

Human Kindness

Abraham's servant Eliezer searched for specific perfections in the woman who would wed Isaac; one who not only 'responds' to requests, but also fully investigates where else she may assist another. She was not asked, but nonetheless, labored to water all of Eliezer's camels. This additional kindness is what Eliezer sought, for the son of one who embodied true kindness.

Above: Paraphrased from a class by Rabbi Reuven Mann

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Chayey Sara

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Listen to us, master. A prince of the L-rd you are among us. In the best of our burial places, bury your dead. No man from among us will prevent you from burying your dead." (Beresheit 23:6)

The opening passages of Parshat Chayay Sara describe Avraham's successful efforts to purchase a burial place for his wife, Sara, in the

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Eliezer Tests Rebecca

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Eliezer was sent by his master Abraham to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham's son. He swore to find a wife from Abraham's family. Eliezer reached Aram Naharayim and stopped at the well, one location where people meet. He prayed to God that He should send him a woman who would not only respond to his request for his own water, but a woman who would initiate hospitality in the form of watering his camels as well, without request.

"And it was that he had even finished speaking (to God) behold Rebecca came out, born to Besuale, the son of Milka, wife of Nachor, the brother of Abraham and her with her pitcher on her shoulder". (Gen. 24:15)

Of course Eliezer had no knowledge of her lineage, but the Torah teaches how God prepares most efficiently for the righteous. The prayer was not even complete, yet the response was already at hand.

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Eliezer Tests Rebecca

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What happens next catches one's eye, "...she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended. And the servant (Eliezer) ran to greet her and said, 'let me sip please, a little water from your pitcher. And she said, 'drink my master', and she rushed and took down the pitcher from her shoulder and gave him to drink. And when he finished drinking, she said 'I will also draw for your camels until they finish drinking'. And she rushed and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and she ran yet again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels."



draw the water knowingly for another. When one works for herself, there is a connection with the object of their labor. To part with water drawn for herself, Rebecca would display a higher level of kindness. For this reason, Eliezer waited until she drew the water - for herself - and only then, asked for it. He intended to see if she would part with water she drew for herself. We see that not only did Eliezer respond to Abraham's request, but he thought into the best manner of responding to his master. Ironically, Eliezer's own perfection mirrors Rebecca's, as they both responded to requests as best they could. Simply responding to a request in kind is not reflective of a high caliber

individual. The righteous are perfected. They see a need, and think into the best way to respond. This may very well explain why Eliezer formulated his approach to Rebecca as he did. He too partook of the very kindness he sought in a mate for Isaac.

Allow me to focus your attention on a problem, "...she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended. And the servant (Eliezer) ran to greet her..." Pause here for a moment. What strikes you?

What strikes me as I read this is one question, "Why the delay?" There must have been at least 10 minutes which passed as "she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended." It is clear that time passed, yet Eliezer did not budge. His latter sentiment not to delay bringing Rebecca back to Isaac teaches that he was not wasting time. So if he saw her appear as he finished his prayer, why did he not approach her at that very moment?

Why did he wait until "she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended?"

Let us better formulate the question: What was there to gain by waiting until Rebecca filled her pitcher? We can refine this question further, "In searching for a woman with the best qualities, what did Eliezer feel he would learn by waiting for Rebecca to fill her pitcher?" The answer is now apparent. Eliezer desired to learn how far Rebecca would go in her kindness. As Eliezer waits until Rebecca draws her own water, her offer is all the more gracious than if she would

draw the water knowingly for another. When one works for herself, there is a connection with the object of their labor. To part with water drawn for herself, Rebecca would display a higher level of kindness. For this reason, Eliezer waited until she drew the water - for herself - and only then, asked for it. He intended to see if she would part with water she drew for herself. We see that not only did Eliezer respond to Abraham's request, but he thought into the best manner of responding to his master. Ironically, Eliezer's own perfection mirrors Rebecca's, as they both responded to requests as best they could. Simply responding to a request in kind is not reflective of a high caliber

individual. The righteous are perfected. They see a need, and think into the best way to respond. This may very well explain why Eliezer formulated his approach to Rebecca as he did. He too partook of the very kindness he sought in a mate for Isaac.

Notice, Eliezer's request was "let me sip please, a little water from your pitcher". He asked for a little, and received much. Not only did Rebecca give of her own, but she gave more than requested of her, and she gave all he needed, even though it meant watering all his camels, and did so with speed, again, to accommodate as best she could. □

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G-d's Laws Without G-d?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: In a way, your position on Torah is better suited to the pragmatist view that ignores the importance of ultimate Truth in favor of what "works." The germ theory of disease was fought for decades by religionists who believed in the paramount role of Sin as a cause of disease. While sin might be an important constituent of stomach ulcers in the long run, in the short run, we seem to have gotten closer to cure by the discovery of a particular bacteria which lodges in the intestine. In a similar vein you might look at the "instrumental value" of Torah from the "as if" point of view, and ask this question: Apart from the question of whether or not G-d exists, does a life guided by Torah - with the user of Torah operating "as if" G-d existed - yield better results than a life with no Torah? In other words, is there something "true" about Torah teaching in say, for example, the doctrine of complete spiritual rest on Shabbat, which makes life better, regardless of one's final belief in the true status of Torah, and G-d's existence?

Mesora: A human body surely benefits from physical rest, if he is tired. However, rest per se is not always a 'good'. Exercise is also a must for one's health. So we see King Solomon's words are again substantiated (See Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3) i.e., there is a time for everything, but not everything is good - all the time.

However, we cannot stop there. "Sabbatical rest" cannot be defined as a good, if we measure it in simple, physical terms. All of man's actions truly miss their mark and purpose, if the entire scope of reality and man's ultimate purpose is ignored. When asking what is the "good" for man, (rest, happiness, eating, etc.) while excluding man's ultimate goal (loving G-d), you cannot answer the question within the framework of "true reality". The answer must, by definition, be wrong. If you wish to know what is good for man, we must take into account man's true purpose and all that is true and real.

So what is man's true purpose? How can we identify it? We must study reality, and arrive at what is absolute truth. Reality is founded on G-d's existence, and His goal for man. Sinai is eternal proof of G-d's existence, and His desire that man follow the Torah. The Torah is man's one goal,

and purpose. If man denies G-d's existence, man's existence is of no value. All his rest, exercise, reading, kindness, and all activities including Torah observance, fail to be realized as a service in gaining knowledge of G-d, and adhering to His laws. Once G-d is removed from the equation, man is not living with any value. For example, it may seem that one cares for another person with his "kindness", but if he cares merely to make people happy or healthy, but not for the sake of a happy/healthy life... "to follow Torah", then the happiness and healthiness is limited only to the sphere of man's Earthly stay. Man, in such a case, has missed his only opportunity to arrive at knowledge of G-d, by using intelligence, which was given for this primary objective. Man has completely failed to operate in reality, and his life is a waste.

When asking if rest is a good, we must ask, "rest for what goal?" One may reply, "to be strong to work and raise his family." Sounds admirable. We then ask, "why is it good to do these?" If we do not eventuate in the primary goal of approaching G-d through our intellect, then all actions in man's life are bereft of the absolute "good", i.e., loving G-d. In such a case, rest, kindness, Torah observance, etc., are not a "good", in G-d's terms. They are the "means", with no "ends", as defined by G-d...as defined by ultimate reality.

Any Torah law or tenet, performed or accepted, without conviction of G-d's existence, forfeits its purpose. And if a man lived his entire life with such a philosophy, he forfeits his life. Even more, Rashi in Deuteronomy says, if one does not understand the idea of a mitzvah, he obtains no benefit through that mitzvah. He must still keep that command, but the entire goal is not achieved. Every command and principle contained in Torah aims at man's appreciation of the Source of the Torah - G-d. If one's studies and actions do not culminate in a realization and appreciation for G-d, then he misses the entire purpose of those ideas and commands.

Reader: So, what would you say about a person of no awareness of G-d, finding a copy of Torah on a park bench which it turns out has been edited to delete references to G-d as the Source of Torah and the Authority behind Torah? The person reads

through the Torah and decides to try to live by the precepts it contains, following to the letter all of the mitzvahs, etc... 1)Would that person, in your opinion, derive any benefit from being a Torah Person? (Do we need to know who invented aspirin or what aspirin contains for aspirin to cure a headache?)

Mesora: As I said, without conviction in G-d's existence, and that Torah was created and given by G-d, the observer lacks any appreciation for the Creator, therefore, such actions fail in their primary goal. Man's life was a waste.

Reader: Not sure I agree. Just as I can appreciate the design of a watch without knowing if it was created by G-d or by man, I can appreciate the meaning of Shabbat as a Day of Rest without knowing that it is meant to recall the day G-d rested after creating the world. It's not that the latter is unimportant so much as to suggest that we could be missing something very important by just talking about why we are supposed to celebrate Shabbat. I would suggest we need to appreciate the spirit of the celebration by allowing ourselves to just experience self imposed rest from our weekly labors and ponder the value of that as such. Once we can recognize the value of that, plus the value of all the other mitzvahs in our lives without reference to their origin, we know we have a real blessing as opposed to a duty.

Mesora: There is no Sabbath rest, without G-d. This is impossible. Sabbath, more than other laws, is bound up inextricably with the truth of the Creator.

You are making the most fundamental error in Torah - man's purpose and design. There is no inherent benefit to Sabbatical rest, Kosher laws, or any other law, if one does not recognize the Creator. The Shema says, "And you shall love your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." This teaches that all of man's activities must be enacted solely for the sake of approaching G-d. If G-d's existence is not apprehended as an absolute truth, and man's actions are not a service to G-d, man misses his singular goal with this distorted life. ■

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Chayey Sara

RABBI BERNARD FOX

Land of Israel. Nachmanides is troubled by the inclusion of a detailed description of this episode in the Chumash. G-d chose every word of the Chumash carefully. Every word, indeed every letter, must teach a lesson. Why is an entire chapter devoted to these events?

Nachmanides explains that this incident illustrates the fulfillment of one of G-d's promises to Avraham. In Avraham's first prophecy, G-d promised him that, although he would be traveling to a new land, he would achieve fame and earn the respect of the inhabitants. Avraham's mission was to reintroduce to humanity the worship of the Almighty. Consequently, his influence and stature among the inhabitants of his new home was crucial to his success.

Nachmanides goes on to explain that, this chapter demonstrates that, in his lifetime, his neighbors regarded Avraham as a prince of the Almighty, and ruler over the land. Throughout the chapter, the citizens of the city treat Avraham with the respect appropriate for a king and a prophet. They assure him that he may bury Sara wherever he wishes. Avraham chooses the Ma'arat HaMachpayla – the Cave of Machpayla – in Hevron. The owner, Efron, offers Avraham the property as a gift. Only at Avraham's insistence does Efron agree to accept any compensation. These attitudes demonstrate the fulfillment of the Almighty's initial promise to Avraham.[1]

“My master, hear me. Between me and you, of what significance is a portion of land worth four hundred silver shekel? Bury your dead.” (Bereshit 23:15)

Efron owns the Ma'arat HaMachpayla. Avraham asks Efron to sell him the cave. Efron replies that he will give Avraham the cave and does not seek payment. Avraham is not satisfied and insists upon paying Efron. In our pasuk, Efron responds that the cave and the field upon which it is situated are of little consequence. Efron explains that he and Avraham are wealthy individuals. There is no reason to enter into a dispute over a portion of land worth four hundred silver shekel. Avraham immediately weighs out four hundred shekel and delivers the payment. Payment is made in front of the townspeople. The Chumash also mentions that Avraham paid Efron with coins that were readily negotiable currency.

Our Sages criticize Efron for his behavior. He offered to deliver the field to Avraham as a gift. But he accepted a payment of four hundred shekel!![2] At first this criticism seems unfair. Efron never asked Avraham for payment. Avraham insisted on payment. Efron mentioned the price of four hundred shekel only in passing. He never demanded this payment.

To fully understand our Sages' analysis of Efron, we must carefully consider another pasuk. Efron tells Avraham that a field valued at four hundred shekel is of little consequence. The Chumash

then comments that “Avraham heard Efron” and weighed out the payment. It is odd that Avraham's payment is associated with “hearing” Efron. Efron had refused payment. It would seem that Avraham, in insisting on paying for the field, was not hearing Efron!

Sforno explains that Avraham heard and agreed to Efron's estimate of the field's value.[3] This interpretation is supported by Targum Unkelus. Rabbaynu Nissim offers another explanation. He comments that Avraham heard Efron's response and detected a hidden meaning. He heard more than Efron's literal response. He heard a deeper message. What was this implicit message?

Avraham realized that there was no reason for Efron to specify the value of the land, in his response. He should have merely indicated that the land was of little significance. The indication of a specific value was very meaningful to Avraham. He understood this to imply that Efron was very aware of the value and ambivalent about giving the land.

Based upon this analysis, Rabbaynu Nissim explains Avraham's subsequent actions. Avraham was suspicious of Efron's intentions. He therefore met Efron's price in the presence of the townspeople. They had heard Efron specify the value and would now see Avraham meet this price. Avraham paid Efron in negotiable currency. He did not want to leave Efron any opportunity to question the value of the coins.

“And the girl, to whom I shall say, “Tip your jug and I will drink,” and she will say, “Drink and I will also water you r camels,” she is the one you have designated for you r servant Yitzchak. And through her I will know that you have done kindness with my master.” (Bereshit 24:13)

Avraham send his servant Eliezer to Aram Naharayim. There, he is to find a wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer arrives at Aram Naharayim and prepares to fulfill his mission. He must find a wife who is appropriate for Yitzchak. He devises a test. He will stand by the town's well. The girls of the town will come to draw water for their families. Eliezer will approach each. He will ask each to share some water with him. The girl that offers him water and also offers to water his camels will be destined to be Yitzchak's wife.

The Talmud discusses this incident in Tractate Chullin. The Talmud explains that it is prohibited to act on the basis of omens. For example, a person drops his staff. He considers this to be an ill omen and stays in his house all day.[4] A person also may not establish signs, which will serve as omens. The person predefines a certain “test” as meaningful. The test is then performed. The person acts on the basis of the outcome. The Talmud offers an example of this type of behavior. The example given by the Talmud is the test devised by Eliezer to choose a wife for Yitzchak.[5] Eliezer devised a

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Chayey Sara

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RABBI BERNARD FOX

test. He assumed the outcome to be meaningful. He then acted on the basis of the outcome. Maimonides explains that these behaviors are superstitious. We are commanded to guide our lives by wisdom. Therefore, these behaviors are prohibited.[6]

How is it possible that Eliezer the servant of Avraham violated this prohibition? It is also remarkable that Hashem would help Eliezer in his superstitious behavior!

Rabbaynu Nissin, in his commentary on Tractate Chullin, answers this question. He explains that the Talmud does not intend to accuse Eliezer of acting foolishly. Eliezer's test did not involve superstition. He realized that Yitzchak's wife should embody kindness. He devised a test, which would identify essential behaviors and attitudes. This test was based on wisdom not superstition.

What was the Talmud's purpose in using Eliezer's test as an example of superstitious behavior? The Talmud is explaining that the prohibition of relying on omens is not violated until the person actually acts upon the omen. In order to violate the prohibition, the person must treat the foolish omen with the certainty of Eliezer. This defines superstitious behavior. The fool treats an arbitrary sign as if it were a scientific indication of reality. The fool acts with the certainty appropriate for a meaningful test – such as the one devised by Eliezer.[7]

“And Lavan and Betuel answered. And they said, “The thing has gone forth from Hashem. We cannot say to you bad or good.” (Beresheit 24:50)

Avraham sends Eliezer to Aram Naharayim. He is to seek a wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer arrives at the town. He devises a test designed to measure

the charity and character of the women of the town. The young woman who will offer water to him and his camels will prove herself sensitive and kind. She is the appropriate wife for Yitzchak.

The moment Eliezer designs his test Rivka appears. She satisfies and surpasses the qualifications Eliezer seeks. Furthermore, she is a member of Avraham's extended family. Eliezer is invited to the home of Rivka's father Betuel. There, Eliezer requests that Rivka be given to Yitzchak as a wife.

Lavan and Betuel are idol worshippers. Furthermore, the Chumash later indicates that Rivka's family was not completely happy with the match. Yet, after hearing Eliezer's account they immediately agree to the marriage and acknowledge that Hashem made the match. How did Eliezer so impress Lavan and Betuel that they immediately acquiesced to the marriage and recognized the Almighty's involvement?

There is a useful hint contained in the Chumash. The Chumash relates in detail Eliezer's account, to Lavan and Betuel, of his experiences. The design of the test and the outcome are recounted completely. It is odd that the Chumash did not merely summarize Eliezer's remarks.

The Chumash is stressing that Eliezer retold the events exactly as they occurred. There was no embellishment. Lavan and Betuel were overwhelmed by these events. Despite their prejudices against giving up their sister, they agreed to deliver her immediately to Eliezer. The reaction of Lavan and Betuel provides eloquent evidence that Providence was at work. Even two idol worshippers could not deny that the Almighty influenced these events. They recognized that no other explanation could account for the immediate success achieved by Eliezer. □

The Patriarchs vs Their Children

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi's commentary on Gen, 24:42. "Rabbi Acha said, 'More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah (commands) of their children, as we find Eliezer's account (describing his encounter with Rebecca) doubled in the Torah, while many of the central commands of the Torah are only given by way of hints.'"

This is a truly perplexing statement, as we are all of the opinion that that which is most central in the Torah are God's words. How then can a servant's words, even a servant of Abraham, be more precious to God? Was not the Torah given for the sake of the commands?

How do we approach such a question?

The first step is to note what is being compared, as the quote of Rabbi Acha is one of comparison. We find that "speech" is compared to "Torah", and "servant" is compared to "Patriarchs' offspring". In both comparisons, what generates our questions is that the latter appears obviously more important: Speech does not outweigh Torah, and servants do not outweigh Israelites, (in the capacity that Israelites must keep the Torah as the world's teachers.)

I would suggest a central lesson is being taught by Rabbi Acha. He intends to draw our attention to God's estimation of personal character. He first teaches, that which the Torah repeats is done so for emphasis of its importance. Based on this rule, Eliezer's words must be more important than the Torah's commands. But how so?!

I believe the one difference between the Patriarchs and ourselves, is that they followed God out of an internal realization of God's truth, with no externally imposed system. Even the speech of the Patriarchs is replete with wisdom, and their attachment to God included no coercion. The Midrash says, "At Sinai, God held that mountain over

our heads commanding us in the Torah's observance, and if we refused this obligation, He would drop the mountain on us, and there would be our graves." This Midrash is of course metaphoric. But it teaches that the event of Sinai carried such clear proof of God's existence, that His commands were undeniably emanating from the Creator, one Who we would be foolish to ignore. Our acceptance of the yoke of Torah was in a manner, coerced.

Not so the Patriarchs. They all came to a knowledge and service of God on their own. This is much more precious to God. The Megilla read on Purim reads, "They arose and accepted that which they already accepted." This is referring to the Jews' re-acceptance of the Torah out of love, as opposed to their Sinaitic acceptance out of fear. Again, we are pointed to the concept that adherence has levels. Greater than one who is commanded, is one who arrives at the truth using his own mind. True, there is a statement of the Rabbis, "One commanded is greater than one who is not." But this does not mean 'greater' in every way. This latter Rabbinical statement, once elucidated by a Rabbi, means that when one is commanded, he has more to conquer and is greater. He must fight the additional desire to rebel against "obligations". Had one no obligation, and observed, he is great, but has not successfully conquered his rebellious instinct. But here we discuss only the sphere of "conquering his instinct". A totally different question, than our topic, "adherence to God".

"More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah of their children." This teaches that love supersedes fear. Our ultimate goal in life is "love of God", not fear of God - attachment to His knowledge, the true appreciation of the Source of all reality, attachment to Him. This is love of God. □

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 23:19.

[2] Mesechet Baba Metzia 87a. [3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 23:16.

[4] Mesechet Sanhedrin 65b. [5] Mesechet Chullin 95b.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 11:16.

[7] Rabbaynu Nissin ben Reuven (Ran), Chidushai HaRan, Mesechet Chullin 95b.

Following G-d "Perfectly"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah says in Deuteronomy 18:9, "When you come into the land which Hashem your G-d gives you, do not learn to do as the abominations of those (other) nations." The Torah lists idolatrous prohibitions; passing children in between pillars of fire (Molech), inquiring counsel from your staff (Kosame), fortune telling, witchcraft, consulting the dead and other practices. We understand that all these idolatrous practices are not based on truth and knowledge, and thus, are completely false. But this section concludes with a statement not found at the end of other sections of commandments, (18:13) "Perfect (tamim) shall you be with Hashem your G-d." My questions is: Why isn't this statement applied to other areas, i.e. kosher and non kosher animals, laws of robbery, court systems, or any other section? Why is the statement of "Perfect shall you be..." mentioned here? What does "perfect" mean?

We must say that only in the area of the idolatrous practices is one in violation of "perfect shall you be with Hashem your G-d". If one were to eat non kosher foods, he would not violate this command to be perfect. To what specific objective does "perfect" with G-d refer? Framing the question this way, we are forced to understand these "abominations".

Each of the mentioned idolatrous practices is an attempt - in some way - to procure information. In each case, there is an inquiry, or an attempt to secure oneself. A few examples will help to illustrate this point: Molech was a practice where a parent would pass his son or daughter through two flames - not burning the infant, according to at least one view. What was this objective? Let us consider: Fire is the one element which opposes all biological existence. In all elements, an organism may survive, except in fire. Passing the child through unharmed, the father imagines that just as the child is shielded from flames, so he is shielded from all other mishaps during his life. It makes sense that the parent/child relationship forms the prohibition, as the paternal or maternal

instinct is focused primarily on survival of their infant. The parent has a distorted notion that such action is fortuitous and actually "protects" the remainder of his child's existence. Kosame and Nichush were two practices which foretold the success or failure of future events or actions. So too was the practice of consulting the dead. The goal is to obtain knowledge of the 'other side', or of future events. One would usually attempt to consult a dead friend or relative. As there was nothing to be learned about someone with whom you were already intimate with, the interest in consulting the dead must serve some other need; knowledge of the future, or more specific, the inquirer's future. Obsession with the dead is an expression of one's own immortality fantasy.

What common thread runs through all these practices? The answer is "knowledge". In each of these violations, the inquirer seeks security through some imagined source of knowledge, via a warlock, an enchanter, or the dead. He assumes there is a source of knowledge out there - besides G-d. This is precisely where one removes himself from following G-d perfectly, or rather, "exclusively". To assume sources of knowledge other than G-d, is to not follow G-d "perfectly". It is a dilution of G-d's unique and exclusive position in reality. Therefore, the command to "be perfect with G-d", means in other words, "do not assume other causes for the universe's existence and operation".

The followers of these practices assume that aside from G-d, there are other means by which the universe operates. They feel some people have supernatural powers over events outside real laws of cause and effect. This of course is absurd. Their insecurities propel them to seek forecasts for their actions, so they need not think for themselves. Relying on another's advice removes their need to make decisions. This is the opposite of G-d's plan that man receive and engage the gift of intelligence. Similar to these idolatrous practitioners are present day Jews who check a mezuzah when

household members fall sick, or those who don red bendels, place keys in challas, use prayer books as protection, and those who ascribe powers to Rebbes, Mekubals and Kabbalists. I recently heard of a "Meir bal Hanase" practice where foolish individuals believe that by giving charity, you can locate a lost object. How ridiculous and damaging are such notions! What is "created", cannot oppose the "Creator". It is clear. Just as G-d set boundaries for the sea, "You set a boundary, they cannot overstep..." (Psalms, 104:9) so too, all creation follows the laws governing its matter and behavior. Just as parchment and ink mezuzas burn, so too they are static, and have no will, and cannot "do" anything.

All practices assuming forces aside from G-d control cause and effect, are idolatrous. It makes no difference if we see "religious" Jews practicing such foolishness, or if we even read about them under a Hebrew title, or authored by a Rabbi. What is the objective truth? That which G-d created and wrote in our Torah. He created and controls the universe, therefore, He alone determines reality. Not people, and not objects. The same mezuzah which will be consumed when exposed to flames, people foolishly think it to possess protective abilities. If mezuzas cannot protect themselves, how can they protect anything else?

G-d created everything. There is no other source of knowledge. G-d's knowledge alone defines the operation of the entire universe. Therefore, there cannot be anything which can alter our reality, other than G-d, the Sole Creator.

"Perfect shall you be with G-d" means we must not deviate from following Him alone. G-d, to the exclusion of anything else, is the only Cause. This makes sense: How can That which has ultimate power, coexist with anything else laying claim to His power? G-d's ultimate Kingship and power negates anything else from having any power whatsoever. This is so clear, it boggles the mind that there are such idolatrous practices within our fold.

Having shown that the term "perfect" (tamim) refers to man's requirement not to create sources of knowledge outside G-d, we have a question: In Genesis 17:1, regarding circumcision, G-d instructed Abraham to "walk before Me and be perfect". G-d uses the term "perfect". How does this fit in with our theory? I believe it is 'perfect'! The Ibn Ezra says the following commentary on this command to Abraham to "be perfect", "You should not ask why (to) perform circumcision." On the surface, Ibn Ezra defies all which he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How then can he verbalize such a statement? I don't believe Ibn Ezra is saying we should not use our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of divine decrees dependent on his own intelligence. Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to an erroneous notion that "only when I know the reasons will I perform, but not before". To this, Ibn Ezra teaches, "do not inquire why the circumcision" - "do not let your inquiry determine your acts". "Be perfect with G-d and don't render your intelligence superior to His" - this is what Ibn Ezra is teaching, and why the term "perfect" is also used here. In this case too, man can go so far as to think of himself as a source of knowledge outside of G-d...making his subjective knowledge supreme to the knowledge contained in G-d's divine commands. G-d says to Abraham, "be perfect" - follow me even when your mind does not grasp with complete understanding.

We see Abraham does follow this concept, as he did not second guess G-d when he was commanded to kill his son Isaac. A Rabbi once asked why Abraham inquired of G-d's decision to destroy Sodom, but not regarding Isaac's slaughter. The Rabbi suggested that Abraham realized he could learn about G-d's justice by asking. But regarding perfection via commands, Abraham felt he could not necessarily understand how a command would perfect him, although it did. He therefore did not ask about the killing Isaac - a divine command - but he did inquire about G-d's justice. □