

JewishTimes



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BIBLE'S CLUES

Kosher: For the Mind

Not the Body

**RABBI MOSHE
BEN-CHAIM**

LETTERS

Marriage: Not Made in Heaven

PARSHA

Lethal Worship of God

DANI ROTH

JUDAISM

Sensible to the Mind

Other Religions Aren't

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JewishTimes

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3 Prohibited Mitzvahs?

RABBI CHAIM OZER CHAIT
Revering the Temple Mount must be expressed in action

6 Kosher

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Numerous clues reveal a surprising and brilliant objective in keeping kosher

9 Lethal Worship

DANI ROTH
Even good intentions can be harmful in worshipping God

10 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Replying to a reader's sources that appear to indicate that spouses are preordained

11 Honoring Parents

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Why Torah study overrides it

11 Mysticism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
God's refutation of serving the luminaries

14 Man in Search of God

RABBI REUVEN MAN
Sin does not necessarily destroy a person

16 If I Forget You Jerusalem

RABBI REUVEN MANN
Recognizing Har Habayit's significance

17 Judaism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Judaism vs. others: Intelligence vs. fantasy



TORAH'S CLUES ABOUT KOSHER

That kosher signs are found primarily in feet, fins, legs, and crawling—means of locomotion—and that kosher applies to animals but not vegetation, an amazing principle is derived.

MIN HAHAR

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Prohibited Mitzvahs?

An acquaintance recently told me that he attended a shiur on the Har Habayit and that one Rav spoke for forty-five minutes listing all the gadolim that say it is assur (prohibited) to ascend the Har Habayit. He wanted to know my opinion. I asked him if he said what the issur is? He stared at me for about a minute and said no, he did not. I explained to him that is because

there is no issur. How can you have an issur on performing a mitzvah? That is an oxymoron. This is like putting an issur on purchasing a lulav, on the grounds that it might be from an asherah (a grove worshipped by heathens), such a decree is impossible. The Mitzvah of Mikdashe Terau (Vayikra 26:2) the 21 positive commandments according to the counting of

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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the Rambam (and the 254th mitzva according to the Sefer Hachinuch) explicitly commands us to show awe and reverence to the Temple Mount. This Mitzvah applies for all times. The Rambam explains in Hilchot Beis Habechirah 7:1,2 Mikdashe Terau may only be accomplished by entering the Temple Mount in a manner that shows awe and reverence. For example, walking without shoes. Placing a violation on entering The Temple Mount is tantamount to abolishing the Mitzvah, which is a violation of the Torah (see Rambam's Ninth Principle of Faith "One may not add to it nor delete from it, neither in the written nor oral Torah, as it is written "Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it"). The Rambam points out (ibid Halacha 7) that the Mitzvah of holding the Temple in awe and reverence applies even after the destruction of the Temple as it states in the Torah (Vayikra 19:30), "You shall observe My Sabbaths and you shall revere My Sanctuary." Just as the observance of Shabbos applies for eternity so too the reverence for the Temple must be eternal. Even though it is in ruin, it remains holy". Furthermore, all Mitzvot of the Taryag (613 commandments) are eternal. They never expire or are replaced (see third principle of the Rambam to Sefer Hamitzvot). See also Rambam Hilchot Melachim 11:3:

The general principle is : this law of ours with its statutes and ordinances is not subject to change. It is for ever and all eternity; it is not to be added to or to be taken away from. Whoever adds aught to it, or takes away aught from it, or misinterprets it, and strips the commandments of their literal sense is an imposter, a wicked man, and a heretic."

This is why there cannot be an issur to enter the Temple mount. (Note: one should not confuse this with the law that if Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbos, the Mitzvah of blowing Shofar is suspended. That suspension was under the authority of the Sanhedrin which obviously does not exist today. Furthermore, it was clear from the decree that the suspension of the shofar is only temporary and the Mitzvah will be carried the forthcoming year when Rosh Hashana comes out on a weekday. Whereas, regarding the Mitzvah of Mikdashe Terau it has been suspended by the Rabbinate for over fifty years and from the prohibition of Rav Kook over one hundred years. This is a clear violation of removing a Mitzvah from the Taryag. [see Rambam Hilchos Mamrim chapter 2 Halacha 9])

For centuries the Jewish people have been ascending the Temple Mount whenever the ruling authorities permitted. We find the Gemara at the end of Makos page 24b where it relates the story of Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues walking on the Temple Mount. The Yerushalmi relates in Pesachim 7:12, that the Rabbis would place their sandals under the doorjamb of the Temple Mount when entering the Temple Mount. At the time of the Meerie the common practice was like the opinion of the Ra'avad and people would enter the Azara (Meerie Shevuos page 16a). (Note- there exists a basic debate between the Rambam who



holds that the sanctity of the Temple is of the same Kedusha (holiness) as it was during the period when it was in full use. The Ra'avad maintains that the Kedusha is not of the same standing. The practical difference between them is that according to the Ra'avad one may enter any part of the Temple Mount, even the Kodosh Kodashim (the holy of holies) whereas according to the Rambam that is prohibited by penalty of Kares. At the time of the Meerie the practice was like the Ra'avad (see sefer "Har Habayit K'halacha" by Rabbi Elisha Wolfson our Rosh Kollel of Drishat Zion, siman 4 for a lengthy list of times when the Muslims permitted the Jews to ascend the Har Habayit).

The first major figure to place an issur on ascending the Har Habayit was Rav Kook ZT"L (1865-1935). He was appointed the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine in 1921 who prohibited entering any part of the Temple Mount (see Photo above). This behooves us to ask what made him feel he had the responsibility and the authority to place such a ban. This we leave for my next article

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NOTE: One should not ascend the Temple Mount without proper Rabbinical instruction:

- 1) You should be informed of the various routes that are available according to the different Rabbinical opinions.
- 2) You must immerse in a Kosher Mikvah that meets the standards to be kosher med'orisa.
- 3) You must receive instructions for the proper preparations for the Mikvah (Chafifah) ■

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BIBLE'S CLUES

Kosher: For the Mind

Not the Body

**RABBI MOSHE
BEN-CHAIM**

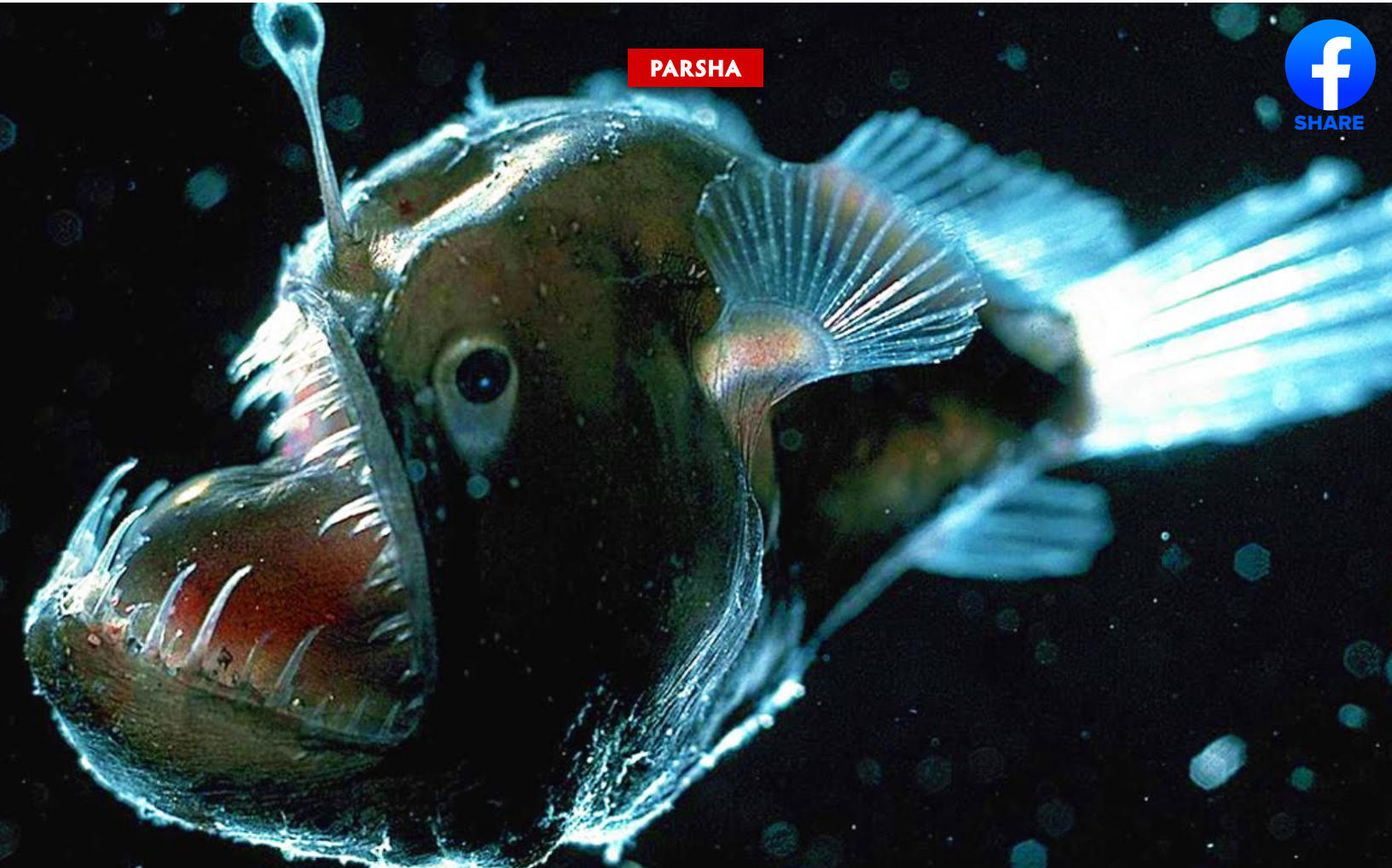
PARSHA

More than most laws, kosher is iconic of Jewish observance, and not without cause. Many times in His Torah[1], God commands us to abstain from eating and touching certain creatures. Like all other commands, the benefit in following any law lies in understanding how it perfects us. And as always, God provides clues. The following are God's words as He concludes the section on permitted and prohibited species:

Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified, and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified (Lev. 11:43-45).

God's objective for us in our abstention from these creatures is to become like Him: "sanctified." The avoidance of loathsome behavior is a path towards sanctity. But how does this sanctification work? What is "sanctity?" How does eating prohibited animals harm us? More precisely, how does eating physical objects harm our metaphysical souls? Rashi says[2] abstaining from loathsome creatures alone sufficed for God to take us out of Egypt. What is Rashi's point? Why are we also told many times (Lev. chap 11) to additionally "abhor" (shakeitz) those creatures prohibited from our diet? But why isn't abstention from eating sufficient? Oddly, Moses omits this abhorrence when he repeats the section of kosher and non-kosher animals in Deuteronomy 14:3-21. Why this omission?

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We can eat literally all vegetation without restriction. But when it comes to animals, certain species are not to be eaten. Why this distinction? And what is significant about “creeping” things that renders it a dominant consideration among prohibited creatures? Finally, what is it about the act of eating per se that is harmful? Other peoples do not follow kosher laws, yet, they have existed as long as we have. Eating non-kosher apparently does not wipe out civilizations.

Deciphering God's Clues

In Leviticus chapter 11, God offers us signs that indicate permitted and prohibited animals: fully-split hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, knees (locusts), multiple legs, belly-crawlers, paws, and things that creep upon the ground. Even the Rabbis say^[3] that although in the Torah birds are not signaled by a sign but by species, there is yet a sign relating to their legs. Notably, most signs indicating a species' kosher and non-kosher status are based on its means of locomotion...an idea worth pondering.

Locomotion & Kosher

What is significant about locomotion? Unlike inanimate vegetation, animate life—beings with locomotion—engenders human identification. We don't identify with inanimate objects, like plants, rocks, mountains, or oceans. But animals move. This element of animate life awakens in man our identification with that creature. We are drawn to animals and visit zoos. We obtain pets and mourn at their deaths. We develop systems of animal rights, in which, man draws distinctions: killing insects or even reptiles and birds is not met with the same crime as killing dogs or cats. This is because man places greater value on those species with which he identifies greater.

Identification exists with moving creatures, unlike inanimate objects. Signs of prohibited species inhere in their means of locomotion, the feature wherein man identifies.

Kosher is a Barrier

God wishes man to not identify with the prohibited species. By eating snakes, rats, spiders, etc. man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and dulls his sense of what is to be loathsome. However, God wishes man to preserve this disgust. This is why He created man with this emotion. By preserving our emotion of disgust, our behavior in all areas benefits by these “barriers.” In contrast, people who eat whatever they wish and engage in unbridled lusts, and worse—eat disgusting species—forefeit their purpose as an intelligent being. They are no longer “sanctified.” Sanctified refers to man operating on the highest level humanly possible. This level is when he is most engaged in intellectual pursuits, studying the universe and Torah, as God designed humans to do. Caving to desires without limit, and breaking the barriers of naturally-reviled things, man loses a critical boundary. (As vegetation offers man no dangers of identification, no restrictions apply. All fruits and vegetation are permitted as they

were since Adam the First.)

We now understand that God wishes man to retain certain barriers. The emotion of disgust is dulled by eating/identifying with certain creatures. Rabbi Israel Chait stated that things that creep on the ground remind us of death. Perhaps it is that close proximity to the underground—the grave—that we find abhorrent in these species. This can also explain why God created man upright, unlike most other creatures...distancing us further from the Earth. “Also the world [God] planted in their hearts so man should not discover the matter that God has done from beginning to end” (Koheles 3:11). This verse refers to God's design of man's immortality fantasy (Ibid. Ibn Ezra). God does not wish us to be preoccupied with death. Anything that reminds us of the grave is disturbing. These ground-crawling species disgust us due to their association with the ground, with death. This disgust is reinforced through the additional prohibition of contact with their carcasses, possibly bearing out this idea of distancing us from death.

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Eating is one of our two primary drives; sex is the other. The rabbis and leading psychologists are in agreement on this. God limits the Jew's involvement in satisfying these core instincts so we may become accustomed to controlling our instincts. The goal is to enable our intellects to rule our instincts, and ultimately engage in pursuing wisdom, the greatest pleasure. A person who has no limits on his appetitive and sexual activity will find great difficulty in advancing, or even engaging his intellect. His pursuit to know God will never be realized. For he will incite cravings that only grow as he feeds them: "Rabbi Yochanan said, 'There is a small limb in man: starve it and it becomes satiated, feed it and it becomes hungry'" (Succah 52b). Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the more we satisfy the sexual drive, the greater the urge, and thus, less energy is available for fulfilling God's Torah. This applies to all drives.

Abstaining from lusts and from eating certain creature suffices to control our emotions on one level. By not eating "disgusting" creatures,

we break identification with that species, and we additionally maintain the emotion of disgust, which can then be applied to other forbidden areas. God desires we maintain a minimal level of abhorrence in the area of the appetitive drive. Retaining this disgust for certain species, we don't only control one emotion, but all of our emotions benefit. We will find avoiding detestable behaviors easier since we strengthened our overall emotion of disgust.

By our very nature, we cannot be overindulgent in one area, without our entire emotional makeup sensing this relaxation. This explains why the Jews worshipping the Gold Calf also arose to engage other instincts (Exod. 32:6). The satisfaction of one emotion—idolatry—causes other emotions to seek satisfaction. In contrast, barring instinctual expression—not eating disgusting creatures—controls other emotions.

Increased Mercy

Leviticus 11 categorizes mammals, then fish, then birds. It is interesting that pawed animals are not initially identified in the first group of mammals[4]. Also interesting is that mammals alone are the one group in which we do not find the word "disgusting" (sheknetz). Instead, they are called "tammay" or impure. Perhaps this is because God wishes to teach another consideration within kosher laws. One aspect is what we answered: to sustain a barricade of disgust. Another benefit—in abstaining from pawed creatures—is that it engenders mercy. Pawed animals offer man more identification than other creatures. They are more like man: paws closely resemble human hands, our tools of creativity. We even ascribe intelligence to species that express greater tactile dexterity, like monkeys. The more an animal resembles man, the greater the identification. It's a natural human response. The prohibition to abstain from pawed animals may serve the opposite benefit: to retain a level of mercy towards God's creatures.

Therefore, God also prohibits animals that more closely resemble man. It is then not surprising that our pets are pawed. Our relationship to animals is then twofold: 1) abstention from disgusting creatures to maintain the necessary emotion of abhorrence, 2) to engender mercy toward beings that are not disgusting. Good and bad emotions are thereby kept in check. Therefore, as pawed mammals are not eaten due to a reason different from impurity, they are not included in the first mention of impure mammals.

God created man to naturally sense a feeling of abhorrence. We could have been designed to find all creatures equally appealing, but God deemed this harmful. He instilled in human nature many emotions, including disgust for many creatures. This disgust may be towards their outer appearance like rats and many insects. We also are designed to revile things that crawl on the ground like snakes and spiders, which recall the grave. God created us with disgust, and additionally commanded the Jew to reinforce this disgust through

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abstaining from eating or touching many creatures. Disgust is the natural wall between man and his instincts. By abstaining from instinctual gratification according to Torah parameters, God intends that man raise himself to the life where his intellect is not compromised, but rather, free to engage in studying the Creator. This is how man is sanctified, and resembles his Creator. This is Rashi's point, that the path to living an intelligent life is paved by controlling our instincts. Abstaining from certain species accomplishes this goal, and alone, warranted God's Egyptian Exodus.

Summary

At first, we wonder at the various species; why are they all needed? What is kosher all about? Is it a health law? But we then appreciate that God permitted us to enjoy flesh in all corners of the Earth, since man is mobile. We travel. God provided food in all regions: land and sea, valleys and mountains. By analyzing the signs that indicate kosher and non-kosher species, we realize they address our rarely examined emotional makeup. But God teaches us through kosher laws that we must have one eye on our psychological health and strive toward the perfection of our instincts. We also must recognize the species as God's will and show them mercy, as in sending the mother before taking the young, thereby sparing her pain, and perhaps also via abstaining from eating pawed species. This reinforces the mercy we are to show people. With our emotions in check, abstaining from eating certain species and even going so far to abhor them too, we control our instincts and become in some small way like our perfectly intelligent Creator who is bereft of any human quality and emotion. We too can partake of wisdom, the pursuit that God designed that offers us the greatest satisfaction.

As Jews, our mission differs from all other peoples. As teachers of God's Torah, we must condition our instincts through restraint, allowing our intellects to be untarnished from urges that cloud our thought. In this pristine manner, we can study clearly and accurately teach God's single system for mankind, in a manner that impresses all who observe us. God's will that we impress the world with Torah will then be fulfilled, as the nations remark, "What a wise and understanding people is this great nation" (Deut. 4:6).

Addendum

"Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified" (Lev. 11:43-45).

Parshas Shmini concludes by clearly identifying the prohibition as "Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps" and "do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth." Clearly, the prohibition against these species is not to a physical concern, but that our "souls"—our intelligences—should not become compromised through association with death, embodied in creatures that creep on the Earth's surface close to the place of our graves. Perhaps even the signs in kosher mammals—split hooves—and the signs in kosher fish—fins and scales—cause those creatures to move in a way dissimilar than the non-kosher creeping creatures. We are left with the question of how chewing cud plays a role in this theory.

Addendum II

Why did Moses omit any reference to "shekletz" in Deuteronomy 14:3-21? Perhaps Torah contains 2 sections of kosher laws to address 2 distinct objectives. One objective[1] is to retain a level of disgust, as stated. But when Moses omits that term, he thereby teaches that even without retaining disgust, a restricted diet serves another purpose: distinguishing the Jewish nation, which Moses states just before discussing kosher: "For you are a holy nation to the Lord your God, and you God selected to be a treasured nation from all peoples on the face of the Earth" (Deut. 14:2). Thus, Moses teaches the Jews that even without preserving the emotion of disgust, some level of diet contributes to the Jews' role as a treasured nation. We are treasured, as we exhibit control over our most base instinct of appetite. Only one who masters his instincts can elevate his intellect and partake of the Chosen People's role as Torah students and educators of mankind. ■

[1] Exod. 22:30, Lev. chap 11, Deut. 14:3-21.

[2] Lev. 11:45

[3] Tal. Chullin 59a. See the mishna.

[4] Lev. 11:1-8

Lethal Worship of God

DANI ROTH

In Parshas Shemini, we read about a special Korban to Hashem that Ahron and his sons brought after meticulously carrying out all of the actions necessary for this Korban. Hashem showed a sign of acceptance for the Korban and it was a time of celebration for the Jewish people. During this time of celebration, Ahron's sons, Nadav and Avihu brought a "strange fire" before Hashem that He had never commanded them to bring. Hashem punished them through a fire that consumed them.

The pasuk is unclear what their sin was, commentators give their own ideas about the issue of their actions. What is interesting is that in every explanation, their intent was for showing gratitude to Hashem, like they had just done before. Why would they be punished so harshly for their actions if their true intent was for service of God?

The answer to why these great people deserved death lies in the fact that only Hashem knows how we should properly serve him. When we project our own emotional fantasies onto the service, it becomes avodah zarah. The same word "zarah" used to reference their fire—"Aish Zara"—is also the word used in idol worship, "avodah zarah".

Rashi (Num. 10:2) offers two opinions why Nadav and Avihu were killed. According to these opinions—they ruled in front of Moshe, or they served God while drunk—they were dismissive of Torah authority. By offering a strange fire, they believed they knew how to serve Hashem without His guidance, and by ruling in front of Moshe they rejected his authority.

Death was an appropriate response for their sin, because they were changing God's will, which is the basis of Avodah Zara, which we punish with death. In Hilchos Avoda Zara 1:1 Rambam teaches that the original star worshipers did not deny God's existence, rather: "All mankind knew that God is unique alone. Rather, their mistake and their foolishness was that they imagined that star worship is God's will." ■

Preordained Spouses?

Deciphering Talmudic Allegory

READER: I read the article in the Jewish-times 3/11/22 on Bashert. Although I like the article, it raises more questions than answers, especially on [the rejection of] predestined partner. I don't think the totality of the ways of God can be subjected to rational analysis, as God stated in the book of Isaiah, "Just as the heaven is higher than the earth, that is how high His thoughts are higher than us." While speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, He stated that, "even before he was born, God had know him," hinting on predestination.

The question is whether God predestines the right partner for some individuals or not. What about the prayer of the servant of Abraham seeking a partner for Isaac? He said that he was looking for the one that "Hashem had appointed" for Isaac. The ideal of marriage as seen in the Torah was stated by Adam, "bones of my bones and flesh of my flesh." That seems to mean that the consideration for a partner is the divine ordained match. The last related question is, is interracial marriage really kosher? Is it really the perfect will of Hashem?

—Tayo Odel

RABBI: Although "God's thoughts are higher than ours," this does not mean we are ignorant about everything:

Let the wicked give up his ways, the sinful man give up his plans; let him turn back to the Lord, and He will pardon him to our God, for He freely forgives. For My plans are not your plans, nor are My ways your ways—declares the Lord. But as the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways high above your ways and My plans above your plans (Isaiah 55:7-9).

God can tell man that he is ignorant of certain knowledge, as He told Moses and Job. Acknowledging our ignorance is knowledge. But here God tells us more. God's claim here of being "higher than man" is intended to be understood, not that God is telling us that we know nothing and our knowledge of Him is completely outside rational analysis. Here, the rabbis say God means this: although man feels once he sins, he remains eternally damned, this is not so. God completely removes the penitent man's sins, as if he never sinned:

If the wicked one repents of all the sins that he committed and keeps all My laws and does what is just and right, he shall live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions he committed shall be remembered against him, because of the righteousness he has practiced (Ezek. 18:21,22).

Thus, God's ways being higher than ours does not mean all His ways are unintelligible, but that He acts differently, but yet, in a manner we can grasp. We can't now what God is essentially. But when He communicates, He is sharing knowledge on man's level of grasping.

Next, God's "knowing Jeremiah before he was born" (Jer. 1:5) means Jeremiah had a mission. Not that Jeremiah had no free will.

You also cite marriage as preordained. Talmud Sota 2a says:

Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitz ak says: "When Reish Lakish would introduce his discussion of the Torah passage of sota he would say this: 'Woman is matched to a man only according to his actions, as it is stated: "For the rod of wickedness shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous" (Psalms 125:3). But Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: "Forty days before an embryo is formed a Divine Voice issues forth and says: 'The daughter of so-and-so is destined to marry so-and-so.'"

There is no contradiction. This [latter] statement by Rav Yehuda is with regard to a first match [zivug], while this statement of Reish Lakish is with regard to a second match. A first match is decreed in heaven; a second match is according to one's actions.

If one is attracted to the mystical, he won't question this portion and will feel secure about some "providence" regarding marriage. But a thinker will ask this:

Of what sense is it that a marriage is predestined, if the Talmud says one can have a second marriage, meaning I'll divorce or lose my first wife? This means I am predestined for headache! And even if certain righteous people are under God's providence, Sforno says most Jews are not (Lev. 13:47).

Thus, this talmudic portion must mean something other than providential predestination. And Maimonides teaches that, "Marrying a good woman is a mitzvah and God does not

decree a mitzvah. And marrying an evil woman is a sin and this too God does not decree." So this talmudic portion cannot be suggesting that marriage is divinely ordained.

This talmudic portion also says that one's first marriage is different from his second marriage: one's first wife has some "heavenly voice" determining his wife 40 days before the person is formed in the womb. What this "heavenly voice" refers to is this: natural biological, psychological design, which is the cause of gender attraction. Instinctual (psychological) attraction alone is usually how man is drawn to his first wife when younger. But once older and one has learned life's lessons, he no longer marries based purely on instinct (formed on the womb), but based on his level of perfection and his intelligence—"Woman is matched to a man only according to his actions." Here, in one's second marriage, he has learned that attraction is only skin deep. Man now chooses a mate based on his actions, i.e., his experience and knowledge.

Eliezer prayed,

"Let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac" (Gen. 24:14).

Rashi understands the word "decreed" to mean "fit," and not that she was preordained, but that she of her own perfection fits the model of a suitable wife for Isaac. Sforno states that Eliezer was not seeking magical signs, but that he prayed that matters should unfold this way. He sought a certain quality in a wife, not that he would take anyone who suddenly appeared. For had Rivka not offered to water the camels too, Eliezer would reject her. Thus, he sought character, not magic. But with the Torah's words "before he finished speaking, Rivka came out..." we are taught that this marriage was preordained. But this was an exception, not the rule.

Adam saying, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" expresses a strong identification with Eve, not preordination. But despite his words, in truth, this was another rare case God's preordination. But Rivka and Eve are rare cases, from which we cannot derive rules. Maimonides teaches that only a perfected person earns God's providence.

Finally, interracial marriage was performed by Moses, Joshua, Joseph, King Solomon and Ruth. Humans are equals and we should value and marry good people of all races. ■

God's Refutation of Myticism

The haftorah of Tzav says that the sinners' bones should be spread out under the sun and the moon and never buried, as these were the objects that they deified. This rare phenomenon calls our attention. What is the lesson?

At that time—declares the Lord—the bones of the kings of Judah, of its officers, of the priests, of the prophets, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be taken out of their graves and exposed to the sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven which they loved and served and followed, to which they turned and bowed down. They shall never be gathered for reburial; they shall become dung upon the face of the earth. And they chose death over life for all that are left of this wicked folk, in all the other places to which I shall banish them—declares the Lord of Hosts" (Jeremiah 8:1-3).

God commanded this demonstration of the fallacy of idolatry. For these are the bones of people who believed that serving the sun, moon and stars guaranteed eternal life. But now they are lifeless bones, and will remain unburied as a display that their false gods did not protect them from death. In fact, those heavenly objects still do nothing to resurrect these bones. The belief in star worship is thereby exposed as false. The need for an eternal display is because had these bones been reburied, others might say these dead people finally received afterlife. To ensure that fallacy is never considered, their bones must be on eternal display to show the eternal fate of idolaters does not include the afterlife, and it shows that the sun, moon and stars they worshipped are powerless. They are merely luminaries.

And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven (Deut. 4:19).

Rashi comments that God's "allotment" to all nations refers to providing light. Nothing more.

An additional lesson of "God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven" is that nations are wrong to assume the sun or moon is "their" god. For God did not distinguish a certain people, but He created the luminaries equally, to "other peoples everywhere." This discounts a nation's claim that they alone benefit from a solar or lunar god, while others do not. Teh Creator made no distinction.

One must equally apply this lesson to modern-day amulets like protective mezuzas, red bendels, sefarim, incantations, Tehillim, and other acts circulating in the Jewish world believed to provide security. We pray to God alone, as He alone—not lifeless heavenly orbs, or man-made amulets—can improve our lives. ■



Torah Study vs. Honoring Parents

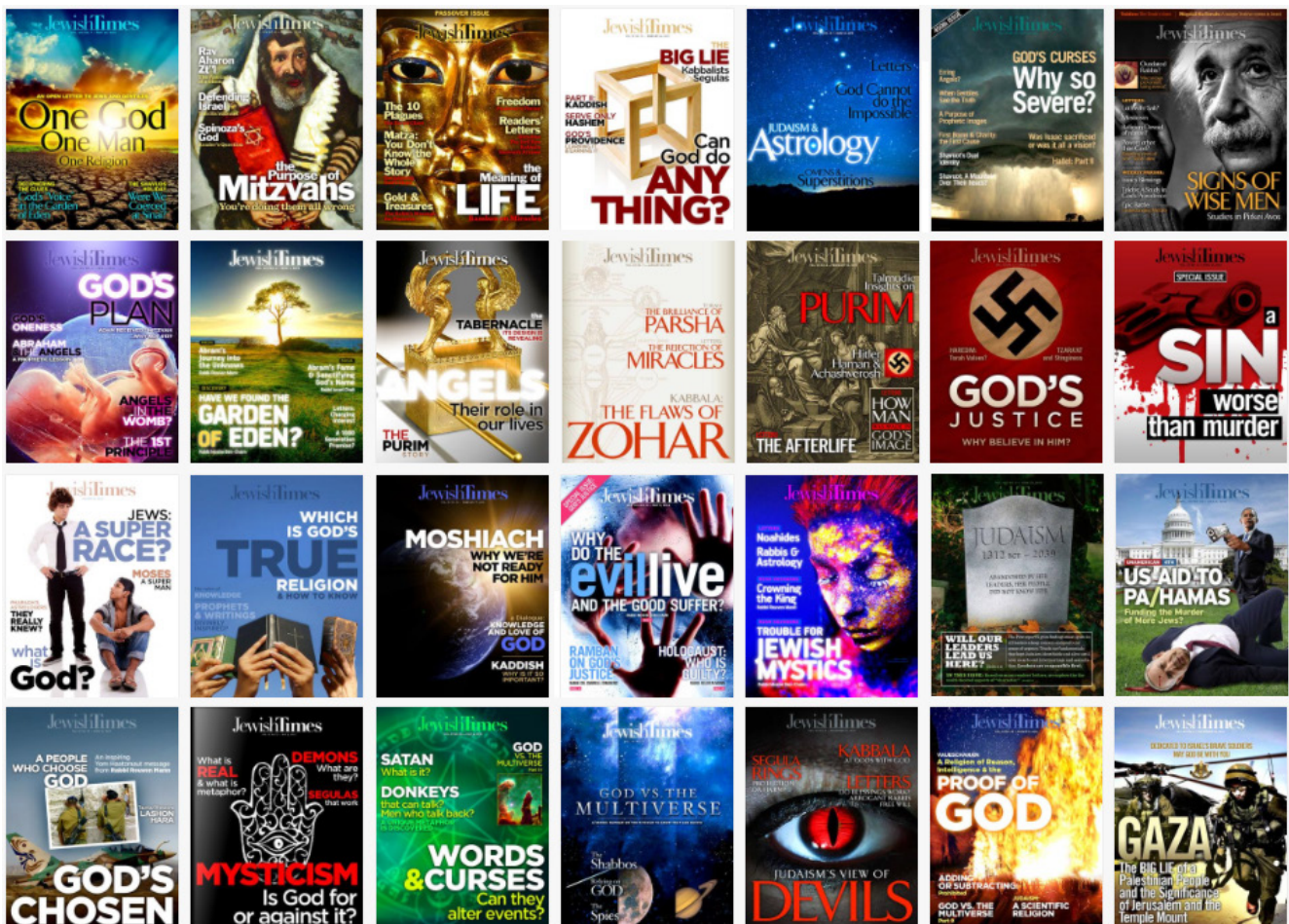
Studying Torah overrides honoring parents because honoring parents is merely preparatory to recognizing God, whereas Torah study is a direct mode of recognizing God:

Rabba said that Rav Yitzchak bar Shmuel bar Marta said: 'Studying Torah is greater and more important than honoring one's father and mother, and a proof of this is that for all those years that our father Jacob spent in the house of Eber and studied Torah there, he was not punished for having neglected to fulfill the mitzva of honoring one's parents (Megilla 16b).

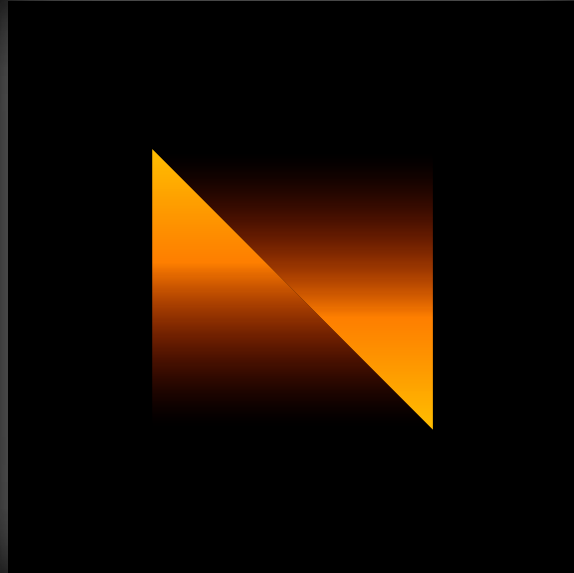
Honoring parents conditions us to accept authority. It was for this reason that at Marah—en route to arriving at Sinai to accept Torah—God taught the Jews laws of honoring parents, laws of courts and judges, and Sabbath laws. Why these 3 topics? For the Jews to accept God's authority via accepting Torah at Sinai, God prepared the Jews beforehand at Marah in accepting parental authority, communal authority (justice) and God's authority through Sabbath, which recognizes the Creator. Thus, honoring parents is preparatory for recognizing God, as it trains a child in respecting authority. But the end goal is not respect...our goal is love and fear of God which is attained through Torah study. Thus, the true goal of Torah study overrides the preparatory means of honoring parents. ■

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CONDÉ NAST





Man in Search of God

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's Parsha, Shemini, describes the inauguration of the Mishkan; the wilderness Sanctuary which was the precursor to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This was an awesome occasion marked by great joy, as the Creator Manifested His Presence in the midst of Klal Yisrael (the community of Israel).

Fire descended from Heaven, and consumed the sacrifices that had been offered by the Kohanim (Priests). "And a fire went forth before Hashem, and consumed upon the Altar the elevation-offering and the sacred-fats; all the people saw and sang glad song and fell upon their faces" (VaYikra 9:24).

However, the euphoric state did not last long. Inexplicably, the sons of Aaron—Nadav and Avihu—of their own accord, brought an incense offering which had not been commanded by Hashem. This brought forth another Heavenly fire which had tragic consequences.

In Judaism, our task is to seek to understand—to the greatest extent possible—the Will of Hashem, and implement it without distortion. Human originality and creativity has its place in the scheme of things, but not in the most sensitive area of the Temple Service.

(It is interesting to note, that a famous Jewish Theologian titled his classic work, "G-d In Search of Man." I disagree with the intent behind this title, and would more accurately describe the character of our religion with the phrase, "Man, in Search of G-d.")

It is important to consider that the inauguration services were conducted by Aaron and his sons. This comes as somewhat of a surprise, due to the prominent role he played in the sin of the Golden Calf. This was so egregious that, "Hashem became very angry with Aaron to destroy him; so I prayed also for Aaron at that time" (Devarim 9:20). One might have thought

that this would have disqualified Aaron from serving as Kohen, but "Hashem's thoughts are not our thoughts..." (Yishayahu 55:8).

However, the sin of the Golden Calf did leave its mark on Aaron. Rashi informs us, that he was "embarrassed and afraid" to perform the inauguration services until Moshe said to him, "Why are you embarrassed? For this you have been chosen!" (Rashi, VaYikra 9:7). Finally, Aaron was able to compose himself and muster the confidence and resolve, to properly perform the inaugural services.

Why, indeed, was Aaron not rejected from the Kehuna (priesthood), as a result of his catastrophic participation in the sin of the Eigel HaZahav (Golden Calf)? I believe that the answer is, that sin does not necessarily taint a person for life. Everyone makes mistakes, and transgresses at some point in their lives. The key challenge in life, is with regard to how one responds to spiritual defeats and setbacks.

The truly righteous, are not broken by their failings. They have absolute faith that Hashem forgives the sinner, if he engages in scrupulously honest and genuine repentance. In fact, the Rambam teaches us that, "In the place where the Baal Teshuva (penitent) stands the pure Tzadik (righteous one) cannot stand" (Hilchos Teshuva 7:4, Sanhedrin 99a).

Aaron sinned in a grievous matter but he did not seek to escape his responsibility. He was the individual most suited to be the Kohen Gadol (Chief Priest), because he was beloved by the people for the great role he played in spreading peace among all segments of the nation.

In designating Aaron to be the Chief Priest, Hashem demonstrated that sin does not necessarily destroy a person; and with proper Teshuva (repentance) can, in fact, enable him to reach a level which was otherwise unattainable.

May we have the strength and courage to acknowledge our Aveirot (sins), engage in genuine repentance and strive to transcend them, by reaching ever higher levels of moral perfection.

Shabbat Shalom

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to announce that my newest book, Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra has been published at: www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q

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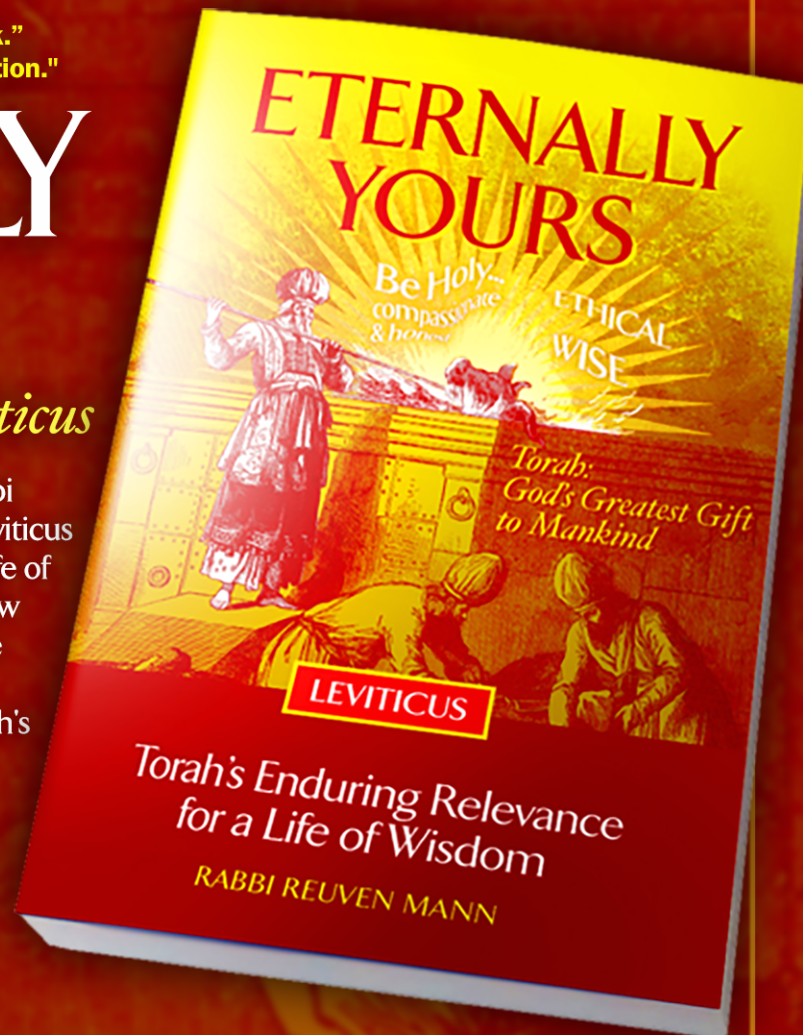
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If I Forget You Jerusalem

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Jewish history is saturated with many tragedies of a physical as well as a spiritual nature. The worst disaster in the realm of material existence was the Holocaust which sought the utter eradication of Jewish existence.

From the spiritual standpoint the most devastating catastrophe was the destruction of the Beit Hamidash the Holy Temple around two thousand years ago. Since that time the Jews have been without a Sanctuary and all Temple Services such as the one performed on Yom Kippur which provides atonement for the entire nation cannot be performed.

Judaism has been able to survive this loss because on a certain level the Synagogue functions as a "Minor Sanctuary" and prayer substitutes for animal sacrifices. However, the ideal relationship between Hashem and the Jewish People-which causes the Divine Presence to dwell among us- cannot be attained without the Holy House.

It is a fundamental Jewish belief that the Temple will be rebuilt and restored to its full majesty in the days of Moshiach. Judaism went very far to prevent Jews from forgetting about the Temple and desisting from striving to regain it.

Many customs were established to keep the memory of the Mikdash and hope for its restoration firmly in our consciousness. We count the Omer today to recall the days when the Temple stood and then recite, "May the Merciful One return to us the Temple Service to its place, speedily and in our days, Amen."

Perhaps the most well known of the Temple remembrances is that which takes place under the Chuppa when the groom smashes a glass with his foot and recites, "If I forget You, Jerusalem, May my right hand forget it's skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy." But what exactly do we mean by "forgetting" Jerusalem? How could we determine whether we are, on any level, guilty of that? The "If I forget thee" declaration, which implies that if we do forget our holiest place we should suffer unpleasant consequences, is a very bold statement and before making it we should be certain that we are are not, in way, forgetting the Beit Hamidash.

Until very recently the Temple Mount was outside of our control and aside from praying and remembering there was little one could do on a positive level to restore the Sanctuary. Everything changed in June 1967 when the heroic soldiers of Israel liberated Jerusalem and the Har Habayit came under Israel's jurisdiction.

This was a glorious moment for the Jewish People and they should have proudly proclaimed, "We have returned to the holiest of our holy places never to leave again." Actually this was Moshe Dayan's initial reaction to Motta Gur's announcement that "Har Habayit beyadeinu." ("The Temple Mount is in our hands").

But Dayan's initial resolve "never to leave again" did not last very long. Almost immediately, for reasons that are hard to fathom, he returned the place of the Holy Temple to the jurisdiction of the Muslim religious authority known as the WAQF. Not surprisingly the Muslims immediately "decreed" that Jews may not gather for prayer in their holiest site and the great joy of the conquest was converted to bitter mourning.

If one "remembers" Jerusalem how can he stand by and allow the site of the Kodesh Kadashim (Holy of Holies) to be desecrated by a religious sect which despises Jews and mocks Judaism? Remembering Yerushalayim means to treasure its holiness and revere it as the Mitzva declares, "Revere My Sanctuary!" To indifferently allow it to become a place of Muslim worship from which Jews are banned is clearly a failure to truly "Remember" Jerusalem and honor its sanctity.

Fortunately, Israel is a democracy which respects the right of all citizens to freedom of worship. Israel's courts have ruled that it is wrong for Arabs to have the right to pray on the Temple Mount while Jews are prohibited. However the Israeli police have prevented the implementation of this right by claiming it would constitute a provocation and trigger Arab violence. The threat of Arab terrorism prevents Jews from praying at the Har Habayit in the land which they conquered with their sweat and blood.

The only upside to this shameful situation is that Israel's judicial system is not immune to political realities. Nothing will be done if only a very few people are interested in visiting the Temple Mount and asserting their right to pray there. However if more and more Jews manifest their desire to have Jewish prayer in the place of the Beit Hamikdash things will start to change.

And indeed they have. In the last few years an ever growing number of individuals have visited the Mount and asserted their right to pray there. It must be pointed out that ascending the Har Habayit is not a simple matter. There are very serious prohibitions against walking in places that are "off limits" according to Torah law. A new institute of Torah, Yeshivat Har Habayit and Kollel Dreshat Zion is dedicated to teaching all of the halachot that pertain to the Beit Hamidash. They lead people in visits to the Mount taking extreme care to only go in the areas that are Halachikally permitted.

And the Israeli police have softened their stance on Jewish prayer at our holiest site. Today, daily prayer services are conducted on the Temple Mount but still no visible expression of worship such as the wearing of tallit and Tefillin and loud prayer is permitted. This represents an improvement over the past situation but there is still a long way to go.

It is vitally important for the Jewish People to recognize the great significance of the Har Habayit. It is the place which is most propitious for prayer and petition to the Creator of the Universe. We must do everything in our power to prevent the surrender of this site which was liberated with heroic Jewish blood and Divine Providence to those who desecrate its Kedusha (Holiness).

The next time you attend a wedding and the moment comes for the recitation of "Im Eshkachech" ("If I Forget You...") please think more deeply into the matter and ask, if we can honestly affirm that we do remember Yerushalayim and that we have not, Heaven forbid, forgotten it. Let us resolve with a full heart that the Jewish People will always remember and honor the sanctity of the holiest of its holy places. ■



UNLIKE OTHER RELIGIONS, Judaism teaches reality and wisdom, not fantasy and fallacy.

One mark of man-made (false) religion is its focus on man, as is evident in Jesus and Mohammed. In contrast, Judaism prohibits human deification and openly discusses the sins of our leaders. Other distinguishing marks are their selfish motives like salvation and eternal instinctual gratification. These common marks are generated by fantasy. Most people do not mature from their need for human security (parents) and then when older, they project this need onto idols, man-gods, saints, or fabricated prophets. People remain attached to sensuality, and fabricate the reward of extreme sexual gratification and placate their insecurities in the belief of imaginary gods that watch over them. As Rabbi Israel Chait recently taught, idolatry seeks to aggrandize the self. One thinks through worship, he finds favor in the gods' eyes and therefore will be cared for. Even in human sacrifice, idolater's perpetrated such cruel and callous crimes due to their belief that this "high degree of self-sacrifice" would secure great success for them. Thus, in false religions and in idolatry, man seeks self-preservation and also gratification, as measured by man's instinctual framework. And the appeal of these instinctual motives explains why such religions attracted billions of followers. On top of all this, man-made religions are simple in nature, bearing no wisdom.

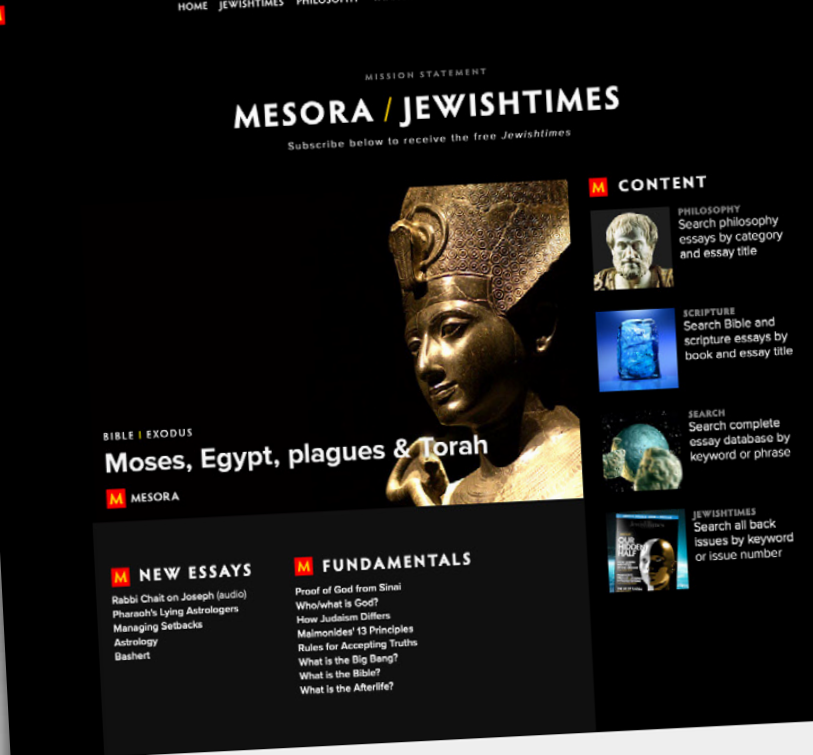
In stark contrast, Judaism's focus is on God's wisdom, revealed in thousands of laws and principles. Each one complies with reality, not fantasy. These laws cover all areas of life, from morality which includes justice, charity and kindness, to ownership and damages, holidays, marriage, statutes like tefillin and tzitzis, community care, speech, death, farming, eating, blessings, dress, prayer, and the gamut of all areas. Following all these laws, man is required throughout his day to understand principles that guide his actions, not merely to act in a perfunctory fashion. As God designed every law in all its details, each one directs us towards His knowledge. He directs us towards reality. And as God designed man that understanding reality pleases our minds, we enjoy discovering new laws and their underlying principles. It's an everlasting, exciting journey. God designed man that this journey, this exploration of God's wisdom, provides greater enjoyment than all other earthly pursuits. *Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim* ■



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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" (Eccl. 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. 1:17). "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.



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