

# JewishTimes

VOL. XVI NO. 15 — JAN. 5, 2018

PARSHA

## IS GOD "IN" THE WORLD?

DIALOGUE: GOD AND MOSES PG 6

## THE JEWS AND MOSES

FRAGILE CONVICTION PG 6

LETTERS

## AYIN HARA

THE EVIL EYE: WHAT IS IT? PG 3

## AFTERLIFE

WHO HAS  
SEEN IT?  
PG 4

PARSHA

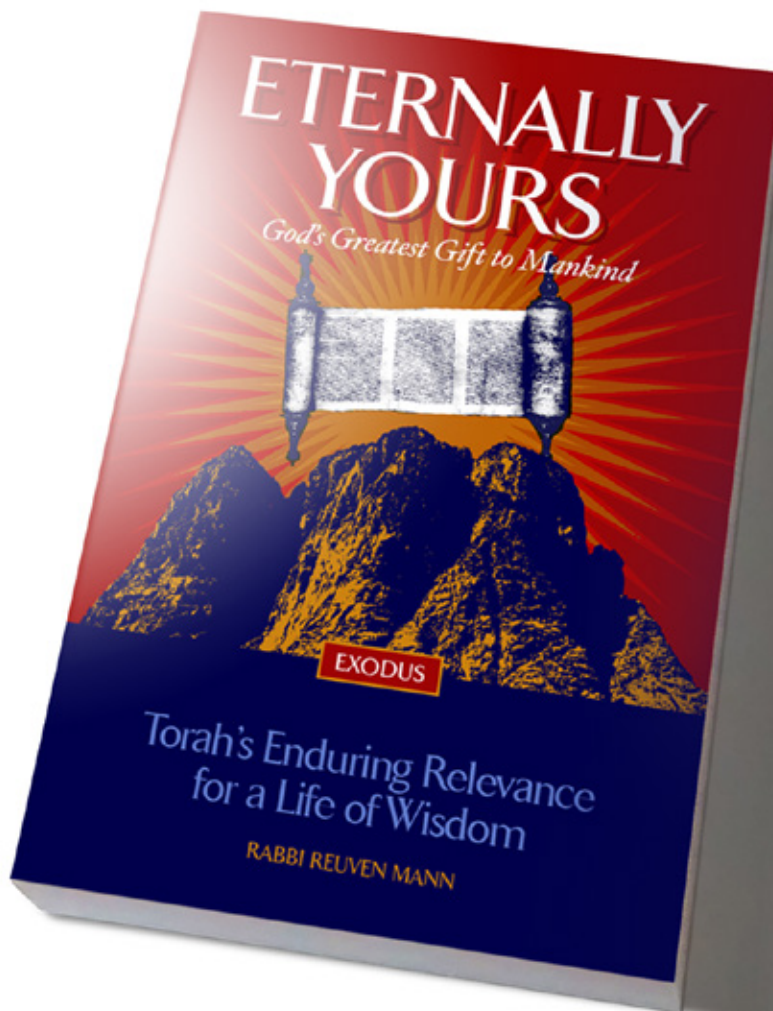
# ISRAEL

THE SECRET BEHIND THIS  
INDESTRUCTIBLE NATION PG 14



# Exodus

The 2nd of the Five Books of Moses, is one of the most fascinating and inspiring stories ever written. It describes the formation of a unique and eternal People, from their cruel enslavement by King Pharaoh to their miraculous redemption, and emergence as a nation via a public Revelation on Mt. Sinai.



The themes in this Book are eternal and applicable to every time and situation. Throughout history downtrodden Peoples, identified with the oppressed Jews and composed inspiring hymns which depicted Moses confronting Pharaoh and commanding him to “Let my People go!” The purpose of this book, “Eternally Yours” is to examine the underlying ideas contained in Exodus. My governing premise is that there is deep wisdom hidden beneath the surface which if properly apprehended will enlighten our lives. I analyze the emotional forces at work in the drama and this yields new insights into human psychology with great practical consequences for our understanding of the dynamics of social interactions. It also provides a deeper insight into the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and demonstrates that the pattern depicted in Exodus has recurred many times in history. This contains important lessons for confronting this problem in our time. The analyses and resolutions presented in this book lead to meaningful conclusions that are relevant to a deeper understanding of the challenges we face today as individuals and a society. My hope is that the book will enhance the reader’s appreciation of the Bible’s stories and that he will come to regard it as a source of enlightenment, enjoyment and inspiration. While it is written from the perspective of an Orthodox Rabbi, I firmly believe that people of all faiths and backgrounds who have an interest in the Bible will find it useful and gratifying. It contains no religious preaching, only a search for and analysis of, the eternal wisdom of the Book of Exodus.

*Rabbi Reuven Mann*

**Buy on Amazon:**  
<http://amzn.to/2nZoWgv>





### 3 Evil Eye

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Letters: Insecurity and misunderstanding fosters false beliefs

### 6 God: "In" the World?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Parsha: Who is God? The vision at the Burning Bush

### 10 Fragility/Conviction

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Parsha: Rabbi Fox offers insight into the conflicts of redemption

### 14 Guaranteed Immortality

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Parsha: What is the secret of the Jews' survival?

## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## Ayin Hara: The "Evil Eye"

**Reader:** Many Jews wear a red string. Even Rabbis even endorse this practice said to "ward off the Ayin Hara."

**Rabbi:** For clarification, let's first identify the popular understanding of Ayin Hara, the "evil eye." This is the belief in a power possessed by people through which one harms others using their eyes. All kidding aside, when does a harmless infant alter into a vicious adult wielding this power? Where did this child learn this ability and who taught it to him? More to the point, what evidence is there for this power?

In his letter to Marseille, Maimonides teaches that one should accept as true only one of three matters: that which we experience through our "senses," that which our "intelligence" says must be true like  $2+2=4$ , and that which "Torah" states. Any suggestion that does not comply with one of these three methods of validation, Maimonides says we must not accept as fact. The belief in an evil eye as a power has never been demonstrated (senses), is not arrived at rationally (intelligence) and is not found in the Torah. Therefore, following Judaism's greatest minds, we must dismiss this mystical belief, along with the belief that red strings defend against this imagined force. As the force does not exist, no defense is needed. But red strings (benders) too have never demonstrated any powers. In fact, if one ignites a red string, it will burn. If it cannot protect itself, it cannot protect anything else. Tosefta Shabbos (chap. 7) refers to wearing red strings on the finger as heathen practices, "Darchei Emori."

This same reasoning applies to the belief in protective mezuzas. Quoting the Shulchan Aruch (Gilyon M'harsha, Yoreh Daah, 289) "If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by God. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

### Free subscriptions by emailing:

[subscribe@mesora.org](mailto:subscribe@mesora.org)

Subscribers receive our advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements.

### Contacts

We invite feedback at this address:  
[comments@mesora.org](mailto:comments@mesora.org)  
(516)569-8888

### Advertising

<https://www.Mesora.org/Advertising>

### Donations

<https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

### Content at Mesora:

#### Jewishtimes Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Jewishtimes>

#### Philosophy Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Philosophy>

#### Weekly Parsha Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/WeeklyParsha>

#### Audio Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Audio>

#### Interactive Classes

<http://www.Mesora.org/TalkLive>

#### Search

<http://www.Mesora.org/Search>

Articles may be reprinted without consent of the JewishTimes or the authors, provided the content is not altered, and credits are given.



mezusa will be as knives in his eyes". These are very strong words from a respected Torah authority. He is teaching that God is the only source of protection, and that physical objects have no power. Rather, if one feels they do, these objects, even a mezusa, will be the opposite, "knives in his eyes"—something destructive. We say every day, "He (God) alone is the master of wonders". Maimonides (Hilchos Mezusa, 5:4) calls such people fools for seeking protection through mezusa. He states that they take a command, which is in fact for the lofty purpose of guiding us towards profound ideas on the Unity of God, His love and His service, and they make it into an amulet of physical benefit. Maimonides states they have no share in the next world.

What type of God would create an evil force and not warn His creatures? God does not secretly create harmful powers only for His unassuming human species to fall prey. The Creator is not evil and does not create forces to harm man. The opposite is true, all God does is for man's benefit: "God is good to all, and His mercies are upon all His creations" (Psalms 145:9).

These notions of evil eyes and other mystical beliefs are imaginations, nothing more. The cause for this belief is human insecurity. This is also the cause of all forms of idolatry. Yet God tells us not to accept such beliefs, omens, witchcraft, as Ibn Ezra says they are falsehoods: "Those with empty brains say 'Were it not that fortune tellers and magicians

were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues (Lev. 19:31)."

Yes, Torah discusses the Ayin Hara, but it simply refers to human nature. One case is when Jacob's sons descended to Egypt. Rashi (Gen. 42:5) says Jacob warned them not to all enter one gate of Egypt, but each son should enter Egypt through a separate gate. Dispersing in the crowd would prevent the Egyptians from casting an evil and suspicious eye upon Jacob's 10 sons who were of great stature and of foreign dress. Imagine 10 tall Arabs entering Tel Aviv airport. Certainly, people would take notice. Their suspicions, although baseless, could cause harm to the Arabs. Jacob wanted to avoid any undue suspicion of his sons and therefore advised them not to arouse any unnecessary attention. Here, evil eye refers to suspicion, and not to any real power.

On Pirkei Avos 2:11, Rabbi Joshua says that the evil eye ruins one's life. Rabbeinu Yona comments: "The evil eye refers to a person who is not satisfied with his lot, and he is always eying his rich friend's possessions, longing to have such wealth himself, and this causes him pain." The Chumash and Pirkei Avos both explain the evil eye as negative thoughts: either from others or from oneself. But Torah does not suggest that powers exist outside of God. In fact, Torah prohibits the belief in any powers

and punishes violators with death.

Furthermore, our Torah fundamental of Reward and Punishment rejects the evil eye. For God teaches that only those with sins experience mishap or punishments. But believers in the evil eye reject God and claim that even without having sinned, an evil force can cause them in mishap. This false view understands God as a being who will allow harm to visit a totally righteous person, thereby contradicting God's Torah.

The belief in forces other than God is idolatrous. This was the crime of Egypt. God's 10 plagues intended to expose Egypt's religious culture as fallacy. God is the sole creator of all existences. As such, nothing can override His exclusive control of the universe.

The Jew's mandate is to follow an intelligent life based on reason and proof and to dispel all fantasies, regardless of how many religious Jews have adopted such falsehoods. God gave each person intelligence precisely so each person engages it to determine what is true and what is false. Blindly accepting any belief rejects God's gift of intelligence. Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, the talmudic rabbis, Moses, Kings David and Solomon, and a host of prophets and sages reject the existence of any force in the universe except for God. Then you have today's kabbalists and mystical rabbis who say otherwise. Both views cannot be correct. ■

## The Afterlife

**Reader:** Does the Talmud/Torah mention anything about seeing the tunnel and the light after death? Also is there any mention of seeing a loved one/relative greet you after death?

**Rabbi:** "And Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said that Rabbi Yohanan said: 'All the prophets only prophesied with regard to the days of the Messiah. However, with regard to the World-to-Come, it is stated: 'No eye has seen it, God, aside from You God' (Isaiah 64:3)" (Talmud Berachos 34b).

The Prophet's words are from God, making them absolute truths. All other opinions cannot contradict the Prophet. Thus, facts about after death are not within human knowledge. ■



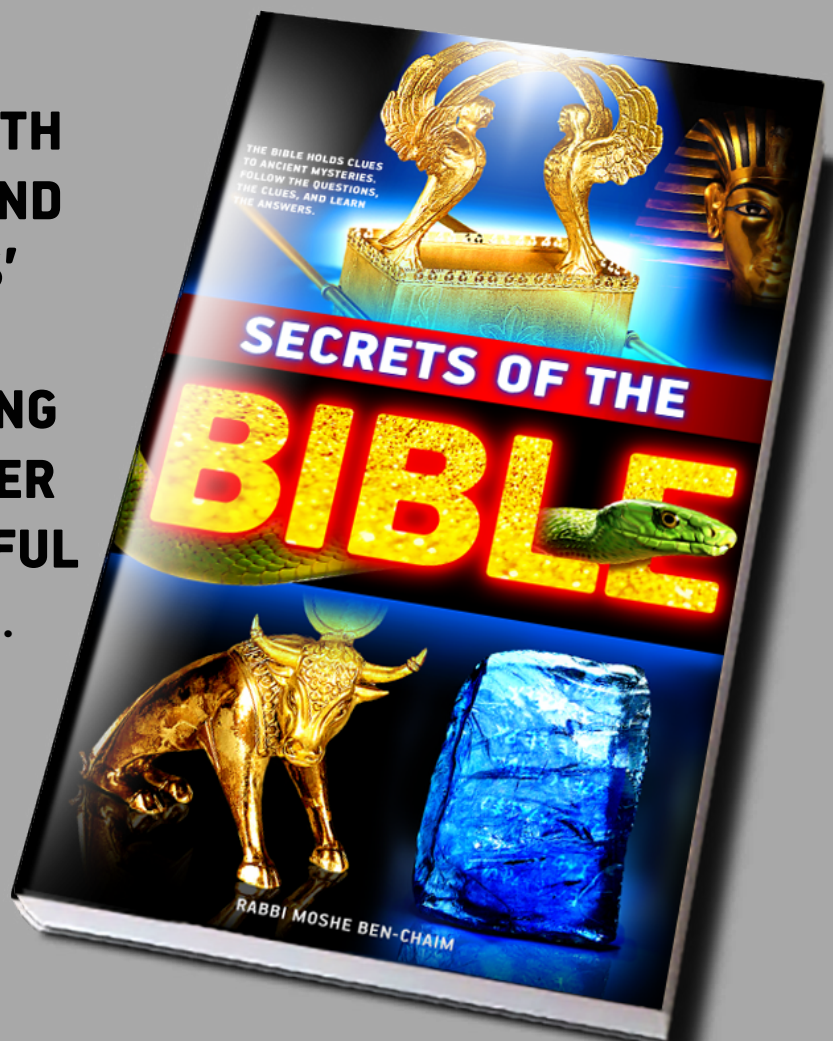
**Only**  
**KosherWine.com**

*a division of Chateau de Vin*

**GOD CODED HIS BIBLE WITH  
HIDDEN MESSAGES BEYOND  
THE WORDS. THE VERSES'  
ORDER, JUXTAPOSITIONS,  
CONTRADICTIONS, SEEMING  
REDUNDANCIES AND OTHER  
PATTERNS ARE PURPOSEFUL  
CLUES TO GOD'S WISDOM.**

BY JEWISHTIMES PUBLISHER  
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**FREE PREVIEW:**  
[WWW.MESORA.ORG/SECRETS](http://WWW.MESORA.ORG/SECRETS)





**T**he enactment of the covenant between God and the Jews commences with an interesting discussion between God and Moshe:

*Moshe said to God, "When I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moshe, "I will be that I will be." He continued, "Thus shall you say to Bnei Yisrael, 'I will be sent me to you.'" (Exod. 3:13,14)*

First, God refers to his name as, "I will be that I will be." But then He changes it to, "I will be." God continues:

*And God said further to Moshe, "Thus shall you speak to Bnei Yisrael: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Yaakov, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity. (Ibid. 3:15)*

In his Guide (book I, chap. lxiii), Maimonides asks, "What question did Moshe ask of God?" Was there a special name that the Jews knew of? If the Jews knew that name, then that is how Moshe knew it [and Moshe's reciting of that name is insignificant.] And if the name was one that Moshe alone knew, again this proves nothing as Moshe can make up any name he wishes. Maimonides says that it is obvious from the verses that Moshe's question about which name to tell the Jews did not concern a name per se, but the name represented an idea.

God mentions three names: 1. "I will be that I will be," 2. "I will be," and 3. "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Which name is the correct name that Moshe should tell the Jews?

Rashi quotes an interesting statement by Chazal:

*"I will be that I will be: As I am with the Jews in this trouble, I will be with them in their future troubles."*

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

# GOD:

## Is He "in" the world?

*Rabbi Israel Chait* STUDENT'S TRANSCRIPTION



*Moshe then replied, "Why should I mention other troubles to the Jews? Their current troubles are enough." God replied, "You speak well. This is what you should say, 'I will be has sent me to you.'"*

God gave Moshe an idea of "I will be that I will be." But as a leader, Moshe adapted the idea and consulted with God as to whether his adaptation of God's name was correct.

This is a difficult area and I cannot say with complete certainty that the explanation I will offer is the correct one. Obviously, this area deals with metaphysical ideas that are difficult to comprehend. Maimonides himself says that the only name of God is יהוה. All other names signify attributes. יהוה refers to master and אלהים refers to forces; neither refer exclusively to God. Rashi says that אלהים means multi-powers, explaining its pluralistic form. Even שדי inherently partakes of anthropomorphism to some degree. We are permitted to use these names as they are necessary to convey important ideas concerning certain results of God's actions. But these names do not describe God Himself. The only name that is free from anthropomorphism is יהוה. Maimonides explains that all God's other names came into being after creation (Guide, book I, chap. lxi), for

all other names refer to God in His relationship to the physical world and do not refer to Him per se. But יהוה was God's name prior to creation. Meaning that יהוה reflects the idea of God's absolute existence.

"I will be that I will be" is closely tied to יהוה; you can see that. But I would like to attempt to offer an explanation of this name, although, again, I cannot say for certain that I am correct. Nevertheless, insofar as one has the right to understand the Torah, I wish to attempt an explanation. Given that introduction, allow me to offer a pshat.

### Explaining God's Name

A person cannot make the statement "I will be," for that is an inherent contradiction. It indicates that one does not exist now. In which case, there is no I. And if one does not exist now, he cannot say, "I will exist." Instead, one should say, "I exist." Therefore, it is illogical for a person to make the statement "I will be that I will be." However, God can make this statement. The meaning of "will be" means that God's existence will enter the realm of time and space. Man exists within time and space and God exists outside of it. "I will be" is God saying that he will exist in time and space. This does not mean that God

will change His existence so that He is subject to time and space. It means that man will perceive God's existence within man's time and space system. But what is the implication of this? This means that God will perform a miracle: God's alteration of natural law. And to alter natural law means that God enters the time and space system, so to speak.

The existence of the universe expresses God's creation. A miracle means that God intervenes at a certain time. In a manner of speaking, a miracle is God to breaking into the realm of time and space. Unlike a miracle, the creation of the universe is not God breaking into time and space [for neither existed yet]. You can say that the universe is the result of God's essence or a spill-off of His essence. But God is not "in" the universe. "He is the place of the universe and the universe is not his place" (Rav Yosi ben Chalifta, Yalkut Shimoni). [God being the "place" of the universe means that He is the prerequisite for the existence of everything, just like place or space is necessary for something to exist. Without a place or space, nothing can exist. Similarly, without God, nothing else can exist, metaphorically stated as, "He is the place of the universe."]

A miracle means that God affects time and space, as if to say He "enters"

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



time and space. This explains the phrase "I will be." [God will be evident at a certain time.] But what is meant by the second half of God's name, "that which I will be?" The full name is difficult to understand, "I will be that which I will be." "That which I will be" refers to an idea of constancy. It modifies the first phrase, "I will be." Thus, the meaning is, "I will enter time and space, and this will be always." Regarding His creation of covenants, God will continually render miracles to sustain the Jewish people. This entering into time and space (as man views this from his perspective) is part of God's eternal nature. This means that God's capacity as a creator of covenants stems from His eternal nature.

Moshe's reply to God was that telling the Jews that God's intervention is a part of His eternal nature means that it will happen again; that God will need to intervene again due to future troubles from which the Jews will require salvation. It's a forecast of future doom. [After so many years of torturous labor and servitude] the Jews would not be able to emotionally tolerate such news. God then told Moshe to say that His name is "I will be," meaning that God intervenes in time and space, omitting the last part, "that I will be" [with the Jews during future troubles.]

What is the meaning of the third name, "The God of your forefathers?" The answer is precisely as we are saying. In explaining to the people this abstract idea, the end result for man in pondering the abstract nature of God is that man simply gets lost: there is no idea about God to which man can relate, since the concept of God is totally abstract. While Moshe was explaining an abstract metaphysical principle, it was one that left the elders with the unidentifiable and unknowable idea of God. The elders were left with nothing with which to relate. This explains why God said:

*Thus shall you speak to Bnei Yisrael: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.*



With this name, God offered man a means to relate to Him through His providence, expressed to the forefathers. Man is flesh and blood and needs some tangible way to relate to God. This third name was that bridge. The elders could relate to God's providence, previously expressed to the forefathers.

*This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity.*

Chazal say the Hebrew word לעלם (forever) is written without the vav, allowing it to be read "I'alame," meaning hidden. יהוה refers to "This shall be my name forever," and "This is My appellation for all eternity" refers to "God of the forefathers." The gemara says regarding God, "I am not read the way I am written." This means that we do not pronounce יהוה, but instead we read it as אדני. [This is a means of expressing our ignorance of God's nature; we do not enunciate His name the way it is written, as if to say we do not know what He is.]

What was Moshe's message to the nation? He presented the people with a new, previously unheard-of religion. That religion is that God's nature is so abstract that man cannot relate to Him. Nevertheless, man is permitted to relate to God in a certain way: the God of our forefathers. This is our closest relationship to God. Any other image, feeling, or sense behind the word God is prohibited and borders

on idolatry. Moshe presented the people with a new religion where one relates to God on his emotional level, while simultaneously conveying that God is unknowable. Man cannot relate to God's absolute [and unknowable] nature יהוה; he relates only to "God of the forefathers."

If we only had the identity of God as "God of our forefathers," man would project anthropomorphic notions onto God. Therefore, we do not pronounce יהוה as it is written to remind ourselves of God's unknowable nature. This is the central idea of Moshe's prophecy and a central idea of the new religion he established. This is the essence of Judaism.

### Moshe: God's Messenger

How could Moshe prove that he was God's messenger? Evidently, signs and wonders would have been insufficient. As the following verse says, the signs were for the people, not for the elders. For the elders, Moshe needed to convey the concept of "I will be that I will be."

*Then Moshe and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moshe, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. (Exod. 4:29,30)*

God was not satisfied to have the elders believe through wonders. This is in accord with Maimonides:

*One who believes because of a sign has doubts in his heart (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 8:1)*

The belief in wonders does not involve all of man's faculties. Signs and wonders do not impress the inner man; ideas alone offer this impression. Therefore, the elders, who were capable of grasping the ideas, would be impressed through ideas and not signs. It is so beautiful how the verse works out. "I will be that I will be" was Moshe explaining the mesora to the elders. The only way a man can be accepted as God's messenger without signs and wonders is by explaining the meaning of the mesora that the elders possessed. ■





# JEWISH LIFE

**WE'VE BEEN  
FIGHTING  
FOR IT FOR  
20 YRS**

Mesora and USAIsrael have improved Jewish life globally for 20 years. From ambulances purchased for Israel, to funding cancer patients, disaster victims, the poor and Israel's terror victims...to campaigning congress and producing 1000s of Jewish publications and classes enjoyed globally, we've spearheaded successful programming for decades.

Please support us today with your tax-deductible donation:

[www.bit.ly/Mesora-org](http://www.bit.ly/Mesora-org)

MESORA



JewishTimes

# the Fragility of our Convictions

Rabbi Bernie Fox



**A**nd the nation believed and they heard that Hashem had remembered Bnai Yisrael and that He had seen their suffering. They kneeled and they bowed. (Sefer Shemot 4:31)

## The capacity of the Jewish people to believe in Moshe

Parshat Shemot describes Pharaoh's implementation of a strategy to oppress the Jewish people. This program eventually evolved into a campaign of genocide. Moshe is introduced and the initial stages of our redemption from bondage are recounted.

In his first prophecy, Moshe is directed by Hashem to convene the elders of the Bnai Yisrael. He is to tell them that Hashem will take them forth from Egypt and bring the nation into the land that He promised to their forefathers. Hashem provides Moshe with wonders that he is to perform for the elders. The performance of these miracles will assure the elders that Moshe is an authentic prophet and that Hashem has indeed determined that the moment of redemption has arrived.

Moshe is joined by his brother Aharon. Together, they address the elders.

Aharon acts as Moshe's spokesman. They communicate to the elders Hashem's message and perform the wonders that Hashem empowered them to execute.

What was the reaction of the nation and its elders to this wonderful but unanticipated message? The above passage explains that they believed Moshe and Aharon. The Talmud comments that through their response to Moshe, the elders and the people demonstrated that they were "believers, descendant of believers". The intent of this comment is that the people exhibited a capacity to embrace a vision of the future completely inconsistent with their current condition. They were oppressed slaves subjected to wonton cruelty by powerful masters. Moshe and Aharon told them that soon they will emerge from bondage and take possession of a land long-ago promised to their forefathers. Accepting the truth of a message so incongruent with their current miserable condition required enormous courage and trust.

*And they said to them: "Hashem should reveal Himself regarding you and execute judgment. For you have made our spirit disgusting in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants – to the extent of placing a sword in their hands to kill us." (Sefer Shemot 5:21)*

## Bnai Yisrael's abandonment of their belief

Moshe, Aharon, and the elders present Pharaoh with their demands. Pharaoh dismisses them and orders new measures designed to further oppress and break the spirit of the Jews. Moshe and Aharon are confronted by the elders. The elders condemn them for failing them and for exacerbating their suffering. They have not brought closer the redemption of Bnai Yisrael. Instead, they have provoked Pharaoh to inflict further suffering upon his slaves.

How can this response be reconciled with the Torah's previous description of the people and the elders? The Torah tells us that they believed in Moshe and Aharon and in their message. The Talmud praises our ancestors for their response to the news of their coming redemption. How can the commenda-

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)





tions of the Torah and Talmud be reconciled with the nation's immediate abandonment of Moshe and Aharon at the first disappointment and set-back?

*And I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to leave without a mighty hand. (Sefer Shemot 3:19)*

### **Moshe forewarned the people of setbacks**

The response of the elders and the people to this setback is even more disturbing when we consider the above passage. Hashem tells Moshe that Pharaoh will not easily or quickly accede to the demand to free the Jews. Hashem will reveal His might. Only in response to the overwhelming omnipotence of Hashem, will Pharaoh grant the Jews their liberation. Moshe was directed by Hashem to share with the elders his prophecy – including this forewarning that freedom would not be attained quickly or easily. The elders and the people knew from Moshe that there would be setbacks. Why did they abandon Moshe and Aharon when they encountered the first of these obstacles?

### **We envision our path and its challenges**

Rav Israel Chait addresses this issue. The solution that he proposes has two components. The first is an important insight into how our beliefs and convictions function as personal motivators. He explains that we do not act upon abstract assurances or predictions. When a person embarks upon a challenging journey, the person also has a vision of the path and its challenges.

He has considered these and is prepared to move forward and encounter these challenges. This vision of the path and its challenge defines the person's commitment. He is committed to travel the path and endure the challenges he has envisioned.

Let's consider an illustration. I decide that I need to get into better shape. I have started to diet and to exercise more regularly. The journey to which I have committed is not merely an abstract concept. I have a rather specific vision of the the path I will travel and the obstacles I may encounter. This vision is integral to my commitment and capacity to move forward. I am not committed to an abstract goal. It is to this vision that I am committed.

### **The impact of unanticipated setbacks**

What happens when a person encounters a major setback? It depends on the nature of the setback. If the setback was envisioned and anticipated, or even similar to the type anticipated, then the person will accept the disappointment and move forward. But what happens when the setback is of a type completely unanticipated? Then, the person's commitment will be severely challenged.

Let's return to our illustration. I recognize when I embark on my crusade to become fit that I will encounter setbacks. There will be days that I will get onto the scale and it will tell me that I have not lost the pounds I had anticipated shedding. I know that on some days I will go to the gym and have no energy

and feel completely exhausted at the end of my workout. I am prepared for these setbacks. When they are encountered my commitment will not waiver. But what happens if I diet diligently, get onto the scale, and discover that after all of my deprivation I have gained two pounds? What happens if on the way to the gym, I slip and fracture my ankle? These are not the setbacks that I anticipated and that I am prepared to endure. If I encounter these setbacks, then my commitment may be severely challenged.

Now, let us apply this analysis to the experience of the elders and the people of Bnai Yisrael. Moshe had warned them that Pharaoh would resist their demands. They understood that they would need to strive with Pharaoh, stand up to him, and act with courage. They were prepared for all of this. It was included in their vision of the path they must travel and the challenges that they must endure in order to secure their freedom. But they could not anticipate or be prepared for the actual outcome of their first encounter with Pharaoh. He ridiculed them, dismissed their demands, and instituted additional cruel measures to further oppress them. If Hashem has decided that the moment of their liberation has arisen, sent to them His messenger, and charged them to demand from Pharaoh their freedom, then how can He allow Pharaoh to respond in this manner? They could not reconcile their vision of the path they must travel and its challenges with the reality before them.

*And the quota of bricks that they produced yesterday and the prior day place upon them. Do not diminish it. For they are lazy. This is why they cry out saying, "Let us go and offer sacrifices to our God." (Sefer Shemot 5:8)*

### **The importance of personal dignity**

A second factor contributed to the collapse of the determination of the elders and the people. Dignity and self-respect are important to every person. However, we cannot acquire and sustain our dignity and self-respect without reinforcement from our environment. It is very difficult to be proud of

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

oneself if this pride is not confirmed by the people who are important to us. A child seeks the confirmation of parents. Students require the acknowledgment of their teachers. Employees need to hear from their superiors that they are valued members of the organization. And even a slave seeks the approval of his master. In fact, because of the slave's psychological over-estimation of his master, this approval or disapproval is very potent.

Pharaoh's response to the demands of Bnai Yisrael, demonstrate shrewd insight into human psychology. He did not respond to the demands of the Jews by simply denying them. He was completely dismissive. He declared that they were motivated by slothfulness. They were simply a collection of lazy servants seeking to shirk their responsibilities.

Pharaoh's assessment of the psychological susceptibilities of the Jews was completely accurate. The elders immediately complained to Moshe and Aharon saying, "You have made our spirit disgusting in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants." They were completely unprepared to endure their shame and embarrassment.

Rabbi Chait concludes that there is no contradiction between the Torah's and our Sages' description of elders and the people as "believers" and their immediate deterioration in response to Pharaoh's rejection of their demands. They were "believers" but they were also human beings. They were confronted by an unanticipated setback for which they were completely unprepared. Furthermore, Pharaoh succeeded in completely undermining their dignity and self-respect. The combination of these factors undercut the strength of their convictions.

*And after this Moshe and Aharon came. And they said to Pharaoh: "Thus says Hashem the God of Yisrael, 'Send forth my nation and they will celebrate before Me in the wilderness.'" And Pharaoh said: "Who is Hashem that I should obey His voice to send forth Yisrael? I do not know of Hashem. Furthermore, I will not send forth Yisrael." (Sefer Shemot 5:1-2)*

### **Moshe altered the relationship between Pharaoh and the people**

Based upon the above discussion, another element of the dynamic within this encounter becomes evident. Moshe and Aharon came to the elders in order to enlist them as partners. They asked that the elders join them in placing their demands before Pharaoh. They were seeking in the elders great courage of confidence. The elders responded by accepting upon themselves this role. How did Moshe and Aharon inspire this courage?

Moshe and Aharon offered the elders and the people an opportunity to address Pharaoh in a framework that was very appealing. They would be making their request in a framework that is inconsistent with the slave-master relationship. They would demand to be sent forth to serve their God. Consider how inconsistent this demand was with the creed of the Egyptians. A vanquished people was demanding to worship its own God! Moshe and Aharon offered the elders the opportunity to speak to Pharaoh as leaders of a people with its own powerful God – Who must be obeyed.

Let us consider the implications of this framework. Moshe and Aharon told the elders and the people that they would confront Pharaoh as a proud people, demanding the right to worship its own God. This is a confrontation in which one can engage with dignity and even gratification. It is not a conversation between a master and a slave begging for his freedom. It is demand made by a proud people, insisting on its right to serve its powerful God.

Now, let us review Pharaoh's response. Again, his shrewd psychological insight is evident. He does not simply reject their demand. He dismisses their God. He refuses to allow the discussion to rise above the pleadings of a slave before his master. He would not allow the Jews and their elders to imagine themselves other than as lowly slaves.

### **Recognizing the fragility of our convictions**

A conclusion that emerges from this investigation is the fragility of our convictions. This discussion focuses on a few of the factors that undermine even firmly

established and strongly embraced convictions. One factor is our estimation of the challenges we will face in living by our convictions. The other is the difficulty that every person encounters in remaining true to convictions and values when they evoke ridicule and derision. The Torah's account should be sobering for us. It should be a warning. The elders of Israel were incapable of maintaining their commitment when confronted with unanticipated setbacks and intense ridicule. We are foolish if we think that we can be more steadfast than these giants.

This discussion should inform our plans and how we live. Let's consider an example. Parents and their teenagers put significant time, effort, and thought into selecting their college. If the above discussion is taken seriously, then this selection process must include the following consideration:

The environment of the secular college campus is often very dangerous for our young people. Students encounter hostility toward traditional values, religion, and especially toward Judaism. This hostility takes the form of implied and even manifest ridicule. A day school education and even a year or two of study in Israel will not immunize our teens from the deleterious impact of this environment. Many of our young people succumb to the pressures of this environment and either abandon observance or loose the intensity of their commitment. It is important to take seriously the challenges teens encounter on campus. Our teens should not be expected to overcome the type of challenges that defeated our elders.

Young people and their parents must carefully consider the extent and quality of Jewish life on the campus. The institutions on campus that promote Jewish life and provide a Jewish environment will likely be the only consistent refuge for our teens from the challenges that surround them. Their future as committed members of the Jewish people will not be secured through the education that they received before moving on to the campus. It will depend on the degree of our teens' Jewish experience on campus. ■





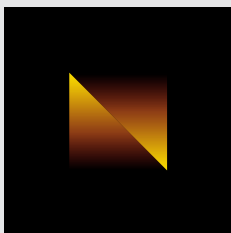
Of 26,200 designers, LocalSolo ranks NYDesign #1 in NY and #11 worldwide. (May-Dec. 2017)

LocalSolo

Websites that are not “responsive” to mobile screen sizes, lose Google ranking, and business. **We can help.**



Industry leaders select NYDesign. Our unique styling drives sales: successes over the years proves this time and again. NYDesign provides cost-effective solutions for all visual communications. Our expertise and experience offers rapid delivery, meaning fewer billable hours. And our first-class design empowers you to reach your audience with the most stunning communications, yielding greater sales than firms of lower caliber. Our month-to-month retainer basis helps you start with a low budget, and no commitments. Contact us today and obtain affordable, expert design that drives sales.



NYDesign.com

Building loyalty and sales through design strategies  
studio@nydesign.com | 516.569.8888

Branding	Dataviz/Charts	Websites	Social Media
UI/App Design	Infographics	Landing Pages	Advtg/Promo
Wires/Prototypes	Iconography	Editorial Design	Animation
App Store Design	Illustration	Presentations	Packaging

W  
HOTELS

CONDÉ NAST

CNBC

A&E

POLO

pepsi

Walt Disney  
PICTURES

WB

Pizza  
Hut

BURGER  
KING

MasterCard



# PARSHA GUARANTEED IMMORTALITY

Rabbi Reuven Mann



**T**his week's parsha initiates the second Book of the Torah, Shemot, in which the family of the Patriarchs was transformed into a unique nation with a very specific purpose.

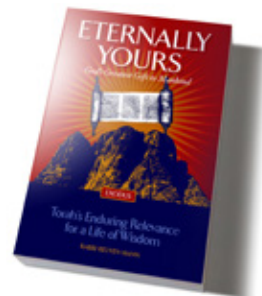
Whatever your opinion of the Jews, you must admit that there is no people like them. All other nations have come into being by chance, as a result of economic, geographical, racial, demographic, and political factors. These countries retain the freedom to determine their own destiny, whether for good or for evil.

Although numerous empires have arisen in the course of history, none have been able to learn the secret of perpetuity. They made lots of noise and accomplished "great" things in their time. They virtually ruled the world and seemed invincible, but all have been consigned to the dustbin of history.

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Author of the new book  
"Eternally Yours"  
on Exodus

Buy on Amazon:  
<http://amzn.to/2nZoWgv>



Not all of the "great" nations have disappeared. Some, like France, Spain, and England are still around, but in a much diminished capacity. Their "moment in the sun" is behind them, largely because World War II was a turning point in history.

After the war, the entire world order was rearranged, and the U.S. emerged as the most powerful and dominant superpower in history. Thankfully, ours is a decent and magnanimous country that has done more to advance the cause of freedom and social progress than any other.

No country can make the claim that its existence is essential to the wellbeing of mankind and thus is guaranteed immortality. However, there is an exception to the rule that nations, like individuals, are finite and subject to expiration. That exception is the Jewish people.

The Jews are an eternal people. Though many have sought to nullify this existential reality, none have succeeded (although some, most recently the Nazis, have come too close for comfort).

The brief respite from virulent anti-Semitism that set in after the shock of the Holocaust has now dissipated. A storm of murderous Jew hatred once again engulfs the world, and Israel has been targeted for annihilation by the brutal Iranian regime. But the ultimate ambition of the haters is in vain.

How can we be so sure? The Rambam expounds the doctrine of Jewish immortality in his famous "Epistle to the Jews of Yemen." When these people came under harsh decrees that banned the practice of mitzvot, they turned to the great Torah luminary for guidance.

Rambam used this occasion to expound the principle of Jewish eternity. He stated that, although there will be periods of persecution, they will be brief. Further, he said, "We are in possession of

the divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a preeminent community. As it impossible for G-d to cease to exist, so is Israel's destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable, as we read, "For I the Lord change not, and you, O sons of Jacob, will not be consumed." (Malachi. 3:6)

Why are the Jews different? What makes them immune from the laws of nature, which decree that all living entities must perish?

We can find the answer in Shemot, which describes the founding of the Jewish nation. This people did not emerge as a result of the ordinary laws of nature; rather, this was a divinely ordained happening. The Creator of the universe intervened in the world of human affairs to create a special society. Hashem declared, "I fashioned this nation for Myself, that it might declare my praise." (Isaiah 43:21)

G-d broke the chains of His people's bondage, destroyed their captors, and brought them out of Egypt with great wealth. The ultimate bond was forged on Mount Sinai, when He gathered the entire nation and proclaimed from heaven, "I am Hashem your G-d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." Why did He do this? In order "to be a G-d unto you". We are an eternal people because of our special relationship with the eternal G-d.

Our special relationship with Hashem should enhance our appreciation of our Jewish identity. We must draw renewed inspiration from the awareness that we are part of a society founded by Hashem to be the instrument of His purpose in creating mankind: that all the world should recognize G-d's existence and behave according to the moral program He communicated in His Torah.

Shabbat shalom. ■



# 2,700 YEAR-OLD CLAY SEAL

REUTERS: JERUSALEM JAN 1, 2018  
Writing by Jeffrey Heller; Editing by Adrian Croft

Archaeologists find a clay seal impression with ancient Hebrew said to have belonged to a Jerusalem governor.

Hebrew reads "belonging to the governor of the city." The impression was unearthed near the Western Wall. "It supports the Bible's account of a governor of the city in Jerusalem 2,700 years ago (2 Kings and in 2 Chronicles, Joshua and Masseiah respectively). The Antiquities Authority's announcement came several weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a decision that overturned a decades-old policy on the status of the city and stirred Palestinian protests and international concern.



# Subscribe to the Jewishtimes. It's FREE.



Subscribe by emailing [Subscribe@Mesora.org](mailto:Subscribe@Mesora.org)

Enjoy our magazine and special issues throughout the year with original, thought provoking articles on Torah, Israel, science, politics and readers' letters.

Enjoy all 512 back issues free: [www.Mesora.org/Jewishtimes](http://www.Mesora.org/Jewishtimes)