

What prevents Jews from observing a Torah lifestyle? What insights might we offer them?

1997  
2009  
12  
YEARS

# JewishTimes

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

Volume VIII, No. 21...April 24, 2009

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

## IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: TAZRIA	I-5
REMAINING NON-RELIGIOUS	1,67
REMAINING UNMARRIED	8
PASSOVER REPRINT	9-14

## THE JEWISHTIMES

EDUCATING 10,000s  
WORLDWIDE



JOIN IN THE MITZVAH  
WWW.MESORA.ORG/DONATE

## CANDLE LIGHTING 4/24

Boston	7:16	Moscow	7:35
Chicago	7:22	New York	7:26
Cleveland	7:58	Paris	8:36
Detroit	8:05	Philadelphia	7:29
Houston	7:35	Phoenix	6:47
Jerusalem	6:55	Pittsburgh	7:49
Johannesburg	5:26	Seattle	7:52
Los Angeles	7:12	Sydney	5:06
London	7:52	Tokyo	6:03
Miami	7:30	Toronto	7:53
Montreal	7:32	Washington DC	7:35

## Weekly Parsha

# Tazria

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Reconciling Torah with  
Science

Speak to Bnai Yisrael saying: If a woman conceives and gives birth to

(continued on next page)

## Kindness

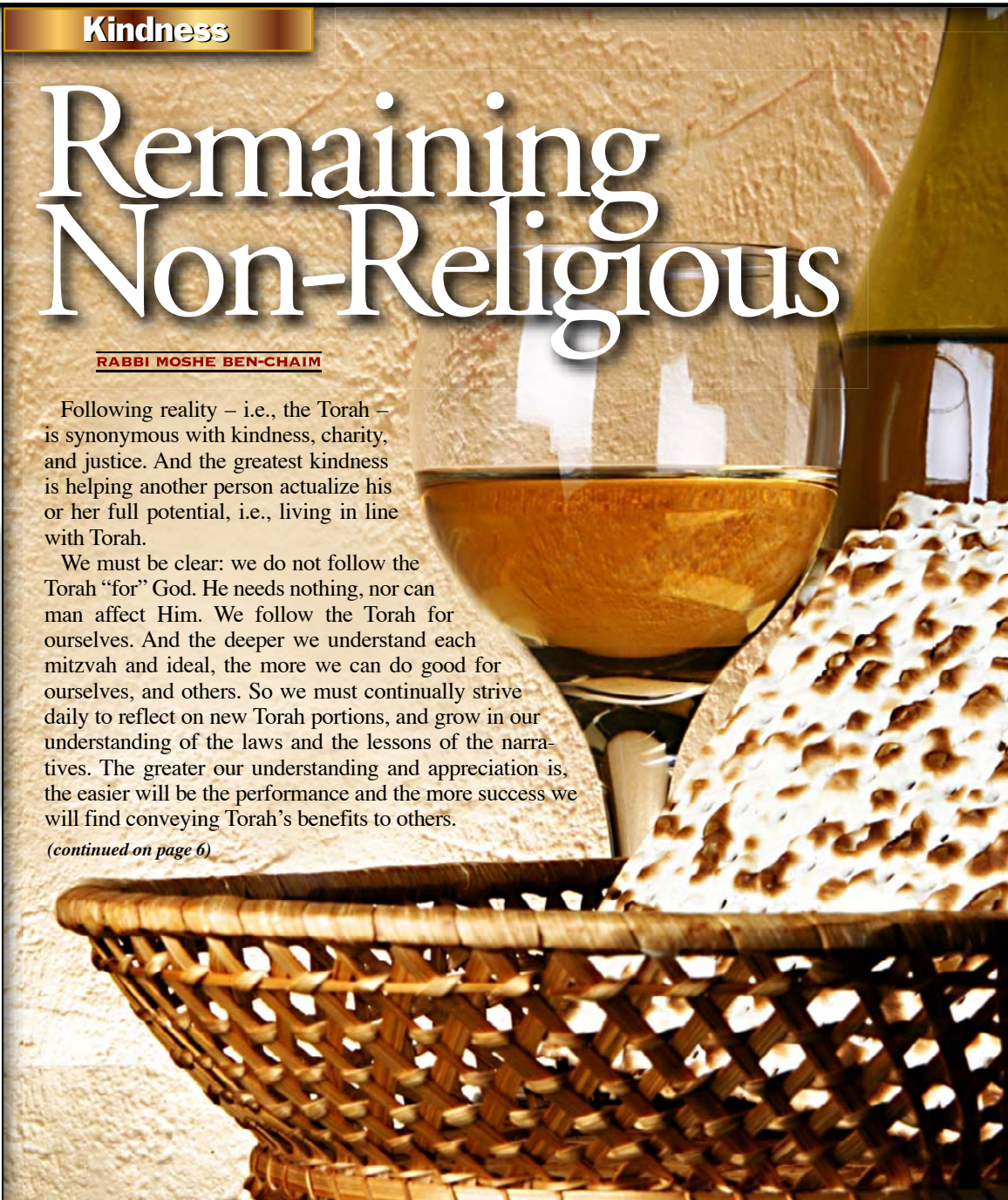
# Remaining Non-Religious

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Following reality – i.e., the Torah – is synonymous with kindness, charity, and justice. And the greatest kindness is helping another person actualize his or her full potential, i.e., living in line with Torah.

We must be clear: we do not follow the Torah “for” God. He needs nothing, nor can man affect Him. We follow the Torah for ourselves. And the deeper we understand each mitzvah and ideal, the more we can do good for ourselves, and others. So we must continually strive daily to reflect on new Torah portions, and grow in our understanding of the laws and the lessons of the narratives. The greater our understanding and appreciation is, the easier will be the performance and the more success we will find conveying Torah’s benefits to others.

(continued on page 6)





(Tazria cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



**The JewishTimes is published every Friday and delivered by email. Subscriptions are FREE. To subscribe, send any email message to: [subscribe@mesora.org](mailto:subscribe@mesora.org)**

Subscribers will also receive our advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements.

**Contacts:**

We invite feedback or any questions at this address: [office@mesora.org](mailto:office@mesora.org)  
Ph(516)569-8888 Fx(516)569-0404

**Advertising:**

<https://www.Mesora.org/Advertising>

**Donations:**

<https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

**Content at Mesora.org:****JewishTimes Archives:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes>

**Philosophy Archives:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/Philosophy>

**Weekly Parsha Archives:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/WeeklyParsha>

**Audio Archives:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/Audio>

**Interactive, Live, Audible Sessions:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/TalkLive>

**Database Search:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/Search>

Articles may be reprinted without consent of the JewishTimes or the authors, provided the content is not altered, and credits are given.

*a male, she shall be unclean for seven days; as [in] the days of her menstrual flow, she shall be unclean.* (VaYikra 12:2)

This pasuk explains that after giving birth a woman is ritually unclean for seven days. There is a fascinating teaching from our Sages relating to the pasuk. They explain that the pasuk alludes to the factors influencing the gender of the child. The Sages maintained that the process of conception requires that seed from the female be joined with seed from the male. This pasuk describes the birth of a male child. The translation above is not perfectly literal. A more literal rendering of the passage is that "When a woman gives forth seed and gives birth to a male child..." In this more literal translation, the birth of a male child is associated with the seed of the woman entering the womb prior to the seed of the husband. Commenting on this pasuk, our Sages explained that if the seed from the female enters the womb first, the child is destined to be male. If the husband's seed is present first, a baby girl will be born.

This theory does not correspond with today's understanding of the reproduction process. How should we regard such teachings? Are we to reject modern science? Are we to deny the validity of our Sages' theories?

Torah Temimah helps respond to this dilemma. He explains that the Sages based their theory upon the scientific knowledge of the times. The intention of the Sages was not to indicate that our pasuk is the source of their conclusion. They based their conclusion upon the scientific views of their times. Instead, they saw in a pasuk, an allusion to the theory of gender determination that was then the accepted scientific position.

Torah Temimah provides an interesting proof to his claim. The Talmud offers an alternative for its theory of gender determination. In listing the children of Yaakov, the Chumash refers to Dinah as Yaakov's daughter rather than as Leyah's child. The Sages explain that the male children are attributed to Leyah. This is because they resulted from her seed preceding that of Yaakov. Dinah is referred to as Yaakov's daughter based upon the same reasoning. This female child was a result of Yaakov's seed entering the womb first.

Torah Temimah points out that this source certainly cannot be a derivation of the Sages' theory of gender determination. He bases this

observation upon another teaching of the Sages. The Sages suggest that Dinah was conceived as a male child. Leyah prayed that the sex of the child be reversed. Her prayers were answered and Dinah – a female child – was born. If the pasuk attributing Dinah to Yaakov is a derivation, it suggests a theory of gender determination completely contrary to the theory of our Sages. The father contributed the first seed and a male child was conceived! Only through miraculous intervention was the gender reversed and a female baby born.

This suggests that the intention of our Sages is not to derive a biological principle from either source. The principle is based upon scientific knowledge. The sources are merely regarded as possible allusions to the idea.[1]

## Tzara'at is Cured Only Through Repentance

*And the Kohen shall see. And the tzara'at has covered all of his skin, then he shall declare the afflicted person clean. As long as he has turned completely white, he is clean.* (VaYikra 13:13)

This pasuk discusses the affliction of tzara'at. Tzara'at can afflict various parts of the body. This passage deals with tzara'at appearing upon the skin. Tzara'at is described as a white discoloration. The affliction is not regarded as a disease of physical origin. It is the result of spiritual impurity. It can only be identified by the kohen. If the kohen declares the ailment to be tzara'at, the person becomes a metzora and is unclean.

A person whose skin is generally healthy but a small portion is afflicted with tzara'at is unclean. However, a person completely covered by the affliction is considered clean. This seems somewhat odd. A small blotch of tzara'at is adequate to render a generally healthy person unclean. Yet, a person covered with the affliction from head to toe is clean!

This paradox can be explained through an analysis of the definition of tzara'at. Tzara'at is an affliction of the skin. It must exist in contrast to healthy skin. This contrast is essential to the definition of tzara'at. Without the contrast, tzara'at does not exist. Therefore, a person completely covered with the affliction is not deemed unclean. There is no contrast; an essential criterion for tzara'at has not been met.

(continued on next page)

The issues can also be viewed at a deeper level. Let us begin by considering another issue. A person afflicted with the discoloration of tzara'at is immediately brought to the kohen. After examination, the kohen must determine the status of the individual. This decision has various ramifications that are discussed in the parasha. It is sufficient to note that advanced tzara'at is far more serious than the preliminary form of the affliction.

Tzara'at of the skin is evaluated on the basis of three symptoms. Any one of these symptoms indicates that the tzara'at is advanced. One of the symptoms is a discoloration of the hair in the affected area. This discoloration is a change from the natural color to white. The presence of this white hair is an indication of advanced tzara'at.

Imagine a person finds a white blotch upon the skin. The person sees that white hair is present. May the person remove the white hair before consulting the kohen? This is prohibited.[2] Nonetheless, if the law is violated and the hair is removed, the intervention is effective. The kohen must evaluate the person as he or she appears.[3] At the time the person appears before the kohen, the white hair is not present.

This might seem a little odd. The Torah is creating a tremendous temptation. The metzora has the opportunity to remove the hair before appearing before the kohen. The intervention is effective. Yet, the metzora is expected to refrain from taking this step!

In order to respond to these issues, we need to understand the function of this affliction. Tzara'at is a divine punishment. It is a consequence of lashon hara – tale bearing and gossip.[4] The affliction is a warning designed to encourage repentance. The tzara'at cannot be effectively treated medically. Only spiritual improvement cures the disease.

The affliction cannot be relieved until the person is declared unclean and begins the process of repentance and spiritual cleansing. This is adequate motivation to prevent a person from removing the signs of tzara'at. Little will be gained through the intervention. Much will be lost. True, the intervention will influence the declaration of the kohen. However, the affliction will continue unabated. The healing process can only begin after the declaration of the kohen. In other words, one must first accept the status of being unclean. Then one may begin the process of purification.

This provides a deeper understanding of the law governing the person completely covered with the affliction. The person is not declared unclean. This is not leniency; until the person is declared unclean, the process of purification cannot begin. The affliction will continue. Only after a healthy portion of skin appears, can the person be identified as a metzora. With this declaration, the process of repentance and purification can begin.

### Segregating the Metzora

*All the days that he is afflicted with the disease he shall be unclean. He is unclean. He shall dwell alone. Outside of the camp shall be his dwelling.* (VaYikra 13:46)

A person declared to be a metzora is segregated from the community. Rashi explains the reason for this law. Tzara'at is a divine punishment for lashon hara – speaking negatively about others. This activity creates division and strife within the community. The segregation of the metzora is a fitting punishment. He has caused division within the community. It is appropriate that his punishment should include exclusion from the community.[5]

Daat Zekaynim offers another explanation for this law. The affliction of tzara'at is a divine punishment. However, the disease is a physical ailment and contagious. The metzora is quarantined in order to prevent the spread of the disease.[6]

The explanation of Daat Zekaynim presents an interesting problem. The disease of tzara'at can be communicated through contact with the metzora. Yet, halachah treats the metzora as guilty of a crime. This treatment implies that the ailment was not contracted by natural means! This contradicts Daat Zekaynim's contentions that the disorder can be conventionally transmitted.

Maimonides explains that the laws of the Torah are designed to encourage physical, as well as spiritual, well-being. In discussing the laws regulating our eating, he elaborates on this theme. He explains that the foods prohibited by the Torah are generally unhealthy.[7] It must be noted that Maimonides is not asserting that the reason for these laws is simply to ensure good health. He explains that the Torah regulates our behavior in order to encourage temperance and moderation.[8] However, the Torah did not arbitrarily prohibit certain foods and behaviors in order to encourage temperance. Instead, food and behaviors were forbidden that are potentially

unhealthy. In this manner, the Torah achieved a secondary goal of encouraging good health.

Modern medical science may differ with some of Maimonides' theories regarding proper diet. Yet, his basic assumption is reasonable. The Torah is a guide for the proper life. It is appropriate to assume that the various laws encourage physical well-being.

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo answers our question based upon Maimonides' thesis. He explains that it is possible for tzara'at to be transmitted naturally. However, confronted with an individual suffering from the disease, we do not assume that a natural transmission took place. We assume that the ailment represents a divine punishment. What is the basis for this assumption? The Torah regulates our consumption and hygiene. For this reason the metzora is quarantined. Through these regulations, the physical causes for the disease are controlled. Therefore, halachah assumes that the contraction of the disease is not a result of natural transmission.[9]

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo explains another mystery regarding tzara'at based upon this same approach. The Torah outlines various forms of tzara'at. If tzara'at is a divine punishment, why are all of these forms needed? He explains that although the disease is a spiritual punishment, it is also a natural phenomenon. In other words, Hashem causes the person to contract a natural ailment. A physical ailment will take slightly different forms in various people. A single disease has different symptoms in different people. Therefore, tzara'at will appear in varying forms.[10]

### Torah Laws and Health Concerns

*Speak to Bnai Yisrael saying: If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be unclean for seven days; as [in] the days of her menstrual flow, she shall be unclean.* (VaYikra 12:2)

The parshiyot of Tazria and Metzora deal with various forms of spiritual impurity. In general, there are two means through which a person can acquire spiritual impurity: 1) Through contact with an impure object, 2) Through specific bodily functions or disease. Our parshiyot primarily deal with impurity acquired through bodily functions or disease. It should be noted that in this context "disease" does not refer to conventional disorders. This term refers to a skin affliction – tzara'at – that is contracted as a punishment for sinful behavior.

(continued on next page)



(Tazria cont. from previous page)

## Weekly Parsha

Most of the bodily functions that cause impurity are unique to women. These functions include menstruation and childbirth. The impurity that results from these events has two expressions. First, the woman is forbidden from entering the Mishcan or making contact with certain sacred items. Second, the woman and her husband may not be sexually intimate.

There is a variety of opinions regarding the reasons for associating these bodily functions with impurity. Many Sages contend that these instances of impurity reflect health considerations. In other words, these Sages contend that intimate relations during menstruation or immediately after childbirth carry health risks. Of course, these views are based on the medical knowledge and perspective of their times. We should not assume that if these Sages had access to modern science they would come to the same conclusions.

Many students may be tempted to dismiss consideration of these opinions. They reason that because these authorities base their interpretation of these mitzvot on outdated and discarded theories, there is no need to consider their opinions. This is a mistake. It is true that these Sages base their interpretation of these mitzvot on discredited theories. However, it is important to note and acknowledge that these Sages believed that it is completely plausible for mitzvot to reflect health considerations – not moral or spiritual issues.

In order to fully appreciate the implications of this perspective, some additional discussion is helpful. Most mitzvot are clearly associated with moral or spiritual concerns: We are commanded to serve Hashem; observe Shabbat; accept Hashem's unity; to pray only to Him; to eat matzah; and to dwell in the succah. All of these commandments, and many others, address spiritual issues. Other commandments deal with moral or ethical issues: we are not permitted to steal or deal dishonestly with others; we must be return lost property; and build appropriate barriers around any dangerous area of our property. These are all examples of commandments that reflect ethical concerns. We think of Torah as a system for spiritual and moral advancement. We do not typically view the Torah as a system that also promotes physical health. Yet, these Sages accept that among the Torah's objectives is the promotion of physical well-being.

Not all Sages accepted this perspective. Akeydat Yitzchak objects to the contention that the Torah contains mitzvot that address medical concerns. This discussion takes place in reference to last week's parasha. The Torah permits the

consumption of certain species and prohibits others. For example, we are permitted to eat the flesh of animals that have split hooves and chew their cud. A set of mitzvot in last week's parasha outlines those species that are permitted and those that are prohibited. Many Sages explain that these mitzvot reflect health concerns. Consumption of those species that are prohibited is unhealthy. However, Akeydat Yitzchak disagrees with this approach. Akeydat Yitzchak argues that it is inappropriate to explain that these species are prohibited because of health concerns. He offers a number of arguments:

- The Torah's objective is to provide us with spiritual and moral guidance. The Torah should not be reduced to a medical work.
- If the prohibited species present a health threat, this concern could be countered through proper preparation.
- There are many other foods that, if prepared improperly, are harmful. Yet, these foods are not prohibited by the Torah.
- Our own observations confirm that the non-Jews who do not observe these prohibitions are healthy. If consumption of these prohibited

species is unhealthy, then those who consume these species should experience health consequences.[11]

Sefer HaChinuch is one of the authorities who suggests that some of the commandments in our parshiyot regarding defilement are based on health concerns. In his comments, he responds to Akeydat Yitzchak's objection to assuming that that Torah addresses health issues. He comments that the body is the receptacle of the soul.[12] In order for the soul to function, the body must be healthy.

This response requires careful consideration. Sefer HaChinuch accepts Akeydat Yitzchak's assertion that the Torah's objective is to provide spiritual and ethical instruction. However, he argues that this objective does not preclude the inclusion of mitzvot that address health issues. Spiritual and ethical perfection cannot be separated from health. Our moods, energy, and attitudes are affected by our health. In turn, these factors influence our views and intellectual perceptions; a person who is depressed sees the world differently than a person who has a positive outlook. Different outlooks impact the manner in which individuals understand experiences – and

(continued on next page)

# JewishTimes

*The Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought*

## It's better to give and to receive!

**Give:** Email a FREE subscription of the JewishTimes to a friend or relative and they'll also receive 2 free gifts at right: our 60 pg book Retrospective and the 32 pg Passover Special edition with astonishing imagery.

**Receive:** As you help grow our readership, more advertisers place ads. We pass that on to you in the form of your continued, free JewishTimes subscription. Plus, we'll give you these 2 publications! *Invite others today!*

[www.Mesora.org/Subscriptions](http://www.Mesora.org/Subscriptions)



even the manner in which they interpret information. In short, health is a valuable asset in the effort to advance oneself spiritually and ethically. Illness and poor health are obstacles in this endeavor.

Sefer HaChinuch's message is more important than his specific interpretation of the commandments in our parasha. His interpretation of some of these commandments is based upon discredited medical theories. However, his basic assumption remains true and tested. Today, we have even more evidence of the close association between one's health and one's outlook, cognition, and perceptions. Sefer HaChinuch suggests that because this association is so important, the Torah actually legislates measures designed to assure health. Certainly, Sefer HaChinuch would insist that we give appropriate attention to our health and would admonish us against neglecting our health or engaging in habits that endanger our health[13].

Sefer HaChinuch acknowledges that these mitzvot have other objectives in addition to the health benefits he identifies. He explains that the mitzvot prohibiting intimate relations with a niddah (a menstruating woman) and with a yoledet (a woman who has recently given birth) also foster closer ties between husband and wife. Let us focus on his comments regarding the prohibition of having relations with a niddah.

In order to fully understand his position an introduction is required. Conventional Western religions sometimes seem to adopt a prudish attitude towards sexual intimacy. In these religions, sexual intimacy is viewed as something that is, at best, a shameful necessity. Preferably, it should be avoided and should certainly not be cultivated. Sefer HaChinuch maintains that sexual intimacy is an essential element of marriage. A healthy attitude towards intimacy fosters a stronger marriage. Based on the assumption that sexually intimacy is an essential and natural part of a wholesome marriage, it follows that enhancing this intimacy is a worthy objective for a mitzvah. However, before we can appreciate the Torah's contribution to fostering strong marriages, we must recognize one of the most common obstacles faced by couples.

We tend to disdain – or at least take for granted – things that are readily and constantly available. We have all had the experience of deeply desiring some object. After finally securing the object of our desire, we become accustomed to it. Soon, we take it for granted. In time, we may discard the previously cherished possession and search for a replacement. This pattern is an expression of



basic human nature. Marriages are intended to extend over decades. How can we prevent the members of this union from becoming bored with one other, taking the other for granted, and even eventually discarding his or her spouse?

The Torah prohibits intimate relations with a niddah. The result of this prohibition is that intimacy is regulated. During part of every month, relations are permitted and prohibited another part of the month. Husband and wife experience a period of separation each month and the excitement of reunion. Sefer HaChinuch suggests that a couple sharing this monthly experience has a greater appreciation of intimacy and of each other. The members of this union are less likely to become bored with one another.[14]

In short, Sefer HaChinuch, in his interpretation of the mitzvot in our parasha, suggests that some mitzvot of the Torah reflect health concerns. Some mitzvot are also designed to strengthen marriage and to specifically enhance intimacy. Both of these objectives are noteworthy and reflect enlightened perspective. Furthermore, this perspective is sometimes sadly absent from today's conventional views on the nature of piety and religiosity. ■

[1] Rav Baruch HaLeyve Epstein, Torah Temimah on Sefer VaYikra 12:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at 10:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam /

Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 10:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 16:10.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 13:46.

[6] Daat Zekaynim Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 13:46.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, Volume 3, Chapter 48.

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

[9] Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 12:2-5.

[10] Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 13:9-13.

[11] Rav Yitzchak Arama, Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer VaYikra, Parshat Shemini.

[12] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 166.

[13] It seems this view is not universally accepted in our era. It is notable that some individuals who are otherwise scrupulous in their observance of the Torah seem to feel that a healthy diet and regular exercise are unimportant. Some individuals seem to even express disdain for these concerns – apparently regarding these issues as unworthy distractions from more important spiritual endeavors. However, this does not correspond with the position of Sefer HaChinuch and many other Sages.

[14] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 166.

But many times we hear strong opposition from friends and family to leading an observant lifestyle. If however we become familiar with these rejections, we may find we are successful in helping others overcome their personal hurdles towards observance. I share my thoughts with you...hoping you too will share them with others. Do not be hesitant to discuss such matters, for remaining silent will cause others to remain non-religious, and waste their lives.

### **"I don't want Restrictions"**

With this statement, one suggests that a "restrictive" quality is harmful or undesired. Yet, any sane individual will restrict his or her diet if advised that they are killing themselves. People will restrict themselves from walking off a cliff. We get the idea: boundaries are in fact beneficial. But the error non-religious people make is remaining ignorant of how each mitzvah and Torah truth helps us. But even the phrase "helps us" must be set in proper context. It refers to helping us "become happy and live within reality". This is where Torah directs us: to realize new truths, to help us avoid following falsehood and to redirect our energies typically immersed in sensual drives, towards a life of wisdom which is more fulfilling. If however one seeks a sensual lifestyle, chasing sexuality, wealth and fame, he or she must first reevaluate this lifestyle to understand why it cannot lead to happiness. Otherwise, they will view Torah as preventing them from achieving these desires.

It is vital that the first steps made with non-religious Jews are to, 1) prove the existence of God based on revelation at Sinai; and 2) prove that Torah is His word. Once discussed, any intelligent person will accept these proofs. But they will then face an emotional reluctance to making "change". They wrongly associate this "pain" of change, with Torah. In truth, any change in life is difficult simply because our emotions become comfortable with repeated activity. So it is not Torah that is painful, but the "act of change". Assure this person that this same "comfort of the familiar" will arrive in his or her attachment to repeated Torah acts. We must now guide this person to focus on what his mind told him is true, and to dismiss any emotions of avoiding observance.

Once a person starts seeing the truths of mitzvahs and the philosophical and psychological benefits of boundaries, they will abandon their original view that restriction is harmful. They will understand and agree that charity creates peace, and that God replenishes the

charitable person's bank account. They will learn from God's acts with the patriarchs and matriarchs, that a perfected life is not lived alone...God is involved. Such historical truths must impress us. God's guarantee of wealth due to charity further helps one release his attachment to money.

Studying Talmud and Prophets will enlighten a person to brilliant ideas that last longer and are more fulfilling than sensual drives that meet with pain when performed in excess. One will learn how marital and dietary laws train one's emotions in restraint, which in turn render one more fit for lengthy study. All Torah laws are reciprocal, benefiting each other in ways seen, and unseen. We cannot arrive at a full knowledge of Torah, for only God possesses this.

### **Nature: an Example**

Nature is a fine lesson. Discuss with a non-religious friend or family member how they admit of the perfect order of weather, plant life and growth, animal life, and the biological systems like respiratory, nervous, reproductive, circulatory, and digestive. Discuss how the Creator created all these. Impress upon them how these all target the goal of a planet where man can function properly and achieve all needs. And brilliantly, as the Rabbis taught, what we need most is most readily accessible and free. Air is needed most, for we die quicker without it than without water. And air is free. Water is also very available, but not at every location as is air. Water too is free. Shelter can be built from trees that abound in most countries, and clothing can be obtained through animal skins, wool and cotton. Necessary food is also abundant and free or relatively inexpensive, such as fish, fruits, vegetables and bread.

The point to all this is to convey that God's actions are for man's benefit. He also created the Torah. Hopefully this will open their hearts to viewing the Torah on par with other matters they admit are truly "good".

### **"Religious People are Poor and Non-religious People Prosper...why bother being religious?"**

First of all, no one knows who is truly religious or righteous, unless God tells us. We have no idea of people's thoughts and actions. External are meaningless, and we should not support the notion of "religious clothing" or "religious appearances". (Radak on Tzefania 1:8) If we wrongly accept such externals to be a true reflec-

tion of one's inner self, this will only delude us further. God also warned the prophet Samuel not to value externals. The Torah too warns of this. Therefore, we are in no position to assess if someone is "religious" or "righteous" or is receiving his or her just desserts. Perhaps the religious person had sinned, and is now receiving a punishment here. Or perhaps he made a poor decision in business that led to his impoverished state. We must study at all times, if we are to possess any right to pose intelligent arguments. And if we haven't studied God's system of Reward and Punishment or psychology – both deep sciences – then we are not able to judge others. And even with these studies under our belts, we don't know who is just and who is evil. God alone knows this.

And are the poor really suffering? A Rabbi about to die had mourned the fact that he left one item of food. That's all he had left as he died, so why was he mournful? It was because he regretted having worked that extra, brief amount of time, for something that he never used. He deeply regretted wasting time from his true passion of study. This Rabbi clearly lived day to day. He was of the poorest of the poor. Yet...he lived a happy life. So we cannot judge one with little, as unhappy.

We must be careful not to project our own views onto others. Many people live simple or below average income because they are not compelled to fulfill the American dream of owning a home, traveling, or becoming wealthy and famous. Their dream is different: to pursue what they found offers them the most intense enjoyment. So they happily forgo – not sacrifice – the dreams of others. They are truly rich.

For 40 years, the Jews lived in the desert, receiving only their daily bread. No vacations. No new possessions or fancy homes. Why? Because God knows what man needs to be happy. He created us, and He provided that generation with an undistracted life of study. The Rabbis refer to that generation as a "dor dayah", a "wise generation". As a matter of fact, God's original plan was that Adam and Eve have all they need, with no need to toil for human needs.

We have many stories available to us in the Torah, stories that are historically proven. We must make use of them to study how God does in fact relate to sinners and to those who follow Him. This would be the wisest approach for determining whether Torah followers live well or not. And to reject such study, is a clear declaration that this non-religious person wishes to deny the truth. We cannot help one who does not wish to learn. "An unexamined life not worth living" – Socrates. It is foolish to criticize a religious lifestyle, never having examined it.

(continued on next page)



*"...if we reject God's Torah, why should He help us to harm ourselves by leading a non-religious lifestyle?"*

*"I cannot suggest Einstein is wrong on 99 issues due to an error in a single matter. All he has proven to date remains untainted.... Certainly with regards to God who cannot be ignorant or wrong, I must not reject all of Judaism when I locate a matter that eludes me. Instead, I should attribute great wisdom to God, and blame myself for my lack of understanding."*

### The 1% Rule

Some may find elements in religious Judaism that are to them "distasteful" or inexplicable, and thereby justify their rejection of the remaining 99%. This is irrational. For if we find tremendous psychological and philosophical truths in Torah, but at times cannot explain other matters, the unexplained issues in no way affect the remaining portions as truths. Similarly, I cannot suggest Einstein is wrong on 99 issues due to an error he made in a single matter. All he has proven to date remains untainted. Either on that last matter he was wrong, or I am ignorant of his meaning. But in either case, it is irrational to reject the 99% that had been proven based on that 1% in question. Certainly with regards to God who cannot be ignorant or wrong, I must not reject all of Judaism when I locate a matter that eludes me. Instead, I should attribute great wisdom to God, and blame myself for my lack of understanding.

This 1% rule also applies to the majority of cases. Most people living an orthodox life with study and appreciation of wisdom as their primary focus lead very pleasant lives. Due to their analysis of what truly gladdens one's heart and soul, they abandon luxury, excess, lusts, fame, fortune, and all matters that King Solomon exposed as bereft of any lasting or real happiness. Recall that God gave King Solomon miraculous wisdom at age 12. Pay attention to his words. The vast majority of intellectual people led lives immersed in happiness as they spared themselves the unnecessary efforts of accumulation of things never used, but passed on to others at death. These wise souls enjoyed what God intended we enjoy: a study of the universe and Torah. In contrast, those seeking Earthly desires were never satisfied.

So although we may find cases where someone 'apparently' religious was suffering, we must follow the rule and not the exception. And that rule is that religious life is the happiest life. We do not discount 99% of cases because of 1%. If we are left with a question regarding that 1%, that must be the case. Only God has all the answers. But our question cannot deny the great lives led by the remaining 99%.

### Conviction in God and His Word

The Shema guarantees success to those who follow the Torah. Proverbs 3:16 also promises wealth to the Torah observer. And the reason is simple: God wishes the good for mankind...that is why He created us – to

benefit us. And when we live in accord with Torah, we are following what will most benefit us. Therefore, God will assist us with our needs so we might continue that life.

But if we reject the Torah, why should He help us to harm ourselves by leading a non-religious lifestyle? And as we said, we may see non-religious and even crooked people who prosper, but this may be God's act of repaying them here for some good performed at some point in their lives. Or it may simply be their great business senses. But don't equate wealth and fame with happiness. Certainly, they are not enjoying life if they simply chase wealth and fame. King Solomon taught that the wealthy man cannot sleep at night since he worries about his wealth. God did not design us to be happy with such pursuits. Reflect that millionaire stars overdose and get divorced from the most beautiful spouses. These matters do not satisfy our deepest parts: our values of truth and morality. We sense emptiness when all we do is for money and our egos. This is why so many movie stars become philanthropists: they cannot tolerate a life where they are transparently egotistical. The need to portray themselves as do-gooders to create some acceptable self image.

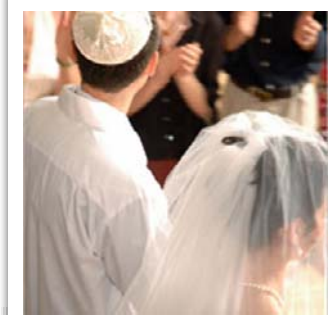
In summary, if we didn't read a word of Einstein's writing, we would be foolish to speak up in a lecture he gave. So too, if we are ignorant of God's Torah, we are ignorant of how he works and we can say nothing about the apparent evils we witness on Earth. We also have no right to ridicule Torah and an observant lifestyle.

We must remain always mindful of the most brilliant minds like Kings David and Solomon, Moses, Maimonides, Ramban, Rashi, Radak, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, Abarbanel, all the prophets, and the millennia of Sages and Talmudic Rabbis. They all attested to the perfection and unparalleled life enjoyed by Orthodox Judaism.

We must reflect on the good God bestowed with His natural creations. He also gave a Torah for our good. We are foolish to prefer ignorance and a rejection towards change, than studying what the Creator informs us is "for our good".

Humility, admission of our ignorance, and a respect for God's word and our brilliant leaders is vital to our happiness. I hope you are successful employing these and your own thoughts, so as to perform the greatest kindness: attracting others to a religious life that God intends for our happiness. ■

## Perfection



# Remaining Unmarried

**RABBI YAKOV TRACHTMAN**

Yevamos 62b

*Rabbi Tanchum said in the name of Rabbi Chani-lai: Any person who doesn't have a wife is stuck lacking joy, lacking blessing and lacking good. Lacking joy, as it is written[i]: "And you shall rejoice with your house [Rashi: your wife]". Lacking blessing, as it is written[ii]: "To place blessing on your house [Rashi: your wife]". Lacking good, as it is written[iii]: "It is not good for man to be alone".*

The Radak[iv] explains that joy is reflecting on ones state as being good, or in other words being satisfied. When a person is joyful they want to share it. They aren't satisfied keeping the happiness in; they feel like it must burst forth. However the only way two people can share happiness is when the benefit of one is also the benefit of another. As long as a person has a self-centered view of the world he cannot experience full happiness since his happiness is restricted to himself. Only when his identity is merged into a greater entity is his happiness fully experienced. Marriage is exactly this experience; a person's identity becomes reformed into a compound identity. A person who refuses to get married is stuck in an outlook, which will not allow a full experience of joy; if all benefits are viewed selfishly they can never be satisfied.

The Radak[v] defines blessing as addition of good. A household is the ideal receiver of blessing. This is for two reasons. First practically a household allows for efficiency of production. Since everyone is cooperating there is less wasted effort and resources. Second the way God designed the world as a source of benefit for people is not for the individual but for the species. Insofar as a person recognizes this and acts based on this principle he will more easily benefit from the blessings that God bestowed on his creation.

The Ramban[vi] defines 'good' as existing in a complete state. A human being is by nature a social being. If he refuses to get married then he is lacking in this identity. He views himself as an independent being, not a member of a species. Marriage demands the recognition that ones identity must emerge in a social context. While as a soul he exists independently, as a human being his existence is as a particular temporal part of a species. Marriage leads a person to this proper self-identification in two ways. First it causes him to view himself as a member of a group, in that he identifies with his wife. Second it sets as a goal the ongoing existence of the species.

In summary people who refuse to get married block themselves from fully experiencing good and limit their ability to receive it. Both of these lacks are not incidental but emerge from not living truly humanly, through not recognizing ones existence as a member of a species. On the other hand marriage naturally brings a person to this recognition.

The Gemara continues:

*In the west [Israel] they said, lacking Torah and lacking a wall. Lacking Torah, as it is written[vii]: "is my helpmate [Rashi: my wife] not with me? If so then wisdom [Torah] is taken from me [Rashi: since he will need to be involved in household needs his Torah will be forgotten]. Lacking a wall, as it is written[viii]: "A women will surround a male".*

How does marriage help ones learning? While it is true that a single person has certain responsibilities which are taken over by the spouse on the whole marriage seems to leave less time for learning, "if a millstone is on his neck, how will he be involved in torah!"[ix]. It seems that we need to view this idea not in terms of quantity of learning; rather we must view it qualitatively. What causes one to forget learning? The Gemara[x] says that learning all of Shas is only valuable if one has Yiras Hashem. Rashi explains that the Yiras Hashem is necessary for remembering. If one lacks Yiras Hashem then they will forget their learning. The Rambam defines Yiras Hashem as[xi] recognizing ones true nature as a small (almost) insignificant part of a great system governed by unfathomable wisdom.

Our Gemara is based on this principle; someone who is married has a proper view of himself as a part of the creation (as Rabbi Tanchum explained). When a single person spends time in household needs he is likely to be taken in by that framework, his actions are completely self-serving. Living life in order to enhance oneself as an individual is in direct conflict with the system of Torah which trains one in viewing themselves as a part of a system. This conflict will lead one to forget their Torah. On the other hand someone who is involved in household needs as part of a family will be living his life in line with the lessons of the Torah and his actions will express his knowledge as opposed to contradicting it. This is the

main idea of a spouse as a 'helpmate, opposite'[xii] the help is not just a practical one, but rather the assistance in the practical also creates the proper psychological and philosophical outlook for the practical endeavors. Each spouse advises and corrects the other ones weaknesses.

Marriage also provides a wall. The Maharsha explains that the female is a wall for the male from the attacks of the instincts. They provide for each other an outlet for the instincts in way that is in line with God's plan for the creation. This idea is the idea of Kedushah and that Torah is not just theoretical but enters all aspects of life.

In summary Torah and 'a wall' are the complete framework of human perfection, the theoretical and the practical. Not only does marriage help a person exist humanly, it is a springboard for perfection of the soul.

The Gemara continues:

*Rava Bar Ulla said: Lacking peace, as it is written[xiii]: "And you will know that your tent [Rashi: your wife] is at peace [Rashi: Only when you have a tent, you have peace, and you should consider your dwelling, and you will not sin"*

The Rambam[xiv] defines peace as the complete state of ethical perfection. True peace can only emerge when all parties are balanced and act in line with their nature. Then they are living in the naturally harmonious state that God created. When one is married, in a way that is without sin, then they have created the substratum for peace. The perfection of the home and the individuals can start extending outward to the perfection of the human species as a whole, of which they are a small part.

In summary this Gemara sets up a hierarchal framework of the purpose of marriage. First marriage leads to a proper identification of oneself as a human being, necessary for success and satisfaction in life. Second this idea of self, allows the marriage to be a foundation for perfection of the soul. And ultimately the perfection directed marriage creates a foundation for the entire human species to reach perfection. ■

[i] Devarim 14:26

[ii] Yechezkel 44:30

[iii] Breishis 2:18

[iv] Sefer Hashorashim

[v] Breishis 2:3

[vi] Breishis 1:10, 2:18 etc.

[vii] Iyov 6:13

[viii] Yirmiyah 31:21

[ix] Kiddushin 29b

[x] Shabbos 31a

[xi] Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 2:2, 4:12

[xii] Breishis 2:18

[xiii] Iyov 5:24

[xiv] Shmonah Perakim chapter 4



## Passover

Reprinted due to legibility  
error in Passover edition



# Gratitude

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



Each year we study Passover, its laws and philosophy. Each year we discover new, major principles.

Take for example, Charoses. Talmud Pesachim 114a contains a debate whether it requires a blessing, as does the Matzah and Maror. But we immediately note that the Torah does not say we must eat the Paschal lamb over Matzah, Maror “and Charoses”. Charoses is not mentioned in that verse. So why does Rav Elazar bar Tzadok say we do in fact bless over it? Let’s keep this in mind as we ask a few more questions.

We learn that the retelling of the Exodus must follow a dialogue format. The Mah Nishtanah expresses this. But we wonder why this must be. Our obligation to teach our students and children Torah all year need not follow a dialogue format. What is it about the retelling of the Exodus – the Haggadah – that requires dialogue? And what more does dialogue accomplish, than monologues or lectures?

*(continued on next page)*



Why must this dialogue be accomplished through a discussion starting with our degraded state (as idolaters and slaves) and concluding with our praise as a freed people following God? As long as all information is imparted to the child, what would be lost if we arrange the order as we wish?

We also note a unique statement, “For all who increase in retelling the Exodus are praiseworthy”. Why aren’t those who increase in Torah study also considered “praiseworthy”? It is also strange that this statement actually forms part of the Haggadah’s text. But there is a hint: that Haggadic section says, “Even if we were all wise, all of us understanding, all of us elders, all of us knowing the Torah...it is a Mitzvah upon us to retell the Exodus. For all who increase in retelling the Exodus are praiseworthy.” What do these “even ifs” come to add to our Haggadah?

(continued on next page)





The obligation to retell the Exodus is derived from this verse: “And you shall tell your son saying, ‘Because of this did God perform for me, when I left Egypt’”. (Exod. 13:8) Also derived from this verse is the obligation for each of us to view ourselves as if we exited Egypt.” (Tal. Pesachim 116b) This is derived from, “Because of this did God perform for “me”, when “I” left Egypt.” The verse speaks in the first person. What aspect of Haggadah demands we view ourselves as having personally left Egypt? And is it a coincidence that this obligation is derived from the very same verse that teaches our obligation to teach our sons?

Lastly, why does the Haggadah conclude with Hallel?

#### Answers:

What is significant about Charoses – mortar?

“And they embittered (vay’iMaroru) their lives with harsh labor, with mortar and with brick making...” (Exod. 1:14) We see how in this verse, God joined embittered (Maror) with mortar. Charoses embodies the real phenomenon we experienced; the mortar pits. We didn’t eat bitter herbs in Egypt during our stay, nor were such herbs the cause of our bitterness. But we are commanded in the bitter herbs since “imagining” the pain of our forefathers is not experiential and does not impact us, as much as real sensations. So Maror is necessary to experience some pain. Perhaps Rav Elazar bar Tzadok taught that the mortar (Charoses) requires a blessing, as it was the true, historical phenomenon experienced back then. He felt mortar must be raised to the level of Maror through its own blessing. The fact is, the verse quoted above teaching how Egypt embittered us, also refers to mortar. Mortar and Maror are integrally tied. “And they embittered their lives with harsh labor, with mortar and with brick making...” The mention of mortar in a verse is license to require a blessing. However, greater gratitude is evoked when we can contrast the suffering to the redemption: the greater our sensation now (eating bitter herbs) the greater will be our gratitude. Perhaps this explains why the Torah law requires Maror, and not mortar, Charoses.

But both Maror and Charoses serve to offer us today an “experience”. We must literally sense the bitterness by eating Maror, and we must view the Charoses in memory of the mortar.

(continued on next page)

Retelling the Exodus is not a matter of “learning”. That is not the goal. For if it was, then if we were all wise, we might dispense with this law. However, as acquisition of wisdom is NOT the objective, the obligation to retell the Exodus is incumbent upon everyone. What is the obligation?

### Gratitude

This is the theme of Passover night. We recount the story of the Exodus to evoke feelings of gratitude for the Creator. This is the main concept on Passover...the holiday of God's redemption. It matters none that we know the story inside out. For Haggadah is not to engage us in an act of “Torah study”. Rather, it is as we said: we are to perform many actions to engender feelings of gratitude. Therefore a dialogue format is unnecessary when teaching Torah, but required when reciting the Haggadah. Torah study and teaching deal with intellectual truths, whereas Haggadah deals with evoking gratitude.

“And you shall tell your son saying, ‘Because of this did God perform for me, when I left Egypt’”. This verse requires we act upon matters, but with a singular objective: 1) the father must teach the son, and 2) he also must view himself as having left Egypt. But both are subsumed under the objective of “Gratitude”.

As my friend Shalom said, by teaching the son, the father offers the child the best chance of sensing gratitude for God, as children follow their parents more than anyone else. Furthermore, the dialogue format engages the child to a far greater degree than lecturing or a monologue. The child is personally involved in the discussion. This is why we remove the Seder Plate and dip twice...to evoke curiosity in the children. Secondly, the father must also view himself as having been freed, thereby evoking his own gratitude. It is perfect that both requirements are found in this single verse, as they share the same objective: father and son must feel gratitude towards God for the Exodus. And many other Torah commands function to do this as well. Think about how often we read “Zecher l'Yitzias Mitzrayim”, “A remembrance to the Exodus”. It is insufficient that such a great act as the Exodus is recalled only one time yearly. Sabbath too is a remembrance of the Exodus, as our ability to rest when we wish is a direct result of our having been freed. (Maimonides' Guide, book ii, chap. xxxi) We observe Sabbath each week. And many other laws too recall the Exodus.



(continued on next page)





Acknowledging the Exodus is of paramount status. For this reason, the very next verse (Exod. 13:9) requires us to don Tefillin daily. Tefillin encase these two sections concluding Parshas Bo: the redeeming of firstborns in memory of the final plague that freed us, as all Egypt chased us out, fearing that they too might die. The “Yad Chazakah” mentioned in this verse refers to God’s “mighty hand” in delivering such an amazing and completely inexplicable plague. Yad Chazakah – “mighty hand” – refers to the idea that God is strong, while “others” are not. Death of the firstborns revealed God as the only power in the universe. This plague rejected the notion of idolatry, as Egypt’s lifeless gods could not defend themselves or the Egyptians. This is why we also include the Shema in Tefillin. Shema describes God as “One”, while redeeming firstborn recounts when God “judged the Egyptian gods”, reducing them to dust. (Rashi, Exod. 12:12) Tefillin embody a single idea that God is one, and all other deities as seen in Egypt, are imposters. They could not save the firstborns, nor could the idols prevent God’s destruction of their forms.

Regarding Yad Chazakah, “strength” is a relative term, and here, it is stated in stark contrast to the Egyptian fallacy that idols were powerful. What an awesome and mighty plague Firstborns was. How do only those who were born first, suddenly fall dead, and simultaneously? No biological law explains this.

It is quite fitting that the Exodus is brought about through the destruction of the firstborns and the Egyptian gods. For the 10 Plagues had as one of its core objectives the establishment of monotheism and the rejection of idolatry. And when Moses commands the Jews in Tefillin, he is informing them of another fundamental: “you are freed so as to accept God”. Tefillin must be immediately commanded at the freedom of the Jews. They must understand for what they were freed.

**“For all who increase in retelling the Exodus are praiseworthy.”**

The expression of gratitude for some good we receive is greatly reduced, if we can describe this gratitude one moment, and then in another, switch topics of conversation. But a sustained discussion on God’s deliverance from Egypt enhances the very gratitude. We are more impressed with the “person” unable to stop describing the goodness he received via the Exodus. The sincerity and feelings of thanks expressed by such an individual imbues all listeners with a higher evaluation of the Exodus. It is to this, I believe, what the accolade “praiseworthy” refers. One is “praiseworthy” when his retelling of the Exodus results in listeners becoming awed by God’s miracles and redemption. And this is accomplished by one who goes on and on about that extraordinary history.

(continued on next page)



Additionally, since the theme of the night is gratitude, one's continue description of the Exodus is an act of gratitude, explaining why such a person is praiseworthy.

We now also understand why we commence with our degradation as slaves. For when we end with our status as a freed nation, our gratitude is greater due to this contrast. We then recite Hallel as an expression of this gratitude.

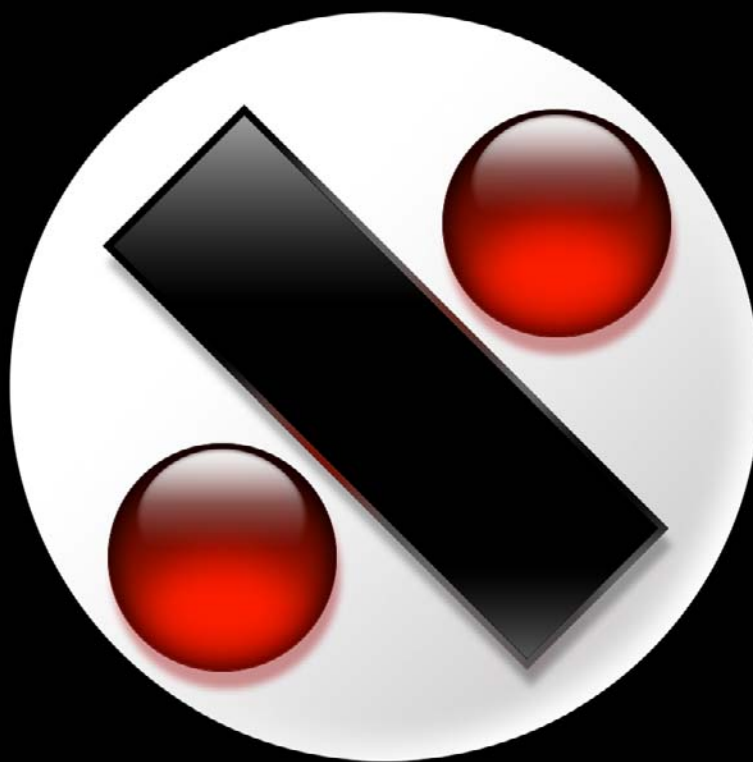
### What is the necessity for our gratitude?

Why don't we have many mitzvahs that are "remembrances of creation", just as many are "remembrances of the Exodus"? The reason is that man might increase his allegiance to God and His commands. God wants the best for man, so God offers us a chance to realign ourselves with His Torah by causing us to reflect on His kindness. This same God who freed us, also gave us a Torah 50 days later. Both acts must be for man's well-being. "I am God, I do not change". (Malachi 3:6)

So as we recount all those amazing miracles this Passover, we are recalling God's kindness, which should imbue us with the realization that His Torah too is for our good. Through the laws of Passover, God helps generate in each of us a sense of gratitude, in order that we might find following Torah – what is best – all that easier when we first start down that path. Eventually, we need no incentives to study and practice Torah, as the study itself and the Mitzvahs become things difficult to part with due to the amazing insights included in all areas.

God needs nothing, and nothing from man. All He does, all His commands and the deep ideas conveyed through them, is in order that man might enjoy the best life here, and grant his soul eternal life in that most happiest, ultimate state. But the only way to attain an eternal existence where we enjoy that purely spiritual state is if while here on Earth, we learn to enjoy wisdom through continued Torah study. ■





# NYDesign.com

**DEVELOPERS OF MESORA.ORG AND DESIGNERS OF THE JEWISHTIMES.  
CONTACT US WITH YOUR DESIGN AND MARKETING NEEDS.  
EXPERTISE INCLUDES: WEB DEVELOPMENT, FLASH, PRINT MATERIALS,  
ADVERTISING, LOGO DESIGN, PACKAGE DESIGN.**