

JewishTimes

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PARSHA / PHILOSOPHY

A 2nd World Guides Ours

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

WISDOM

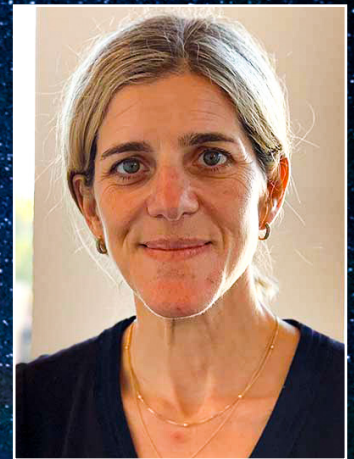
The Better Answer

DANI ROTH

PURIM

Man's Role in Miracles

RABBI REUVEN MANN



PEOPLE

Kim Simon Her Impact on the World Still Grows

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If we have the true perception of God, that He created the universe and Torah, we will never be satisfied with mediocre explanations, but we will earnestly toil in our studies to find God's brilliance: the "buried treasures" King Solomon said we should seek (Proverbs 2:4).

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

They Saw God?

READER: *"And they saw the God of Israel—under whose feet was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity. Yet [God] did not raise a hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they beheld God, and they ate and drank."*

Torah says Moshe and the 70 elders saw Hashem. How was it possible? What did they see? What is it telling us?

-Saul Aptekar

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RABBI: Rashi clarifies: “They gazed intently and failing in this they peeped in their attempt to catch a glimpse of the Supreme Being, and thereby made themselves liable to death.” The leaders sinned, Moses did not. These leaders sought to render God into a viewable being. They made God tangible, which is a great sin. In fact, all they saw was their imaginations. ■

Communicating with the Dead

READER: What do we make of stories (whether within Judaism or outside) of the dead coming to a person in a dream and revealing something they otherwise would not have known? Some claim that certain stories can be corroborated first hand. Do the dead really come to us in dreams?

-Jack Hazan

RABBI: Science and Torah approach wisdom assuming the least. This principle is called Occam’s Razor or the principle of parsimony. The simplest answer here is that one already subconsciously knew the information, and he constructed a dream scenario where someone else in that dream was unveiling what he already knew. Upon waking, the dreamer only “thinks” he learned something new.

Ibn Ezra said, “Torah prohibits not what is true, but what is false, and the proof are idols” (Lev. 19:31). Torah prohibits consulting the dead for the reason that we cannot communicate with them. Therefore we don’t suggest dreams of the dead to be any different; such communication contradicts Torah. I also don’t recall any Torah precedent of the living having dreams where they communicated with the dead. And more, Isaiah 64:3 says that God alone knows what exist afterlife. This would preclude contact with the dead in dreams.

Finally, first hand corroboration for dreams is impossible. As only the dreamer experienced the dream, no one else can corroborate such an independent experience, if this is what you mean. ■

Good Traits

“He who covers up his faults will not succeed; [but] he who confesses and gives them up will find mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). It is a valuable trait to admit error. This allows us to learn greater truths. But if ego rules over us, we will reject what is disagreeable at the cost of forfeiting knowledge, and we won’t change and improve our behaviors. By covering up faults, success cannot be had, as success is a result of an honest, intelligent path...not one of denial and faults.

Another beneficial trait is excitement and anticipation when learning Torah or science. If we have the true perception of God, that He created the universe and Torah, we will never be satisfied with mediocre explanations, but we will earnestly toil in our studies to find God’s brilliance: the “buried treasures” King Solomon said we should seek (Proverbs 2:4). Only when we seek answers do we find them, and only when we seek the best answers, we will dismiss mediocre explanations and toil until God shows us His marvels. As King David said, “Open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your teaching” (Psalms 199:18). ■

Success

STUDENT: Can we determine the exact criteria of justice in every area of life?

RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ: Studying Proverbs, your mind is trained in a certain way of thinking. When a particular situation arises, that training comes into play and using your training, you evaluate all factors at hand. Variables are infinite, but principles are not. This is why a trained mind is so important. One will be happy as Torah trains one to learn their nature and how to deal wisely in all areas. ■



With Passion & Commitment, Kim Simon, 52, Shaped Vision and Culture of USC Shoah Foundation

Tue, 02/28/2023 - 2:43pm

We are deeply saddened by the untimely loss of our friend and colleague, Kim Simon, a beloved member and leader of the USC Shoah Foundation family for nearly three decades. Kim passed away February 28 at the age of 52 after living with a rare degenerative disease. She is survived by a husband and two daughters and leaves a rich legacy that will sustain the Institute’s mission for years to come.

“We are devastated by this loss,” said USC Shoah Foundation founder Steven Spielberg. “From almost its very first day, Kim helped define the Shoah Foundation. She, as much as anyone, understood my dream to allow the voices of Holocaust survivors to echo in classrooms around the world; she played a huge part in taking this concept from dream to reality. Her impact on the institute, on the field, and on everyone she worked with, including me, was profound.”

Among her many roles, Kim served as interim executive director and managing director during her 28 years at USC Shoah Founda-

tion-The Institute for Visual History and Education – nearly her entire career and the full lifespan of the Institute. Driven by loyalty to the mission and respect for survivors, she etched her passion, her empathy, and her relentless drive for excellence into the very identity of the Institute.

Kim joined what was then known as the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in 1994, soon after it was established by Steven Spielberg following the making of Schindler’s List. At the time, the Institute was headquartered in a collection of trailers on the backlot of Universal Studios in Los Angeles.

Kim, who was born and raised in Malibu, California, had just returned to Los Angeles after living in Prague, where she had traveled to research her family history after graduating from Colorado College with a BA in history. She had subsequently stayed in Prague working in the film industry for a number of years.

Upon her return, Kim received a phone call from her mother.

“I read that Steven Spielberg is starting this foundation—you’d be perfect for it!” Kim recalled in a later interview.

June Beallor, Founding Executive Director of USC Shoah Foundation, who, along with

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Co-Founding Executive Director James Moll, hired Kim, said she immediately perceived that Kim – then in her mid 20s – was supremely capable and driven, and that she brought a maturity and urgency to the work.

“Kim understood how important nuances were in this kind of effort, and she thought deeply about the way we approached everything. As she advanced into her leadership role, she made sure that every aspect of the work was thought through from many different lenses, and put a huge effort into supporting our teams,” Beallor said. “Kim was a dear friend and an incredible human being. I will miss her terribly.”

One of Kim’s first roles was as an international production coordinator as the Institute collected more than 50,000 testimonies of survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust. She also traveled the world as part of a team to help train interviewers and other volunteers. Eventually focusing on outreach to small communities in Eastern Europe, she came to appreciate that understanding the distinct culture and needs of cities and towns – especially those in which testimony was rooted – was an essential component to building genuine and successful relationships around the world.

She subsequently established the Office of Global Partnerships, through which she oversaw educational work and programs in 17 countries and supervised a team of international consultants. She spoke Czech and launched partnerships across Europe with leading organizations in Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine, to name a few.

Martin Šmok, former senior consultant for the Institute’s international programs, remembers meeting Kim in Los Angeles in 1995, when they were both working on production.

“Clutching some folders, in a fashionable beret, she kept running around making sure everything was going along smoothly, with unstoppable energy, almost driven,” Šmok said. Her commitment never waned. “She was a professional to the core and she found solutions to the unsolvable, from South Africa to Ukraine.”

Kim also understood the power of using testimony to produce documentary films. She worked on *Spell Your Name*, a documentary about the Holocaust in Ukraine that integrated Russian and Ukrainian-language testimony, which premiered in Ukraine in 2007. Along



Kim Simon (second from right) with Stephen Smith, Steven Spielberg, and George Schaeffer in Los Angeles, CA, 2016.

with that effort, she oversaw the development of a teacher’s guide and an educational program that brought Holocaust education to every region of Ukraine.

When Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation became part of the University of Southern California in 2006, Kim oversaw the development of USC Shoah Foundation’s branding and identity, while serving as its director of programs. And when Executive Director Douglas Greenberg left the Institute in 2008, Kim was the natural choice to take the helm during the search for a new executive director.

“Kim has been the principal architect of all our international work, has been deeply involved in all our educational efforts, and has been at the very center of crafting [our] new strategic plan,” Greenberg said at the time.

In 2009, Kim took on the mantle of Managing Director, working with then Executive Director Dr. Stephen D. Smith.

“Kim and I were in lockstep with each other for over a decade. Every day she was an inspiration to me – my journeyman, my teacher, my guardian, my partner in crime, a fighter for humanity,” Smith said.

Kim guided the conceptualization and development of IWitness, USC Shoah Foundation’s award-winning online platform that realizes Steven Spielberg’s vision of using

testimony to educate students on how to become better global citizens. IWitness now encompasses educational partnerships that bring testimony-based activities to some 10 million students a year.

In 2011, Kim hired Dr. Kori Street, now Deputy Executive Director of USC Shoah Foundation, as Director of Education to develop IWitness.

“I have never met someone as curious and collaborative as Kim Simon. Kim masterfully dove into complexity and ambiguity. She taught me a great deal about facing challenges head-on, and about being a reflective and impactful leader,” Street said. “Her insight into the power of testimony to transform and her commitment to education was once beautifully described by a colleague as a ‘lived exercise that she embodied with joy and humility.’ Working with Kim was one of the most profound experiences of my life. I am heartbroken that my partner and my friend is gone.”

Recognizing the importance of measuring the impact of ongoing work, Kim implemented an evaluation protocol that has become a hallmark of all programs at the Institute. She also envisioned new efforts to bring testimony – already reaching students, researchers and filmmakers – to a wider global community through grassroots programming and a broader communications campaign.

Kim worked closely with the Board of Council-

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ors and the Next Generation Council, engaging lay leaders in substantive and compelling ways. Current Chair of the Board of Councilors, Joel Citron, worked with Kim for more than a decade.

“Without Kim’s work ethic and passionate commitment to the Institute for nearly three decades, USC Shoah Foundation would not be what it is today,” Citron said. “Kim had the unique ability to inspire and engage with her kindness, leadership, and authenticity. She was widely beloved, and I am forever grateful to have been touched by Kim and to have known her as a friend. She truly was an Eshet Chayil, A Woman of Valor.”

In 2003 Kim was appointed to the U.S. delegation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), a consortium of 35 countries that brings together top experts to promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance. Kim served on the Communications Working Group from 2011 to 2018, chairing the group in 2017. She was also a member of the Strategic Planning Group, which in 2017 developed a five-year strategy focused on setting expectations in the field of Holocaust education, research and remembrance as well as promoting historically informed policymaking and building international cooperation and engagement.

Dr. Robert Williams collaborated with Kim through IHRA before he came on as Finci-Viterbi Executive Director of USC Shoah Foundation in October 2022.

“Kim had an unparalleled ability to communicate passion and insight on those issues critical to the future of Holocaust memory. Her drive inspired so many people, including me, and helped the

international community come together to better address its shared obligation to keep alive the memory of the Holocaust,” Williams said.

In recognition of Kim Simon’s work, her Alma Mater, Colorado College, awarded her the Alumni Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in 2011.

Kim’s daughter, Eva, participated in USC Shoah Foundation’s William P. Lauder Junior Internship program, and, as a student at USC, has continued to intern with the organization’s education team.

Through the advanced stages of her illness, Kim continued offering guidance and insights to shape the vision and programming of the Institute, as she had since its earliest days.

Ari C. Zev, a past executive director who worked closely with Kim for more than two decades, echoed the feelings of many other colleagues and friends.

“Kim was exceptional in so many ways. She was strong, she was focused, and she could push through any problem with intelligence and care,” Zev said. “As we grew up at the Shoah Foundation together, she had a profound influence on me personally, and I think on everyone who had the privilege of knowing her, of working with her, and, most importantly, of calling her a friend.”

Kim is survived by her husband, Yuss Simon; daughters Eva and Lily; mother Ruth Hillman; sisters and brothers-in-law, Karen and Zev Fried and Jana and Sam Gustoman; nieces and a nephew.

May Kim’s memory be a blessing. ■

Kim and her husband Yussi, 2012



PARSHA / PHILOSOPHY

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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rabbi David Markowitz questioned an interruption. After Torah (Trumah) outlines Tabernacle's vessels, curtains and its structure, the parsha following—Titzaveh—outlines all the priests' clothing. However, these first 2 verses below interrupt a seamless flow between these two related topics of Tabernacle's vessels and priestly garb:

You shall instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly—the Menorah. Aaron and his sons shall arrange them in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain which is over the Ark of the covenant, to light daily lights from evening to morning before God. It shall be an eternal law for the Israelites for all generations, from before the children of Israel. (Exod. 27:20,21)

After these 2 verses, Titzaveh commences to describe the priestly garb. How do we understand this interruption of the Menorah and the Ark? And furthermore, why not mention this earlier when the Ark and the Menorah are discussed?

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From all Tabernacle's vessels, the Menorah and the Ark cover alone have a prohibition: they both must not be assembled from parts, but are to be beaten into shape from a block of gold. Also unique to these two vessels is that other vessels' lengths aligned with the length of the Tabernacle, i.e., the Table's long side was placed parallel to Tabernacle's long side. But the Menorah and Ark alone were positioned length-to-width. What does this teach?

Secondly, we see the Menorah has a "relative" purpose: it is lit "outside the curtain which is over the ark." Thus, Menorah relates to the Ark, as it must be lit only in this location, facing the Ark. But we wonder why Torah says, "set them up...outside the curtain," instead of saying, "outside the Holy of Holies," the room containing the Ark. Truly, the Menorah is outside the room, not outside the curtain. So why focus on the curtain?

Third, the Menorah functions to illuminate, but illuminate what exactly?

Torah addresses Tabernacle's structure, but to share Tabernacle's purpose, Torah must also convey more than mere measurements. When Moses assembled the Tabernacle, he did not first erect the beams and then place the coverings over them, which would be the more intuitive process. No. He held up the coverings and then assembled the beams underneath them [1]. He did this in order to display the essential element of this "Tent" of Meeting: it is a covering, a veil.

A veil exists between God and man. We cannot invent new ways to relate to God as the sinful Jews expressed in molding the Golden Calf. This calf expressed a sinful conviction by those Jews: they felt that they knew how to relate to God, through forging a metal model of the Egyptian calf deity. God's response was that the Jews must now build the Tabernacle that corrects flawed religious expression, now following God's guidelines, and not human emotions attached to animal gods. Tabernacle was a concession to man's errors. Its most fundamental lesson [2] is that there is a room—the Holy of Holies—that is unapproachable. This restriction parallels our inability to fathom God, unlike the sinful Jews expressed confidently with the calf. There is a veil between God and us...Tabernacle's primary message. "For man cannot know me while alive" [3] was God's response to Moses who sought to know God. The vertical Parochess curtain blocked entry to the Holy of Holies. Even the horizontal curtain layers above had seams of gold hooks placed directly over the Parochess. This demarcation of an off-limits area is Tabernacle's focus.

"Aaron and his sons shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain which is over the Ark of the covenant"

Menorah's 6 branches emanating from a central 7th branch parallel the seven days of Creation. Meaning that Creation (Menorah) "illuminates" us to the reality "behind" the curtain. Studying the universe reveals tremendous wisdom that is behind the physical world, and controls it. This means that the physical world is guided by a non-physical world. Menorah stands directly in front of the curtain covering the Ark, to illuminate it. Lighting the Menorah from "night until morning" parallels the illumination of darkness into light. Creation points to another metaphysical world that controls it.

Menorah embodies Tabernacle's purpose of directing us



away from assuming the physical world alone exists, towards our acceptance of the metaphysical world guiding the physical universe.

Laws—non-physical entities—govern the universe, and were used prior to Creation to create the universe.

Therefore, the separating curtain is of great significance. Menorah illuminates us to a "reality" behind a curtain, to a metaphysical world that controls our physical world. In other words, the Menorah embodies the seven days of creation—the physical world—a world through which studying it leads us towards metaphysical knowledge, just as the Menorah's lights illuminate the curtain covering the Ark. Study of creation imbues man with ever increasing knowledge about God and His laws which are "behind the curtain," behind the physical universe. Therefore the Menorah is located just in front of the curtain, and its center branch's wick leaning towards the curtain, indicates the Menorah's purpose is to shed light on the metaphysical world. And the curtain itself had embroidered angels to parallel the angels over the Ark [4]. Even from outside the curtain, God reminds us of the Menorah's illumination of metaphysical matters.

It is only due to Tabernacle's service that the priests require honor through their clothing. Their clothing is not integral to the priest's, to honor the priests per se, but to honor to God whom they service. We feel that the discussion of the Tabernacle should be followed by a discussion of the priest clothing without interruption. But the priests' clothing in fact are subordinate to Tabernacle service. Therefore, the order is:

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1) describe Tabernacle's structure,
2) immediately followed by Tabernacle's service (Menorah lighting), and only afterwards,

3) discuss the priests' clothing, for their honor is only due to Tabernacle worship.

Therefore, the lighting of the Menorah—a service embodying Tabernacle's primary message—must precede the priests' clothing. Menorah must follow Tabernacle's structure to share the purpose of this structure.

The Menorah's and Ark's lengths were perpendicular to Tabernacle's length to teach that these vessels do not complement Tabernacle, but the inverse, Tabernacle is here for the Ark/Menorah message. That Menorah and the Ark cover target man's objective of attaining wisdom, both Menorah and Ark cover were to be made with skilled ingenuity beaten from a single block of pure gold. The "wise" craftsmanship displayed in these 2 vessels direct man towards 2 worlds of wisdom: wisdom of creation (Menorah) and wisdom of the metaphysical world (Ark). The Ark cover had 2 angels on it which represent the means through which man attains knowledge. For at one moment, man has a question. And then suddenly, he sees an answer. How did he receive that answer? The answer: angels teach man wisdom. (Rabbi Israel Chait explaining Maimonides' theory of knowledge).

Pure gold was also a requirement in building the Ark cover and Menorah. Just as pure gold is the highest value, this points to the greatest value of wisdom.

To summarize, creation (Menorah) is one world of wisdom. But creation also enlightens us to metaphysical laws (Ark) and ideas that control the universe. Creation did not make itself. A second more impressive world guides our physical world. It is a hidden world, just as the Holy of Holies is hidden from man. But creation can illuminate us to some metaphysical knowledge, just as Menorah illuminates the Paroches curtain over the ark.

Torah's words are precise and divinely worded. Rabbi Markowitz's sensitivity to Torah's words has unveiled a most fundamental lesson. ■

[1] Sforno, Exod. 40:18

[2] Hil. Beis Habaichira 1:5

[3] Exod. 33:20

[4] Exod. 26:31





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CONDÉ NAST





Wisdom

the Better Answer

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim
& Dani Roth

“Lest you lift your eyes heavenward, and you see the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, and bow to them and serve them, that God your God allotted to all peoples under heaven” (Deut. 4:19). (Talmud Avodah Zara 55a)

Based on this verse, I explained in last week’s *Jewishtimes* issue (Feb. 24, 2023) that Moses rejected idolatry, by saying the luminaries were “allotted to all peoples.” My meaning was that there is no favoritism. The belief that worshiping a luminary will favor you and benefit you is false since the luminaries are allotted to all people with the same function of providing

light. This equal allotment means they do not favor individuals, as they are inanimate, despite peoples’ beliefs that sun worship will better improve their lives.

I asked Dani Roth how he learned the verse, and he said the rejection of idolatry is because here, God says that He controls the luminaries: “He allotted them” means He controls them. Therefore it is foolish to worship the sun, stars or moon, as there is something greater that controls them. We should worship the greater entity.

Dani’s answer is superior to mine, as Dani shows a primary reason not to worship the luminaries: God controls them, which

refutes their status as a deity: a being that is not controlled by anything else. While both answers are true, my answer is based on the luminaries themselves, that they have limited powers. But Dani’s answer shows a primary reason to reject the luminaries in the greater context of their rank in the universe.

Dani’s answer includes the complete scope of all reality; the better answer is always the one that explains more. Rabbi Israel Chait asked, “Who has greater knowledge of the human cell: a scientist or Moses?” He said Moses does. Since Moses understands the greater philosophy of the universe, he understands the role of the human cell better. In Moses’ mind, a cell contributes to the health of a human being, which contributes to his ability to study Torah and come closer to God. This is man’s purpose, and the purpose of all that sustains man. But to the scientist, a cell is defined strictly within the context of the body: the cell contributes to human health, and nothing more. But by not appreciating the greater universal of man’s purpose in God’s plan, the scientist fails to see the ultimate and true purpose of a cell, which is to enable human beings to recognize the Creator. Thus, when we explain any phenomenon in the greater context, we explain more.

I explained the deficiency in the luminaries only in the context of the luminaries’ abilities. Whereas Dani explained their deficiency in the context of total reality.

Thank you Dani for your wise insight. ■



PURIM

Man's Role in Miracles

Rabbi Reuven Mann

The Book of Esther describes the great wonder of salvation, which we celebrate on Purim. However, the miracle by which the Jews were saved from their enemies was different from the ones that were experienced in Egypt and the wilderness. In the Megillah the deliverance was achieved as a result of human action, most significantly that of Esther. It is very worthwhile to study this Book carefully, for it contains a great deal of insight into the human condition.

The danger faced by the Jews was nothing short of total annihilation, “children and women on one day”. Haman’s genocidal ambition was more lethal than Hitler’s which could only be implemented over the course of years. He had no need for secrecy and, indeed, the orders for the Jew-killers to be ready to act on the thirteenth of Adar were publicized almost a full year in advance. Haman could count on many “willing executioners” who were ready to spring into action and annihilate the Jews. On one day.

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PURIM



In a sense, the case could be made to place the blame on Mordechai. His refusal to bow before Haman triggered the burning anger which resulted in his decision to destroy the Jewish People. Why did Mordechai refuse to bow? At the very least, he should have endeavored to remove himself from the path of Haman so that he would not see him and be unobligated to bow.

The matter can only be understood from the standpoint of the Torah's attitude to idolatry. The Rambam states that the overarching objective of the entire Torah is to uproot idol worship from the world so that mankind can recognize and serve the true G-d. When it comes to the sin of Avodah Zara (idolatry) there may be no leeway, even if one's life is at stake. The Jew must be ready at all times to sacrifice his life, if need be, in order to renounce false gods.

Our father Avraham publicly instructed mankind to relinquish their mistaken religions and recognize Hashem, in spite of the fact that this activity resulted in his being sentenced to death. And the Jews openly set aside a sheep, the deity of Egypt, which they proceeded to slaughter on the eve of the Exodus. This in spite of the fact that Moshe had refused Pharaoh's offer to allow the Jews to worship Hashem in Egypt by saying; "It is not proper to do so, for we will offer the deity of Egypt to Hashem, our G-d— behold if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt in their sight, will they not stone us? (Shemot 8:22)"

Yet when Hashem commanded them to sacrifice the sheep for the Korban Pesach (Pesach offering) they fully complied without fear of the consequences. That, I believe, explains the behavior of Mordechai. Haman the Amalekite attributed divinity to himself in the same manner that the Nazis regarded themselves as the super-race, and thus, Mordechai reasoned, bowing down to him would be an act of idolatry. He couldn't give his assent to the idolization of man. It was his and the Jewish People's mission to completely reject any and all forms of idol worship, even if it placed their very existence in jeopardy.

After the decree of annihilation was publicized, Mordechai did all he could to thwart it. He turned to Queen Esther and urged her to prostrate herself before the King and plead for her nation. At first, she demurred, citing the danger involved

in a sudden uninvited appearance before Achashveirosh which could trigger the death penalty. What good would it do if she was executed for a breach of protocol? How would that contribute to the cause of Jewish survival?

But Mordechai wouldn't buy that. He insisted that this was no ordinary situation, and she needed to take risks in order to gain the attention of the King. This was not a time for business as usual. Moreover, he implied that it was Hashem that had placed her in this position for just such an occasion.

Esther accepted the rebuke of Mordechai. However, she did not just follow his orders. In fact, she went through a spiritual transformation and emerged as a courageous, fearless leader. She instructed Mordechai to gather all the Jews in Shushan to join her and her maidens in a fast of three days and nights, after which (still in her fasting state) she would appear before Achashveirosh without any fear for her own life; "and if I am to perish, I shall perish" (Esther 4:16). Esther was now in charge and making the decisions; "And Mordechai went about and did everything that Esther had commanded" (Esther 4:17).

What is the meaning of "everything that Esther commanded?" A similar term is used in describing the disagreement between Avraham and Sarah as to whether Hagar and Yishmael should be driven from Avraham's home. "The matter greatly distressed Avraham regarding his son". In response, Hashem told him, "Listen to everything that Sarah tells you ..." Why?, say the Rabbis, because, in these matters, she is guided by the "Holy Spirit". And, I believe the matter is the same over here. Once Esther accepted her Divine responsibility, she was infused with a Holy Spirit of wisdom and insight and Mordechai agreed to do all that she instructed.

Certain things became clear to Esther during her three days of fasting and introspection. She could not just go and plead with the King, as Mordechai urged. This would be futile. Before she could request Achashveirosh to rescind the decrees of Haman, she had to cause the King to recognize Haman for the evil, self-serving manipulator that he was.

That is why, upon being granted an audience with her husband, she asked that he and Haman come to a party that she was hosting for just them. This alone had to arouse the

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wonder and imagination of the King. And then at the party, when he urged that she express her desire, she remained coy and only asked that the two men come the next night to her party, at which she would enunciate what was on her mind. Is it any wonder that on that night the “sleep of the King was disturbed”?

Esther’s goal was to transform the King’s attitude toward Haman. But she could only go so far. She needed the assistance of the “One Who Spoke and the world came into being”. On that night, Someone took over and orchestrated events in such a way that Haman’s standing disintegrated.

Unable to sleep, the King had the State chronicles read for him. He noticed that Mordechai, who had reported the assassination plot of Bigsan and Seresh, had not been rewarded for saving his life.

At that very moment Haman who on the night of his greatest triumph could no longer tolerate the insouciance of Mordechai acted on the advice of his closest confidants to solicit permission to hang Mordechai immediately. So Haman stood in the outer court of the King when suddenly he was summoned to proffer advice on how to properly reward Mordechai. Responding to the summons of the King, Haman blissfully walked into the trap, little suspecting what he was in for.

The King was now toying with Haman because he had been awakened to his actual selfish nature and his true intention to exploit the empire for his own selfish purposes. Thus, he asked him what should be done to the one whom the King wants to honor. But he purposely did not tell him who that might be or what he was being feted for. The King intended to reward Haman’s archenemy, Mordechai, and, adding insult to injury, desired that Haman, personally, dispense all the honors.

Haman displayed no political caution and eagerly took the bait. He was convinced that he was the one whom Achashveirosh had in mind, so in answering the question revealed his deep-seated ambitions. The honoree should be attired in the Kings, wardrobe, be seated on the royal steed and led through the streets to the proclamation of “This is what is done to the one whom the King wants to honor” (Esther 6:9). This was all that Achasherosh needed to hear (he found Haman’s inclusion of the monarch’s crown particularly galling) and he ordered Haman to do those exact things to Mordechai, the Jew, “who sits in the King’s gate”.

The humiliation and unmasking of Haman was now complete. The actual coup de grâce came that night at the second party, when Esther made the request that her life and that of her People be spared. The King responded, “Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?” Esther answered, “The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman”. The fury of the King against Haman now reached its peak and, when informed of the tree that he had prepared for the demise of Mordechai, commanded, “Hang him on it” (Esther 7:9).

The miracle of Purim consisted of the wondrous transformation whereby Haman’s cruelty and disloyalty was exposed and the faithfulness of the Jews came to light. Mordechai was appointed to take the place of Haman, the Jews obtained a lofty status in the realm and their enemies were thoroughly routed.

What was unique about the miracle was that it entailed a cooperation between human initiative and Divine Providence. Esther implemented a bold and ingenious plan. In order to succeed, certain factors outside of her control had to line up in a certain way. Because of the national

PURIM



Teshuva (repentance) which was brought about by the three-day fast of Esther, the Jews became worthy of Hashem’s protection.

May this story serve to inspire us to return to the ways of the Torah, to seek to act with wisdom and boldness in all our endeavors, and to become worthy of Hashem’s eternal beneficence.

Shabbat Shalom V’Chag Purim Sameach.

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>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of VaYikra and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com.

Additionally, for those in Eretz Yisrael, my books are available at David Linden’s bookstore located at Emek Refaim Street 21, Jerusalem and at Pomeranz Book store, Be’eri 5 Jerusalem. They are very nice stores to visit and browse.

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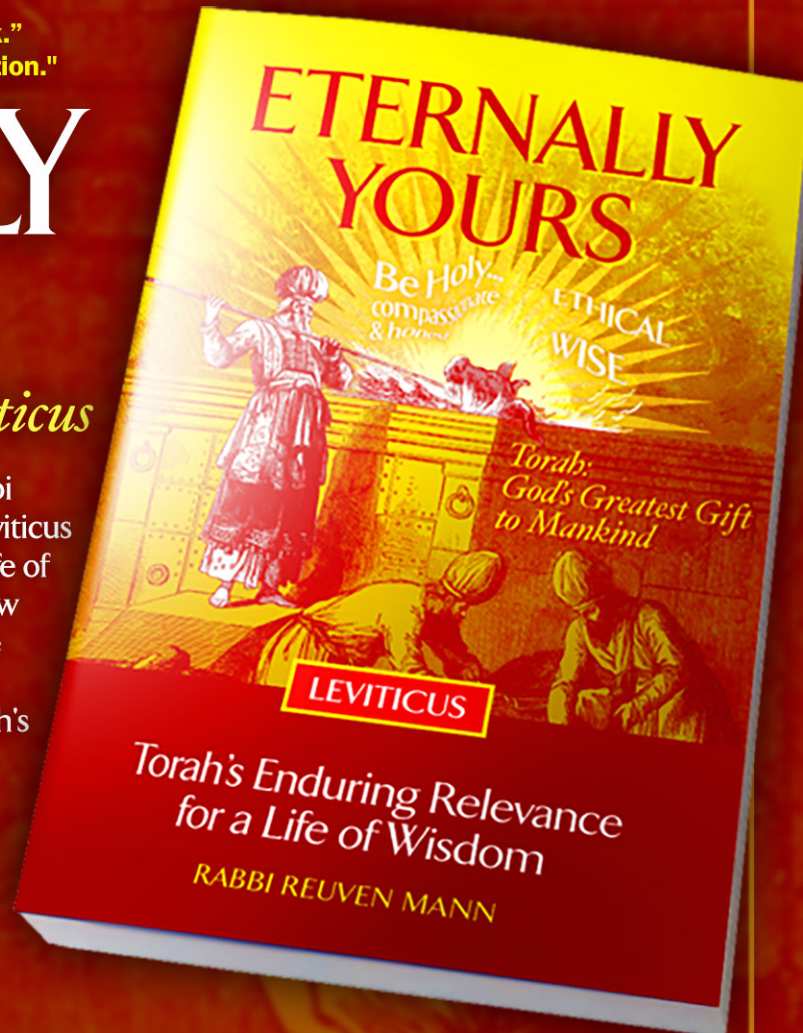
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