

JewishTimes

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THE 17TH OF TAMMUZ

Our Sins



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THE LOSS OF MERIT

Why Lose it?



NEW WEBSITE

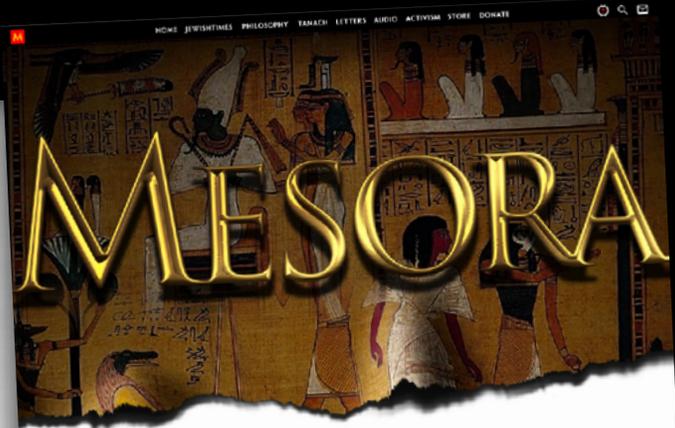
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MISSION

God's Revelation at Mt. Sinai: One Plan for Mankind

The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

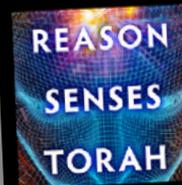
MESORA
Summer 2020

EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a religion offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the only time God communicated a religion to man. Masses witnessed this, which is the only validation of any historical claim, and why the major religions accept the Bible. Mesora's mission is to share God's Biblical religion with all who seek it. As every human descends from that first couple; all humans are equals. Jews boasting "Jewish Superiority" and those who discriminate against any race violate the Bible and reason. Nearing a quarter century, Mesora helps others realize God's will for us all, sharing the beauty of Biblical wisdom. Search our 1000s of original essays, publications and audio, and write us with your questions. God determined the Jew's role is to share Torah's history, wisdom, laws and moral code with all mankind. As God created all mankind, He loves each person equally. As science has defined laws, God's will for man also has defined laws and principles, and they delight the soul. The greatest minds spent their lives studying God through Torah and science, as they found nothing that compared to its enjoyment. Let us humble ourselves before Moses, Kings David and Solomon, Maimonides, Aristotle, Newton and Einstein who taught that a life of wisdom is the most fulfilling life. We too can partake of this pleasurable existence.

THOUGHT

FUNDAMENTALS

"WHAT IS UNDETECTED BY THE SENSES, REASON OR TORAH, MUST NOT BE ACCEPTED AS TRUTH." MAIMONIDES



FEATURED

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CHARACTER

PERFECTION

"PERFECTION" REFERS TO ONE WHOSE VALUES AND ACTIONS COMPLY WITH TORAH PERSONALITIES AND LAWS: THE MOST PLEASANT LIFE.



KINDNESS

As equals, all humans must fully treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal or selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness to us.



RACISM: A LIE

Mankind descends from Adam. Black and white twins unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from a Moabite. "Better is the day of birth than the day of death." (Eccl. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us, but how

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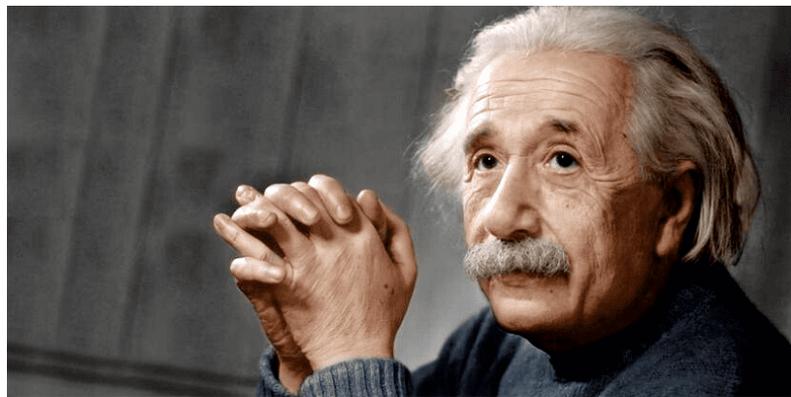
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Maimonides' 4th Principle is that God preceded all else. But what is the vital importance of knowing this?

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Bilam was unlike other prophets in his corrupt ways. Prophecy doesn't perfect a person.



"It's not that I am smarter, but that I stay with problems longer"

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Q&As

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STUDENT'S NOTES

The Greater Teacher

STUDENT: "These are the children of Aaron and Moses, on the day that God spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai" (Num. 3:1). As Moses' children are not mentioned, Rashi explains why Aaron's sons fill the capacity of Moses' "children": "Whomever teaches his friend's son Torah, it is considered as if he bore his friend's son." The very next Rashi says: "Aaron's offspring were rendered as his (Moses') own, since Moses taught them what he learned from God's mouth." These two Rashis seem redundant. What is the unique message of each one?

RABBI CHAIT: Psalms 27:10 says: "Though my father and mother abandoned me, the LORD will

take me in." Rashi comments: "At the time of intercourse, the parents' intent was for their own pleasure. Once they completed their pleasure, he turned his face to You and she turned her face to You."

Why should we honor parents? Rashi says parents gratified their instinctual urges, and that's why a child exists. As parents intended to satisfy themselves, why should this demand honor from the child? They did not intend their intercourse to benefit a child, but only to satisfy their desires! This is the meaning of "my parents abandoned me": although not yet existing during intercourse, the child is "as if" abandoned, since during intercourse, the parents paid no attention to the child-to-be, but only to their instinctual gratification.

Rashi then says, "The Holy Blessed One protected the drop [semen] and created the embryo."

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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The embryo's life is due to God. Thus, honoring parents—honoring that institution that generates life—must target honoring God, who is the true cause. That is why the command to honor parents is placed in the first of the two tablets, which address man's relationship with God. One might think honoring parents belongs on the second tablet that addresses interpersonal laws. But God—not parents—is the focus of the honor given to parents.

As honoring parents targets honoring God, one who teaches Torah to his friend's son plays the true "parental" role: he causes the son to honor God in a far greater measure than the biological parent. The teacher fills the truer parental capacity that biological parents intend to fill: to imbue the son with honor for God. This is the meaning of the first Rashi: "Whomever teaches his friend's son Torah, it is considered as if he bore his son."

The second Rashi says: "Aaron's offspring were rendered as Moses' own, since Moses taught them what he learned from God's mouth." This second Rashi must teach something new; Rashi isn't redundant. Moses' education of Aaron's sons elevated them in manner that eclipsed Aaron's education. When a person thinks, he relates to God. Moses imbued Aaron's sons with a level of thought higher than what Aaron taught them. While Aaron provided the necessary foundation for his son's knowledge of God, Moses elevated them to a higher degree. It is proper to say that the sons' degree of knowledge of God is due to Moses, in a manner unrelated to Aaron's education. It was Moses alone who brought Aaron's sons to the higher level of knowledge of God they now attained. In this manner, Aaron's sons were now rendered as solely Moses' sons. The second Rashi says, "they were rendered as his own," unlike the first Rashi that says, "Moses bore them." Rashi is precise.

As Moses taught Torah to Aaron's sons, he shared with Aaron the role as a parent. That's the first Rashi. But as Moses' education surpassed Aaron's education of his sons, Moses now functioned as the "sole provider" of that elevated knowledge of God. In this capacity, Aaron's sons were no longer his, but solely Moses' own creation. Aaron played no role in the higher level his sons attained due to Moses' education. ■

The Loss of Merit

STUDENT: How do we understand Jacob's fear of "losing merit?"

RABBI CHAIT: "The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, 'We came to your brother Esav; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.' Jacob was greatly frightened; this vexed him, and he divided the people with him and the flocks and herds and camels into two camps, thinking, 'If Esav comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape.' Then Jacob said, 'God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, God, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal goodly with you!' I am unworthy of all the kindness and all the truth that You have shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav; lest he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count'' (Gen. 32:8-13).

Rashi comments:

"My merits are diminished in consequence of all the kindness and truth which You have already shown me. For this reason I am afraid: perhaps, since You made these promises to me, I have become defiled by sin, and this may cause me to be delivered unto Esav's power" (Shabbat 32a).

Rashi says that Jacob felt, "Maybe my merit decreased," and "Maybe I was defiled with sin." According to Rashi, what is the uniformity of these two ideas?

Gemara Shabbos 32a warns one from risking danger and relying on a miracle to be saved, citing this case regarding Jacob. However, as Jacob didn't place himself in danger, how does the gemara cite Jacob as an example? This idea that one loses his merit because God changes natural law to save him, is questionable. How does providence decrease one's merit? And in general, why should one lose his merit, he should retain it.

The principle is that when a miracle occurs for a person, he can't help but feel a certain egotistical pride that hashgacha (God's providence) is with him. His feeling of being

"close to God" is egotistical, and actually removes him from God. This is why he loses his merits. The gemara says that an egotistical person can't live in the same world with God: God says, "He and I can't live in one world." [Human life has but one focus, and that is God. With focussing on oneself, one lives not in God's world.] God promised Jacob kindness, and then fulfilled His word—God's "truth." Thereby, Jacob feared that he was "defiled by sin" through his view of God being close to him. This can happen to one who is completely blinded to true reality; he is convinced by a false notion in his mind: a notion that he is close to God. But in fact, he has deviated and fallen prey to a blind spot in his mind which is brought about when God promised him kindness, and He came through. That's like experiencing a miracle [both are divine benefits] and why the gemara cites this case. Once one feels that God is with him, one doesn't introspect, and he is not careful about his decisions. He can blindly commit the worst sins. Rashi learns "katonti" ("my merit decreased") means that as God came through on His promises, Jacob grew small. Through his assuredness of "being with God," Jacob could be blinded from sin and he worried that this had occurred.

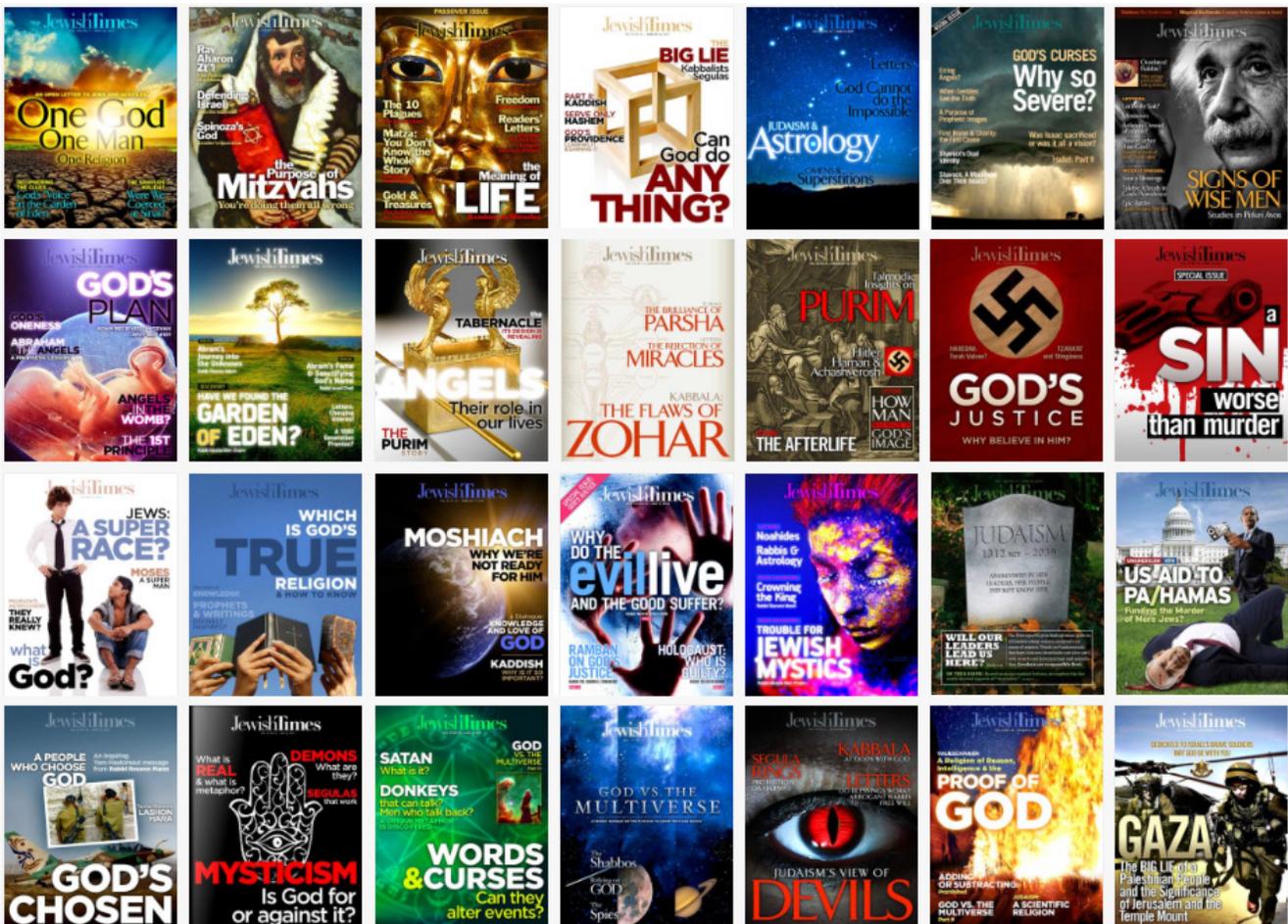
This answers our 3 questions: 1) Why should one forfeit his merit through God's kindness? 2) What is the uniformity in Rashi's two parts? 3) How does the gemara in Shabbos correlate Jacob to relying on a miracle?

Ramban raises a strong question on Rashi: If Jacob felt unworthy of God's kindness, how could Jacob then ask God to save him, saying, "Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea'?" (Ibid. 32:13) We answer as follows. Here, Jacob asked for God's kindness, but not due to his own merit. Citing these words "hatave aytiv; I will deal bountifully," Jacob invoked God's kindness on account of Abraham. Rashi comments, "I will also do good to thee on account of your father's merits." Jacob asked not for God to do good for his sake, but for what He promised to Abraham. The promise Jacob cites here "and make your offspring as the sands of the sea" was a promise to Abraham, not to Jacob. Thereby, Ramban's question is answered: Jacob pleaded with God not due to his merit which he might have lost, but due to God's promise to Abraham. ■

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EARTH

Why it Exists

What makes this idea
a fundamental?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Maimonides indicates that the 13 Principles are essential for one to receive the afterlife; erring in even one principle forfeits it. Therefore, it is vital that one sets time at present for this study.

But understanding Maimonides' words is only the first step. Like any teacher, limited words can deliver limited lessons and cannot exhaust all derivations. Like all rabbis wishing the best for us, Maimonides leads us to further discover what might be additionally derived through reasoning, and what other truths each principle demands.

For example, we are to wave the lulav north, south, east and west, and we are also to wave it heavenward and downward. But with those facts alone, we don't arrive at the ultimate lesson of lulav; with additional thought, we can. All 4 directions relate to man's activities on earth: man travels upon the earth's horizontal plane in 4 directions of the X axis. He does not fly upward on the Y axis; up and down refers to what is up, and what is down: the heavens are up, earth is down. We now arrive at the lesson. We give thanks to God for His produce (waving lulav, esrog, etc.) as He is the being that 1) created everything (heavens/earth). And we give thanks to God 2) who governs man's actions (4 directions). He created all and He knows all: the main themes of the High Holidays—Malchuyos (omnipotence) and Zechronos (omniscience). Our benefit of produce is due to God's 1) creation of that produce, and 2) His government of man by supplying worthy societies with that produce. This reasoning uncovers the underlying message of waving the lulav as we do. Let's apply this analysis to Principle IV.

Maimonides' Principle IV is that God preceded all else. We grasp that factually, but what is vital in knowing "God came first" that qualifies it as one of Judaism's fundamentals? Since we forfeit afterlife through ignorance of these principles, these principles must reflect on the greatest of all areas: knowledge of God. What else can we deduce from God being first?

This teaches that the universe is God's will, not a mere accident of God's existence, like a shadow (Aristotle). Knowing God intended the universe means the universe has a great purpose; it has such importance that it deserved God's will to come into existence. Rashi explains (Avos 2:8) that if the Jews don't follow Torah, the earth will be destroyed. "The heavens are to God, but the earth God gave to man" (Psalms 115:16). Earth was created for man to learn Torah. The rabbis teach that all in earth is to facilitate man's study of creation and Torah. Earth was not made for inanimate elements, or even living creatures bereft of intellect. Earth was created with wisdom to offer a species the opportunity to be amazed by God's wisdom. Thereby we further derive that the Creator is most kind, as He created a species that can perceive His wisdom and derive great joy from that knowledge. This is fundamental in understanding God: He desires man to find the greatest satisfaction, and this is only through using his unique intellect, which no other creature possesses. God's wisdom is the purpose of earth. We derive how essential it is that we prioritize Torah study in our short lifespans.

This principle that God preceded all else teaches us about God's kindness to His creatures. Earth isn't an accident, but forms part of God's plan that man perceives God. This is a fundamental idea about God's kindness and not merely a statement about who came first. ■

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PUNISHMENT

17TH of Tammuz

Where We Fail

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Five calamities occurred to our forefathers on the seventeenth of Tammuz. Moses descended [from Mt. Sinai with the tablets], he observed the people worshipping the Golden Calf and, 1) Moses broke the tablets. And it is written: "And it came to pass, as soon as he came near to the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing, and Moses' anger burned, and he cast the tablets out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount" (Exodus 32:19).

Also on the seventeenth of Tammuz:

- 2) the city walls of Jerusalem were breached,
- 3) Apostemos publicly burned a Torah scroll,
- 4) Mennashe placed an idol in the Sanctuary, and
- 5) the daily sacrifice ceased. (Taanis 28b).

Due to random variables, our life's events have no pattern. Reflect on your car accidents, family birthdays, illnesses, career changes and stock fluctuations. Did these all occur on the 1st of the month? Like all events, they happened at unrelated chance moments. But these 5 tragedies deviated from nature law, all occurring on the same date. Concurring tragedies intend to awaken sinners that these events have an Orchestrator who disapproves of our lives. God is sending a message; He is punishing us for our sins. The message should be clear, but do we listen, and repent? As Temple is still not rebuilt, our flaws remain. But do we understand these 5 sins; do they share a common theme?

Moshe broke the tablets lest the Jews deify them as they deified the Gold Calf (Rabbi Israel Chait). The Jews veered from metaphysical God and sought religious expression through a lifeless, yet tangible Egyptian model. The holy city was breached; a city designated for worshipping God, but wherein the Jews failed at His worship and served idols. Our Torah was burned, idols were erected in Temple, and sacrifice halted. We abandoned God for idols, we left His worship, and we left His Torah. We will again fast and mourn for our degraded state until God once again takes prominence in our minds, in our hearts and in our lives. But this cannot occur without prioritization of Torah study and practice.

With what have we replaced God in our personal lives, that Temple remains in ruins? Do we chase money more than give charity? Do our egos expel God from our daily thoughts, fueling instead our obsession with man and the egoistic fires of lashon hara and dishonest business dealings? Have we abandoned Torah study as our primary activity and focus? These tragedies all underscore our abandonment of God and Torah study. Reversing these sins is how we can earn God's providence and a renewed state for the Jewish people.

One difficulty in repentance is that most Jews live in cultures that praise the antithesis of Torah values: wealth, fame and instinctual gratification. Man's ego dominates his interests and speech. Man's ego drives him to seek social acceptance. Society has become man's ego ideal; man bends over backward for societal approval regardless of society's base values. At the root of many of our sins, like wealth and fame, is the yearning for human recognition. But if we follow our great kings and rabbis who taught how precious and satisfying is Torah study, man would lose prominence in our eyes, we wouldn't sacrifice all for wealth and fame, and we would be fully content exploring God's wisdom. But as society doesn't value Torah, from where will Jews learn the right path? It is up to our Torah teachers to correct our communities and individuals. So I ask rabbis, teachers and my dear friends dedicated to Torah to help others by multiplying your efforts teaching Torah and uncovering our sins. May God strengthen your efforts a hundredfold. ■

The Arrogant Prophet

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Pinchas, tells the story of a great person who countered the evil intentions of Bilaam who had advised the leaders of Moab and Midian to use their young women to seduce the Jewish men into idolatry.

A unique individual, Bilaam embodied mutually contradictory characteristics. He had a very strange relationship with G-d. He certainly recognized the supreme might of the Creator. This can be seen in his words to Balak, who beseeched him to "curse" the Jews. "Whatever word G-d puts in my mouth, that I shall speak."

Bilaam was granted a very high level of prophecy. He expressed wonderful things about the Jews and foretold their glorious future in the Messianic era. But after experiencing such an exalted spiritual high, he descended to the lowest depths. Balak engaged Bilaam to weaken the Jews via curses, but when he was prevented from doing that, Bilaam came up with a diabolical plan.

Historically, Jews have faced two kinds of enemies. The overwhelming majority of our opponents vilify Judaism and deny that we have been chosen by G-d. These foes accuse the Jews of every manner of wickedness and vociferously negate our claim to be the bearers of G-d's Revelation to the world.

The Rabbis foresaw that the entire world would oppose the Jews. They famously said, "Why was the Torah given on Mount Sinai? Because from there hatred went forth to the entire world." The word Sinai is related to the Hebrew word *sinah*, which means hatred. In other words, hatred was engendered by jealousy because the Jews were given the Torah.

This implies that the Gentiles do indeed recognize that the Torah is from Hashem and desire it for themselves. If that is the case, how are we to understand their disparagement of our religion?



In my opinion, classical antisemites are motivated by religious envy, because deep down they are convinced that the Torah is true. But they are prevented from acknowledging this, even to themselves, because of their visceral hatred of Jews. Bilaam, however, personified another type of antisemitism. He communicated with Hashem, who told him, "You shall not curse the nation, because they are blessed."

As a supreme egotist, Bilaam viewed everything from the standpoint of power. He realized that no one could oppose the might of Hashem. His difficulty was his inability to subordinate himself to his "Father in heaven." His great arrogance allowed him to believe that he could "outsmart" the Creator and achieve his personal goals.

Shrewdly, Bilaam studied the ways of Hashem. According to the Rabbis, he calculated the times when Hashem sat in judgment over sinners, and then he would "curse" them and subsequently attribute their suffering to his pronouncements. He thus sought to

"exploit" G-d's system of governing the world for his own purposes.

But he was entirely helpless in response to Balak's request that he curse the Jews. Hashem would simply not give him leave to do this, but would instead make him the mouthpiece to express the highest virtues of the Jewish people.

In spite of the fact that he had been granted access to sublime prophecies, Bilaam's basic nature was unchanged. He remained arrogant, egotistical, and determined to "win." He did not engage in the *milchemet hachayim* (battle of existence), seeking to overcome and subdue his *yetzer harah* (evil inclination). This war is the basic purpose of life, and there is no escaping it. No matter how smart, talented, or creative one is, we must all wage war with ourselves to overcome our primal arrogance and truly subordinate our will to that of our Father in heaven.

Bilaam could not do this. Instead, he sought to "defeat" Hashem's objective by bringing great harm to His Chosen People. His method

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

was diabolical, actually plotting to cause Hashem to harm His people. By studying the Torah, which he believed it to be true, he learned that the G-d of the Jews "hates promiscuity," especially when it is combined with idolatry. This knowledge did not elevate Bilaam; instead he utilized it to attain his nefarious aims. He advised the leaders of Moab and Midian to instruct their women to seduce the Jewish men and thereby render them vulnerable to Divine punishment.

Bilaam's plot caused great harm. As he imagined, the Jews were enticed into sexuality and idolatry. And Hashem punished them with a plague that killed 24,000 sinners. But Bilaam had not reckoned upon the likes of a man like Pinchas, for he had no ability to comprehend the character of a genuine tzaddik (righteous man).

Pinchas was a man of great energy who zealously fought for the honor of Hashem by summarily executing the Jewish leader who consorted with the Midianite princess. He exemplifies man's ability to redirect all his instinctual forces to the service of G-d. At various times in history, genuine Jewish zealots have heroically emerged to rescue the Jews from calamity.

Every one of us should seek to cultivate, according to the level of our ability, the virtue of a true zealot for Hashem. This stands in complete opposition to the contemporary ideal that we must respect all opinions, no matter how outrageous.

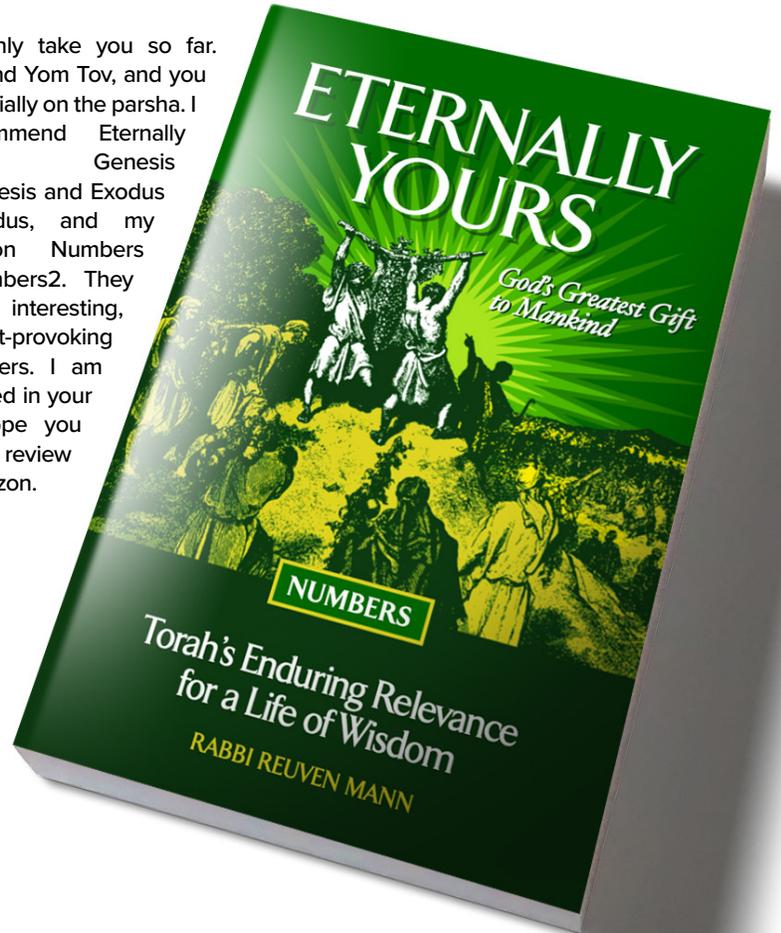
As Jews, we must be committed to the truths of our Torah, courageously and intelligently speaking out when the name of Hashem is in danger of being desecrated. For there is no greater mitzvah than to sanctify G-d's Name in the sight of the Jews and the whole world. May we merit to achieve this.

Shabbat shalom. ■

Dear Friends,

In this time of "social isolation," we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online.

But that can only take you so far. Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.



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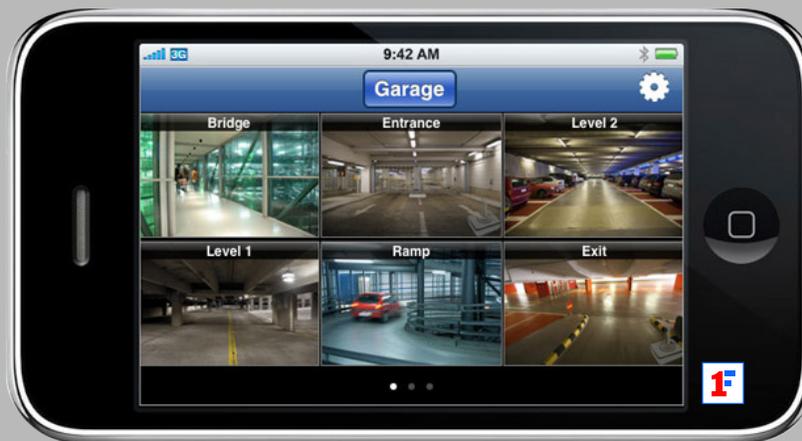


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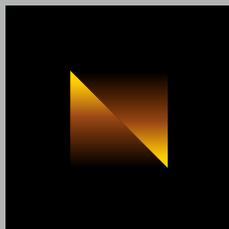
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