

## SPECIAL ISSUE: IDOLATRY

**AMULETS OF 2 KINDS WERE PERMITTED:  
1) MEDICINAL VEGETATION; 2) WRITINGS, WHICH  
PROVED TO BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY COMFORTING. BOTH  
ARE SCIENTIFICALLY, PROVEN TRUTHS AIDING MAN IN  
HIS 2 PARTS: HIS PHYSICAL AND HIS PSYCHOLOGICAL.**

**AMULETS WERE NOT PERMITTED UNLESS PROVEN SUCCESSFUL.  
THE RABBIS BASED EVERYTHING ON REASON. IN CONTRAST,  
RED STRINGS FOLLOW NO REASON & ARE PROHIBITED.**

TALMUD SABBATH 61A

ESTD  
1997

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification  
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

# JewishTimes

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### IN THIS ISSUE:

LETTERS: RED BENDEL	1,4,5
WOLF IN SHEEP'S STRING	1-3
FAITH VS PROOF: RESPONSE	5
CALL FOR YOUR ACTION	6
SCRIPT OF BENDEL VIDEO	7
DOES IDOLATRY WORK?	8,9
FINAL THOUGHTS	10

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### Torah Fundamentals

## Red Bendels

RABBI SAUL ZUCKER

*(This letter was sent by way of Mesora to Judaism.com - currently selling Red Bendels under the claim it forms Jewish tradition. Rabbi Zucker has responded denying this view, referencing the Rishonic authorities)*

Dear Sir: I read with great fear and anxiety your response to The

(continued on page 4)

# THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S STRING

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Proponents of the Red String claim it protects one from the "Evil Eye", it watches over children, offers success, and insures healthy pregnancies. These claimants attempt to cloak their thread under the guise of "Jewish Tradition" by wrapping it around our matriarch's grave. But make such claims about any other object, say, a cross or a rabbit's foot, and these very same Jews will holler "idol, idol!" Is the Red Bendel a Jewish tradition, or idolatry, and why should we treat it differently than other charms?

Moses killed the Egyptian, who was torturing the Jewish slave. He criticized Dathan and Aviram when they argued. He also defended the daughters of

(continued on next page)



**NO X-RAY REQUIRED:  
SIMPLE OBSERVATION EXPOSES  
THE RED STRING TO BE IDOLATROUS -  
AS IF IT WAS THIS PHAROAH IDOL**

## Idolatry

Yisro when troubled by the male shepherds.

And timely enough, Mordechai stood up to Haman, refusing to prostrate, even when sacrificing the safety of Jews. How much more must we take action when no one's life is in danger, while our fellow Jews are deceived that Red Strings protect, and that they form part of Judaism? This is no small issue. Red Strings question Judaism's fundamentals. We must do as Moses and Mordechai exemplified in their deep concern for others, and take action. Inactivity conveys disregard for the proliferation of false notions among your brothers and sisters, and is contrary to the perfection displayed by Moses and Mordechai.

What does the Torah and its greatest teachers say? What is demanded by reason?

**Tosefta Shabbos, Chapter 7:**

"These things are "from the ways of the Emorim" (i.e., behavior of idolaters): one who cuts his hair "koomi" (i.e., like the idolaters), 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 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."

**Maimonides' "Guide for the Perplexed" (Book III, Chap. 37):**

*"The same idolatry and superstitious performances which, in your belief, keep certain misfortunes far from you, will cause those very misfortunes to befall you. "I will also send wild beasts among you" (Lev. xxvi.22), "I will also send the teeth of wild beasts upon them, with the poison of those that creep in dust." (Deut. xxxii. 24). "The fruit of thy land, and all thy labors, shall a nation, which thou knowest not, eat up." (ibid. xxviii. 33). "Thou shalt plant vineyards and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, etc. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil." (Dent. xxviii. 39,40). In short, in spite of the schemes of idolaters to support and firmly establish their doctrine, and to make people believe that by idolatry certain misfortunes could be averted and certain benefits gained, worship of idols will, on the contrary, as is stated in "the words of*

*the covenant" prevent the advantages and bring the troubles."*

*"Our Sages say distinctly, "whatever is used as medicine" does not come under the law of "the ways of the Emorite": for they hold that only such cures as are recommended by reason are permitted, and other cures are prohibited. When, therefore, the dictum was quoted: "a tree that casts off its fruit may be laden with stone or dyed with red color", the following objection was raised: "The loading of the tree with stones may be justified on the plea that it serves to weaken the strength of the tree, but why should it be permitted to dye the tree with red color?" This question shows that the dyeing of the tree with red color, and all similar things which are not explained by analogy from nature, are prohibited as "ways of the Amorite!"*

**No Proof**

Where do today's false rabbis, self-proclaimed kabbalists, and peddlers derive this notion of a Red String? Did they witness some correlation between one wearing a Red String and such fortune? Can you truly correlate wearing anything, and a successful pregnancy, claiming the former caused the latter? Isn't such a correlation bereft of any causal relationship? Hence, one cannot suggest strings cause healthy pregnancies, or any improvement in health, success, etc.

If there were any cases where Red Strings proved miraculous, why are there no recorded miracles of this kind? With no record of such miracles, and with no basis in reality, we are forced to suggest two ways that Red Strings came about:

1) Deviant Jews concocted this myth. I would ask these Jews why they see doctors for medical treatments and surgery, when this Red String has so much power! Why do they even work at all? Let this great string deliver their needs miraculously! But they do work, precisely because their Red Strings are useless. But they care nothing about deceiving you, so they manufacture Red Strings and sell them under the pretense that they will bring you success and health. Money is their god. If Torah was their objective, they would abandon their sale of Red Strings in light of the following, most authoritative source on the subject, which identifies Red Strings by name as prohibited;

2) According to the Tosefta in Shabbos chapter 7, the Rabbis warn us not to wear Red

(continued on next page)



*If red string peddlers  
feel this object can save  
pregnancies, but do not  
freely give this thread  
away to poor, pregnant  
women...then, in their  
equation, they cause  
infant deaths.*

*What evil intent  
is worse?*

Strings, as they are the “ways of the Emorites.” The Emorites concocted Red Strings. Now, if their ways were provable and reasonable, the Rabbis would not prohibit them, as Ibn Ezra says, “The Torah does not prohibit that which is true, but only that which is false.” (Leviticus, 19:31) The Talmud too records a case where the Rabbis acquiesced to the Greeks, submitting that the Greeks surpassed them in certain sciences. Torah is based on truth. Hence, the Rabbis of the Tosefta prohibited the Red Strings because they are senseless, and the Jewish nation is a wise nation.

#### The Evil

I accuse these peddlers of a great crime, “in their terms”: if in their minds, the Red String has the power to heal and insure healthy pregnancies, then they should give this string away FREE to those in need. But they don’t. They keep them under lock and key until they receive some money. Thereby, according to their ‘logic’, they bring miscarriages upon women who don’t have the \$25 to pay for this string. In their own terms, Red String peddlers are most evil people.

#### Antithetical to Reason

They suggest there is a, “if-then” argument...a “causative” relationship between wearing a Red String, and certain success or health: “If” you wear a Red String, “then” such and such will happen. Yet, they cannot explain why, or how wearing Red Strings causes these specific results, nor have they any accounts as proof.

#### The Contradiction

In essence, Red String proponents contradict themselves. For they say there is a “causative” relationship between wearing strings and certain results. Yet, we know that with regards to any, true cause of a result, one readily sees the relationship, thereby explaining “how” X was the cause of Y. We know exactly how dripping black ink on a white carpet is the cause for the carpet’s new stain: pigmentation and dying properties exist in the ink, and the carpet possesses a contrasting hue and moisture retention. For one to intelligently suggest that X causes Y, there must be apparent characteristics explaining this statement of “causality”.

However, when we review the words of kabbalists and current day Red String peddlers claiming these strings cause certain results, we see through their transparent lies: they borrow only half the equation, attempting to gain

credibility by claiming Red Strings “cause” certain results. An average person would never think someone would make a claim that strings “cause” something, had it not been witnessed. But with a little intelligence, and the courage to oppose someone with the title “Rabbi” or “Kabbalist”, one can easily uncover the game these charlatans play.

Ask them for an explanation of how Red Strings affect reality as they suggest. They will of course have no answer. The ask them, “Why must the string be placed on my wrist? Why must it be on my body? What is the difference if it is red or blue?” These Rabbis and Kabbalists cannot answer these questions, because there is no answer or any reasoning, which could explain their claims. They are lying to you. Then ask them, “If you cannot answer me, why do you believe these Red Strings work?” Their only line of defense is to cite a previous Rabbi or Kabbalists. Then the cycle repeats itself.

In the end, you find no Torah source, no reason, but simply a bunch of fools purporting idolatrous powers to exist, which have never been witnessed, and they defame Torah in the process. This is why we must take a stand against such seemingly innocuous matters. But in fact, the fundamentals of Judaism are severely harmed if we remain silent. People begin to accept “powers”. Then, God’s exclusive claim to all that we see is marginalized. Therefore, we speak out.

On Monday, March 7, an Arab terrorist sprayed gunfire at Israelis standing at the entrance to the Machpela Cave, the tomb of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron. Four people were injured including a Border Guard soldier who sustained serious wounds. But Red String proponents claim if you wrap this string around Rachel’s grave, it obtains some power. But we must ask: how is it that a gravesite in Hebron containing even more Patriarchs and Matriarchs than Rachel’s grave, was not protected from gunfire? If the gravesite has no defense to protect itself, it cannot impart defensive or protective powers to a string.

Honestly, the mere uttering of these words, “a string having powers” is so infantile and primitive, I am amazed that adults buy into it. What’s worse: these adults are raising children - our next generation.

People, use your intelligence: God gave it to you for the precise objective of adhering to His Torah based on your use of reason. Don’t be misled by the popularity of Red Strings, the reputation of the seller, be he “Rabbi” or “Kabbalist”.

Reason exposes this idolatry cloaked in Jewish disguise, as a “wolf in sheep’s string”. ■

(Red Bendel continued from page 1)

## Torah Fundamentals

Jewish Times regarding the issue of the sale of red threads as a protective amulet. The reason that I say "fear and anxiety" is that your letter seems to say that as long as there are opinions in print supporting a certain practice, that practice may be encouraged even if it runs contrary to towering Jewish authorities and texts. It is as if to suggest that while authorities such as the Tanna'im, the Radak, and the Rambam may clearly prohibit in very strong terms the wearing of red threads, as long as two rabbis (who lived within the past hundred years and are recognized to be illustrious) say that it is all right, then there is no problem. I beg of you, as someone who undoubtedly has the interest of fellow Jews in his heart, to please reconsider your position. I appeal to your tzelem elokim in this request, based upon the following sources:

The Rashba, alluded to in the Be'er Moshe that you quoted, (presumably in Teshuvos HaRashba, volume 2, letter 268) states:

*"There are customs that the women observed on their own, and it is prohibited to violate (those customs) provided that they were observed based upon a correct issue..."*

(There follows a list of customs observed by women as cited in Yerushalmi Pesachim, some of which are deemed appropriate, and others which are not). To use this as a basis to say that since women established the custom of tying red threads, therefore it should be accepted, seems to be a distortion of the Rashba's explicit words.

But more...the Tosefta in Shabbos 7:1 explicitly states that wearing a red thread is a clear violation of a Torah principle, darkei ha-emori. With that in mind, please see the commentary of the Radak on Yeshayahu 40:21, where he states, "...people thought that many things and certain actions would help or damage, sicken or heal. These things are not based upon wisdom or medicine or natural forces, but rather they are based upon the repeated customs of people throughout the generations...and these are the darkei ha-emori." Does not the "ancient custom" of the red thread fit exactly into what the Radak derides?

And worse...please see the Rambam's Moreh HaNevuchim 3:37, wherein he states unequivocally that the engagement by people of practices that constitute darkei ha-emori in order to protect themselves from danger will not only be ineffective, but on the contrary, will result in new dangers brought to them as a result of their sin.

If this is not enough to convince you, my dear brother, I beg that you at least consider putting

something along the following lines on your website when offering the red threads for sale:

*"The use of these threads that are for sale was mentioned by the Tanna'im as being a violation of Torah law. The Radak and the Rambam clearly reiterate the sin involved in using them, and the Rambam in particular says that using them will bring about further calamity in your life. There are, however, two rabbis who recently wrote that there is no problem with using these threads since their origin is based upon the established custom of numerous common, lay people in earlier generations."*

At least in this way, you are practicing full disclosure and informing the people of both sides of the issue, along with the risks that they may be taking in choosing a particular side.

I invite you to join me in a continuing full study of the issue, to pursue our divine mission of avodah HaShem through chochmah, so that we may clearly and properly understand what it is that HaShem has designed for us. I hope that you accept these words in the true spirit in which they are written and sent, with ahavas Yisroel, and with the hope that with the true path of Torah and mitzvos, and without the need of any external, tempting illusions, we may all merit to see bi'as goel tzdek bimhayrah veyameinu.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Saul Zucker

## RED STRINGS: OBJECTS POSSESS NO POWERS

Dear Mr. Perelman,

Having looked through your website, it dawned on me that there seems to be no need for any religious practices if mundane objects can be imbued with such power and promise. Please explain the purpose of Tefilla if all we need to do is wear a red string on our wrist. How does this help us? And if you want to answer (as most do who ascribe to this practice do) that we don't need to know how it works only that it works, may I remind you of the Ibn Ezra who tells us that if we come upon a mitzvah that we cannot fully understand without

the explanation within the works of Torah SheBal Peh, than we discount the mitzvah entirely as it cannot be a part of the Mesora! I ask you, where is the Torah SheBal Peh for this practice? Where is there any source for the Torah for this practice at all? How do we know what this practice is if it is not discussed at all within the Torah. If it is truly as powerful as you are stating, wouldn't it be included in the Torah as something for all to benefit from? In fact, where is there any source anywhere in the Torah that tells us that regular physical objects can be imbued with magical powers for our personal benefit? What is the point of perfecting ourselves and doing the mitzvot of the Torah if all we have to do is wear this "magical" string and we will be protected. How can you honestly say that this is part of Torah Judaism. Do you really believe that a religion with the massive intellectual works that Judaism has, (Mishna, Gemara, etc) and the Torah giants that we have would endorse a practice such as this?

In addition, I have not seen your answer anywhere to the Rishonim (the Tosefta, the Rambam, etc) that so clearly state that this practice is wrong and and avodah zarah. You cannot honestly answer that the sources you quoted from a few late achronim (who by the way do not seem to present logical arguments-just that this is the way its been done, therefore do not belittle it) can contradict the Rishonim. These Rishonim present cogent logical arguments with clear sources from the Torah that this practice is wrong and destructive for the nation.

One last point, What does this say about God's system of Justice? Lets say I'm a Rasha, can I where this string and still be protected? Are we rewarded and punished for our mitzvos and aveiros or because of a string that we wear?

It must be that you believe that Judaism does not have to make sense? There is obviously no logic to the religion. In that case, why stop at a red string? Maybe I can draw a big sign on my forehead that says "protect me". Is that really any different? What about a lucky penny or a rabbits foot?

I understand that there is a strong emotional attachment to these types of beliefs. They are easy and require almost no work. That is not what Judaism is. All I ask is that you look through the sources (the Tosefta, that Rambam, etc,) and really think about these ideas. Because that's what Judaism demands.

Thank you,

Elliot Plotnick  
Long Beach, NY

## Letters

**RED STRINGS:  
AN INTELLIGENT  
APPROACH**

Mr. Perelman,

I reviewed your letter on your website regarding the red string. I have also read about it in the JewishTimes. I am a little confused. The Rishonim seem quite clear on this and your sources are Achronim (I am assuming so. I haven't heard of them - my shortcoming) Can Achronim argue on Rishonim? Can a custom remove an Issur – a prohibition?

But even putting aside the source "battle" what about the logical arguments? Does a red string have power? Is it justice for God to punish someone for not wearing a red string and rewarding one who does regardless of their merit? Does it make sense to you?

What about the Shema, which tells us that the road to prosperity is keeping the mitzvot? Why should one do Teshuva, Tefilla, U'tzedaka (repent, pray and give charity) if all it takes is a red string? It would clear up a lot if you could address these arguments on your site. Simply quoting sources that (at least seemingly) go against the fundamentals of Torah - of Ein Od Milvado – "There is none other than God" – only clouds the area. Please explain how this practice of wearing Red Strings does not go against the fundamentals of Judaism, how infusing an object with power is not at least approximating idolatry. Thank you.

Regards, Ari Fischbein

**RED STRINGS:  
REFUTED BY  
THE TORAH**

Dear Mr. Perelman,

I saw the mini-movie about the red string on Judaism.com, and I am deeply concerned with what I saw. No object in the world is given innate powers of protection or destruction. I will quote a few sources to demonstrate my point.

The Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (3:8) states: "And it came to pass, when Moshe held up his hand, that Israel prevailed..." (Ex. 17:11). But could the hands of Moshe make war or lose a war? It is rather to teach you, as long as Israel was looking upwards and subjecting their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed, and if not, they fell. Likewise, you may say, "Make for you a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live" (Num. 21:8). But could the serpent

cause to die, or could the serpent cause to live? Rather, when Israel looked upwards and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed, and if not, they perished."

Furthermore, in reference to the incense that was used to stop the plague that God smote the Jews with after the incident of Korach and his assembly, the Gemara in Berachos 33a states: "Why with incense? Because Israel was jeering and complaining about this incense, saying, 'It is deadly poison; Nadav and Avihu died through it, and two hundred and fifty people died through it.' The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, 'You shall see that it is a plague stopper, and sin is what kills.'"

One has to wonder how a red string which nobody ever heard of can be more powerful than Moshe's hands, the copper serpent, and the incense.

I also object to line in the movie that states that Jews have prayed to Rachel Emainu at her tomb for centuries. Such a practice goes against one of the thirteen essential principles in Judaism; namely, that God is the only existence that one may pray to. Chazal talk about Calev going to pray by the tomb of our forefathers, but they are careful not to suggest that he prayed to them. He only went there to gain chizuk for his prayers.

Please do not take this letter to be a personal attack on you or anyone who works for Judaism.com. I am merely trying to engage you in a debate about certain modern practices in Judaism.

Yours Truly,  
David Fischbein

**FAITH VS PROOF:  
A RESPONSE**

Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben Chaim,

Gil needs to take a closer look at the Rishonim. For those who say that proofs of ideas in Judaism are a waste of time, I would ask, why does Rav Saadia Gaon constantly use proofs in his arguments in Emunot V' Deot? What is the purpose of all the proofs that the Rambam formulates in the second book of the Moreh Nevuchim? Why does the Rashba talk about hearing, understanding, and accepting the fundamental precepts of Judaism in Teshuvah 51 of his Shailos U'Teshuvos (by "accepting", he means making them first hand knowledge, as opposed to the second hand knowledge of tradition which the individual already has)? If the rabbi in the Kuzari accepts Judaism on faith, then what leverage can he claim over the Christian and the Muslim (the rabbi in fact disproves them on the very basis that their religions are not based on any solid proof)? -David Fischbein

**REFUTATIONS OF  
THE RED BENDEL****Violation of Tosefta Shabbos**

Tosefta is on par with the Oral Law. It is more authoritative than Judaism.com's sources. The Tosefta cites many acts as the ways of the Emorites, idolatrous peoples, including "wearing a red thread on one's finger."

**Judaism.com acknowledged this source, yet does not share it the public, to date.**

**Violation of Judaism's Fundamentals**

The Red Bendel contradicts Maimonides' 13 Principles; that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Those defending the Red Bendel say this is not true, unless someone wears this string.

**No Evidence that Strings Affect Reality****Denies Known, Medical Science**

Maimonides, along with every doctor in history never treated the sick with red strings, but with medicine and surgery. The owners of Judaism.com have seen doctors in their lives, and have had surgery...they did not avoid these medically-sound procedures, using the Red Bendel instead. Judaism.com's staff contradicts itself.

**Talmud Refutes the Red Bendel:** "Sin is what kills"...and not the avoidance of wearing the Red Bendel. (Berachos 33a)

**Isaiah 45:22 Refutes Red Bendels**

"Look to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

**Rambam, 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."

Rambam 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 (Tehillim 34:8) 'The angel of the LORD encamps around them that fear Him, and delivers them'. Nowhere in Tanach or in the gemara do people use a red string to protect themselves.

**The Torah Refutes Them**

The Torah says, "Teshuva, tefilla, u'tzedaka maavirin es roa ha'gzeira", "Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil decree". Nothing is mentioned that a red string is required.

**Ironically...No Protection from Our Claims**

Judaism.com's workers most certainly wear Red Bendels. Why then are their Red Strings of no help to them, shielding them from our accusations? It appears their subjugation to our refutations expose the red strings as lies. ■



## Idolatry

# Don't Let Them Mislead Others

## Wearing Red Strings Violates the Torah.

## Selling them is worse.

Email these sites. Ask them to stop Red String sales and false claims of benefits. Ask that they instead, admit error and post the Tosefta prohibiting Red Strings as an idolatrous practice.

**JUDAISM.COM**  
**KABBALAH.COM**  
**RACHELSREDSTRING.COM**

These websites prey on people desperate for cures, success, or resolve to personal issues. These sites offer unproven and false hopes by selling Red Strings.

"Protective devices" violate reason, and the Torah.

The Tosefta identifies Red Strings as the "ways of the idolatrous Emorites."

The Torah & Tosefta teach reliance on God alone. Nothing overrules these two authoritative sources.

Judaism.com acknowledged this Tosefta, but to date, omits it along side other sources they quote, even after many requests from us.



Understand why the Torah prohibits Red Strings. Read the JewishTimes: [www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes154.pdf](http://www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes154.pdf)  
 Learn the sources. Then teach others.

The Rabbis teach:

"Your friend's money should be as beloved to you as your own."  
 Don't allow these sites to deceive others and take their money.  
 Email all of these sites with one click from our page below:

**[WWW.MESORA.ORG/THEREDBENDEL](http://WWW.MESORA.ORG/THEREDBENDEL)**

**Please Post this Ad**

## Idolatry

MESORA'S  
Commentary

Judaism.com says:

*"...this thread becomes blessed with special authentic and proven qualities, a segulah to remove pain, evil eye, to bless with children who will live on, and to give the woman who is giving birth an easy and successful one."*

**The Torah does not say anywhere that objects have powers. Reason refutes this.**

**Question:** Judaism.com makes claims with no proof. Should you spend money on something unproven?

**Question:** If such strings can heal, and Judaism.com does not freely give them away, at least at cost, are they not causing injury, in their own minds?

**Question:** Judaism.com acknowledged the Tosefta prohibiting Red Strings. Are they to blame for not sharing this with you?

**Question:** A Tosefta is more authoritative than man, yet, Judaism.com disregards it. Is it wrong to cause others to violate it? Should you buy something prohibited by the Oral Torah?

**Question:** How can people be called "responsible" when they don't share the primary source prohibiting Red Strings?

*Chananya, Mishael and Azarya risked life, and refused to bow to idols. Mordechai refused to bow before to Haman's idolatry. Today, idolatry is tempting misinformed Jews. Follow these true Torah leaders. Speak up. Educate others.*

## "AUTHENTIC RED STRING MOVIE" SCRIPT POSTED BY JUDAISM.COM 3/10/05:

## Actual Video Clips:

**Left:** Ceremonies not found in Jewish law are performed (wrapping graves in strings, prayers) violating the Torah prohibition not to add practices;  
**Right:** Adherents claiming the Red String offers "benefits".



"We live in a fast paced world... filled with economic pressures, health concerns, interpersonal tensions and even fear. We are looking to connect with a cosmic force, to embrace our desires for a life of fulfillment, and our need to be protected from forces beyond our control.

Recently, the press has reported on a so-called mystical red string, photographed on the wrists of many a Hollywood superstar; a string, they say, that has been mystically infused with Kabbalistic powers at the Tomb of Rachel, the burial place of OUR Jewish Matriarch.

Overnight, this most humble of bracelets has become a new-age Kabbalistic accessory, a shortcut to spirituality, with the promise of protection from the negative looks of others, the so-called Evil Eye.

Actually, the red string is neither new, nor new-age. For hundreds of years it's been a common Jewish practice, albeit unpublicized, to wear a red string around the wrist, and to tie a string around the wrist of a child.

Judaism.com wants to reclaim this age-old custom as a Jewish tradition....

[MUSIC]

In the Land of Israel, there are three places that are the most holy: The Kotel, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, site of the Holy Temples; the Maarat Hamachpelah in Chevron, the burial place of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah; and Kever Rochel, the Tomb of the Matriarch Rachel, on the road between Jerusalem and Chevron.

For centuries, visitors have come to pray at her resting place, asking this Mother of the Jewish People to intercede on their behalf. And today, even though the route is difficult and dangerous, and even though the ancient Tomb is now encased in bomb-resistant concrete for its OWN protection, the faithful still come to Kever Rochel, and will always come....

[MUSIC]

Rabbi Eran Brandwein, a scholar-in-residence at Rachel's Tomb, reads from a book by the Apter Rav, which was written over 80 years ago.

"HaTorah HakDoshah Katvah, Hi Matzevet Kevurat Rachel Ad Hayom - It is written in the Holy Torah, it is Rachel's Tomb to this day. It is a segulah for salvation in the merit of our faithful and pitying Mother, where the custom is to wrap thread around the Tomb, and this thread becomes blessed with special authentic and proven qualities, a segulah to remove pain, evil eye, to bless with children who will live on, and to give the woman who is giving birth an easy and successful one."

Each part of the ceremony has significance.

[RECITATION OF TEHILLIM]

About a string it is said, "Every morning a thread of grace prevails, and G-d renews the world for another day." Seven

circuits around the Tomb correspond to the seven days of Creation, the seven emotional attributes of man, and the seven channels that bring holiness into the world. Each of the special prayers and Psalms recited while the string is being wound, has its own significance, meaning and structure that relates to the number seven.

[MUSIC]

But what is it about Rachel that has made her resting place so holy? Why is it Rachel's string to which we want to be attached?

Her story of love found and love delayed is well known. Her pain of childlessness was almost unbearable. Yet throughout her years of unfulfillment and sadness, Rachel harbored neither negative thoughts nor jealous glances towards Leah, her older sister. It was Lavan, their father, who had switched Leah for Rachel under the wedding canopy with Jacob.

Rachel's red string reminds us not to look unfavorably upon others even if we feel betrayed or suffer damage. Rachel's red string reminds us to look within ourselves for what may be missing in order to receive G-d's blessings.

With the birth of Joseph, Rachel's prayers were finally answered. And while giving birth to Benjamin, the youngest of the 12 Tribes, Rachel passed away and was buried at the side of the road. The Prophet Jeremiah explains that she was buried there so that over 1500 years later she could pray for the Jewish People as they passed her Tomb on the way out of Jerusalem, into exile.

And those that come to her Tomb today also pray that Rachel will wrap her blessings around them, like a string around the wrist. In the merit of Rachel's benevolent gaze towards her sister Leah we pray that her string may be a protection for us from the unkind looks of others. That is our hope.

Judaism.com guarantees that the Authentic Red String has been prepared according to classic Jewish traditions by **responsible** and knowledgeable individuals who have the highest intentions and respected Jewish affiliations. Actually, that's all we CAN guarantee, since any increase in spiritual awareness or mystical connectiveness, or perceived protection that the string G-d Willing provides, will surely have as much to do with the feelings, thoughts, intentions and actions of the person that wears it. It's not Kabbalistic magic.

It's a way to connect, to have Rachel in mind as we go about our daily lives. Rachel still weeps for her children, waiting for G-d's promise of Redemption to occur. May it be speedily in our days. [MUSIC] [CREDITS]

[END]" □



## Idolatry

**DO INANIMATE OBJECTS HAVE POWERS?  
THE TALMUD DISCOUNTS ASSUMED ANIMATE BEINGS, AND  
ASSUMED POWERS, EVEN WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES SO IMPLY.  
CERTAINLY, LIFELESS RED STRINGS MUST BE DISREGARDED  
AS POWERFUL, WHEN NO SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES EXIST.  
READ THE RABBI'S WORDS BELOW.**

# IDOLATRY: DOES IT WORK?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

If you were told that idolatry actually worked, would you believe the person? Let's say that the person was a Jew? Perhaps the person was even a Rabbi? This is exactly what the Talmud takes up in its discussion on page 55a of Avoda Zara.

There are two incidents regarding which, two different Jews asked Rabbis what their opinions were, as both incidents seemed to imply that idolatry was in fact effectuating change in the world:

## Case 1:

"Zunin (a Jew) asked Rabbi Akiva, 'Both of our hearts know that there is no truth to idolatry, however, there was this cripple (dislocated joints acc. to Rashi) who entered into a church, and left in a recovered state.'

Rabbi Akiva responded: 'I'll give you an analogy, there was this trustworthy man by whom all residents of his town would deposit their goods without witnesses. There came a man who normally used witnesses, but didn't on one occasion. The trusted man's wife came and said, 'let's deny his goods, (as he has no witnesses to testify we received them). The trusted man responded to his wife, 'shall we throw away our livelihood because of this one fool?' So also is the way with disease, they are to visit man for a certain time, and they are to leave at a certain day, at a certain hour, through a certain means, and by a certain medicine. Now, should they abandon their oath (their natural course) and remain because at this moment this fool entered into a church?'

This case is explained very simply by Rabbi Akiva as 'coincidence'. It just so happened that when the cripple left the church, his ailment was expiring at that very moment. Such coincidences do happen. God's perfect laws of nature therefore are not suspended in such circumstances to merely accommodate the fool and deter them from idolatry. Rather, nature continues to adhere to its laws as has been designed by God (adherence to their laws is euphemistically referred to as their 'oath'). This teaches that God desires that man change himself to follow reality, and not the opposite, that God should change reality (nature) to follow man. Now, in this case we see a connection in "time" (the cripple entered a church, and was also healed) yet, the Rabbis do not ascribe powers to the church or its god. Certainly, we must follow the Rabbis, and not ascribe any power when NO change is seen. Thus, we must not assume Red Bendels for example to possess any power.

## Case 2:

"Rava the son of Rabbi Isaac asked Rabbi Judah, 'There was a church in our town, and when the world needed rain, their god appeared in a dream and told them, 'kill a man, and I will cause the rain to come.' The people killed a man, and it rained.'

Rabbi Judah responded: 'Had I already died, you would not have learned what I did from Rav. He taught, 'why does the Torah teach (Deut. 4:19) 'Lest you lift your eyes to the heavens and see the sun, moon and stars,



*all the hosts of heaven, and you turn aside and prostrate yourselves to them and worship them which God has smoothed them out for all nations under the entire heavens'. Rabbi Judah continued, 'This teaches that God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world.'*

A few questions present themselves when we contrast these two cases. We must keep in mind that this section of Talmud is bringing two cases which are dealing with the same area, but each must have a unique, new insight not taught by the other:

1) Why didn't the first case answer this second question of Rava? Isn't this Case 2 also coincidence?

2) How do we define 'coincidence'?

3) In case 2, did their god actually appear?

4) How would a wise man interpret the Case 2, had he lived in that town at that moment when it rained? Would he say that their god is real and actually caused rain?

5) What is the meaning of 'God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world'? What type of justice is this of God? Do we not also read that 'God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather, in his repentance'?

6) Who made their ways 'smooth'? God? Was this teaching that God actively makes it 'smooth' for an idolater to keep to his path? Or is it referring to another party?

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## Idolatry

A distinction between the two cases must be made clear. The Talmud does not record two cases if they deal with the same phenomena.

This section of Talmud is discussing the phenomena of 'relation'.

If we look at two extremes, we see that phenomena are either related or unrelated. There are no quantitative levels between these two. Just as an object is either in motion or at rest, there is no partial motion. A falling leaf is in motion just as much as a fired bullet. Only in speed do they differ, but they equally partake of motion. In 'relation' as well there are two poles, either something is or isn't related to something else.

The assumption of relation is precisely where these two Jews questioned.

Before we answer, let us define what is and what isn't 'relating'. When someone throws a rock which hits glass, and simultaneously the glass breaks, we say the rock caused the glass to break. There is a relationship. As long as we can trace a cause and effect to natural laws of physics, and an effect follows a cause based on the laws operating at hand (glass breaking is immediate, while poison may take years) we then say there is a relationship. If however one throws a rock at glass but the glass does not break until 20 years later, we do not say the rock caused the glass to break. The time lapse divorces the rock from attaining the status of cause.

Let's apply these rules to our cases: The first case is an example of what we call 'coincidence'. We define coincidence as 'the simultaneous occurrence of two or more unrelated events.' For example, if someone throws a ball and simultaneously a shooting star appears in the sky, we say this is coincidence that both occurred at the same moment, as they are not related by any natural laws. If however one throws a ball and sprains their arm, we do not call that coincidence, as the relationship is clear.

This is Case 1. There is no physical relationship between one entering a church, and one's body being healed. (We are barring psychological causes as we are elucidating this Talmud strictly according to the text.) Here, man creates a relationship in his mind which is not in line with physical law.

If the second case were strictly coincidence, it would not have been recorded, as the Talmud is not redundant in its teachings. One may then ask, 'Am I to say there is some relationship between killing a man and rain falling?' The answer is of course patently no. But it is also not a case of coincidence as the two events did not occur at the same moment. Here, two events happened in succession. Normally we would not assume a relationship between two events which happen, even close in time. However, the element of a 'prediction' fools man into believing a relationship exists.

So there are two mistakes man makes when

interpreting phenomena: Case 1) He either associates two unrelated events based on the fact that he witnesses them occurring at once. Case 2) Man assumes relationships exist if their is close proximity in time to one another. Man assumes a link between the two events due to an element of forecast. In both cases however, man has erred, and there is in fact no relationship.

When the Rabbis began elucidating this area, they understood well that idolatry is false. There is only One Force in the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth and all forces in them. However, the Rabbis, as always, analyze an area and present categorical findings. They saw two distinct categories when it came to explaining away assumed effects of idolatry.

But we may now ask why a fool believes this?

This is what I believe the words, 'God has smoothed out' come to teach. God designed man's psyche in a way where he always has the ability to freely select intelligence as a way of life. God does not desire that man is 'forced' into this selection. Say for example, man was always frustrated by his desires, i.e. he couldn't overeat due to immediate stomach pain, he couldn't oversleep due to sudden headaches, he couldn't have intercourse more than once a week due to illness, etc. In this scenario, man would not be abstaining from desires and lusts based on an effort to curb his desires, but from adverse reactions. Internally, he would still be craving these desires. This is the central point.

God desires that man select a path in life based on intelligence, and without a choice, he is not selecting. If one cannot leave a lifestyle, he is not there by choice. He need not analyze the good of such a life, as he has no other option, so analysis is of no practical value. A true philosopher might analyze such an existence, but the Torah must be for all men, not just the rare philosophers.

Getting back to Case 2, the person did not create the relationship without external stimuli. Something beside himself contributed to the assumed relationship. In such a case, there is a choice;

1) The individual can believe what he sees on the surface, that is, he can follow what is 'smooth' in his own eyes. God is not smoothing it out, but God designed man that this 'smoothness' of explanation is available to mankind. Emotions have appeal, although they provide wrong conclusions, and false relationships.

2) He can follow wisdom. The wise man will see that someone had a dream - which was his own fantasy. There are no other gods. This wise man would try to stop them from killing an innocent man, as his mind tells him that there is no relationship between the murder and rain, regardless of the fact that it rained, wisdom dictates his thoughts and actions. The wise man knows

idolatry is false, but the average man doesn't. Succession removes this case from the definition of coincidence, enough so, that onlookers will follow their fantasies for idolatry.

Someone had asked, 'Why would God want to 'smooth' out their ways to remove them from the world? This seems to imply that God purposely made idolatry work so as to remove man from following Torah ideals.'

God did not make the phenomena misleading and smooth, rather, He made man with the ability to project smooth and appealing interpretations. To 'remove them from the world' is not God's goal, as we see from the quote, 'God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather, in his repentance'. To 'remove them from the world' refers to the numerous phenomena of desires which appeal to man as 'smooth', so as to act as the other choice for man. Without smooth, or attracting emotions, man has no choice. So God making them smooth to 'remove them from the world' is semi-allegorical for 'God made the purpose of the emotions (not God's goal) attract man'. God's goal is that man chooses between what satisfies his emotions, and what is right according to his mind. This is the plan for mankind, that we have both emotional drives, and intellectual curiosity (the yetzer hara, and yetzer hatove) and we must choose between them.

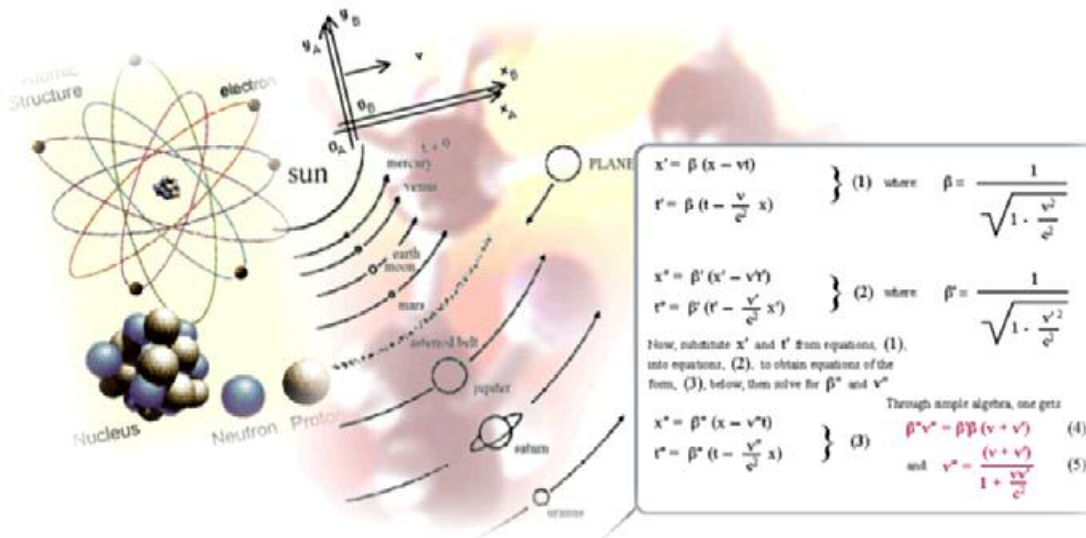
In summary, the Rabbis dismiss both cases, as they are examples of man drawing untrue relationships.

Man creates relationships in his mind, as this is where relationships truly exist. Relationships perceived accurately follow the laws of reality. A real relationship is one where there is perceivable, physical interaction. When there is no contact, can we say there is still a relationship? Our Talmud teaches that we cannot suggest so. These are the only two ways where man creates inaccurate relationships. I say 'only', as the Talmud exhausts all the possibilities. In Case 1, the relationship is baseless, as a simultaneous occurrence does not suffice to create a relationship between two events. All that is similar between these two phenomena is their timing. But there is no physical contact. As is seen from the shooting star example, Case 1 deals with coincidence in time. This relationship is drawn between two real phenomena, but they in fact have nothing to do with each other.

In Case 2, man draws a relationship based not on simultaneity, but on successive events linked together in man's mind by the presence of a forecast which removes this second case from being categorized as coincidence.

One may also add that 'dreams' are not considered 'events' as they happen in one's mind, not in reality.

Therefore, there isn't even a second 'event' to talk about. ■



God created the universe with infinite wisdom that awes the greatest minds.



Is the notion that this simple thread protects representative of this Creator's wisdom?

If all it takes is red strings, then prayer, charity, and perfection become meaningless. Is that how the Creator designed His world? Is that what the Torah says?

*"How great are Your works God, all of them are made with wisdom..."*

Psalm 104, authored by King David