

JewishTimes

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JUDGMENT DAY

This Life & the Next

The afterlife is not our focus
but we must accept its reality

LETTERS

**SUFFERING
WITHOUT SIN?**

**HELPING
THE DEAD?**



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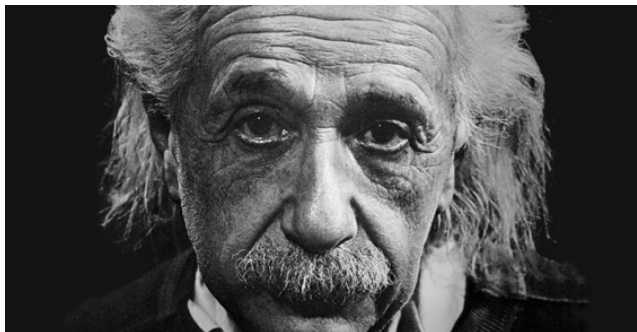
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We now include "L'Dovid" (Psalm 27) in our prayers until Rosh Hashanna. What is King David's message, and how is it timely?



"They once wished to convince Einstein of the existence of the occult. They said to him, 'What if we have evidence to corroborate it?' Einstein replied, 'I would still not believe it.' The reason Einstein refused to accept the idea of the occult is because he knew that the universe operates according to wisdom. Thus, any case that the occultists might bring would, at best, be a question, but it could not be a reality. The wise person is convinced based on ideas."

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Death & Suffering without Sin?

READER: Shabbos 55a it says, "There is no death without sin and no suffering without transgression." If so, how can people like babies die if they have not sinned nor have any understanding of sin? Thank you, have a good day,

—Moshe
New York

RABBI: Although Rav Ami said, "There is no death without sin and no suffering without transgression," that talmudic section concludes on 55b that there is in fact death and affliction without sin. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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“But as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for on the day you eat of it, you shall die” (Gen. 2:17).

Initially, Adam would have lived forever. With this verse, God teaches that when man disobeys God due to his attachment to the physical and his denial of that which is harmful (the fruit), he must become mortal. Mortality tells man that his stay on Earth is temporary. This helps man detach from the physical, for life ultimately comes to an end; mortality corrects Adam’s sin of his attachment to the physical.

Death for mankind occurs due to the demonstration that the most perfect human—Adam—required death to correct his nature. Therefore, even if we do not sin, we still must die as even the greatest man required death as a corrective measure cover his very nature. We certainly require this adjustment. Thus, everyone dies, with or without our own sins.

Infants who die prematurely can be due to a mother’s activities, such as poor health habits or drug use. But even healthy mothers may have stillborns. But God is just and knows how to treat that infant’s soul. There are many consideration of which we are unaware. God killed Abraham and Chanoch before their time to spare them from evil. Rashi says about Chanoch (Gen. 5:24) “He was a righteous man, but his mind was easily induced to turn from his righteous ways and to become wicked. The Holy One, blessed be He, therefore took him away quickly and made him die before his full time...”

Death must occur to everyone. God deems this best for man’s perfection. When we see those who appear as undeserving die early, like infants and righteous people, we must know God manages all, and that He is just. We also cannot be certain that one who we assume to be righteous is without sin. ■

Moses: Too Harsh?

READER: I have been studying Devarim 13 and I was a bit confused why Moses’ legislation was especially harsh: one has to stone relatives that explore other religions. Is Moses giving the Law by his own judgement or by Hashem’s orders? Is there any parallel in other parts of Scripture, or were Moses’ legislations entirely new in Devarim? Is the Torah in part Moses’s innovations, or is everything in Torah Hashem’s will?

—Tay Odele
Gamboru Ngala Nigeria

RABBI: Let’s review Moses’ words:

If your brother, your own mother’s son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your closest friend entices you in secret, saying, “Come let us worship other gods”—whom neither you nor your fathers have experienced—from among the gods of the peoples around you, either near to you or distant, anywhere from one end of the earth to the other: do not assent or give heed to him. Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him; but take his life. Let your hand be the first against him to put him to death, and the hand of the rest of the people thereafter. Stone him to death, for he sought to make you stray from God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thus all Israel will hear and be afraid, and such evil things will not be done again in your midst (Deut. 13:7-12).

Exodus 34:29 reads, “And it was when Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the treaty in his hands as he descended, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant when God spoke with Him.” Why did God create this miracle of light beams emanating from Moses’ face? This was done to validate Moses, that all his teachings were endorsed by God. For God does not perform miracles for a person lying in His name. Thus, all Moses said of his own in Deuteronomy, God endorsed.

Why so harsh? Moses understood idolatry as the worst crime. Rashi (Avos 2:8) teaches that, “Earth was created solely for Israel to study Torah. Otherwise, God will destroy Earth.” Elsewhere in Torah extreme measures are found, as God killed the sinners of Noah’s generation as well as idolatrous peoples.

God created human life for the sole purpose of man recognizing God. If one fails, his life is worthless. Unlike modern societies, Judaism does not value life as an inherent good. Life is worthless when God is not part of that life, and worse, when one follows idolatry. Moses’ words above are not new.

“Show him no pity or compassion.” The reason the relative shall be first to murder the idolater is to counter the greater compassion a relative feels; he must be extra vigilant against his compassion for the sinner.

The sum good of this law is to rid Israel of idolatry, which can cause others to veer from God and forfeit the goodness God wishes man to attain through living with the joy of Torah wisdom on Earth, and inheriting the next life.

The Jews are to teach the world, so we must ensure all idolatrous people are rooted out and killed. ■

Helping the Dead?

READER: How do you understand Rabbi Meir's and Rabbi Yochanan's apparent improvement of their Achare's fate after his death? Should it be interpreted that they actually helped Achare receive Olam Habah? However, is reward not based exclusively on one's merits? Here is the entire discussion in Talmud Chagiga 15b.

Thank you,
—Alex
New York, NY

When Achar passed away, the Heavenly Court declared that he should not be judged, nor brought into the World-to-Come. He should not be judged in a manner befitting his deeds, because he occupied himself with Torah, whose merit protects him. And he should not be brought into the World-to-Come because he sinned. Rabbi Meir said, "It is better that he be judged properly and be brought into the World-to-Come. When I die I will request this of Heaven, and I will cause smoke to rise up from his grave, as a sign that he is being sentenced in Gehennom." When Rabbi Meir passed away, smoke rose up from the grave of Achare, implying that Rabbi Meir's wish was granted. Rabbi Yochanan said, "Was this [truly] a mighty deed on Rabbi Meir's part, to burn his teacher? Was this the only remedy available?" Can it be that there was one Sage among us who left the path and we cannot save him? If we hold him by the hand, who will remove him from our protection? Rabbi Yochanan continued and said, "When I die I will have the smoke extinguished from his grave, as a sign that he has been released from the sentence of Gehennom and brought to the World-to-Come." Indeed, when Rabbi Yochanan passed away, the smoke ceased to rise up from the grave of Achare. A certain eulogizer began his eulogy of Rabbi Yochanan with the following: "Even the guard at the entrance could not stand before you, our rabbi. The guard at the entrance to Gehennom could not prevent Rabbi Yochanan from arranging the release of Achare."

RABBI: God knows how to accurately judge all people, and He judges each person based on his/her own merit, not on the actions of others. This is perfectly just and reasonable, and God's words

make this a truth: "Fathers shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for their fathers: a person shall be put to death only for his own crime" (Deut. 24:16). Thus, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yochanan cannot alter Achare's reward and punishment. So a literal reading of this talmudic portion cannot be accurate; it must convey a deeper message.

What this allegory means is that Rabbi Meir's and Rabbi Yochanan's dedication to save their teacher reflected Achare's merits. This talmudic portion is revealing Achare's worth, as he left behind 2 Torah giants. When Rabbi Meir died, the metaphor of smoke ascending from Achare's grave meant that Achare was being purified of sin, just as fire (smoke) purifies metal. And when Rabbi Yochanan died, the smoke stopped, indicating Achare's completion of his purification and his entrance to heaven. Neither Rabbi Meir or Rabbi Yochanan can offer God any new defense for Achare—"request this of Heaven"—as God is omniscient.

But why did Achare gain these two merits only upon the death of his two students? Were not Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yochanan great rabbis even once Achare died...long before their own deaths? God did not wait until Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yochanan died; God gave Achare his true reward once he died. But only upon these 2 rabbi's deaths was their true measure revealed: "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Kohel 7:1) Ibn Ezra explains that its is only upon death that one's total value is calculated. Rabbi Meir's and Rabbi Yochanan's value at death was the barometer of Achare's value, but God knew this long before they died. Thus, the talmudic rabbis scripted this metaphor about smoke first rising from Achare's grave and then stopping, to indicate that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yochanan respectively revealed Achare's value: Achare deserved atonement (smoke commencing) and entrance to the World to Come (smoke ceasing). Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yochanan did nothing new after Achare died. Rather, their very existence and perfections as great rabbis conveyed Achare's worth.

"A person shall be put to death only for his own crime." What others do affects only them: I do not pay for your sins, nor am I rewarded for your merits. We each are given free will. Based on our own choices we are rewarded or punished. "Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might. For there is no action, no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in Sheol, where you are going" (Kohel 9:10). Meaning, once one dies, one cannot gain any further merit (Rashi, Ibid.)

We derive that part of human perfection is measured by our positive influence on others. ■

JUDGMENT DAY

This Life & the Next

The afterlife is not our focus
but we must accept its reality

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by a student

Rabbi Yaakov says, “*This world is like a hallway (prozdor) before the World to Come. Fix yourself in the hallway so you may enter the drawing room (traklin)*” (Avos 4:16).

Maimonides writes:

A traklin is a chamber and a prozdor is a gatehouse. And the metaphor is clear and the intention is known. As it is in this world that man acquires the virtues through which he merits the World to Come. As this world is indeed a path and a passageway to the World to Come.

Rashi writes:

Every man must fix himself in this world with repentance and good deeds, for one who toils on Friday will eat on Shabbos (one who toils in this world will enjoy the next world).

Rabbeinu Yona writes:

And he wants to say that this world is only so that one merits the World to Come.

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opposite, as we have recounted. And they make darkness into light and light into darkness. And woe is it to those who destroy the truth. And [King] Solomon, peace be upon him, made this matter a fundamental in Koheles in his praising the profit of the world and in his disgracing its loss. And its elucidation is that there is after death neither gain nor [any] other acquisition of that which he refrained from here. And this is all true. And when you examine that book from this perspective, the truth will be clear.

What is meant by “One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the time in the World to Come?”

If one does not repent and perform good deeds, he will have a lower level in Olam Haba and all of Olam Haba cannot compensate for the [higher] level he might have achieved had he repented and performed good deeds. The quality of Olam Haba for the one who repented and performed good deeds is of a far greater quality. No quantity of a lower level of Olam Haba, no matter how long it is extended, could compensate for the loss of one who failed to perform even a moment of repentance and good deeds.

And one hour of pleasure in the World to Come is better than all the time in this world.

All the greatest satisfactions of this world are qualitatively differentiated from the satisfaction of Olam Haba. Rashi says that this life pales in comparison to Olam Haba because of the pains and evils that we endure, and because of the fear of death. Ibn Ezra says this as well in Koheles, “Death is always between man’s eyes.” Man always has the specter of death before his eyes and he can never really enjoy life. Why does Rashi discuss pains and evils? The mishna says that all of this world does not measure up to a moment of pleasure in Olam Haba. To make a stronger point, shouldn’t Rashi have said that even a blissful earthly life does not compare to Olam Haba?

There is a certain amount of dissatisfaction that is naturally inescapable, even in a good life. This dissatisfaction exists in two areas: the externals—physical frustration—and even more so in terms of the internal world—the psyche. The nature of satisfaction that the psyche desires does not conform to what exists in reality. That is what Rashi means by the “pains and evils.” The psyche does not wish to experience any frustrations, rather it desires total pleasure. The world the psyche desires is not the physical existence in which we live. The psyche’s desires are desires of fantasy, and as reality does not offer fantasy, people experience frustration when seeking physical pleasures. This describes the pains and evils. And even enjoyments themselves contain moments of frustration. For when one is hungry, he is in pain, and he can only enjoy food as long as he has that pain of hunger. And when he removes that pain and is full, he can no longer eat, as this becomes painful. Man can only enjoy the desire when he has pain, and once he removes the pain he can no longer enjoy the desire.

A chocham who studies human nature will conclude that there is no way a human being can enjoy a life of total physical pleasure. Even the desires one searches for have their roots in childhood fantasy, to which reality does not conform. Thus, the satisfaction is only a substitute for what a person searches for in his fantasy, and therefore one becomes frustrated. Additionally, all pleasures are short-lived, driving people to seek subsequent pleasures. A philosopher said that every enjoyment is followed either by depression or by another desire.

The second pain Rashi mentions is the fear of death. However,

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The next mishna continues this theme...

He would say, “One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the time in the World to Come. And one hour of pleasure in the World to Come is better than all the time in this world” (Avos 4:17).

Maimonides comments:

We have already elucidated in the tenth chapter of Sanhedrin that there is no completion or addition after death. Instead, a person increases and completes his virtue in this world. And about this, [King] Solomon hinted when he stated (Koheles 9:10), “For there is no action, no reasoning, no knowledge, no wisdom in the grave to where you are going.” But this matter is that [the situation/nature of existence] to which a person goes will remain [the same] forever. And because of this, a man should make efforts during this short time and not waste his time, but only [spend it] on the acquisition of virtues—as his loss would [otherwise] be great, since he has no replacement [for it] and he cannot acquire [it later]. And since the pious ones knew this, they only saw [fit] to finish their time with wisdom and by increasing their virtues; and they benefited from all their time in the true way. And they frittered very little time on physical matters and on things that are necessary and impossible to do without it. But others spent all their time in physicality and they left [the world] like they came [to it]—“All corresponding to how it came, so will it go”—and they lost an eternal loss. And the masses all switched the truth about this question and said that the first group [the wise men] lost the world and that the last group profited [from] the world. And the matter is the

this fear is irrational as one no longer exists here once he dies. The error is that people feel they will still be here, but under the ground, and that is false. This is based on the immortality fantasy driving one to deny that he departs Earth, rather he feels he will experience “death underground.” This false view is represented in the language we use: “He is dead.” But this is a total contradiction. The word “is” represents the fallacy that one is still here. People falsely believe the dead person still “is.” However, one should accurately say, “He is not.” The immortality fantasy cannot accept that one is not, forcing people to say, “He is dead.”

Therefore, Rashi says that earthly life can be summed up as this: “All satisfactions are not real, but the frustrations are real, and the fear of death looms over all of man’s accomplishments and satisfactions.” Man is inherently caught up in conflict and can never achieve satisfaction. That is the earthly existence.

Man seeks satisfaction by attempting to capture a fantasy, but reality simply does not conform to fantasy. Man’s disappointment comes from a failed attempt to control reality, which is impossible. Man fails to realize that the nature of his ultimate desires is a fantasy. [What is “fantasy?” It is an imaginary, perfect, purely pleasurable, and endless experience, which does not exist.] Man refuses to recognize one most painful idea: At the core of his most desired and cherished dreams, lies a great fantasy. Man always blames reality, saying, “If I could only make certain changes I would achieve genuine happiness.” But if man were to truly understand his desire he would acknowledge that reality does not conform to it. However, man refuses to turn his mind’s eye on his underlying desire, explaining his constant depression and desperation.

If this is the case, it would appear that man is doomed to an unhappy life. Either man experiences depression when he cannot attain his fantasies, or he gives up the search and experiences no satisfaction.

The enjoyment of Olam Haba is infinitely greater than earthly satisfaction because life is full of “pains and evils.” There is no way to derive satisfaction from the physical world. In his Commentary on the Mishna, Maimonides offers another important reason for man’s frustrations: Everything in nature has its own type of quality. For example, the quality of animal life differs from the quality of human life. The quality of the object’s enjoyment cannot be

greater than the object itself. Therefore, even if the psyche’s satisfaction were achievable, that satisfaction would never compare to the satisfaction of Olam Haba. This is because the psyche [man’s emotional make up] is part of the physical world, while the soul is of a different nature altogether. That is why the soul exists eternally while the psyche is temporal. Chazal’s main concept regarding Olam Haba is stated in Berachos 34b:

All the prophets prophesied only regarding the Messianic Era, but regarding Olam Haba, “No eye has seen it except for You, God” (Isaiah 64:3).

This verse has a secondary meaning: No one knows the nature of the enjoyment of Olam Haba. Maimonides explains this to mean that every particular thing has an attending enjoyment. For example, an animal eats grass and this function is endowed with a certain pleasure. When the psyche obtains its desire, there is an attending enjoyment. The only enjoyment we do not experience in this world is the soul’s enjoyment. Maimonides states this in his Commentary on the Mishna in Sanhedrin. In earthly life, there is no such thing as a spiritual enjoyment. Due to the nature of the merger between the soul and the psyche in the body, our enjoyments are purely psychological. Chazal agree with this view of Maimonides as well. It is a fundamental belief; we are prevented from

enjoying spiritual pleasure on Earth. This means that our enjoyment of ideas and wisdom is only a psychological pleasure. But the soul has no enjoyment here.

What is Olam Haba? It is the situation where the soul will have an enjoyment: a natural enjoyment that results from its activity. But the ultimate enjoyment of the soul is known only by God: “No eye has seen it except for You, God” (Isaiah 64:3).

God created man in a way that our greatest psychological enjoyment is derived from pursuing wisdom. This is so that the soul functions and achieves happiness in this physical existence. But that is not the real enjoyment. Furthermore, wisdom is always available—it is very intense and attracts our energies. A person can labor physically all day, but if he does not pursue wisdom he has not tapped his great reservoir of energy. God designed man such that we derive our greatest satisfaction through our involvement in wisdom. Even when he is ill, a person can apply his energies to wisdom. Einstein said, “I was happy when I was ill, for I was able to think, as I was undisturbed.” A person’s nature is created in such a way that he can practically always think [and enjoy wisdom]. Man always achieves the greatest satisfaction when he perceives the world of wisdom. So, in earthly life, a life of wisdom is the most pleasurable one. But this great enjoyment is not on par in any way with Olam Haba.

The reason Chazal say that enjoyment in Olam Haba is infinitely greater than earthly

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pleasure is for another reason. Since the soul is of a different quality, its enjoyments must be of a different quality. The enjoyment that the eternal entity—the soul—has must, by definition, be superior to physical/psychological enjoyments.

Furthermore, as all knowledge is filtered through the senses, the soul does not operate here in its fullest form. That is why it cannot achieve its ultimate function in this world. Even the soul of Moshe, the most perfect man, did not achieve its highest level of functioning until his death. And at that point and forward the attending enjoyment must increase, for that is when the soul functions in its fullest form.

In Sanhedrin—in one breath—Maimonides discusses our inability to know what Olam Haba is, yet he also says that perfected people have a much better idea of Olam Haba. Maimonides discusses the Messianic Era [a utopian earthy existence] and says that its primary characteristic is that people will, with little effort, attain their needs. The advantage is that a person will not worry as he does today. The natural result of the removal of these worries and stress is that one's life is extended. Maimonides says that during that era, Olam Haba will be understood in a very strong way. However, this contradicts Maimonides' statement that Olam Haba is known only by God.

Mishna 4:17 says that the premise of this world is a pathway to the next world. That being the case, one should spend his life pursuing wisdom to prepare for the next world. However, this contradicts another principle: One should learn Torah for its own sake, lishma:

Do not be as servants who serve the master to receive a reward (Avos 1:3).

Reward refers to Olam Haba, as Maimonides says:

The good in store for the righteous is life in the World to Come, which is a life connected with no death and a kind of good connected with no evil, such as is described in the Torah: "That it may be well with you, and you may prolong your days" (Deut. 22.7), which was traditionally deducted to mean, "That it may be well with you" in a world that is entirely good"; and that you may prolong your days—in a world existing forever, and this is the World to Come (Hilchos Teshuvah 8:1).

Maimonides also says:

The one who worships based on love, engages himself in the study of the Torah and the observance of precepts, and follows the paths of wisdom for no other motive, neither for fear of evil nor to inherit the "good," but he does the true thing because it is true (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:2).

That "good," Maimonides says, is Olam Haba. Lishma refers to the good here on Earth; it does not concern itself with any future benefit. The Torah does not openly say that one should perform the mitzvos to earn Olam Haba. Learning lishma is the best life here, as the Maariv prayer states, "For [mitzvos] are your life and your length of days." Torah and mitzvos are what give man enjoyment and satisfaction; this makes his life. And while it is true that Olam Haba will eventually come, that is not the motivation of one who worships God out of love.

The fault in serving God for a reward is that the person seeks an exchange. Such a person performs mitzvos and studies Torah to attain Olam Haba. This reflects a mindset under the influence of psychological fantasy—desiring the unknown object of the afterlife—which the person believes to be very good. This person read mishna 4:17, which says that Olam Haba is very enjoyable, and his fantasy for enjoyment has gone unchanged. Chazal say that this person operates on a low level.

In his commentary on mishna 4:17, Maimonides stated that Chazal partook of

the physical world only in a measure that was indispensable to live. Otherwise, they reserved all their time and energies for the pursuit of wisdom. This approach to the physical differentiates Chazal and other perfected people from pleasure seekers. Chazal indulged only in what they needed and in nothing more. They lived with "fixed needs." In contrast, a pleasure seeker might attain his needs [and then some] but envies a better physical object. For example, he might buy a home and then regret not having purchased a more luxurious home like the one his friend just purchased. Chazal didn't think this way. Once they had food and shelter, their needs were addressed, and no further energies were invested in pursuit of physical concerns. This sense of fixed needs is the mark of a perfected person.

Regarding our contradiction, in so far as one does not remove himself from fantasies, his fantasy of "ultimate satisfaction" is merely converted into an Olam Haba fantasy. He is far from the truth.

Another possible life is where one perceives the world of wisdom and he understands that wisdom [universal principles and brilliant laws] is what guides the universe. He views this wisdom as the world of reality and he becomes attracted to it. This attraction to wisdom removes such a person from the desire to satisfy his psychological satisfactions, which then become insignificant to him. Wisdom becomes a lure and his mind turns solely toward seeking greater wisdom. When this person understands that the world of wisdom can be perceived to a far greater degree in Olam Haba, he is naturally attracted to the afterlife, as Maimonides says, "so that he merits eternal life":

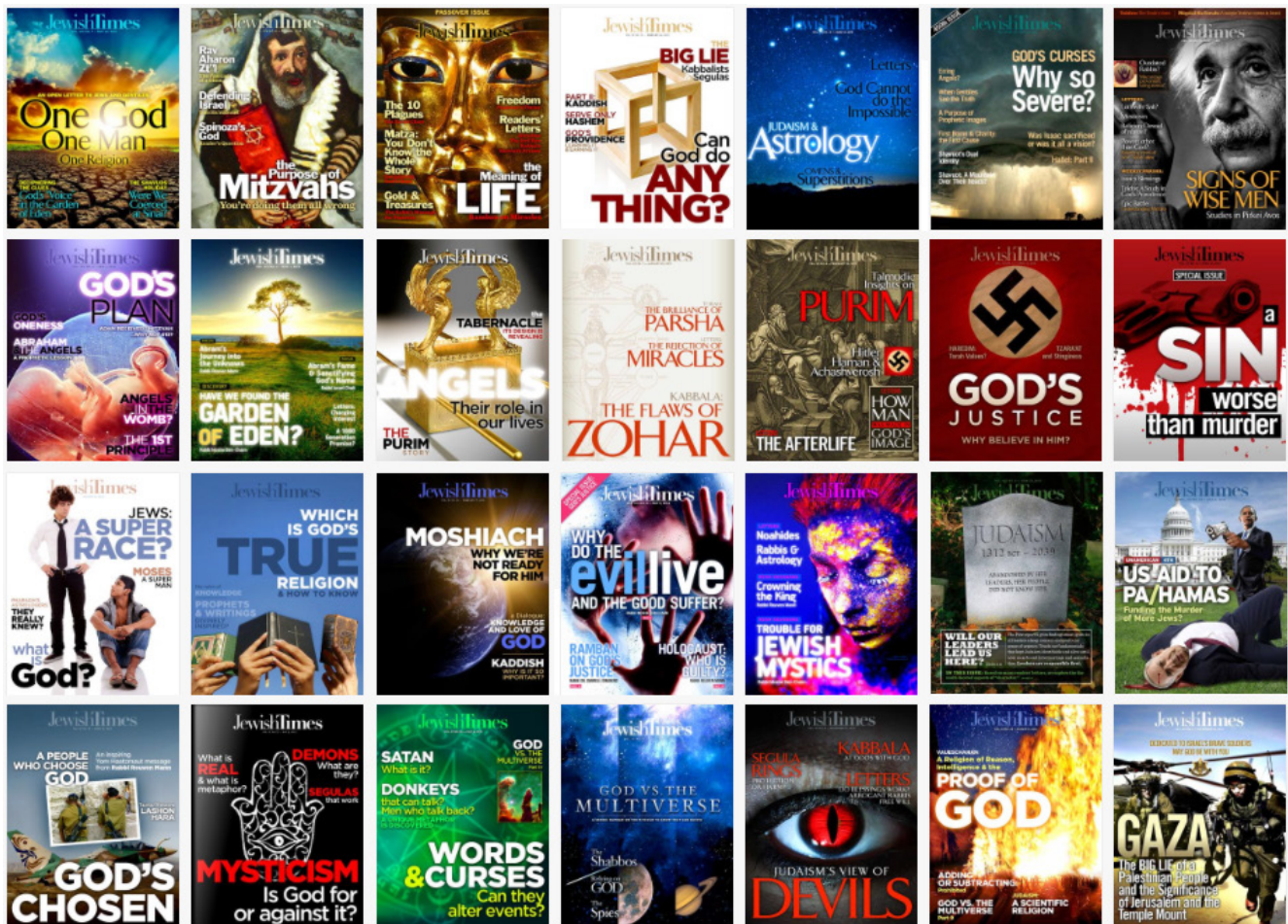
The sages and the Prophets did not long for the days of Moshiach because they wanted to rule the world or because they wanted to have dominion over the non-Jews or because they wanted the nations to exalt them or because they wanted to eat, drink, and be merry. Rather, they desired [the days of Moshiach] so that they would have time for Torah and its wisdom. And there would be no one who would oppress them or force them to be idle (from Torah). This, so that they would merit the World to Come, as we have explained regarding the laws of repentance (Hilchos Malachim 12:4).

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This is the proper attitude and is not considered “learning with an ulterior motivation” for a fantasy afterlife. In this case, one loves wisdom and views Olam Haba as being a state of the same pleasure of wisdom. [Such a person does not pursue an ulterior fantasy but only the very wisdom that he values.] This person learns lishma.

Olam Haba is the existence where ultimate knowledge is possible. The more one partakes of wisdom, the more his appreciation of Olam Haba is realized. This desire to unveil the true reality that is behind everything is shared by all people, not just by Chazal. The desire to perceive the ultimate wisdom is perceived by all intelligent people. And this is the desire for Olam Haba.

One who learns Torah out of an enjoyment for that activity is on a high level. But that is not the ultimate level. This was expressed by the Epicureans, who sought pleasure and found wisdom to be the highest pleasure. However, they were still bound to seek personal satisfaction. The highest level is to seek an understanding of wisdom, not as an enjoyable thought problem [but as a curiosity for how halacha is designed, or to understand God’s justice, His nature, or His intended perfections for the mitzvos. In this capacity, one does not seek a psychological pleasure of a mind game or a thought problem, but the self is lost, and one is absorbed in pondering and thinking about the world of wisdom].

A distinction can be seen between one who seeks knowledge for psychological pleasure and the perfected person who wishes to uncover truth. The former will not

pain himself in his studies, as this detracts from his desired psychological pleasures. [When the going gets tough, he abandons his studies for relaxation and ease.] But the latter will endure stress [if he must conduct lengthy research and memorize a lot of information] and pain, for he is drawn to understand, even if it causes him stress. His appreciation for wisdom makes him ignore the psychological pain. This is the soul at work.

Bechira exists only so far as engaging the soul [over the emotions] to function. But the soul’s function [itself] does not involve bechira. Therefore, whatever that function is of the soul, it cannot change, which is why there is no way to change when in Olam Haba. Bechira refers to selecting where to disperse psychological energy, which is only a function on Earth. But there is no psychological energy in Olam Haba, which is an existence where the soul follows that which captivated it. That is why Olam Haba is devoid of bechira—it is impossible to have bechira in Olam Haba.

Maimonides concludes his comments on mishna 4:17 by saying that in studying Koheles, one discovers the most prevalent idea in the book. The ultimate fantasy is that of immortality. This fantasy is not what the soul seeks, but it is what the physical/psychological man seeks. Whether one desires to be a billionaire or wishes for fame, one’s ultimate fantasy is immortality, which is unattainable. That is why people are so attracted to Olam Haba. [It appeals as if it is the promise of the immortality that everyone seeks, but Olam Haba is not what people think it is.]

Many times, one idea or phenomenon

can have two very disparate understandings. Primitive man understood the idea of contagion quite differently from modern doctors. [The former attributed mystical properties to it.] Primitive man believed the sun to be the source of all life on Earth and therefore he worshipped it. It is scientifically true that the sun’s energy is what feeds the planet, but it is a completely different idea from primitive man’s idea. The same applies to Olam Haba. Man’s primitive element finds the idea of an afterlife attractive, but the true Olam Haba is a totally different phenomenon from what primitive man thinks it is. However, people cannot distinguish between their primitive desire and reality. Judaism says that Olam Haba is different from what people think because the fantasy of immortality, which is based on earthly existence, is unrelated to Olam Haba, a metaphysical existence. In Sanhedrin, Maimonides distinguishes the primitive notion from reality.

One must know that it is prohibited to argue against a person who assumes Olam Haba to be physical. Such a person follows the mitzvos to attain his false belief in Olam Haba. But although this is not the appropriate way to worship God, we actually encourage this person to remain on this path because of the following principle: “From performing the mitzvos for the wrong reasons, one will eventually perform them for the right reasons,” (mitoch shelo lishma, ba lishma). To dissuade such an erring person would destroy him, and it is prohibited to dissuade him. Judaism espouses love for mankind and allows man’s fantasies if it takes him along the correct path. Ultimately of course, one must open his mind and accept the truth.

Maimonides describes people as having the wrong view, exchanging light for darkness. They value earthly pleasure, falsely believing that those pursuing wisdom are losing the true good. People pride themselves on how much physicality they amass, when in truth, one should feel shame in valuing the physical, which requires more energy in the pursuit of that which is only temporary. A person should partake of the physical only insofar as he needs to live a life of wisdom. And the greater the person, the less he needs of the physical. That is why Maimonides cites Chazal as partaking in the physical minimally, only as much as they could not live without. But involvement in physical pursuits should not be a source of pride, as it represents man’s weakness. One should take pride in living according to a life of wisdom, but not in that which represents a corruption of the soul. ■

Wounded Narcissism

RABBI REUVEN MANN

There are many people who believe that the Torah is exclusively concerned with the arena of human action. According to this view man must act according to a certain ethical and moral code but what he feels inside is not subject to the discipline of Torah.

To a certain extent that would seem to be true. We should bear in mind that a person may not be able to control all of his feelings and, in fact, some negative one's may even seem justified. For example Kibbud Av Vaeim (Honoring one's father and mother) which is one of the Aseret Hadibrot is one of the most important commandments in Judaism.

This Mitzvah requires that one display the greatest respect for one's parents. He must stand up when they enter the room, address them with extreme deference, never express anger against them and so forth.

It is very relevant to review this injunction at the present moment. We are now in the month of Ellul, the precursor to the High Holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. As everyone knows these are times of Teshuva in which one seeks forgiveness for his many trespasses. The dominant imperative is to mend the breeches in our relationships with Hashem and with fellow man.

In many areas societal attitudes seem to have deviated from the prescriptions of Torah. This can be clearly seen in how children relate to parents. The posture of deference and soft speech demanded by Torah are on the whole not to be seen. In many cases children say the harshest and most disrespectful things to their parents or simply dismiss them with utter disdain. If people need guidance regarding which facets of their behavior are in need of improvement this certainly might be one of them.

But someone might ask, what does the Torah require of

me regarding my parents, action or attitude? Suppose they are genuinely annoying, boorish people whom it is very difficult to like? And suppose I honestly don't like or respect them because they are very unworthy of that, am I then in violation of this vital Mitzvah?

I would say that you are not in violation if your actions are proper and appropriate. The Mitzvah of Kibbud Av is concerned with how you treat your parents not how you feel about them. Of course your true feelings must not be expressed as this would cause them great pain, but if your behavior accords with the Torah's definition of respect, you have fulfilled the commandment.

(It is necessary in this regard to mention that the Torah is not in sync with the popular outlook that parents have to "earn their respect". Not all parents are truly worthy of reverence but the Torah bestows a special status on them because they are regarded as "partners" with Hashem in the creation of the child and therefore honoring them is indirectly regarded as revering the Creator.)

Thus it seems to me that the Torah doesn't require that you actually like your parents and understands that they may be very unlikable people. All it demands is that you keep your feelings out of it and treat them in a respectful fashion. But is it true to say that there are no cases in which Judaism is concerned with a persons inner emotions?

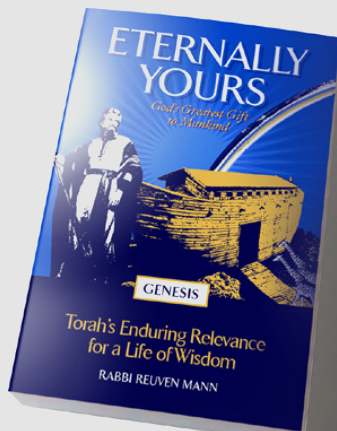
This week's Parsha, Ki Tetze, warns that one may not diminish the special rights of his bechor (first born son) from his "hated wife" in favor of his offspring from the woman he loves. But how can there be such a phenomenon in Israel when the Torah clearly warns, "You should not hate your brother in your heart" (Vayikra 19:17)?

In this case the Torah is regulating the private emotion

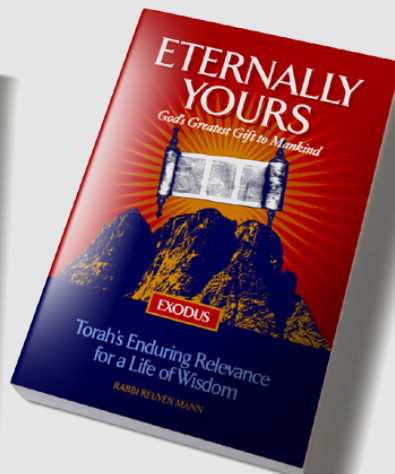
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RABBI MANN'S CHUMASH BOOKS ON AMAZON

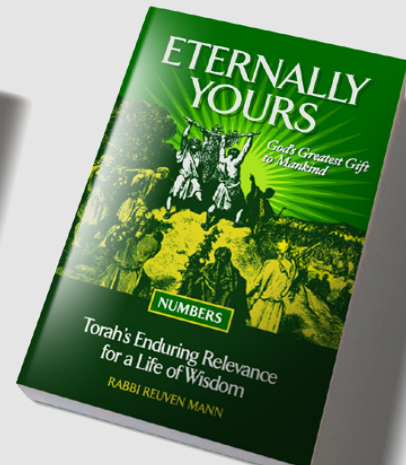
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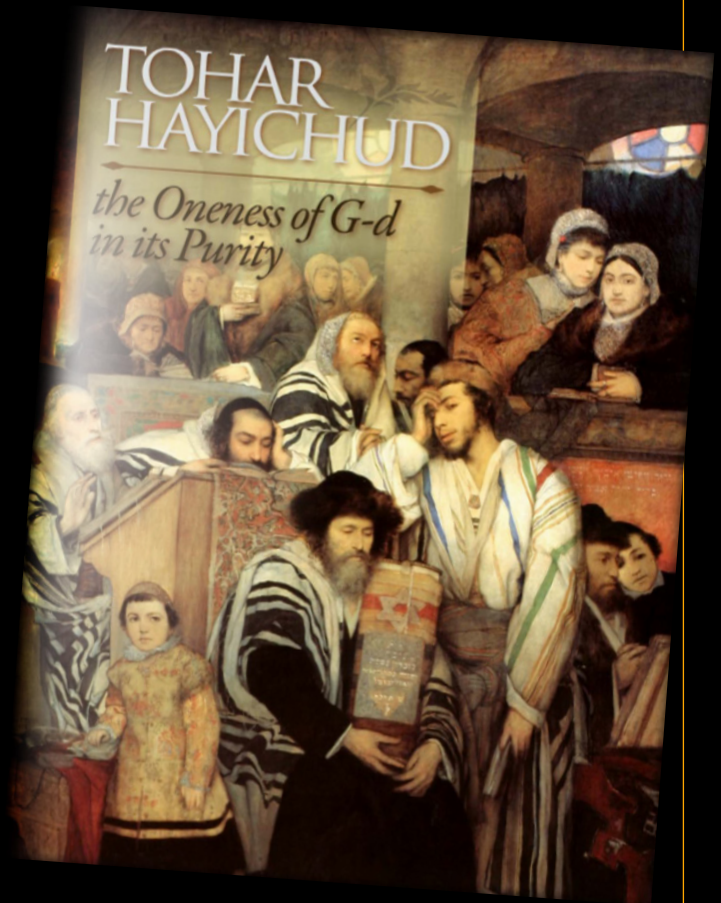
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of a person and is prohibiting us from harboring feelings of animosity against any fellow Jew (the term “brother” in the verse means sibling a reference to any member of Israel, male or female).

But what if someone has treated me terribly or gravely insulted me and my natural response (which seems reasonable) is to despise him, what then? The Torah does not only enjoin unjustified or baseless hatred. Even if there are very good reasons for your animosity, it is prohibited. Even if there is no chance that you will act on your feelings, they are proscribed.

But you may say, “What can I do, that is how I feel?” The Torah maintains that one must not be a slave to his feelings but can exercise control and overcome them. Ideally he should confront the one who offended him and in a calm and intelligent manner express his grievance. If the guilty party acknowledges his wrongdoing and apologizes he should be forgiven and all residual anger should disappear.

However, even if confronting the offender is not possible or feasible one must still remove the hatred from his heart. He must strive to cultivate humbleness and be able to tolerate a certain amount of wounded narcissism. He must not accord too much power to the insults of others and remember that ultimately it is only what Hashem thinks of us that matters. And the Torah does not require that he actually like the person who insulted him, he is only enjoined from hating him.

As we review our actions and behaviors in preparation for the season of Judgment let us remember that we must also consider whether we harbor unseemly emotions that we must dispose of (just as we dispose of chametz before Pesach). When it comes to the difficult chore of forgiving an offender it might help to ask how often we ourselves might have treated others in an insulting or insensitive manner. The awareness that we are not perfect in this area might make it somewhat easier to be tolerant of others.

But the essential feature of Teshuva, the desire to return to Hashem and be in His Presence, is the most compelling factor which enables us to mend our ways and our attitudes. May we merit to achieve it.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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RABBI ELIEZER BARANY

In 2021 the average reader could come across hundreds of self-help guides, be confronted with dozens of challenges, of which many will be new Jewish books trying to lead such initiatives. “The 40 Day Challenge” by Rabbi Mark Wildes is no different in that respect. However, wherein the differences lie places this book in a category of its own.

“The 40 Day Challenge” is a book that is meant to be read one chapter at a time for the forty days between Rosh Chodesh Elul and Yom Kippur. The reader then contemplates the action prompt and responds in the text box provided at the end of each chapter. This book was built on the premise that we prepare for whatever we value in life, so our high holiday experience should be no different. Rabbi Wildes presents topical examples to elucidate the presented principles, quoting from Abraham Lincoln to Nat King Cole.

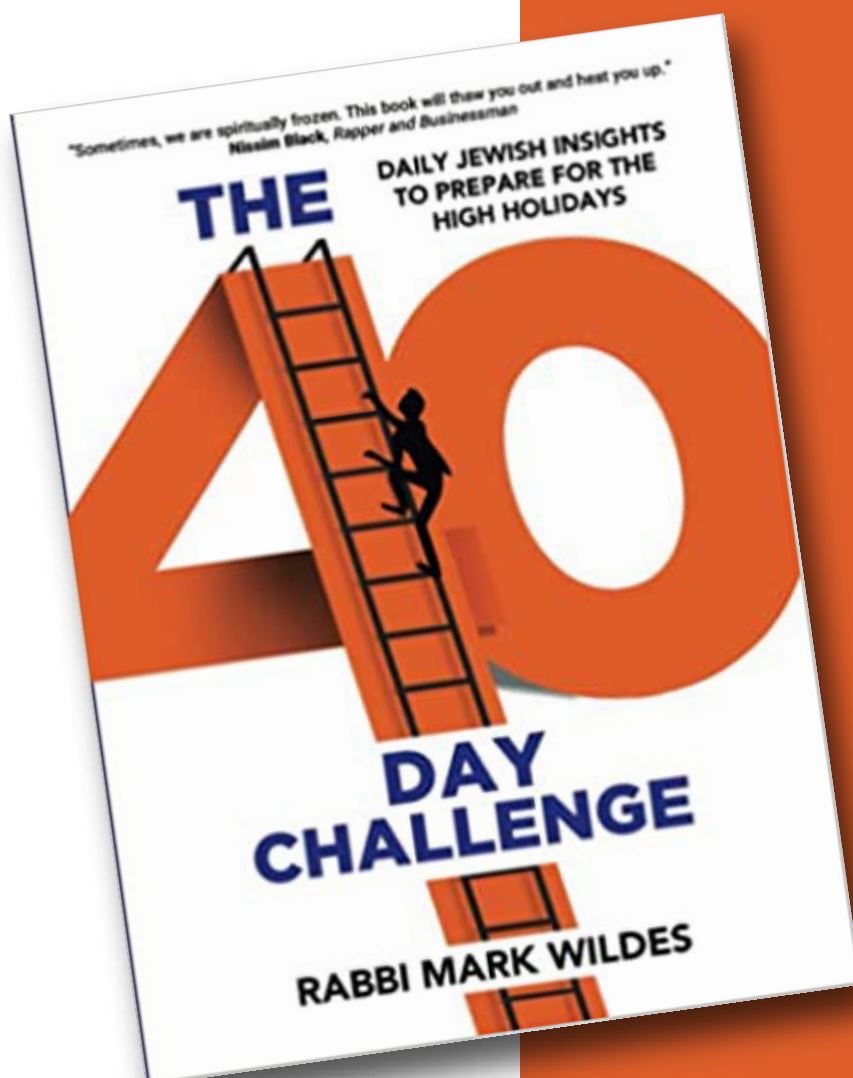
While written as a self-help guide and presented to the reader as such, the author does not refrain from sneaking in critical and varied sources spanning the gamut of Torah scholars. You can expect to learn insights from the Rav and Rabbi Nachman MiBreslov, touching on psychology, biology, world history, and current events.

Rare in this genre of Jewish growth books, the author gives concrete examples and provides a workbook to take actionable steps to apply the teachings of the sages. Yet, the author provides varied ways for different people to achieve the same challenges. He thoroughly introduces each idea so a person with little to no knowledge can understand these insights, giving a glimpse into many areas that could inspire the reader to advance their knowledge of the presented topics.

Rabbi Wildes engages the reader through the highs and lows of a topic, leading you through the questions that confronts a person when studying the area and quoting from a wide array of sources to answer the dilemmas. Themes such as continual effort and caring for others are developed, reviewed and referenced. He provides personal examples and shares his learning from the lessons he shared.

Written for those interested in adding to their religious devotion and for those looking to enhance their religious devotion. Though examples given will be best for newly or soon to be observant, all can benefit.

Perhaps the one suggestion I would make would be that the author left a void for what is next. Once the person searching for a greater connection to the world of Torah finishes this



book, to whom should they turn? Based on the reputation of the author, I am sure they could turn to him. Perhaps he could have shared that offer, to provide a potential contact, or a list of books that may benefit the reader. It just seems that this book aims to provide an ascension for the person and the reader may be left lost at the end. However, I think that the main purpose of this book, and a major value in Jewish philosophy, is perfectly summed up by the author himself.

But there’s another fundamental concept which Judaism can also take pride in bringing to the fore; consistency – the value in sticking with something every day...It may not always be exciting to do the same thing day after day, but that is precisely how we accomplish the changes we want to see in our lives.

Hopefully this book can aid its reader in continued growth, through hard work. And may we all merit to be successful during this time of year. ■

Purchase:
bit.ly/40-day-challenge



Rabbi Mark Wildes is the Founder and Director of Manhattan Jewish Experience (MJE), a highly successful Jewish outreach and educational program

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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.

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My Reality is God— not Man Psalm 27

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

When evil men assail me to devour my flesh, it is they who pain and attack me who stumble and fall. Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident (Psalms 27:2,3).

Despite a threat's magnitude, the world operates under God's reward and punishment. God's providence is reality. Enemies posed to King David no doubt that his righteousness would defend him. Most people focus purely on interpersonal relations and are frightened when victimized; God is not part of the equation. While King David viewed all events as subordinate to God, and thereby he was calm in his trust of God.

One thing I ask of God, only that do I seek: to live in the house of God all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of God, to frequent His temple (Psalms 27:4).

Why do we read this Psalm in the days leading up to Rosh Hashanna? This can be deduced from the Rosh Hashanna prayers which focus on reality: recognizing God as creator and king of the universe. Throughout the year our desires and accomplishments, our relationships and our career advances and successes create a myopic view of ourselves. But this focus on the self, this value system of wealth and status obscures our true purpose: growing in our wisdom of God through Torah, mitzvahs and studying nature. Ultimately, our lives are in His hands, not in our hands or others. Ultimately we leave Earth. In Psalm 27, King David's overarching theme is precisely his value of God over all human threats, but he offers keen insights.

God is my light and my help; whom should I fear? God is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread? (Psalms 27:1)

King David opens this Psalm by praising God for His mental, psychological and physical assistance, which covers all man's faculties. "Light" is metaphoric as God provides no illumination. Rather, when one says that another provided "light," he means that he received greater wisdom: he was imbued with proper ideas and considerations to better guide his path, as if his path was made easier through sunlight. "My help" means God literally saved King David from many precarious situations.

"Whom shall I fear" contrasts God's omnipotence against man's feeble attempts to harm others. King David's mindset was unconcerned with man's plans against him. God was his full security, his "stronghold." And about immediate close-at-hand threats, King David felt no dread.

"One thing I ask of God," means King David valued this alone. We ask only one thing, when all else is irrelevant. Ibn Ezra says, "to gaze upon the beauty of God" refers to King David's wish that God reveals to him the fundamentals of His actions. King David's sole focus—"the one thing he asked"—was God's wisdom. This is true love of God.

This attitude epitomizes what we strive for as we approach Rosh Hashanna. For all year we are misled that we must attain more than what we physically need, that we must accept society's values of wealth and honor. We continue to deny our mortality and believe that happiness is attained as the masses erroneously fantasize. Rosh Hashanna's prayers seek to correct our corrupt philosophy, that instead, we focus on the reality of God as creator, as ourselves as clay in His hands, and His plan for our true happiness and eternal life of our soul. This culminates on Yom Kippur's final Neilah prayer when we say, "That we abandon the oppression of our hands." Temporary Earthly success is not why God created us. But the world views fame and success as the ultimate good, and it's difficult to reject the masses. Abraham is the example of a man who did just that, and opposed the world's beliefs. He is the forerunner of Torah and the true role model for mankind. In the High Holiday prayers we refer to his perfection of sacrificing Isaac because this is the greatest degree of valuing God.

So, as we repeat Psalm 27 daily, we must take to heart King David's prioritized value of God over man, and perhaps with its repetition, we start to release our attachment to man and live more by intelligent values than by an emotional need for peer approval. God designed us to be happier when we do so. ■





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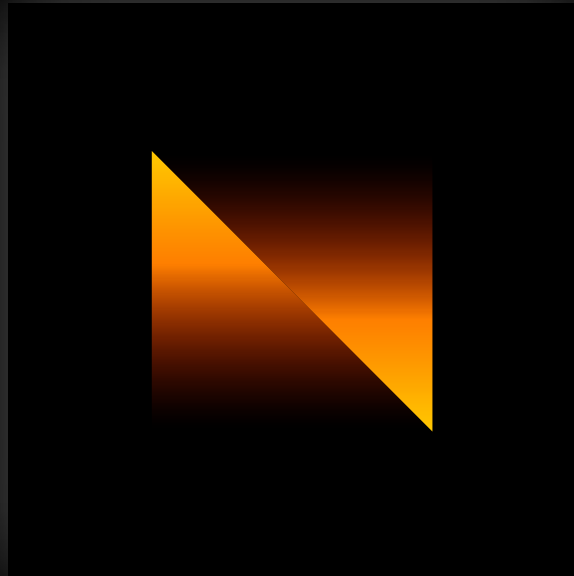
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