

# JewishTimes

VOL. XVI NO. 18 — SEPT. 7, 2018



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*Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim*

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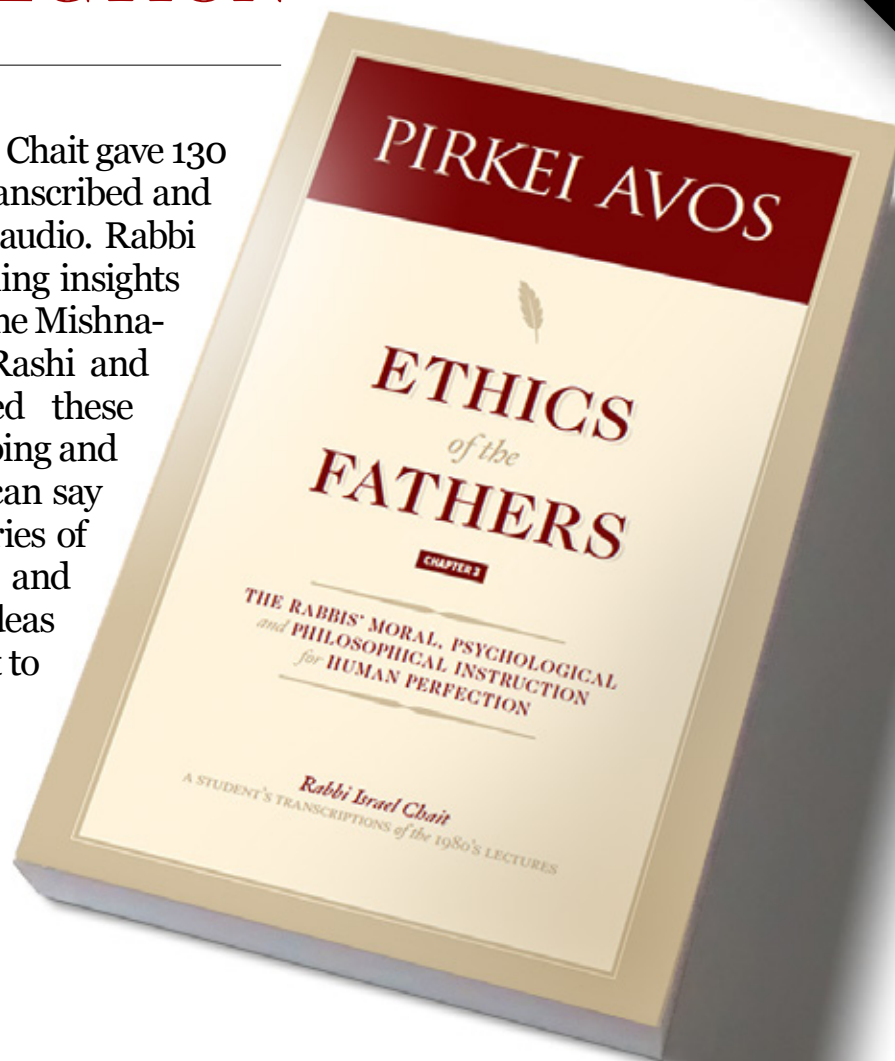
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## LETTERS & MUSINGS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

### Magic & the Supernatural

**Reader:** The Torah tells us in Deut. 18 to avoid divination, sorcery, necromancy, etc., but rather accept spiritual guidance from G-d through Prophets. In this case metaphysical or supernatural matters are exposed to us outside the Torah only through prophets and not idolatrous priests. Therefore, belief in metaphysical revelations from Prophets is not illegal according to Torah. Living out the Torah makes you fulfill your religious duties as part of the Covenant with G-d but revelations from Prophets help us to deal with spiritual issues in life. An example is, one can stay religious all his life and yet will remain financially unstable because of a family curse or cycle imposed by some negative spiritual forces. In this case, only spiritual guidance from G-d through His Prophets can set you free. Being religious and spiritual go hand in hand.

**Rabbi:** "Family curse," "spiritual forces" and "idolatrous priests" (who supposedly perform supernatural phenomena) are all unverified. Distinguish these fantasies from reality i.e., what your senses detect. God gave you senses for a reason: to accept what they detect, and to deny what they do not detect, like such fantasies you mention. And we only accept as prophets those who performed miracles, and who endorse Moses' Torah.

**Reader:** If the Torah itself attests to Bilam being an evil priest, how would you consider it unverifiable? Also, the Pharaoh's magicians?

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**Rabbi:** What's your question in Bilam? That phenomenon follows what I cited, that we admit to what our senses tell us. And as we witnessed Torah being given by God on Sinai, we accept all stories contained therein, including Bilam receiving prophecy. However, the Torah uses a different term "lahat"—not "os" or "mofase" used regarding Moses' miracles—teaching that the magicians' used sleight of hand, as they had no powers more than you or I. And the very Torah verses teach their incapacities, as they could not reproduce lice (too small for tactile dexterity) and they could not remove the boils from their bodies! Why? Because they could only use sleight of hand, turning the waters red with dyes, and expelling the frogs from the Nile with chemicals that frogs repel (Saadia Gaon). Why didn't the magicians stop any of the plagues? They were powerless. See this essay: <http://www.mesora.org/leaders.html>

**Reader:** Didn't really have a question. My response was based on your statement "'idolatrous priests are unverified.'" The magicians' powers were limited, but not all opinions agree that all tricks were sleight of hand. Regarding Bilam, we can infer he didn't just have prophecy as Balak was convinced Bilam could also issue curses. Bilam never denied his general ability to cast curses, he simply refused because he didn't want to act against G-d's will.

**Rabbi:** Man can't possess power to alter nature. As God created the universe, He alone caused all existences to be, and how to behave. Man can't overpower God. And God does not give man such powers. The greatest man ever—Moses—prayed to God to alter nature for every miracle, for he had no powers himself. Bilam not rejecting he has cursing ability in no way validates that he actually changed nature with his lips. He had no powers, but as Rabbi Israel Chait explained, he naturally predicted—not caused—that someone was about to bring failure on himself through poor decisions. At that moment, to make himself appear as his curses

worked, he pronounced a curse. Onlookers attributed the person's failure to Bilam, and Bilam grew fame through being hired to curse. But Bilam was simply shrewd, not magical...magic does not exist. And Pharaoh's magicians have now powers as the Torah attests, as I wrote above. Magic has never been proven because it does not exist. ■

## Man's Failure: A Disgrace to God

*"If a man is guilty of a capital offense and is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, you must not let his corpse remain on the tree overnight, but must bury him the same day. For a hanged body is a curse [disgrace] to God: you shall not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess (Deut. 21:22,23)."*

Rashi comments:

*"A degradation of the Divine King, for man is made in His image and the Israelites are His children."*

Rashi first refers to the first part of the verse and I believe Rabbi Israel Chait said that the "degradation" to God is that His creations didn't follow His will and deserved hanging. This is a poor reflection on God as Creator.

The second part, "Israelites are His children" refers to the second part of the verse that the land is contaminated. This means that the expressed relationship between God and Israel, which is the land of Israel, is now marred by the fact that this elevated nation—not simply generic man—fails God. So the two parts of Rashi identify the first issue which is a disgrace to God as Creator because his creations could not fulfill God's plan, and the second part is man's failure in the capacity of being the chosen nation of Israel. ■

## Metaphysics vs. the Physical World: Which is Real?

**Rabbi:** Today, I saw a post on facebook critiquing metaphysics (the world of ideas, reason, the soul, and God) and the writer used "reasoning." My reply:

"As you are using reason, you use a non-physical phenomenon. Meaning, reason is "metaphysical." For it is not of physical attributes...no shape, no location, no color, weight or size...etc. Reasoning is not found in the brain. Thus, metaphysics exists. In fact, metaphysics, and natural laws are more real than physical phenomena, as the physical world strictly follows—without deviation—metaphysical universal laws, while metaphysics does not take orders from physical creation. ■

## Deifying Man

Isaiah 44:13 rebukes man for his idolatrous creations:

*"The craftsman in wood, measures with a line and marks out a shape with a stylus; he forms it with scraping tools, marking it out with a compass. He gives it a human form, the beauty of a man, to dwell in a shrine."*

Isaiah depicts the careful design of idols to be placed in shrines and worshipped. Man seeks the image of man as his god.

Isaiah 2:22 says further:

*"Oh, cease to glorify man, Who has only a breath in his nostrils! For what is man considered?"*

"By what" (bameh) is reinterpreted by the Rabbis as "bamah" (an altar, is man considered). Isaiah teaches that man has a strong desire to deify man, as if man is an altar to worship. Therefore he says we must cease glorifying man.

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Moses warns the Jews in the same fashion (Deut. 4:16):

*"Don't act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman."*

The prophets were wise, they understood man's attempt to return to the infantile state: the dependent infant clogging to his parents to remove his fears and offer human security. But man is to mature, to recognize God alone as the only power in the universe. He created it alone, He does not need man to govern us all. We pray to Him alone, and reject all idolatrous forms, be it statues, deification of man in the form of Jesus, dead rebbe's, or in attributing sainthood and infallibility to any human. ■

## Deifying the Heavens

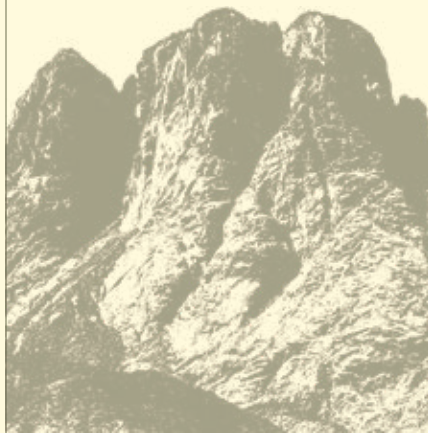
**Reader:** Question: The following verse appears to give gentiles permission to worship the luminaries:

*"When you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars--all the heavenly array--do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven" (Deut. 4:19).*

**Rabbi:** This verse does not mean God apportioned the luminaries as deities for other nations, but to simply illuminate the earth. Meaning, "Don't deify heavenly objects that were simply created as a means to give light." The concept here that the luminaries are to serve all nations equally, may intend on dismissing any subjective importance that different nations project onto the luminaries, such as one nation deifying the sun and another deifying the moon. God counters such baseless subjective idolatrous projection by saying that He apportioned them to all nations, and did not differentiate the luminaries' purpose from one nation or another.

It also says, "all nations" which includes

Jews. Therefore, the heavenly spheres and bodies have equal purpose for all mankind. And further, as idolatry is one of the Noahide laws, this verse cannot suggest otherwise, giving permission for the gentiles to serve the sun, moon, stars, etc. ■



## God Suspended Mount Sinai over the Jews?

*"The Holy One, blessed be He, suspended the mountain over them, and said, 'If you accept the Torah, then it will be well with you, but if not, here will be your burial site'" (Mechilta DeRabbi Shimon Bar Yochai 19:17).*

If this was a literal event, certainly, Moses would have mentioned this when he recounts Revelation at Sinai in Deuteronomy. Not only would Moses recall the "voice from amidst flames" that the Jews heard, but certainly he would have recalled the suspended mountain.

If it was true that God's threat of dropping the mountain was the cause of the Jews' acceptance of Torah, Moses would not need to offer the Jews a choice later on where he says "choose life" (Deut. 30:19) for they had already made a choice.

If God actually suspended the mountain over the heads of the Jews, does this not conflict with God's creation of human free will, that man chooses Torah without coercion? What then is the purpose of

human intellect and free will, if God coerces man?

If the coercion of a mountain dropping on the Jew's heads was actuality, why does the Torah not include this in the curses of the Jews abandon Torah? Instead of threatening Jews with diseases and exile, God should have threatened Jews with a mountain dropping on their heads.

Both Maimonides (intro to the Guide) and his son Abraham (intro to Ain Yaakov) teach that midrashim are not literal.

Esther 9:27 states "They rose up and accepted" which the Rabbis say means that the Jews reaccepted the Torah, now out of love, in contrast to the coerced acceptance at Sinai. Seeing how Mordechai and Esther orchestrated an intelligent plan and achieved success through God's intervention, the Jews marveled and rejoiced at the expression of two righteous and intelligent Jews who worked with God's system of wisdom to achieve salvation. They were enthralled with God's Torah, a system of wisdom, and a system of divine providence over those whom follow God's wisdom.

The Jews at Sinai could no longer deny God's existence. They heard intelligence emanating from fire, the one element in which no biological organism can survive. Thus, the sound they heard was an intelligence not of this world. This phenomenon is what Moses related 8 times to the Jews 40 years after that event before his death. Moses highlighted the one element of Revelation at Sinai, the irrefutable proof of God and His will for mankind. It was so compelling, it was as if God held the mountain over their heads.. ■

## Loving the Convert

Based on Maimonides' Hilchos Dayos 6:3, the reason one must love a fellow Jew—and not others—as himself, is because that love expresses his values: he values the Torah life and those who follow it. But to love an idolater or someone who

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## LETTERS

leads a hedonistic lifestyle would be misplaced love: love of someone who does not follow the good represents a corrupt value system.

Love of the convert is also one of the 613 commands, "And you shall love the stranger" (Deut. 10:19) (Hilchos Dayos 6:4). "Gare" has 2 meanings: convert and stranger. The term gare used here refers only to converts.

Interesting is that Maimonides writes further in this law:

*"God commanded the love for the convert as He commanded the love for Himself: 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God' (Deut. 6:5.). The Holy One, blessed be He loves the convert Himself, even as it is said: 'And He loves the stranger' (Ibid. 10:18)."*

In Hilchos Dayos 6:4, as Rambam already told us of the law to love the convert, what is he adding by equating the love of converts with love of God? What does Rambam further add by saying, "God Himself loves the stranger?" Does this mean that our obligation to love the convert is on par with our obligation to love of God, unlike our love for a fellow Jew? If so, how? And does God's love of the convert add an amplification of our love of a convert, that man's love of converts should be based on God's love of converts, unlike our love of a Jew? If so, God teaches that the convert deserves greater love than a born Jew. And this can be because the convert chose Judaism, while born Jews have not. Thus, the convert has a quality not found in the Jew and deserving of God's additional love. ■



# JEWISH SUPERIORITY

REJECTED BY THE RABBIS

I recently listened to Rabbi Israel Chait's shiur where he quotes Abraham the son of Maimonides. Abraham cited the discussion between Chazal and the Greeks regarding astronomy. Chazal had the ability to defend their position, but they did not, and admitted that the Greeks had greater knowledge than they had: "Their knowledge is better than ours." The was stated by Judaism's wisest men, not by today's foolish and arrogant Jews. Chazal fulfilled the mishna in Pirkei Avos 5:7, that a chocham is one who admits the truth, with no concern whether he is defeated. Social status plays no role in the chocham's pursuit of truth.

Again we find support that the Jewish soul is not superior than any other soul.

I also find this debate about the superiority of souls to be completely baseless. If one would tell you that A's soul is round, and B's soul is square, you would reply that this is a ludicrous statement, since the concept of shape is inapplicable to a metaphysical soul, and that which is metaphysical cannot be detected by our senses. Therefore, man cannot make any statement about a soul. This includes shape, color or its imagined capacity to be superior or inferior to another soul. How can one suggest that "capacity" even relates to souls? Man has no way to gauge this! Therefore, it is foolish to quote even an ancient rabbi (not that ancient authors are more correct) who defends the view of a Jewish "superior soul," since any defense requires reason, and there is no basis in reason to claim Jewish soul superiority, nor is there any tradition that says so. Additionally, rabbis are not infallible, so one might be quoting a rabbi with an incorrect notion.

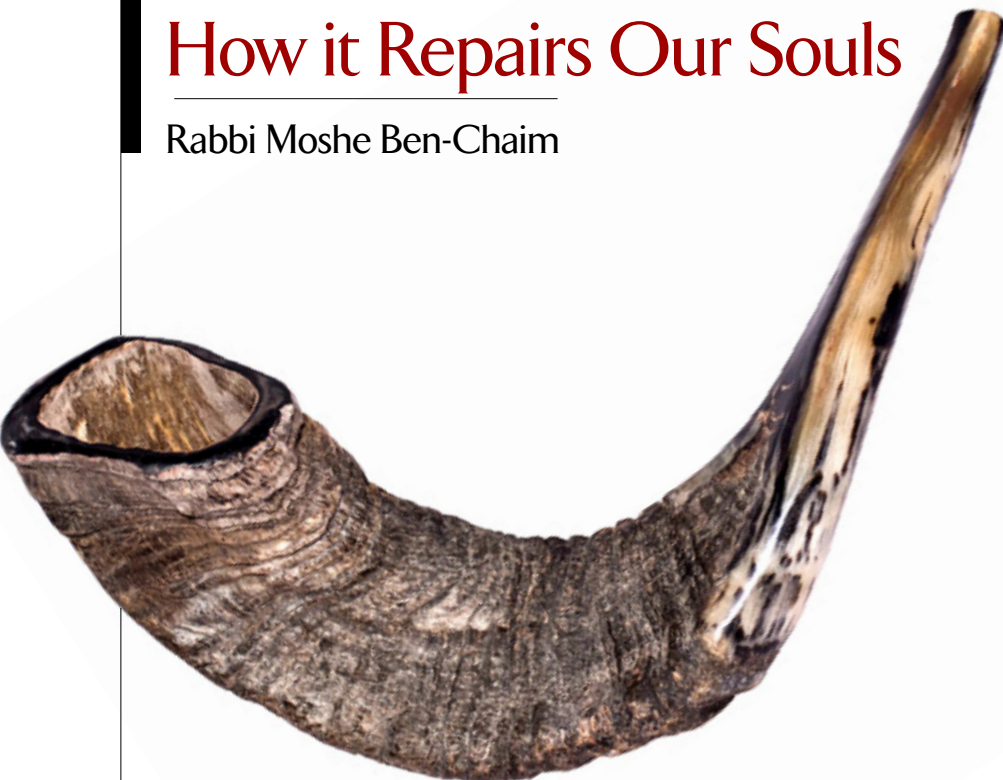
Maimonides teaches that any human being who enters the world has equal potential (Shmitta v'Yovale 13:13). Without evidence, reason or tradition to claim otherwise, human equality goes unchallenged as the true reality. ■

NEW YEAR

# SHOFAR

## How it Repairs Our Souls

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



**T**he Torah command cannot simply be to hear a horn blowing. Torah is intent on perfecting us as it is God's tremendous wisdom, so a mere sound alone cannot possibly improve us. There must be far more to shofar. What are we to think about when hearing the shofar blasts, that perfects us?

What is the significance of the shofar? Its primary focus is its blasts blown during our prayers on Rosh Hashanna. We also have the custom to blow it each morning during the month of Elul. This month precedes the month of Tishrei, the first day of which is Rosh Hashanna. During this month of Elul, the shofar is to act as a wake-up call; "Uru yshanim mi'shinaschem; awaken you slumberers from your sleep." At this crucial time when we are soon to be judged for life, prosperity, and health, the shofar alerts us to our impending judgment. We are to arouse ourselves, waking up from our routine activities and backsliding during this past year. We are to examine ourselves, search out

our flaws, and respond with a renewed strengthening of Torah values and actions. But why use a shofar? What is its significance?

### Purpose of the Blasts

We learn that the blasts of the shofar are meant to resemble the weeping and sobbing of Sisra's mother. This is why we have long and short blasts, as weeping takes on different types of cries. Sisra's mother awaited her son's return from battle. (Judges 5). Sisra delayed in returning. Sisra's mother assumed he was dividing great booty, so this must have taken time. But later, her assumption of good slowly turned towards reality, and she realized he must have perished at war. Her sobbing was a response to recognizing reality. The shofar blasts are to make us associate to Sisra's mother's sobbings: her return to reality. We too must return to reality, that is, returning to a life of Torah. This is enforced by Rosh Hashanna, a day when we direct our attention to God's exclusive role as King, Who knows all

our thoughts and actions and Who rules the entire world. During our last prayer on Yom Kippur—Neila—we say, "so that we may disengage from the oppression of our hands." Our daily activities of work, family and other pursuits distract us from what our true focus must be: the study and application of God's Torah system.

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 26b teaches that a shofar used for Rosh Hashanna must be bent, not straight. This is to resemble man's "bent" state of mind: he is bent over in humility. This presents a contrast: God is King, but we are His creations. Our undistorted recognition of God's role as our Creator and King, results in our sense of humility.

### The Shofar at Mount Sinai

We find the shofar associated with many events. The shofar waxed increasingly louder at Sinai when God gave us His Torah: "And it was that the sound of the shofar went and grew increasingly loud... (Exod. 19:19)." Why was shofar integral to Sinai? Sinai was also much earlier than Sisra. Does Sinai's shofar convey a different idea than sobbing? It would seem sobbing is unrelated to Sinai. What is Sinai's shofar to teach us? Rashi states that it is the custom of man that when he blows for a long period, the sound gets increasingly weaker and more faint. But at Sinai, the sound grew increasingly louder. Rashi clearly indicates the lesson of shofar is to teach that man did not orchestrate this event. Shofar is to reflect the Creator's presence. Why was this lesson required at Sinai? Perhaps the very act of accepting the Torah is synonymous with our recognition that this Torah is God's ideas. Only such an appreciation will drive our studies towards answers, which resonate with absolute truth. God's knowledge is the only absolute truth. Truth is the purpose of Torah study. Torah was therefore given with the sound of the shofar, embodying this idea. Rashi also mentioned that the sound of the shofar on Sinai "breaks the ears." This means it carries great impact. Why was this quality of "sound" necessary? The miracles alone proved God's existence!

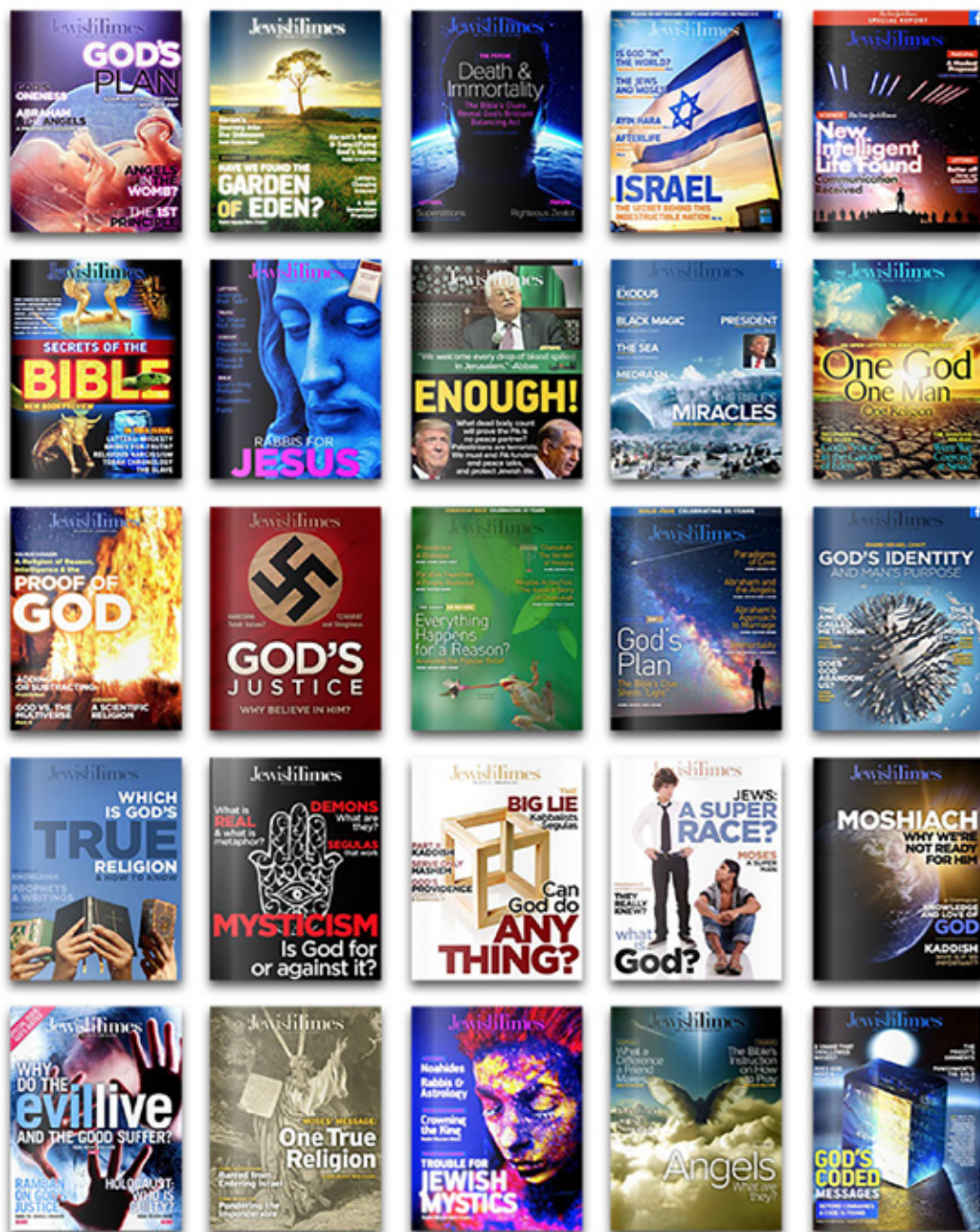
There is one difference between a sound and a visual: sound is perceived unavoidably. You cannot "hide" your ears. Turning away from a visual removes its sight, but this is inapplicable to sound, certainly a loud sound. It would appear that besides the grand spectacle of Sinai ablaze, when receiving the Torah, the Jews required uninterrupted attention. The shofar blast kept them attentive to the divine nature of this event.

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### Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a: "Rabbi Abahu said, 'God says blow before Me with a ram's horn, so that I may recall for you the binding of Isaac, son of Abraham, and I will consider it upon you as if you bound yourselves before Me.'" Since the ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac, our blasts of the ram's horn are to recall this event before God. It is clear from this Talmudic statement that Rosh Hashanna demands a complete devotion to God: we must render ourselves as if bound on the altar, like Isaac. We accomplish this via our shofar blasts. This act attests to our commitment to Abraham's sacrifice. We gain life in God's eyes by confirming Abraham's perfection. We follow his ways. This merit grants us life. The lesson of Abraham is not to end when Rosh Hashanna ends. This holiday is to redirect our focus from the mundane, to a lasting cognizance of God's presence and role as Creator. He is to occupy our thoughts throughout the year: "Bichol diracheha, da-ayhu, vihu yiyashare orchosecha; In all your ways, know Him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs, 3:6)."

But let us ask: why is the binding of Isaac central to the theme of Rosh Hashanna? There were many instances where great

people sacrificed themselves in the name of God? Let us take a closer look at that event.

When Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, and was subsequently commanded not to do so, he found a ram caught in the bushes: "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son" (Gen. 22:13). Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed: a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that God wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to express the perfection of adherence to God's command. Therefore, God prepared this ram. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that God intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

My close friend Shaye Mann suggested the following, insightful answer: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham. Abraham did not remove his attention from God, once he had his son back. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son would remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention to anything else. But Abraham's perfection didn't allow such a diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention and love was still completely bound up with God. This is where Abraham's energies were before the sacrifice, and afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from God, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying God. The ram teaches us this. Abraham remained steadfast with God. Abraham's perfection was twofold: 1) he was not reluctant to obey God, at any cost, and 2) nothing surpassed his attachment to God.

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## Maimonides on the Binding of Isaac

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham's binding of Isaac. I will record his first principle:

*The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of God. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions, which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared God, and loved to do what God commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of God. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear God, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc. that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a God-fearing man, all people shall*

*learn how far we must go in the fear of God. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of God, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear thy glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the 'akedab' (sacrifice or binding of Isaac).*

Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram's horn, displays man's height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the command of God. Shofar, the ram's horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to God.

We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on God's miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on God alone. This means, a true recognition of His place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of God, and loving God. Not the idea of God Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

## Shofar and the Jubilee

Another area requires shofar, the Jubilee year. This is the 50th year in the Hebrew calendar. After the shofar is blown, all slaves are set free, and all lands returns to their original inheritors apportioned by Joshua upon his initial conquest of Israel. What is the role of shofar here? Additionally, the shofar on Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee shofar. We are to use the same shofar on Rosh Hashanna as we use on the Jubilee. It would seem counter intuitive. Doesn't the day of Rosh Hashanna have more significance than a day, which occurs only once every 50 years? Why is the shofar of Rosh Hashanna derived from some area, which on the surface seems less significant? Maimonides states that once the shofar is blown, there is a pause until ten days later, Yom Kippur. Although free, slaves remain in the domain of their masters on those 10 days. Why do they not go free immediately upon the shofar

blast?

The Jubilee year teaches us yet another facet in recognizing God as Creator: man's "ownership" (slaves and land) is a mere fabrication. In truth, God owns everything. He created everything. Our ownership during our stay here is not absolute. We learn from the release of slaves and land, that ownership follows God's guidelines. It is a means by which we again come to the realization of God's role as our Master.

Perhaps Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee for good reason. The Jubilee attests to a more primary concept: God as Creator. Rosh Hashanna teaches us that God judges man, but this is based on the primary concept that God is Creator. Our recognition of God's judgment must be preceded by our knowledge of His role as Creator. Therefore, Rosh Hashanah's shofar is derived from the Jubilee's shofar.

Why don't slaves go free immediately upon the shofar blast? If slaves would be freed, their freedom during the entire ten-day period would eclipse their repentance. The law is perfect: masters cannot work these slaves anymore for fear of their preoccupation with ownership, and slaves cannot leave their masters homes, for fear that they would be self-absorbed in their new found freedom. Both, master and slave must focus on God's role as King during these ten Days of Repentance.

## Summary

In all our cases, we learn that shofar has one common theme: the recognition of God as our Creator. This is the true "healing of our souls." This recognition was essential for the Jews' acceptance of Torah, for our acceptance of God as the true Judge, and for us to view God as the absolute "Owner." Abraham expressed the zenith of man's love of God, so this event of the binding of Isaac is remembered, and reenacted via our shofar blasts. As a Rabbi once said, God created everything, so there must be great knowledge in all we see. I refer to our command of Shofar. ■

שנה  
טובה





# MITZVA

## מצוה

### A POWERFUL TOOL

Rabbi Israel Chait

**T**here are several types of tzedaka in parshas Ki Tetzei:

*When you reap the harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the orphan and the widow—in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings (Devarim 24:19).*

Rashi explains that even though the sheaves came into the hands of the poor without the owners' intent, the owner still receives God's blessing. The mitzva of shikcha (sheaves overlooked in the field) came to the poor accidentally because the owner forgot them. The owner did not intend to give the stalks to the poor; he left them behind accidentally and the poor came in and took them.

Rashi gives a kal v'chomer:

*If you didn't intend to give the wheat and you fulfill a mitzva, one who gives intentionally will surely be rewarded.*

Rashi adds another case of a man who accidentally drops money from his pocket. He is unaware that it dropped, and a poor man finds it and uses it. The owner of the money is credited with a mitzva, even though it wasn't his intention to give the money. It was an accident.

In both cases—the forgotten sheaves and the lost money—for a careless act, we are credited for the mitzva of tzedaka. If we fulfill a mitzva for an unintentional act, a person may not be aware of all the mitzvot he has performed because many were accidental and without intent.

This is a novel idea in the performance of mitzvot, where we are usually concerned with all the details of the performance. The Torah teaches us that we benefit from these mitzvot, even if they weren't performed perfectly or without full intent.

There is a very good reason for this: mitzva is such a powerful tool in perfecting a person, that even if it wasn't done 100 percent properly, we still gain from it. ■

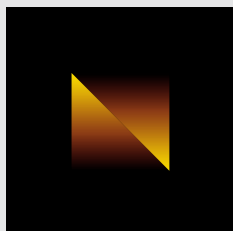
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# Joyful Trepidation

Rabbi Reuven Mann



**T**he holiday of Rosh Hashanah demonstrates the uniqueness of Judaism and the Jewish view of life. Virtually all people and cultures take note of a new year and mark it in a particular manner.

Most of them approach this time as one of celebrations and partying, as an opportunity to engage in all the physical and emotional indulgences that excite people. Why does the passage of one year and the onset of a new one generate mindless and drunken excess?

The Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is entirely different. While it retains the status of a Festival, it is best described as a time of seriousness. According to Judaism, one can be joyful and serious at the same time.

There is a deep and intense hidden joy that lies at the heart of Rosh Hashanah. For this is the time of the coronation of

the King of the Universe. At first glance, the very notion that man crowns G-d is absurd. Hashem is the absolute Ruler of the world by virtue of His being its Creator.

This is expressed in the “Adon Olam” composition, whose opening words proclaim, “Master of the Universe Who reigned before any creature was created.” He is the ultimate King by virtue of His existence.

Let us be absolutely clear: G-d does not in any way need nor does He derive any benefit from our coronation. Rather, it is man who needs the Kingship of G-d. Hashem, in His mercy, does not impose His rule on man. The goal of Rosh Hashanah is to transform the latent authority of the Creator into a dominant living reality that shapes the behavior of human society.

The immediate significance of Rosh

Hashanah is that, on it, the world was created. It brings us great joy to acknowledge G-d and to appreciate His infinite wisdom, as seen in the natural order and in the magnificence of His Torah.

This is a very different kind of joy than the one you will find expressed on New Year’s Eve in Times Square. That is a superficial, momentary sensation of excitement generated by overrated pleasures and assisted by the intake of alcoholic beverages, which distance a person from reality.

Acknowledging Hashem as the Master of the Universe carries with it an element of concern, for the most serious consequence of Divine rule is judgment. Aversion to this phenomenon—that we are responsible for our actions and will have to give an accounting for them—causes many people to abandon religion altogether. They may believe in G-d, but do not desire His intruding too closely into their lives.

In addition to the theme of G-d’s Kingship, Rosh Hashanah is also known as the Day of Judgment. In one of the day’s most moving prayers we intone, “On Rosh Hashanah it will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed, how many will pass from the earth and how many will be created; who will live and who will die.”

Because of this, the Hallel (joyous songs of praise) is not recited on this holiday or on Yom Kippur, for “the Book of Life and the Book of Death is open before Him and you would sing Hallel?”

However, even this somber realization does not cause these days to lose their celebratory character. They are days of joy mingled with seriousness. Even the consciousness that we are being judged by the King of Kings does not bring us down. Indeed, we should even regard this as good fortune. Rabbi Akiva said, “You are fortunate Israel; before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? The Holy One Blessed is He.”

We are judged by Hashem, Who is infinite in compassion and Whose only purpose is to enable us to get closer to Him and thereby achieve the goodness He has intended for us. May we merit to experience and enjoy it. And may this be a wonderful year filled with all of Hashem’s blessings for us and for all of Klal Yisrael.

Shabbat shalom v’shana tova. ■

# Do this to discover if you'll live-out this year

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

**Jessie:** “R. Ami says, ‘If you want to know if you're going to live through the year, light a lamp during the 10 days between Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur, in a house where there's no wind. If it continues to burn, you will complete your year (Horayos 12a).”

Can you provide a rational explanation so it's not superstition [a fallacy, which is also forbidden]?

**Rabbi:** The gemara says further, “And when you study, study adjacent to a river of water; just as the water flows, your studies will flow.” This cannot be causative outside of natural law, as nothing exists other than nature. It must mean that certain physical stimuli engender specific positive attitudes, as the Rabbis teach that a depressed person should walk in the park, as natural beauty calms one's nature. Similarly, flowing water engenders a “steady stream” or continuity in one's emotional state. This can apply to painting as well, not just Torah study. The uninterrupted flow naturally permeates one's emotions. It is interesting, but this is God's design of man: our emotions are affected in a like kind to the stimuli.

A flickering flame is akin to something alive; we describe people who passed as “extinguished.” The gemara saying that this metaphor reinforces a certain attitude during the time when we are judged for life. The person who desires life takes a measure of concern to assure the flame will not be in a windy area; thereby, reflecting his true concern to act properly during the 10 days of repentance. That is, if one takes this measure to ensure the flame remains alight, it reflects his already existing concern for life, and he must be acting properly already. But it's a reflection, not a causative phenomenon. One who lives properly will enjoy life another year even without this flame. So this is actually different than the stream, which does engender an attitude naturally.

Thus, these phenomena can either be causative (stream), or act as a barometer (flame). Perhaps also a flame is used as it keeps one mindful of his concern, day and night. ■





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