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OR HARM?

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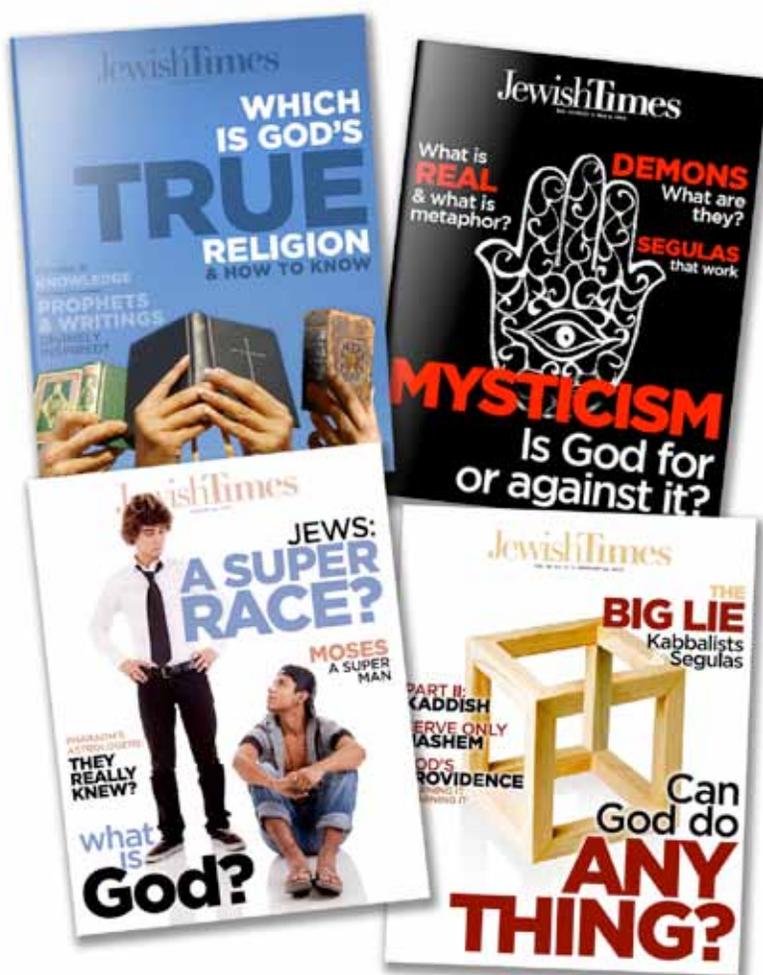
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Mystical beliefs spread in our communities, and many don't want it. The failure to teach TaNaCH contributes. We must reject what conflicts with God's words.

LETTERS

Talking to the Dead

Oliver: About your article where you said Saul did NOT see Samuel (mesora.org/talkingtothedead5.html). If as you say, "Saul's seeing the deceased Samuel raised from the Earth was not prophetic, but Saul's own imagination", why is it so well described in the, well, Scriptures? Could it be that it was a demon in the vision? I'm just doing some work on religion for school, could you help? Also, wouldn't the "talking with dead" prohibition include this prohibition too?

Rabbi: The reason for its apparent "literal" treatment, is precisely to emphasize how real Saul imagined Samuel to be, although Samuel was dead. This was the lesson: to transmit to the Torah reader how people, even those such as Saul, a king, will succumb to imaginary things.

Witches are a separate violation from talking to the read, necromancy. Since witchcraft includes any act, not just necromancy. ■

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Objects of Mitzvah

Reader: If the shawl (tallis) is of Christian origin, but made correctly, is it an acceptable item for Torah practice?

Rabbi: It is not an authentic Torah item and should be discarded. Objects of Torah law must be made by Jews who understand what God is, and what purpose the commands target. Even though this shawl might look identical to an authentic Jewish shawl, it possesses no sanctity or status as a religious item. ■

Arrogant Rabbis

Reader: I heard a shiur by a hassidic Rabbi who criticized people who come to shul on shabbat with colorful shirts, as being akin to those Jews who accepted certain aspects of hellenic culture. Why are the ultra-orthodox so obsessed with dress? Do our true ancient Sages and Rabbis ban Jews from wearing any colors other than black and white? Plus, I keep hearing them make racist comments about black people calling them schvartzas and this seems to spill over into their attitudes toward dark Jews of middle eastern descent. Why do Rabbis encourage this and not speak out against this?

Rabbi: The Rabbi is completely wrong, and arrogant, as seen in their remarks against black people. They feel dress indicates their pious level, while piety is internal and unrelated to dress. The Torah says that such acts were punished by God. The Prophet Tzefania 1:8 (see Radak's commentary) discusses how God punished certain Jews who dressed different than the rest of the people, they desired to look more distinct and pious. The Radak calls their ways "evil". This makes sense that they were punished. As God did not command Jews in a certain dress other than cross-gender dressing, dressing in idolatrous garb, and immodest dress. This step taken by Chassidim and ultra-orthodox Jews to dress in black and white is not part of Judaism. Torah says not to add or subtract from God's words. And therefore we cannot add prohibitions that do not exist in Torah, like wearing colorful garments. Even Jacob made a beautiful coat for Joseph!

As far as skin color goes, again the Torah does not judge a person based on external phenomena. Moses' wife was black, and so were many perfected individuals. ■

Free Will

Oliver: I quote you:

"Maimonides' principle discounts any truth to the false notion of "forces" which many people assume to have existence, will, and the ability to affect man. This is false. Man's life is in his own hands, "Hakol b'day shamayim, chutz mayiras shamayim; All is in God's hands, except the fear of God." This means man's will is his own, unaffected by anything but himself. Therefore, there cannot be anything in creation which could deter man from choosing to follow God (mesora.org/angels.html)."

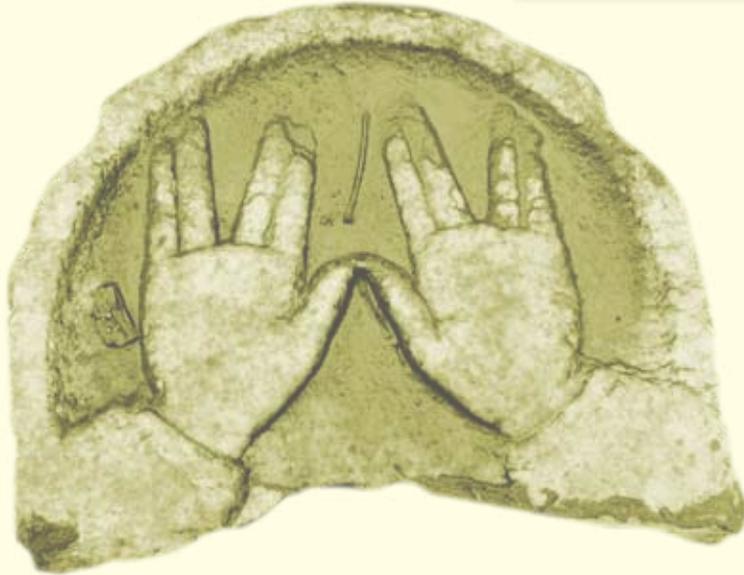
Now, does that mean that everything that happens on Earth is part of God's plan for us, or can you still put your will to do something else with you life? For it sounds like either you are with God's plan or with nothing? Let's say someone died from a car accident and the driver who caused the accident had alcohol in his blood. Whose will was being fulfilled? Could you say it was driver's fault, or God's plan since everything is in God's hands? If it was not God's hand, could He save someone from an accident taking place?

Rabbi: "Hakol b'day shamayim, chutz mayiras shamayim; All is in God's hands, except the fear of God" means God controls all except free will. In a case of a drunk driver, he drank of his own free will, and he can either kill someone undeserving of God's salvation, or God can avert the disaster for a worthy pedestrian without affecting the drunk's free will. ■

LETTERS

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Do Rabbis' Blessings Work?

Reader: What is your opinion on the value of getting a bracha from a "big" Rabbi?

Rabbi: Only God can change your fate. But someone else can pray for you, and God might answer him, for his sake.

Rabbi Israel Chait said the main prayer is of the person in need.

Reader: Yes clearly but is there any special power to the prayer/blessing of a Rav? I'm guessing the merit of someone active in Talmud Torah in mitzvos is more than others and therefore they have a higher likelihood of their prayers being granted.

Rabbi: Agreed, his "prayers" will be answered more, as he will pray for what is in line with Torah, while others on a lower level must, by definition, be

praying for lesser matters, and may not be answered. But no one has powers to "bless."

"Prayer" is the proper act.

Reader: What makes you say no one has powers to bless? There is a widespread custom to bless children before kiddush on Shabbos night. Kohanim bless us yomtov days and in Israel every morning. At weddings parents bless their children before they go the chuppah. There must many other examples that I can't think of right now.

Rabbi: Jacob was a prophet. No one today is. When his wife asked him to give her children, he became angry and said, "Am I in God's place, that I withheld children from you?" He didn't have the ability to bless her, so no one does today.

Kohanim "recite" the blessing, but the verse says, "Place My name on the Jews and I (God) will bless them." The Kohanim did not "cause" the blessings, as God says clearly. They were needed to express God's will, not that they effectuated anything.

By analyzing at the dynamics between the Jews and the priests, perhaps their relationship affords some insight. The priests receive gifts from the Jews. The priests also serve in the Temple. The Jews do not. What attitude might be generated from such a relationship where one party receives gifts from the other, and where they also have exclusive rights to Temple service, not granted to Jews? Would the Jew feel justified in his resentment, because he toils for his possessions while the priests receive them from the Jew for free? The Jew might also resent the priests' "closer" proximity to God, since they alone serve in the Temple.

Perhaps this is exactly what the blessings address. They preempt the strife, which might occur based on the Jews' resentment of priestly gifts, and the exclusion of the Jew from Temple service. I suggest that precisely to rid Jewish society of such resentment, God commanded the priests publicly bless the Jews in these two areas - monetary needs, and that God pays attention to Jews, the desired result of prayer. By doing so, any ill feelings will be addressed before they become an issue. See my article: mesora.org/naso-priestlyblessings.html

All other cases, at shabbos or weddings, people merely express their wishes for their children and hope God responds. But this in no way causes anything. ■

LETTERS

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YOSEF IN CONTROL

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The “deception” comes to an end in Parshas Vayigash when Yehudah’s plea seemingly instigates the revelation of Yosef’s true identity to his brothers. In this one moment, Yosef’s plan comes to fruition, and the future of Judaism is saved. However, right before that moment of disclosure, Yosef makes a strange request — he calls for all the Egyptians in the room to leave. As we will soon see, this was more than simply the desire for privacy with his family. In fact, we are drawn into the mind of Yosef as he contemplates the consequences of this dramatic moment.

It seems Yosef was ready to break down (Bereishis 45:1-2):

“Now Joseph could not bear all those standing beside him, and he called out, “Take everyone away from me!” So no one stood with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept out loud, so the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard.”

One could easily deduce that Yosef’s response was due to his inability to maintain any sort of emotional control. Why was it critical to have everyone leave

the room? Rashi (along with the Ibn Ezra) offers one explanation (ibid):

“He could not bear that Egyptians would stand beside him and hear his brothers being embarrassed when he would make himself known to them.”

Saving the brothers from more embarrassment seems to be a noble objective. However, we have to keep one important point in mind. Part of Yosef’s plan was to bring the brothers onto the path of teshuva, repentance. When studying the words of the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva (4:5), we see that admitting one’s sins in a public manner, which is clearly more embarrassing, is considered a praiseworthy action. In other words, one could surmise that additional embarrassment would be of great benefit to the overall teshuva process the brothers were supposed to be engaged in. Therefore, we can ask why Yosef was so concerned about the greater shame that would occur if the Egyptians in the room remained.

Onkelos offers what one might consider to be the explanation closest to the literal understanding of the events. He uses the word “leaschesana”, which means that Yosef was unable to remain strong. However, we can ask again why it was critical for him to clear the room of all non-family members.

Finally, the Ramban offers his own very unique explanation. He seems to agree with Onkelos’s definition as referring to some type of control. However, the context is completely different. Those Egyptians in attendance were observing the back and forth, and were expressing their clear sympathies with the brothers. The inability here was not in Yosef’s self-control; rather, it was the inability to control the crowd. He therefore throws everyone out of the room. The Ramban continues, offering a critical explanation for why it was necessary to clear the room. Yosef was concerned about the fallout that would occur if those in the room heard about the events surrounding the sale of Yosef. The probable reaction would be that these brothers of the Viceroy of Egypt were cruel and evil people, and that there could be no room for such people in Egypt. Furthermore, it would erode any trust they had in Yosef as their leader. It was imperative for Yosef, according to

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the Ramban, to do whatever he could to keep the details of the events surrounding Yosef's youth out of the local press, so to speak.

Each of these interpretations requires a deeper explanation. Looking at Rashi first, we are faced with Yosef's concern for the high level of embarrassment that would occur if he would expose his identity to his brothers in the presence of the Egyptians. At the same time, we know that public embarrassment is a kiyum (plus) of sorts in the teshuva process. The answer lies in what made this situation unique. Normally, a person recognizes his sin, undergoes introspection, understands to a greater degree his relationship with the Creator, and then performs viduy, confession to God. When following these steps, viduy should be done publicly. However, this scenario is different. The brothers were indeed on the path to teshuva, but they were being "guided" along by Yosef. And with Yosef's revelation, all of a sudden the brothers would be face to face with what they had done. In a sense, this final step was "imposed" on them by Yosef. Without question, they would feel a sense of shame at this revelation. It was this

sensitive moment that was of concern to Yosef. He was afraid that the delicate nature of this process, if accomplished in a more public manner, would lead to a different quality of embarrassment. The brothers would be more than humiliated, and would see it as part of a vindictive plan on Yosef's part. It is one thing to suffer the embarrassment of sin recognition. It is another to do so in a way that offers up an entirely different dimension of humiliation. This would be an impediment to their teshuva; as a result, he clears the room.

Onkelos, though, sees Yosef's reaction in the more literal sense. However, we must then explain why it would be necessary for him to evacuate all the non-family members. Without question this reunion was going to have its emotional component, and Yosef would indeed display a deep and powerful emotional reaction. What concerned Yosef was the perception this would create among the Egyptians. In general, people have certain expectations about their leaders, one of them being the ability to control one's emotions. It generates a sense of security, regardless of whether this feeling is justified or not. The fact is, people tend to think that the ability to

retain a "cool head" means a greater control over any particular situation. Yosef could not anticipate exactly how he would react, but he did know that this would be a moment replete with drama, and he therefore wanted to ensure that the image of steadfast leadership would not be distorted.

This leads us to the Ramban. One intriguing idea we see at the outset with the Ramban's approach is Yosef's intent on keeping the as much as possible under wraps. In fact, we see Yosef goes to great length to keep the true story hidden early on. When Yosef was thrown into prison, he tells his fellow prisoner, after interpreting his dream (ibid 40:15), that he was kidnapped and taken to Egypt. It would seem his intent all along was to make sure the truth would never get out. Obviously, the political fallout would be tremendous. One could walk away from this Ramban appreciating the tremendous foresight Yosef had. However, it is possible there is one other subtle idea here that reflects Yosef's brilliance to a greater degree. Yosef realized how important it was to make sure no Egyptian found out what took place. As their sympathies become aligned with his brothers, he realized he had to

behave in a certain way to ensure no suspicions might emerge; after all, to just throw Egyptians out of the room would certainly be a strange action. Thus, we see Yosef, according to the Ramban, calling out in anger. He was already acting in a very aggressive way, at least through the eyes of the Egyptians. When a leader lashes out in anger, it almost always grabs the attention of his subordinates, preventing any time to reflect on the current state of affairs. The point here is that this as part of Yosef's overall effort to ensure the future Jewish nation would be able to reside in Egypt.

The overall impression one takes from this episode is that this was not a case of Yosef being unable to control his emotions. The various commentaries make it a point to demonstrate that Yosef was constantly thinking, attempting to work out the ideal way of revealing himself to his brothers, assisting them in their repentance, while also ensuring his leadership was intact and the sons of Yaakov welcomed. This reflects a general theme among the commentaries, an insistence on understanding that chachma, wisdom, was and always is the modus operandi of any great chacham. ■

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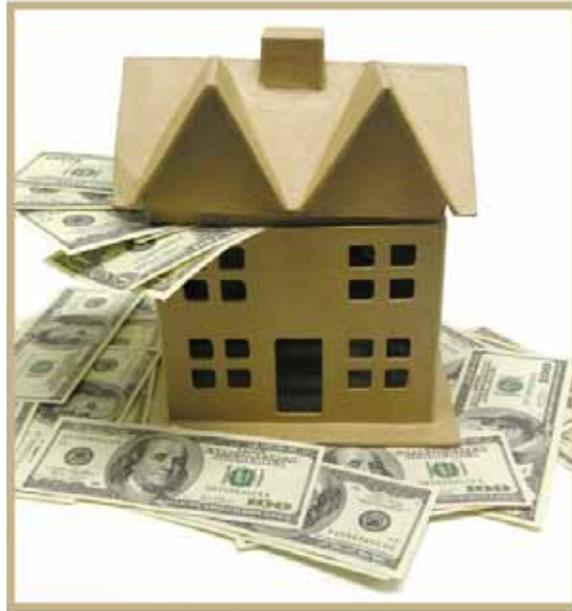
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JUDAISM'S VIEW OF

DEVILS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This week, two independent people questioned the same Talmudic section regarding mazzikim (“devils” or “destroyers”). It caught my attention.

As we often state, King Solomon taught that the Rabbis wrote in riddles, as he did himself. Our Rabbis also included in their riddles clues that direct us to their meanings. Below, I wish to convey how the clues must force the reader to abandon a literal misunderstanding in this case too, and seek the truly intended concealed insights.

I will quote the entire source, then take each statement individually; first highlighting those clues, and once again I will cite each statement offering my interpretation.

Talmud Brachos 6a:

It has been taught: Abba Benjamin says, “If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could endure the mazzikim (devils/destroyers).” Abaye says, “They are more numerous than we are and they surround us like a ridge around a field.” R. Huna says, “Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand.” Raba says, “The crushing in the Kallab lectures comes from them. Fatigue in the knees comes from them. The wearing out of the clothes of the scholars is due to their rubbing against them. The bruising of the feet comes from them. If one wants to discover them, let him take sifted ashes and sprinkle around his bed, and in the morning he will see something like the footprints of a cock. If one wishes to see them, let him take the afterbirth of a black she-cat, the offspring of a black she-cat, the first-born of a firstborn, let him roast it in fire and grind it to powder, and then let him fill his eye, and he will see them. Let him also pour it into an iron tube and seal it with an iron signet that they should not steal it from him. Let him also close his mouth, lest he come to harm.” R. Bibi b. Abaye did so, he saw them, and came to harm. The scholars, however, prayed for him and he recovered.”

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IF THE EYE HAD THE POWER TO SEE THEM, NO CREATURE COULD ENDURE THE MAZZIKIM

Abba Benjamin opens this topic, teaching that devils cannot be seen by the eye. So the hypothetical seeing and harm he mentions, makes no sense if taken literally. For if something cannot be seen, there is no hypothetical case where they can be seen. Therefore, mazzikim cannot refer to physical phenomena. Furthermore, what is meant that we cannot endure these mazzikim if we saw them? How would “seeing” them alone harm us? What is Talmud’s view of a devil?

THEY ARE MORE NUMEROUS THAN WE ARE AND THEY SURROUND US LIKE A RIDGE AROUND A FIELD

This means they “surround” us; at all times from all directions. But if they are not subject to vision, how is this statement made? What makes devils “more numerous” than people?

EVERY ONE AMONG US HAS A THOUSAND ON HIS LEFT HAND AND TEN THOUSAND ON HIS RIGHT HAND

The right hand is what we use to accomplish our daily tasks, as most people are right-handed. So what is it that works against us to a far greater degree (10,000 at our right hand) when we attempt progress, but are less numerous and less destructive when we are not engaged in progress?

THE CRUSHING IN THE KALLAH LECTURES COMES FROM THEM

These devils cause mass attendance at Torah lectures. Thus, they are not inherently evil if they contribute to study.

FATIGUE IN THE KNEES COMES FROM THEM

Faintness of heart and fear are caused by these devils.

THE WEARING OUT OF THE CLOTHES OF THE SCHOLARS IS DUE TO THEIR RUBBING AGAINST THEM

Those not engaged in manual labor, still suffer the wearing-out of their garments (Rashi). But how?



THE BRUISING OF THE FEET COMES FROM THEM

These devils motivate us towards our daily activity, as walking (feet) bruises the feet. Without walking, our feet remain unharmed.

IF ONE WANTS TO DISCOVER THEM, LET HIM TAKE SIFTED ASHES AND SPRINKLE AROUND HIS BED, AND IN THE MORNING HE WILL SEE SOMETHING LIKE THE FOOTPRINTS OF A COCK

Notice it says “discover,” not “see,” meaning evidence can be found of these devils. Why around his bed; what does sleep have to do with discovering devils? Maharsha says, at night, there are more devils and they also cling to man more at night. Also, why do they appear like a cock’s footprints?

IF ONE WISHES TO SEE THEM, LET HIM TAKE THE AFTERBIRTH OF A BLACK SHE-CAT, THE OFFSPRING OF A BLACK SHE-CAT, THE FIRST-BORN OF A FIRST-BORN, LET HIM ROAST IT IN FIRE AND GRIND IT TO POWDER, AND THEN LET HIM FILL HIS EYE, AND HE WILL SEE THEM.

One should take a disgusting afterbirth, and also cruelly kill a helpless

animal? Can he also truly find out which cat is a firstborn, of a firstborn? Then, he should grind the burnt remains? This is morbid, and it’s likely also prohibited to kill animals for such purposes. How then can the Rabbis tell us to do such acts?

LET HIM ALSO POUR IT INTO AN IRON TUBE AND SEAL IT WITH AN IRON SIGNET THAT THEY (THE DEVILS) SHOULD NOT STEAL IT FROM HIM

He must seal these powdered remains so they are not accessible to the other devils. What is meant that other devils would steal the remains? What do the devils need them for?

Let him also close his mouth, lest he come to harm. R. Bibi b. Abaye did so, he saw them, and came to harm. The scholars, however, prayed for him and he recovered

Why does speech (an open mouth) bring greater harm? Why was R. Bibi b. Abaye – a scholar – harmed?

The questions are many. After thinking them over, read further to see my interpretation.

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INTERPRETATION

IF THE EYE HAD THE POWER TO SEE THEM, NO CREATURE COULD ENDURE THE MAZZIKIM

Devils cannot be seen by the eye. These mazzikim cannot refer to physical phenomena. Mazzikim are destroyers. What kind?

They are human instincts; they drive us towards our own destruction; thus, the title destroyers or devils. This explains why they cannot be seen. Our instincts work in a hidden fashion, within our psyches. Examples of mazzikim are viciousness, anger, revenge, aggression, hatred, etc.

What is meant that we cannot endure these mazzikim if we saw them? This means that if we confronted these parts of our psyches openly, in a non-sublimated manner, we would be controlled by them. They are powerful forces. Most of us sublimate our aggression and hatreds, in a manner we can accept, while still satisfying the instinct. Lashon Hara, evil speech, is a perfect example. Tell a person who always speaks Lashon Hara about her friend Nancy, that she truly wishes Nancy dead, and she won't be able to accept that. Her aggression is sublimated to a tolerable form: speech. But ask her if she ever dreamt of Nancy dead, and she might say yes. For in sleep, our inhibitions are almost gone. Our true desires are unbridled to a great degree. But while awake, our other instincts like guilt and peer approval force us to sublimate our raw desires. Nightmares are wishes that bother us to the point of waking us. As we don't wish to see this side of ourselves in their full and unbridled rage, we can't handle the nightmare, and escape by awakening. And if we truly confronted our deepest rages while awake, they would devastate us. Thus, the Rabbis say, "If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could endure the mazzikim."

THEY ARE MORE NUMEROUS THAN WE ARE AND THEY SURROUND US LIKE A RIDGE AROUND A FIELD

Our instincts are always at work, they constantly "surround us." What makes



devils "more numerous" than people? Simple: each person has many instinctual drives.

EVERY ONE AMONG US HAS A THOUSAND ON HIS LEFT HAND AND TEN THOUSAND ON HIS RIGHT HAND

The right hand is what we use to accomplish our daily tasks, as most people are right-handed. When attempting this progress, we must work within a set of rules. Farming requires many steps, and at the right times. Proper ploughing, certain seeds, certain times of the year and certain quantities of water yield a healthy crop. By nature, our instincts wish unrestrained reign and freedom over every one of our acts. So when we must follow rules that will yield success, the desire of the instincts for freedom are far more numerous than when we are recreational or at relaxing pursuits, that fully comply with

our instincts, and thus, there are less instincts working against us at those times.

THE CRUSHING IN THE KALLAH LECTURES COMES FROM THEM

These devils cause mass attendance at Torah lectures. Thus, they are not inherently evil since instincts also serve to satisfy ego goals, which may be enjoyed by learning much, and boasting. Attending a popular lecture can be motivated by ego, by these devils.

FATIGUE IN THE KNEES COMES FROM THEM

Faintness of heart and fear are caused by these devils. Instincts come in all forms. Fear is one form.

THE WEARING OUT OF THE CLOTHES OF THE SCHOLARS IS DUE TO THEIR RUBBING AGAINST THEM

Those not engaged in manual labor, still suffer the wearing-out of their garments (Rashi). But how? Men who study, have controlled their instincts for business accomplishments, sex, and other indulgences. The fight against these drives is described here as the wearing out of their clothes. Alternatively, we can say their clothes actually wear out, as a result of their sublimation of their urges, translated into shuckling as they study, which wears out their clothes.

THE BRUISING OF THE FEET COMES FROM THEM

These devils motivate us towards our daily activity, as walking (feet) bruises the feet. Without walking, our feet remain unharmed. This needs no interpretation.

IF ONE WANTS TO DISCOVER THEM, LET HIM TAKE SIFTED ASHES AND SPRINKLE AROUND HIS BED, AND IN THE MORNING HE WILL SEE SOMETHING LIKE THE FOOTPRINTS OF A COCK

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Maharsha says, at night, there are more devils and they also cling to man more at night. Also, why do they appear like a cock's footprints?

This means that sleep is an experience when our instincts have free reign, as stated above. In the morning, a person senses the residue of the powerful emotions dreams express. “Around his bed” means after awakening, that residue slowly fades, as do the small footprints of birds on ashes.

IF ONE WISHES TO SEE THEM, LET HIM TAKE THE AFTERTH OF A BLACK SHE-CAT, THE OFFSPRING OF A BLACK SHE-CAT, THE FIRST-BORN OF A FIRST-BORN, LET HIM ROAST IT IN FIRE AND GRIND IT TO POWDER, AND THEN LET HIM FILL HIS EYE, AND HE WILL SEE THEM.

One should take a disgusting afterbirth, and also cruelly kill a helpless animal? Can he also truly find out which cat is a firstborn, of a firstborn? Then, he should grind the burnt remains? This is morbid, and it's likely also prohibited to kill animals for such purposes. How then can the Rabbis tell us to do such acts?

The Rabbis don't mean we should do this cruel act. However, the lesson is that if one engages in a cruel act, he will sense a satisfaction; he will face his demons, as his instinctual urges become real, like in his dream state. His unbridled engagement in base instincts will actual appeal to him, for this is the raw desire. He will see the devil in himself. But as we also said above, man does not wish to admit of his base instincts and rage. This is almost impossible to face, as impossible as it is to find a black she-cat first-born, of another black she-cat first-born. “Filling his eye,” means he will see, he will comprehend his devils.

LET HIM ALSO POUR IT INTO AN IRON TUBE AND SEAL IT WITH AN IRON SIGNET THAT THEY (THE DEVILS) SHOULD NOT STEAL IT FROM HIM

He must seal these powdered remains so they are not accessible to the other devils. What is meant that other devils would steal the remains? What do the devils need them for?

Sealing these remains, means he must keep them restrained, for his own benefit. For the instincts find greater power when teamed with other urges and drives. When the Jews sinned with the Gold calf, they also arose and partied. Their idolatrous satisfaction awoke in them other instinctual urges.

LET HIM ALSO CLOSE HIS MOUTH, LEST HE COME TO HARM. R. BIBI B. ABAYE DID SO, HE SAW THEM, AND CAME TO HARM. THE SCHOLARS, HOWEVER, PRAYED FOR HIM AND HE RECOVERED

No one is immune to the powers of the instincts – not even Torah scholars. Furthermore, irreparable harm can come to anyone if he indulges his base instincts. This is why R. Bibi was saved only through God's help via the prayers of others.

In summary, we again witness the keen intelligence of the Rabbis, their insights into human nature and their abilities to write metaphors in such a way that they direct us to truths. This approach must be applied when we encounter all similar Talmudic stories. Mysticism is not part of Judaism. It is not witnessed in any of God's works; Chumash, Prophets and Writings describe no prophet or patriarch following anything but reason. These great, perfected personalities from whom God wishes we study, lived intelligently. May we all do the same. ■

RECONCILIATION

RABBI REUVEN MANN

In this week's parsha, Vayigash, the tension mounts as the drama of Yosef and his brothers approaches its final act. The brothers had no idea what they had fallen into at the hands of this unpredictable Egyptian ruler. He alternated between displays of severe harshness and demonstrations of friendship and reasonableness. The underlying constants were his accusation that the brothers were spies who had come to

discover the "nakedness of the land," and that vindication would only come when they brought their younger brother, Benjamin, to confirm their claim that they were all members of one family. They had managed to convince Yaakov to part with his beloved youngest son who had become a substitute for Yosef. They had returned to Egypt, where matters had at first gone unbelievably well. All the misunder-

standings had seemingly been resolved and the brothers had shared a meal at the house of Yosef. He treated them very well, gave them gifts and packed their bags with food to bring back to Canaan. One can imagine how relieved and cheerful the brothers must have felt as they began their return journey, with Shimon and Benjamin intact, to their father. However, they had no idea what awaited them. Who could have

(continued on next page)



RABBI
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MANN

imagined that this fair minded ruler who they had convinced of their innocence had conspired to entrap them? Yosef's messenger caught up to them on the road and accused them of stealing Yosef's special goblet which he used for purposes of "divination." The brothers were shocked and outraged that such a heinous accusation could be made against them. So convinced were they that the allegation could not be true that they made an astounding offer. "Whoever among your servants it shall be found by shall die and the rest of us will be slaves unto your master." One must watch what one says. The search commenced and the goblet was discovered exactly where it had been planted, in the sack of Benjamin. The brothers appealed to Yosef to not be separated from Benjamin and for all of them to be slaves to him. However, Yosef, feigning righteousness, summarily rejected the vile notion of collective punishment. "The one who was found to have the goblet shall be a slave to me and the rest of you shall return in peace to your father." At this point all seemed lost. The burden fell most heavily on Yehuda who had personally guaranteed that, come what may, he would return Benjamin, in good shape, to his father. The prospect of fulfilling that sacred pledge now seemed very bleak. Yet, Yehuda did not give up. His courageous and

forceful appeal illustrates the Rabbis' teaching that "even if the sharp sword is on one's neck he should not despair of Divine mercy." In addition to total faith one must utilize all of one's resources and tap deeply into one's reservoir of wisdom. Yehuda approached Yosef and made his case. He carefully reviewed all the events which had transpired since their initial encounter with the Egyptian ruler. He emphasized that the brothers had kept all the conditions that Yosef had demanded. He described how much suffering all of this had brought to Yaakov. The old man had gone through so much, losing one son and now facing the loss of the other. Yehuda did not merely plead for mercy. He had the creativity to come up with a proposal. He did not contest the justice of Yosef's verdict against Benjamin. Though in his heart he knew his brother was not a thief and that the whole thing was a set up, he did not verbalize this idea. He, implicitly, conceded Yosef's need to enslave Benjamin and make an example of him in order to put fear in any potential enemies. However, he argued that Yosef's purposes could be equally served by letting Benjamin go and imprisoning him in his place. The benefit of this plan was that it would save Yaakov's life. Yehuda made this clear as he conveyed the words of Yaakov who had told him, "if you take

Benjamin from me and an accident befalls him you will bring my old age down to the grave." Thus, Yehuda pleaded, "Allow me to stay behind as a slave to my master and the lad will go with his brothers." Yehuda argued that imprisoning Benjamin would spell the end for Yaakov. One can't help but ask, what about the loss of Yehuda, wouldn't that be equally devastating to Yaakov? Yehuda was saying that though his father obviously loved him, Benjamin meant more to him. He would somehow survive the loss of Yehuda but not that of Benjamin. The greatness of Yehuda was that he was prepared to give up his life in order to honor his pledge. Even more important was his capacity to renounce the jealousy which had engendered the hatred of Yosef and to accept the right of his father to "love Yosef more than any of his sons." The triumph over jealousy and renunciation of the baseless hatred it engendered was a great moral victory. It signaled to Yosef that the defects and sins which had caused the breakup of the family had now been rectified and the time for reconciliation had come. May we attain the wisdom and strength to recognize and rectify our flaws, make amends to all we have hurt and forgive those who have acted iniquitously to us.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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A new "Jewish" idolatrous practice — exposed with a little thought

SEGULA Rings

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



These rings are only a question due to their new popularity. We must realize this false correlation: that which is popular, is credible. Popularity in no way validates. If this were so, fabricated religions with mass popularity like Christianity and Islam should be more credible than Judaism. However, an intelligent person examines the phenomenon, and decides its worth based on the matter alone.

Why they cannot work: a natural argument

Amulets cannot work. For if one ignores his flaws – the true culprits of his/her problems – the resulting inevitable problems remain. Thus, wearing such rings while continuing to slack off at work, will not help retain employment; the slacker will continually be fired from job to job. One who

eats harmfully will remain sick, despite wearing these rings. Conversely, if the slacker shapes up, and the person eats healthfully, despite not wearing these rings, both will find greater success.

Why they cannot work: a divine argument

Our merit and sins are what causes our reward or punishment. By wearing these rings, one heretically confesses that God does not run the world justly, and that any evil person can be divinely-shielded from harm by wearing a ring, and that righteous people who don't wear the ring, will be divinely subjected to harm, without having sinned.

This presents an unjust view of the Creator and denies the fundamental of "Reward & Punishment" that permeates all of Torah.

Denies God's Torah

God commanded against these falsehoods, referred to as Nichush (Lev. 19:26); the gauging of our actions based on unrelated phenomena. God granted mankind five senses, precisely so we use them to determine what causes 'X', and what does not. Our senses tell us rings and red bendels, et al., do nothing. Subscribing to such imagined powers is a rejection of God's will for man to trust our senses.

These rings are idolatrous in nature and no different at all than the Egyptian idols and practices from which God saved us.

Unintelligent

1. Baseless: no evidence
2. Contradiction: People don't live that way in in other areas of their lives. Tell believers in these rings/bendels to quit their job and rely on a ring or red bendel to provide their rent. They won't, since deep down, they don't believe in them.
3. Created vs. the Creator: Created things cannot deviate from their natural governing laws; they cannot control those laws or affect man's fate. Red bendels and rings burn in fire. If they cannot protect themselves, how can they protect anything/anyone else?
4. Inexplicable: When did these rings gain their "powers"? While still ore in the ground, no one would suggest they are different than any other element or contain powers. Once the ore is melted, but not yet a ring, is there power yet, or only once fashioned into jewelry? And what principle compels a person to suggest the power arrives in the ring at any step in the process? The failure of ring proponents to answer this question unveils their complete ignorance of their very claim. They accept what is inexplicable. ■

KABBALA

At odds with God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

After meeting with a few community members concerned that Jewish education is suffering from mystical influences from within, and hearing many others' view of a "mystical Judaism," it continues to be alarmingly apparent that Jewish educators and local Rabbis do not teach "Judaism."

These community members I met are intelligent, and realize that without a firm grasp of the very basics - TaNaCH - students are being led astray by Rebbeim who believe in Kabbalistic heresies, such as God being similar to creation, that He has parts, He is inside man's soul, that He exists in sin, that Rebbes are the "atzmus" (essence) of God so they are infallible, and other disturbing and heretical notions.

If students and Jews in general been taught Judaism's fundamentals as cited by Rambam and other leaders, had they been taught God's words (not man's) like "I (God) am not similar to anything (Isaiah)", that Moshe sinned - hence human infalli-

bility is a lie...our students would not accept foolish doctrines cited above. Students and Jews would protest notions that contradict God's words in TaNaCH.

Today's Judaism ignores God's words, and instead, favors incomprehensible and heretical notions found in man-made works like Kabbala, Tanya, Breslov and other works that assume an identity similar to Christian doctrines. When the priority of God's words is rejected, this is no longer Judaism.

I urge educators and Rabbis to address this, if you sincerely wish to promote the Judaism God gave us through His words in TaNaCH. I urge you to protest the teaching of heretical notions, regardless of the mass acceptance of certain works.

When two sources contradict each other, and one source is God's words, we must reject the opposing source.

Do this for Judaism, for students, for the community...and for yourself. ■



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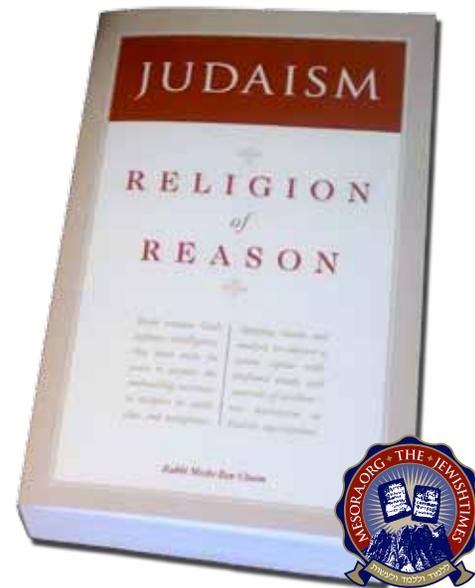
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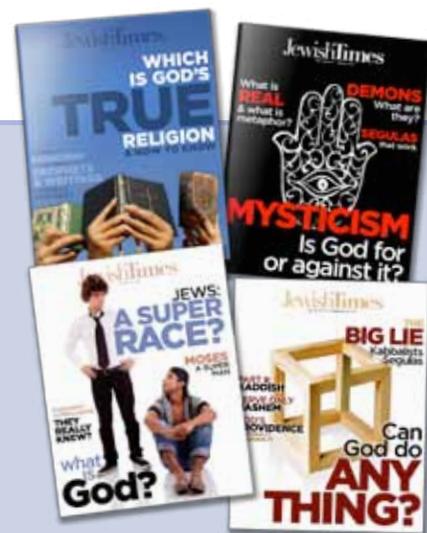
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Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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