

JewishTimes

JUDAISM

1312 BCE — 2039

ABANDONED BY HER
LEADERS, HER PEOPLE
DID NOT KNOW HER

**WILL OUR
LEADERS
LEAD US
HERE?**

(PAGES 6, 8)

The Pew report's grim findings must ignite in all leaders a deep concern and profound sense of urgency. Teach our fundamentals that kept Judaism identifiable and alive until now, so as to end intermarriage and assimilation. **Leaders are responsible first.**

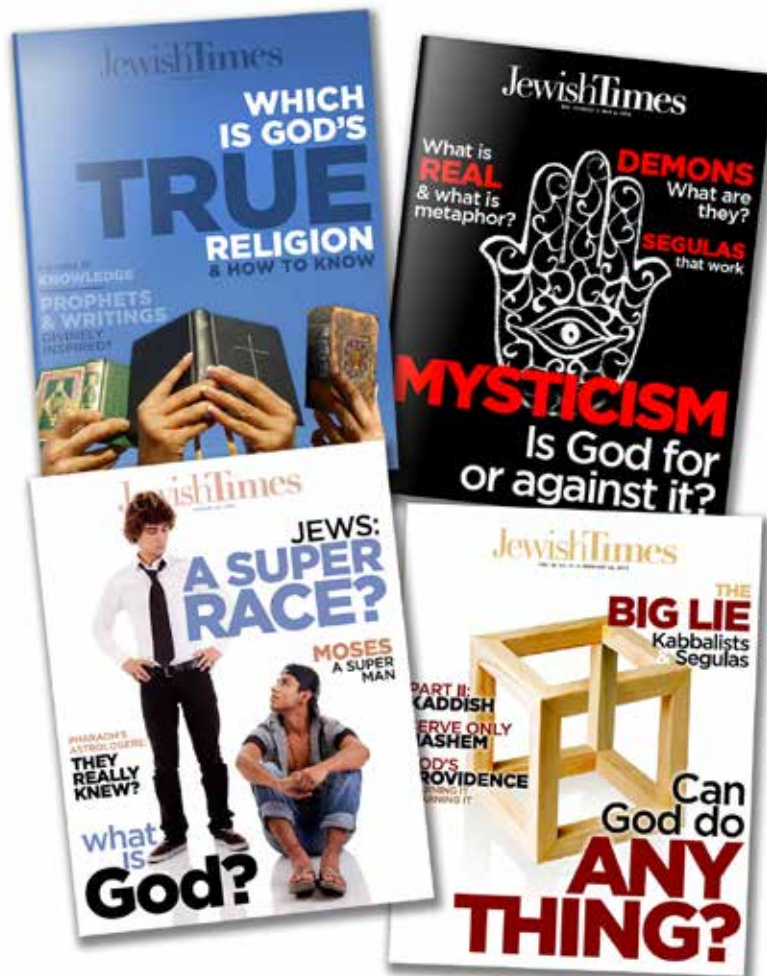
IN THIS ISSUE: Based on many readers' letters, we explore the the multi-faceted aspects of "character." (PAGE 3)

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C O N T E N T S



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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What Determines Character: Knowledge or Action?

Question: Rambam writes, "Anyone who performs all that is written in Torah and knows Torah/God with a complete and proper knowledge, he merits the afterlife and in proportion to his acts and the greatness of his wisdom is he meritorious." My question: is one's Hashgacha Pratis (personal divine providence) a function/result of both knowledge and action, or just knowledge? Or, does action affect the mind?

Moshe — New York, NY

Answer: Your quote from Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 9:4) says, "who performs..." Thus, action is required, since action is the barometer of human conviction. Without action, one is not fully convinced that the act is proper. God designed man as a being that is motivated to act upon all matters of which he is 100% convinced of their truth, and value. Just as it is impossible not to bleed when cut, it is

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equally impossible that one should not act when convinced of the truth and value of any act. One who is unsure of either the reality or value of an act, fails to act. This also teaches that clarity of thought assists in overcoming all internal obstacles.

God's Character

Question: How do we know that God didn't lie at Sinai? Maybe He said He was good, compassionate, and promised us reward...but it's all a trick? Why believe that God is truthful?

Dev K. — Via email

Answer: Your question is clearly not based on knowledge. Granting us senses, God wishes we accept what is real and reject what does not register on our senses. We therefore reject views that stars govern our will or events, what we call astrology. But we accept evidence, like gravity and medicinal cures. In His Torah, God granted numerous laws: all display His concern for mankind's well-being, health, wealth and happiness, such as laws of charity, kindness, laws prohibiting stealing, rape, murder, cheating, cursing, misleading and evil speech. God punished those intending to hurt others physically or psychologically. Those who acted properly were even miraculously protected.

Study the Torah and creation. You will find a clear answer to your question.

Question: OK, agreed. Also, how do we know that God is really perfect, and all-controlling? How do we know that He is the force controlling all, and has no limits?

Answer: "Perfect" means not lacking. As God alone created and controls the entire universe, (what "God" means), He does not lack anything, and this is His perfection. This also means He is without limits, since nothing can affect its Creator. Thus, nothing impedes God's will, meaning His abilities.

Character Improvement

Question: I have 2 important areas in my spiritual growth that need improvement. I am currently trying to work on my speech; trying to stay away from problematic conversations and watching what comes out of my mouth. However, my very good friend has a little problem of shemiras halashon (guarding the tongue), and sometimes when we talk, she slips up and discusses bad things about Jewish teachers, and classmates. She doesn't always realize that it, so I try telling her but she sometimes forgets. So, this is my challenge in this area. My second important area is kibud av va-em (honoring parents); specifically not responding disrespectfully. I am really trying to work on both, but I am realizing that I need to work on one more thoroughly than the other, if I really want to improve in that area.

So in short, which area is more important and should be taking precedence over the other: Shemiras halashon, or kibud av va-em?

Anonymous

Answer: I compliment you on taking action to perfect your character. You sound capable of addressing both matters. And I feel it is good practice to contend with multiple areas of life, as this is necessary as an adult. But if you need to focus on only one for now, focus on Lashon Hara, since it is far more grave a sin than disrespectful responses to parents. Maimonides says Lashon Hara equates to the 3 cardinal sins (Hilchos Daos 7:4). In Hilchos Teshuva 3:14 he states that a frequent speaker of Lashon Hara forfeits his afterlife.

To cease from Lashon Hara, we must fully grasp its destruction of reputations. Torah teaches that part of the sinner's requirement is to free a blood-stained bird free over an open field, simulating irretrievable evil speech (Lev. 14:7) which is akin to a bloody chirping bird. Recognizing that bird can't be caught again, we hopefully are impacted by the equally irreversible damage our bloody speech has brought upon another person.

Lashon Hara is a weakness where the speaker cowardly seeks support from others for their aggression. And with what intent; to somehow "set things straight" with this character assassination? One fools themselves with this notion: nothing in the world has changed after Lashon Hara has been spoken. One must ask why they are so bothered by what another person said or did. This is an insecurity, where we crave peer approval, and talk down about people who don't approve of us. We must only desire God's approval. Some people feel their friends are getting away with something they wish to do. Others are jealous of a peer's popularity. And still others speak Lashon Hara as a response to a personal attack. If so, we must confront others and share how we feel about their words against us. There are many factors and there is no single approach to addressing Lashon Hara, without knowing what exactly transpired. The specifics must be learned. But to denigrate others is not the constructive method of resolving conflicts, and it is prohibited. Bearing this in mind we can more easily restrain our tongues.

I suggest you continue to point out to your friend when she needs to curb her discussion, or simply leave her presence so you don't partake of the sin by listening. Let her know it's nothing personal, so discuss this with her at present.

Regarding honoring parents, again we must fully grasp God's will in this command. We are created as infants so as to slowly learn the concept of authority. These many years as a dependent child are meant to cultivate a respect for parents, which ultimately we use as a model for our respect of God. Without such dependency during our youth, we rebel as Adoniyahu did against his father King David, since King David never rebuked him as a child (Kings I, 1:6). If we can view our parents as God wishes, as a means to learn the fear of God, this will help us bear more of the common friction we endure as teens. We can ask our parents to sit down with us and discuss where we disagree, and arrive at some compromise so both parties are happier.

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Parents will actually respect such an approach, and this will cause them to ease up on any control issues they might have, which many parents do. The more they view you as an adult, the more they will be apt to treat you this way. Understand that talking back only exacerbates friction, and this is not what you want. And the more you control your responses, and learn patience, the easier it will get. Think about if what you say helps or hurts the situation. It is also better not to respond when passions are hot, and wait until emotional flare ups subside. So keep in mind God's will for us to honor parents, that it is really for our own benefit, and that disrespectful responses only hurt our goals.

Perfected Character

Question: What exactly is perfection: is it doing what is right, or having more knowledge about the philosophical? How was Abraham perfected without Torah and using independent thinking? How did he know he was correct in his thinking? Was he perfected because of his righteous actions or his knowledge of how Hashem works, i.e. His justice, His creation, etc.?

Josh — N. Carolina

Answer: Perfection is not thought alone, but refers to a person who acts based on truths and morals. This requires knowledge that is absolutely clear, and registers on one's mind as real. Once a person is convinced of the reality of, let's say, the lethal nature of certain chemicals, he will not ingest those chemicals. The danger is a reality to him, and a person naturally acts in accordance with what he determines to be real. One who takes drugs denies the lethal effects. His euphoric state feels so good, he does not wish to accept the truth of the harm. The greater one's knowledge is, the more in reality he will live, and vice versa. It is the stingy person who denies the truth of God's will to be charitable, or that his stinginess overcomes his intellect and blinds him to act for himself alone. But one

who studies and realizes the benefits, or God's will, he will be charitable. Acceptance of the goodness of charity alone is not perfection. Such a person who says with his lips that he values charity while never giving, is not convinced that charity is a real value. He is not yet perfected regarding charity.

Abraham was perfected since he acted based on his knowledge. We derive from him that with intellect alone, man is well-equipped to arrive at truths, using deduction, induction and studying the world. And morals are recognized innately, as man recognizes institutions like ownership, damages, rights, and other moral codes. One need not be taught that taking the property of another is morally corrupt. Certainly taking another person's wife, stealing, and murder are matters one does not wish to be the victim of, and thus, one should not inflict on others. Equality and justice are derived from God's will that many people exist, not just myself. Thus, since God wishes others to live, I must comply and respect their labors and ownership rights that enable them to provide for themselves. And these few examples merely scratch the surface of the wealth of truths man can derive with his mind alone.

The mind is an amazingly resourceful tool, rarely used to such a degree as Abraham displayed, but nonetheless, possessing that potential for any person to unleash.

Follow-up Question: But, let's say there are 3 people, each more or less equally perfected and they are trying to resolve a certain issue. Hypothetically, they are trying to decide on what to do with a black widow spider in the house. Andrew says it should be killed without question because it could potentially cause fatal harm to a member of the household. Brandon says it should be caught and released back into the wild, even though it could come back into the house, but it is one of Hashem's creations and shouldn't be killed. Charlie believes that the spider should just be left alone, because catching the spider causes the risk of being bitten and also that it shouldn't be killed, he will just leave it up to chance.

Without Torah, how would they know whose view is the correct one? Would it be shown through a Divine punishment/correction? I guess what I'm asking is how did Abraham know he had the correct views?

Answer: God does not need the universe. His independent ability to create such a marvel demonstrates this. Thus, it must exist in all its wisdom for His creations. God desires His wisdom to be learned, as seen in His creation of a Universe permeated with His wisdom. Humans possess intellect, animals do not. As man is the sole being possessing intelligence, animal life is subordinate to human life in order that God's will is achieved, that will being that His wisdom is enjoyed. Thus, animals are killed for man's benefit, be it food, clothing, or to eliminate harmful attacking creatures. If one is in danger due to a creature, one may kill that creature. But God also desires that creatures exist, as He created them. Saving rather than killing a creature's life is preferable. Releasing it to the wild makes sense only if it is relocated far enough that the chance of attack is removed. But allowing a dangerous creature to remain close by is foolish.

Abraham applied reasoning to all areas of his life, and was able to arrive at truths. Divine intervention is unnecessary to arrive at truths, since God's creations offer us clues to the answers, if we use our mind. This also explains why Torah was unnecessary for the first 2448 years of our species, since man's intellect is a powerful tool that can unravel the truth.

The Character of the "Ashray" Psalm

Question: In Part One of your recent article "God's Justice", you quote some of Psalm 145:

"God is good to all, and His mercies are upon all His works. God supports all the fallen, and He sets upright all who are bent. You open Your hand and satisfy the

(CONT. ON PAGE 10)

(Assisted?)

Suicide by Assimilation

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Purim is, arguably, the most joyous occasion on the Jewish calendar. The holiday is very user-friendly, as there is no prohibition against performing ordinary weekday activities. Its most challenging religious requirement is to listen to the reading of the Megillah, the book of Esther written on a scroll. Aside from that, it's a happy day with a festive meal, distribution of treats to one's friends, and gifts to the poor. A sense of unity prevails among the Jews as we celebrate the salvation of our people from the edict of annihilation instigated by the evil Haman.

The theme of deliverance from our enemies is central to the Jewish historical experience. We are a people that lives in the shadow of hatred and are always on the verge of a major catastrophe. At the Passover seder, we recite "In every generation they rise against us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed is He, saves us from their hands." Can anyone deny that the great sages who composed these words were prophets?

For American Jews, the history of antisemitism is abstract and remote from personal experience. As a kid in the 1950s, I did encounter some verbal bigotry and bullying from gentile youths. That was the time before political correctness took hold, and expressions of prejudice were still "acceptable." Matters have changed dramatically during the course of my life. In the last 50 years, the country has



undergone a major transformation on the issue of tolerance. It now categorically condemns all forms of bigotry based on race, religion, color, gender, and even sexual orientation.

We have witnessed the election of an African-American president, which was inconceivable when I was young. It was once regarded as a self-evident truth that there could never be a Jewish president. In 2000, the Gore-Lieberman ticket actually garnered more popular votes than George W. Bush. According to all the surveys, Joseph Lieberman's Jewishness was not viewed as a drawback, and many voters regarded it in a positive light.

We must acknowledge that American Jews have arrived. Never in our history have we attained such freedom and acceptance. Every area of endeavor is open to us, and Jews no longer have to adopt gentile names in order to succeed. As a youngster, I felt awkward and uncomfortable getting up to pray in a public place such as an airport.

Well, as Bob Dylan famously sang, "The times, they are a-changin'...."

Today, I have no compunctions at all putting on tallit and tefillin at an airport terminal. I even pray on airplanes when necessary and receive nothing but respectful understanding from my fellow passengers. In fact, one time a Catholic woman asked me to say a prayer for her sister, who was ill with cancer. As a Jewish comedian who hailed from Russia once said, "America, what a country!"

From the standpoint of freedom, respect, and acceptance, the United States is the greatest land in our exile. However, one can truthfully say of our sojourn here, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." We can no longer ignore the awesome spiritual price we have paid for our American interlude. The Jews are one of the least religious groups in this country. The rates of assimilation and intermarriage threaten the continuity of the Jewish community. Considering this problem in 1988, Charles Krauthammer had this to say: "Nothing will stop the rapid decline by assimilation of Western Jewry. The attraction of Jews to the larger culture and the level of acceptance of Jews by the larger culture are historically unprecedented. If anything, the trends augur an intensification of assimilation." *[italics added]*

The situation 26 years later is much worse. All sectors of the Jewish community have been shocked by the recent Pew demographic study. It documents a 70% intermarriage rate and a frightening dissolution of the concept of Jewish identity. American Jews are renouncing Judaism or watering it down to the point of meaninglessness. If these trends continue, we are in serious trouble. I propose that we officially designate American Jews as an endangered species.

We must also consider this perplexing dilemma: Our history in the exile has been a constant struggle to obtain full political rights and acceptance; yet the dirty little secret of Jewish existence is that we owe our religious durability to antisemitism. In describing the Egyptian oppression, the verse states, "as they afflicted him [the Jews], so he

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increased and became stronger.” As long as the Jew was mistreated, segregated, and severely limited in his economic opportunities, he was steadfast in his adherence to Judaism.

We must ask, is Judaism sustainable only in conditions of persecution? Can it survive the era of American freedom and acceptance? Can it compete with the material allurements and moral relativism of this society? What lessons must we learn from the Pew report?

There is one positive statistic in this otherwise dreary survey: assimilation and intermarriage numbers drop precipitously among the various groups that identify as Orthodox. These observant Jews practice their religion and transmit it to their children by placing them in religious day schools. The success of the Orthodox in perpetuating Jewish identity in contemporary America proves that Judaism is sustainable in a modern society whose values are contrary to Torah.

This country has gone through a cultural upheaval that is also known as the “sexual revolution.” Its values are based on a hedonistic philosophy of self-gratification, which denies an objective moral truth and affirms the freedom to “do your own thing” as the highest ideal. These attitudes are diametrically opposed to the fundamental principles of Judaism. Anyone whose views are shaped by the current culture will not take our religion very seriously. For Judaism to survive, we must recognize that the prevalent lifestyle is at total variance to that prescribed in the Torah.

American Jewish leaders must not stand idly by as this crisis unfolds. Looking back, we must acknowledge the failure of American Jewry to aggressively advocate for vigorous rescue policies while our brethren were being slaughtered during the Holocaust. Physical annihilation is a more tangible calamity and hence less deniable.

We must summon deep concern for the religious decimation that is another form of Jewish annihilation. Can we adopt a posture of indifference and continue with business as usual? Or, like Mordechai in the Megillah, should we not don sackcloth and ashes and go

into the streets and “scream a loud and bitter scream”? If we don’t feel this sense of responsibility to our fellow Jews, we will be of no real help to them. First and foremost, we must recognize the supreme obligation we have to saving our brothers and sisters and stemming the tide of assimilation before it is too late.

The current crisis is a test of the depth of our commitment to Judaism and the future of our people. Everyone should ask himself, “Do I truly believe in the veracity of Torah and the teachings of Judaism?” A major part of the problem is that countless religious leaders, whose task it is to affirm the supremacy of Jewish values, have themselves internalized the basic tenets of American culture. Many Jewish denominations have yielded to the influence of the times and have sculpted “theologies” that simply reflect contemporary thinking. Their positions on appropriate sexual behavior, kashrut, Shabbat, abortion, conversion, and intermarriage are not rooted in classic Jewish sources. The type of Judaism they espouse is one of accommodation and the “slippery slope.”

The Pew report demonstrates that only Judaism based on absolute commitment to the divinity of Torah and observance of the commandments, as they have been transmitted through the ages, is sustainable. The Jewish religion has survived the most

turbulent circumstances because, for most of our history, the Jews regarded themselves as G-d’s chosen people, whose mission was to scrupulously observe the commandments. Repudiation of the divine origin of Torah and our absolute obligation to perform the mitzvot are the prime causes of the current crisis.

American Jews have been taught that the social values of “liberalism” and the moral beliefs spawned by the sexual

revolution are the guideposts of a meaningful life. How can we reverse the downward spiral of American Jewry and increase the chances that our children’s children will be proud members of our people?

To accomplish this, it is vital that we appreciate the uniqueness of Judaism. Every other religion is based on blind faith and traces back to an individual who convinced others that G-d had “spoken” to him. Judaism is founded on the Revelation at Sinai, where an entire nation witnessed miraculous phenomena and heard a voice from Heaven proclaiming the Ten Commandments. The veracity of this event is so compelling that both Christianity and Islam have affirmed it and sought to co-opt it as the foundation for their religions. Only the adherents of Judaism can confidently declare, “We have reason to believe.”

Our conviction in the divine character of Torah motivates us to devote our

energy to its study. When we immerse ourselves in Torah learning, we become aware of its limitless depth and incomparable beauty. We will also recognize its superiority to the shallow values of the bankrupt culture in which we live. The social calamities that plague our country, such as the breakdown of the family, the monumental increase in drug abuse and dependencies, excessive violence, and the inability to sustain

meaningful relationships are but some of the symptoms of a society that rejects G-d and His Laws.

We must reorient ourselves to the Torah. We must study it with energy and passion, and mold our behavior according to its principles. Then we will fulfill our mission as G-d’s chosen people and be a source of blessing to ourselves and our children, and a light unto the nations.

Shabbat shalom. ■

“American Jewish leaders must not stand idly by as this crisis unfolds. Looking back, we must acknowledge the failure of American Jewry to aggressively advocate for vigorous rescue policies while our brethren were being slaughtered during the Holocaust. Physical annihilation is a more tangible calamity and hence less deniable.”

PEW REPORT:

1

METHOD WE MUST PUT INTO ACTION

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

FACT:

KNOWLEDGE OF TORAH TRUTHS

STRENGTHENS OBSERVANCE

When a person is convinced that something is 100% true and good, he will follow it without wavering. Certainly this is true, when he sees clearly that all other options are false and damaging.

Why do Jews intermarry and convert? This is attributed to their ignorance of facts proving Judaism as the only God-given religion, rendering literally all other religions false. In our politically, or rather, religiously-correct society, most Jewish educational institutions will not openly expose the fallacies and lies of other religions. How will students respond? They will sense that teachers and Rabbis are not that convinced that Torah and Judaism are God's exclusive words to mankind. Jews today go so far as to preach that other religions are "equally God's words." Yes, we treat other peoples with kindness, but we do not lie and accept their religious beliefs as truths.

God gave us 10 Commandments – the head categories of Torah. Maimonides codified 13 Principles for the same reason: they highlight primary ideas, including the facts that other religions are false, that Moses is unsurpassed as God's chief prophet, and that Torah will never change, for it is perfect as given, for all time. I direct that statement at Conservative and Reformed Jews misled by their leaders who follow impostor Judaisms. You must wonder why our great minds from Ibn Ezra, Saadia Gaon, 100s of Talmudic Rabbis, Rishonim, Maimonides, Rashi, et al. never violated God's prohibition to alter Torah, like the Conservative and Reformed camps violate. Furthermore, these camps have no one that holds a candle to the great Orthodox minds, nor have any of them written works of comparable magnitude, depth and genius. It ends up that ALL prophets and the wisest men throughout time followed Orthodoxy. It behooves you to follow wiser minds.

God deemed it vital to isolate core principles we must all know with full certainty, and teach others. Our true leaders embellished on this point. But teachers and Rabbis today fail our children.

If our children had teachers that passionately taught the amazing truth of Revelation at Sinai proving God's existence, His exclusive selection of the Jew, the mass-attended miracles, how each of Maimonides 13 Principles is true, and how other religions are false...our children would be in awe of the veracity of Judaism. They would not consider intermarriage, conversion or apathy, since they would be loyal to what they see as proven, moving, and brilliant. Jewish pride would not be only Zionist, but also religious. ■

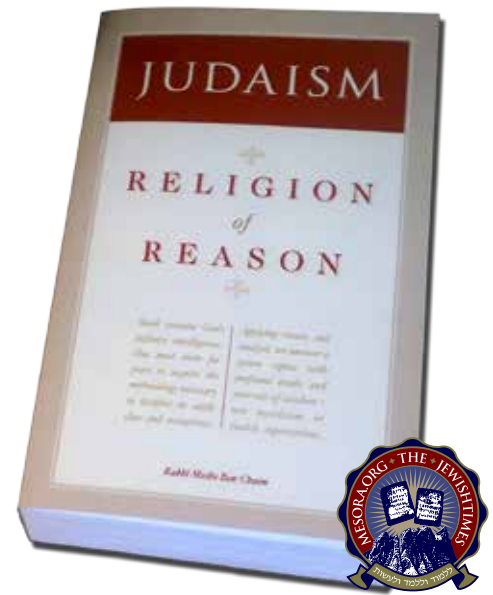
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RELIGION of REASON

by Jewishtimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

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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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needs of all life. Righteous is God in all His ways, and pious in all His acts. God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth. The will of His fearers He performs, and their cries He hears and saves them. God guards all who love Him and all wicked people He destroys."

Why does King David change his point of view from third-person "God is good," "God supports," to second-person, "You open..."? Why not continue as "God opens His hand..."? Is King David trying to teach something here or just a change in wording? Also, why doesn't he just say, "God is close to all who call Him in truth," instead of saying, "to all who call Him", twice?

Josh — N. Carolina

Answer: King David wished to do two things: 1) praise God himself, and 2) spread God's fame to others.

To praise God himself, he addresses God in second person, "You do...etc." But to tell others about God's greatness, he must refer to God as "He."

King David did both, since he wished to use himself as an example to demonstrate the correct response of man, and also to tell others of God's greatness. To merely tell others to praise God without doing so himself would be hypocritical, and would lack in the best argument for his beliefs.

Perhaps this is why the Rabbis placed the first two verses of Ashray as they did, so as to set the pace of the Ashray praise. Ashray is not a single psalm. The first verse "Happy are those who dwell in Your house, they will yet praise you more", is Psalms 84:5. Here, King David addresses God directly in second person. The next verse is third person, of Ashray is 144:15, "Happy is the nation that has such, happy is the nation that God is their God" (the verse that immediately precedes the majority of the Ashray praise, Psalm 145). We see that the Rabbis wished that the Ashray commences with a sample of both, King David's direct address to God, and then his teaching to others so as to establish the tenor or Ashray.

However, I cannot answer why King

David selected the verses he did, respectively, for second or third person.

Finally, "God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth" uses repetition as a form of speech.

Moses' Character of Humility

Question: Bal Haturim offers a reason for the tiny letter alef found in the opening word of Leviticus 1:1: Moses did not wish this word Vayikra ("God calling to Moses") to imply any greatness of Moses. When God called to Bilam, the word is "vayikar" is used, with no alef, implying a chance discussion...God chanced upon Bilam. Moses did not wish the Torah to state that God called to Moses "Vayikra" implying any greater importance of Moses over other people like Bilam. But God insisted Moses write the word "Vayikra" ending with an alef. Therefore, Moses wrote the alef, but very small, to still indicate he did not view himself as worthy. With such a small alef, the word alludes to "vayikar," as is used regarding Bilam.

My question is this: we don't see any complaint by Moses when God tells him to write this verse: "*And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth (Numb. 12:3).*" Here, God tells Moses to openly write that he is the most humble man! Why doesn't Moses protest the writing of his great humility, as he did regarding the case above with the small alef?

Alan — Cedarhurst, NY

Answer: I would also ask why in Leviticus 1:1 Moses protested, while in Exodus (24:16) when God called Moses to ascend Sinai to receive the Torah, Moses did not protest. There too the identical phrase is used, "*And He called to Moses.*"

Addressing your question first, what was the context that God told Moses to write "*And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble...*"?

Numbers 12:1-13:

"And Miriam and Aaron spoke about Moses regarding the matter of the black woman that he married; for he married a black woman. And they said, 'Is it only with Moses that God speaks, does God not also speak with us?' and God heard. And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth."

It is important to note that these 3 verses create a single parsha (section) in the Torah, bracketed by the letter samech. This means that these 3 verses are all related. Thus, Moses' humility is crucial, to understanding God's recorded message here. Let's understand these 3 verses...

"Is it only with Moses that God speaks, does God not also speak with us? and God heard"

Miriam responds that she and Aaron did not separate from their spouses as did Moses, although they too received God's prophecies. She equated herself and Aaron to Moses, an error that Maimonides says is the core issue. But we must ask why Miriam had to "discuss" her opinion. What forces one – with any opinion – to advance the thought to a discussion? The only change is that a discussion includes another person. Perhaps here, Miriam was too much preoccupied with social framework: meaning, she assessed her relationship with Moses. But man should be focused on his or her relationship to God, not to other people.

"and God heard"

Of course God heard...God hears everything! We must question the necessity to mention this here, and not in other cases where people sinned through speech. Miriam was not engaged in relating to God when she discussed Moses with Aaron. Therefore, God wrote in His Torah that He did in fact hear, indicating that this is where she should have been focused. Had Miriam acted properly, she would not have concerned herself with her status relative to others, to Moses. She would not be comparing.

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By teaching us the God did hear, we learn that Miriam was talking in a manner “not in pursuit of God.” God is subtly teaching us that Miriam’s sin was in the directing of her attention more towards man, than towards God. By contrast, “and God heard” highlights her focus on man.

“And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth”

Since Moses was so humble, he would not take such discussions to heart and concern himself with the relative statuses of people. It means nothing to the perfected man whether he measures up to others. He is not a competitor and his values have nothing to do with social acceptance or status. Rather, the perfected man is a philosopher — only truths and God’s approval concern him. This verse explains at least two things: 1) why Moses didn’t respond, and 2) it contrasts Moses’ perfection to Miriam’s imperfection, making Miriam’s error more acutely identifiable:

Moses was humble and uninterested in social status, while Miriam succumbed.

We therefore understand why Moses did not protest God’s decree that he write about his great humility. Moses recognized that this was the precise lesson God wished to include in Torah: to contrast Moses’ humility to Miriam’s character. That is why this verse is part of the 3 verses, since it is vital to the lesson of man succumbing to social statuses. Thus, Moses could not protest. But in Leviticus 1:1 God was merely calling to Moses to instruct him and the Jews on sacrifices. Here, Moses felt his role was of less importance, and that there was no need to say God directly appeared to him. The issue here is not about Moses the man, but to communicate sacrificial laws. Despite Moses’ opposition, God did insist Moses remain a focal point of transmitting sacrificial law. But God’s allowance of Moses writing “Vayikra” with a tiny alef does imply Moses was correct to a degree.

Regarding Exodus 24:16 when we were about to receive the Ten Commandments, again Moses did not oppose God calling him with the word “Vayikra.” Here, we can answer that Moses recognized his central role in receiving the Torah, as opposed to all others. Maimonides teaches Moses’ level of prophecy is one of the 13 Principles. Meaning, were it not for this principle, subsequent prophets, false prophets and religions might claim Moses’ law has been replaced. To secure the Torah, God gave it to the greatest of all prophets, and God concluded His law (Deut. 34:10) stating that Moses will remain unsurpassed in his level of prophecy. He knows God’s will better than any other human. Now, no man can ever oppose anything written in Torah, since no man outshines Moses’ status. This is another verse which Moses did not protest, understandably as Moses knew this was a truth vital to protect Torah from any and all subsequent change. ■

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MARRIAGE

Women of Character

TRAITS & BEHAVIOR

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



Question: In Proverbs, King Solomon says, “a woman of worth is hard to find...more precious than pearls (Proverbs 31:10).” Does this mean that most women are not of value, and are as rare as pearls? He also says, “Whoever finds a wife, finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the Lord (Proverbs 18:22).” He does not say “she” is good, but rather “has found a good thing.” Does this mean finding “any” wife is good...that it is better to have an unfit wife than to be single?

Will – Portland, OR

Answer: King Solomon’s father King David ridiculed men as well, “Every man is a liar (Psalms 116:11).” Thus, the species — not the gender — possesses faults...and we have many. But let’s understand the specific ridicule and praise King Solomon offered women in the verses you quoted.

Rashi and Ibn Ezra explain the first verse you quote refers to King Solomon’s mother. After wedding Pharaoh’s daughter, awake all night enjoying musical festivities, King Solomon overslept. The Temple’s keys lay under his head. When the morning sacrifice was due, his mother Batsheva awoke him and rebuked him on this tardiness (Rashi). Ibn Ezra explains that due to Batsheva’s wisdom, includ-

ing her rebuke that Solomon not be so engaged in women and wine, but uphold kingly virtues, King Solomon responded with this praise of his mother’s teachings.

Evidently, King Solomon viewed his mother’s character as rare. This may be due to the gender’s relatively submissive nature, being a more sensitive creature so as to tend to children, softer than men who from youth are toughened by male aggression, competition, toil and ego. In general, God designed the woman as submissive, “And your husband will rule over you (Gen. 3:16).” This is fitting, as prior to this change in woman’s nature, Eve dominated Adam, leading him to sin by eating the forbidden fruit, despite the punishment of mortality. God did not change woman’s psyche, without just cause.

Batsheva was not submissive, and spoke up at the proper moment with intelligent rebuke. Rashi says this verse compliments a woman who is industrious and provides finances through her acts; again, a dominant role rarely seen in the gender. Batsheva broke the mold, and displayed greatness.

Perhaps also, King Solomon praised her over pearls, since pearls are fixed in their value, whereas an industrious woman brings forth continued value.

As you said, King Solomon wrote, “Whoever finds a wife, finds good, and obtains favor of the Lord (Proverbs 18:22).” King Solomon also wrote, “I have found more bitter than death, a woman who ensnares, whose heart is nets, and arms that are chains. He who is pleasing to God escapes her, but the sinner is caught by her (Koheles 7:26,27).” So the answer is “No”: marriage is not better than being single, when one is wed to such a dominant spouse. One must wed only a fine woman. The Rabbis did not attend weddings unless a Talmudic scholar was wedding the daughter of a scholar. They meant to emphasize the proper marriage.

God said, “It is not good that man be alone, I will make for him a support opposite him (Gen. 2:18).” King Solomon says that finding a wife is “finding goodness.” Finding a proper wife, the king says, one will be favored by God. The Rabbis say, since man performs God’s decree (marriage), God will favor this individual. Ethics also says, “Do His will as yours, in order that He will do your will as His (Ethics 2:4).” This means that as we live closer to God’s laws, He provides for us in a greater measure. This is sensible. However, if this is so, why did the king single-out the specific mitzvah of marriage that earns God’s favor?

Perhaps marriage is the one command that carries a unique challenge: to incorporate another person’s personality, opinions and emotions into our each and every day. This forfeits personal freedom, for both marriage partners. It requires great care, patience, humility, tongue-biting, compromise and self-control. Other commands are isolated, brief acts. Whereas marriage is a sustained, intertwined daily involvement. If performed properly, it can lead to great personal perfection, and happiness. As this is a far greater challenge than most commands, King Solomon states that here, one earns God’s favor.

Interesting too, is that in both verses, King Solomon talks of

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“finding” a woman. This implies another truth, that a woman is a “found” phenomenon, much like an unexpectedly-found treasure. Unlike our ability to locate fish, lumber, or employment, where each have “road signs” like ponds, forests and villages respectively...a woman’s (or man’s) character is not associated to locations like fish are to water, or lumber to forests. Nor does character correlate to types of jobs, where a man might visit a certain business type seeking a wife from its employees. Man’s lot of a wife depends on chance meetings, the matchmaking of others who themselves meet others by chance, or God’s providence to meet a woman of value. Thus, a woman is many times “found” and not “located.” She has no beacon. Do not be misled by the Talmud’s statement, “40 days before the formation of the embryo a voice calls out ‘daughter of this man [will marry] to this man (Sotah 2a).’” For this only means that psychological drives that cause romantic attraction are formed at this point. It does not mean our spouses are divinely compulsory. Maimonides says, “It is a mitzvah to marry a good woman, and God does not tamper with man’s free will to do good. Marrying a woman of poor quality is a sin, and again, God does not make man sin.”

“Houses and wealth are inheritances of fathers, but from God is a wise woman (Proverbs 19:14).” Apparently this is so obvious that few Rabbis commented on this verse. Talmud Sotah (2a) adds that a good woman is not given to an unworthy man. An average man chasing a virtuous woman will encounter insurmountable hurdles, or never meets her. We thereby learn from these 2 additional sources that although in most cases man must “find” a wife, if a man perfects himself following God’s Torah, God will then provide him with a wise woman. But if a man is of low character, God will not grant him a good woman. This would be unfair to the woman. God intends the good for each human. He intends that good people complement each other’s virtues and are not dragged down by a



mate of low character. God’s provision of Rebecca to Eliezer for Isaac is not a one-time event. This is a rule that applies to those who deserve God’s providence.

One is therefore wise to refine his or her character, if he or she wishes God’s help to find a worthy mate. Certainly, one must refine his or her dating behavior:

Don’t be lazy or discouraged; make a real sustained effort.

Respect others and arrive on-time or early for dates...you would not arrive late to a job interview.

Be appreciative, even if the date is not for you, certainly when someone spent time and money on you. You will protect your own reputation this way.

Don’t mislead others in any way. Speak only the truth, always, and don’t

“fudge” the truth. Eventually the truth does come out, and lies destroy trust.

Always remain patient and polite.

Don’t hurt yourself by rejecting a dating prospect based on hearsay; speak to the individual yourself.

Don’t share matters about other singles, which you are unsure yourself. This spoils reputations, and lives.

If you hear others speaking evil of people, no matter whom, speak up to halt such damaging evil speech.

Seek proper qualities and dispense with matters that are irrelevant or nonsensical. Age, professions, exorbitant wealth, dress styles, fame, types of homes or cars must be less of an issue than a person’s character, intellect and good deeds. We forfeit chances to meet people of character when we pursue illusionary and superficial matters.

Break bad routines, rid yourself of overestimating your own worth, and you will invite more dates, and more possibilities.

Unless someone is not a match due to clearly bad character, give people more than once chance. You would certainly not want someone you liked to reject you after just one hour.

Bounce your reaction about your dates only off of intelligent people.

Finally, know that just like you, no one is perfect. If someone you find attractive displays intelligence, controls his or her emotions, is emotionally available, earns a living or can patiently care for children with love, possesses maturity and is dedicated to Torah, you may have found a fine match. And don’t be afraid to explore a romantic relationship with a long-time friend. In fact, that might be a very good idea, since you have much in common already.

In summary, a good woman is rare. Marriage is desired by God, and God favors those who get married. And if one seeks and deserves a wise woman, God arranges this. God will not give a fine woman to an undeserving man.

To meet and marry a person of quality, it is essential that we refine our characters, abandon the search for superficial traits, adhere to Torah, and seek fine qualities in a match. ■



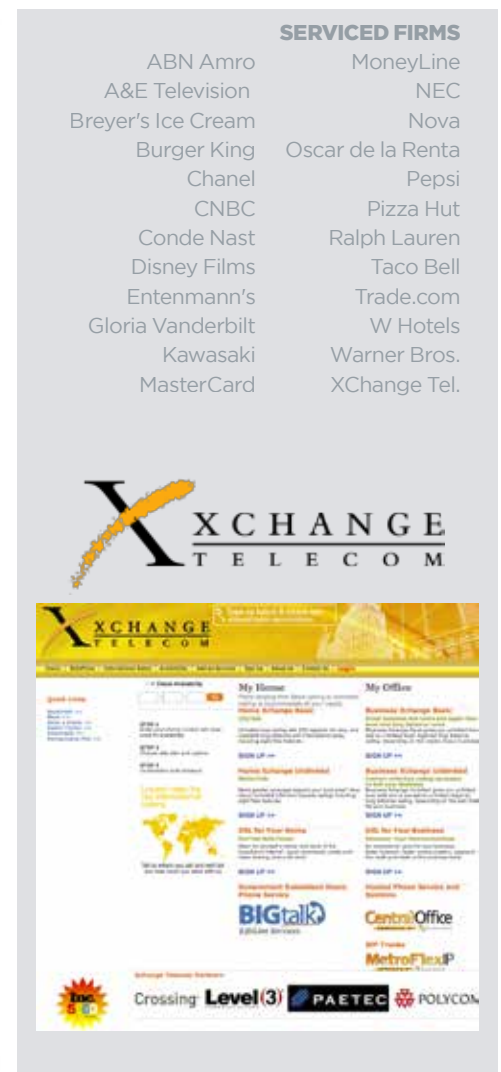
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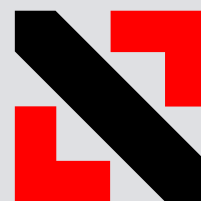
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LEADERS

Moses the Psychologist

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

God told the Jews they would conquer Israel with His help. Therefore, the Jews' desire for a preemptive surveillance was unnecessary. Moses recognized the insecurity unveiled in the Jews' request. He therefore blessed Joshua so he not succumb to the spies' counsel. Moses understood that due to the spies' insecurity, despite God's assurance of success, the spies might seek a pretense to avoid confrontation with the land's inhabitants.

Moses wished to change the hearts of the spies, and help them rest assured in God's word. But how could he? Repeating God's promise would prove futile; the spies knew that already. The spies sinned by evaluating their ability to succeed based exclusively on military prowess. How could Moses get the spies to consider that Divine help was as real as natural factors?

Moses instructed the spies to bring back a report of the land and its inhabitants: are they many? Do they live in fortified cities or less protected, relying on their strength? The one oddity is Moses' request that they report if there are trees (Num. 13:20). Rashi (ibid) says this alludes to men of merit who would be protected, ostensibly from the Jews' attack.

It appears to me that Moses developed a fine psychological plan. Moses knew the spies feared their own predicament purely from natural considerations, rejecting God's promise of military success — not as certain as natural forces, i.e., the enemy's might. By asking the spies if there were trees, (in Hebrew "aitz" which also means counsel) Rashi



suggests Moses directed the spies to consider the concept of "reward and punishment." More to the point, Moses wished the spies to reflect on the truth that God helps those He loves, i.e., the Jews. If the spies could consider that any righteous inhabitant would earn merit that could save him, they could then apply this idea to themselves and open their hearts to accepting God's original promise that He would battle for the Jews.

Moses knew he would not be successful merely repeating God's promise. By asking the spies to consider the merits of others, Moses hoped he would successfully enable the spies to consider that they too could be beneficiaries of God's reward, by winning the conquest.

Rashi was of the opinion that a reconnaissance mission reporting of mere land and population, could not have been Moses' only goal. Rashi felt Moses, the great leader, had a more fundamental plan: to address the expressed insecurities of the spies and win their hearts back towards trusting God's word. This could be accomplished only through redirecting them away from natural factors, and trusting in God's promise and His divine assistance. Furthermore, Moses' request of asking

the spies to determine the level of righteousness of the land's inhabitants, must be for the benefit of the spies, and not for that knowledge per se. For it is unlikely that this knowledge might be attained without personal contact, and over a period of time.

Interesting too is that Maimonides states that the book of Job also references the "land of Utz" — another form of the word "aitz" counsel. Maimonides says as follows (Guide, book iii chap xxii):

First, consider the words, "There was a man in the land Utz (Job 1:1)." The term *utz* has different meanings; it is used as a proper noun. Compare, "Utz, his first-born (Gen. xxii. 21)." It is also imperative of the verb "*utz*," to take advice. Comp. "*uztu*" take counsel (Isa. viii. 10). The name *utz* therefore expresses the exhortation to consider well this lesson, study it, grasp its ideas, and comprehend them, in order to see which is the right view.

Moses wrote the book of Job (Baba Basra 14b) and hinted to the reader to "take counsel" from this book. From Maimonides' words, we may understand Moses to have acted similarly, suggesting the spies take counsel by referring to trees, "aitz." ■

From Tragedy to Triumph



Rabbi Reuven Mann

When tragedies such as the brutal kidnapping of Gilad Sha-ar, Naftali Frankel, and Eyal Yiftach occur, we should band together and focus on doing all that is necessary to secure their freedom. We hope and pray that they are unharmed and that they will be rescued quickly, without having to endure a lengthy captivity. At the same time, we must be realistic and ask, what exactly can we do?

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The Jewish response to crises always involves action on two fronts, the practical and the religious. All efforts must be made to salvage the situation in the framework of the natural order. The brunt of this obligation falls upon the Israeli government and its intelligence agencies and armed forces. At present, they are doing everything possible to obtain information about the whereabouts of the captives and are pursuing all means of effectuating a rescue. The Israeli security services are among the finest in the world, and we may be confident that they are doing their utmost to secure our boys' freedom.

The question arises, is there anything that we who reside in America (and other lands) can do? I believe that political pressure on the various Arab countries can have an effect. If the entire civilized world condemned this atrocity with the appropriate fervor, it might cause certain of the Arab players to realize that it would be in their best interests to help find the stolen teenagers.

It is a great disappointment that there have been no forceful statements from key figures in the U.S. or from others with an international voice. Could you imagine the thunderous outcry that would ensue if the situation were reversed, and Israel kidnapped three Muslim children to elicit certain concessions from the Arabs? Would President Obama, the E.U., and the U.N.

be silent? Not only that, but all Jewish organizations would be revolted by such an action and would exert the greatest pressure on the Jewish captors to immediately release their hostages.

Why is the world so tolerant of the abduction of innocent children in the furtherance of war aims, even though it is contrary to all the norms of civilization? Let's be forthright about the answer to this question. The absence of moral indignation is due to the identity of the victims. They are Jewish and Israeli, and thus do not qualify for the mercy and consideration that would be present under different circumstances. Remember, for example, the chorus of condemnation when Israel legitimately defended its rights in the case of the Mavi Marmara, the Turkish ship carrying arms to Gaza.

"There are numerous Jewish organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League, whose mission is to defend the rights of Jews everywhere. Why are they so silent? They should be activating their political connections to rouse the conscience of America and its major leaders, including Senators, Governors, and, of course, the White House. "

There are numerous Jewish organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League, whose mission is to defend the rights of Jews everywhere. Why are they so silent? They should be activating their political connections to rouse the conscience of America and its major leaders, including Senators, Governors, and, of course, the White House.

After all is said and done, we must acknowledge that there is not much that we can do on the practical level. However, we must remember the Rabbis' admonition that "it is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to abstain from it." Our major area of engagement must be in the spiritual realm. We firmly believe in Divine Providence and that G-d responds to heartfelt prayer and teshuva (repentance).

These, indeed, are times of teshuva. We should be

inspired by the overwhelming reaction to the kidnapping by Jews everywhere. The entire nation has become deeply involved in the tragedy. This demonstrates the uniqueness of the Jewish people. In what other country do people regard every child as though he were their own? Where else would you see an entire nation gathering in prayer on behalf of individuals they do not know personally? The bonds that unite Jews are unparalleled and should be appreciated.

The catastrophe of the kidnapping should inspire us to become better

Jews by improving our deeds. This is a time to renounce baseless hatred and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood among all Jews. If our desire to do teshuva and elevate ourselves is sincere, it must include a return to Torah. We must renew our commitment to Judaism by accepting our obligation to observe G-d's commandments.

This doesn't mean that we will become perfectly religious overnight. However, recognizing G-d, His Torah, and its mitzvot (commandments) as the cornerstone of the Jewish people is an excellent place to start. May the merit of our deeds, the pain we feel, and the prayers we utter for the captive children find favor and bring redemption to them and to us, speedily and in our days. ■

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