

# JewishTimes

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LETTERS

# Auspicious Times

Torah Truth or  
Superstition?

PARSHA

# Imagination

Worse than  
Idolatry?

# Be Holy

# Leaving Egypt

# Internal & External Obligations



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### 3 Letters

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**  
Auspicious times: Torah reality or superstition?

### 8 Leaving Egypt

**RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT**  
Maimonides' apparent redundancy enlightens us to greater wisdom

### 6 Imagination

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**  
The Rabbis share deep psychological insights of the Parsha

### 9 Be Holy

**RABBI REUVEN MANN**  
What this command adds



## GOAT DEMONS + BLOOD EATING

How is fantasy worse than idolatry?

### LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## Do Certain Dates Have Power?

**READER:** This week's Torah portion Kedoshim prohibits superstitions: "...you shall not practice divination or soothsaying" (Lev. 19:26). Rashi explains:

*Divination refers to those who foretell the future from the cry of a weasel or the twittering of birds (Sifra, Kedoshim, 6:2; Sanhedrin 66a), or from the fact that the bread falls from his mouth or that a deer crosses his path. A soothsayer is one who says, "This day or that day ensures success for beginning a project; this or that hour endangers the start of a journey" (Sanhedrin 66a).*

Thus, Torah prohibits gauging our actions based on fantasy, as we attempt to secure success or avoid failure. Just as a bird's twitter is unrelated to my stocks rising, a calendar date or the day of the week is unrelated to events. For dates and days are abstract measurements that don't exist physically, while events are real earthly activities. Similarly, color is unrelated to motion; they are disparate categories that don't intersect. Belonging to this category too are lucky horseshoes, red bendels, mezuzas, and any object in which one invests unwitnessed powers.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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Now, if one proceeds to gauge his activities on such unrelated phenomena, if he feels Tuesday is better to work than Wednesday and does so, or if he feels a black cat is a “sign” of bad luck and stays home, he violates Torah prohibitions of these superstitions. In other words, it is idolatrous (superstitious) to act in a manner believing A causes B, when they are unrelated. Doing so, one believes in fantasy and not in reality. He does not follow what his senses and events verify. But he follows what is imaginary. He succumbs to fears of insecurity, seeking assurance from mystical beliefs.

Based on this prohibition, how do we understand the Rabbis teaching that the month of Adar is an auspicious time for joy, and that Av is a time to refrain from legal disputes, as it is an auspicious time for bad tidings?

*From when Av begins, one decreases acts of rejoicing. Rav Yehuda, son of Rav Shmuel bar Sheilat, said in the name of Rav: Just as when Av begins one decreases rejoicing, so too when the month of Adar begins, one increases rejoicing. Rav Pappa said: Therefore, in the case of a Jew who has litigation with a gentile, let him avoid him in the month of Av, when the Jews' fortune is bad, and he should make himself available in Adar, when his fortune is good. (Taanis 29b)*

**RABBI:** Ritva (Ibid.) suggests that Av and Adar partake of heavenly decrees of sorrow and fortune respectively. Thus, the months themselves are not invested with power, but God decreed these times for reward and punishment. Talmid Arachin elaborates:

*Rabbi Yossi says, “A fortunate matter is brought about on an auspicious day, and a deleterious matter on an inauspicious day.” As the Sages said, “When the Temple was destroyed for the first time, that day was the Ninth of Av,” a date on which several calamities had already occurred; and it was the conclusion of Shabbat, i.e., it was on the day after Shabbat, a Sunday; and it was the year after a Sabbatical Year; and it was the week of the priestly watch of Jehoiarib and the priests and Levites were standing on their platform and singing song. And what song were they singing? They were singing the verse, “And He brought upon them their own iniquity, and He will cut them off in their own evil” (Psalms 94:23). And they did not manage to recite the end of that verse “The Lord our God will cut them off,” before gentiles came and conquered them. And likewise, the same happened when the Second Temple was destroyed. (Arachin 11b)*

“A fortunate matter is brought about on an auspicious day, and a deleterious matter on an inauspicious day” means God embellishes His lessons. The Rabbis do not say Av causes evil or that Adar causes success. The reason we minimize joy during Av is to demonstrate our recognition of God’s punishments. God selected Av to punish the Jews on many occasions. Our punishments fall out on the day of our sin when we slandered Israel. To teach us of our sin, God aligned punishments on the precise day of our sin. We slandered Israel on the 9th of Av, and on that date God destroyed both Temples, the Battle at Betar was lost, and the Romans plowed the Beit Hamikdash. Thereby, the relationship between our sin and God’s punishments which occur on the same date are undeni-

ably related, aimed at teaching us our faults. To rejoice during this time is to ignore our sins and God’s providence. Therefore, “the month of Av, when the Jews’ fortune is bad” does not mean the month is invested with power. But that we must act to demonstrate belief in God’s reward and punishment. Conversely, in Adar when God saved us, we rejoice. We recognize God’s positive providence. But in neither in Av nor in Adar do we attribute any power to those times.

Maimonides teaches another lesson:

*Although it is always well to cry out and repent, but during the space of the 10 days' time between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur it is exceedingly better, and the supplication is immediately accepted, as it is said, “Seek the Lord while He may be found” (Isaiah 55:6). (Laws of Repentance 2:6)*

Again, this period of time is not invested with power. But as man typically fears God will seal his yearly fate for evil, he is on his best behavior during these 10 days. “Seek the Lord while He may be found” refers to when man shows his true values, so God readily accepts his repentance. But during the year, life’s demands and troubles derail man’s focused path towards God. Since man is not necessarily expressing his true values, God may not immediately accept his repentance.

Radak quoting his father says, “Seek the Lord while He may be found” refers to when one seeks out God with his “entire” heart, as it says, “God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth” (Psalms 145:18).

Radak also quotes Yonasan ben Uzziel who says, “Seek the Lord while He may be found” refers to prior to death: “For one can only call to God while alive, and not after he dies.” His reasoning: “For there is no action, no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in death, where you are going” (Koheles 9:10)

Dates and days are not substances, they are not material...they are abstract ideas that mark calendar durations and events. But this does not invest powers into these dates and days. Just as my act of measuring my height does not suddenly alter reality, a new day arriving at sunset has no affect on natural laws: Tuesday transitioning into Wednesday does not stop the rain and does not suddenly change my financial success. This is because Tuesday or Wednesday do not exist outside our minds. These days are mere mental labels just like our names John and Sue. Changing a name changes nothing. A black cat crossing my path or a new day’s arrival cannot affect reality, these notions are fantasies. Whereas God designed us with senses to live within reality.

Once we separate reality from fantasy, we can abandon our belief in fantasy having any affect on reality. Then we can disavow superstitions as we realize they are fantasies. We then take control of our lives and employ only what is real to lead happier lives.

Parshas Kedoshim teaches that divination and soothsaying—superstitions and dates—are false. Because they are false, they are prohibited. I will close with a profound quote:

*Those with empty brains say, “It is because fortune tellers and magicians are true, that Torah prohibits them.” But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues (Ibn Ezra, Lev. 19:31) ■*

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Torah states that one who does not bring sacrifices to God to the Tabernacle (Temple) is blamed for bloodshed and he will be cut off from among this people. The reason given: “That they may no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat demons after whom they stray” (Lev. 17:7). The Jews believed in goat demons to which they sacrificed in the desert. To eliminate this type of idolatry, God commanded sacrifice to be brought only in the Tabernacle.

Torah then employs a strange formulation for the next prohibition of blood eating: “And to them say.” Why here does Torah deviate from the typical intro, “And God said to Moses saying” or, “Command the Jews saying?” With this unique phrase “And to them say,” God forbids blood to “those already forbidden” in goat demon worship. In other words, God says, “Those already forbidden in goat demon worship, are also those forbidden in blood eating.” God clearly conveys a relationship between goat demons and blood eating; those prohibited in one are prohibited in the other. This relationship between goat demons and blood eating is further supported by both prohibitions being contained in a single parsha:

*That they may no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat demons after whom they stray...  
And if anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them eats of any blood, I will set My face against the person who partakes of the blood...” (Lev. 17).*

It is very curious indeed. What is God’s cryptic message? What quality is shared by these 2 sins?

On goat demons, Ibn Ezra comments: “*Insane people see them (seirim) in the form of goats*” (Lev. 17:7) Meaning, they are not seen by normal people. They are “imaginary.” That’s a key word. Isaiah also refers to those goat demons:

*And Babylon, glory of kingdoms, proud splendor of the Chaldeans, shall become like Sodom and Gomorrah...overturned by God. Nevermore shall it be settled nor dwelt in through all the ages. No Arab shall pitch his tent there, no shepherds make flocks lie down there. But beasts shall lie down there, and the houses be filled with owls; there shall ostriches make their home, and there shall satyrs dance. (Isaiah 13:19-21)* (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

**GOD'S HINTS**  
**Imagination**  
**Worse than Idolatry**

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Radak comments:

*Satyrs refers to demons, similar to Lev. 17:7 (above) and they are so called because as they appear as goats to those who believe in them.*

With his words, “to those who believe in them,” Radak says that normal people do not see goat demons. Both Radak and Ibn Ezra discuss the phenomenon of “imagination.” Goat demons are imagined in the psyche, and not seen with one’s eyes.

### Blood Eating

Maimonides addresses the other sin of blood eating (Guide, book III chap. xlvj):

*The Law, which is perfect in the eyes of those who know it, and seeks to cure mankind of these lasting diseases, forbade the eating of blood, and emphasized the prohibition exactly in the same terms as it emphasizes idolatry: “I will set my face against that soul that eats blood” (Lev. xvii. 10). The same language is employed in reference to him “who giveth of his seed unto Molech”; “Then I will set my face against that man” (ibid. xx. 5). There is, besides idolatry and eating blood, no other sin in reference to which these words are used. For the eating of blood leads to a kind of idolatry, to the worship of spirits.*

*As the Israelites were inclined to continue their rebellious conduct, to follow the doctrines in which they had been brought up, and which were then general, and to assemble round the blood in order to eat there and to meet the spirits, God forbade the Israelites to eat ordinary meat during their stay in the wilderness: they could only partake of the meat of peace-offerings. The reason of this precept is distinctly stated, viz., that the blood shall be poured out upon the altar, and the people do not assemble round about. Comp. “To the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices, which they offer in the open field, even that they may bring them unto the Lord...And the priest shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar...and they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto the spirits” (Lev.xvii. 5-7). Now there remained to provide for the slaughtering of the beasts of the field and birds, because those beasts were never sacrificed, and birds did never serve as peace-offerings (Lev. iij). The commandment was therefore given that whenever a beast or a bird that may be eaten is killed, the blood*

*thereof must be covered with earth (Lev. xvii. 13), in order that the people should not assemble round the blood for the purpose of eating there. The object was thus fully gained to break the connection between these fools and their spirits.*

*“They sacrificed unto spirits, non-gods” (Deut. 32:17). According to the explanation of our Sages, the words non-gods imply the following idea: They have not only continued worshipping things in existence; they even worship imaginary things.*

**How are goat demons and blood eating different from classic idolatry? It is that they do not relate to any real object: “they even worship imaginary things.” Worship of imaginary things completely removes man from reality. There is no rational component operating to bring him back to truth.**

There is a profound lesson here: Maimonides says the most corrupt person is he who follows pure fantasy. Those who imagined goat gods, and those who believed in spirits were completely divorced from reality, as they worshipped something never sensed by the eyes. Only fools imagined goat gods, and spirits by definition cannot be seen. At least in classic idolatry of stone idols, man engages some of his senses, as he sees the idol. But when man worships imaginary things, his mind is completely removed from reality. There is no rational component operating to bring him back to truth. This explains why God says, “And to them who worship goat demons, tell them also not to eat blood.” It is because they share the same attachment to imaginary things, that God joins His warning of these 2 sins.

This sin of following fantasy still applies today, but the objects of fantasy are simply changed. Today, even religious Jews imagine protective powers to alleviate their insecurities. Instead of trusting in the most powerful God, Jews foolishly trust in their imagined superstitions. People still flock to graves and insert notes to the dead, they place notes in the Western Wall, they recite Tehillim as a magical cure, and they wear red bendels. They don’t consider that Tehillim’s author did not recite Tehillim when his infant was sick. King David properly fasted and prayed. Torah’s words are not to benefit our bodies (Maimonides).

Our precious Torah is ignored, rejected are the values of our patriarchs and matriarchs who never followed superstitions, but devoted their prayers to the one God alone. Rabbis and teachers, this must be corrected. ■





# MAIMONIDES

*In every generation, one must display himself as if he personally exited the subjugation of Egypt, as it is stated, “And He took us out from there” (Deut. 6:23). And regarding this, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded in the Torah (Deut. 5:15, 15:15, 24:22), “Remember that you were a slave”—meaning to say, as if you yourself had been a slave, came out to freedom, and were redeemed. (Maimonides, Hilchos Chametz u’Matzah 7:6)*

This law seems redundant. Maimonides says, “one must display himself as if he personally exited the subjugation,” based on one verse. Then he says this again, “as if you yourself had been a slave and came out to freedom” based on other verses. How do we explain this apparent duplication?

“In every generation” teaches that one might assume that in a poor generation, one is not obligated to display that, “he himself had exited the subjugation of Egypt.” However, with “In every generation,” Maimonides teaches that regardless of the social situation, this mitzvah remains intact. This is the meaning of the *והיא שעמדה* :

*And it is this that has stood for our forefathers and for us; since it is not one alone who has stood [against] us to destroy us, but rather in each generation, they stand [against] us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hands (Hagaddah).*

“In each generation” is the operative phrase. If we live in oppressive times, “God rescues us from their hands.” Thus, we view ourselves as beneficiaries of God’s Egyptian Exodus, despite our current social predicament. Maimonides teaches the following:

*The reciting of a certain portion of the Law when the first-fruits are brought to the temple, tends also to create humility. For he who brings the first-fruits takes the basket upon his shoulders and proclaims the kindness and goodness of God. This ceremony teaches man that it is essential in the service of God to remember the times of trouble and the history of past distress, in days of comfort. The Law lays stress on this duty in several places: comp. “And you shall remember that you were a slave” (Deut. 5:15). For it is to be feared that those who become great in riches and comfort might—as is generally the case—fall into the vices of insolence and haughtiness, and abandon all good principles. (Guide, book III, chap. xxxix)*

This mitzvah of feeling as though we were freed has 2 modes. The primary mitzvah is, “Remember that you were a slave”; remembering is an “internal” experience. But an “external” mode—communication—is also required, and that is expressed with *ואותנו הוציא משם* —“And He took us out from there, etc.” Here, one is addressing an audience, it is part of *מצות סיפור*. This is what Maimonides means with, “one must display himself as if he personally exited the subjugation of Egypt.” “Display” refers to communication. Thus, one must experience God’s freedom from Egypt internally, and he also must communicate it. *להראות* is the mode of external communication.

Maimonides teaches that one’s “display” at Seder is not a primary mitzvah, but forms an external communicative expression if the primary internal mitzvah, “Remember that you were a slave.” An internal experience logically precedes an external expression; the internal experience is primary. ■

# Viewing Ourselves as Having Left Egypt

Rabbi Israel Chait  
Student’s notes





# A HOLY EXCISE NCE

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**T**his week's Parsha, Kedoshim introduces us to a unique concept of the Jewish religion, "holiness". The Torah commands us to be holy, without detailing for us the specifics of what that entails. This leads to the question; is it enough for a Jew to simply be scrupulous in observance of the commandments? Would that by itself render him into a holy person?

It would seem that that question must be answered in the negative. For if that were the case, why in addition to the oft-repeated injunction to guard Hashem's Mitzvot, are we specifically abjured to "Be Holy"?

This statement clearly constitutes a command over-and-above all the other six hundred and thirteen Mitzvot. In other words, one can be very careful in his Torah observance, fulfilling all the numerous ritual requirements, and yet, still not be holy. What is it that this imperative demands of us?

The commentators offer various explana-

tions. Of great interest is that of the Ramban (VaYikra 19:2). He maintains, that it is possible for one to live a hedonistic lifestyle "with the permission of the Torah." This means, that one can pursue all the carnal pleasures—especially, those of food and sexuality—while being careful to adhere to the letter of the law. Such a person, indulges in the most alluring culinary delights and pursues attractive sexual partners, in strict conformity to the particularities of Halachik correctness.

Many people might ask; well if so what has he done wrong? This question, is based on the premise that Judaism consists of meticulous adherence to religious requirements, without any overall philosophy of the type of life that is supposed to produce.

However, that would be very far from the truth. The goal of the Mitzvot, pertaining to forbidden foods and sex, is to generate a state of holiness. This means, that the person should not be a slave to his lusts, living only for the sake of physical gratifications. He should instead cultivate the virtue of moderation; which essentially means that he views these instinctual activities, as a means-to-an-end.

The real essence of man resides in his divine soul, which enables him to rise above animal existence, and obtain wisdom and ethical perfection. He has been endowed with a physical constitution which he needs to care for, but he must do so in a manner which enables him to be involved in his real vocation, perfection of the soul.

We therefore see why the Torah could not restrict itself to simply legislating the commandments. A person could keep those and still not

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



obtain the overall objective of Hashem's religion. Therefore, according to the Ramban, there was a need to specifically proclaim, Kedoshim Tehiyu (Holy, Shall You Be)!

I would like to suggest another layer of interpretation. Many people regard themselves as "constitutionally" moral and good beings. They believe, that if they simply follow their natural dispositions about what to do in life, they will be on the correct track. The goals that they pursue and activities they engage in, are those that are mandated by their ordinary proclivities. That is manifestly not a holy existence.

There is no evidence that the way one feels about things, corresponds to what is actually true or beneficial. Judaism maintains that one should not follow the path of his natural inclinations. Rather, he must activate his mind and constantly pursue the truth.

A holy person is one who lives according to the truth, even if his feelings are opposed to it. The ability to override one's emotions and "do the right thing", is what differentiates man from the animals.

Someone who only does that which is pleasant and appealing to his basic sense of right and wrong, is not traversing the path of holiness. The goal of this Mitzvah is to elevate our existence to the level which is appropriate for one who was created with a Tzelem Elokim. May we merit to achieve this exalted stature.

Shabbat Shalom.

Dear Friends,

My newest book, Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra was recently published, and is now available at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q>

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—Rabbi Reuven Mann

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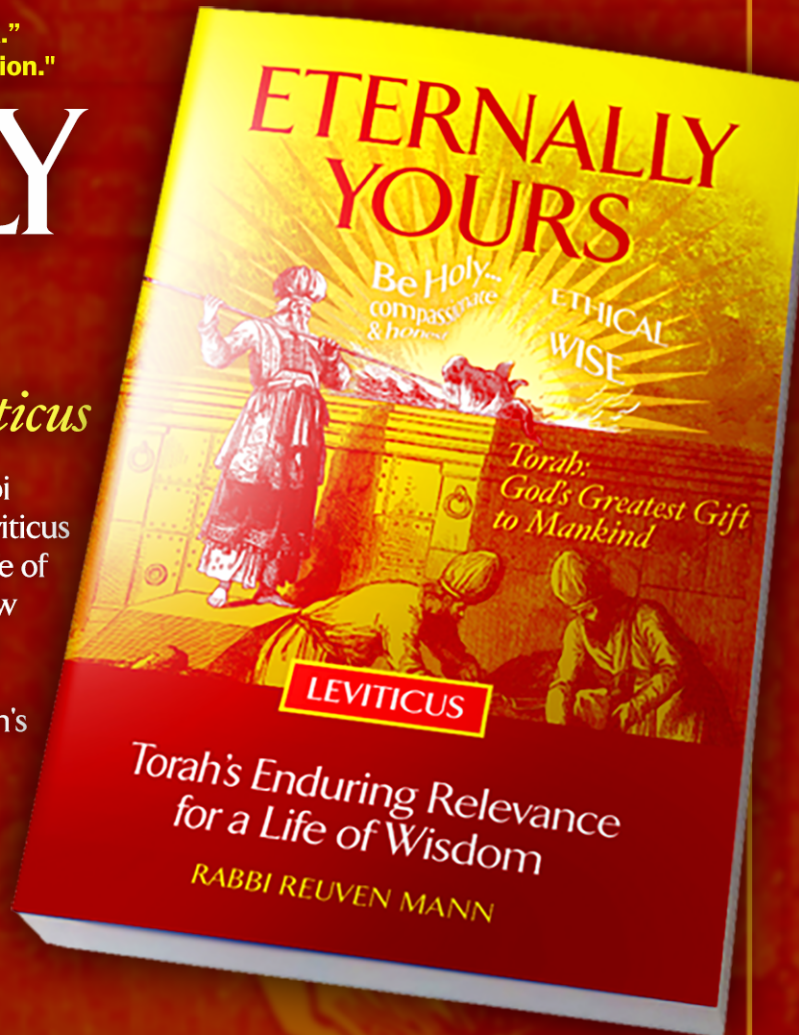
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