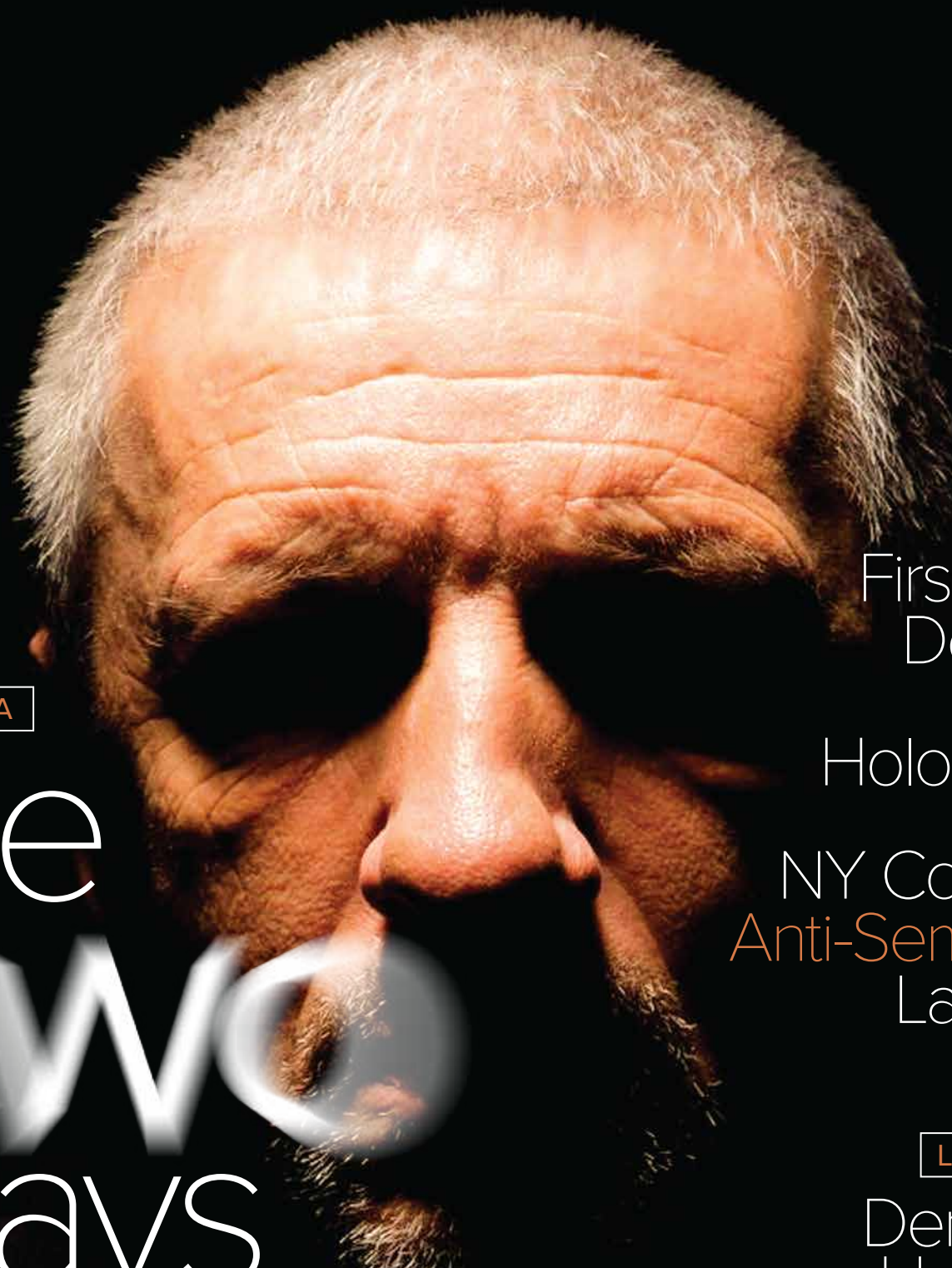


# JewishTimes

VOL. XV NO. 8 — MAY 6, 2016



PARSHA

## the two ways we sin

Firstborn  
Deaths

Holocaust

NY College  
Anti-Semitism  
Lawsuit

LETTERS

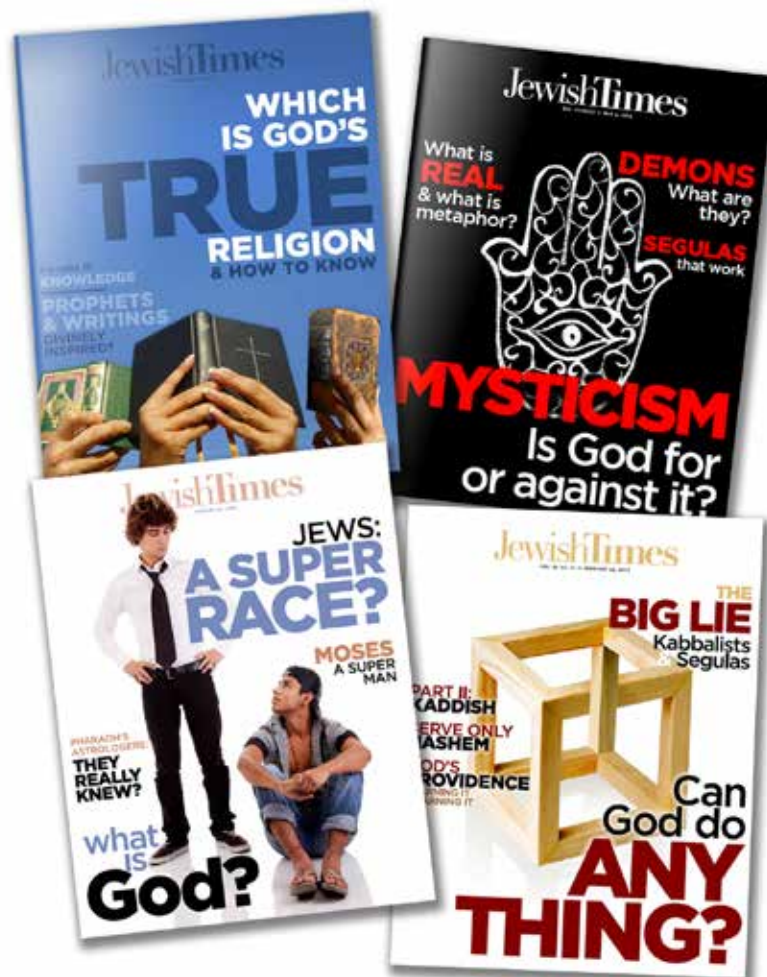
Demons  
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## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## Ridding homes of "demons"? This is the rational "Jewish" life God desires we live?

**Question:** My wife came home from a matchmakers (shidduch) meeting this week. She said one of the women had holes placed into the walls of her home in order that the demons (shadim) can leave. Huh?

**Rabbi:** Don't be so surprised, many Jews share this nonsensical belief. Coincidentally, this week's parsha Achary Mos discusses demons:

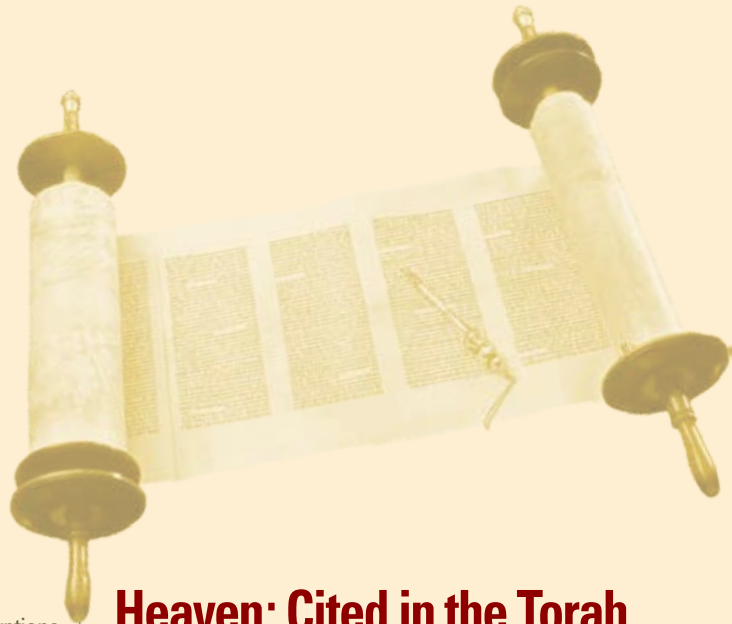
*"And they shall no longer slaughter their sacrifices to seirim (goats) that they are estranged after them...(Lev. 17:7)."*



Ibn Ezra comments:

*"To seirim:" These are the demons, but they are called "seirim" for whomever sees them, his hair (seir) stands up (from fright). But more sensibly, is that that fools see these demons in the forms of goats (seir). And the phrase "no longer" indicates that the Jews sacrificed this way while in Egypt.*

*"That they are estranged after them:" For anyone who sought the shadim and believed in them, he has estranged himself from God, for he thinks that there exists a being that can perform good or evil other than God, the honored and feared One.*



Ibn Ezra teaches that the Jews learned from the Egyptians this practice of idolatry; animal sacrifice to imagined beings, thinking this would secure their future good. But Ibn Ezra makes it clear that the Torah (Bible) views only one being as possessing the ability to alter our fates: God. No other forces exist. It is man's insecurity that drives his fantasies to attempt to secure his future. Man is a very insecure being. That is, until he matures his thinking to the point where he rejects his fears of unproven beings, and strengthens his sense of independence until he arrives at a level of self-confidence.

Finally, man must learn from God's numerous Biblical lessons that God works with a system of Reward and Punishment. Intelligent men and women who are also morally correct, enjoy God's divine assistance, while people who abandon God for fabricated gods and powers, who sin, live without His protection. The Bible teaches, to attain confidence in a good future, we must be intelligent, moral, and follow God's ways and commands. But if we reject Him, and believe other forces exist, like those sacrificing to shadim, such people cannot be assisted by imagined beings!

Ibn Ezra's words are revealing, "For anyone who sought the shadim and believed in them, he has estranged himself from God." Ibn Ezra teaches that shadim depend on belief, and not that they possess true existence like a tree or a lake. As they are based in belief, we are taught that shadim are merely a belief, and not real. He also says only fools see them, meaning a demented mind will create illusions. ■

## Heaven: Cited in the Torah

**Rabbi Moshe Abarbanel**

This week, while attending a driving event upstate NY, I met a non-religious Kohen. He proceeded to tell me that he married a non-Jew. He shared that he observes nothing in Jewish life, and that he is a libertarian. Since he was simply disclosing and not asking any questions, I tried my best to move on. But he continued, telling me that "it does not really matter (that I married a non-Jew) since we Jews don't believe in heaven." I responded: "We do believe in heaven." The Kohen then asked me where heaven is written in the Torah. I paused for a moment to consider his question. I told him it just happens to be recorded in this week's Torah portion. In the last half of Acharay Mos, the Torah lists the forbidden sexual relations. The Torah states not to violate them like the Egyptians and Canaanites. We are told by Moses, "Keep the Creator's laws and decrees so you may 'live' by them." The question (asked by my ancestor Don Issac Abarbanel), "What does the Torah mean, 'live' by them?" The Egyptians and Canaanites did not 'die' by violating these sexual laws! It must mean (as translated by Unkelos) the world to come; we "live" in the afterlife, i.e., heaven. If we keep the Creator's Laws and decrees, we will gain the World to Come, i.e., heaven. With this we parted ways.

Good Shabbos, and I pray every Jew receives his share in the world to come. ■



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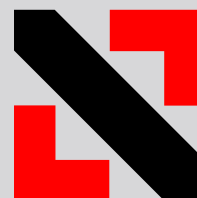
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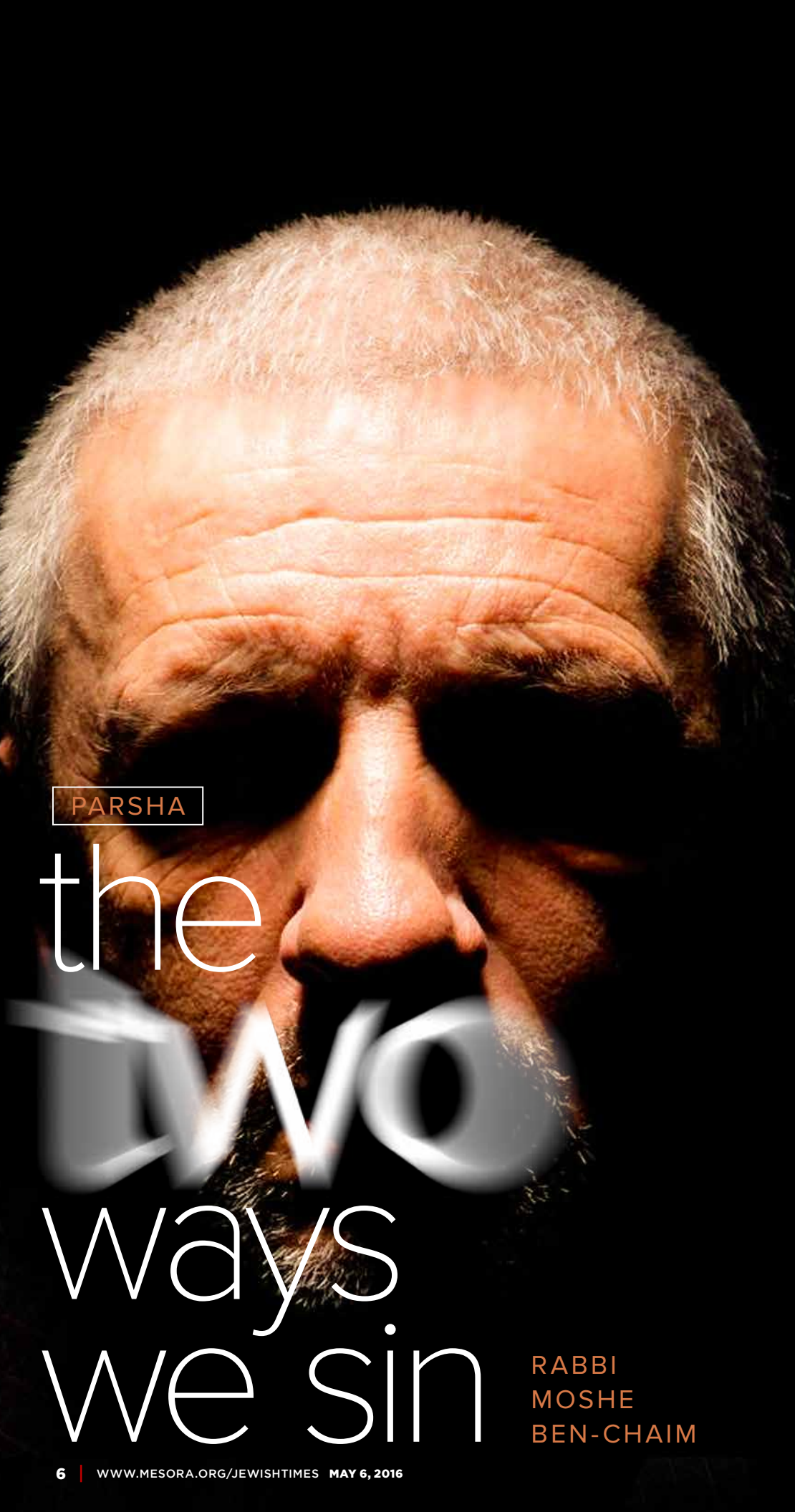
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PARSHA

# the two ways we sin

RABBI  
MOSHE  
BEN-CHAIM

**M**any people subscribe to the notion of “modernity”, i.e., previous generations are archaic and not as advanced as today and previous cultures’ values are no longer applicable. Some cite “animal cruelty” in connection with Temple sacrifice. Additional rejection of the sacrifices of Yom Kippur may arise due to their association with a long day of fasting, standing, and many uncomfortable restrictions. Are the Temple’s “ancient” sacrifices just that; archaic, inapplicable, and even brutal acts, deserving our abandonment? Must our religiosity comply with our subjective feelings, or must it be “we” who comply with God’s practices and ideas?

As Torah Jews who respect that all in our Torah is God’s word, applicable for all time[1], we take a different road: we seek to discover the eternal truths contained in each of our precious Mitzvahs and ideals, instead of projecting our wishes onto them. As Torah Jews, we know all that God commanded does not expire, as man’s nature does not expire. There is great wisdom in each command...if we patiently “seek it out like silver and buried treasures” as King Solomon instructs[2].

As was Adam, and as were the Jews at Sinai, so are we today: possessing the identical faculties and desires. As such, we are no less in need of the Torah’s sacrifices and their lessons. The sacrifices

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



would still perfectly address our human nature today. It is only due to our sins that the Temple is non-existent, degrading us by its absence. Until the Messiah's arrival, may it be soon, and the Temple is rebuilt and sacrifice reinstituted, we may still perfect ourselves to a great degree by understanding the underlying ideas of the Yom Kippur sacrifices. We must study the characteristics and requirements of the sacrifices. We must review the Torah, Talmud, and our sages, such as Maimonides, Ramban, Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

## TWO GOATS

I will address just two of the Yom Kippur sacrifices: the two goats upon which a lottery was cast. Two goats – preferably with similar visual features, height, and cost – were presented in the Temple. The priest would blindly draw a lot, which contained both God's name and that of Azazel. Each goat was designated by the lot selected for it. The scapegoat – the one sent to its death off Mount Azazel – is described as “carrying all the sins of the Jews.”[3] The other goat dedicated as a sin offering in the Temple atoned only for the sins of the Jews in their defiled entry into the Temple sanctuary.

What is the reason for the goat's similarity? Why were their designations for either a sin offering in the Temple, or Mount Azazel, decided by a lottery? Why do we require two goats: cannot a single goat atone for all sins? What was significant about Mount Azazel? And why was there a service of clouding the Holy of Holies with incense where the Ark resided, included in the process of sacrificing these two goats?

Furthermore, we are struck by the Torah's placement of the Yom Kippur sacrifices in Achrei Mos[4] immediately subsequent to the death of Aaron's two sons who offered a “strange fire:” an offering not commanded by God. What was the gravity of their sin, that God killed them, and what is the connection between Aaron's sons' sin and the Yom Kippur sacrifices, that the Torah joins the two in one section? We also wonder what God means by His critique of Aaron's two sons, “And you shall not come at all times to the Holy of Holies behind the Paroches [curtain] before the Kapores[5] which is on the Ark, so none shall die...for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kapores[6].” What is the stress of “for in cloud do I appear on the Kapores”? What is the significance again of “cloud”? And finally, why, after concluding the section on Yom Kippur sacrifices, does the Torah continue with the restriction of sacrificing outside the Temple, with the punishment of one's soul being cut off? In that section[7] God warns the Jews about

sacrificing to demons (imaginary beings) and also warns about eating blood, which also meets with the loss of one's soul. Maimonides teaches that the practice of eating blood was imagined by those sinners to provide them camaraderie with assumed spirits, and that those sinners would benefit by such a union. Although the questions are many, I believe one idea will answer them all.


## THE SCAPEGOAT

What is the significance of Yom Kippur? It is the day when we are forgiven. What does “forgiveness” imply? It implies that we sin. And in what does man sin? This is where I believe we can answer all our questions.

We readily answer that we sin by deviating from God's commands. The worst sin, of course, is idolatry, where we assume the greatest error: other powers exist, besides God. If one assumes this fatal error, his concept of God is false, and his soul cannot enjoy the afterlife, which is a greater connection with the one, true God. This explains why those sinners who sacrifice to imaginary beings – demons – and those who eat blood, lose their eternal life. And even if these exact practices are not performed, but one harbors the thought that there exists powers other than God, be they powers assumed to exist in physical objects, or even in Hebrew texts or objects of mitzvah...such individuals also cross that line of idolatry.

The Scapegoat – the one goat sent to its death off Mount Azazel – was to atone for our sins. Sin emanates from a disregard of God and His word, but its most grave form is idolatry. The Rabbis say that the Scapegoat is not sacrificed, but hurled from a peak downwards, to prevent us from assuming it is a sacrifice to those demons, normally associated with the wilderness surrounding Mount Azazel. By destroying the Scapegoat and not sacrificing it, we actively deny any claim of those desert-based demons, and deny truths about camaraderie with spirits by eating blood from sacrifices to demons. We wish to deny any and all claims of assumed powers other than God. Our atonement is effectuated through the Scapegoat, by admitting the fallacy of idolatry, and the rejection of any intelligent existence besides God, His angels, or man. Nothing else exists that is self-aware. Nothing but God, His angels, and man, possess intelligence, or capabilities other than natural laws. The Scapegoat thereby undermines and utterly rejects man's path of Torah deviation. But there is another area of sin.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



Aaron's two sons perishing  
as they offered a "strange" fire

## THE OTHER SIN

"And they brought before God a strange fire, which He had not commanded them[8]."

Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu expressed the other area of sin: man-made, religious practice. Although we assume sin to be solely identified as deviation from the Torah as seen in idolatry, sin also exists when we attempt to approach God, but with our own devices, as the verse states, "And they brought before God a strange fire..." "Before God" is the operative phrase. Nadav and Avihu intended to approach God, not in accord with His ways, but with their own design. The Rabbis stated, "The Jews desired to contain the Evil Instinct. It exited as a fiery lion from the Holy of Holies. They attempted to retrain the lion by seizing its mane, but it let out a loud roar." Regarding this Talmudic metaphor, a wise Rabbi once asked what is most significant. He answered, "The instincts were exiting the Temple's Holy of Holies". What does this mean? It means that man's instincts are most powerful – like a fiery lion – in connection with the most religious of activities and locations: the Holy of Holies. We need not look far to realize this truth, expressed today by ISIS. Religion is a great target for man's instincts, as in this area he is greatly passionate. In unguided religious expression, man's emotions will take over, as seen in Aaron's two sons who wished religious expression of their own creation. The existence of so many divergent man-made religions proves this point that man wishes subjective religious expression.

It is this sin, I believe, that the second Yom Kippur goat addresses. This second goat sin offering was brought in the Temple, and not sent to the wilderness as the other. For it is this goat that addresses man's sin in the Temple. Man sins in two ways: deviating from God, and in approaching God. God too addresses these two deviances with His commands not to add to,

or subtract from the Torah. Subtracting from the Torah parallels the Scapegoat, where man abandons Torah and God in place of demons. Adding to the Torah parallels the sin of Nadav and Avihu who expressed an addition to the Torah's prescribed commands, corrected by this second goat brought in the Temple to atone for the Jews' sins in Temple.

## GOD'S ARRANGEMENT OF TORAH SECTIONS

We now understand why God placed the Yom Kippur sacrifices in His Torah, between the sin of Nadav and Avihu and the prohibition to sacrifice to demons. It is because Yom Kippur sacrifice intends to address man's two areas of sin: the over religious sin seen in Nadav and Avihu, and the lack of religiosity seen in demon sacrifice, where one does not approach God, but runs from Him towards imposters. Yom Kippur atones for us by directing our attention to the two areas of human sin: non-religious, and over religious. We are alerted to apply this lesson to our own deviances. One who abandons Torah for other beliefs assumes more knowledge than God, as he feels he understands better how the world operates. He therefore creates his own "demons" and worships them. He is lacking an understanding of the One Creator, as he assumes different or multiple forces. The over religious person feels otherwise: he feels safe, as he "approaches God" as did

Aaron's sons. He feels with his intent to serve God, anything goes. He feels he can create new modes of religious practice, and that he will find favor in God's eyes. But the Torah's response to both is death of some kind. Thus, "any" deviation – even when our intent is to serve God – is construed by God as sin. There is

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



some truth to the saying, “The path to hell is paved with good intentions.” Many times, our intentions are corrupt. But if we do not deviate from God’s words, and we “do not add to or subtract from the Torah,” one of the 613, we are safe.

The need for two goats is derived from our two areas of deviance. As one goat addresses the abandoning of God in idolatry, that same goat is unfit to address our faulted approach to God: idolatry is a far greater crime: idolatry errs about God Himself, while over religiosity errs about His will. But both goats are preferably identical, to teach that either goat satisfies one or the other requirement, since there is nothing in the goat per se that atones, but it is our understanding of these lessons that truly atones for us. The lottery also contributes to removing any significance to either goat, as each was picked by chance.

## CLOUD

Why was clouding the Holy of Holies where the Ark resided, included in the service of Yom Kippur? And why was God’s response to Nadav and Avihu, “for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kaporets?” Cloud was also present at God’s Revelation at Sinai. What is the connection?

Nadav and Avihu violated the principle that God is unknowable, by assuming they knew how to approach God. Thus, God responds that He appears in cloud. What is cloud? It represents man’s blindness. Man is blind about God’s nature, and without Torah, man is also blind about how to approach Him. Nadav and Avihu’s sin was their denial of their ignorance concerning God. God therefore reiterated to Moses and Aaron the concept of man’s blind ignorance, by describing how He appears in cloud. And again in our yearly Yom Kippur service we must demonstrate our ignorance by clouding the holiest of all places, the Holy of Holies. Our religious practice must contain a service that demonstrates our limitations. Our atonement relies on a rejection of our instinctual, religious fabrication.

## APPLICATION FOR TODAY

It is vital in our approach to God, that we are careful not to add to Torah commands, regardless of the popularity of new practices, even among religious Jews. Our barometer for what is God’s intent, is God’s word alone. We must not fall prey to our need for human approval, that we blindly accept what the masses of religious Jews perpetrate as Torah. If we are truly careful, and seek out authentic, authoritative Torah sources, we will discover what is true Torah, and what violates God’s words.

In a conversation with a dear friend recently, I was asked what I felt about certain Kabbalistic views. They included these: that cut fingernails are dangerous; that people might hurt us with evil eyes; that reciting the letters of God’s name offers man power; and other opinions. My first response was that there is doubt as to the authenticity of the Zohar, and further, Zohar is not the Torah given by God at Sinai. But regardless, I told this friend that if an idea makes no sense, it matters none if a Rabbi wrote it, for even Moses erred; the most perfected man. Therefore, no man alive today is infallible. So quoting the Zohar is meaningless, if the idea violates Torah and reason.

God gave each of us a Tzelem Elohim – intelligence – that we must engage, and not ignore. Regardless of the prevalence of practices in religious Jewish communities, we have intelligence with which we may discern what makes sense, and what is nonsense. It matters none if the practice is a sacrifice to demons, or a practice that includes a Torah object like a mezuzah, a challah, even if one cites an accepted book authored by a Rabbi. We have the Torah’s authentic principles to guide us towards reasonable practices. Just as demons and their assumed powers are imagined, so are the powers assumed to exist in challas, red bendels, mezuzas, or reciting Torah verses with the intent to heal the sick.

Religious deviance seeks substantiation by including Torah articles in man made practice. And as we learn from Nadav and Avihu, any deviation from God’s commands – even to approach Him – is a sin. If you are in doubt about the validity of a practice, study the Torah,

read the Shulchan Aruch, or ask a Rabbi to show you a source. But if you find no source for a given practice, do not follow it. And many times with your mind alone, you can uncover the falsehood in popular claims.

Yom Kippur is a time to break free from what is popular, comfortable, or falsely promises success and health. “Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka”, repentance, prayer and charity, are what God says is our correct response. Do Teshuva from false notions and actions, regardless of their popularity, for you exist to follow God, not to impress your neighbor by copying their errors. Pray to God to direct you to new truths, to forgive and purify you, and to help you abandon fallacy. And if your Hebrew reading is not excellent, pray in English or in your own language, for prayer is meaningless if you do not understand what you recite. And give charity to recognize your insignificance, to break loose of your attachment to wealth, and recognize that God alone grants wealth. Assist others, recognizing Jew and gentile equally as God’s creations, and show them pity, as you wish God to show you. Follow God’s laws alone to secure your good life, and do not continue in the sins of abandoning God, or attempting to serve Him in ways He did not command. The Scapegoat teaches that our imagination is destructive, and the goat sin offering curbs our over religious tendencies. We must learn where these lessons may apply to each one of us, for we all have false notions in connection with purely instinctual needs, and religious needs. Be guided by reason, and by God’s precisely worded Torah. And may we all forgive, be forgiven throughout the year, make peace with others, and enjoy a life of health, wealth and happiness that can only come from careful Torah adherence. ■

- 1) See Maimonides’ 13 Principles
- 2) Proverbs 2:4
- 3) Lev. 16:22
- 4) Lev. 16:1-34
- 5) The Kaporets was the Ark’s lid formed of solid gold, with the figurines of two cherubim – childlike creatures with wings.
- 6) Lev. 16:2
- 7) Lev. 17:1-16
- 8) Lev. 10:1

# Days of Remembrance and Hope

PASSOVER

Rabbi Reuven Mann



**O**n the second night of Passover, we commence the longest running mitzvah of the Torah, Sefirat HaOmer (Counting the Omer). During this time, we tally the 49 days, starting with Passover and culminating in the holiday of Shavuot. That is when we celebrate the greatest event in history, the revelation of G-d's Torah at Sinai.

Liberation from slavery was not an end in itself. It was the necessary means for the Jewish people to achieve their true destiny, via the study and performance of Hashem's commandments. G-d wanted to establish a special nation that would be "wise and discerning" and a "light" unto mankind.

However, such a national distinction is not easily attained. It entails a long historical struggle with many twists and turns and numerous ups and downs. We have "had our moments," but have not yet attained the ultimate spiritual pinnacle of being a holy nation. When we succeed in this, the Moshiach will come, and the Messianic era will commence.

Until then, we remain vulnerable and subject to persecution. We Jews have suffered many tormentors, besides Pharaoh, in our past. None was worse than Hitler and the Nazis. The greatest calamity

in Jewish history, aside from the destruction of the Temple, was the Holocaust.

The period after Passover is marked by three significant "days." Yom Hashoah commemorates the Holocaust. A few days later, Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Israel Independence Day) is celebrated. It is preceded by Yom Hazikaron, on which we pay tribute to the memory of all the IDF soldiers who have fallen in defense of Israel and the Jewish people.

It should be noted that these three days are secular and have not been established as religious institutions. The question arises; do they have any theological significance? How should a Torah observing Jew relate to them?

There is a controversy surrounding Yom Hashoah. The great sage, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, was all in favor of commemorating the Holocaust. However, he insisted that, according to Jewish law, the time designated for that endeavor is the 9th of Av. The Rav was therefore opposed to assigning for this a different time with no foundation in Jewish tradition.

That being said, we must admit that memorializing the Shoah is of great religious significance. It fulfills the Biblical

commandment to "Remember and not forget what Amalek did to you." Rabbi Soloveitchik himself famously asserted that the Nazis were to be regarded as Amalekites.

We are therefore obliged to study the Holocaust, to be affected by it, and to seek out its lessons. No one can answer the question, why did it happen? However, this comprehension deficit must not inhibit our obligation to introspect and commit to improving our ways. We must return to Hashem and genuine observance of His Torah, both in the realm of commandments between man and G-d and those between man and man.

On a practical level, we must face the implications of genocide and labor to implement the imperative of "Never Again." In that regard we can see a connection between Yom Hashoah and Yom Ha'atzma'ut. Ironically, the worst catastrophe of Jewish history was followed by the great blessing of our return to the land of Israel.

The establishment of the Jewish state and its development into an economically, technologically, and militarily formidable entity is one of the greatest miracles of our history. It is vitally important that Jews acknowledge and appreciate it. Israel is fundamentally consequential for our physical survival as well as our spiritual welfare. Had there existed a Jewish state when Hitler came to power, millions of our people would have been welcomed to this haven, and there would have been no Holocaust.

The Exodus from Egypt was accompanied by the promise that Hashem would bring His People to the land He had promised to their Fathers. For millennia we have been exiled, dispersed to the ends of the earth, and persecuted. Now we have returned to the Land that Hashem designated for His People. On Yom Ha'atzma'ut, we should take time to recognize this miracle and offer thanks and praise to Hashem. Only a few days ago we recited in the Haggadah, "Now we are here, next year in the Land of Israel." This has become a reality in our time. We have the great fortune to live in the era of "Next year in the Land of Israel". Let us strive to become worthy of this awesome miracle.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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## ANTI-SEMITISM

# Lawyer in Discrimination Suit:

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**President of CUNY College Pressured Jewish Faculty Member to Withdraw Antisemitism Complaint**

Jeff Lax

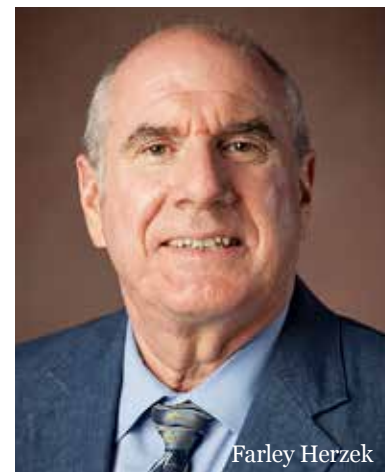


**A** lawyer representing a New York City professor in a suit against his university for alleged antisemitism told The Algemeiner her client was previously pressured by the school's president to drop an internal complaint.

Brooke Goldstein, director of the nonprofit legal think-tank the Lawfare Project and co-counsel to the plaintiff — Jewish professor of business Jeffrey Lax — said that City University of New York (CUNY) Kingsborough Community College President Farley Herzek repeatedly instructed Lax to withdraw a formal CUNY complaint lodged against Stuart Suss, former vice president for academic affairs and provost at Kingsborough. Herzek, according to Goldstein, told Lax to “let it go.”

As previously reported by The Algemeiner, Lax filed a lawsuit in February against senior Kingsborough administrators, claiming they limit the hiring and promotion of Jews and maintain a hostile work environment for them. According to the suit, which named Suss specifically, Jewish faculty members were frequently mocked for wearing religious head coverings and keeping kosher, and were referred to as “the Devil” and “evil.”

Before filing the lawsuit, Lax submitted separate informal complaints to Kingsborough's General



Farley Herzek

Counsel and the Interim Provost. Both were ignored, he claimed, forcing him to file a formal complaint with the CUNY human resources department. As a result, the suit alleges, “discrimination and harassment only intensified” against Lax.

According to the suit, Lax, an orthodox Jew, faced “constant discrimination based on his religion” from Suss, including “comments, innuendo and verbal harassment.” Suss, the suit accuses, expressed support for suicide bombers and attacks against Jews, and was “constantly reminding people that he knows that they are Jewish.”

“The significance of Herzek responding in this manner to serious allegations of antisemitism cannot be understated,” said Goldstein. “For the president of a CUNY institution to

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



direct an employee to drop his claim of discrimination against a senior administrator rather than investigate them, represents not just a dereliction of duty, but a vile and tacit endorsement of antisemitic practices.” In March, Herzek told The Algemeiner: “Based on my knowledge of the review of this claim, it is baseless and entirely without merit. Discrimination and acts of bigotry of any kind are in complete violation of the values we stand for at Kingsborough Community College.”

In a recent op-ed by Herzek in the Jewish Voice, the Kingsborough president denied knowledge of any incidents or complaints of antisemitism on his school's campus. However, a faculty member at Kingsborough — who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of losing his job — told The Algemeiner that acts of antisemitic vandalism at the college have become commonplace. Swastika graffiti is found on campus at increasing rates and the personal property of Jewish faculty members has been repeatedly defaced, the faculty member said.

Reports of antisemitic behavior at Kingsborough are part of ongoing charges against CUNY as a whole. In March, the New York State Senate approved a resolution cutting \$485 million in funding to the institution, due to what some lawmakers considered inaction on its part where antisemitism on its campuses is concerned.

Herzek failed to immediately respond to The Algemeiner's request for comment on the latest allegations against him. ■



In this photo obtained by The Algemeiner, a 2-foot high swastika is seen scratched into a bathroom door at Kingsborough Community College.



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# DEMONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Compared to the thousands of ideas in the Talmud, there are relatively few instances of the term “shadim,” usually translated as “demons.” Regardless of its infrequency, the concept deserves elucidation. When the Rabbis discuss unusual phenomena, one must be extra cautious to maintain rationality and refrain from a flight of fantasy.

If we are in a remote rural area, in a pit, on a mountain top, or if it is at night... the Rabbis tell us not to give greetings to “others,” lest he be a “shade.” Additionally, a Talmudic portion (Gittin 66a) states that if one hears a voice calling from a pit, (telling anyone who hears) to divorce his wife, we listen to him. The gemara asks, “Perhaps it is a shade?” [And we should ignore it] The gemara continues, “No. It is when you see a shadow.” [Therefore it’s a real person] The gemara asks, “But the shadim also can have shadows!” The gemara concludes, “No. You also saw a shadow of a shadow.”

The gemara ends, saying that since you saw a “shadow of a shadow,” this cannot be a shade, and we can divorce this man’s wife. On the surface, this is a very strange gemara indeed. But there must be an idea here. (We can also ask why a shade might be assumed in such a case, where one thinks he hears a man wishing to divorce his wife.)

There are a number of questions:

1) What exactly is a demon? Can it be taken literally that there are demons roaming the earth? Have any of us ever seen one?

2) Why are we not admonished from greeting our friends in the city? Why is the warning only in the fields, pits, night time, and mountain tops? Are shadim unable to leave these four situations?! This is truly odd.

3) What is the warning about? Will they harm us? If so, what’s the difference if we greet them or not? Can they not harm us equally, whether or not we greet them?

4) In Gittin 66a above, how does a “shadow of a shadow” prove that it is not a shade?

The answer to all these questions can be approached by first looking at one peculiar bit of information: the location where we are warned not to greet friends. All the cases — pits, fields, mountain tops, night time — are cases of isolation. Either geographical isolation (mountain tops, pits/caves, or fields/deserts) or psychological isolation: at night.

What does isolation do to a person?

Man, a social creature by definition, fears isolation more than anything. This is why solitary confinement is the worst punishment. Isolation is even recognized by the Prophets as one of the worst situations, and requires one to bench gomel, (praising God for being saved) as we read in Psalms, 107:4, “They wandered in the wilderness, in the desolation of the path, they found no inhabited city.” Not finding inhabitants is utterly distressing, to the point that King David made mention of it here in Psalms.

When one is isolated, his acute desire for company causes him to project onto reality: he will think he sees someone. But it is all an illusion to satisfy his fear, his loneliness. Thus, what the Rabbis are telling us not to offer greetings to, is in fact our psychological fantasy, a “demon.” Greeting that which is a mirage, is crossing the line from fantasy to reality, one of our worst crimes. The Rabbis, knowing that these shadim are truly daydreams or illusions, warned us not to talk to them. Talking to a mirage elevates fantasy to reality. There are so many areas of the Torah which deter man from living an illusory life, that the Rabbis saw it fit here too to remove us from this behavior. Talking to a phantom of the mind gives credence to it. The Torah desires that man abandon all that is false, “midvar skeker tirschak; from falsehoods keep distant (Exod. 23:7).”

This now explains why the gemara in Gittin said that if there was a shadow, then it is a real person. You can then divorce the wife of this person in the pit, although you do not see him clearly. When a person creates these illusion to comfort himself, that people are in fact around, he only creates the minimal information needed to convince himself of this. That is, either a form of the person’s face, his height, his hair color, or something else distinct to the person he desires to be around. But what is not needed, is not created, such as a shadow. This offers the person no comfort, and is therefore not created by the fantasy. Therefore, if one sees a

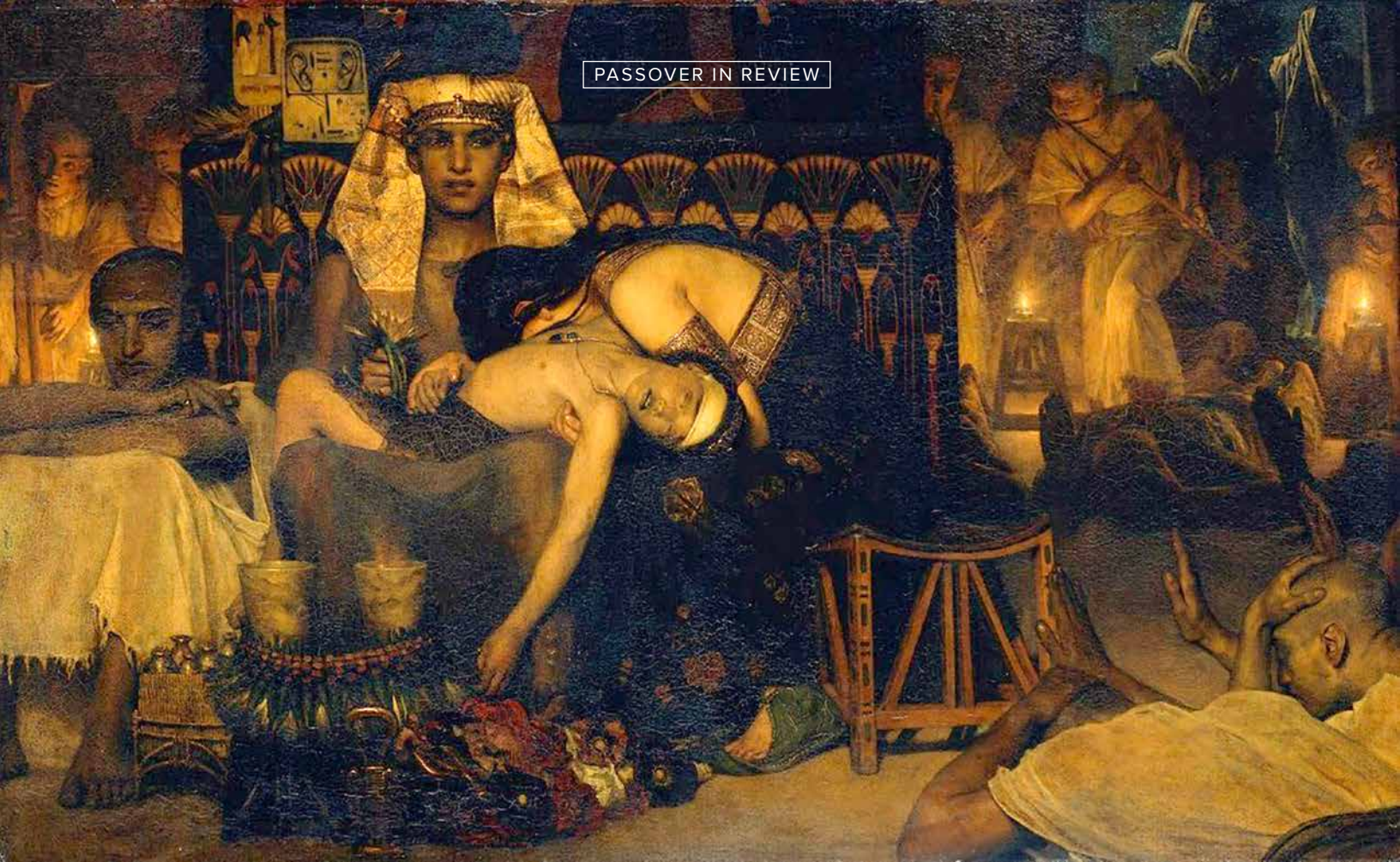
shadow, it most probably is a real person. The gemara goes on to suggest that even shadim have shadows. This means that in some cases, one will create a more defined illusion. This is possible, so the gemara adds that when there’s a “shadow of a shadow,” for certain, it is not a shade. Shadow of a shadow means that completely detailed illusions do not exist, and hence, it must be a real person one is seeing, and greetings are then permitted, and divorce is warranted.

It now makes sense that shadim don’t enter cities. Deciphered, this mashal (metaphor) means that images of friends are not created when they are in reality near to us, as is found when we are in cities. Here, no need exists in our psyches to create illusions. At night however, when we are psychologically alone, or in the mentioned isolated locations, we will create images to comfort us.

In summary, the Rabbis teach that shadim are illusions created to satisfy real concerns. They are fantasies created in our minds. As the Rabbis warned us not to cross the line with a greeting, thereby treating fantasy as reality.

Rashi states (Gen. 6:19) that Noach took two of every species into the ark, “even shadim.” This fits in well with our theory. Noach was now embarking on a state of isolation. Rashi is intimating this aspect of isolation by suggesting metaphorically that Noach brought shadim into the ark. ■





# DEATH OF THE FIRST BORNS

God's Biblical clues reveal a  
brilliance behind the plague



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

As is true regarding all Torah verses, Divine wisdom is revealed only through analysis. Passover 2016 has passed, but our salvation — catapulted by the final plague of Firstborn Deaths — remains fresh in our thoughts. As the theme of Passover is gratitude for God's salvation, a gratitude that must endure, let us review the details and intentional hints of intriguing final plague. Prior to the plagues, Moses descended from Midyan to return to Egypt with God's message of salvation and threats to Pharaoh:

"And Moses took his wife and his sons and rode them on the donkey and returned towards the land of Egypt, and Moses took the staff of God in his hand. And God said to Moses, 'When you go to return to Egypt, see all the wonders that I have placed in your hand and do them before Pharaoh, and I will harden his heart and he will not send the people'. And you will say to Pharaoh, 'So says God, 'Israel is My firstborn. And I say to you, send My people and they will serve Me, and if you refuse to send, behold, I will kill your firstborn sons.'" (Exod. 4:20-23)

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Even before the onset of the 10 Plagues, God warned Pharaoh and Egypt that Israel is His "firstborn." What is God's meaning behind "firstborn," and how was this punishment more significant than all other plagues, that it was the first message to Pharaoh?

Individuals — not nations — are "born." Thus, nations cannot be firstborn. Israel's "firstborn" status is not a birthright, but a distinction derived from the forefathers whom God selected due to their intellectual and moral perfections.

There is a qualitative distinction between God's "firstborn" and Egypt's firstborn. God endowed Israel with "firstborn" (i.e., "elevated") status, while Egypt projected a baseless, mystical significance on whatever left the womb first. Furthermore, Egypt rejected Israel's status. This distorted value system required correction. In other words, via Moses' first address, God communicated that Egypt's determination of prized status is wrong. One's elevated status is not due to the accidental phenomenon of being born before other siblings: this earns one no merit whatsoever. One is meritorious due only to his or her decisions: one's pursuit of truth and acts of high morality. This was Israel's status: a nation descending from Abraham, a man of great intellect and high moral standards.

As Egypt did not recognize God or Israel, God stepped in with the 10 Plagues. But Pharaoh was stubborn.

His refusal during the first 5 plagues demanded he not be entitled to repentance. Therefore, God hardened his heart to endure the second 5 plagues, earning him the punishment he deserved (Maimonides).

The final plague was about to occur:

Moses' announcement to Pharaoh:  
"And there will die all firstborns in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on the throne to the firstborn of the maidservant behind the millstone, and all the firstborn animals [Exod. 11:5]."

In God's command to Moses to announce the Paschal Lamb laws to the Israelites, God says:  
"And I will pass through the land of Egypt on this night and I will smite all firstborns in the land of Egypt from man unto beast, and on all Egypt's gods I will render judgements, I am God [Exod. 12:12]."

God's actual plague:  
"And it was at midnight and God smote all firstborns in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne, unto the firstborn of Egypt's captives in the pit [jail], and all firstborn beasts [Exod. 12:29]."

This final plague raises many questions: What is the lesson behind God's killing of the firstborns; what's their significance?

Why mention "from Pharaoh's firstborn who sat on his throne to firstborns of maidservants behind the millstone?"

As animals cannot sin, what additional lesson is derived from the death of firstborn beasts?

What is the need to "render judgements on all Egypt's gods?"

Rashi teaches "render judgements" refers to God melting the iron idols and rotting the wooden ones. How is this related to the primary message of this plague?

Why did this plague arrive specifically at midnight; how does this specific moment relate to the primary message of the plague of the Firstborn Deaths?

### AN EQUATION

"... from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on the throne to the firstborn of the maidservant..."

The highest and lowest echelons of society were equated; Pharaoh and the maidservant were equally smitten. Egypt, like other cultures, was a caste system. Lineage, birth and occupation defined one's social status. God's plague leveled the playing field; all firstborns were killed. Why firstborns? These were the elite, an expression of a flawed value system. Even before the

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first plague, God told Moses to tell Pharaoh the firstborns would be killed. Meaning, Egypt harbored a value system contrary to God: "Israel is My firstborn." God communicated that Egypt's brutal mistreatment of the Jews was an incorrect assessment of human value. The Jews were monotheistic, while Egypt was idolatrous, including their firstborns. Thus, firstborn status is meaningless.

Firstborn Deaths revealed to the Egyptian culture that their caste system was a corrupt value. Even idols were destroyed in the plague, to underscore the message: imagined levels of superiority are just that, imagined. The Egyptians and their gods were defenseless against God. He alone reserves sole superiority. The flaw of Egyptian idolatry was related to values of a caste system, and therefore were addressed together in this plague. Perhaps too, God smote the firstborn animals to emphasize that just as animals do not have a caste system, as all beasts are equal, all mankind too are equal before God. Fabricated levels of superiority which breed idolatry, are baseless. Just as one animal is not superior to another, Egypt's fabricated levels of superiority too were false: kings and maid's firstborns shared an equal fate. God's message is that Israel is truly the chosen one, since one's merit is due to intellectual and moral superiority, not one's birthdate.

We learn that Firstborn Deaths are closely related to Egypt's idolatry: both are fabricated systems of assumed superiority, which God exposed as false. He alone is superior and remains on one side of the fence; all mankind, beasts and elements (stone/-metal gods) are on the other side of the fence. All are defenseless against the single true Power in the universe.

## MIDNIGHT

In order that Egypt not attribute Firstborn Deaths to their gods, like the sun or moon, God caused this plague to occur at a moment equidistant from sundown and sunrise, when no heavenly phenomena were active.

## "I AM GOD" (EXOD. 12:12)

God performed this plague "not through an angel (Haggadah)." What natural phenomenon could explain the simultaneous deaths of man and beast, depending on birth order? Birth order is as unrelated to life, as color is related to sound. This naturally-inexplicable phenomenon owes its cause to God's will alone...the meaning of "not through an angel." (Rabbi Heshy Roth) Through Firstborn Deaths, God was revealed as real, and supernatural. He showed Himself as unparalleled in His ability to direct world events, outside natural law. Thus, the One who overrides natural law, is the One who created it. (Nachmanides)

## TEFILLIN

Following Firstborn Deaths, God commands the Jews in wearing tefillin; 2 texts recording Firstborn Deaths, and eventually, 2 texts describing God's unity (the Shema)...but more to the point, God's "mighty hand." This plague was the final blow. Through Firstborn Deaths, God earned the distinct role as the sole power: no other god was able to defend itself against him. He therefore commanded the Jews to wear tefillin as a daily reminder of God's unique role as the Creator and exclusive power of the universe. This command would help prevent the Jews from succumbing to the same flaw that lead Egypt to accepting imagined gods. ■

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