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Outdated?

The Jews:
Under Scrutiny

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Obeying
doctors but
not God?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



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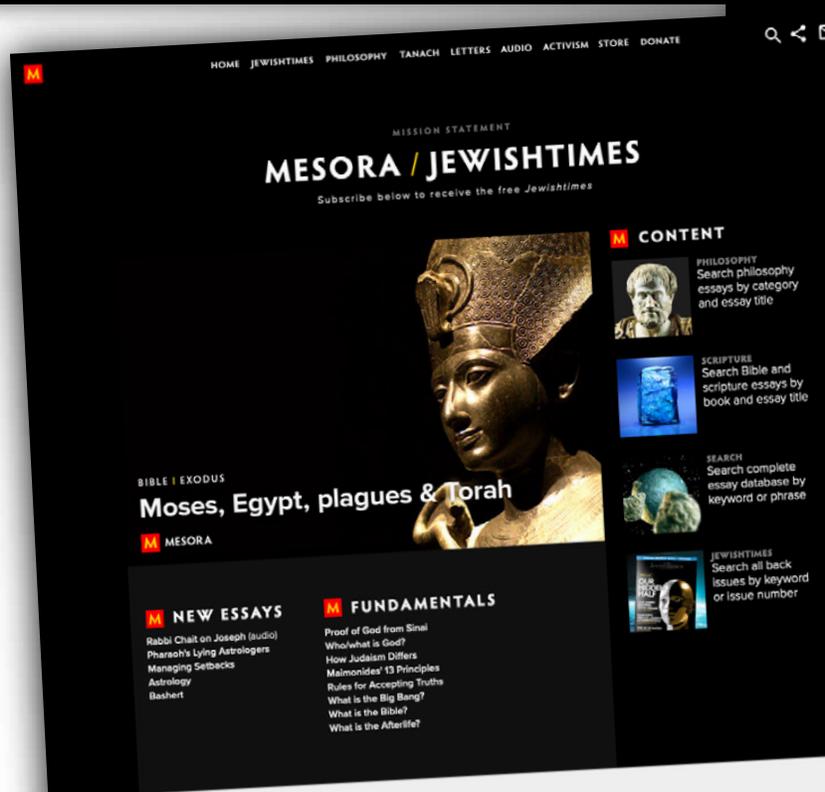
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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

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

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

EMAIL

ASK THE RABBI

JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

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"Against your will you were created, and against your will you were born, and against your will you live, and against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give account and reckoning before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He (Ethics 4:22)."

RABBI ELAZAR HAKAPOR

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

"Love Your Friend as Yourself"

READER: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). I personally go with the commentary of Rashbam and the Ohr Hachaim respectively: "If he is wicked you need not love him, as even God hates him as we know from Proverbs 8:13, "To fear the Lord is to hate evil," and Psalms 139:21 "You know I hate those who hate You, etc." What is your interpretation?

RABBI: This refers to your actions, not feelings. What you dislike, don't impose on others. But Torah cannot legislate feelings, only actions. Ibn Ezra says, "Its meaning is that one should love that which is good for one's neighbor as he does for himself." ■

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“The Death of the Righteous Atones”

READER: I am a new reader of your site. From an article I found “Why does Tzaddikim atone for all of us?” by Rabbi Elchanan Lewis, I have a question about the excerpt below:

How can the death of a Tzaddik become a Kapparah [atonement]? Answer: Tzadik is not a personal individual who impacts only himself, he is a public figure who impacts everyone around him; the loss of a Tzadik is, therefore, a public loss, not individual or family. The Tzadikim are not here for themselves, but for others - this is how they live their lives and this is how they also die; Just as death serves as an atonement for the deceased himself, the departure of a Tzadik does so for his community.

I find this affirmation strange: How could a man—even a just man—be an atonement for another man or for a community? It reminded me of the foolishness of Jesus.

—Willmes Gomes, Brasil

RABBI: True, Jesus’ death didn’t magically atone. It was a feel-good notion that was adopted, as was the remainder of that false religion.

But this rabbi’s words above concerning the death of the righteous atoning—which is true—does not explain how this atonement works. Talmud Moade Katan 28a states:

Rabbi Ami said: “Why was the Torah portion that describes the death of Miriam juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the red heifer? To tell you: Just as the red heifer atones for sin, so too, the death of the righteous atones for sin.” Rabbi Elazar said: “Why was the Torah portion that describes the death of Aaron juxtaposed to the portion discussing the priestly garments? This teaches that just as the priestly garments atone for sin, so too, the death of the righteous atones for sin.”

Moade Katan says that not only do sacrifices atone, but the priest’s garments atone. How so?

First, we must define “atonement.” This refers to God’s forgiveness of a sinner. But God grants forgiveness only to one who regrets his ways and commits to never returning to his sin. What generates one’s remorse for sin? When one sacrifices, he takes an animal life in place of his own. This is why he confesses his sins on the animal’s head. He accepts his wrong and that a life is required as payment, but God accepts the animal in his place. Killing the animal is man’s demonstration that his own life should be taken. He feels remorse, repents, commits to not sin again, and God forgives.

Why is it only the death of the righteous that atones for the community? It is because when one sees that even righteous people die, they draw an argument to themselves that they “certainly” have greater cause for death through their greater sins. The death of the righteous evokes self-reflection and

repentance, it also causes us to reflect on the righteousness of such people. This reflection leads us to value their perfections and copy them. It’s not magic: if one does not apply this lesson, the death of the righteous in no way atones for him. The priest’s clothing atone because his garments are designed around ideas. His breastplate carries the 12 Tribes’ name. The priest’s act of bringing the tribes names—all of Israel—before God in Temple, embodies the recognition that all Israel wish to draw near to God. The nation seeing this is aroused to embody drawing to God in their actions, which God sees and forgives. ■

Dialogue on Astrology

JEWISH ASTROLOGER: This week, Venus aligns with Saturn and thereby their energy empowers your greater decisiveness.

RABBI: 1000 years ago Maimonides wrote a letter to Marseilles rejecting astrology (mesora.org/LettertoMarseilles.htm) There is no evidence that stars/planets affect man. Maimonides critiqued astrology defenders citing King Solomon, “The simple believes everything” (Prov. 14:15). And Jeremiah 10:2-3 reads, “To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of the heavens do not fear...”

Let us use our minds and follow even greater minds as quoted above.

READER: Right, so I’m not going to argue with Maimonides. But he wrote things that are advised by many rabbis not to read. I definitely think we’re above the stars like Hashem said to Abraham, but when there’s a full moon my entire body feels it.

RABBI: No intelligent Rabbi says one should to avoid any type of knowledge. Such advice you received stems from a threat to one’s own notions. And what your body feels is psychological, because the full moon exists “every” night....it’s just not fully illuminated from our vantage point.

READER: Right, so the specific one I was implying was Guide for the Perplexed...many rabbis are categorically against reading that book, but I completely agree with his other teachings.

Not sure if what I’m feeling is psychological...you could be right, but I think nature effects us to some degree, and if that’s the case, the stars and moons would play some role too. I think when one is without God he is entirely dependent on nature, hence why Hashem said we are above the stars because. When we connect [to God], that changes.

RABBI: Objects cannot affect us at a distance, so any changes in yourself cannot be physical, but psychological. There’s no other possibility. And Guide to the Perplexed is a great book, definitely get it. I have been reading it for decades. Knowledge can’t hurt you, bit ignorance can. Rashi on Deuteronomy 18:9 teaches us to study false religions to know what to answer others.

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READER: I get what you're saying and I pride myself in being logical but I still leave some room for possibility.

RABBI: The philosophers and rabbis used their minds, they arrived at definite conclusions, just like Abraham who arrived at the conclusion that idol worship is false. He did not leave any room for the other possibility. If on the other hand, one does not exclude an opposing view, one has not acquired any knowledge.

READER: Great point! However unlike idols and things man made, the stars the universe and everything in nature was God made and for a purpose.

RABBI: I disagree. Regardless of the topic discussed—be it man-made or nature—arriving at a conclusion is “knowledge.” But leaving room for alternative possibilities means the mind is not convinced of anything...the mind has not “learned.” Topic is irrelevant. One can err about things without purpose like idolatry, and he can also err about the purpose is of God’s creations. And astrology is a great error about astronomy.

READER: What if the conclusion is wrong?

RABBI: What our mind says must be true, is what we must follow. Abraham didn't say, “Maybe I am wrong about God vs idolatry.” We don't say, “Maybe right is left.” ■

people would not view the house as a shelter, as the inside is inaccessible, preventing a person from gaining shelter indoors. One's understanding of the house would be wrong. Only once the house is completed with doors, do people accurately assess the house's true purpose. Similarly, man was created after all other creations so he might properly assess God's will, which can only be grasped through studying a complete set of creations.

Rabbi Simlai parallels creation to Torah laws. Just as man's accurate grasp of God's will in nature requires all creation to precede man, so too, all laws preceded man's laws to again indicate that to understand man's laws, we must see those laws within the full context of a complete Torah system. Laws concerning man are part of a totality, without which, our grasp of our laws would be incorrect. For example, had laws of ritual slaughter not existed, man would be missing the element of God's mercy over animals. Man would then have an incorrect view of God's command of human mercy. Had sabbath not existed prior to man, man would not value proclaiming creation through resembling God's rest each sabbath.

A complete natural system was set prior to creating man, thereby offering man an accurate picture of God's will. Similarly, a complete Torah system preceded man, as man's laws make sense only within the context of all other Torah laws. ■

Why God Made Man Last

READER: Torah says, “When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be unclean seven days...” (Lev. 12:1). Rashi comments: “R. Simlai said, ‘Even as the formation of man [in Genesis] took place after every cattle, beast and fowl when the world was created, so too, the law regarding man [women's ritually unfit] is explained after the law regarding cattle, beast and fowl’” [the previous Torah section discusses permitted and forbidden animals, followed here by laws concerning man].

My question is this: What is Rabbi Simlai's parallel between Genesis and Leviticus, between man's “creation” occurring after the animals and man's/woman's “laws” following the animals?

RABBI: Man's purpose is to study God's wisdom, explaining why man alone was granted a soul, an intellect. God completed all other creations before man would be created. In this manner, “the table was completely set,” i.e., creation was now a complete picture, ready for man to explore God's wisdom. But had man been created prior to the animals, or prior to any other creation, what man would witness would be an incomplete universe; his conclusions about God's will must then be wrong. Every earthly creation intends to reveal to man another aspect of God's will; the sum of all creation presents man with a total “accurate” picture. To arrive at an accurate understanding of God's will, man must be created after all else. Had a carpenter created a house without doors,

“Feel Good” Sayings are Bad

RABBI: People post self-help and encouraging sayings. Yesterday, I read this one: “If your path is more difficult, it is because your calling is higher.”

Such baseless placating notions, imagining “powers” guide our decisions, are self-destructive. Such sentiments prevent a suffering person from essential introspection, and correcting harmful thinking and actions which ruin lives. Thereby, they forfeit self-improvement and remain unhappy and unsuccessful. ■

Gambling & Smoking

READER: While I enjoyed the Jewishtimes 55 Q&As, could you bring a Torah source for why smoking and gambling are permissible. Yes, one cigarette does no harm, but a lifetime of smoking will kill a person. I am curious as to why you think smoking is allowed. Many thanks.

—Turk Hill (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

RABBI: Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igrot CM II:76) strongly discourages smoking, but he writes that since many people who smoke do not suffer any health problems, and most who smoke are not endangered by it, one may say that smoking is permitted because “the Lord watches the simple.”

Rav Moshe Feinstein said gambling is not openly prohibited, but is repulsive and not productive. (Igrot Moshe, Orech Chaim 4:35). ■

Chok (statute)

READER: I was reviewing your essay on the Red Heifer and would like to comment on your quote from Rabbi Chait below:

Rabbi Israel Chait once distinguished between Mitzvah and a Chok. Mitzvah is a law which a person would arrive at with his own thinking, such as murder and stealing. But Chok is a law that man would not arrive at on his own, such as wearing black boxes (tefillin), resting on Sabbath as a way of recognizing God, or laws of kosher. However, this does not mean that these laws do not share the same brilliance as every other law. Chok is distinguished from mitzvah only in the fact that man would not have innovated such a structure, but not that they are bereft of great wisdom.

The idea in general is a good one but there is a problem with your terminology. A Chok is a type of Mitzvah. As I remember Rabbi Chait explaining there are 3 types of Mitzvos (as referenced by the wise son's question):

- 1) Eidos-testaments: such as Tefillin and Mezuzah whose purpose is to testify to an idea i.e. Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus), Yichud Hashem (Unique Oneness of God) and Ohl Malchus Shamayim (the acceptance of the Yoke of Heaven).
- 2) Mishpatim-justice: laws whose purpose is obvious with respect to upholding a just society i.e. prohibitions against theft and murder.
- 3) Chukim-statutes: i.e. Sair LeAzazel and the Para Aduma.

It is not that one must abandon investigating an area such as a Chok because it is in some way lacking in Hashem's wisdom. It is filled with wisdom and should be studied like and other area. But, in a sense, the Chok partakes of the highest level of observance in the sense that man must subdue his own wants, desires and reasons for serving Hashem and must simply accept Hashem's will. [Since many chokim are difficult to understand, one's performance displays greater subjugation to God's will.] This notion applies to all areas of Torah, Chachma and observance of Mitzvos.

One must distinguish between observance and pursuing

wisdom and knowledge. We observe all Mitzvos because they are Tzivuyei Hashem (Commandments of God) irrespective of any idea or understanding that we might glean from them.

For example the Gemara in Maseches (Tractate) Shabbos discusses some of the ideas about Tefillin. One such idea is that the Tefilin-Shel-Rosh (the frontlet) is meant to be a type of crown. This is why it is acceptable to wear Tefillin for the purpose of beautification (Noy) on some occasions. When we combine the idea of the crown with the position of the box we can see the preeminence of the importance of Wisdom (it is placed on ones head by ones mind), Torah, knowledge of Hashem, reflecting on the Unique Oneness of Hashem and Yoke of Heaven. The frontlet contains four Parshiyos (segments of Torah) that reference these primary ideas. See also Nachmanides on Shemos 13:16 for several beautiful detailed explanations of Tefillin.

RABBI: Thank you for your clarification, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim ■

Pure Halachic Torah Judaism

READER: Shalom Aleichem Rabbi Moshe, Today's Q&A in the Jewishtimes was great. I really enjoyed the part about the shlissel challa. It brings joy to the heart the way you insisted and demonstrated in following the truth. It is rabbis like you who are a light unto the nations. Even though Torah judaism is the only religion, it is very unfortunate that it has been tainted with unwanted pagan, superstitious beliefs. Be'zraat Hashem let us continue to fight against false beliefs and get rid of them, following the pure halachic Torah Judaism that the our prophets taught us.

—Mark Stanley Gomez
Vetturnimadam, Tamilnadu

RABBI: Thank you, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim ■

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AND QUESTIONS TO
COMMENTS@MESORA.ORG**

Obeying doctors but not God?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Some might think Torah contains outdated laws. But as man's mind and psyche do not change, neither does Torah. Ever since Noah, all humans share the identical unchanging psychological, philosophical and biological design. This is supported by God's command that Torah never be altered (Deut. 13:1).

Others feel Torah is optional. However, Rabbi Elazar Hakapor said,

Against your will you were created, and against your will you were born, and against your will you live, and against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give account and reckoning before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He (Ethics 4:22).

I would add, "Against your will you need air, water and food." What do I mean?

If you would recognize that your physical existence and design is not your doing, but you were created where you depend on oxygen and physical nourishment, you should feel compelled to learn how God determined you will have the best psychological life: how you can be truly happy. God designed your body and created food as a perfect compliment. God also designed your mind and soul and He created Torah as their perfect compliment. In his statement above, Rabbi Elazar Hakapor shares the blatant truth that we were coerced into existence. We were also coerced to follow system which is not optional. But coercion isn't always negative, and "freedom" from religion does not lead to happiness. One who coerces a child to drink medicine saves the child. If we follow Torah, we will find only goodness and happiness. But people who oppose a Torah lifestyle veer from what can benefit them, just as children who don't swallow medicine will die. But it is wiser to follow the great Rabbis and God who taught that happiness is generated by following God's Torah, just as happiness is generated by following a doctor's advice.

We gain deep appreciation for God's Torah system when studying it. An intriguing form of Torah command is found in what some consider an archaic prohibition of eating blood. But as you will see, this law bears a most applicable lesson. Instead of continuing Torah's formulation of "Don't do this" or "Do this," God formulates the prohibition of eating blood, also including Himself in the command:

And if anyone of the house of Israel or of the converts who reside among them partakes of any blood, I will set My face against the person who partakes of the blood, and I will cut him off from among his kin. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for atonement for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects atonement. Therefore I say to the Israelite people, "No person among

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you shall partake of blood, nor shall the convert who resides among you partake of blood.” And if any Israelite or any convert who resides among them hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of all flesh—its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people, “You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh,” for the life of all flesh is its blood. Anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off. Any person, whether citizen or stranger, who eats what has died or has been torn by beasts shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he shall be clean (Lev. 17:10-15).

Repetition Provides Clues

God says, “Therefore I say to the Israelite people, ‘No person among you shall partake of blood’” (17:12). 17:14 repeats this: “Therefore I say to the Israelite people, ‘You shall not partake of the blood.’” Unlike other commands, here, God includes Himself in the warning by adding, “I say...” Why this inclusion? God could have simply said, “Don’t eat blood,” omitting the words “I say...” .

The blood eater is punished via “karase”—cut off—i.e., he loses the afterlife (17:15). In what manner is eating blood a greater crime than eating animal flesh without slaughter? The latter simply require bathing, but the blood eater loses his afterlife. In either case, as one simply eats animal derivative, how is blood eating more severe?

The Motivation to Eat Blood

17:14 repeats an idea: “For the life of all flesh; its blood is its life”; “For the life of all flesh is its blood.” What is this relationship between blood and life, and in what capacity does this relationship relate to the prohibition?

Loss of blood causes death. Thus, eating blood—not flesh—can be construed as granting life. But that’s mere imagination. The motivation is clear: one seeks to prolong his life by eating that which he deems is the source of life. It’s no surprise that there is a word “lifeblood.” Eating blood—not flesh—is man’s attempt at immortality. However, God is truly the only One who can grant life.

Maimonides writes:

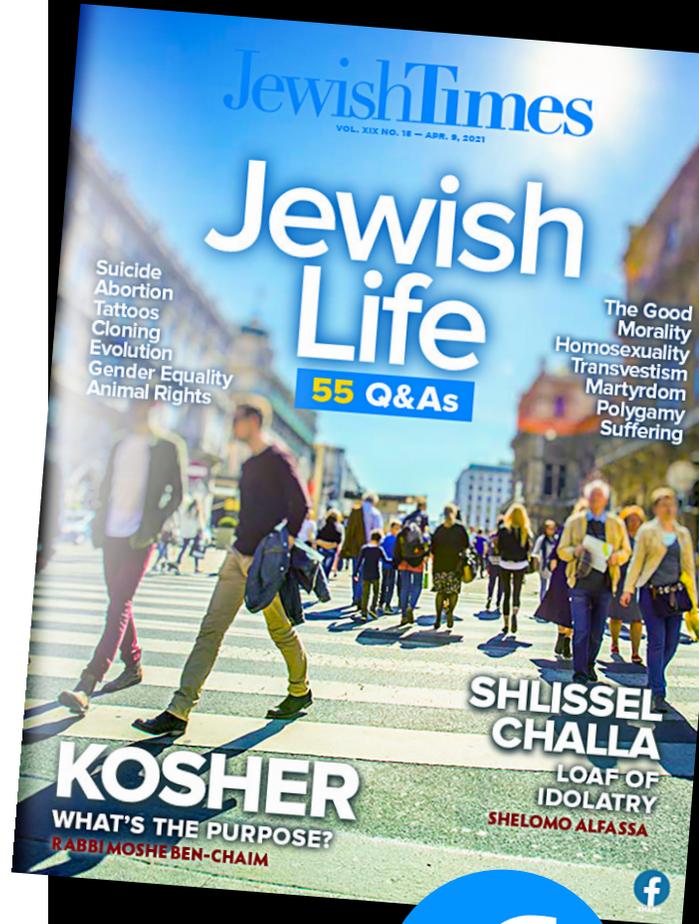
Man thought blood was the food of the spirits: by eating it man has something in common with the spirits, which join him and tell him future events... There were, however, people who objected to eating blood, as a thing naturally disliked by man; they killed a beast, received the blood in a vessel or in a pot, and ate of the flesh of that beast, whilst sitting round the blood. They imagined that in this manner the spirits would come to partake of the blood which was their food, whilst the idolaters were eating the flesh: that love, brotherhood, and friendship with the spirits were established, because they dined with the latter at one place and at the same time: that the spirits would appear to them in dreams, inform them of coming events, and be favorable to them” (Guide, book III, chap. xlvi).

Clearly, man’s estimation of blood was that it contained unique properties.

A Sin Against God

God repeats, “I say to the Israelite people, ‘No person among you shall partake of blood.’” Meaning, eating blood is a greater sin “against God” than other sins; the sinner goes against God who “told him” not to eat blood. Inasmuch as life is God’s greatest gift and man’s greatest value, if one seeks preservation of life through any means other than God, he commits this great sin: his view of God is not the “sole provider of life.” The punishment of eternal death directly responds to man’s error: “If you think life is preserved without God, your life is worthless and you lose the afterlife,” God says in other words. God sets His face against the person who eats blood (17:10) which Rashi interprets as “I will turn away from all My affairs and concern Myself [punish] only with him.” Simply put, this matter is urgent. Similarly, when the Jews sinned, God replied, “I, I forgive your sins” (Isaiah 43:25). Had God said, “I forgive sins,” that statement would teach that, “God forgives.” But by saying, “I, I forgive your sins,” the emphasis is on “God” being the only one who can

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forgive, as if saying, “I and no other forgives sin.” Here too, God says not to eat blood. In man’s vain attempt to secure life, God warns against eating blood to prolong life, since life is granted only by God.

God’s repetition emphasizes that blood eating is a greater denial of God than other sins. Life must be viewed as under God’s control alone. By eating blood, one rejects the One who told us not to eat blood. This Torah section concludes with eating carcasses, the remedy of which is simple bathing, whereas blood eating forfeits one’s afterlife. Eating blood is uniquely heretical, while eating carcasses is simply a lust.

2 Great Sins

Regarding the statement “I will set My face against him” Maimonides teaches this: “There is, besides idolatry (Lev. 20:5,6) and eating blood, no other sin in reference to which these words are used” (Guide, book iii, chap. xlvi). Meaning, these 2 sins share something severe. Blood eating drives towards life (immortality), and idolatry drives towards success. If man thinks either—life or success—is obtained other than through God, he has sinned in an ultimately harmful manner: he rejected the reality of reward and punishment (life and success are from God) and he believes in powers other than God. Such a person loses his right to life.

We now appreciate the severity of eating blood and what it shares with idolatry. The blood eater seeks to secure his immortality with a means other than God. The idolater seeks to secure success with a means other than God.

Why is a reason openly stated for not eating blood—“For the life of all flesh is its blood”—but no reasons are provided regarding other commands such as kosher, sending the mother bird, lulav, and many others?

As eating blood per se is not the true motivation, with His repeating “For the life of all flesh is its blood”, God unveils the hidden connection man makes between blood and life. Abstinence from blood per se is not God’s wish, rather, God desires our abstinence from seeking immortality through idolatrous measures. But as shooing the mother bird or wearing tefillin are the desired acts, we have sufficient information to arrive at these, and other commands’ purposes. Again, blood eating is not man’s goal—it is immortality. So God spells that out to help man discover his true sinful motives.

The Purpose of the Species

The prohibitions of eating a limb from a living animal (evair min ha’chai) and eating blood teach that the appetitive drive should not override sustaining a species. On a basic level,

Noahide laws prohibit treating a living creature as food. A more extensive application of this concept is that even if an animal is dead, Jews must not treat the blood as an edible object due to its direct relationship to life. So, while the Noahide must only treat animals as a species in their lives, Jews must maintain animals’ higher purpose even after they have died, by abstaining from their blood.

Not eating a living animal for a Noahide, and the Jews’ abstinence of eating blood both target man’s recognition that animals exist not primarily as food, but that in their live states they display God’s wisdom through their behaviors and design.

Man’s existence has value, provided he abides by God’s laws. But once man stooped to an instinctual level, the Flood was required. Here too, both Noahide and Jew lose their existence through these sins.

At the same time we do not support animal rights, that animals have any value outside human existence. All that God created on Earth is for the purpose of the intelligent being that can draw closer to his creator by engaging thought, reason and wisdom. Animals do not have a purpose other than to assist man in his physical needs, but primarily, to help man appreciate God’s design of the universe and the animal kingdom. “God brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them” (Gen. 2:19). God designed each species with unique qualities which reveal His wisdom to man.

The core principle of not eating a limb from a living animal or eating blood is that human appetite does not override the primary purpose of the animal kingdom: to provide man insight into God’s wisdom. Originally animals were prohibited to be eaten. Post Flood generations through today were weakened physically to

avert man’s invincibility and tame his ego which were responsible for man’s sins (Rabbi Israel Chait). Thus, allowing animals as nutrition was God’s concession to compensate for man’s weakness.

Sustaining a species is more important than a person’s appetitive drive because the species offer man insight into God’s wisdom, whereas the appetitive drive is merely a catering to man’s lusts.

Vampires, Jesus and Torah’s Eternal Relevance

John 6:53 says, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man (Jesus) and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” Additionally, vampires are fictional characters originating in the 1700s. They subsist on blood and live eternally.

We see from the New Testament and vampire tales that human nature has not ceased from its idolatrous leanings towards blood eating for the purpose of attaining immortality.

God is correct that eating blood is man’s attempt to secure immortality and must not be followed, while Christianity time and again violates God’s words.

In place of seeking quick fixes for securing our life and success, God already shared how we achieve this: follow His Torah to realize how the pursuit of wisdom is more fulfilling than any other endeavor (King Solomon), and God will provide your needs here and grant you eternal life afterwards.

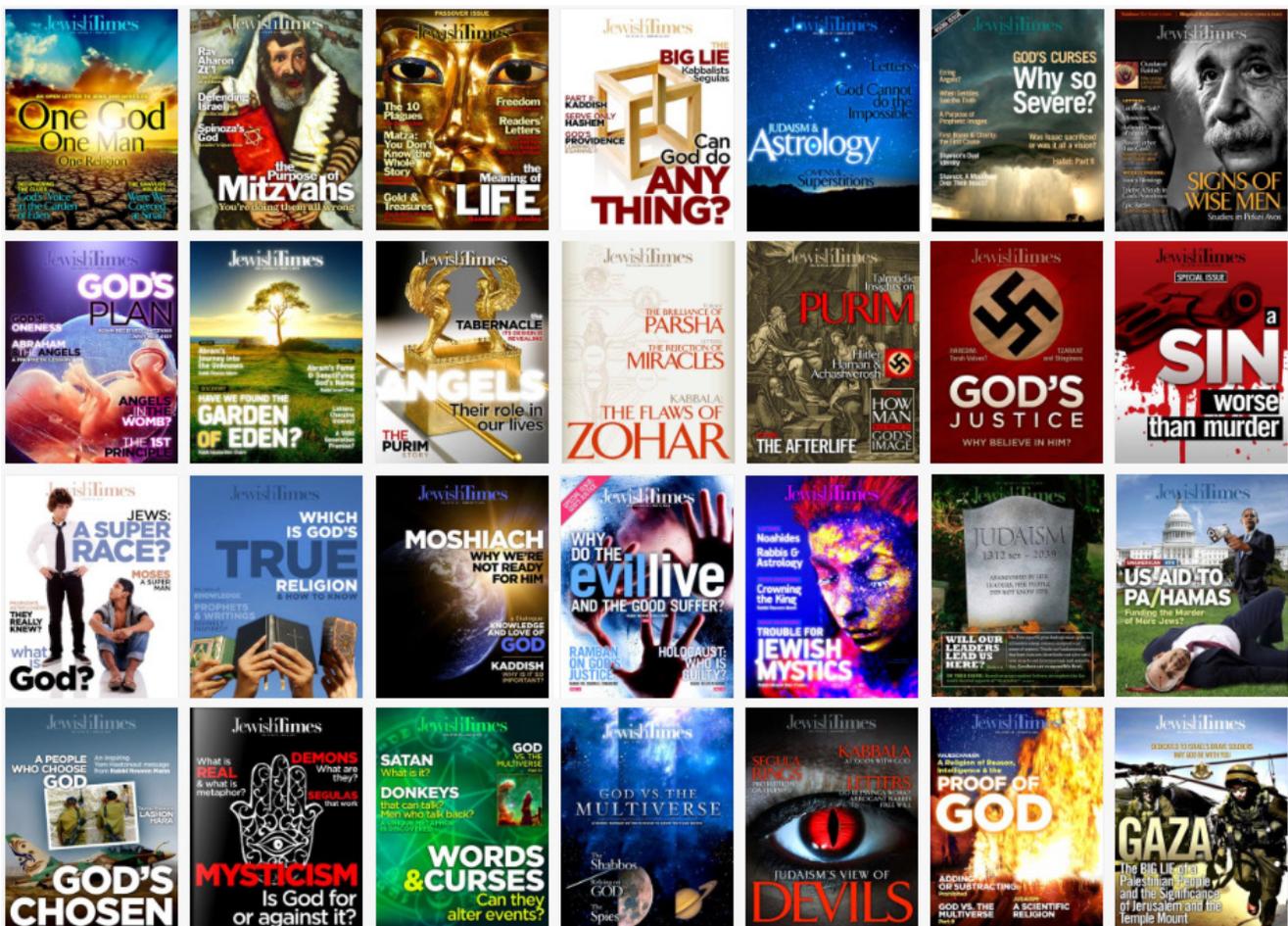
Torah’s relevance is truly eternal. ■



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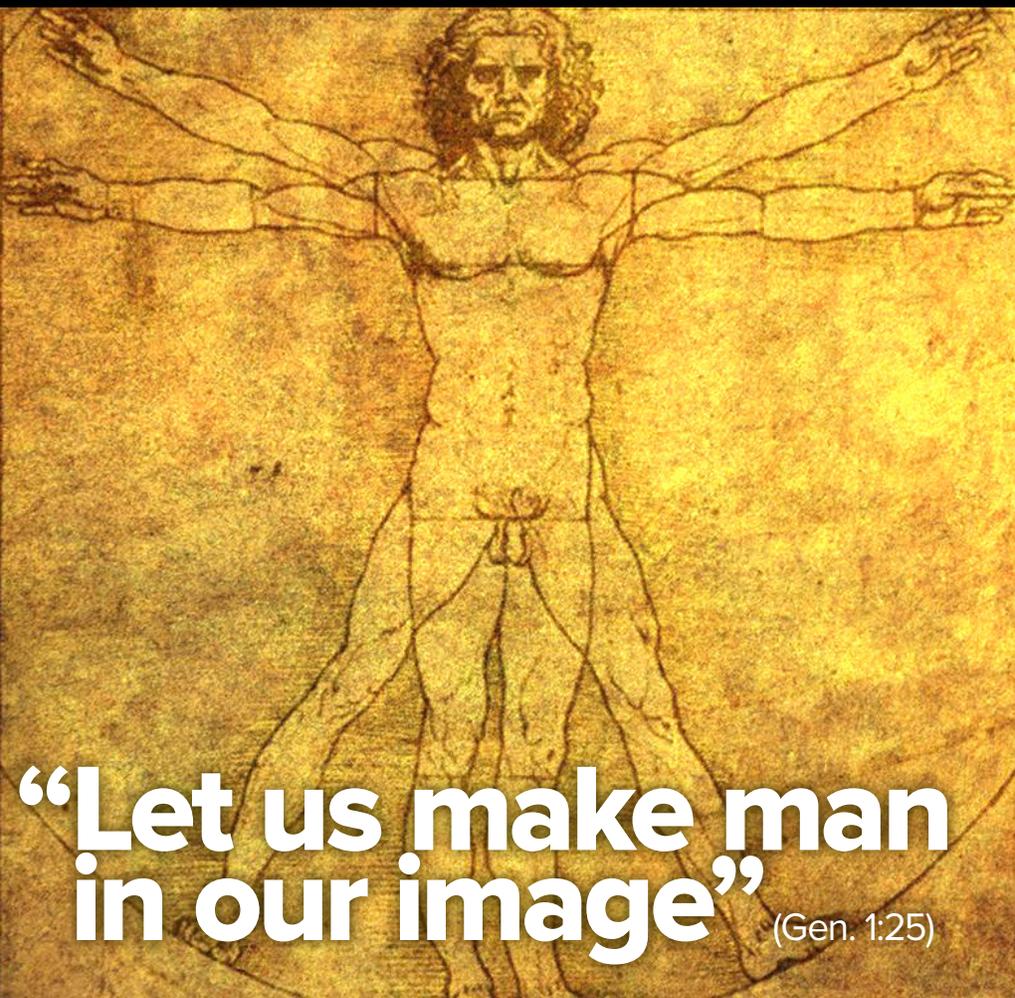
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“Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:25)

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I write this for my nephew Aden who will soon be Bar Mitzvah. Mazel tov Aden!

It is because within earthly creation, man alone possesses an intellect—a soul—that he and no other creature is like “God’s image.” Man is similar to God in his capacity to engage wisdom. But animals, plants and minerals have no intellect. Plants and minerals are inanimate, and animals cannot reflect on themselves or ponder what is right or wrong, they can’t talk, or discuss what math or philosophy is. Therefore, Torah says that man alone was created in “God’s image.”

God needs no being to assist Him in His creations. Why then did God say to the angels “Let us make man?” Rashi comments:

Although the angels did not assist Him in forming man, and although this use of the plural “us” may give heretics an occasion to rebel (i. e. to argue in favor of their own views), yet

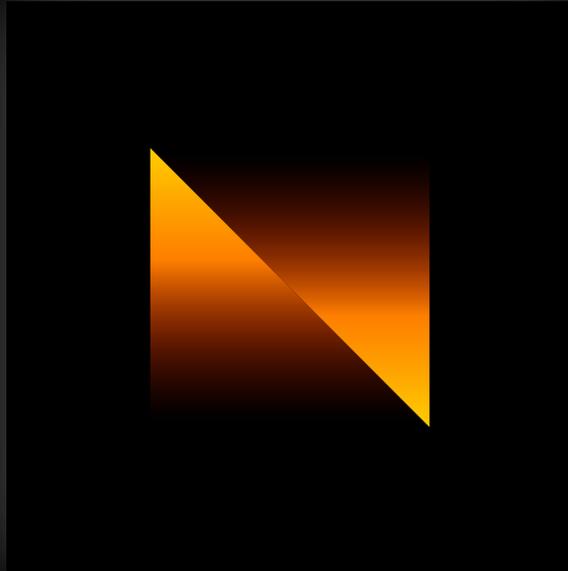
the verse does not refrain from teaching proper conduct and the virtue of humbleness, namely, that the greater (God) should consult, and take permission from the smaller (angels); for had it been written, “I shall make man”, we could not, then, have learned that He spoke to His judicial council but to Himself. And as a refutation of the heretics it is written immediately after this verse “And God (alone) created the man”, and it is not written “and they created” (Gen. 1:26, Rashi).

Rashi teaches that God wished to set an example for man: just as God took counsel with the angels when creating man, man too should take counsel from his subordinates. Why?

Learning is our primary task; it is why God created man “in His image.” Humility allows a person to learn from any person who might have something to share. “Ben Zoma said, ‘Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said: ‘From all who taught me have I gained understanding’” (Psalms 119:99). The man who is wise, is one who does not place ego before his pursuit of wisdom. He is interested in wisdom over any other concern in life. So he is not embarrassed to learn from even a child.

Therefore, God teaches man to be humble, and consult with even lesser individuals. We don’t wish to lose an opportunity to gain wisdom, which is possible even from lesser individuals. King Solomon named his book “Koheles,” which means assemblies, to teach that he did not rely on his own wisdom, but taught in assemblies of other wise men to gain feedback and critique. Bouncing ideas off others allowed his ideas to be refined, where errors can be detected by others and removed from his book.

But Torah continues as Rashi stated, that it was God alone who created man, “And God created the man.” Taking counsel is one matter, but man’s actual creation was due to God alone, as was all creation including angels, proving God does not need angels to assist Him in anything. ■



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CONDÉ NAST





Under Scrutiny

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Parshat Emor delineates the special laws regulating how the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) conducts himself. He must live according to a higher standard of sanctity than the “ordinary” Jew. For example, he is prohibited from coming in contact with a dead body.

If a close relative dies he must guard his state of purity and not participate in the funeral. The only exception to this restriction is the case of the Meit Mitzvah. This refers to an individual who has no close relatives to arrange his burial. It is then a commandment upon every Jew to oversee his internment and the first person to encounter him is charged with that responsibility. What if that happens to be the High Priest?

Judaism maintains that this person who may not attend the funeral of his blood relatives must do so for this total stranger. The Chesed involved in honoring the deceased is so great that it overrides the High Priest’s requirement to retain his ritual purity. This is an awe inspiring teaching about Judaism’s concern for the dignity of all people.

There is another category of people who must adhere to a “higher standard”. The verse exhorts, “You shall observe my commandments and perform them; I am Hashem. You shall not desecrate my Holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel.”

It seems that the command to sanctify Hashem and not to disgrace His name is addressed specifically to those who observe the Mitzvot. But if we are keeping the commandments then we are obviously respecting Hashem. Why is it precisely us who must be warned against disgracing His Name?

The Mitzvot are extremely important but their mere technical or perfunctory fulfillment does not, in itself, constitute spiritual perfection.

God’s Commandments should not be regarded as arbitrary and incomprehensible demands without rhyme or reason. Some people believe that the value of religious performance resides solely in demonstrating obedience to Hashem. They do not make the effort to discover the moral values that are contained within the Mitzvot.

This type of approach can cause someone to act in a manner which is contrary to the great ideals of Judaism. It is crucial for all Jews, especially observant ones, to be aware that their behavior will be scrutinized by others, their co-religionists and gentiles alike.

They will not be judged by their conscientious attention to every detail of the ritual code. Religions are evaluated by the overall behavior of their adherents, especially in their treatment of others. It is expected that religious people should be kind, considerate and compassionate. When such individuals exhibit wisdom, emotional control, and concern for the welfare of others, they arouse admiration and respect.

In contrast, when these same people are seen to be unreasonable, uncaring, and generally ignorant, they turn others off. Observers of the scene associate the unattractive behaviors of a theological group with the religion they represent, and the Name of G-d is not exalted.

The Jewish people are supposed to be a unique and holy people. In the Havdalah blessing recited at the conclusion of Shabbat we praise Hashem, Who differentiated between “the holy and profane, light and darkness, Israel and the nations...”

Hashem has separated us from all peoples of the earth, to be a “light unto the nations”. We must adhere to a higher standard of living that manifests knowledge honesty, justice, and

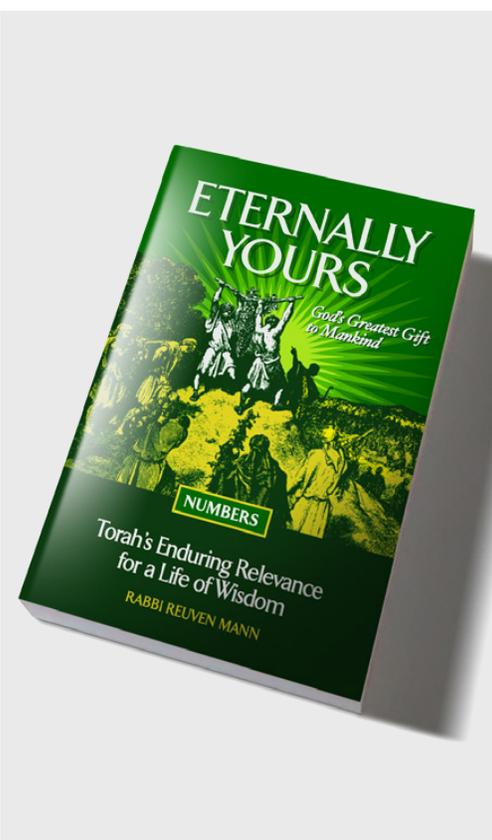
compassion. We should therefore strive to understand the moral teachings embedded in the commandments, internalize their meaning, and implement their wisdom in all areas of our lives. The mission of the Jewish people, especially those who scrupulously observe the mitzvot, is to display, in its most attractive form, the beautiful lifestyle of Torah Judaism. May we merit to achieve it.

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.



Good People & Appreciation

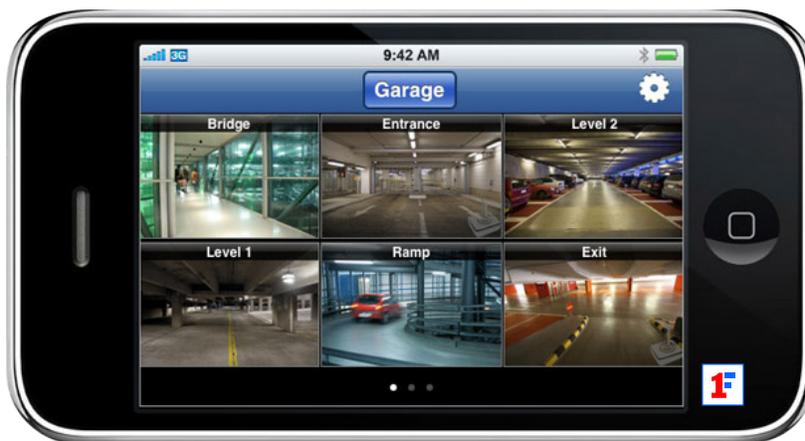
INTERNET



LaVonte Dell was recently pulled over, writing on his Facebook page: “Yesterday I was pulled over in Westland for my window tint. This stop was nothing like I thought it would be. He was walking back to the car and he’d seen my daughter wasn’t in a car seat. So he asked me to get out and speak with him. He asked why didn’t she have one and I told him all I been through this year like I barely making it because of these garnishments and I really don’t like asking people for (stuff). Do you know this white police officer told me? He told me follow him to Walmart on Ford Road and he purchased my daughter a car seat with his own money. If u would have seen us in Walmart u would have thought we were best friends. It was like night and day. u got me hella tats walking side by side with a white officer...Westland at that. I’ve been calling all day trying to get his name because I was so in shock. I didn’t even look at his name tag. Never judge a book by it’s cover it’s most def is some good guys left. I told him I never met a officer like u. He said, “I’m just doing my job...what good would giving u a ticket do, besides putting u further in the hole making it harder on you to come up?” Westward Police Department posted shortly thereafter: “The Westland Police Department would like to express how proud we are of the officer responsible, Officer Joshua Scaglione. We would also like to thank the driver, LaVonte Dell for coming forward and sharing this experience with us. In a world filled with negative stories, the fact that you shared yours has had an unbelievably positive impact on all of us. Thank you.”

Credit: Westland Police Department.

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