



TEHILLIM'S AUTHOR – KING DAVID – DID NOT RECITE TEHILLIM WHEN HIS OWN SON WAS DEATHLY ILL. KING DAVID SAID, "WHILE THE BABY WAS STILL ALIVE, I FASTED AND CRIED..." (SAMUEL II, 12:22)

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

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JewishTimes

Volume IX, No. 18...Apr. 16, 2010

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Weekly Parsha

Tazria Metzora

RABBI BERNIE FOX

When a person shall have on the skin of his flesh a white blotch, a similar discoloration or bright white spot and it is suspected of being a mark of tzara'at on the skin of his flesh, then he should be brought to Aharon the Kohen or one of his sons the Kohanim. (VaYikra 13:2)

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Dialogue on Hashgacha P'ratis

RABBI CHAIM OZER CHAIT

Student: I found a very interesting idea on Hashgacha Pratis (individual providence) in the Sefer Ha'chinuch in this week's Sedra of Tazria, Mitzva 169 Rebbe: What does it say?

Student: It says "There are certain groups of people who think that the watchful care of Hashem is over all species individually, both over humans and over living creatures. And there are groups among them who believe that the watchful care of Hashem is over all things of the world, whether living creatures or any other things. In other words, not one small entity will move in this world except by His desire (blessed is He) and by His degree – to such an extent that they believe that when one leaf falls from a tree, Hashem decreed over it that it should fall, and it is impossible for the time of its fall to be delayed or advanced by even a moment. But this view is VERY REMOVED FROM HUMAN REASON."

Rebbe: O.K. that certainly makes sense.

Student: But can you prove it to me, why is it so illogical to say that Hashem has such Hashgacha on every little thing?

Rebbe: Of course, Let us begin.

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Superstition

TEHILLIM: PERMITTED TO RECITE FOR THOSE SICK, OR IS IT MERE SUPERSTITION?

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(Tazria cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Our parasha initiates the Torah's elaborate discussion of tumah – spiritual defilement and taharah – spiritual cleanliness. The parasha begins with a description of the laws governing the tumah accompanying birth. The parasha then enters into a discussion of tumat tzara'at. Tumat tzara'at is a form of tumah associated with a skin affliction. This skin affliction is generally characterized by the appearance of a white blotch on the skin. In some ways, tzara'at is similar to leprosy. In fact, the term tzara'at is often translated as leprosy. The laws of tumah and taharah are often complicated. Many people are intimidated by this area of halachah and assume that the contents of their parasha are beyond their grasp. This is unfortunate. The laws of tumah and taharah are fascinating. This is particularly true of the laws governing tumat tzara'at. The material that follows provides an introduction to one of the forms of tumat tzara'at. Hopefully, this introduction will make the material a little more approachable.

The pasuk above provides a description of the white blotch associated with tzara'at. The pasuk describes three types of blotches. These are se'ait – a white blotch, sapachat – a similar discoloration, and baheret – a bright white spot. What is the difference between these three terms? Our Sages explain that baheret is the brightest form of tzara'at. This discoloration is as white as snow. Se'ait is a somewhat duller discoloration. Its shade is compared to the color of the fleece of a newborn lamb. Sapachat is a derivative of baheret. Its whiteness is less intense than se'ait. Its shade is similar to the plaster of the Temple. Se'ait also has a sapachat – derivative – version. The sapachat of se'ait is the duller form of tzara'at. Its color is compared to the white of an egg. The following chart summarizes the various shades of tzara'at in order of intensity:

Table 1. Forms of Tzara'at

Intensity (1=highest)	Name	Description of Shade
1	Baheret	Snow
2	Se'ait	Newborn lamb's wool
3	Sapachat-baheret	Plaster of Temple
4	Sapachat-se'ait	Egg white

As the above chart indicates, there are two primary forms of tzara'at. These are baheret and se'ait. Each primary form of tzara'at has a derivative form. These are sapachat-baheret and sapachat-se'ait.

The order of intensity of these four discolorations is interesting. As we have explained, baheret is the brightest form of tzara'at. However, the next most intense form of tzara'at is se'ait. This is surprising. We would expect sapachat-baheret to be closest in brightness to baheret. It is a derivative of baheret! It is reasonable that it should be very similar in intensity. However, this is not the case. Se'ait is the second brightest form of tzara'at. Sapachat-baheret follows se'ait in intensity.

This requires an explanation. Sapachat-baheret is a derivative of baheret and sapachat-se'ait is a derivative of se'ait. Therefore, we would expect the forms of tzara'at to be arranged as follows: 1) Baheret, 2) Sapachat-baheret, 3) Se'ait, 4) Sapachat-se'ait. In other words, in what sense is sapachat-baheret a derivative of baheret? Is not the form of tzara'at most similar to baheret! How can we explain the order of the four forms of tzara'at?

In our pasuk, there are two hints to the answer to our question. The first hint is derived from the terms baheret and se'ait. What is the literal meaning of these terms? The term baheret is derived from the word bahir. This means bright. The term se'ait literally means elevated. The Sages explain the derivation of the term se'ait. A white spot that is seen against a darker background appears to be depressed or sunken relative to the background. The se'ait is not as intensely white as the baheret. The se'ait appears to be depressed against the darker background of the surrounding skin. However, it does not appear to be as deeply depressed as a baheret. This is because the baheret is brighter. In other words, the se'ait is elevated relative to the baheret. This analysis reveals that the terms baheret and se'ait describe a relationship. These terms describe the relative intensity of these two white discolorations. Baheret means the whitest blotch. Se'ait means a discoloration that is less intense than baheret.[1]

The second hint in our pasuk is derived from the term sapachat. As we have explained, the term sapachat indicates a derivative form of tzara'at. Although baheret and se'ait each have a sapachat – a derivative, the term only appears once in the passage. We would expect the term sapachat to appear twice. Once to describe the derivative of baheret and a second time to communicate that se'ait also has a derivative.

Viewed together, these two hints provide a fundamental insight into the four forms of tzara'at. It seems that these four forms can be divided into two levels of intensity – a primary level and a secondary level. Each level includes two shades of tzara'at. These two shades are defined relative to one another. The primary level is composed of the two brightest shades of white. These two shades of tzara'at are defined relative to one another. The brighter is baheret and the duller is se'ait. The secondary level of intensity is the sapachat level. On this level, there are also two shades. These are defined relative to one another. The brighter is sapachat-baheret. This term means that this tzara'at is the brighter shade on the secondary level of intensity. The duller tzara'at is sapachat-se'ait. This term means that this tzara'at is the duller shade on the secondary level.

We can now understand the reason our passage mentions the term sapachat only once. The term sapachat does not indicate a derivative form of tzara'at. It refers to a derivative or secondary level of brightness. There is only

(continued on next page)

one derivative level of tzara'at. Therefore, the term sapachat appears a single time in our passage.

Based on this analysis, it is possible to explain a fascinating law. There is a minimum size for tzara'at. A blotch that is less than this size does not produce a state of tumah. The required size is equal to a Cilician bean. Assume two blotches are adjacent. Each is a different form of tzara'at. Are these two adjacent blotches joined together in order to fulfill the minimum size requirement? In other words, if a blotch the exact size of a Cilician bean is composed of two different forms of tzara'at, is the person tameh – defiled?

The chart below illustrates the answer of Rav Ovadiah Me'Bartenurah.[2]

Table 2. Combinations of Tzara'at and Tumah	
Combination	Tumah
Baheret and Se'ait	Yes
Baheret and Sapachat-baheret	Yes
Baheret and Sapachat-se'ait	No
Se'ait and Sapachat-se'ait	Yes
Se'ait and Sapachat-baheret	No
Sapachat-Se'ait & Sapachat-baheret	No

The above chart indicates that both shades of the primary level join together to meet the size requirement. In addition, a blotch on the primary level joins with its parallel shade on the sapachat level to satisfy the requirement. In other words, baheret and sapachat-baheret join together. However, a blotch on the primary level does not join with the non-parallel shade on the secondary level. This means that baheret and sapachat-se'ait do not join. Finally, the two shades on the sapachat level do not join.

This seems to be an odd arrangement. We would imagine that the shades that are the most similar should most easily join. However, this is not the case. Se'ait and sapachat-se'ait join to meet the minimum size requirement. These two shades are separated by an intervening shade – sapachat-baheret. Yet, se'ait and sapachat-baheret – which are very similar shades, do not join. Also, sapachat-baheret and sapachat-se'ait – two similar secondary level shades – cannot be joined! What is the reasoning underlying this pattern?

In order to understand the answer to these questions, an illustration will be helpful. Reuven and Shimon are brothers. They are sitting on the shore of a lake. On the surface of the water, there is an image corresponding with each brother. Let us consider the relationships among the components of this illustration. Reuven and Shimon are clearly related. They are brothers. Reuven's reflection is related to Reuven and is derived from his image. The same relationship exists between Shimon and his reflected image. Reuven does not have a direct relationship with Shimon's reflected image; neither does Shimon have a direct relationship with Reuven's reflection. Certainly, there is no direct relationship between the reflected images themselves. The following table enumerates these combinations and the relationship or lack of relationship between the components of each combination.

Table 3. Components of illustration and their relationships	
Combination	Relationship
Reuven and Shimon	Yes (Brothers)
Reuven and Reuven's reflection	Yes (Primary image and its derivative reflection)
Reuven and Shimon's reflection	No
Shimon and Shimon's reflection	Yes (Primary image and its derivative reflection)
Shimon and Reuven's reflection	No
Shimon's reflection and Reuven's reflection	No

A similarity between Table 2 and Table 3 is evident. This similarity suggests a more precise understanding of the four shades of tzara'at and their relationships to one another. The two levels of tzara'at are not equal. Baheret and se'ait are comparable to Reuven and Shimon in the illustration. Sapachat is a secondary or derivative level of tzara'at. This level corresponds with the reflected images in our illustration. More specifically, a shade of white on this secondary level is regarded as tzara'at only because its relative brightness to the other shade on the level defines it as a derivative of the corresponding shade on the primary level. This means that the sapachat shades are not inherently shades of tzara'at – just like Reuven's reflection is not Reuven. Instead, the sapachat is only regarded as tzara'at because of its derivative relationship to a primary form of tzara'at. In other words, the various shades of tzara'at from baheret to sapachat-se'ait are not shades within a range of intensity, and any shade in this range is regarded as tzara'at. Instead, the Torah identified the two shades of baheret and se'ait as the primary forms of tzara'at and assigned each its own derivative. Sapachat-baheret is not tzara'at simply because it falls within a range of intensity for the whiteness of tzara'at. It is tzara'at because the Torah acknowledges a secondary level of intensity, and on this level, the sapachat-baheret is parallel to and a derivative form of baheret. Of course, the same analysis applies to sapachat-se'ait.

Sapachat-baheret is a derivative form of baheret. It is a derivative of baheret on the sapachat level. Therefore, a baheret and its sapachat can be joined. This is because the primary form can combine with its derivative. These two shades are related in a manner similar to Reuven and his reflected image. However, a se'ait and sapachat-baheret cannot be joined. This is because the sapachat-baheret acquires its identity as a form of tzara'at from its relationship to baheret. However, there is no relationship between se'ait and sapachat-baheret. They are similar to Shimon and Reuven's reflection. They are not related.

Similarly, sapachat-baheret and sapachat-se'ait do not join. This is because these forms derive their identity as forms of tzara'at from their respective relationships with the parallel shade on the primary level. However, these two forms of sapachat are not innately forms of tzara'at. Therefore, they cannot be joined – just and the reflection of Reuven and Shimon are not related. Hopefully, this brief discussion clarifies some of the laws discussed in the parasha and provides an example of the beauty of the halachot that regulate tumah and taharah. ■

[1] For a more complete discussion of these terms see Rav Yisrael Lipshitz, "Mareh Kohen," 1:3.

[2] Rav Ovadia Me'Bartenurah, Commentary on Mishne, Mesechet Negaim 1:1. For a more complete discussion of this issue see Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at 1:3.

(Hashgacha continued from page 1)

Parsha

Rebbe: There are only two possibilities, and that is: that either Hashem practices Hashgacha in the animal world, or He does not. Is that correct

Student: Yes.

Rebbe: And we want to prove that it is illogical for Hashem to practice Hashgacha on the animal world.

Student: Correct.

Rebbe: And we must also say that Hashem is logical and just.

Student: Absolutely.

Rebbe: Let us then select the lions as an example of a species in the animal world.

Student: A good choice

Rebbe: Do you know what lions eat?

Student: Yes, frequently they eat zebras.

Rebbe: Correct. Did you ever see a film of a lion on a hunt for a zebra?

Student: Yes I have.

Rebbe: Can you describe it to me?

Student: Of course. The lioness (female) approaches the herd of zebras and then attacks, jumping on one of the zebras, killing it and feasting upon the remains.

Rebbe: How true. Now if we say that there is Hashgacha, then we must say that Hashem decided which Zebra should be caught and killed by the lion.

Student: Absolutely, this is the meaning of Hashgacha.

Rebbe: And it is certainly a gruesome and painful deal for the zebra, is it not?

Student: Very.

Rebbe: Now why did Hashem choose this particular zebra? Did it do something wrong to deserve such a horrible death?

Student: No!

Rebbe: Maybe it wasn't nice to the other zebras?

Student: Let's not get silly.

Rebbe: In other words since zebras have no Bechira (freedom of choice) or Mitzvoth, there can be no punishment or reward?

Student: Correct.

Rebbe: So to choose one zebra over the other cannot be based on logic.

Student: It seems so.

Rebbe: And if Hashem made the choice, it is only a whim and not a logical decision.

Student: It seems so.

Rebbe: But we said that Hashem cannot be illogical!

Student: Yes we did say that.

Rebbe: Therefore, to say that there is Hashgacha in connection with the lion, i.e. that Hashem decides which lion kills which zebra, seems to be illogical?

Student: So it seems.



Rebbe: Now, if it is illogical for Hashem to act with Hashgacha over the animal kingdom, then it is only logical to say that there is no Hashgacha on the animal kingdom. And therefore we must say that as part of the act of creation, Hashem set up the animal world where animals will choose which prey it wishes to kill and eat!

Student: I see your point now and this is what the Sefer Hachinch means when he says "This view is very removed from human reason."

Rebbe: Absolutely. Furthermore, we may add the following: Which is a better program...one that the programmer must always adjust, or one that runs on its own and only needs adjustment from time to time?

Student: One that runs on its own.

Rebbe: So greater logic exists in a world that runs on its own whenever possible.

Student: Yes

Rebbe: And only when there is a special need, such as a human act that requires a change in the general laws of nature or physics, would Hashem have to make a change.

Student: Yes indeed. But you have explained this well in the animal kingdom. Can you prove this in the world of plants?

Rebbe: Of course. Let us look at a leaf that falls off a tree. Again, there are only two possibilities: that this was the will of Hashem, or it happened by itself. Are there any other possibilities?

Student: There doesn't seem to be any.

Rebbe: If we can prove that it is illogical for Hashem to cause the leaf to fall off the tree, we must conclude that there is no Hashgacha regarding plants and leaves fall off by the laws of nature, which Hashem created.

Student: So it seems.

Rebbe: Next...if the falling of the leaf was a direct act of Hashem, that it was intended to fall at a certain time, let us say at exactly 6:00, we would wonder why Hashem chose this time, would we not? It certainly does not seem to make a difference if it fell off at 6:00 or 6:01?

Student: Yes.

Rebbe: So if it is an act of Hashem and He chose 6:00, He did it without reason! And to act without reason is illogical, is it not?

Student: Yes indeed it is, but maybe we don't understand Hashem's reasoning?

Rebbe: Such an approach would present a great deal of difficulties.

Student: What do you mean?

Rebbe: For example, the Hashememara (Talmud Sota 14a) says, "As he clothes the naked, for it is written, And the Lord Hashem made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them, so do you also clothe the naked. The Holy One blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written, And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre, so do you also visit the sick etc." But maybe Hashem is doing these acts for unknown reasons that do not apply to mankind, so why should we try to emulate these gracious acts? Therefore, we must say that when we see an act of Hashem, we must try to understand it in a logical way and we must say they are acts of kindness which we must therefore emulate. Here too, when we see a leaf falling off a tree which is an act of creation, an act of Hashem, we must interpret it in a logical and reasonable way, should we not?

Student: Yes we should

Rebbe: And is it logical to say that Hashem created a world that runs without interference and constant adjustments.

Student: Yes it does.

Rebbe: And therefore it is very logical and understandable to say that a leaf falls off a tree when its nutrients are depleted?

Student: Yes.

Rebbe: And if that takes place at 6:00 or 6:01 it is solely by accident?

Student: Yes.

Rebbe: And to say that Hashem chose the time for an unknown reason would be "REMOVED FROM HUMAN REASON"?

Student: Yes it does, and this is what the sefer Ha'chinch means.

Rebbe: Absolutely

Student: It does make sense to me now. ■

TEHILLIM

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When many individuals within our Jewish communities – even respected individuals – act a certain way in the name of “religious practice”, we tend to accept that such practices are truly endorsed by the Torah; either in Torah Shebicsav (Chumash, Prophets and Writings) or in Torah Shebaal Peh (The Oral Law) found in the Talmud, the Shulchan Aruch and in the words of our accepted leaders such as Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, Ramban, Rashi, Unkelos, Ibn Ezra, Tosfos, Sforno, Radak, Gra, Rif, Ran, or the Rash. I cite only these sources, as these works are either the Divine words of God taught by His prophets, or they are the accepted transmitters of God’s prophets. Tragically, often times what Jews practice has not been validated by these sources.

Do you recite Tehillim to heal others, as a result of your careful research into these sources and the lengthy study of the Rabbis’ words? Do you know if others who share this Tehillim practice conducted such research? You must know that there are literally thousands – if not more – who wear red bendels on their hands to protect them from the “Evil Eye”. Yet, this practice is openly prohibited. (Tosefta Shabbos chap. XII) Nor do people have any accurate meaning of the term “Evil Eye”.

Arriving at a conclusion might require you to change your practice. Are you ready to act contrary to others, if what you learn here says you must? Or, will you succumb to the need for social approval and continue following the ignorant masses? Does your relationship with man outweigh your relationship with God?

Science reflects God’s wisdom. You would be foolish and mocked, had you attended a meeting of the world’s top scientists to offer your solution to problems that baffle them. Torah as well – also God’s creation – cannot be grasped by a cursory glance, or without diligent and rational research. King Solomon wrote, “If you seek it out like silver, and chase after it (Torah) like buried treasures, then you will understand the fear of God, and the knowledge of God will you find.” (Proverbs, 2:4) It is essential to note that many Jews attach themselves to the “act” of the mitzvah, and not to the meaning. However, the real benefit of any command is not in its act, but in our intelli-

gent grasp of the underlying idea. (Action is nonetheless required as a means of demonstrating our convictions.) This is why the Talmud teaches that Torah study surpasses all other mitzvos. (Moade Katan 9b) It surpasses all others, for without understanding the commands we forfeit their true objectives. Do you know why you wave a Lulav? If not, what benefit did that act serve you? Do you understand why Tefillin are boxes that protrude from your head and arm? Do you know why those four Torah sections – and no others – are located inside Tefillin? Do you know why you cannot wear wool and linen together? The list goes on with 610 more.

Are you simply going through the motions with no appreciation why God gave these highly specific activities? If so, you cannot attain any appreciation for God (i.e., His wisdom), which is why you were created. Performing one mitzvah, then another and another, all of which you are equally bereft of their ideas, will have a dulling affect on you. You will view each command with the same ignorance and blank value. If so, why did God give so many ‘different’ commands? In truth, each command must achieve some ‘new’ purpose that any other command could not. And that purpose is only attained when you understand its idea. So let us seek out those beautiful pearls of wisdom as a means of appreciating what is, and what is not Torah Law.

What is the Torah’s Prescription: Tehillim or Prayer?

From the patriarchs and matriarchs, throughout Talmud...this is clear with cases too numerous to count: we are to daven – pray – to God and include our requests in the appropriate Shmoneh Essray blessing. When one is sick, we insert a request in “Heal us” (Ripha-aynu). When in need of finances, we insert a request in “Barache Alaynu”, and so on. The Rabbis did not institute Tehillim as our response to our needs. They instituted Shmoneh Essray, a highly structured formulation.

Did Tehillim’s Author Use Tehillim?

What must impress you most, is that the very author of Tehillim – King David – did not recite

Tehillim when his own son was deathly ill. King David said, “While the baby was still alive, I fasted and cried...” (Samuel II, 12:22) Consider this clearly: if Tehillim’s author did not say Tehillim for the sick, but instead, he fasted and cried (prayed), then no one can give his work a new designation, which King David did not.

Can Words Heal? If not, is there any Harm in Reciting Tehillim?

There is a primary difference between a sick person intent on healing himself using Tehillim (or any Torah verse) as opposed to a healthy person shielding against future mishaps through the merit of Torah study.

Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi (Talmud Shavuot 15b) recited verses concerning afflictions before retiring at night. He was not ill, but wished his ‘merit’ of engaging in Torah to earn him God’s providence. But he also taught, “It is prohibited to heal with the words of Torah”, so was he contradicting himself? Not at all. Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi taught, “It is prohibited to heal with the words of Torah” because this is a prohibition of Nichush. Nichush stems from idolatrous cultures. An example of Nichush is a person who refrains from work, as he saw a black cat and assumes there to exist a ‘causal relationship’ between animals and financial success. Seeing the cat has caused him bad luck, he assumes. However, the Torah is a system of reason. This is why the Talmud (Shabbos 67a) prohibits amulets that have not been proven successful. We don’t ‘believe’. We demand proof.

Thus, Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi taught, “It is prohibited to heal with the words of Torah” as there is no relationship between reciting words and physical health. If one refrains from work after having seen a black cat, or, if one carries a rabbits foot, a horseshoe, tosses pennies into wells, avoids walking under ladders, fears broken mirrors, thinks elephant trunks in an upward position are “lucky”, bakes challas with keys inside, or recites Tehillim assuming the words heal...all such acts are Torah violations. In all these cases, the person assumes a relation to exist, when it does not. He has fallen prey to superstition, while the Talmud prohibits it. If so, why did Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi recite verses about afflictions before going to sleep? In this case, he adhered to the principle of Reward and Punishment. Sleep is a vulnerable state. This alerted the Rabbi to other vulnerabilities, and he wished God’s protection. Therefore, he engaged in the greatest mitzvah of Torah study, so that the ‘merit’ of the study – not the recital of a verse – would generate merit enough for God to shield him. Make sure you have this distinction clear in your mind.

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(Tehillim continued from previous page)

The Greatest Minds Prohibited Tehillim

But Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi is not the only great mind who taught, "It is prohibited to heal with the words of Torah". The Shulchan Aruch and Tur also prohibit this, and it is from here that we derive Jewish law. (Yoreh Dayah 179:8,9) If you have not read this section, cease from your Tehillim practices until you do.

Maimonides' words are essential, and as always, this great Rabbi's words reveal deep insight, if we respect Torah's depth and duly analyze what he wrote (Laws of Idolatry, 11:12):

"One who chants over a wound and reads a verse from the Torah, and similarly, one who reads on behalf of an infant to calm his fear, and one who places a Torah scroll or Tefillin on a child so he might sleep...it is not sufficient for them that they are in the category of Nichush and conjurer practitioners. But they are categorized as heretics. For they render the Torah's words as physical remedies, while it is truly a remedy for the soul, as it says, 'And they will be life to your soul'. However, a healthy person who reads verses and songs from Tehillim so that the merit of his reading might shield him from mishaps and injuries, this is permitted."

You must note that the last case when no illness is present, is "permitted", and not 'commanded' or even 'suggested'. Maimonides does not suggest in the least, that although permitted, such recital will have any results. However, when an illness or a wound is present, one who recites verses as a bodily remedy is deemed a heretic. Maimonides uses the harshest condemnation, which must cause your trepidation, not your dismissal.

Only under extreme circumstances is the recital of Torah words permitted: when ill and in danger. (Shabbos 67a) This permission is so one does not become distraught, and that he retains his senses to address his or her ailment with presence of mind. Hopefully, he or she will also consult a physician. But in no way does any Rabbi suggest that reciting Tehillim heals. As Maimonides teaches, it is superstitious, if not idolatrous.

Maimonides: A Lesson in Torah's Requirement for Study

Maimonides' wording is exact – his lesson, profound. Note what he describes as prohib-



ited: reading a "verse" from the Torah, in the singular. At the end describing what is permitted, he writes that a healthy person who reads "verses" and "songs" from Tehillim, in the plural. What is his lesson?

We stated earlier that the primary error in this practice is that one assumes a relationship to exist between his reciting of words and his health, or the health of others. But in fact, no evidence in reality exists for such a relationship. And Torah demands that we follow reality. This act is viewed as superstition: a belief in something that does not exist, and is therefore prohibited. Based on this understanding, we appreciate Maimonides' distinction...

In describing the prohibited act, Maimonides teaches that if one assumes a specific verse will heal, he thereby violates. For he expresses belief – in action – that something in 'particular' is causative...when it is not. But when describing what is permitted, one must not assume a 'specific' verse is causative, but he may follow the principle of Reward & Punishment, that Torah in general (many verses, i.e., study) may offer him merit from "mishaps and injuries" (again plural). In this manner, one does not project a causative nature onto 1) a specific verse or object; nor does he assume a definite, shielding against 2) a specific harm, as he speaks of "mishaps and injuries" without identifying a specific harm. If however one is healthy, and he either recites a single verse; alternatively if he recites many verses but intending to shield against a

'specific' eventual harm, then he violates Nichush. Furthermore, Maimonides' lesson embellishes the earlier point of how Torah life demands study, not the simply mimicking our peers' "religious" actions.

In summary, all sources prohibit Nichush, from the Torah (Lev. 19:26) through Talmud and our greatest Rabbis. Nowhere and at no time did Nichush ever produce results.

We become aware that our failure to study Torah has resulted in widespread, heretical religious rites, which even you – the reader – felt were unquestionable until now. But with study, we have just learned the contrary: Nichush, as in attempting to cure through Torah verses is condemned in the harshest terms by Maimonides, Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi, the Shulchan Aruch and the Tur.

This must be a wake-up call many other "Jewish" superstitions. Certainly, when such actions violate reason and we witness no connection between Torah words and healing the sick, we must cease from this action. When acting this way, we're not following Torah, but misguided people. Following this practice, we in turn misguide others.

Please read this again to ensure you remember all the sources, that you grasp the ideas, and so you might correct others.

Let us follow the Torah's very statement that Torah "will be life to your soul" – your "soul", not your body. ■



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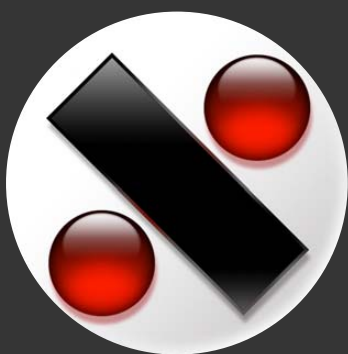
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