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ESTD 1997

"Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him all bright stars for He commanded, and they were created."

King David: Psalm 148

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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Chassidishe Silver Rings

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Dear "Jewish Publication", □
In the xxxx-th issue of the "Jewish Publication" you ran an article endorsing "powers" reportedly contained in chassidishe silver rings. I wish you to give equal time in your publication to the view that there are no powers in the world other than Hashem. A human does not have power over his own life, how can he control another's life, even with rings? We do not rely on "any" inanimate object of any kind for protection. I will support my claim by the words of the Torah and Rishonim.

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Woman in Judaism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
commentary by
RABBI REUVEN MANN

Reader: Clearly the only way for a human being to reach God is to learn Torah and develop a deep understanding of His ways. However, within the Halachik system that God created, He makes it easier for some to do this more than others. The perfect example of this is the different "roles" the Torah lays out for man and woman. the Jewish man is encouraged to study Torah, delve into the deep rational ideas, and develop his mind with the study of Talmud. Because of this, the great sages were able to reach great spiritual heights. The woman however, was mapped out a different path by God Himself. She is to run the house, raise the children and not question her husbands authority. She cannot own property, inherit, or be a witness in a court, or pasken Halacha. A raped woman is not compensated for, except the fine that the rapist pays to her father, now that she is worthless property, unless she chooses to marry her rapist. It seems that women really got the raw end of the deal in the halachik system. Her whole purpose is to make it easier for men to learn Torah, by doing the dirty work and staying out of the way. Although women are not specifically prohibited from learning most parts of Torah(although some clearly are prohibited), the practice of teaching a daughter Torah was always considered absurd, and a waste of time. The Rambam seems to be pretty solid on this as well. It has only been recent that women began learning Torah, and this was only a response to their recent access to secular education, which was taking them away from the sheltered life of the ideal Jewish woman. Since I know that God is just, and is not either male or female, the only rational reason I can think of to explain this is the curse of Eve, that man will rule over her.

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WHY DID ELIEZER WAIT TO REQUEST WATER UNTIL AFTER REBECCA FILLED HER PITCHER? COULD HE NOT ASK HER WHEN HE FIRST SAW HER LEAVE HER HOUSE?

(Think for yourself before you read the answer.)

Answer: Only afterwards was Rebecca's pitcher 'drawn for herself'. It was 'hers'. The giving of one's own, drawn water demonstrates a greater act of loving kindness, more than merely responding to someone else's request. Eliezer sought the *highest* level of kindness. He therefore waited until Rebecca drew for herself, then asked for water, to see if she would part with her *own* water.

Have your children email us with their questions: questions@mesora.org

Love & Marriage -The Torah's Criteria

RIVKA OLENICK

"And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother; he married Rebecca, she became his wife and he loved her; and thus was Isaac consoled after his mother." Genesis 24: 67

It appears that the sentence above contains some unnecessary as well as some needed information. However, this would be contrary to the idea of not adding to or taking away from the Torah since the Torah's statements are all perfect truths. There is an order to the above statements. "And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother." The word "and" indicates a continuation from Sarah to Rebecca. We already know that Sarah is Isaac's mother yet the Torah states "Sarah his mother." He married Rebecca, she became his wife this seems obvious, yet it was necessary to make two separate statements. "And he loved her; and thus was Isaac consoled after his mother". It was after Isaac married Rebecca she became his wife. And it was after she became his wife that he loved her, not before. Love came after marriage. It also seems obvious that since Isaac married Rebecca and she became his wife, he loved her. Why does the sentence add: "And he loved her?" Is there a difference between love and consolation? Isn't love part of consolation? The dictionary's definition is as follows: "Console- to comfort, to cheer, especially by making up for a loss or disappointment, to give contentment or moderate happiness by relieving from distress." When you love your neighbor as yourself isn't part of that love to also console your neighbor in his/her time of pain and sorrow? Yet the Torah is indicating two separate ideas here: love and consolation. The Ramban's statement below joins love and consolation together by adding through. And it is through his love for his wife, was he consoled. The Torah does not say "and she loved him and he was consoled". Here Isaac loves Rebecca, and is consoled by her through his love for her. His love for her is not just because she loves him - that would be strictly an emotional reciprocation of her love. Rather it was based on her greatness, how she lived her life, her emulation of Sarah. Isaac grieved for his mother and all that she was. He needed comfort from his wife who would continue in the righteousness and deeds of his mother.

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Chassidishe Silver Rings

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

If you choose to endorse the Torah's views, I strongly urge you to see what the Torah says for yourself, and make it known to others. "Talmud Torah k'negged kulam".

I understand many may be awed by the reputation of those endorsing these silver chassidishe rings. However, just as the Rishonim themselves did not follow people, rather, they followed ideas, arrived at after critical analysis, we too must follow this mode of operation, engage reason and choose a view not based on an author, but based on the validity of its content. The Talmud teaches, "I would not follow (that view) had even Joshua said it". (Talmud Chulin 124a, at the very bottom). The doctors of the Talmud paid no respect to reputation. Ramban didn't simply follow Maimonides due to the fame of the latter. Reputation played no role in Ramban's Torah adherence. We don't find Ramban while arguing with Maimonides, yet saying Maimonides is also right! This is absurd and against reason. Celebrity endorsements play no role in the validity of reality and Torah.

Unfortunately today's religious communities are impressed with names, not chochma (wisdom). Our communities echo with sentiments like, "who am I to argue with so and so?" People abandon the use of their own minds if someone supposedly greater makes a philosophical statement. People feel if someone is a Rabbi, he must be right and "who am I to argue?" In psak halacha, yes, but not in hashkafa. You must realize that simple reasoning shows the fallacy of this argument. If there are for example, two Rabbis who argue with each other's opinion, by definition, they cannot both be correct. Astonishingly, I have even heard people say they can both be right. Amazing! How far are people from honesty. The Ramban showed both he and Maimonides cannot both be right when they argue. So how do people hold such self-contradictory positions? They evidently are not following Chazal, but following their emotions. The Chovas HaLavavos says we must do just the opposite. (See below)

The same way we look to the words of the Chumash to determine what is Torah shebicsav, we look to the Rishonim for Torah she'bal peh. Torah has at its core the system of the Mesora, the oral tradition, which originated with Moshe and which was passed down through generations. We must limit our sources to these to

determine what falls within the pale of Judaism and what does not. This is our sole barometer:

Tefila (Daily Prayers) We say every day "Ki hu livadu po-ale g'vuros", For He alone works might". We ourselves attest to man's incapability to perform wonders, or the like. This is clear. This clearly denounces the silver chassidishe rings.

Amulets may have been accepted by certain individuals, but keep in mind they are "mutar", permissible, not obligatory. This teaches that their existence in limited forms is tolerable, not a suggested practice. The acceptable forms are based on the reasoning that people have the need for psychological ease. Perhaps reflecting on a pasuk in an amulet places a person at ease when in straits. He is thereby reassured of God's word. However, not one of our masters of the Talmud ever held that there were any powers on Earth - except for those empowered by Hashem Himself, as we say in davening each day "...He alone works might". We must not endorse amulets as they are falsely understood today as having powers. This is clearly false, against reason, and against our Tfilos.

It is crucial to understand that assuming silver rings contain power goes directly against Hashem's unshakeable laws of Reward and Punishment discussed throughout the Torah, and so clearly in Yeshiah, chapter 18. Hashem teaches us that a wicked person is punished, and a righteous person rewarded. According to this view of "rings", someone deserving a punishment from Hashem will not receive it if he wears one of these rings. So what is mightier, these rings or Hashem's laws of Reward and Punishment? If they will respond that Hashem still punishes a wicked person, even while wearing these rings, and he rewards the righteous even when they don't wear these rings as we see throughout the Chumash, then these rings do not effect any change! We have now proved conclusively that silver chassidishe rings have no powers. This applies to any object.

I will now quote our authentic sources - not for the sake of gaining endorsement, but for the sake of showing the undiluted Mesora:

Tosefta Sabbath: Chapter 7 states the wearing of red threads on fingers is considered "ways of the Emorites". Against Judaism. (This clearly denounces the popular red bendels.)

Ibn Ezra: Parshas Kedoshim (Lev. 19:31) "...the brainless people say if it wasn't for the fact that the Ovos (idolatry) and also the witchcraft worked, the Torah would not have prohibited them. But I say opposite their words, as the Torah doesn't prohibit what is truth, but rather, (it prohibits only that) which is false. And the proof is (the prohibition) against "elilim" and "psilim" (statues of idolatry which all

attest to their inability to do anything). If it weren't that I do not desire to go into this at length, I would bring clear proofs against Ove".

Maimonides: Peirush Mishnayos, Avoda Zara 55a "...the good and pious of our own (Jewish) nation feel there is truth to idolatry, but they are prohibited only from the Torah. But they don't know that they are futile and lies, and we are commanded by the Torah not to do them, as we are warned in the Torah not to lie."

Saadia Gaon: Emunos v'Daos" "I say also that it was for this very reason that God made the prophets equal to all other human beings in so far as death was concerned, lest man get the idea that just as these prophets were capable of living forever, in contradistinction to them, so were they also able to perform marvels in contradistinction to them."

"For if God would have done that (allowed prophets existence without food or drink) men would have ascribed this fact to some peculiarity in the constitution of the prophets wherein they deviated from the rules applying to all other men. They would have said that just as the prophet necessarily deviated [from the character of the rest of humanity] in this respect so too it was a forgone conclusion that they be able to do what we cannot."

"God did not allow the prophets to commit miracles at all times nor permit them always to know the secrets of the future, lest the uneducated masses think that they were possessed of some peculiarity as a matter of course. He rather permitted them to perform these miracles at certain stated occasions and to obtain that knowledge at certain times so that it might thereby become clear that all this was conferred upon them by the Creator and that it was not brought about by themselves." (This denounces any distinction given to kabbalists or rabbis feigning to have powers. If they defend themselves by stating they do nothing without God's intervention, they border on being false prophets.)

Rabbi Bachya: "Chovas Halavavos" "Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly G-d's commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence."

"If, however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain of it - both by tradition and by force of reason. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you

fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator."

Devarim 17:8-10 states: "If a case should prove too difficult for you in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, between (leprous) mark and mark, or other matters of dispute in your courts,you must act in accordance with what they tell you." Regarding this passage, Rabbi Bachya states: "the verse does not say,....simply accept them on the authority of Torah sages,....and rely exclusively on their tradition. Rather, (Scripture) says that you should reflect on your own mind, and use your intellect in these matters. First learn them from tradition - which covers all the commandments in the Torah, their principles and details - and then examine them with your own mind, understanding, and judgment, until the truth become clear to you, and falsehood rejected, as it is written: "Understand today and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the G-d in the heavens above, and on the Earth below, there is no other". (Ibid, 4:39)

Gilyon M'harsha: Yoreh Dayah, 289, (page 113 on the bottom), "If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by G-d. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes".

Genesis: When Rachel asked Yaakov for children, Yaakov said, "Am I in G-d's stead?". Yaakov attested to the fact that he had no power to give her children. If people have powers, why did Jacob respond this way? It is clear that Jacob understood that no one is able to do what G-d does. Those were his very words, "Am I in G-d's stead?". (This denounces the practice of seeking brachos from rabbis. Rav Moshe Feinstein was once asked that he give a brachah, to which he responded, "If you are learning Torah, you have the greatest brachah, if you are not, there is nothing I can give you.")

Prophets: When Naaman requested Elisha to rid him of his leprosy, Elisha did not leave the house, but rather, he sent a messenger to instruct Naaman to bathe, and this would remove his ailment. Naaman was upset with Elisha, that he did not come out, call upon G-d's name, and "wave his hand over the place of the leprosy and remove it". A friend suggested wisely, that Elisha desired that G-d retain the grandeur for such a miracle, therefore, Elisha did not leave the house. He avoided the spotlight, as Elisha knew that G-d was the performer of all miracles, and did not want to mislead Naaman. Elisha was aware that people desire to believe in man as a miracle worker. Elisha therefore avoided at all cost, taking any credit for that which man has no connection with.

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Woman in Judaism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
commentary by
RABBI REUVEN MANN

(continued from page 1)

But still, being subjugated to men is only a trifle of a punishment when compared to the fact that women have been denied access to true Torah, the only rational method of reaching God, and the purpose of mankind! Why are women excluded?

Mesora: Women are not prohibited from learning. They have many mitzvos, and in order to understand what and why they perform mitzvos, they must study them. They can achieve the same learning as man. However, also understand that "perfection" (not amassed learning or intellectual acumen) is God's goal for both man and woman. Perfection - one's relationship with their Creator - cannot be measured the same for men and women. As God has given different roles to each, the fulfillment of God's will for each is different, and thus, each one's perfection must be in line with God's will. Perfection equals fulfilling God's will. Perfection is not Torah learning per se. This I believe to be the cause of error.

Just as one cannot use the same criteria for judging the perfection of a car and a jet, so also men and women have diverse roles. By fulfilling God's will, woman achieve perfection through Love of God just as do men. Her role is raising children, a very clear example of care for other human beings which Rambam holds is the mark of true perfection, not learning per se. Perfection is measured through Ahavas Hashem - Love of God - commanded equally for men and women.

Let us look at the command for men to study: It is not through the fulfillment of this command alone that men achieve perfection. Rambam holds that the fulfillment of Torah study in men can be accomplished by a few minutes of study in the morning and the evening. This however is no panacea for perfection. The command for men to study is tied to their role to teach. This is man's role in Judaism. As the system requires strict adherence and promulgation, there must be a group responsible. Teaching is simply man's role. He is not more inclined towards perfection because he must teach, and therefore commanded to learn. Perfection is not measured in terms of amassed knowledge. Wasn't Avraham commanded by God to listen to his wife regarding Ishmael? According to Rashi, Sarah surpassed Avraham's level of prophecy.

Man is no more favored than woman. Both man and woman are obligated in the Love of God. It would be unfair that God would create two beings, giving them both the potential for perfection, but limit the abilities of one. This is not so. Love of God, learning, and teaching others is man's role to protect the system of Torah knowledge. Love of God, keeping her commands and raising children fit for Torah lives is women's role. Women raise males, and men teach women. Both are essential. Both

realize their respective perfections through Love of God.

God's will is that man be formed as an infant, so that he experiences the phenomena of 'looking up to parents'. This relationship where parents are authoritative is needed if man is to eventually relate to God as an authority. Without this gradual process of growth wherein children develop roles in their mind, specifically authority roles, their relationship with God will be severely lacking.

It is God's will that man develop in this fashion, and that the mother is present at the side of the infants to nurture. Yocheved and Miriam had a tradition of how to raise children. A Rabbi once explained why the Torah changes the names of Yocheved to "Shifra" and Miriam to "Pu-hah". Pharaoh had commanded these woman - the leaders of the women in Egypt - to kill the males, to which they would not comply, but saved all the children. These names refer to their address of the physical and psychological planes: Yocheved would take care of the children physically, indicated by the use of the term "Shifra", and Miriam would console the children psychologically by singing to them, indicated by the term "Pu-hah". Attending to both the physical and psychological needs of a newborn was something which was not only performed with knowledge, but was also an institution from the Forefathers. As men of great wisdom, the Forefathers understood all areas of man's needs, and this starts of course at birth. The Forefathers instituted that all Jewish mothers would cradle and pacify an infant throughout childhood so as to render each and every Jew most fit for a life of Torah. Torah enters one who is most perfected physically and psychologically. We see from this area of Chumash that the role of the woman is vital to all mankind. Since Love of God is the goal, man must first be rendered into one who is most receptive to ideas, and this is only if man is raised physically and psychologically sound.

As to your other comments, a woman may refuse her husband's financial support and make her own living, and keep it. If she wants her husband's support, she still maintains her wealth brought into the marriage. She may and should question her husband. I never heard that a woman must listen to her husband. That makes no sense. Every person should be guided by reason, not their spouses commands. Of course you must have a unified approach to the raising of children and halachos, but she need not agree and "follow" her husband on matters she sees different than her husband. Inheritance is clearly something which women are entitled to. I don't know where you are getting your information. Even the chumash says openly that the daughters of Tzelof-chad inherited their father's land.

Regarding positions of authority, it makes sense that the gender commanded to learn Torah laws should govern the laws. If the roles were opposite, then women would be enforcing the laws. This is just. Should students teach the teachers? Of course not, they have no training. Had they, then they would be teachers and not students. Men therefore are commanded to enforce laws, act as witnesses, run courts, and all that is required in that area of Torah enforcement.

Judaism's role for women could not be more fair and just, as it is in all other areas. It all stems from God who is consistent and just in all of His actions. Women equally achieve true perfection - realized by their Love of God. □

Magicians vs. Prophets

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: What exactly is the difference between Moses and any of the other prophets?

Mesora: See the paper, "Maimonides 13 Principles", Principle VII.

Reader: You write that Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles he displayed; in fact, you disparage the concept of a warlock in general. On the other hand, one of the tests a prophet has to pass in order to be accepted is the prediction of the future - exactly the type of miracle being performed in many of the stories, some having been corroborated, that people have written to you about. Yet when people write you about that, you respond with Maimonides' criticism of astrology.

Mesora: Let me first say that astrology today is not divine, it is man's invention, as opposed to prophecy which is God's Divine, informative gift.

If I am clear, what you are asking is how a warlock is of no validation, yet one who predicts future events is accepted, and even warranted. It is a good question.

I would make this distinction; A warlock, as opposed to one who tells the future are doing two qualitatively different acts. The one forecasting events which come true 100%, demonstrates a perfection in the realm of knowledge, and only attainable by God's Will. This validates that he is in line with the Creator. Additionally, he is not spoken of in the Torah as one who derails another from following the Torah, as opposed to one who performs tricks in order to cause others to defect from Judaism. Here alone we see why God tells us not to follow the baal mofes, the warlock. As he is speaking against the Torah, God teaches us that when both a warlock and Torah come into conflict, the Torah always is to be followed. Torah is the absolute truth. Saadia Gaon dismisses all the signs of Pharaoh's magicians as merely slight of hand.

One might ask, "what if an accurate predictor of events tells us to follow idolatry? Do we then follow him, as he predicted future events accurately, is he now completely validated by his forecast?" The answer is that one who forecasts accurately, will never oppose the Torah. Why? It is because his forecast demonstrates that he is receiving knowledge from God, and God will never give a true forecast to one who opposes Torah. This is the case as God instructs us that one who forecasts with 100% accuracy must be accepted by Torah standards. □

Love & Marriage- The Torah's Criteria

RIVKA OLENICK

(continued from page 1)

The Ramban states: "He found consolation only through his love for his wife." This love was inspired by her righteousness and the aptness of deeds, the only criteria upon which the Torah bases the love between husband and wife". The Ramban says: "only through his love for his wife did Isaac find consolation." Only through his love would mean that he perceives and sees and knows that his love for her is based upon her actions. The same actions that his mother Sarah performed meaning the love and respect he had for Sarah his mother he has for Rebecca. Sarah's tent was not dismantled and Isaac brought Rebecca to his mother Sarah's tent not his tent, indicating that Rebecca would continue Sarah's activities of chesed.

Rashi says: "This is the way of the world; a man is attached to his mother during her lifetime: when she dies he finds comfort in his wife."

When Isaac brought Rebecca into Sarah's tent he saw that Rebecca was like Sarah in her deeds and in her ways. It was after he brought her into the tent did he observe this himself and he married her. After all, Isaac knew Eliezer was bringing someone for him to marry. He knew that Eliezer was looking for the right person who would fit the profile of a woman of kindness, of chesed. He saw himself that her deeds were righteous. Do people objectively look at the actions of the other person? A person only looks at the actions of another only in relation to themselves. The person asks: "What is this person doing for me? What am I getting?" That's what matters! This is an extremely important point often overlooked by people who are dating. Most people are too caught up in the image and appearance of the other person how the person looks can have such a powerful effect on the other person that negative personality traits are secondary even overlooked and at worst denied. This is a real trap that many people don't know they're in and others can't get out of. Isaac saw what Rebecca was that she was kind and righteous in all her actions, this is what naturally produces love. Love is the result. And in supporting the Ramban's statement that the only criteria of the Torah regarding love between man and woman is based on how a person lives their life.

Samson Raphael Hirsch adds: "Marriage preceded love, the more they were married, the more Isaac loved her." In this, the first Jewish marriage the Torah illustrates the principle that has generally been followed by Jews." Jewish marriages are contracted not as a result of passion and romance, but as a result of good judgment and sound reason. If the couple is well suited, the marriage will result in love and happiness. Marriages based on pre-marital infatuation, however all too often fail the test of married life. The chapter ends with the words that exalt and ennoble the status of a Jewish wife. Isaac was a mature man when his mother died, but he could not be consoled as long as the sweetness and goodness of the Matriarch was gone from the home. In his wife he found consolation she embodied worth, nobility and greatness. □

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Chassidishe Silver Rings

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 2)

It is for the crime of the belief in powers other than Hashem which our prophets so many times criticized the Jews. Hashem sent His prophets to warn the people of their error. The prophet did not speak his own mind, but what was instructed of him by Hashem. We must understand then, that Hashem wills us to follow only Him, as their are no other forces. Deviating from Hashem is what brings His abandonment of Israel, and all the ill fate we experience.

There are many arguments which clearly show the absurdity of such notions as these silver rings:

Ask any of these quoted rabbis if these rings can cause an amputee to regrow that limb. They will of course say the ring has no such ability. Then ask him what is the formula by which the ring may cause their miracles to occur, but not others. If they hold of miraculous cures, why do they not hold that all miracles can be performed by these rings? Why are they speechless when posed with our question? You will see that they have no answers, as these foolish notions are not based on reason as is the Torah and Hashem's laws, "v'chol darcheha, darchei no-am", "and all her ways are ways of pleasantness". Their practices are based on fantasy, but they cloak them with "halachik-type" mystique to resemble halachik institutions.

The reason the proponents of rings will not claim that they make limbs regrow or the like, is simple: They will not place their reputations at risk. The phenomenon which they say are caused by these rings are natural, and for which man cannot pinpoint the cause. Since there is no way - in their minds - of proving these rings didn't cause the phenomena, they will give credit to the rings. People do heal in time, make fortunes, find psychological ease from stress, all without these rings. All that is occurring when one wears the rings is the rabbi taking credit for natural phenomena which will happen anyway. Had the successful business man not worked for months, he would not have made a fortune just sitting at home wearing these rings. But these foolish followers still maintain the rings caused the fortune. if a sickly person wears the rings without taking medicine, he will die. I don't think any of these rabbis quoted would - if sick - abandon medicine in favor of wearing metal ore on a finger. If they would, they are foolish. Maimonides never prescribed such nonsense, he worked within the

confines of natural science.

The Talmud states (Avoda Zara 55a) that Zunin, a Jew, asked Rabbi Akiva, "We both know that there is nothing to idolatry, so why is it that I see a sick heathen enter a church, and then see him leave all healed? Rabbi Akiva responded, 'Diseases have a duration, they would have left his body at this time anyway, so just because this fool chose to enter a Church at the precise moment his illness was to leave, should the illness remain and oppose natural law because of this fool?'"

This gemara teaches that people will always try to view a phenomena as "cause" for events, if such relationships fit a person's fantasies. In this section of gemara, the heathen undoubtedly felt his prayers to his idols caused his health to return. A chochom as Rabbi Akiva saw the truth. Unfortunately, these rabbi supporting the rings are falling sway to the same idolatrous emotion as this heathen, as they fabricate relationships between the wearing of these idolatrous rings and the latter found success or health. When confronted with such stories, the gemara is what we follow. We don't follow these stories and throw out the Talmud.

Authentic Torah principles are those which sit well with man, they are of ease to his mind and jive with his God-made intellect. yes, there are Chukim, but this does not mean they are bereft of reason, even Shlomo Hamelech knew the reasons for all except one of the Nechash Henechoshes, the Brass Serpent, that it was a physical object which healed, there are two sound responses; 1) This was commanded by Hashem Himself and therefore not Avoda Zara, 2) Chazal already explained that the snake didn't heal, but Hashem did the healing. The snake had no powers.

To arrive at a clear hashkafa, (philosophy) I urge you, read the Torah, see Chazal (the commentators), and understand clearly the precise laws and principles which Hashem wishes we understand. Follow Hashem's word in the T'Nach and talmud, not current view which differ. What will you do when two rabbis argue? You cannot hold they are both right. You must use your own mind to determine the truth, and without Torah knowledge, you will have no tools to do so. Philosophy has no psak (ruling), so study Torah carefully and accurately. Think for yourself, arrive at conclusions only when matters are clear to you.

You are living your life for yourself, and only once. Take great care during your one chance here. Learn what Hashem has placed before you to discern. Hashem designed each of us with reason. We each have the ability to determine what makes sense, and what is false. Don't be afraid to do so.

It is Hashem's will that each person use their own mind, as He has given each of us free choice.

Reader's response to "Silver Rings" article

"Dear Editor;

It was with great amazement that I read your article regarding Chassideshe men wearing silver rings as amulets. While true amulets are also problematical from a halachik point of view, at least they usually have some writing on them; words that may bring to mind hashkafically true ideas. These rings do not even have the benefit of such words. They are purley physical objects. Although you cite to a long list of approbations, without seeing what those Rabbis specifically wrote, I cannot accept them as authority for the investment of powers in thes physical objects. The biggest deficiency of the article is the lack of any suggestion that ascribing powers to these rings is a controversial halachik issue. There are many sources in Chazal and the Rishonim which indicate that investing powers in physical objects is prohibited. A prime example is the Tosefta in Maseches Shabbos, Perek 7, which states that the wearing of red threads on one's finger is considered being in the "ways of the Emorites". You wrote that if one takes one of these rings into a cemetery, he must immerse the ring in a Mikveh. During the conquest of Eretz Yisrael, the Aron Kodesh went into battle with the Jews. Surely there were dead bodies on the battlefield. Yet the Torah didn't require the purification of the Aron. Are these rings more holy than the Aron Kodesh? People routinely take siddurim & Sefer Tehillim into cemeteries, without immersing them in the Mikveh afterwards. Are these rings more holy than these seforim? It seems to me that elevating these rings to such a "holy" level is an indication that deep in their hearts, the proponents of wearing these rings recognize the fallacy of attributing powers to thes man made objects." □

Sparing the Truth

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Dear Rabbi Ben-Chaim, I love your website. I did not realize that Orthodox Judaism had such a beautiful system of logic. I have wonderful and caring neighbors who happen to be Church of Christ and the man is the

pastor. Yesterday he started attempting to witness to me and I used Rabbi Tovias Singer's materials to completely confound this man and his King James Bible. How far should I go in inviting this man in and exposing him to the beauty of Judaism? Isn't it unfair to destroy a man's ignorance if to do so might disrupt his whole life and family? My thinking is that this man is only accountable to God for the Noachide laws and that it is not his fault that he was raised with an idolatrous belief in a "god made flesh". I love to teach my gentile friends about the beauty of Judaism but I also don't want to alienate anyone or cause divorce in a family. Is this Galut mentality? Shalom, Aaron

Mesora: Aaron, You may teach him what you wish to impress him with the ideas of Judaism. What he may practice is another story, viz., as he cannot observe shabbos 100%. That is an exclusive practice for Jews.

If you replace his false notions with the concrete truth, he should not feel the rug pulled out from under him. On the contrary, one find's only true security in what is provable, in contrast to baseless beliefs. When one realizes ideas based in reality, now his mind is involved, whereas with blind faith, the mind is completely absent. When one's mind sees truths, his true essence is satisfied, his doubt removed, and true conviction exists.

Man is culpable for his actions and beliefs. Being raised in idolatrous ways is no defense. We all have intelligence, and the opportunity to approach our philosophy of life with rationale. At some point a person must abandon his false ideas, and only you know what he is ready to hear, and when. Be sure to befriend him so your rejection of 'his' ideas does not result in his feelings of self pity. Feelings of ignorance may accompany his feelings of embarrassment when he sees he ascribed to fallacy. But if you make it clear that you denounce ideas - not him - and you show a warmth, he will not sink into a depressed attitude. Your concern and friendship will support him with feelings of self value essential to ward off guilt for following baseless ideas until now. Any possible embarrassment will be avoided as you show that you do not accuse him of wrong, but the false notions which predated him. Make it clear that even our forefather Abraham worshiped idols, and all men including Moses err. "There is no righteous man in the land that does good and does not sin".

Nothing should come in between your teaching another human being the truth. Mankind's purpose is to learn about God and reality, and the Jew's purpose is to teach mankind.