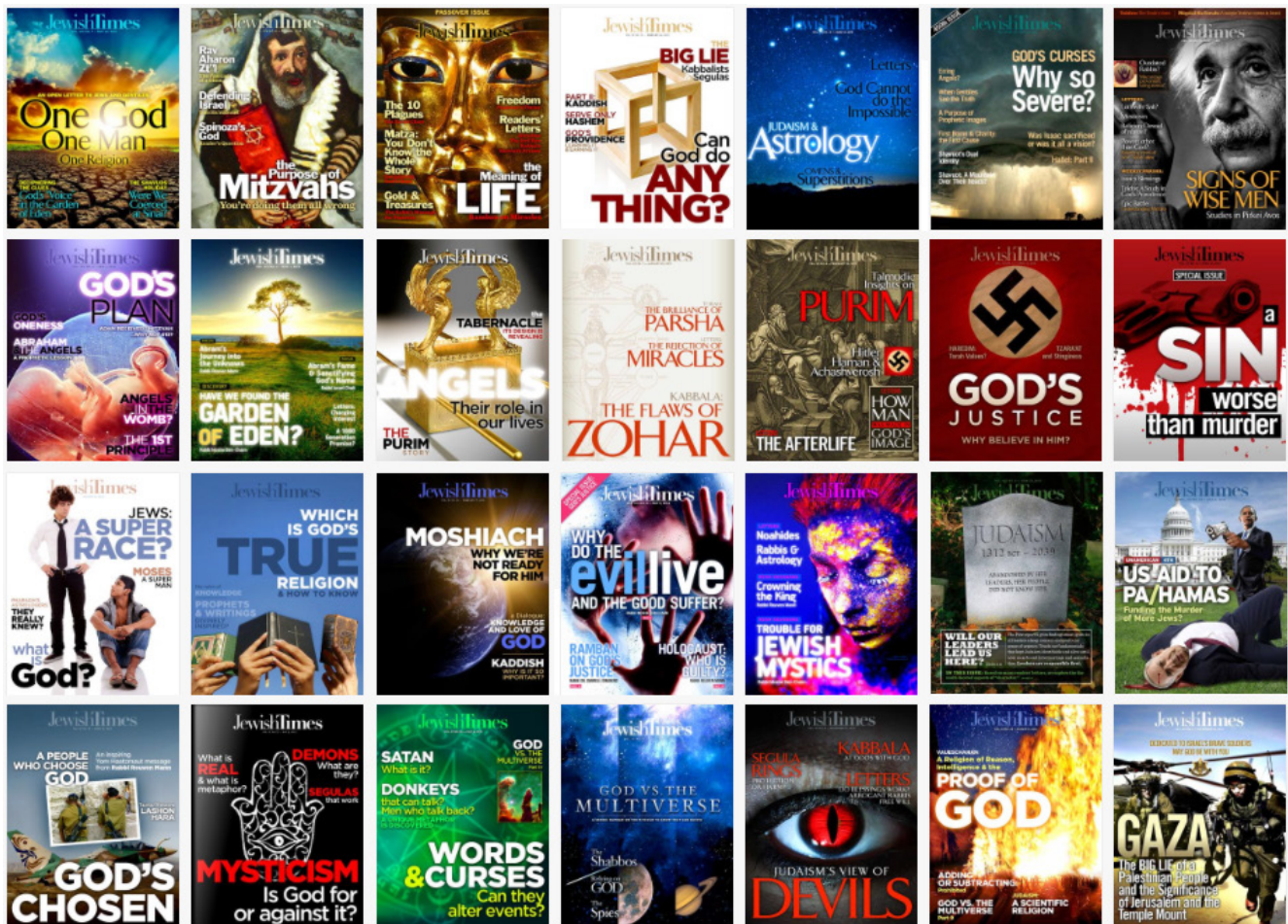
[3] Tal. Chullin 59a. See the mishna.

[4] Lev. 11:1-8

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# Mitzvah



## PARSHA

**T**his week's Parsha, Re'eh, reiterates the theme of blessings and curses which is a major subject of the Book of Devarim. It begins on a positive note; "The blessing: that you hearken to the commandments of Hashem , your G-d, that I command you today" (Deut. 11:27). The Rabbi say that just to hearken to the commandments constitutes a blessing. How are we to understand that teaching?

Anyone even remotely familiar with the Jewish religion knows that it is not a simple one to follow. Every Mitzvah, even those that seem uncomplicated, requires preparation and learning. Indeed there is an obligation to start studying for a Festival thirty days before it takes place. I'm not aware of any other religion which has a similar practice.

The reason for this feature is what is known as the Halachic System which forms the basic framework in which the divine commandments are performed. Thus it is impossible to fulfill the Mitzvot according to the literal meaning contained in the Scriptures.

There are numerous reasons for this, not the least of which is the fact that Scripture in many cases does not provide sufficient information to enable us to proceed. No one would have any idea of how to fulfill the Mitzvah of Tefillin, for example, if all he had was the Written Law.

And the same is true for virtually all the other Mitzvot. Every one contains a mass of information which needs a phenomenal study effort to intellectually master. And the pertinent objects and activities required by the commandments are determined and validated by the Halachic process which operates according to its own principles and definitions.

So for example on the holiday of Sukkot the Torah commands us to dwell in "booths" for seven days. But what does that mean? What constitutes a "booth" that is valid for the proper performance of this commandment? Well, you might say that this question can be answered by reference to the reason for the Mitzvah that is provided in the Torah. The verse commands us to dwell in booths so that, "Your descendants will know that I housed the children of Israel in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 23:43).

The holiday of Sukkot commemorates the Divine Providence which accompanied the Jews during their lengthy trek in the Wilderness. By living in flimsy huts we reenact that experience and review the important lessons

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## What Difference Does it Make?

### The How and Why are Crucial

RABBI REUVEN MANN

we can learn from it.

Therefore, you might say we can observe this Mitzvah with any type of minimal dwelling such as a tent or a hut. How many walls must this structure have, what type of materials can it be made of, what type of furnishings should it have and so forth?

The average person would say, "What difference does it make?" As long as I leave my house and take up residence in an outdoor type of habitation all the while mindful of the Wilderness experience it's supposed to remind me of, everything should be alright, right?

Actually no. One who spends the entire Sukkot holiday in a tent, eating, sleeping and conducting all his activities there and fully immersed and absorbed in the spiritual teachings of the chag, has unfortunately not fulfilled the Mitzvah at all. Though he sincerely tried he did not perform the commandment to "dwell in booths for seven days". Why not? Because the Halachic system does not define the structure he has put together as a Succah. It is therefore, no different than if he had stayed in his house. The entity which Halacha recognizes as a valid Succah is one which conforms to the Halachic definitions regarding walls a roof and proper materials.

There is thus a disparity between the philosophical purpose of the Succah commandment and the technical Halachic requirements determining how it is to be fulfilled. For example the roof cannot be made from any material. It can only be made from things that grow from the ground and have not been fashioned into a vessel.

What is the reason for the rules pertaining to the Scach (roof covering)? It does not seem that a Halachicly valid roof facilitates achievement of the mitzvah's purpose any better than one made of non-acceptable materials. However, we must recognize that the Mitzvah is

composed of two distinct components, the purpose and the performance.

Every mitzvah has a goal and reason as the Rambam makes clear in his Moreh Nevuchim. However the objects utilized in the performance of the commandment and the nature of the actions required do not necessarily conform to the ultimate philosophical objective of the Mitzvah. At a certain point the Halachic and philosophical lines diverge with each going its own way.

I believe that many people are troubled by the seemingly arbitrary and pointless legalistic requirements that pertain to various Mitzvot. However, the Halachic minutiae are very important. The greatest minds our nation has produced devoted their entire lives to endless Talmudic study. The primary focus of Jewish genius has been the mastery over all issues pertaining to and necessary for the fulfillment of the Mitzvot not only its theological lessons but it's Halachic formulation as well.

Judaism maintains that in order to serve Hashem properly one must be rooted in the unshakable belief that our Torah comes to us from heaven. This means that we are obligated by the Creator to fulfill the 613 commandments honestly and scrupulously.

In order to do this we must affirm the absolute veracity of the "Oral Law." This is the belief that Moshe spent forty days and nights on Mt. Sinai learning from Hashem all of the Halachic requirements of the 613 commandments. This body of law and interpretation was transmitted to the greatest Torah scholars of the time who then gave it over to the leading scholars of the next generation. The chain of Torah transmission has remained unbroken to the present day.

So that the Torah we observe today is the same one that was kept by Rashi and the Rambam and the Vilna Gaon and so forth. The

necessity for the very strictly defined Talmudic categories which govern virtually every aspect of religious activity serves two major purposes.

First of all the Halachic formulations are extremely abstract and are an expression of Hashem's Infinite wisdom. Just as a genuine (and humble) scientist trembles with awe of the Creator when he contemplates the intellectual magnificence of the world of nature, so too does the advanced Talmudic student encounter the divine majesty when he obtains insight into the Halachic structures. The awareness that when we are learning Gemara we are studying the "thoughts of Hashem" has a profound spiritual impact on all who engage in this activity. This intellectual encounter with the Creator elevates us to a higher moral and ethical plane.

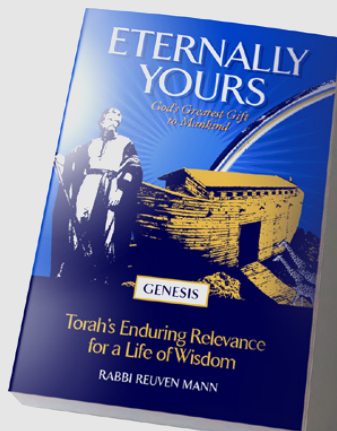
And the Halachic system is absolutely vital to retaining the preservation of our religion. For if everyone used the approach outlined above of performing a mitzva according to his perception of its purpose, Judaism would soon dissipate into many religions far too numerous to count. And there would be no Jewish People.

It is therefore necessary to cherish the Mitzvot not only in terms of their purposes and moral insights but also in terms of how they are to be performed. We should be very wary of unwarranted innovations and recognize the dangers they pose for the true preservation of the authentic Torah. It is only by our nation's commitment to the Written and Oral Torah which was revealed at Sinai that the ideal unity of the Jewish People can be attained. And therefore our Parsha asserts that the blessing is that we hearken to the commandments of Hashem which have been transmitted to us by the greatest prophet, Moshe Rabbenu. May we merit to achieve this.

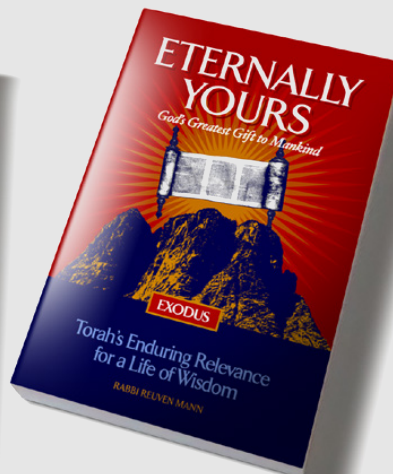
Shabbat Shalom ■

## RABBI MANN'S CHUMASH BOOKS ON AMAZON

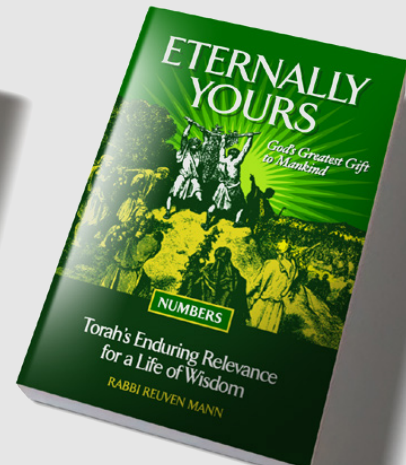
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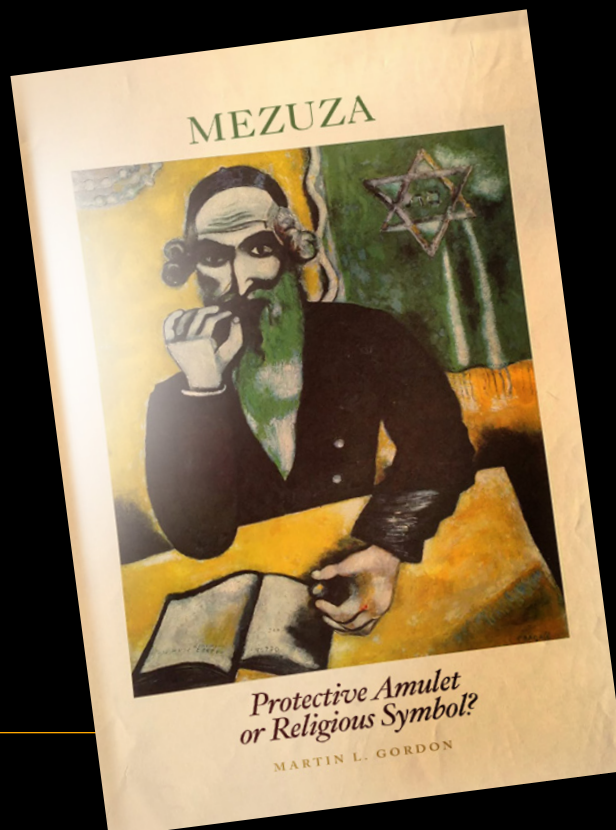
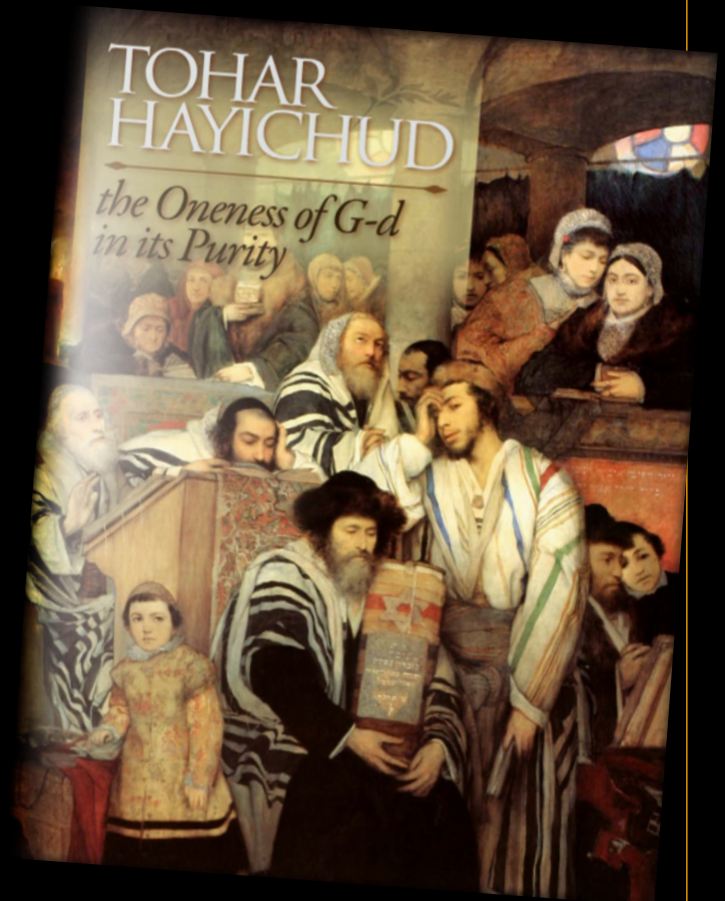


# 2 MUST READS THIS SUMMER

*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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*Mezuzah: Protective Amulet or Religious Symbol?* addresses the popular belief in segulahs and protective devices. Martin L. Gordon refers to Torah and reason as the authorities on true Jewish concepts.

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# Life

If not eternal, its worthless.  
Make yours eternal.

**T**zidduk Hadin—recited after a burial—includes this phrase:

*Whether man lives a year or 1000 years, of what benefit is it to him? He is as one who never lived. Blessed be the True Judge, Who brings death and resurrects.*

This statement has 2 parts: an evaluation of man as worthless, and a promise of resurrection. Even if living 1000 years, man is worthless if he experiences no afterlife. There is no worth to his temporary existence. He is equal to one who never existed. That's some statement. It's difficult to grasp any comparison between one who lived, and one who did not. How does the "temporal" nature of existence eliminate all value and render it worthless? Why must one be eternal to have any value?

Torah says the only real value is knowledge of God, i.e., appreciating His wisdom and moving towards greater love and awe of God. Even mitzvahs performed without understanding their purposes, are of no value. Donning tefillin, shaking lulav or other acts performed with no knowledge of why, offer man no knowledge of God. We are simply moving our bodies, which cannot benefit our souls. Only in the act of pondering God's brilliance, is there any value in existence. Rashi teaches, "God made Earth only if man partakes of Torah and its wisdom. Otherwise, God would revert Earth back to chaos" (Avos 2:8). Thus, Earth is worthless if no man uses it to study God. In such a case, both man and

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Earth become futile, explaining why the Flood engulfed Earth for man's abandonment of God.

We must know this: perception of wisdom is not a momentary phenomenon, but a sustained exploration. Perception of wisdom is not merely grasping an isolated point, but in seeing how one idea leads to another, how many ideas are dependent on others and otherwise interrelated, and in learning more and more principles where one perceives an even greater picture of reality. This is a continuum, a process of drawing ever-closer to God. And the very design of wisdom that it works this way is itself astonishing.

Now, what if man is terminated body and soul: was there value during life? Tzidduk Hadin above says, "No." The good is when a being has an eternal engagement in wisdom. If the exploration of God's wisdom comes to an end, even while alive, this person is not involved in an "eternal" exploration. This quote above is unconditional, so even while alive, it indicates that all one's accomplishments and good deeds are worthless, as he will eventually disappear from existence.

**Certainly once one dies, there is no longer a "him" about whom to say, "he" had a good life....the "he" no longer exists. It is as if he never existed. This is a vital idea, so grasp it with certainty.**

When is one's existence of worth? When he does so eternally. That is why the quote above concludes "Blessed be the True Judge, Who brings death and resurrects." Resurrection—afterlife—is what qualifies one's existence as worthwhile. God grants man an eternity of exploring His wisdom in the Afterlife. Thus, a life on Earth engaged in Torah is worthwhile because such a life is granted eternity.

The very nature of that goodness which God made for man, is eternal: "good" equates only to what is eternal. Just how good is a pleasure that lasts 1 second, or a vacation that lasts 5 seconds? Thus, "duration" is essential to anything good. The greatest good is that which is eternal: the endless search for wisdom, realizing new truths, questioning, and thinking. If a man or woman engages in pursuit of God's wisdom, if he comes to value it...he earns an eternity in exploring God's wisdom. But if one does not engage in wisdom, not only does he forfeit an eternal existence, but his earthly life too is unhappy and worthless: "Whether man lives a year or 1000 years, of what benefit is it to him? He is as one who never lived."

You have one opportunity to experience the greatest good forever, or exist temporarily. To enjoy this life the most, one must pursue Torah. Its wisdom offers the most fulfillment here, and grants us eternal happiness. Don't forfeit the purpose you were created, then greatest life here, eternal happiness and great reward. ■

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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" (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.

EMAIL



ASK THE RABBI





# SAUL & THE WITCH

**FACT**  
OR FICTION?

**READER:** I recently read some of your posts on Saul and the Radak's interpretation, and I have some questions: 1) The most obvious: why did the talmudic rabbis, who we rely on for all of our tradition, say nothing like this, that Saul only "imagined" he spoke with the dead Samuel? 2) Is there any scientific examples of this kind of delusion occurring in a person? And if there is was it an easy enough stage to reach, to justify these people being so heavily believed in and relied upon?

**RABBI:** Radak was brilliant mind, no less than talmudic rabbis, maybe even greater. There are

countless talmudic sections depicting metaphors such as this. But perhaps this story is so clearly impossible to be understood literally, and must be describing Saul's psychological state, no talmudic commentary was necessary. Yes, there are cases of people believing they see and hear things, when nothing is present. Saul was not the first. With great desperation or psychological derangement, one can be fooled he senses what never occurred. Saul believed his fantasy. This is why Torah depicts this story as if it were real...to stress the reality a desperate person ascribes to his desires. ■

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