

As my friend said so well,
"What type of god will punish a righteous man because he does not wear a red string, and will protect a wicked person because he does wear it?" The Red Bendel is all lies.



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Weekly Parsha

Yetzer Hara

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And he made a copper washbasin and its copper base from the mirrors of the women that came to pray at opening of the Mishcan.” (Shemot 38:8)

I remember first learning about the yetzer ha'rah and the yetzer ha'tov as a student in elementary school. We were

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RED BENDELS ARE AS JEWISH AS THE BUDDHA

TORAH TRUTHS MUST BE DEFENDED. DO NOT SUPPORT JUDAISM.COM AND ANY ORGANIZATION PROMOTING IDOLATROUS RED BENDELS

NOT A RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

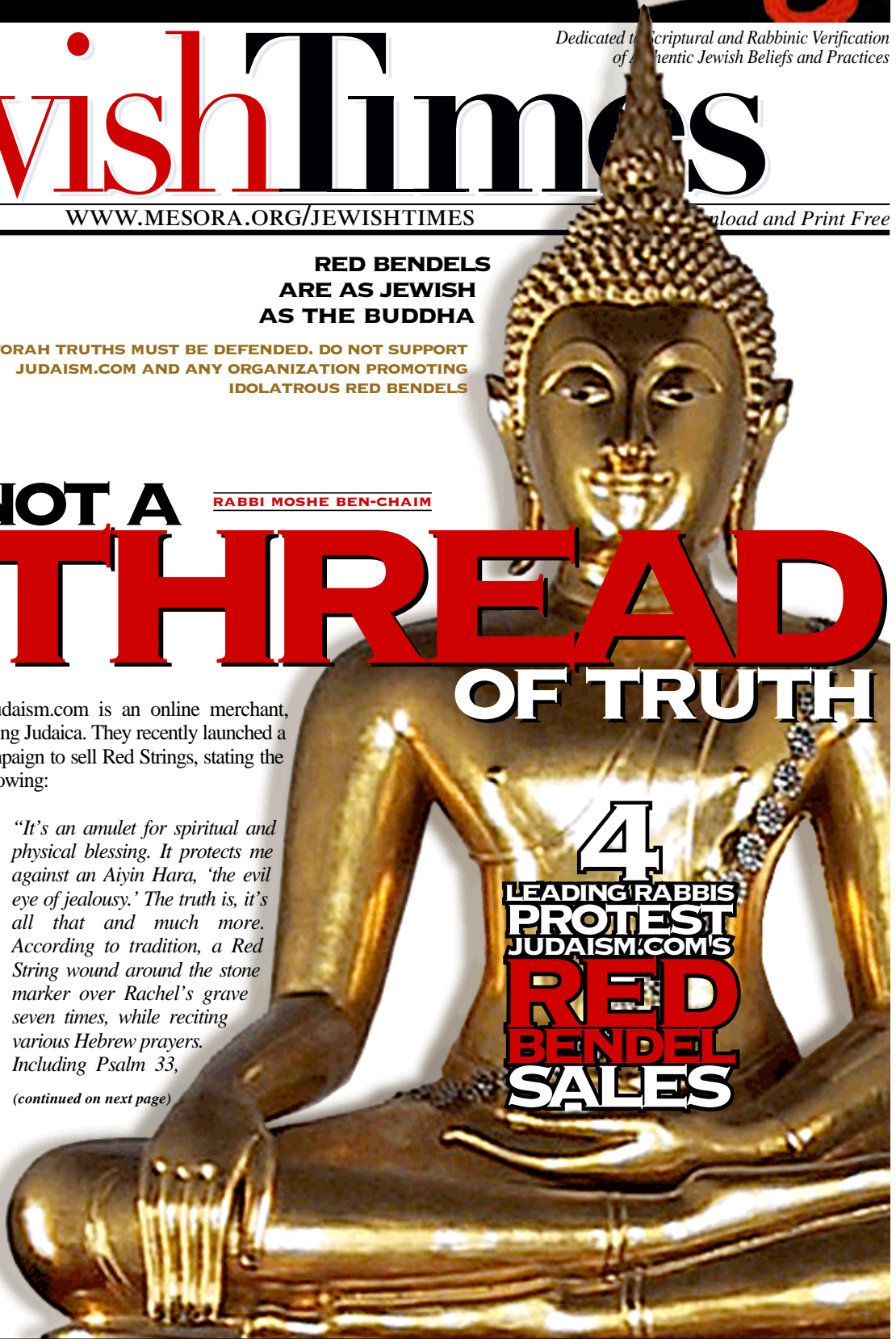
THREAD OF TRUTH

Judaism.com is an online merchant, selling Judaica. They recently launched a campaign to sell Red Strings, stating the following:

“It’s an amulet for spiritual and physical blessing. It protects me against an Aiyin Hara, ‘the evil eye of jealousy.’ The truth is, it’s all that and much more. According to tradition, a Red String wound around the stone marker over Rachel’s grave seven times, while reciting various Hebrew prayers. Including Psalm 33,

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4
LEADING RABBIS
PROTEST
JUDAISM.COM'S
RED
BENDEL
SALES



Idolatry

the mystical prayer Ana B'Koach and Asher Yatzar. The string is then cut into bracelet size lengths and is worn on the left hand as a symbolic request for spiritual and physical protection and blessings. No one actually knows how or exactly when the custom of wearing a Red String began. But we do know that every detail contains deep significance."

Judaism.com proliferates lies, misleading people to buy their products. They violate a Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath (Chap. 7) that states Red Strings are the ways of the Emorites. Despite this, they continue to be more interested in sales and deception, than in upholding Torah. They also admit they are ignorant of the source of the Red String, as they state, "No one actually knows how or exactly when the custom of wearing a Red String began." But Tosefta Sabbath does state its source: the idolatrous Emorites. Judaism.com does not wish to abandon the sales of something, which they admit they are ignorant of, and of which, the Rabbis of our Talmud identify as a Heathen practice. Statements of the Rabbis must be adhered to over admitted ignorance of current day peddlers.

Judaism.com also promotes a video, which says the following:

"We are looking to be protected from forces beyond our control. The Red string has been infused with mystical, Kabbalistic powers at the tomb of Rachel. It promises the protection of the Evil Eye. Judaism.com wants to reclaim this Red String as Jewish tradition. This Red String becomes blessed with special authentic and proven qualities; to remove pain, the Evil Eye, to bless children who will live on, and afford easier pregnancies. We pray that this string may be a protection for us."

In light of these misrepresentations of true Judaism, a number of Rabbis and Torah educators have spoken out against Judaism.com's practices. I thank these individuals for true Torah leadership:

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Rabbi, Rinat Yisrael, Plainview, N.Y.

Founder, Masoret Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, Inwood, NY

"Judaism is based on emulating the ways of Hashem that He has revealed to us. The Torah refers to G-d as, "abundant in compassion and truth." Those who seek to spread Judaism must be scrupulously truthful and compassionate. We therefore may not mislead people and take advantage of them by exploiting their fears and insecurities. The idea that a "Red Bendel" or any other religious object affords protections is contrary

to Torah, which teaches that Hashem is Absolutely Just and is "close to all who call upon him in truth." (Ashrei Prayer) Thus, it is clear that our well-being is not based on the imaginary powers of objects, but on achieving Divine favor through good deeds and sincere prayer.

All religious leaders should seek to emulate G-d's Ways of truth and justice. We must dissuade people from projecting magical powers on to objects, for this is the path of idolatry. We should encourage them to improve their ways and put all their trust in Hashem, to Whom, alone, they should direct their fervent prayers at all times."

Rabbi Saul Zucker

Founder and Rosh Yeshiva

Mesivta of North Jersey, Newark, NJ

"Since the wondrous day of the Revelation at Sinai, where the Jewish people were given the Torah reflecting the unbounded wisdom of the Creator, we have been given the mission of involvement in and appreciation of that wisdom. Attraction to fads, incantations, and seeming "shortcuts" to a life of meaning and depth are antithetical to the Torah way of life. The advent of wearing a Red String to ward off evil forces and influences can be traced to various pagan societies as evidenced by articles in any encyclopedia of superstition, and is prohibited by the Torah as reflected in Tosefta Shabbos 7:1. I myself have heard from Rabbi Herschel Schachter, Rosh Yeshiva at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, that wearing such strings constitutes a Torah violation.

My brothers and sisters of Israel, people created with the divine mission to live and learn Torah -- the Torah itself, as reflected in the Bible and in the Talmud and commentaries is everything that we need to live a life of truth. Let us enjoy the majesty and nobility of the depth of Torah, and not turn to illusions."

Rabbi Zev Meir Friedman

Founder and Rosh Yeshiva

Rambam Mesivta

Lawrence, NY

"Belief in the Red Bendel as a protective device is idolatrous. God is the only source of protection. Divine Providence emanates from Him alone. Placing trust in or attributing powers to physical objects is repugnant and rejected wholeheartedly by Judaism. It is a shame that there are so many charlatans who are feeding on the misfortunes of others by 'selling these so called protective devices'. Desperate people who face real life difficulties are

(continued on next page)

(Red Bendels continued from page 1)

Idolatry

compounding their troubles both practically and philosophically by failing to put their trust in the Almighty. It is precisely during these difficult times that we are put to the test to see if we will reject false but attractive quick fixes like the colored piece of wool. Those who succeed in doing so and embrace Hashem will be rewarded."

Rabbi Steven Pruzansky

Congregation Bnai Yeshurun
Teaneck, New Jersey

"Dear Sir:

I was distressed to view on your web-site "Judaism.com" something for sale called "the authentic red string". On one level, we would have wished that modern man had progressed beyond the stage of belief in the magical powers of icons and amulets. But on a deeper level, it is extremely distasteful that such a borderline-idolatrous object should be offered for sale on what purports to be a Jewish web site - alongside traditional objects like challah boards and kiddush cups.

I assume you are unaware that these red strings constitute the very antithesis of Judaism and all that we stand for. We believe in the power of God alone, and have willingly martyred ourselves in sanctification of His name and in defense of that sublime notion of one, all-powerful, incorporeal God.

These red strings are a Jewish as the cross, and I would respectfully urge you to immediately remove them from your site, with an explanatory note as to the reason for their removal. And may together we bring the light of Torah to the world.

Very truly yours,
Rabbi Steven Pruzansky"

*If red thread cannot
protect itself, and will
burn like all else,
how can it protect
anything else?*

The following are my unheeded letters to Judaism.com:

"Dear Judaism.com,

Although featuring Jews, your 'Red String Movie' and Red String sales violate Talmud Shabbos, Tosefta, Chapter 7: "Red Strings are the way of the Emorites" and are prohibited by Torah. Please remove this idolatrous film from your site and cease your sale of Red Strings. God alone protects the Jew: Someone righteous will not be harmed if he does not wear these Red Strings, and a wicked person will not be saved if he does. Red Strings are foolish and prohibited.

I thank you in advance for acting in line with true, Torah principles. I will look forward to seeing your immediate removal of this Heathen, idolatrous practice from your website."

(After a week, and clearly identifying the source declaring the Red String as idolatrous, Judaism.com has not removed their Torah violation...I wrote again)

"Many others seek to learn the truth of Torah, while you are perpetuating a fraudulent Judaism, only for the sake of making sales. I see you are not interested in reading this source, for yourself. Had you already read it, you would have removed your red strings. If you are an observant Jew, or a thinking individual who knows that God need not contend with red strings when rewarding or punishing, you would admit the following: a righteous person earns reward without the red string, and a Rasha will be punished, even if he does were this twined, dyed object. Study the Rishonim, see Rambam's 13 Principles and Hilchos Avodah Zarah. Also understand that deceiving others, in the name of Torah, is of the worst sins.

This Red String is prohibited, period. It matters none if you wrapped this string around Rachel herself. Such ideas are idolatrous. If you decide to keep this violation on your website, that is your decision. But note our position: to protect others from false notions that violate open Tosefta's Shabbos. We will take all actions to make certain no one is misled by your deception. If however you remove it, we will have nothing but praise for your commitment to Judaism.

Additionally, now that you know of this Tosefta, you are bound to teach others of your mistake, in posted and prominent words, replacing the Red String on your website. Teach your brother Jews of the Torah truths. That is a real "Torah obligation", in stark contrast to foolish Red String sales. If you do not inform your website visitors of this Tosefta, then you desire to keep them blind to an open Tosefta of Gemara Shabbos.

One final thought: Judaism's Fundamentals - the Yesodos of Yahadus - are at the core of Jewish belief, and are more essential than all other considerations in our short lives.

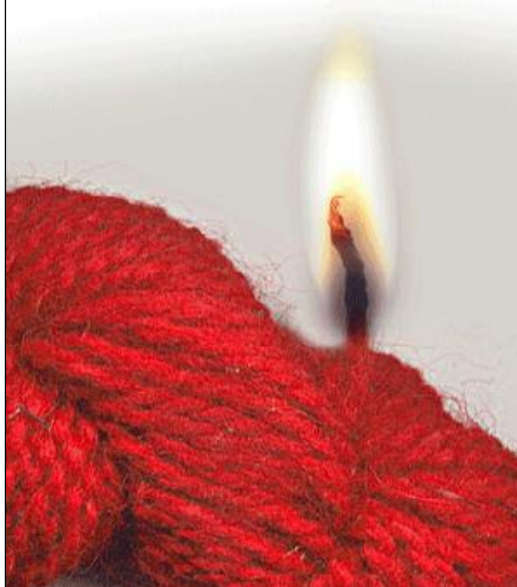
These include a firm conviction in God's exclusive responsibility for each individual's fate. For this reason, all forms of charms, idols, and worship attributing ANY responsibility for fortune or mishap to anything but God, are strictly prohibited. One's idea of God is completely wrong; when he feels other forces protect him. In such a case, God is no longer the ONLY force. It makes no difference how many Jews are misled by this Emorite practice of wearing red strings. The Rishonim were completely against this. Their opinion must outweigh the fools of today. They were the wise ones. They possessed the correct, proven position of Toras Moshe.

Furthermore, no one wearing a thread is protected from a drunken driver, and no one who refrains from donning such foolish devices is more open to danger. Reason proves this, and Torah is synonymous with reason. Conversely, ask these Red String promoters for "proof" of the success of this bendel, and they come up dry. No doctor would suggest wearing a Red String if a woman was infertile, or if a man had cancer. He would in fact laugh at such a practice, as it violates reason. Maimonides was a doctor, and he did not treat people with red bendels, but with surgery and medicine.

Both, Torah and reason refute the validity of dyed threads affecting our reality, or altering God's wishes for us. God alone is the source of our fortune, and this concept is so primary, that we all must protect it.

I express this to you so you understand our strong position against your sale of these ancient, idolatrous heathen amulets, adopted by foolish Jews.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim" ■



*Image at right:
Mirror of Queen
Ahhotep, 18th Dynasty,
1550-1525 B.C.,
precisley when the Jews
were forced into Egypt's
bondage, the very period
that the Jewish women
lured their husbands
with their mirrors.*

*The Jewish women may
have even used this
Egyptian design.*

told that the yetzer ha'rah is constantly urging us to do bad things. But the yetzer ha'tov gives us the proper guidance. It directs us to do good things and battles the evil council of the yetzer ha'rah. I remember the image evoked by this lesson. I imagined two little angels – one perched on each of my shoulders. The angel on one shoulder – the yetzer ha'rah – whispers evil council into my ear, while the other angel situated on the other shoulder – the yetzer ha'tov – advises me to ignore the tempting suggestion of its adversary. Of course, I do not attribute this simplistic characterization to my teachers – probably my first and second grade rabbayim. Instead, this was the manner in which I – the immature – student interpreted and adapted the sophisticated ideas that were beyond my immature level of understanding.

As I grew older I decided that this imagery – indeed my fundamental understanding of the yetzer ha'rah and the yetzer ha'tov – needed some reworking. I became disillusioned with this simplistic characterization on many levels. On the most basic level, I came to realize that the yetzer ha'rah and the yetzer ha'tov seemed to conform to forces with which I had some familiarity. These two terms seemed to accurately describe the battle I often experienced between urges that I identified as less than wholesome and my better judgment which recognized the folly in following these urges. So, although there was some attraction in clinging to the belief that there was some real internal me that acted as an arbitrator between these two external forces, I realized that in reality these forces were intimate elements of my internal nature.

On a more intellectual level, I was uncomfortable with the idea that Hashem had created some evil force whose sole purpose was to mislead and corrupt innocent individuals. So, the idea of a purely evil yetzer ha'rah was somewhat disturbing.

So, what is the yetzer ha'rah? Can it be a purely evil force? Does Hashem create in each of us an inclination to perform evil? How can such a concept be reconciled with the Torah's concept of a perfectly benevolent Creator who does no evil? An important insight into this issue is contained in this week's parasha.

Our parasha describes the actual fabrication and construction of the Mishcan. Each component is briefly describes and its place within the overall structure of the Mishcan is defined. In the above pasuk, the Torah discusses the washbasin which was located in the courtyard of the Mishcan and used by the Kohanim to wash their hands and feet prior to performing their service in the Mishcan. The pasuk tells us that this washbasin and its stand were manufactured from the mirrors of the women that would congregate to pray at the opening of the Mishcan.

Rashi comments that Moshe was reluctant to accept this contribution. What was Moshe's objection? In order to appreciate his objection, we



must begin with a simple question. For what purpose are mirrors used? We look in mirrors to study our appearance. Mirrors are a tool that we use in order to indulge personal vanity. Vanity is an expression of the yetzer ha'rah. So, mirrors are one of the tools of the yetzer ha'rah. Moshe was concerned with this association between mirrors and the yetzer ha'rah. The Mishcan was designed for the service of Hashem. So, he concluded that it was inappropriate to build an element of the Mishcan from a material associated with the yetzer ha'rah.

Moshe's reasoning seems sound. But apparently Moshe was wrong. Hashem instructed Moshe to reverse his decision. Why did Hashem want this donation to be accepted? What was Moshe's error?

Rashi explains that one of the reasons the Egyptians afflicted Bnai Yisrael with intense physical labor was to slow down the population growth. Paroh wanted to work the men to the point of exhaustion. He reasoned that this would undermine relations between man and wife. The women defeated Paroh's plan. They would travel out to the men. They would bring food. And they brought their mirrors. Man and wife would share a meal. Then the wife would hold her mirror in front of herself and her husband. Jokingly the wife would brag of her greater beauty. A relaxed banter would develop. The rigor of the work would be temporarily forgotten. Marital life was maintained.[1]

On a superficial level, the comments of Rashi are difficult to understand. Moshe argues that these mirrors were the tool of the yetzer ha'rah. On this basis, he rejected them for use in the fabrication of an element of the Mishcan. Hashem responded by pointing out that the mirrors had been used for a

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positive end and for this reason they should be included in the materials for the Mishcan. But if this is the meaning of Rashi's comments, then Moshe actually seems to be fully justified in his objection. It is true that in an isolated instance the mirrors were used for a positive end. But this does not refute Moshe's objection. Surely, Moshe was aware of this incident in which the mirrors had been used for a positive purpose. But Moshe's objection was that this isolated instance does not compensate for the overall nature of the mirrors. Despite this single instance in which the mirrors had served a positive end, their overall nature is clear and unchanged. They are a tool of the yetzer ha'rah! How can a single instance of this tool being employed for a positive end compensate for its overall nature?

But before we consider an alternative interpretation of Rashi's comments let us study another pasuk.

“And you should love Hashem your G-d with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your resources.” (Devarim 6:5)

This familiar pasuk is recited each day as part of the Shema. It instructs us in the commandment to love Hashem. It explains that this love must be all encompassing. It must reflect the feeling of our hearts, our souls and that all of our resources must be made available for the expression of our love of Hashem. The Mishna explains that the phrase “all of you heart” means with both the yetzer ha'tov and the yetzer ha'rah.[2] We can readily understand that we must love Hashem with our yetzer ha'tov. But the amazing element of this comment of the Sages is that we can and must love Hashem with our yetzer ha'rah! How does one do this?

Maimonides discusses this issue at length. The general message of Maimonides is that a person a person should serve Hashem in all of one's actions. He makes two points. First, he explains that ideally, a person should not eat in order to indulge desires. Instead, a person should eat in order to give oneself the strength to serve Hashem. Second, he explains the comments of the Talmud in Tractate Shabbat. The Talmud comments that a Torah scholar should seek to secure a pleasant marital life, a pleasant home, and pleasant clothing – for these elements of life aid the scholar in his studies.[3] According to Maimonides, a person is influenced by one's environment. This environment can either encourage a positive attitude or foster depression. A scholar will be most successful in his studies if his attitude and general outlook is positive. Therefore, the scholar should seek to secure a positive environment.

According to Maimonides, this is the meaning of serving Hashem with our yetzer ha'rah. We all have physical needs and material desires. In satisfying our physical needs we should set as our objective the service of Hashem. We should also not neglect our

material desires. When these desires are addressed in a measured and realistic manner, we can achieve a state of internal peace that is essential in the study of Torah. When we neglect these desires, we encumber our efforts with frustration and depression.[4]

Apparently, Maimonides defines the yetzer ha'rah as our physical and material desires and urges. According to his interpretation, we do not actually directly serve Hashem with our yetzer ha'rah. But we must consider and develop an accommodation with our yetzer ha'rah in order to serve Hashem fully. We cannot overindulge our yetzer ha'rah and neither can we ignore it. Instead, complete service of Hashem requires a balanced accommodation of human nature. Without this accommodation our service will be compromised.

In Maimonides' approach, the yetzer ha'rah is neither evil nor good. It is an element of basic human existence. We are physical, material creatures. Therefore, we are subject to desires that stem from this element of our nature. If we respond to these desires properly, the results will be positive. If we do not respond properly the outcome will be evil.

Now, let us return to Rashi's comments regarding the mirrors used for the washbasin. If we adopt Maimonides' approach to understanding the yetzer ha'rah, Rashi's comments can be readily understood. Moshe rejected the mirrors because they represented the yetzer ha'rah. But let us reconsider Hashem's refutation of Moshe's argument. Perhaps, the point that Hashem made to Moshe was that even though the mirrors represent the yetzer ha'rah, this does not disqualify them for use in the Mishcan. The yetzer ha'rah is neither evil nor good. The women of Bnai Yisrael used these mirrors in order to attract the attention of their husbands and to brighten their mood. They were evoking and appealing to the physical desires of their husbands. But they were not interested in awakening these desires simply as an expression of lust. Instead, their goal was to assure the future of Bnai Yisrael.

In summary, the yetzer ha'rah is neither good nor evil. If it is indulged as an end unto itself, it leads us away from Hashem. We are also diverted from the service of Hashem if we neglect the yetzer ha'rah. But if we respond to the urges of the yetzer ha'rah, we will be empowered to more fully serve Hashem. In addition, as Rashi points out, the yetzer ha'rah can even act as an ally in serving Hashem. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 38:8.

[2] Mesechet Berachot 9:5.

[3] Mesechet Shabbat 25b, Mesechet Berachot 57b.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Introduction to Mesechet Avot, chapter 5.

Letters

FAITH VS PROOF

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Gil: In your essay you quote the introduction to Hovos Ha-Levavos by R. Bahya ben Yosef Ibn Pakuda. You rightly note that he says that it is an obligation for anyone intellectually capable to prove our tradition (p. 9 in the Feldheim/Qafih edition). However, he is also clear that those who are not intellectually capable, I would argue the vast majority of Jews, are not obligated to prove it and can be satisfied with tradition and faith. Even Rabbeinu Bahya, one of the earliest and most important rationalist philosophers, only requires the intellectual elite to go beyond faith.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You just agreed that conviction does surpass faith.

Gil: A similar but crucially more moderate view is offered by the anonymous Sefer Ha-Hinukh. On the first mitzvah of Parashas Yisro, the mitzvah to believe in God, the Hinukh writes "And if he merits rising in wisdom, and his heart will understand and his eyes will see proofs that this faith in which he believed is true, clear, and necessary then he will fulfill this mitzvah in an extra fashion (mitzvah min ha-muvhar)." According to the Hinukh, proving faith is only a mitzvah min ha-muvhar. It is not an obligation.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Again you support the view that conviction surpasses faith.

Gil: However, rationalist philosophers are not the only source of our tradition. In your essay, you quote R. Yehudah Ha-Levi in his Kuzari as advocating that tradition must be proven. In this I believe you are mistaken. Indeed, a theme throughout the Kuzari is that faith is greater than proven belief. Consider the end of 2:26 (p. 68 in the Even Shmuel edition): "I say, 'It is God's Torah and whoever accepts it simply, without questioning and investigation, is greater than the investigator and critic. However, whoever has deviated from this high level to investigate, it is good that he search for reasons for these things...'"

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: An "investigator and critic" means one who accepts Torah is better off than one who is a Torah critic. But he goes on to say, "it is good that he search for reasons for these things". Thus, reasoning is a good.

Gil: In 4:27 (p. 189), R. Ha-Levi explains that once Avraham Avinu was taught the truth he abandoned all of his philosophizing and scientific investigations. Once one has been taught the truth, it is unnecessary to search for it. See also 5:1-2 (p. 195) where R. Ha-Levi makes it unequivocally clear that faith is greater than proven knowledge.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You misunderstand what you read. Abraham was wise to abandon speculation in place of proof, which he found. Once someone sees a proof, he needs no further philosophizing. Additionally, why did Moses remind the people "lest you forget what your eyes

saw" referring to Sinai? Moses too relied on proof. What better "proof" do you need that conviction surpasses all else, than Moses' words here? Do you not see this yourself in your own mind? Furthermore, why did God create Revelation at Sinai, were it not that He desired a proof for man, in place of faith?

Also, I fail to see where Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi says faith surpasses proof. You certainly have not displayed that here.

Gil: The Kuzari alone is sufficient to justify those who prefer simple faith over proven knowledge. R. Yehudah Ha-Levi, the anti-philosophy philosopher, is certainly one on whom people can rely for their hashkafos. It is no surprise that his Kuzari is so popular in contemporary Yeshiva circles and that it has been translated into English a number of times, even by Metsudah!

In addition to the Kuzari, the Rivash writes in his famous anti-philosophy teshuvah (45), "They [the Greek philosophers] also wrote in their books that perfect knowledge is attainable only through investigation, not through tradition. But we have received the truth that our Torah, which came to us at Sinai from the mouth of God, through the intermediation of the master of [all] the prophets, is perfect. It is superior to everything and all their investigations are null and void compared to it."

To the Rivash, philosophical investigation is unnecessary when we have a tradition. The investigations are null and void compared to tradition.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You disprove yourself again. The Rivash relies on Sinai...and for what reason? Because from here he derived a "proof".

I would add that in his laws of the Torah Fundamentals, (1:7,8) Maimonides first proves God through scientific proof, and only then does he cite Torah verses. His position is that rational investigation is credible. Additionally, when he described the manner of attaining love of God (ibid, 2:2), he does not even mention Torah as a means, but simply, the study of the universe. This type of study is based on reasoning, not tradition. Thus, Maimonides' view here is that rational conviction is the optimum.

Gil: R. Hayim Yair Bakhrakh writes in his Havos Ya'ir (214), "faith is good and obligatory and investigation is an abomination (to'evah)." The context of that statement demonstrates its relevance to our discussion. See below for his understanding of the Rambam.

You also quote the Ramban as supporting your view. However, your citation does not prove that at all. Indeed, R. David Berger has suggested the exact opposite. In the book "Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures" (R. Jacob Schacter, ed.) p. 99,

(continued on next page)

*If faith is truly superior
than proof to Gil, what
need does he have to
constantly quote sources?
Is he trying to
"prove" their existence
to me?*

*If so, why differ when it
comes to God's existence?
Here too, Gil should seek
proof, not faith.*

*Thus, his methods
contradict his theory.*

R. Berger notes that the Ramban in his Sha'ar Ha-Gemul (Kisvei Ha-Ramban vol. II p. 281) states that every Jew is obligated to investigate suffering in this world and to try to understand how God rewards and punishes. This, however, is due to the obligation of tziduk ha-din, which is a theme throughout Sha'ar HaGemul. Absent this obligation, evidently, there is no need to investigate our beliefs.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Simply because you fail to locate other statements, you feel the one where Maimonides says to 'investigate' means that only "here" one should do so? This is not rational thinking.

Gil: As R. Berger wrote, "[T]he revelation of Torah is an empirical datum par excellence; consequently, there is no more point in constructing proofs for doctrines explicitly taught in the revelation than for the proposition that the sun rises in the morning."

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I disagree; discovery of proofs create a greater appreciation for how God constructed His universe, and His Torah.

Gil: Even your understanding of Rambam, the greatest Jewish rationalist, is not unassailable. It is well known that while the Rambam wrote in a number of places that it is a mitzvah to "know" God, in his Sefer Ha-Mitzvos he wrote that it is a mitzvah to "believe" in God. R. Hayim Heller challenged that translation as ambiguous and R. Yosef Qafih has stated that it is incorrect and that the only proper rendition of the Rambam's Arabic in Sefer Ha-Mitzvos is that it is a mitzvah to "know" God.

However, in his Al Ha-Teshuvah (pp. 195-201), R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik investigates what it means to "know" God. As he points out, it is impossible to know God. Rather, the Rambam means that we are obligated to constantly recognize God's existence. As it says in Mishlei (3:6), "In all your ways know Him." Cf. Rabbeinu Yonah's commentary to Mishlei, ad loc.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Agreed, we cannot know "God", but rather, His creations and actions. Moses too could not know God's nature.

Gil: R. Hayim Yair Bakhrakh, author of Havos Ya'ir, has a different explanation of the Rambam's view in one of his teshuvos. In teshuvah 210, he argues that according to the Rambam the best and clearest faith is that which has been philosophically proven. However, unproven faith is also sufficient. This is, unsurprisingly, in accordance with what the Hinukh says. It is very common for the Hinukh to follow the Rambam's view and even quote him verbatim.

In line with the above, it is interesting to note

how Radak explains knowledge of God in his commentary to Yirmiyahu (9:23). As a rationalist, Radak translates "haskel" as philosophically understanding God. "Yado'a osi" does not mean the same. Rather, knowledge of God means following in God's ways -- doing acts of hesed and tzedakah.

In summary, it is not only overkill to accuse those who disagree with your rationalism of foolishness. It is wrong. Those who prefer faith to proof have ample basis within Jewish sources. Indeed, they have Habakuk (2:4) on whom to rely.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I disagree with your read of Habakuk. However, if you ask what one should do when faced with the dilemma of faith in God, or nothing, I would say there is a third possibility: proof. I would at first introduce proofs. If the person could not grasp them, I would not abandon a sustained attempt at teaching these proofs. I would say that if he claimed to have faith in God's existence, I would pursue that avenue, asking, "What gives you this faith?" Eventually, he would state that other Jews share this faith, for without independent proof from his own mind, he received his faith from others. (There is no other possible means by which he arrived at a faith.) I would then ask him why he feels this to be valid. We would most certainly eventuate at the history of the Jews, and ultimately, Revelation at Sinai. Finally, possessing no method of refuting Sinai, he would be forced, by reason, to admit of its truth. His faith would be replaced rather quickly by conviction.

Which one is better; faith or proof? Only proof affords one a 'perception' of what is real, faith does not. Faith requires no thinking; whereas proof is based on actual perceptions, and reasoning about how the universe exists and operates. We only arrive at perceptions of God's truth, when we engage reason. Otherwise, our "belief" in God need not be bound by any principle or structure. With faith, one may live in fantasy, whereas the realization of God is synonymous with the realization of truth.

No 'thinking' individual, by definition, will suggest simple faith as better than reason. And no 'faithful' person has the capacity to reason, and therefore, he cannot argue his position as better. Also, the two cannot engage in dialogue, as the faithful person bereft of intelligence will not apprehend the rationalist's views.

Herein, you were tactful not to offer any 'reasoning' for your position, as that would have been your contradiction. You simply quoted sources. But allow one final question: "Why shall I accept your sources?" Here is my checkmate to you: if you don't answer, you lose. If you do answer, you succumb to using "reason", thereby abandoning your 'faith'. Either way, "reason" wins. ■

Anti-Christian?

Reader: I came to <http://www.mesora.org> because I have to give a 45-minute presentation on Judaism at a local hospital. For the purposes of my lecture, I wanted to be very practical and did not want to use reference materials. I found your site through a link on the US Navy web page. Since I teach university courses related to world religions, cultural anthropology and the like, I research Judaism on a regular basis. Also, I studied Hebrew at Congregation Ohev Shalom with Rabbi Adler in the late 1970s. Later, I studied under a renowned Hebrew language scholar at Emory University who translated sections of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Recently, I attended a series of lectures from the "biblical" archeologist who discovered the silver scrolls that contain the Aaronic blessing. The text dates to the first Temple period. The implications are very exciting for those of us who are looking for reasons not to be minimalists! Finally, I was very happy when my brother and his family converted to Judaism 10 years ago. In fact, my sister-in-law edits the Jewish Newspaper for her region. As such, I should not be considered hostile to Judaism. I consider myself to be a friend of Jewry and contend with all colleagues who advocate a pro-Palestinian position.

However, I am quite disturbed by the arrogance and blatant hostility that I discovered on your site. Quite frankly, I am offended that you go out of your way to insult Christian believers. Surely, the Jewish Defense League and other Jewish organizations would not want others to do the same to Jewish believers. The Jewish people need friends if they are to survive in the modern world. In your listed links, I did not read any articles on Islam or Buddhism. Islam considers itself to be an Abrahamic religion and has a great deal to say about Judaism and its prophets. Everyone knows that many Jews actively combine (syncretism) their faith with aspects of other religions and New Age spirituality. Why not confront that? It is commonly stated that you can be a Jew and anything else except a Jewish Christian. Christianity is not your enemy. Atheism and secularism are. Ironically, most Jews have been strong advocates of the secular state and promoted it for obvious reasons. In due time, they have fallen victims to its seduction and have ceased to be observant. Marx, Freud, and Boaz are prime examples.

Interestingly, secularism is becoming a spent force in the West. Many post-modern Americans are searching for G-d and authentic spirituality.

Even though they have Christian ancestors, most are not committed to a historical faith or a set of dogmas. As you know, many are turning to Judaism and alternative religions. Secularism has leveled the playing field in the West and no religion has a home field advantage. If you believe that G-d intended Judaism to be a universal faith and that the Creator wants the nations to conform to His will and that Judaism has a global message to share with all peoples (e.g., Psalm 96 or Exodus 19), you should find a positive way to tell your story. Attacking Christians only serves to make potential converts and Jewish sympathizers hostile to you and your religion.

I am not a theologian, but I could easily dismantle most of the diatribes that you hurled at Jesus and Christianity. You are not convincing. In your material, you have not tried to be objective, engaged in critical thinking or taken the counterpoint seriously. (It is clear that you hate Christianity and Christian missionaries.) Rather, you have written with a venom that causes others to respond with anger. Your material does not reflect well on you or on modern Judaism. In fact, your material is so inflammatory that it violates certain laws related to hate language. You do not speak for Judaism and you are not in the mainstream of American religious thought.

Sincerely,

Bill Payne, Ph.D.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Bill, I understand that when I write against Christianity (not against Christians as you will see in my articles) that certain Christians will feel "attacked". That is not my intent, and I make this clear. I have no "hate" towards Christians, or any other group. Just this week, I asked my Christian friend how his search for a kidney donor is going, and if I could announce his need on my Mesora website to excel his search.

You also will find that your assumption that I write against Christianity alone is false. See this week's issue of the JewishTimes where a number of Rabbis joined me in condemning Judaism.com – a Jewish organization that is in violation of our Torah prohibition of idolatry through selling charm bracelets. We speak out just as loud towards Jews. See our site for articles, which unveil the fallacies in Islam, in Buddhism, and in Jewish groups. Our JewishTimes issue #146 addresses this. Please also see our JewishTimes (#149 and #150), and read them cover to cover: <http://www.mesora.org/jewishtimes>

I have made it sufficiently clear in my articles that as Jews, we owe it to other religions not to conceal arguments against your views simply to

gain your support, or keep relations "friendly". Rather, we must be honest and openly educate you on God's words, which we received at Sinai. He desires the good for all peoples, and desires that all follow His one 'book'. He desires the Jew to transmit His Bible to the world, explaining its reasoning. Jews are no better than Gentiles, and our concern for the Gentile is expressed equally to our concern for our own: that is through education with no mitigating factors.

If someone seeks the truth, he will be obligated to speak out, and I do this. If someone as yourself has an argument against something that I write, I wish to hear your points. If they are valid, I will certainly retract anything proven to be incorrect. I have done so before.

Anti-Christianity

Reader: Finally, a rabbi that has the courage and wisdom to announce that Christianity and Jesus worship are idolatry. I'm converting from Catholicism after years of discomfort over that very issue, and this is the first time I've seen a rabbi admit what everyone else (at least in the Conservative movement) wants to gloss over: We are not like the rest of the world - we do not have the option of cozying up to the pagan gods and idols of the goyim - Hashem has called us to serve Him. Yes, we can have goy friends, but we are not to take on their practices and ways. That was the whole point of taking us out of Egypt. Please tell this loudly and forcefully to our fellow Jews.

Abrahamic Genes?

Reader: I would like to ask you a question that I am having a problem with. In the Guide, it seems that the Rambam feels that an individual is born and learns the difference between good and bad from his environment. Granted, I believe that he would hold that even in the womb a child begins his learning. This is much like Immanuel Kant's philosophy. However, in his laws of "Gifts of the Poor", the Rambam states something extremely perplexing. The Rambam here states regarding one who is not charitable, that we may suspect his lineage (that he may not be of Abraham's descent).

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I don't understand how he could have made this statement. How can a good trait be based on genes? I understand that one who gives charity is 'like' Avraham, but surely there are others in this world that are large on charity and have no connection to Avraham (understanding that Avraham does not equal just Judaism). It would have sufficed to state what he stated in the beginning of the halacha (that one who gives charity is from the seed of Avraham). In this case I would be forced to say that 'seed' could mean 'likeness to'. But he continued and stated what we stated before. Furthermore, it would be safe to assume that one who is charitable; we may suspect his lineage of being from Abraham's descendents. I have a serious problem with this statement, as I understand it currently. What are your thoughts?

Regards,
Pinchas Mizrachi

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Pinchas, the safest answer is the one, which assumes the least. Here, I suggest that one of "Abraham's lineage" means one who adheres to Abraham's 'ways'. One, who shares a lineage, also identifies with the founder, with Abraham. I don't think it rational to suggest there is a gene in Jews, which creates more charitable feelings. Nor do I suggest there is a gene in others, which makes them more hostile. Rather, a culture's continued adherence to a system will foster certain beliefs, identifications and even character traits amongst its adherents. This shared ideology and character is that, to what Rambam refers.

God, or Nature?

Reader: Thank you very much for replying to my e-mails. I have another question, if I may? I can't seem to understand the position of the Rambam specifically regarding the tsunami. It seems that in the piece of the Moreh that you quoted, he states:

"This evil may be part of the natural constitution of these persons, or may have developed subsequently in consequence of changes in the elements, e.g., through bad air, or thunderstorms or landslips."

I find it easier to think along these lines while looking from the outside in (myself not affected physically by the tsunami). However, placing myself in a position whereby I was, G-d forbid,

affected it now becomes much more difficult to understand. In the chapter on fast days the Rambam states in chapter 1,2-3 what seems to me the opposite. Here every individual must pray and repent for any trouble and must not say that it is "the way of the world" and "that their trouble is a matter of pure chance". This thinking will only increase their troubles. "If, when I bring this trouble on you in order for you to repent, and you say that the trouble is accidental, then I will add to your trouble the fury appropriate to such an 'accident'!"

How can I better understand these rather conflicting opinions? On the one hand science has it that nature shall act adversely in situations such as this (being that the earth is composed of these elements). But on the other hand, it is quite clear that anyone affected must understand that it was a punishment to him/her "as a consequence of his own evil deeds" (1,2).

Help! I'm perplexed...

Warm Regards,
Pinchas Mizrachi

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: As a Rabbi once taught, when God delivers tragedy (drought or wild beasts) or he delivers sufferings to the Jews as an 'entire nation', then it these three instances alone, we must address such cases as true punishments from God. This is a Torah obligation, as Maimonides states in 1:1 of his Laws of Taanis (Fasting). Thus, if it is a "Torah" obligation, then it only applies to those bound by Torah, i.e., Jews. Therefore, regarding tsunamis, which do not affect the Jewish nation, we are not at liberty to claim such acts as "acts of God." The question would then be why God operates in this manner; where Jewish tragedies must be interpreted as God's will, in contrast to other devastations which do not demand such interpretation.

Keruvim: Innocence or Instinct?

Reader: Dear Rabbi, You wrote:

"What is an infant? How is it distinguished? I believe cherubs are to embody man who is not yet distorted; he does not yet follow the instinctual, primitive

and idolatrous emotions. He is innocent. Keruvim portray man in his yet, uncorrupted state: a child. This is what the knowledge of Torah (housed under the Keruvim) target. Man should return to that state where his emotions have no affect on him."

You write that man should return to a state where emotions have no effect on him, but is that really what childhood is like? What happened to "man is evil from his youth." I was thinking that children, not been able to distinguish between good and evil, are rule by their emotions, the precise thing that the Torah seeks to abolish from adults.

Regards,
Omphile

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Yes, you are correct, and I was not clear. My good friend Matt Schneeweiss responded quite well in this week's JewishTimes, the next letter.

Moshe Ben-Chaim

Keruvim: Innocence or Instinct II?

Reader: Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim,

Would you please explain what you mean by the following statements: "I believe cherubs are to embody man who is not yet distorted; he does not yet follow the instinctual, primitive and idolatrous emotions. He is innocent . . . his emotions have no affect on him." It seems to me that the contrary is true - infants are entirely instinctual beings! Not only that, but the great psychologists tell us that all of the primitive and idolatrous are really just expressions of infantile tendencies. Also, could you clarify what you mean by the terms "not yet distorted" and "innocent"? A Rabbi once said, "the rest of the world looks at the infant as a symbol of pristine purity, but the Torah points to the infant and says, 'that being is pure yetzer hara!'" But I don't need to elaborate on my point, for the same idea has already been addressed by the King of Rational thought:

Youth (condensed version)

"Ah, the innocence of youth," I said wistfully . . . "The what?" "The innocence of youth," I said, coming back to the present.

"You know. Kids are such innocent creatures. Look at them all, running around, having fun, not a care in the world." "Innocent?" he asked. "Innocent of what?"

"Well, they haven't grown up enough to have been messed up by society. They're fresh. Unspoiled. You know. Like a baby right out of the womb." He smiled. "You sound as if you think a baby is in a better state than an adult." "A baby is. Well, sort of. I mean, uh, they haven't been-" I was stammering, and he just kept smiling. "Oh, you know!" I finally blurted out, unable to avoid smiling with him.

"Actually," he said, "I don't know. I agree that a baby right out of the womb may be fresh, but it's also helpless and ignorant. It has to learn virtually everything. How to walk, how to talk, how to eat,-"... "Don't forget potty training," I cut in. "I have some experience in such matters."

"That too," he replied. "And most important, a child has to be taught how to think. No baby fresh from the womb knows how to make proper analyses and conclusions or how to foresee consequences. A child has to be taught how to use its intellect." He looked at me. "Our society, on the other hand, has it backwards. We look at children and think that they're clean and pure and pristine and that they somehow get worse or spoiled once they grow up. The truth is just the opposite. A baby is utterly helpless. Left to its own devices, it will operate strictly on its emotions and instincts, make dangerous - if not fatal - mistakes, and likely not survive. It needs adults, hopefully mature thinking adults, to carefully guide its development for many years. Longer than virtually any other mammal on the planet. The innocence of youth?' A more appropriate statement would be, 'the ignorance of youth!'"

I did think of a possible explanation for your words. Perhaps by the term "innocent" you meant that an infant has not yet corrupted himself by allowing his emotions to overpower his intellect. In other words, the Torah is not against emotions, but rather, the Torah desires that man's intellect govern his emotions. The possession of emotions per se is not corruption - the emotions are just as much a part of our creation as our intellects. Rather, the true corruption is when man allows his instincts to overpower his rational faculty. While it is true that an infant does not fall prey to this corruption for intrinsic reasons (i.e. he has no intellect), an infant is, nevertheless, a symbol, which brings this idea to mind.

Thank you for your time, Matt

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I fully agree Matt, so thank you for YOUR time. □

TORAH PRINCIPLES CONTRADICTING THE RED BENDEL

JESSIE FISCHBEIN

No Powers other than Hashem

Devarim 4:35. Unto you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD, He is G-d; there is none else beside Him.

Jeremiah 9:23. But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands, and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Metzudas Dovid, a commentary: Know Me - that I am Hashem and there is no other besides Me, and I am the One who does chessed to those who love Me and keep my commandments and I am the One who does justice to punish the wicked and I am the One who does righteousness to accept the repentant and to remove judgment from them, and not G-d forbid that there is a force of good and a force of evil, because I desire all of these - to give each person what he deserves and the one who understands this, it is appropriate to praise himself, because through this [understanding] he will derive great benefit.

Isaiah 45:14. There is none else other than G-d.

Isaiah 45:21. Declare, and bring them near yea, let them take counsel together: Who has announced this from ancient time, and declared it of old? Isnât it that I am the LORD, and there is no G-d else beside Me, a just G-d and a Savior; there is none beside Me.

Isaiah 45:22. Look to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am G-d, and there is none else.

Isaiah 46:9. Remember the former things of old: that I am G-d, and there is none else; I am G-d, and there is none like Me;

These verses clearly state that Hashem is the only one who determines a judgment of good and evil. Other than the laws of nature that Hashem established, there are no other powers.

Sources that state that objects have no power

Maimonides, hilchos mezuzah 5:4: Those who write inside the mezuzah names of angels or holy names or a verse or engravings, they are included with those who have no share in the world to come. Because these fools, it's not enough that they are nullifying a mitzvah, but they are making a great mitzvah - which is the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His love and His service - into an amulet for their own benefit as it occurs to their foolish hearts that this kind of nonsense thing can benefit them.

Leviticus 19:31: Turn not unto the soothsayers, nor to familiar spirits; seek them not out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your G-d.

Ibn Ezra: This is a decree of knowledge that they are seeking the future. And people empty of brains said that even though the soothsayers are true (i.e. have real power) and also magic, the torah forbade them. And I say the opposite: the torah does not forbid the truth! Only falsehood!

Reward and Punishment:

Deuteronomy 32:4: The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a G-d of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.

Red string contradicts the principle of "schar v'onesh", reward and punishment. If a person deserves to be punished, how can a red string save them? If a person doesn't deserve punishment, and isn't wearing a red string, what kind of G-d hurts them because they are not wearing a string?

True Spiritual Protectors

Teshuva, tefilla, u'tzedaka ma'avirin es Roa ha'gzeira. Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil decree

Maimonides hilchos mezuzah 6:13

The early Wise Ones said "Whoever has tefillin on his head and arm, tzitzis on his clothing, and a mezuzah on his door, he is strengthened not to sin, because he has many reminders, and these are the angels that protect him from sin as it says (Psalms 34:8)

"The angel of the LORD encamps around them that fear Him, and delivers them!."

Nowhere in Tanach or in the Talmud do people use a red string to protect themselves.

Oral Law Prohibiting the Red Bindle

Tosefta Shabbos Chapter 7: These things are Āfrom the ways of the Emorimā (i.e., behavior of idolators): one who cuts his hair Ākoomiā (i.e., like the idolators), and one who makes a plait (locks worn by Roman or Greek youth or upper classes) and offers it to the gods, one who raises her child between the dead, one who ties a cushion to his hip (a superstitious custom), or a red string to his finger, and one who appoints and

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Letters

throws rocks to the sea or the river, these are idolatrous behaviors; one who and claps and dances to the fire, this is idolatrous behavior.

Ayin Hara (Evil Eye) Discussed in the Torah

Genesis 42:5, Rashi. 10 sons of Jacob entered separate gates to avoid ayin hara.

Genesis 49:22, Rashi. Fish aren't subject to ayin hara (this is a metaphor: because they are in a different environment. People aren't jealous of people that there is no identification with.)

Samuel 1,18:9. After David killed more Philistines than King Saul and the people sang a derogatory song about it, the verse said that Saul looked badly at David from that day on. Rashi comments: ayin hara.

Tractate Berachot - 20a. R' Yochanan - Yosef's descendants are not subject to ayin hara (based on Yosef not being destroyed by his brothers' jealousy)

Tractate Bava Batra - 141a. Having a girl prevents ayin hara

Tractate Bava Batra - 2b. (mid page, Rashi) Don't stand in field with full grown crops, so that he won't be damaged by ayin hara.

Ayin Hara can be explained as people's jealousy and all of the natural horrible consequences of that. It is not a supernatural phenomenon. We say at the end of Shemona Esrei: "To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone (i.e., don't let them have ayin hara, jealousy)."

Be wholehearted with Hashem

Deuteronomy 18:9-13: When you come into the land, which the LORD your G-d gives you, do not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that uses divination (fortune teller), a soothsayer (psychic), or an enchanter (superstition), or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or one that consults a ghost or a familiar spirit (seance), or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination unto the LORD; and because of these abominations the LORD thy G-d is driving them out from before you. You shall be whole-hearted with the LORD your G-d.

Rashi: Go after Hashem completely and put your hopes in Him and do not chase after the futures (fortune telling, etc.); rather, whatever will happen to you accept with wholeness and then you will be His nation and His portion.

Superstitions crop up to 'protect' us from things that we have no control over: health, shidduchim, beauty, safety of our children, and financial success. It is terrifying to have no control. The "Am Hashem", Hashem's nation, does not seek to deal with the insecurity by turning to objects with powers to protect us. ■

Weekly Parsha

ARE YOU RELEVANT?

COMMENTS ON PARSHYOS VAYAKHEL & TETZAVEH

RABBI RON SIMON

A salient feature of this week's parshah, Vayakhel, is that women are found leading the way with respect to the donations that were given for the construction of the Tabernacle, the Mishkan. They cast off their golden adornments in a state of devotion to the newly arriving place of worship. The role of the men in regard to the women's donations is disputed amongst the commentaries, but it seems that it was primarily financial, a certain type of monetary regulation.

This mention of Jewish women is a sort of tribute to Jewish femininity, in that they make many sacrifices for what one of the commentaries refers to as "Chibas Hakodesh", an attraction to the holy. This faithfulness is reflected in their refusal to contribute anything to the creation of the golden calf. It seems that women in general are willing to sacrifice a lot for a good cause, but certain women seem to excel in this.

Although unrelated, I wish to have some thoughts on Parshas Tetzaveh.

Expressions that refer to people in language can both diminish and exalt them at the same time. The very idea of a name is somewhat exalting, as it individualizes a person, but of course, there could be many people who bear the same name, at least the sound.

A pronoun is a little less exalting, perhaps even a little less humanizing. Witness the fact that a pronoun can even refer to inanimate objects. In many languages, Hebrew being one of them, pronouns are divided into two different genders, masculine and feminine of course.

A particularly interesting issue comes up with respect to Moshe's name. Amram and Yocheved didn't even name Moshe. His name came from a somewhat accidental, (in some sense) event. Pharaoh's daughter, a part of an evil empire no less[1], named him upon drawing him out of the river. That action is the basis for his name, and needless to say, the name is not too exalting.

Parshas Tetzaveh opens up with an address to Moshe, "And you will command the children of Israel..." The Ibn Ezra comments on the use of the

conjunction 'and' and the use of the pronoun 'you' as well. The 'and' connects the parsha that deals with the servants of the Tabernacle, Tetzaveh with the parsha that deals with the physical structure of the Tabernacle, Terumah. The conjunction 'and' relates the cohanim to the other features of the Tabernacle. They aren't furniture, but their theatre of action is the Tabernacle or the Temple. Notice, in consonance with this, that the Rambam includes the laws that relate to the Cohanim under the same banner that includes the vessels of the Temple, in the Mishneh Torah.

At the same time, the Ibn Ezra notes that the pronoun 'you' singles out the family of cohanim as the designated group that is to serve in the Tabernacle, to the exclusion of the rest of the people. In this sense, the family of cohanim is in some way diminished and exalted at the same time.

As his name suggests, Moshe, to do his job, was somewhat unexalted. He wasn't raised by the Jewish people, nor designated by them to take his position. However, in the context of the advancement of the cehuna, the priesthood, his position was in line with the use of the pronoun, socially exalted (In Moshe's case, the pronoun would seem to be more exalting than his name.

Around this moment in history, and at this point in the calendar, Jews and non-Jews alike should consider the fact that the Jewish people as a whole have never been bent on social exaltation. The result of Jewish philosophy down through the ages is to view social relationships as functional. People are regarded and gain recognition on the basis of what they involve themselves in, what they reflect and what they contribute. That isn't to say that we must remove our egos from the mixture completely, but that part of our personality clearly shouldn't be emphasized. ■

Good Shabbos

[1] This isn't meant to be an insult to Bitya, Paroah's daughter. Her name in Hebrew reflects a certain righteousness that is noted in the Talmud. I am only really referring to her family.

Taken from "Getting It Straight" Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

News: Now on sale as a downloadable PDF book:
<https://www.Mesora.org/OnlineStore.html>

Lying

DOUG TAYLOR AND RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"What????!!!"

I almost shouted it, but the organic Muzak of waves and seagulls at the beach effectively swallowed my volume. I was skipping rocks with my friend, the King of Rational Thought. He tossed the stones, expertly making them dance like miniature ice skaters on the calm water. I tossed the stones, expertly demonstrating why major league baseball would never knock at my door. We had been talking about the importance of truth when he startled me with what appeared to be a totally out-of-character statement.

"I said," he replied patiently, "that sometimes a lie may be better than the truth."

I stared at him, stunned. I chose to hang around this man as often as possible because of his unique insight into the nature of things. Everything he taught me always made sense. But this?

"It bothers you, doesn't it?" he asked.

It sometimes bugs me when he seems to be able to read my mind. But today it didn't matter. I was too blown away.

"After all the discussions we've had about living in accordance with reality and truth, now you tell me it's better to lie?" I said, exasperated.

"Careful," he said gently. "You're exaggerating my statement. I said that sometimes a lie may be better than the truth. Look, I'll give you an example. Suppose someone came and cut you up with a knife. How would you feel about it? Good or bad?" He flipped a gray stone across the Sound, somehow making it leap and jump like a marionette.

"Definitely bad," I replied. "In fact, I'd be

pretty mad."

"Okay," he said. "But what if that someone was a surgeon and he was saving your life?"

That caught me off guard. Unsure how to reply, I stooped to pick up a rock instead.

"You see," he went on, "cutting flesh is a harm. You bleed, you risk infection, then you have to heal. But sometimes you submit to it to get a greater benefit. Now lying is a harm. But what's the harm?" he asked.

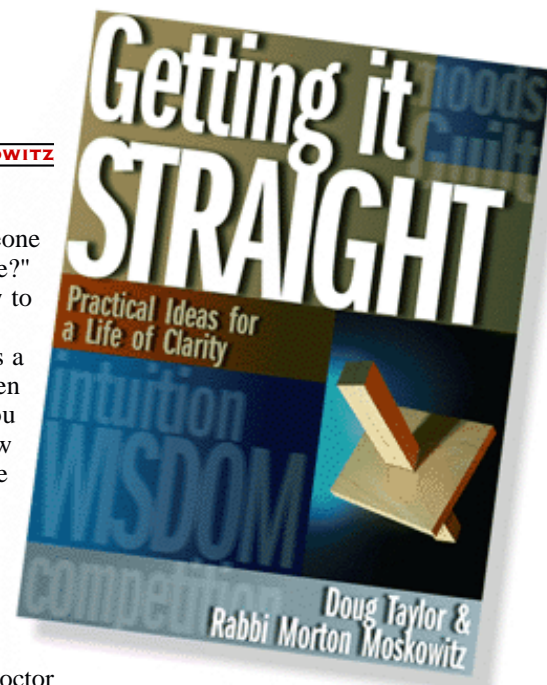
"Well, it's trying to remake reality to suit your own desires," I said, as another of my cannonballs unceremoniously nose-dived into the water.

"You're right," he said. "For example, a child may lie to avoid going to the doctor because it's unpleasant. The child is relating to reality like an authority; like he can change it. But he doesn't see the big picture; the larger good. Plus, the more he lies, the more he's not dealing with reality. He's moving toward a fantasy world and away from truth. No one in their right mind would want to do that.

"But," he said, turning to face me, "what if the only way to save a life is to lie? Imagine you're in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Say you're hiding Jews and the SS comes knocking at your door. Are you going to lie or tell the truth?"

I have found few things in life more disconcerting than to think you've got it all figured out, only to have someone blow the lid off your beliefs.

"Uh, I- uh, well-, I'd- uh-" I closed my mouth and tried to engage my brain. "I guess I don't know what I'd do," I finally blurted out.



"Trust me," he smiled.

"You'd lie. You'd lie because you'd opt for the greater benefit; in this case, saving innocent people's lives. The only reason to lie is if the overall good is better than the harm done by the lie. But you have to carefully, and rationally, evaluate each situation. That requires training. I can almost guarantee your emotions will try to convince you to lie at times when it would be convenient for you, but not appropriate. And remember, if you evaluate wrong, it's like having surgery when you don't need it."

"Well, speaking of training," I said, recovering, "could you let me in on the secret of how you make those rocks skip so magnificently?"

"I can offer a hint," he replied with a straight face.

"What's that?"

"You might try using flat rocks." ▣