



# JewishTimes

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on Parsha

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on Wisdom

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*Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim*

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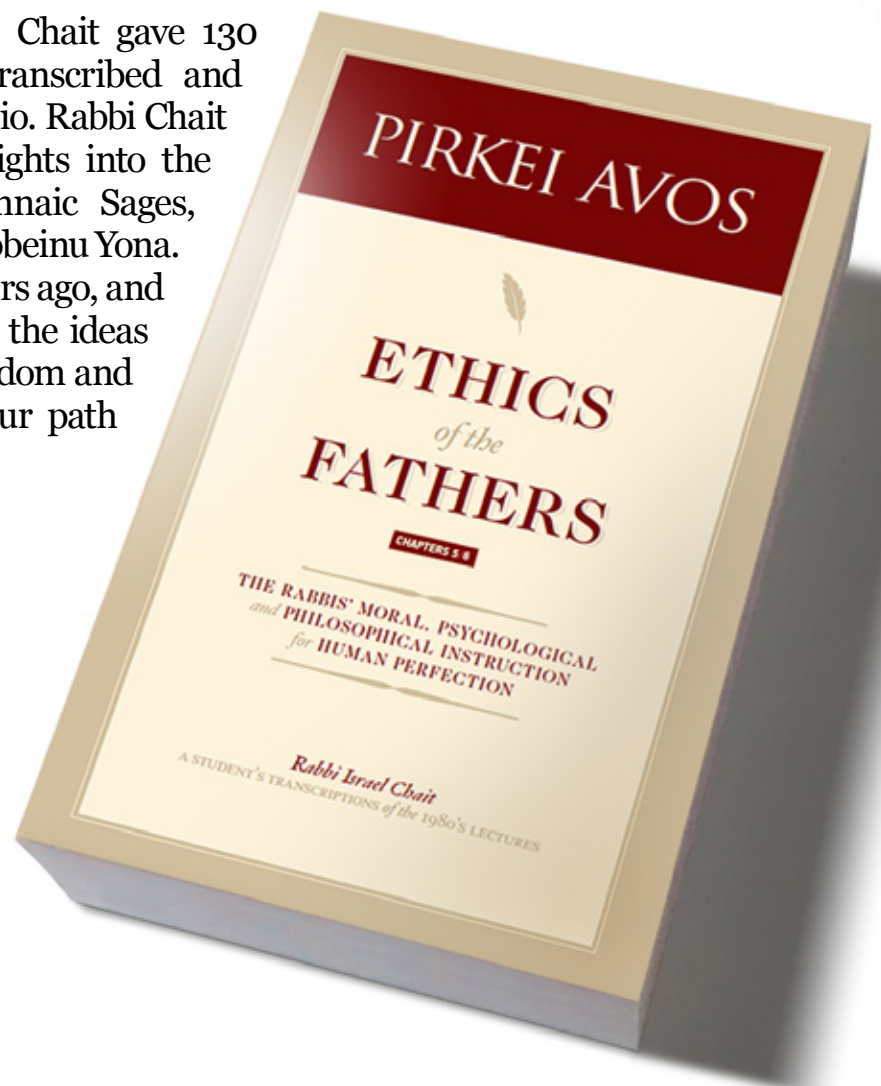
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## THOUGHTS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



## What is Wisdom?

Alexander asked the ages, "Who is wise?" The sages replied, "One who anticipates the outcome of his acts" (Avos 2:9). (Tamid 32a)

A wise person studies the universe and its laws, he studies the range of human behavior and physical needs and plans accordingly. He seeks to comply with reality, not his emotions which

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Alexander the Great

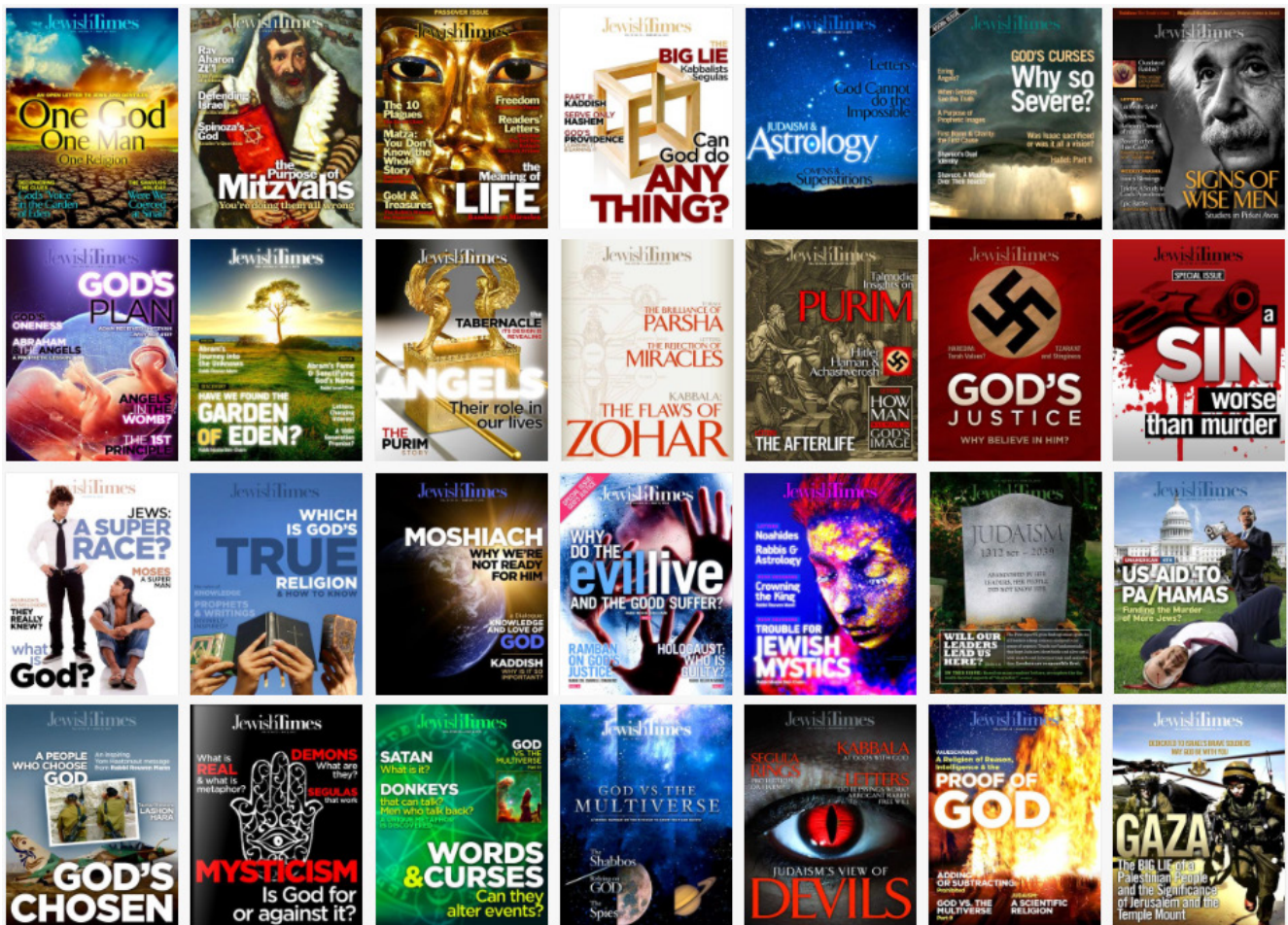
oppose it. Based on a given person's personality and temperament, a wise person knows what to say and what not to say (to avoid conflict and self harm). Jacob embodied this when confronted by Esav. Joseph embodied one who harnessed tragedy (famine) and sustained countries. He worked with reality.

The wise person is successful, as success refers to one who supplies all his needs and finds satisfaction. He expends energy to avert being homeless, hungry or alone. He assesses his needs, excels at a particular ability—or learns it—and diligently toils to live moderately, allowing ample time for his Torah pursuits. One who finds difficulty performing in this manner, may require counseling to realign his thoughts with reality. Such a person might be intelligent, but an emotion can block one's performance and hinder his life. With moderate knowledge and effort, a normal person can attain his needs. But the wise person excels over the average person in his greater knowledge to obtain what is good and avert harm. He is aware of all variables, so he undergoes fewer surprises and mishaps. Wisdom is the acquisition of knowledge and the understanding of how all God created interrelates, and finally, living according to that knowledge. ■



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PSALMS

# Torah is Perfect

## KINGS & RABBIS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**A**fter King David refers to the sun—“The heavens declare God’s honor...” —he says as follows: “God’s Torah is perfect, restoring the soul; God’s testaments are trustworthy, making the simple person wise. God’s pekudim are upright, gladdening the heart, God’s mitzvos are clear, giving the eyes light” (Psalms 19:8, 9).

Ibn Ezra comments:

*Up to this point, (referring to the heavens) King David refers to how an understanding person (who studies the heavens) finds testimony to God (His existence) and His actions. And David says there is also yet another witness that is more honored than the sun, and more trustworthy, and that is God’s Torah...”*

Man’s study of the universe is via derivation and deduction, and subject to our feeble human perception and limited thinking. Whereas Torah’s superior status is that it is God’s articulation, precise formulations of selected words, sentences and sections that lead to discoveries which man cannot find otherwise. Although man can misinterpret Torah, yet, Torah offers man far greater guidance to truths than man’s study of nature. This makes Torah an unparalleled gift, and why King David refers to it as “perfect.”

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Torah “restores the soul” as Radak says, the intellect (soul) is a “captive” among man’s other faculties—human emotions—that chase instinctual gratification. This chase inhibits man from using his limited energies in application to wisdom. But Torah catches man’s attention, and he finds its wisdom more appealing than physical satisfactions. Thereby, Torah releases the captive intellect and restores it to its natural state, and enables it to attain its full potential. This is the meaning that it “makes the simple person wise.” This is the measure of Torah’s capacity, that it imbues even the lowest of people with wisdom. This is Radak’s meaning of “And notice it restores the soul from captivity and confinement to her (rightful) birth and the place of her glory.” “Rightful birth” means the soul lost its attachment to wisdom when man chased lusts. But there is no permanent damage, as the soul—by design—finds great satisfaction in wisdom, and that cannot be changed. Chasing desires distracts the soul, but cannot disintegrate it. Thus, the soul can attain “its place of glory,” its full potential.

Ibn Ezra says *pekudim* (typically translated as statutes) refers to a deposit; matters that God “deposited” in man’s heart. How has God deposited? This refers to the design of the heart (emotions) and human intellect. God designed both in a manner that they find Torah pleasing. God “deposited” a design in the emotions and intelligence, that, when studying Torah, both faculties find Torah to perfectly comply with their design; there is no conflict but a pleasing satisfaction in Torah’s principles and in engaging its thought. Just as God designed the stomach to respond to food with satisfaction and happiness, the emotions and intelligence find Torah wisdom its perfect food.

“God’s mitzvos are clear” means that man can fully grasp them without confusion. What is unclear is not recognized, but Torah is clear. Torah also “gives light to man’s eyes.” Light is necessary to detect what exists, what is real. In darkness, one can only imagine what exists. But Torah’s “light” offers man knowledge of what is real, what is true. Being aware of all that exists, man is at ease, as he eliminates ignorance and its associated anxiety. But beliefs without validation from reality or God, like superstitions, mysticism, and segulos are not found in Torah. Maimonides teaches we are to accept as true only what our senses witness, what our minds demand

must be so (reason), and what God says (Letter to Marseilles). Otherwise, we are not to accept any premise or the beliefs of others, be they a rabbi or a person of great reputation. We respect truth alone, not reputations or titles.

Ibn Ezra teaches that, “for a wise person to understand God and His actions, Torah surpasses the study of nature.” Torah restores the soul to its original potential, elevating it to its highest level. We see this measure as it makes the simple person wise. God designed man to find Torah pleasing, both emotionally and intellectually. As Torah contains clear principles and laws, that enlighten man to all truths.

We must take to heart these words of our greatest leader, King David. Psalms contains deep wisdom that our rabbis have unveiled in their commentaries. So we must not simply read Psalms, but analyze it. Otherwise, we miss its precise lessons and the happiness offered by its pearls of bright wisdom. ■





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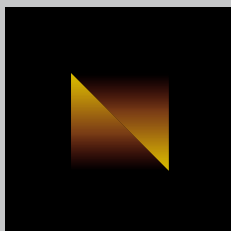
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LETTERS

DO UNTO OTHERS  
AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM  
DO UNTO YOU





# Human Unity

Howard Salamon

We all are in shock after this week's anti-Semitic incident in Monsey, NY. This follows a string of recent hate crimes against Jews where people were killed and injured, just for being a Jew. Today, another madman killed 2 people in Las Vegas stepping into Church during communion and opening fire with a shotgun. Their crime? Being Christian. While we are feeling much pain as we identify with our Jewish brethren who are now being treated in hospitals.

**We must identify with all humans, regardless of race or religion.**

An attack on one, is an attack on us all. Today it's a Jew, tomorrow a Christian, then a Hindu or Muslim etc. We live in the freest country on the planet where we can practice whatever religion we want to, at least until all these incidents. It seems like we are losing this freedom.

Today I heard a politician blaming President Trump for these anti-Semitic crimes. How idiotic is this? Another Trump derangement syndrome person. Probably

to hide their ineptness in controlling the mob, governing or just letting them do whatever they want. I heard others saying that now we are going to prosecute these animals to the full letter of the law. Sounds encouraging right? My guess is that after a week or so it will be out of the news. And what are the laws? Obviously they aren't working out too well. The politicians just have to say something for the populace. I heard Rabbi Potashnik on the radio today where he said it's very nice to come together and pray, but we can't feel that by showing tolerance to these animals they are going to treat us nicely. There must be punishment for people who break the law and for hurting someone just for following his religion. There should be a severe punishment so people will think twice before they act.

It's time for all citizens—religious or not, locally and nationally—to come together as one voice and demand action from all our politicians. May God grant a speedy recovery to all injured human beings of all races and religions. ■

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# The Champion of Forgiveness

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**O**ne of the themes of this week's parsha, Vayigash, is the very limited scope of human power. This was brought to the fore when Yosef revealed himself to his siblings.

The brothers were in for a shock. They had suffered rough and unpredictable treatment at the hands of this strange Egyptian ruler who alternated between displays of thoughtfulness and kindness and arbitrary accusations.

Acceding to Yosef's demand, the brothers returned to Egypt with Binyamin in tow. They also brought the "purchase" money that had been eerily restored to their knapsacks, unsure of what awaited them.

Their anxiety level climbed a notch when they were inexplicably brought to Yosef's house. But they were quickly relieved when told not to worry about the hidden currency they had found.

From that point on, things only got better. The Egyptian ruler hosted them and gave them generous gifts, apparently to make up for the aggravation he had caused them. The brothers bowed in gratitude when the ruler inquired about the wellbeing of their father. And "they imbibed and and became drunk with him." They departed early in the morning with all their trepidations seemingly behind them.

The euphoria did not last long. Yosef had planted his special "divining" cup in

Binyamin's saddlebag. His aim was to entrap his younger sibling to determine how Yaakov's sons would react to their youngest brother's incarceration.

Yehudah, who was the guarantor of Binyamin's safekeeping, rose to the occasion. He made an impassioned plea to the ruler, focusing on the effect Yosef's action would have on their aged father, who could not survive the loss of his youngest child.

Yehudah therefore proposed that the magnate take him as a slave in place of Binyamin. This would resolve the ruler's need to execute punishment for the theft of his goblet and avoid inflicting unbearable pain on Yaakov.

Yehudah's plea touched Yosef to his core. Yehudah's willingness to sacrifice his freedom to achieve Binyamin's release demonstrated complete repentance for the crime of selling Yosef. So at last, the time had come for Yosef to end the charade and reveal himself. One can imagine the brothers' shock when the ruler cleared all strangers from the room and proclaimed, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" But "his brothers could not answer him; they were disoriented before him."

After the brothers calmed down Yosef addressed them. He understood that they would fear retribution for the heinous crime of selling him into slavery. His goal was to

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have Yaakov and the entire family relocate to Egypt so he could sustain them and their livestock through the famine. To do this, he would have to assure them of his absolute forgiveness.

Yosef explained why the brothers had no reason to fear him. He told them that, in spite of their intention to harm him, his being sold to Egypt was a great good, because it provided deliverance for the family.

Not only that, but “it was not you who sent me here but G-d; He has made me a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household and ruler throughout the entire land of Egypt.”

Yosef was affirming to them that he harbored no resentment for what they had done to him. Clearly, though, that he was not exonerating them for their sin. In fact, the purpose of his harsh treatment was to stimulate them to teshuvah (repentance).

He was only explaining why he bore them no ill will. He regarded their intended crime from the standpoint of a world that is governed by divine Providence. And in which man's ability to control events is very limited.

So in effect, Yosef was saying to his brothers, “When you sold me to Egypt, did you have any idea that that it was actually Hashem's will that I be there to save our family? Did you realize that your actions were entirely in accordance with His plan? And did it occur to you that it is not you who are the cause of my being here, but rather Hashem, all to bring about a great salvation?

Well, said Yosef, that is how I look at the

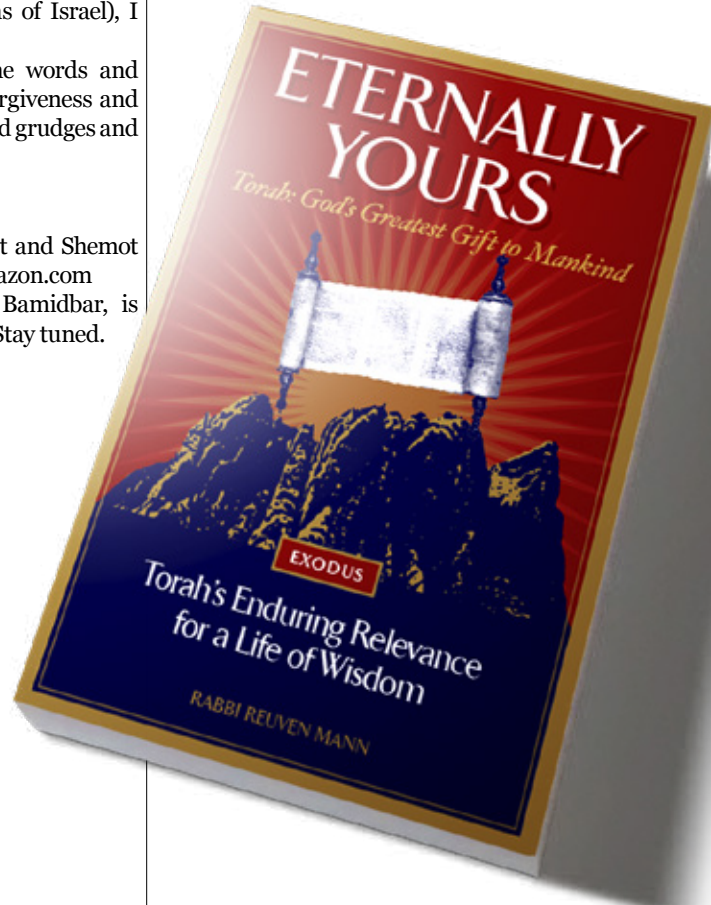
matter of the selling. It was a great thing, because it enabled me to help accomplish Hashem's plan to save the family and bring us to the next phase in Klal Yisrael's development. Therefore, I have no regrets and no reason for any resentments and because you are essentially righteous people, the B'nei Yisrael (sons of Israel), I truly love and forgive you.

May we study carefully the words and actions of the champion of forgiveness and rid our souls of all unwarranted grudges and resentments.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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The next installment, on Bamidbar, is almost ready for publication. Stay tuned.



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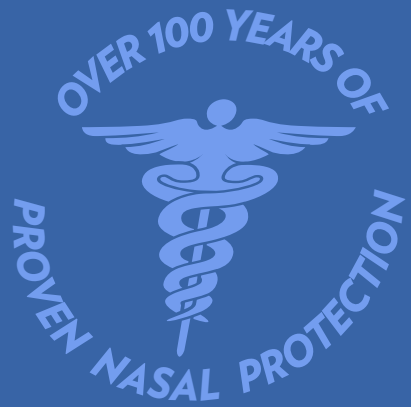
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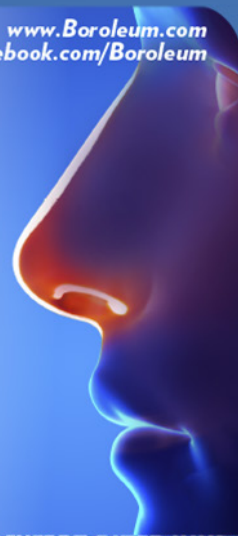
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