

TORAH & SCIENCE

Deciphering Menorah's Symbols

**A GUIDE TO
STUDYING
CREATION**

**The Codes of
the Menorah**



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**IMAGE &
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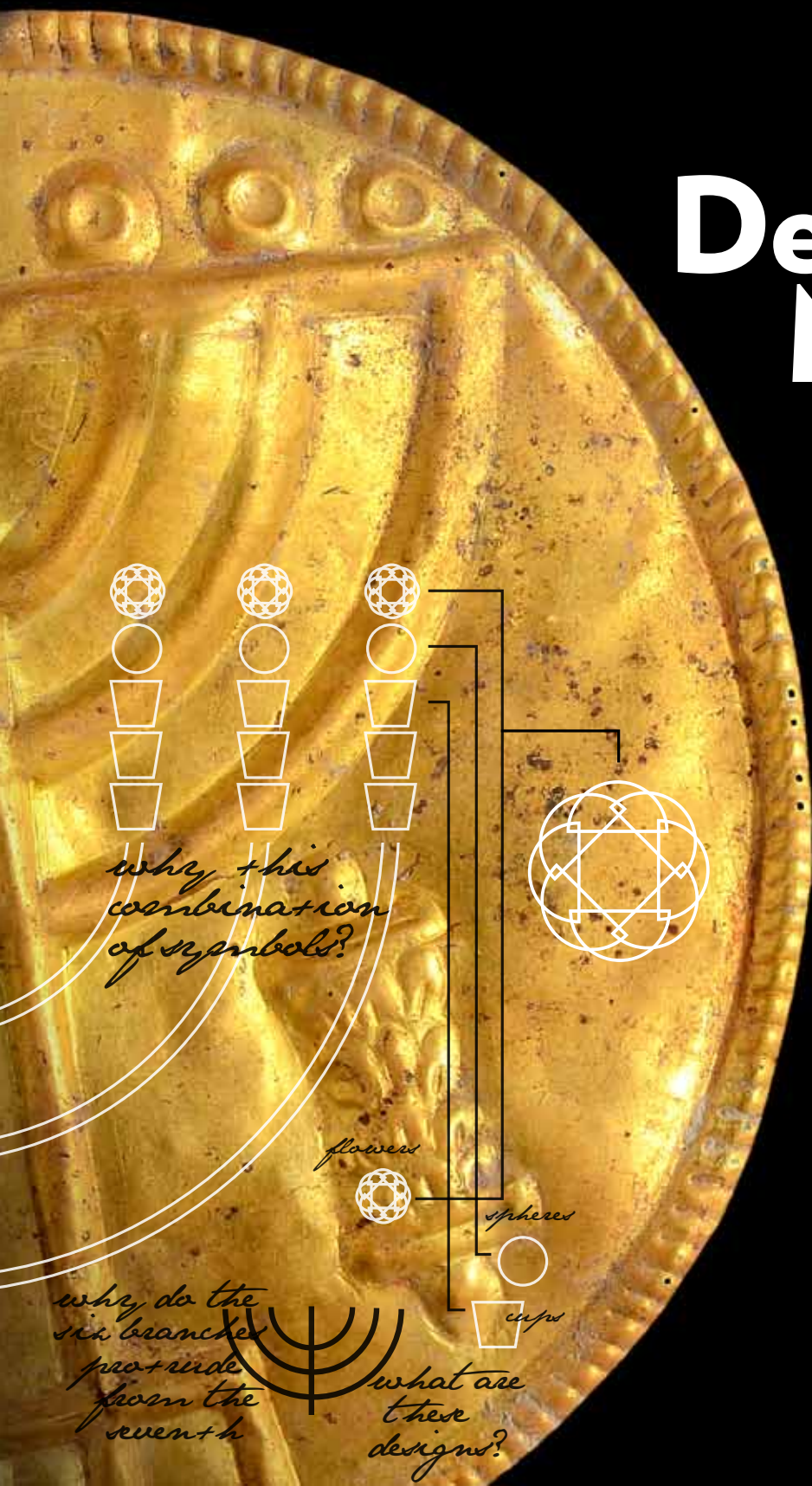
Clothes in Judaism

RABBI REUVEN MANN

**HEARTS
OF GOLD**

What's Inside Matters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

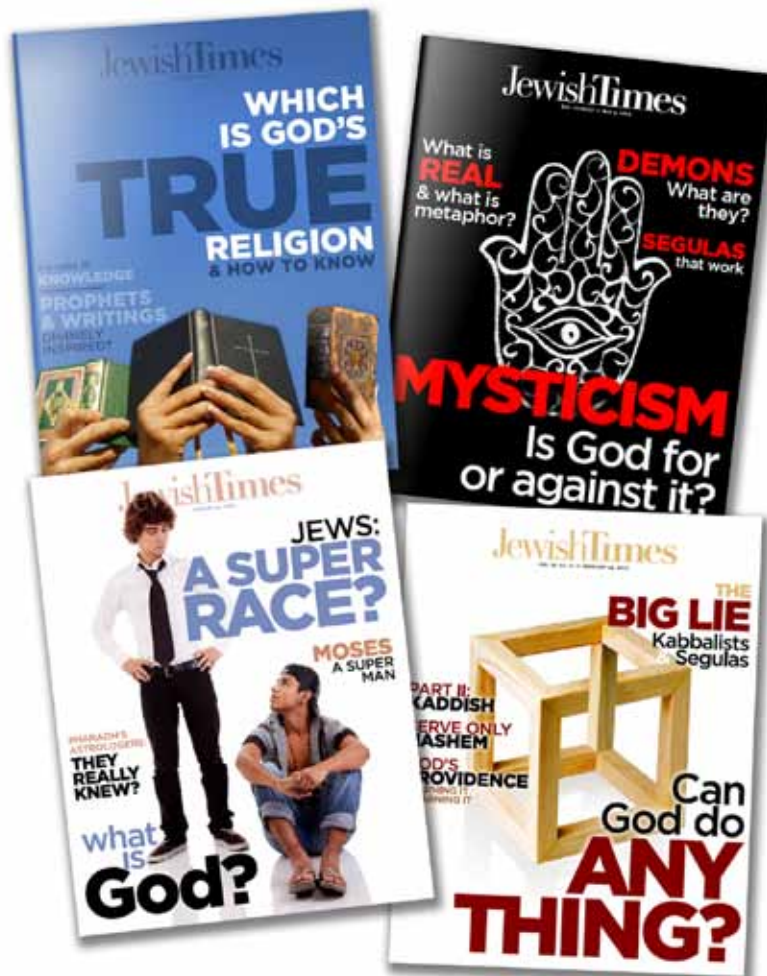


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LETTERS

A Rational Judaism

Reader: I'm fascinated by your approach to Judaism on the Mesora.org site. You seem to be offering a possible return to the somewhat abandoned philosophical Judaism of the Sephardi Rishonim. Possibly an alternative paradigm to the current paradigms of Chareidi mysticism-anti-intellectualism vs. Modern Orthodoxy's over acceptance of modernisms? I do believe that such an approach might serve many Jews better than the two options I just mentioned. What are your thoughts on this?

Rabbi: Marc, Thank you. My thought is this: as God created man with the sense of reality stemming from what is reasonable, not imagination...our brothers and sisters will find greater satisfaction with a rational Judaism, than with the pop-kabbalistic mystical nonsense that pervades today's communities. A rational Judaism as spelled-out by Moshe Rabbeinu, that demands we NOT deny our senses and follow blind faith and mysticism, but rather, accept what we see and test, such a Judaism will eventually be seen as complying with the senses, God's words, and the universe. It will be followed and mysticism will be abandoned. ■



The Menorah

What are God's intended lessons we must derive from such intricate designs?

Deciphering Menorah's Symbols

A GUIDE TO STUDYING CREATION

The Codes of the Menorah

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Unlike other religions toting arbitrarily-designed ceremonial objects and garb, and tapestries that express raw human fantasy...each of God's Torah laws and designs are precise, containing fundamental intellectual and moral truths.

Of all the Temple's vessels, the Menorah is most perplexing. As Einstein would not dismiss any order detected in the universe, we too cannot dismiss the Menorah's intricate details. With them, God intends to share something profound with mankind. While some details may be technical, patient study of the Menorah is rewarded with new insights and increased appreciation for God's design and purpose of this mitzvah, and of man. Without understanding the Menorah's designs and laws, we miss His intended lessons.

Let us first identify the unique features of the Menorah, and then progress in an orderly manner to define those features. While there is much room for drash and allegory, it is vital for the sake of arriving at the true lessons of Menorah, that we do not overstep, or suggest ideas that are not loyal to Menorah's designs and laws.

Menorah's Design

Unlike most other vessels, the Menorah was made of pure gold, like the Ark's cover. Both could not be made in parts, and then subsequently assembled. They were both hammered into their final form from a single block of gold. Why?

Iconic to Menorah is its six branches emanating from a center seventh branch: three branches protruded from both sides, left and right, totaling six protruding branches, plus a seventh center stem. Why do the six branches emanate from the seventh; not standing on the ground independently, on six separate bases, just like the seventh stem?

On top of all seven branches was a basin for the oil. The wicks of all six branches faced towards the center stem: those on the right faced left, and those wicks on the left faced right. And the direction of the center stem's wick faced towards the Holy of Holies. Why?

On each of the six branches were unusual designs: three cups, one flower and one sphere. On the center stem there was an additional cup, three additional spheres (out of which the six branches protruded), one additional set of a flower, cup and sphere, and finally one more flower at the base. The base had three legs.

We readily understand Moses' perplexity of the Menorah's design, that is, until God showed him a vision of it. We too wonder what these cups, flowers and spheres mean. And why were there more cups, than flowers and spheres? But the near duplication of

design on all seven branches must teach something. And the seventh's additional designs too teach another lesson. Furthermore, a miracle occurred that the center stem's wick burned unnaturally longer than the other six branches.[1] What was the need for this miracle? What is that lesson?

In general, what is Menorah: a lamp? The Talmud states that God does not need light, for He lit our journey through the desert! King Solomon sought to highlight this unnecessary need for light precisely by designing the Temple's windows narrow on the inside, and wider on the outside[2]. Menorah was not for the purpose of physical light.

Now, let's proceed to answer this enigma, step-by-step...

What is Light?

"Nare mitzvah, v'Torah Or – A (single) flame is a command, and Torah is light (Proverbs, 6:22)."

Here, King Solomon alluded to a primary metaphor: wisdom is likened to light. Furthermore, the wisdom of one mitzvah illuminates to 'some' degree: a command is equated to one flame. While observing Torah entirely, removes all darkness. It is "light." It is only with a broad understanding attained through observing "all" of Torah, that we see the truth in all areas, as if one walks in broad daylight. The Menorah, then, is not for God, as He needs nothing. The Menorah is to embody the concept of wisdom, light. And in Proverbs (chap. 8) King Solomon personifies wisdom as metaphorically "calling out to man." Verse 19, wisdom says, "My fruit surpasses fine gold." We thereby find Torah equating fine gold to wisdom. Therefore, Menorah's light and requirement to be made of pure gold both attest to its equation to wisdom. Additionally, hammering the Menorah out of one gold block instead of making it through assembly requires greater wisdom, and embellishes this idea.

What wisdom does Menorah impart?

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Six Branches = Six Days

The first step in answering this question, is to recognize Menorah's unique aspects. Seven branches, where six emanate from the center seventh stem, clearly parallel the Six Days of Creation, and the Sabbath. Just as our first blessing each morning – "Baruch She'amar" – defines God as the God of creation, Temple equally requires this concept. The most primary notion of Temple service is that the nation firmly attests to God as the sole cause of the universe. Menorah delivers this message. Rashi on Exodus 28:6 cites Talmud Yuma regarding the priest's clothing, that with every six strands of blue, purple, red and linen, there was wound a seventh strand of gold thread. Again, the concept of six days of Creation is highlighted.

But if, as Sforno teaches, subsequent to the sin of the Gold Calf, Temple came to correct man's notions, what does Menorah correct?

Six Dependent Branches: The Physical is not Absolute

The sin of those who created the Gold Calf was that they viewed the physical world as what is truly "real." They viewed tangible things as absolute truths, more true than the abstract metaphysical God to whom they could not relate.

In truth, the physical world, this universe, does not have to exist.

It does, only due to God's kindness. The six branches "depend on the seventh," as they emanate from the latter. This teaches that the continued existence of the universe – the six days' creations – depend on God's will, as the universe cannot sustain itself. God willed all matter into creation, and He can equally will it out of existence. This design of six branches "depending" (suspended) on the seventh, corrects the fallacy harbored by the Gold Calf followers. They felt a physical object was "more real" than something abstract. "Arise and make for us a god that will go before us, for this Moses, the man, who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has become of him

(Exod. 32:1)." Here, immediately prior to fashioning the Gold Calf, the Jews expressed their attachment to the "man" Moses. Our very point. But in fact, the physical world's existence is flimsy, always depending on God's will for its continued existence. "He renews every day regularly, the works of Creation (Daily Prayers)." The Menorah corrects the false notion of an absolute physical world. Six branches – six days of creation – are dependent on the seventh. Decoded, this hints to the physical world (six branches) as dependent on God's will and His natural laws, or the metaphysical world, referred to as the seventh branch. The seventh branch – the sabbath – has as its goal man's removal from physical creativity, and the engagement in wisdom.

What has Greater Reality?

We must realize that the universe is guided by metaphysical laws that are "outside" of the universe. And these laws are more real than the physical world, as they guide the physical world. If one thing guides another, the former is more real than the latter. Natural law is falsely viewed as "inside" all physical objects. But science likes simplicity. We do not say each body has its own law of gravity inside itself, in an attempt to explain why all elements fall after being lifted. Our minds say there is a "single" law of gravity that governs everything, and is external to all matter. Laws are metaphysical realities. We find this approach more pleasing and sensible. Similarly, God does not will each leaf to fall

from every tree. Rather, we find far greater expression of God's greatness by viewing such phenomena as a result of His "laws", not His independent attention to each leaf. A law removes the need for individual attendance to all leaves. It is much more pleasing to our

minds, and we view God greater with such an explanation.

The six branches depending on the seventh for their suspension, refers to the six days of Creation depending on metaphysical laws for their existence. The Gold Calf disease can be corrected by recognizing that physical objects are subjugated to the laws that govern them. To embellish this point, the seventh center stem had a miracle of its flame burning longer than its oil quantity could sustain. This demonstrated that the physical laws that typically would cause that flame to extinguish, were overridden by God's will. Natural law can be altered by the metaphysical world, or God's will.

To further express the subjugation of the physical word to the metaphysical, all six branches had their wicks pointing towards the center branch: a manner of deference. But interesting too is that the center branch itself had its wick pointing towards the Holy of Holies! This teaches that even those very metaphysical laws are not absolute, but they too are God's creations, and subject to His will. (The Holy of Holies is from where God caused His communications to emanate.)

"Each branch represents one of the six days of creation. Yet, despite the difference in each day's creations, all six branches are identical.

What, then, must we say these cups, flowers and spheres refer to?"

Spheres, Flowers & Cups: Systems and Harmony Reveal God's Greatest Wisdom

Now we must address the Menorah's unique decorations.

Each branch represents one of the six days of creation. Yet, despite the difference in each day's creations, all six branches are identical. What, then, must we say these cups, flowers and spheres refer to?

It would appear, what is identical on all days are the main categories of creation. I refer to substance, form, and properties, or function. Regardless of the specific created entities, all matter possesses these properties. And it is precisely by studying these properties

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

that man attains God's intended lessons. These are the areas of wisdom, which each day imparts.

As we study the universe, we identify numerous "elements." Originally, man assumed there were four elements: earth, air, fire and water. But man later learned there exists over one hundred elements as identified in the Periodic Table. Varying properties of each element, from carbon to uranium, teach us about God's universe.

We then witness various "forms" of creation, such as living species and minerals. For example, we learn from the different mouth structures of beasts, which are carnivores and which are vegetarians. Carnivores have much wider jaw openings and fanged teeth to help in their hunt and eating. Vegetarians, like cows, have smaller jaw openings. Fish have vertical fins, while mammals like dolphins and whales have horizontal fins in order to propel them upwards to rise above the surface for air.

But what imparts to man the greatest appreciation of God's wisdom seen in creation, is the "functioning" of matter, or rather, the "systems" we witness. The solar system, digestive system, weather, etc. impress us most. And when many systems coexist and complement each other as is found in the human being's respiratory and circulatory systems, we are even more amazed. The reason a system is most impressive, is because it points to a greater plan, and thus, greater knowledge and planning, than in a single entity's substance or form.

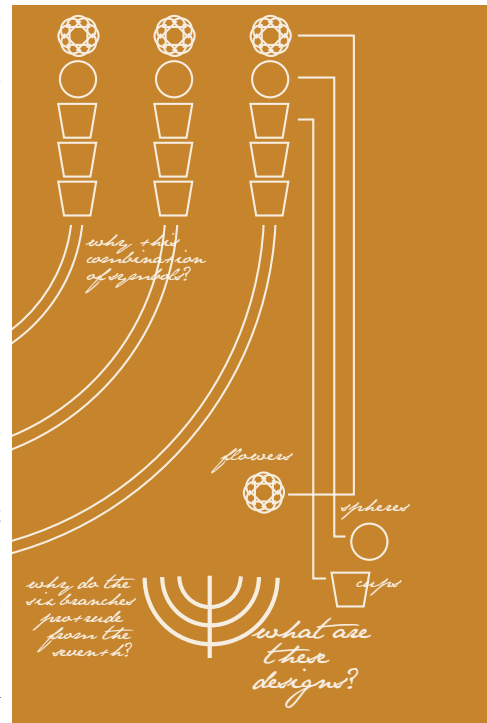
I suggest Menorah's cups refer to creation's properties and functions (systems), Menorah's flowers refer to form, and its spheres refer to raw amorphous substance. While Earth's substances (Menorah's amorphous sphere), and the form of all creations (Menorah's flower) carry important lessons, Menorah's cups (properties & systems) are more numerous on each branch. I believe this may indicate it is through studying the laws and systems of the universe whereby man attains the greatest appreciation of God's wisdom. An apple is a beautiful creation, but when we study the revolution of the Moon and Earth, which cause seasons,

combined with the precise distance of Earth from the Sun, and its axis, we are amazed at the plan, and with God. Therefore I believe there are more cups on each branch to emphasize this point.

Through our study of these three areas, we view God's wisdom. Thus, each branch, each day of creation, intends to offer man expressions of God's wisdom, as seen in elements like iron and hydrogen, in various forms like plants and animals, but mostly, "how" these creations operate, seen in the numerous systems that guide our universe, from the subatomic world, up to the birth of stars. (The reason we find cups, flowers and spheres on the seventh branch, despite the fact that no creation took place on day seven, is to teach that the physical creations of the six days are based on their metaphysical designs – the seventh branch.)

Summary

Menorah is a lesson in the dependent and limited nature of the physical world. This world was created. Nothing demands it exists other than God's will. God also determined what properties all creations possess. Placing more trust in physical objects than in God, and certainly imagining physical things help us in any way other than through their natural properties, is foolish. We must not value Gold Calves more than God, who controls all physical entities, and prohibits their worship. However abstract He is and however emotionally displeasing we initially find it, we must follow our minds and strive to become convinced that physical entities cannot answer our prayers, be they Western Walls, red bendels, dead Rebbes, or Gold Calves. Instead, we are to follow God and His lessons. God provided manna. He performed numerous miracles. And although we are commanded to follow His natural laws and toil to earn our living and not rely on miracles, prayer teaches us that ultimately, God is the source of our



success.

There exists a physical world with laws that govern who eats and who starves. Sitting idly while a farmer toils each season, the idle person dies of hunger while the farmer thrives. But the farmer who is a Torah Jew knows this: despite droughts, a righteous person ultimately relies on God, who can deliver his daily bread. The righteous Jew plans according to nature but relies on God to bring matters to success. He gives tzedaka without fear of diminishing wealth, and in fact views charity as a means of enriching his lot. And although he abstains from work each Sabbath, he does not fear this will diminish his wealth. God is his rock.

Menorah itself is an example that the details of God's creations must be studied to witness God's wisdom: as we study every inch of the universe, we also study the Menorah and all other commands. Menorah's primary lesson is that the universe is subjugated to the metaphysical world, to God's will. Menorah corrects the flaw of the Gold Calf followers and hopefully will correct the false views of those Jews who still place their hopes in anything except God alone. ■

[1] Menachot 86b

[2] Kings I, 6:4, Menachot 86b



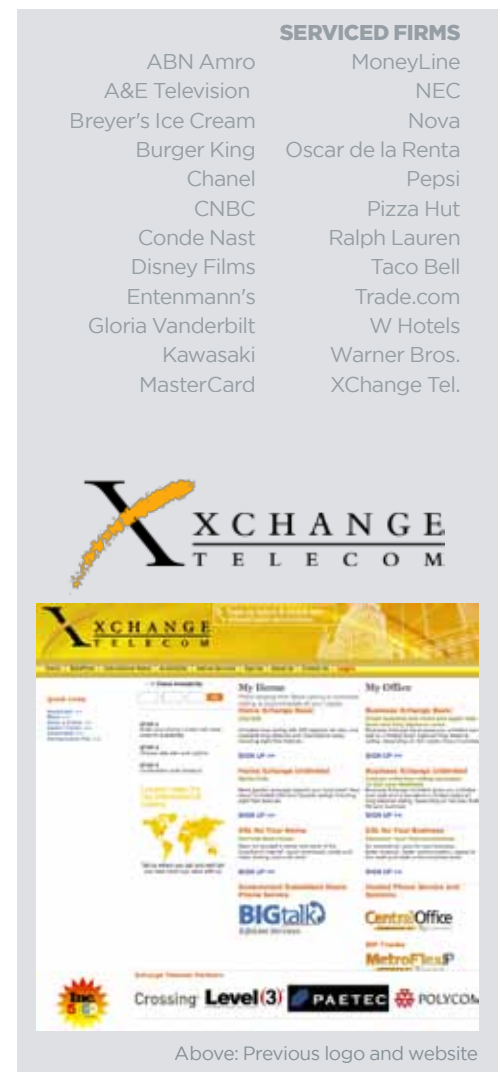
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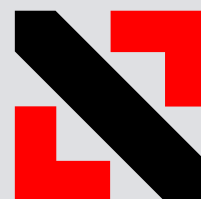
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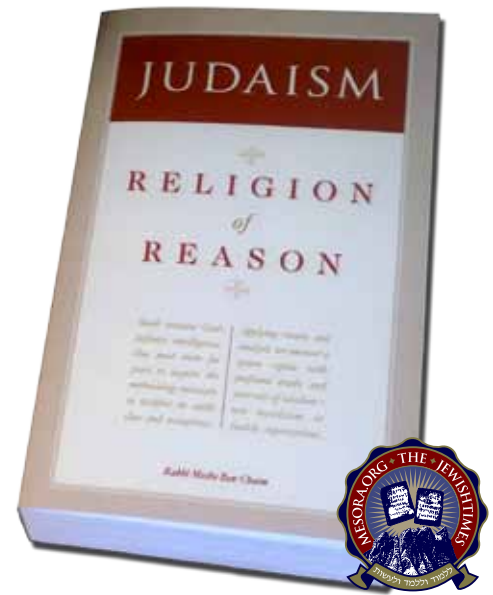
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REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN — Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix

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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PARSHA

IMAGE & ACTUALITY

Clothing in Judaism

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Tetzvah, continues with the instructions for the building of the Mishkan (Sanctuary). The focus now turns to those who were to perform the Temple service. Participation in the activities associated with the Mishkan was not open to all. G-d chose Aaron and his sons to be the Kohanim (ministers) and they and their descendants, alone, had permission to do the work of the Mishkan. This requirement was so serious that the penalty for a non-Kohen who entered the Temple and sought to perform its ritual was death.

Our parsha describes the special garments that were made for the Kohanim. This clothing was essential to enable them to fulfill their task. The ordinary Kohen was outfitted with four garments while the Kohen Gadol (Chief Kohen) who performed the special service of Yom Kippur had to don eight pieces of special apparel. The garments were not merely accessories but were essential to the activity of the Kohen. Without them, he was deemed to be lacking in personal holiness and thus prohibited from performing the service. It can be said that the priestly garments transformed the Kohen into an elevated personality who was fit to minister before G-d.

On the surface, the great emphasis on the dress code of the Kohen seems strange. Judaism does not put much stock in the "externals". One's outer appearance does not seem to be all that important. This attitudes runs counter to the outlook of contemporary society which adheres to the credo that, "clothes make the man."



Fashion is a multibillion dollar enterprise as everyone wants to be in tune with the latest style. There is nothing wrong with wearing nice clothing, however, one should not get too consumed with how he looks. Man has a sense of vanity and wants to be perceived in a certain light by others. The clothing we wear reflects our subjective tastes and the type of image we desire to project. Some people dress a particular way because they seek to be seen as religious or pious. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this as long as the person is honest with himself and cognizant of what he is doing. There is a danger when one allows the image to substitute for the actuality.

A special type of appearance can confer a false sense of religious security which is not truly justified. One of the greatest obstacles to

genuine spiritual growth is an unwarranted sense of self-righteousness, which the external trappings of religiosity can convey. Excessive emphasis on "the look" can also be divisive as it causes people to look down on others who don't dress the same way. One should never judge a person by these externals. Yet, I know of many cases where people have rejected wonderful Shidduch (marriage) opportunities because the person did not conform to the desired "dress code". How superficial and mindless, especially for a nation which is supposed to be "wise and discerning".

The garments Moses was instructed to make for the Priests were special and unique. Hashem said, "You shall make vestments of sanctity for honor and splendor." These articles were designed by G-d to reflect the essence of man, his Tzelem Elohem (Divine Image). Ordinary clothing reflects man's fantasies and imaginary ideals. They express man's instinctual, egotistic make up and his yearning for self-glorification. Before entering the Sanctuary to minister before G-d, the Kohen had to remove himself from the world of fantasy and focus on his true essence and purpose. Clothing differentiates man from the animals. Every article that the Kohen wore reflected a different aspect of man's mission to acknowledge G-d and establish a relationship with Him. G-d has separated the Jews from the nations to serve Him and be a shining example for all to emulate. We should strive to attain the wisdom of Torah and apply it to all areas of life. It is particularly important that we refrain from being consumed by the passing fads and desist from mindlessly pursuing the natural inclinations of the heart. We must be cognizant of our holiness and cherish it as our most precious gift. We must manifest it in our speech, conduct, dress and preoccupations. It is only through an exalted level of wisdom and compassionate deeds that we can fulfill our mission to sanctify the name of G-d in the world.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

PARSHA

HEARTS OF GOLD

Inside Matters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

We are thereby compelled to ask why people are two-faced: why do they fear speaking their true feelings? The answer: they fear man, more than they fear God. So they lie to others about numerous matters, be it their feelings towards someone, their disagreement with someone's beliefs, or their ideas on how to improve their relationships or workplace. In truth, if people would not fear opposition, they may find that what they have to say will improve their life. People of good character will actually appreciate hearing ideas, even if they conflict with their own. One talmudic sage had lost a close friend, and lamented over him since he would always ask numerous questions on his Torah teachings. The sage enjoyed hearing this opposition, as it tested the truth of his own words. He far more enjoyed opposition, than others who brought numerous proofs for his Torah.

Man must stand for what is true, without fear for what others might say. This is a cornerstone of how truth spreads from generation to generation. It's a Torah fundamental. It was

“A tzaddik-chacham must parallel in act what he feels in his heart — “tocho k'boro.” This is taught by the Ark's exterior and interior being equally plated with gold, with “goodness.” So too, we must be equally good in both our hearts, and in our acts.”

(Rabbeinu Channanel)

Abraham's dedication to truth, care for others and desire to engage in monotheistic discourse that earned him God's providence and prophecy. He did not cower to the idolatrous masses. Had he done so, today we might all be idolatrous, or extinct. Abraham recognized that man's worth is proportionate to his attachment to truth. "The unexamined life is not worth living." (Socrates) When we voice our opinions, as we see injustice or errors followed by others, we offer our fellow human beings the greatest gift of knowledge. To remain silent when we see a fallacy, means we do not care enough about others, nor the many more who might follow... "the blind leading the blind," for who knows how long.

Why is it specifically the "tzaddik-chacham" who is addressed here? Well, a tzaddik alone is one who does not veer from the commands, but he may

not be so wise. And a wise man can also be wise alone, without acting righteously. And even a tzaddik-chacham has emotions: he can be overcome by his instincts. But as he possesses both wisdom (internal recognition of truths) and righteousness (the ability to act properly) he is most duty-bound to follow in action, what his mind sees as truth. He must uphold his righteous level, guided by his knowledge of truth. He has the obligation over all others to transmit the human example of perfection.

It is the vanished "man of action" that the Rabbis saw as a loss. "Anshei maaseh." It is vital to the Jewish community that there is seen among us, men and women who fulfill mitzvos, even difficult ones. When we see such men and women, we are inspired to attain their level, and thereby, Jewish traditions and principles live on. ■



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