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VALUES

Proper Torah teachers direct us to value the greatest pleasure, which is Torah. They guide us in self-discipline where we devalue the noises in life of wealth, fame, and lusts. After exposure to Torah wisdom, one naturally rejects possessions, fame and pleasures, as he finds the greatest joy in God's wisdom: "For wisdom is better than rubies; no goods can equal her" (Proverbs 8:11).

PARSHA

RABBI REUVEN MANN

"Know Thyself"

This week's Parsha, Korach, depicts a most unlikely and unanticipated development, Korach's rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach contested the legitimacy of Moshe's appointment of his brother Aaron, as the Kohen Gadol (High Priest from whom all future Kohanim would descend) and the tribe of Levi to assist in the Temple service.

A fundamental objective of the great Revelation on Mt. Sinai, was to affirm before the entire nation the

Divine origin of Torah and Hashem's designation of Moshe to be His sole legitimate spokesman. All the Mitzvot and the extensive body of Oral Law which governs their performance, were communicated by Hashem to Moshe who, faithfully, transmitted them to Klal Yisrael. Thus, in order for the people to fulfill their divine mission, they had to have complete trust in the integrity of Moshe.

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Originally, it was the firstborn males who were supposed to minister in the Mishkan (Tabernacle). However, the sin of the Golden Calf canceled that intention. It was only the tribe of Levi—who refrained from sin, and joined with Moshe in exacting punishment of the transgressors—who were worthy of serving in the Tabernacle. As a result, control over the Temple and its services was transferred to the Kohanim and Levites.

This had a profound impact on Korach, as well as many other disgruntled individuals who harbored resentments against Moshe. They put forth the preposterous claim that Moshe had become power hungry, and had made the priestly appointments on the basis of his desire to keep the important positions of prestige and control “in the family.”

Nothing, of course, could have been further from the truth. In fact, Moshe was “more humble than any other man on the face of the earth”; and had “argued” vociferously with Hashem to appoint someone other than himself to be the leader of the Jewish People. Moshe’s absolute dedication to the welfare of the people and renunciation of any personal desire for glory, had been demonstrated many times. So what was it that triggered the quarrelsomeness of Korach?

According to Rashi, Korach was reeling from what he regarded as a personal slight. After Moshe appointed Aaron as Kohen, Korach expected that he would then be designated as the Prince over the children of his grandfather, Kahat. However, that did not happen. Moshe, acting on Hashem’s instructions, chose the younger, Elitzafan Ben Uziel, for that position. It was this affront to his ego, that infuriated Korach and pushed him to the point of rebellion.

Once he was overcome by this perceived insult, Korach dedicated himself to destroying the authority of Moshe. According to Rashi, he was an extremely intelligent individual who employed great cunning in the pursuit of this endeavor. He took pains to camouflage his true motivation and sought out allies among those who also harbored grievances against the nation’s leader.

Korach was keenly aware that his movement required an idealistic basis and a slogan around which the masses could unite. He claimed, that it was wrong in the Jewish nation for a single individual or family to amass excessive power, as this violates the special Kedusha (holiness) of Klal Yisrael. Korach declared; “This is too much for you. For the entire Congregation is holy and Hashem is among them. Why do you exalt yourself over the Congregation of Hashem? (BaMidbar 16:3)”

However, his real goal was not to promote true Kedusha but, in fact, to undermine it as well as the spiritual fabric of the Jewish People. And while Korach was an extremely bright individual, he was decidedly ignorant in an area of supreme importance, the self.

Socrates famously asserted, “Know thyself.” One should not confuse his inner feelings with objective truths. People become obsessed with all kinds of causes and will fight and die for them, believing without any doubt in the righteousness of their “cause.” But an adept psychologist might be able to show that their unshakable conviction is really rooted in very powerful emotions, which they choose not to acknowledge. Rather than confront his frustrated desire for a leadership role, Korach projected his own defect onto Moshe. He was guilty of failing to know himself.

In man’s quest for moral perfection, it is vitally important to obtain knowledge of right and wrong. But it is equally consequential to gain a genuine insight into one’s real nature and character. This requires a great deal of courage and honesty and is a lifelong endeavor. It is only the person who is honest and insightful about himself that can reach the highest level of serving Hashem. May we merit to attain it.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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—Rabbi Reuven Mann

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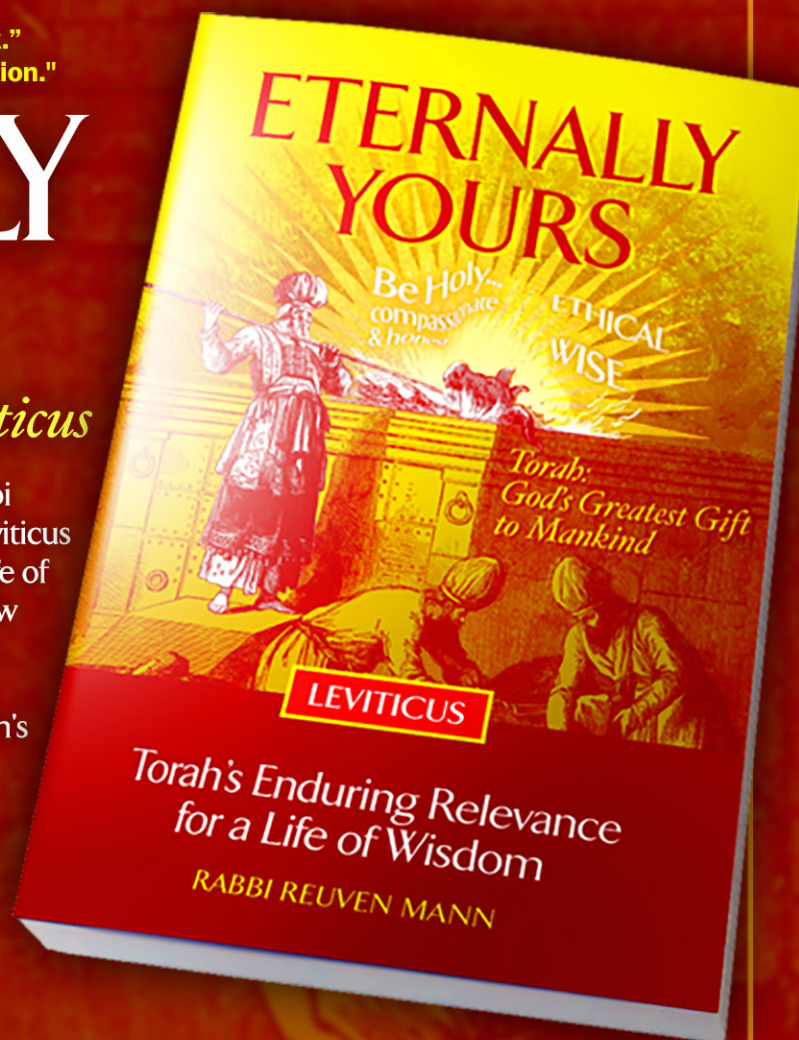
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Creation

THE 2 MOST IMPORTANT ONES

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

In Jeremiah's era, most of the Jews were exiled or subjugated to other nations, and this was the nations' sentiment:

You see what this people said: "The two families [royalty and priests] which the Lord chose have now been rejected by Him." Thus they despise My people, and regard them as no longer a nation" (Jer. 33:24).

God's response to those who say He rejected David's lineage and the priesthood:

Thus said the Lord: "If you could break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that day and night should not come at their proper time, only then could My covenant with My servant David be broken—so that he would not have a descendant reigning upon his throne..." "If I had not established My covenant with day and night—the statutes of heaven and earth...so too I would despise the offspring of Jacob and My servant David! I will never fail to take rulers from his [David's] offspring for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Jer. 33:20,21,25,26).

Rashi comments:

It is impossible that the covenant I made for day and night not be at their set times; and it is impossible for the laws of heaven and earth to be abolished. So too, Jacob's seed will never be abolished. And our rabbis explained this as referring to the Torah covenant, to learn from this that for the sake of the Torah, heaven and earth were created" (Ibid.).

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Creation & Jews

God equates creation and the Jews: as one must exist, so must the other. What then is the need for creation, and how does it parallel the need for the Jews?

As Rabbi Israel Chait taught, the books of Prophets and Writings add nothing to the Five Books—Bible. Bible contains the complete corpus of God's guide for human happiness. Prophets and Writings only embellish the Bible's lessons. Thus, we find a basis for Jeremiah's words in Genesis:

God smelled [Noah's sacrifice's] pleasing odor, and God resolved: "Never again will I doom the earth because of humankind, since the devisings of the human mind are evil [only] from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done. Furthermore, all the days of Earth there shall not cease seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" (Gen. 8:21,22)

Rashi comments: From this we may infer that they (day and night) ceased during the period of the Flood, for the planetary system did not function, so that there was no distinction between day and night (Ibid.)

Man sinned so grievously, God flooded Earth and wiped out all life. At that time, natural law was suspended, seasons ceased, as did day and night. Without man recognizing God, Earth is without purpose. But due to Noah's recognition of God through sacrificing to Him, God swore to never cause natural law to cease as it had during the Flood. "Man is only evil from youth," but he can excel as an adult and use his intellect to overpower his instincts, and lead a perfected lifestyle. Noah's perfected act of sacrifice displayed no further need for another Flood. Noah represented mankind's potential for good.

The Tzaddik Saves Earth

Righteous people justify the sustained existence of the universe. That's a powerful idea: creation exists as God's communication to intelligent beings. Creation functions to display that there is a Wise Being...evidenced in creation. And as wise people exist, they give meaning to the world, as they use the universe to recognize God. This is Rashi's words on Jeremiah: "for the sake of the Torah, heaven and earth were created." Meaning, the universe was made for the sake of man recognizing God. King David said, "The righteous man is the foundation of Earth" (Proverbs 10:25). Malbim says this refers to Noah.

But the universe is not the only means through which God communicates His wisdom, and will for man:

Just as it is impossible that I revoke My covenant of day and night, the statutes of heaven and earth...so too I will never despise the offspring of Jacob and My servant David; I will never fail to take rulers from his offspring for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Indeed, I will restore their captives and show them mercy.

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The Jews' Role: Equal to Others

The Jew who is to communicate God's Bible to the world has equal status as creation. Just as the universe imparts God's natural wisdom, the Jew is obligated to study and share God's Biblical wisdom with all mankind. And as the Jew's role is to share God's Bible, ultimately all mankind are equals, as God wants all mankind to follow His Bible. This is the primary lesson.

We must also note that the verse says, "I will never despise the offspring of Jacob and My servant David; I will never fail to take rulers from his [David's] offspring for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." God promises that David's descendants will retain kingship as not any Jew is worthy of the throne. A Jew is not inherently great...he must follow the character of David, and David's descendants are most fit as they will identify with David more than other Jews.

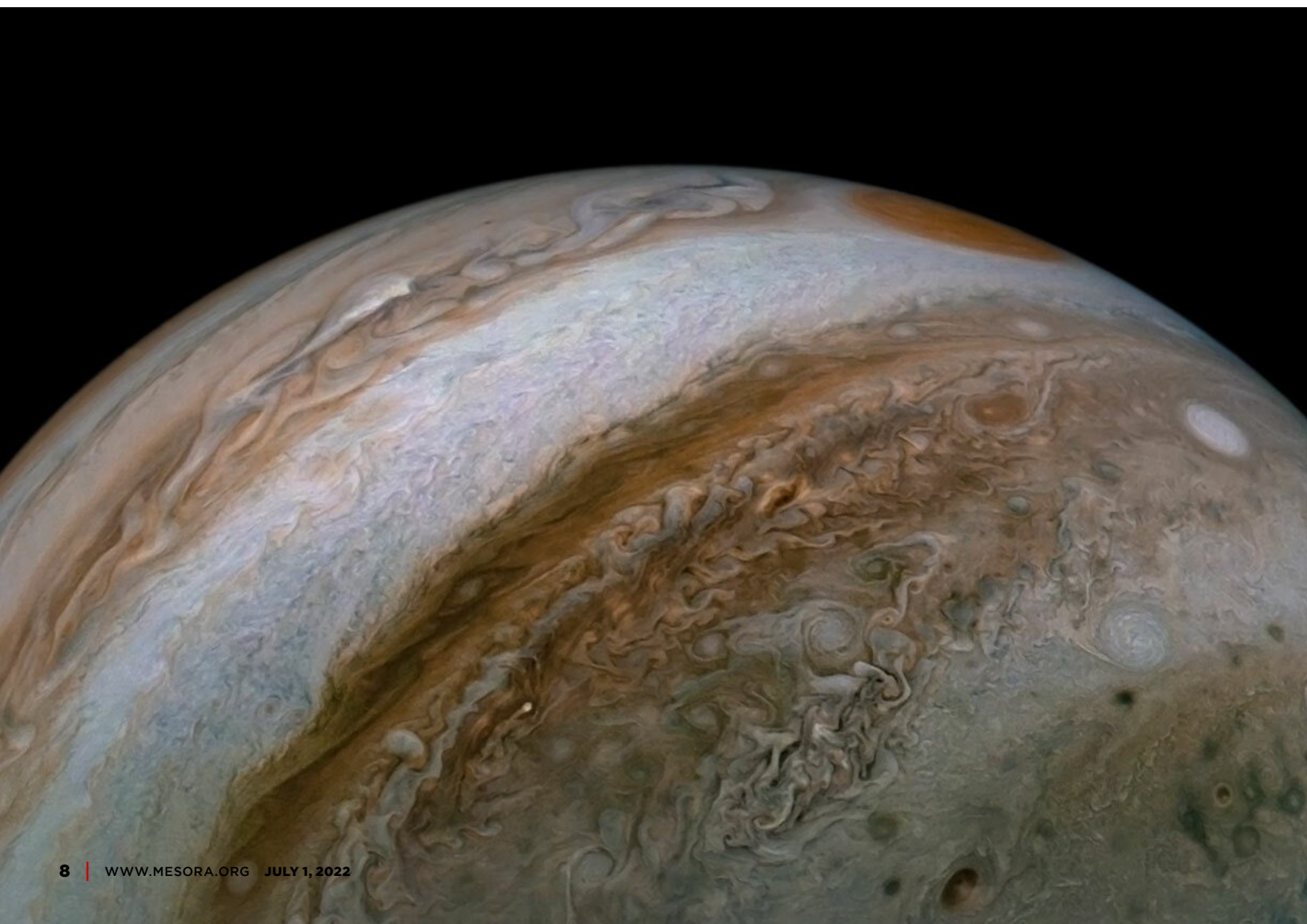
Creation's Statutes

If I had not established My covenant with day and night—the statutes of heaven and earth...so too I would despise the offspring of Jacob and My servant David

Notice that God refers not to the simple physical phenomenon of heaven and Earth, but to the "statutes" of heaven and Earth. "Statutes" refer to laws, a repeating phenomenon. Laws are guided by design, by wisdom, they are intelligent controls which guide the universe. God intends that we don't simply marvel at physical beauty, but the wisdom embedded in natural law is to be our focus. God desires that man unravel the depth of wisdom that runs the universe...that engage his mind. For the pursuits of discovery, analysis and deduction provide man the utmost satisfaction, and direct him towards a growing relationship with the Creator. The very model God determined—wise men teaching others—teaches mankind that the universe and Torah contain great depth and wisdom;

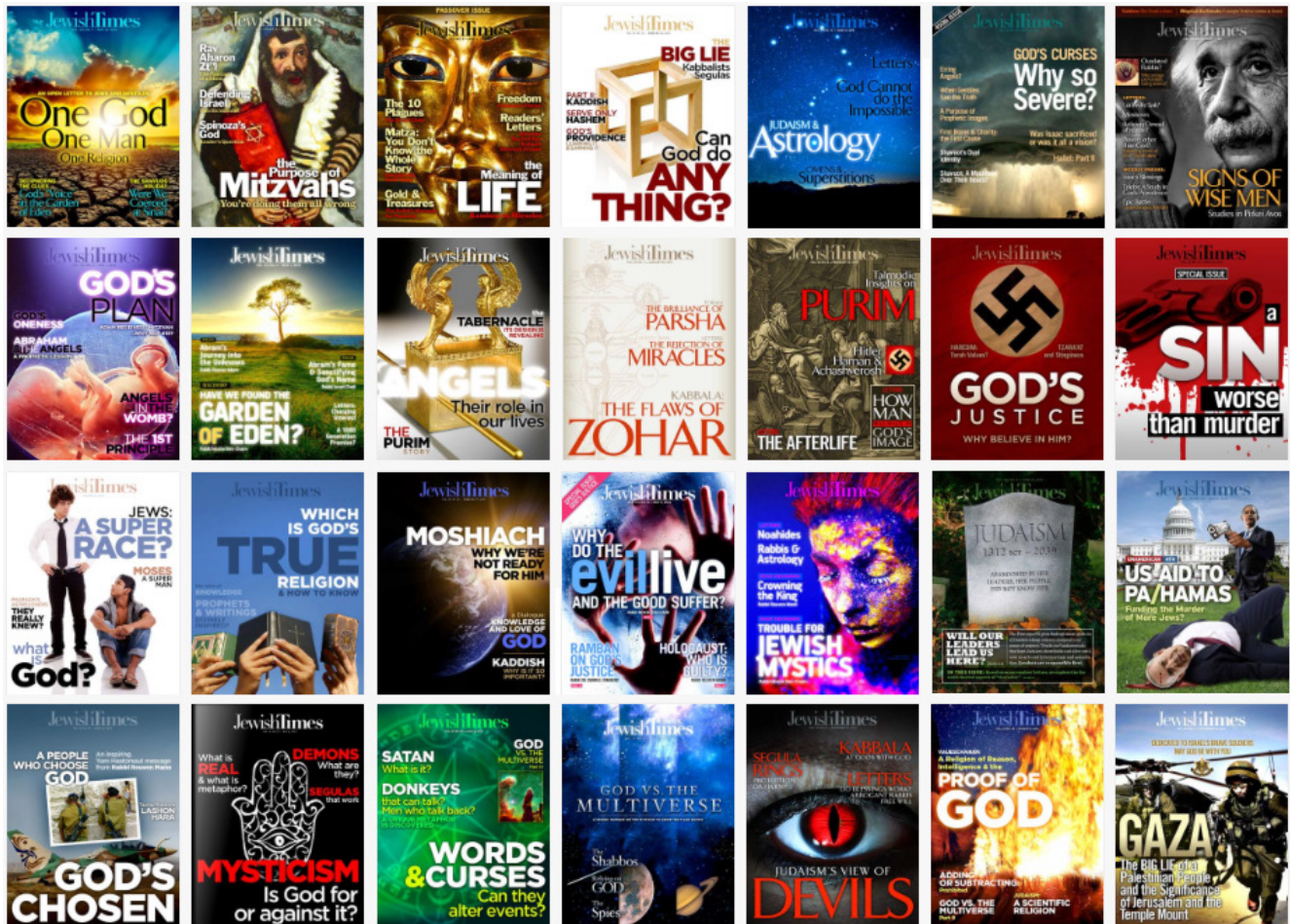
only a wise person can uncover God's wisdom: "A brutish man cannot know, a fool cannot understand this" (Psalms 92:7). Engaging prophets and the Jew, God tells the world that there are great discoveries to made that can fulfill our lives, but those discoveries require intellect. Just as God will not break His covenant with heaven and Earth, He will also retain David's descendants as Jewish rulers. God created a universe wherein physical creation provides great wisdom for our unraveling, and where He established rulers from those who recognize God.

Based on the Jews' state of exile and subjugation, man assumed God rejected the Jews. God could have replied by simply saying He won't ever despise David's lineage. What demanded that God refer to the permanence of heaven and Earth? It is because God wished to convey the very reason David's descendants will rule eternally: the Jew—like heaven and Earth—exist to share God's wisdom. The Jew and creation share the identical role of God's messengers. ■



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What was Korach's Sin?

Rabbi Richard Borah

The parsha of Korach describes the rebellion of Korach and his 250 followers (Bamidbar 16:1-3):

Korach the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi took [himself to one side] along with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, descendants of Reuben. They confronted Moses together with two hundred and fifty men from the children of Israel, chieftains of the congregation, representatives of the assembly, men of repute. They assembled against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do raise yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ("The Rav") analyzes the approach taken by Korach and his followers and how it is essentially similar in form to many current day reproaches of the Torah system of laws. This attack is on both the structure of Jewish law and questions the need for expert scholars to determine the application of the law in a particular case. Korach assumed that Jewish law did not require the intuitive and refined thinking of an expert to derive the law, but only a "common sense" understanding of the facts of the case. The Rav writes in the essay "The Common Sense Rebellion Against Torah Authority" in the sefer "Reflections on the Rav" by Rabbi Avraham Besdin:

Korach's rationale can be understood more readily if we clarify three terms denoting the various levels of reason and intelligence. "Hokhmah" refers to specialized knowledge and scholarship which are acquired by extensive and detailed study. "Bina" is the capacity to analyze, to make distinctions, to draw inferences and apply them to various situations. When "binah" is combined with "hokhmah", we have the especially gifted

and creative thinker. "Daat" deals with common sense, basic intelligence, and sound practical judgment. Korach's appeal to common sense in Judaism was basically a claim that only daat and not hokhmah, is involved in the application of Halakha....

A second dimension of Korach's attack on Moshe's leadership was his claim that Moshe misunderstood the structure of Jewish law. Specifically, Korach denigrated Moshe's understanding the structure of the legal obligation to be separate from the desired outcome or "reason" for the law. Korach derided Moshe for holding, for example, that a room full of Torahs required a mezuzah and a garment of blue color required the blue thread of the tzitzit. The Rav explains how Korach tried to formulate the law to make the Torah's system of laws as explained by Moshe seem absurd. He states:

On the basis of Korach's theory, the mitzvah would have to correspond to the mood that prompts it. The value of the mitzvah is to be found not in its performance, but in its subjective impact upon the person, its ability to arouse a devotional state of mind... If these mitzvot ceased having this impact upon people, their observance would be open to question and new rituals, more responsive to changing sensitivities, should be enacted. What follows from his reasoning is that the mitzvah may be modified according to changing times or even according to individual temperaments of different people. There is to him, no inherent redemptive power in the mitzvah beyond its therapeutic effects, its capacity to evoke a subjective experience.

The Rav explains that the Torah law's obligations are not altered in a particular case to achieve an outcome that is perceived as more aligned with the supposed reason or purpose for the mitzvah. The law must remain consistent in all cases, regardless of the particular outcome. Rabbi Soloveitchik was quite consistent in his view that halachic observance has its own validity as a means to the human being "walking with God" and achieving holiness within one's earthly life. Halacha is not to be understood as receiving its validity from its efficaciousness according to some other system of truth. Kashrut (the laws of kosher foods) is not validated because it may have health benefits; prayer is not validated due to its psychological benefits. Halacha is valid within its own objectives of drawing man close to God and providing human beings with a way to serve the Creator in all aspects of their lives. Halachic authorities would not deny that halachic observance may have extra-halachic benefits, but

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these are neither the purpose of the system or its source of value or validity. If a doctor prescribed exercise to a person to improve the person's health and it happened to help him or her work better at business and be more productive, this ancillary benefit would not impact the medical benefit of the exercise, for which it was prescribed. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks comments on the Rav's work "Halachic Mind" in his essay, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Early Epistemology". Rabbi Sacks writes:

The central argument of The Halachic Mind is that religion constitutes an autonomous cognitive domain. R. Soloveitchik has no taste for apologetics, for the justification of religion in terms drawn from outside itself. He (the Rav) notes "the passionate desire of every philosopher of religion [is] to legitimate the cognitive validity and truthfulness of religious propositions. Yet the problem of evidence in religion will never be solved. The believer does not miss philosophic legitimation; the skeptic will never be satisfied with any cognitive demonstration" ("Exploring the Thoughts of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik", edited by Rabbi Marc D. Angel).

Korach, according to the Tanchuma brought down by Rashi, did more than rebel against the leadership of Moshe. He also attacked Moshe by attacking the Torah itself, portraying certain laws as absurd. The Tanchuma states:

He clad them (Korach dressed his 250 followers) in garments made entirely of blue wool, they came and stood before Moses, and said to him, "A garment made entirely of blue wool, does it require fringes or is it exempt?" Moses said to them, "It does require." They began to laugh at him, "Is it possible that with a garment made of another material, one thread of blue wool exempts it (makes it ritually correct) yet this which is made entirely of blue wool shall not exempt itself?"

In the case that was brought down in this Tanchuma we should note that the question itself is not the sin. One is permitted and encouraged to question one's teacher, even

if that teacher is Moshe Rebbenu, regarding a Jewish law. This process takes place endlessly in the Talmud where debate and discussion are intense and a law is clarified by questions about unusual cases that are brought into the heart of the discussion. In the case of Korach and his followers this was certainly not the case. The situation of dressing the group in the blue garment and the laughter the Tanchuma mentions when Moshe explains that the blue wool garment requires the techielis (blue fringe) show clearly that this question was one brought to Moshe, not for clarification, but as a means of disparagement and derision of Moshe and of the Torah itself.

The Torah and rabbinic laws regarding how the student conducts himself before his teacher are described by Maimonides in the 6th chapter of the Mishneh Torah, "Hilchos Talmud Torah" (Laws of Torah Study). When asking questions of his teacher there are many parameters of how to do it in a respectful and efficient manner. Questioning is, nonetheless encouraged and praised. Maimonides states:

...A teacher should take care of his students and love them, because they are like sons who bring him pleasure in this world and in the world to come. Students increase their teacher's wisdom and broaden his horizons. Our Sages declared: "I learned much wisdom from my teachers and even more from my colleagues. However, from my student (I learned) most of all. Just as a small branch is used to light a large bough, so a small student sharpens his teacher's (thinking process), until, though his questions, he brings forth brilliant wisdom. (Hilchos Talmud Torah 6:12-13)

The honor afforded one's teacher is greater even than that given to a parent and include specific prohibitions regarding the issuing of an halachic ruling in the presence of one's teacher. The violation of the honor of the teacher, although Maimonides does not bring down a court-based punishment, does result in the person's being deserving of death and the loss of one's portion in the world to come. Maimonides states:

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CONDÉ NAST



There is no greater honor than that due a teacher, and no greater awe than that due a teacher. Our Sages declared: "Your fear of your teacher should be equivalent to your fear of Heaven." Therefore, they said, "Whoever disputes the authority of his teacher is considered as if he revolts against the Divine Presence, as implied (BaMidbar 26:9) ...who led a revolt against God." (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:1)

The pasuk quoted (26:9) describes the rebellion of Korach. Maimonides continues in this Halacha:

Whoever engages in controversy with his teacher is considered as if he engaged in controversy with the Divine Presence, as implied (BaMidbar 20:13): "...where the Jews contested with God and where he was sanctified." Whoever thinks disparagingly of his teacher is considered as if he thought disparagingly of the Divine Presence, as implied by (BaMidbar 21:5): "And the people spoke out against God and Moses" (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:1)

Maimonides continues, in the next halacha to describe what is meant by disputing the authority of one's teacher. He states:

A person who establishes a house of study where he (the teacher) sits, explains and teaches without his teacher's permission in his teacher's lifetime. This applies even when one's teacher is in another country. It is forbidden to ever render a halachic judgment in one's teacher's presence. Whoever renders a halachic judgment in his teacher's presence is worthy of death. (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:2)

Maimonides adds in the 4th Halacha of this chapter,

Any student who is not worthy of rendering a halachic judgment and does so is foolish, wicked and arrogant. (Mishlei 7:36) "She has cast down many corpses" applies to him. (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:4)

There are also strict laws of respect for any Torah sage, even if he is not one's own teacher. Maimonides states in the 6th chapter of the Mishneh Torah: Hilchos Talmud Torah):

It is a mitzvah to respect every Torah sage, even if he is not one's teacher as (Vayikra 19:32) states: "Stand up before a white-haired (man) and respect an elder." (The word) zakane (translated as "elders", alludes to the Hebrew words meaning) "one who has acquired wisdom"....(Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:4).

Maimonides continues later in this chapter regarding the sin of disgracing or hating a Torah scholar.

It is a great sin to disgrace Torah sages or to hate them. Jerusalem was not destroyed until (its inhabitants) disgraced its sages, as implied by (II:Chronicles 36:16) "And they would mock the messengers of God, despise His words, and scoff at His prophets" – i.e., they would scorn those who taught His words. Similarly the Torah's prophecy (Vayikra 26:16): "If you despise My statutes" (should be interpreted): "If you despise the teachers of My statutes." Whoever disgraces the sages has no portion in the world to come and is included in the category: "Those who scorn the word of God" (Bamidbar 15:31). Even though a person who disgraces a Torah sage will not receive a portion in the world to come, if witnesses come (and testify that) he disgraced him, even if only verbally, he is placed under a ban of ostracism. (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:4)

It seems to me that Korach certainly violated the laws of disrespecting his teacher, as Moshe was Moshe Rebbenu and the teacher of all of Israel at that time. He also violated the law of disgracing and hating the Torah scholar through his disparaging of Moshe and laughing at his answer regarding the techeiles required on a garment of blue wool. But he violated another law for which the punishment is much more severe. Korach denied the validity of the Oral Law. Moshe is his lifetime was the absolute authority of the Oral Law and the original source of its communication to the Jewish people. To deny the validity of Moshe's halachic ruling was a clear denial of the validity of the Oral Law. In the beginning of the 3rd chapter of Hilchos Mamrim (Laws of the Rebellious Ones) in the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides states:

A person who does not acknowledge (the validity) of the Oral Law is not the rebellious elder mentioned in the Torah. Instead he is one of the heretics...He is like all the rest of the heretics who say that the Torah is not Divine in origin, those who inform on their fellow Jews, and the apostates. All of these are not considered as members of the Jewish people....To whom does the above apply? To a person who denied the Oral Law consciously, according to his perception of things. He follows after his frivolous thoughts and capricious heart and denies the Oral Law first, as did Tzadok and Beitus, and those who erred in following them. (Hilchos Mamrim: 3:1-3)

This violation would certainly apply to Korach and his followers who disputed and rejected Moshe explanation of the law of tzitzit and the situation which required the techeilis thread. By rejecting and disparaging Moshe Rebbenu's position, they were more than rejecting Moshe as a teacher or sage - they were rejecting the very validity of the Oral Law which rested on the validity of Moshe Rebbenu as the primary source of the Oral Law communication to the Jewish people. ■

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Angel of DEATH

In Parshas Korach (Numbers 17:13) Rashi states an amazing story of how Aaron “seized the Angel of Death against its will.” In order to understand this metaphor, we must first understand the events immediately prior.

God killed Korach and his rebellion. On the morrow, the Jewish people said the following (Numbers, 17:6): “You (Moses and Aaron) have killed the people of God,” referring to Korach and his assembly. Evidently, the Jews could not make such a statement the same day as God’s destruction of the Korach assembly, perhaps because the Jews were too frightened at the moment. But as their terror waned, they mustered the courage to speak their true feelings on the next day.

What they said were actually two accusations: 1) Moses and Aaron are murderers, and 2) those who were murdered were God’s people. The Jews made two errors, and God addressed both.

The method God used to correct their second error was to demonstrate through a miracle that Aaron in fact was following God, and Korach and his group were not: detached wood—the staff—miraculously continued its growth and blossomed almonds. Aaron’s rod blossoming demonstrated whom God favored.

Now the Jew’s false opinion that Korach followed God was rejected, as it was Aaron’s staff—not Korach’s—which God favored.

But how did Moses correct the people’s false opinion that he and Aaron were murderers? How did the incense, which Moses instructed Aaron to bring correct the problem, and end the plague, which God sent to kill the Jews? Moses commanded Aaron to take the incense and stand between the living and the dead during the plague, which only temporarily stopped the plague. It was not until Aaron returned back to Moses that God completely halted the plague. What does Aaron standing there accomplish, that it stopped the plague temporarily? Additionally, what does his return to Moses and God at the Tent of Meeting do? This is where the Rashi comes in:

Aaron seized the angel of death against its will. The angel said, “Leave me to do my mission.” Aaron said, “Moses commanded me to prevent you.” The angel said, “I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses.” Aaron said, “Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not

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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask” and this is the meaning of “and Aaron returned to Moses” [Num. 17:15]. (Rashi, Num. 17:13).

Moses knew that the people accused him and Aaron of murder. The Jews viewed Moses and God in conflict, i.e., Moses was not working in sync with God, as he apparently killed the “people of God,” i.e., Korach and his congregation. The Jews’ accusation “You have killed the people of God” displayed the people’s belief that God was correct to follow, but Moses opposed God’s will. Moses now attempted to correct the Jews, and show that in fact, he and Aaron were not murderers opposing God. Moses sent Aaron to make atonement for the Jews. What was this atonement, and how did it entitle the Jews to be saved from God’s current plague?

The Jews saw Aaron with his incense offering, standing at the place where the last Jew dropped down in death; the plague progressed in a domino fashion. And the Jews now saw that due to Aaron’s presence with the incense, no more Jews were dropping down dead. They were now perplexed: they accused Aaron and Moses as murderers, but Aaron was now saving lives—not killing—as they previously accused. This perplexity is what the Rashi described metaphorically as “Aaron seizing the Angel of Death.” Aaron was now correcting the “opinion” of the people, which earned them death, as if Aaron seized the cause of their death. The peoples’ opinion was in fact, their own “Angel of Death.” This means that the angel is not a real being, but the cause of death is man’s own distance from God. And these Jews were distant from God when they imputed murder to Moses and Aaron.

As the Jews were now second guessing their accusation, but not completely abandoning this false view of Aaron and Moses, the plague stopped, but only temporarily, reflecting their temporal suspension of their accusation. We may interpret Aaron as “seizing the angel of death” as his correction the Jews’ false accusation of Moses and Aaron. “Seizing the Angel of Death” means Aaron removed the cause of death in the remaining Jews; he corrected their false notions which earned them death.

When they saw Aaron standing between the living and the dead with incense halting the plague, the Jews were confused. Aaron is Moses’ messenger, but the plague was clearly from God. So, how could Aaron and Moses overpower God? This is what Rashi means when metaphorically the Angel of Death tells Aaron, “I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses.” The Angel in this metaphor personifies the false opinions of the people, which caused death. But with a corrected opinion, God will not kill. So, the Angel talking in this metaphor represents the Jewish people’s corrupt opinion, which in fact causes death. (Sometimes, false views can be so wrong that the follower of such a view deserves death.)

Returning to the Rashi, Aaron replies to the Angel one last time, “Moses says nothing on his own

accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask.” At this point, the plague was temporarily stopped, as the Jews were entertaining the idea that Moses and Aaron were not murderers, as Aaron was trying to keep them alive. Their perplexity about whether Aaron and Moses were following God had to be removed if they were to live permanently. This is what is meant that when Aaron returned to the tent of meeting (Num. 17:15) and the plague was terminated completely. As the Jews witnessed Aaron, Moses, and God “together” they now understood that Moses and Aaron were in fact followers of God. The metaphor depicts Aaron as “seizing” the corrupt views of the people which demanded their death, allegorized by seizing the “Angel of Death.”

This Rashi is yet another of literally thousands of examples where the Rabbis wrote in riddles, as King Solomon taught in Proverbs 1:6. We learn from King Solomon, to whom God gave knowledge miraculously (Kings I, 3:12) that riddles are a means of education. We must continue to look for the hidden meanings in the Rabbis’ words, which at first seem bizarre. We must not take amazing stories literally. There are no demons roaming the Earth, no angels of death, no powers of segulas that protect. God is the only power, and He created the Earth and heavens and all they behold, with distinct, limited physical properties and laws. Physical creation cannot exceed its design: a string dyed red cannot ward off God’s punishments. It is unfortunate that we have become so idolatrous with red bendels.

What is worse, is that children are taught to accept superstitions. They become prime candidates for missionaries. Superstitious rearing teaches children that Christianity is no different.

This new mystical, pop-kabbalistic Judaism blurs the lines between true Torah principles and all other religions. When Jews fail to see the difference between a superstitious Judaism and other religions, they more easily convert. And they are accurate in this equation: there is no difference between a Judaism that preaches segulas, or that parts of God are “inside man,” and between superstitious religions.

What parents, teachers, and leaders must do is teach our fundamentals. If Jewish children were taught the “What’s” and “Whys” about God’s unity; that He is not physical since He created all physical things, that He created everything and nothing possesses powers but He alone, that we cannot know what He is and therefore we can’t say “part of God is in man,” that His Torah is correct (and how it is so), that He rewards and punishes...if students were taught the proofs behind these ideas, then far less students would abandon their observance. Far more students would find profound reasons to remain observant and continue their studies and grow more dedicated to a Torah life. However, the fundamentals are not being taught.

Maimonides formulated his 13 Principles for a reason. Teach them to your children now. ■



THE New Moon

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This article will describe the concepts found in Kiddush Levana, the blessing upon the New Moon. Let us familiarize ourselves with the text:

"Blessed are you God, our God, King of the world, that with Your statement (You) created the heavens, and with the breath of Your mouth all the hosts thereof. A statute and time did You give them that they should not deviate their purposes. Happy and joyous (are the heavenly spheres) to do the will of their Creator. Worker of truth Whose works are truth, and unto the moon You declared that it should renew (itself); a crown of splendor to those (mankind) carried in the stomach, as they (mankind) will eventually renew themselves as the moon, and to exalt their Creator for the name of the glory His kingdom. Blessed are You God, Who renews the months."

Now we will address each section.

"With Your statements (You) created the heavens, and with the breath of Your mouth, all the hosts thereof."

This first praise deals with the heavens (space) and their contents (stars, planets, galaxies). God does not "speak" (He has no mouth) and of course prior to man's creation, speech would be futile as there are no beings existing who can hear. Therefore the concept of "statements" and "breath" teach us something else in connection with God. Speech is a very simple activity, and when applied to God, it denotes that His will alone suffices to create the most awesome, physical bodies. Additionally, it is a general principle that one cannot offer partial praise in connection with God. The Talmud teaches that if one visits a place where one of the miracles wrought on his behalf took place, it is not sufficient if he praises God for that miracle alone, but he must also bless God for other miracles which were wrought elsewhere on his behalf. Daniel also followed this principle when God had revealed to him, both, Nevuchadnezzar's dream content, and interpretation. Upon Daniel's receipt of an answer to his request from God for this informa-

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

tion, Daniel praised God for His greater measures, His ability to set up and dethrone kings, and for His ability to reveal knowledge to wise men in general. Only subsequent to this praise, did Daniel praise God for the specific information revealed to him in response to his request. He too offered the fullest praise to God, as limiting praise of God for his own benefit alone suggests God's praises are limited. Such a praise would dwarf the true, immense scope of God's omniscience and omnipotence. To praise God as accurately as humanly possible, man must speak fully, of God's might and knowledge in the most broad and all-inclusive sense. True, full praise of God therefore must describe universal phenomena, not subjective, individual events. Therefore, we first praise God in general terms: we exalt Him for the works of the heavens as a whole independent of man, prior to exalting Him on account of the moon.

“A statute and time did You give them, that they should not deviate their purposes.”

Here we find the blessing referring not to the physical creation, but to the other half of creation: natural law. All matter was created in a physical state, but that such a state continues following set behaviors is not demanded merely by the body's existence. Matter must also have governing laws so that, i.e., all trees grow and reproduce their own kind, all animals beget their own kind, etc. Laws of gravity, inertia, and all other constants did not come into being simply because matter was created. For we understand that atoms can combine in variations to form different elements.

Thus, in creation, God brought into being two distinct things: matter and laws. I believe the second chapter in Genesis alludes to the second category.

In application to the heavens, we would be remiss in our praise of God if we did not include praise for God's wisdom manifested through not only the spheres, but their relentless paths in which they travel.

“Happy and joyous (are they) to do the will of their Creator.”

This statement on the surface implies awareness on the part of brute creation. However, as animals have no self awareness (they cannot reflect on "me") much less can inanimate objects possess will. How then are we to understand this phrase? Here, "happiness" denotes the removal of conflict. Meaning, the spheres function with perfect

exactitude, as there are no impediments between God's will for the spheres to rotate and revolve, and between their physical performances. That is, God's works are perfect.

So there are 3 praises thus far; 1) Praise for the physical heavens, 2) Praise for their governing laws, 3) Praise for harmony, the perfect system of creation, where God willed something, and there is no conflict intervening between God's will and the immediacy of the reality of His will. God's will is all that exists, what we call "reality," bringing us to the next statement...

“Worker of truth, Whose works are truth”

This teaches that man's awareness of the heavens must target an appreciation for the Creator. This is the culmination of the study of nature. Study for its own sake, for curiosity or scientific knowledge alone is not our objective. Our role is to be aware of God, love Him, and stand in awe of Him, Who is behind creation. An atheist scientist—even if he were as great as Einstein—does not know anything, and forfeits his existence as a total waste. He has not recognized the most primary concept of existence. True knowledge of anything means we know how and why it exists: God created it.

Now, when we say, "truth," we mean to say what is real, what is verified by reality. A "true" statement is that which reflects what exists. Without the true statement, reality is still "true." "Worker of truth"—God—means that which God creates, dictates what reality is. We attain this realization through the "works of truth," through creation. Saying something is true—like when we say, "I am your God; This is true" (end of the Shema)—means that we recognize its fundamental importance in our lives. We are saying, "This is what's real."

“And unto the moon You declared that it should renew (itself), a crown of splendor to those carried in the stomach, as they will eventually renew themselves as the moon”

Here we find the distinction which God gave to the moon. The moon is the singular object in the heavens designed by God to pass through phases of waxing and waning. The purpose is that it should be a crown to man. A "crown" means that which marks the elevated distinction of something. Man's elevated distinction is his free will, in specific, the free will that follows the path of a righteous life. Just as the moon waxes full

and then loses its grandeur as it wanes, man too goes through cycles of perfection and sin. But God gives man a great gift through the moon, as God placed the moon's phases as a sign to all mankind that man too can once again become great, just as the moon. The moon, then, is a parable to man's constant failures and victories, to remind man that although he stumbles, he can—like the moon—become "full" once again. Teshuvah is well within reach. The lesson: creation is to direct man towards maintaining a relationship with God. Creation does not exist for itself, as it is mostly inanimate substance. The wisdom God embedded throughout the universe intends to enable man (and angels) to marvel at God's wisdom. This teaches us the level of import, which God wished to give to repentance. Nowhere else do we see God creating a unique behavior in creation solely for the purpose of reminding man that repentance is always within his grasp.

One more idea contained in these words is the meaning of "those carried in the stomach." I wonder why man is referred to in this peculiar fashion, as opposed to saying "a crown of splendor to man." The idea is to remind man—in his pursuit of repentance—that he is a dependent being. He does not need to exist, represented by his once dependent state in his mother's stomach. This humbling notion of dependence assists man in recognizing God, his Creator, and to return to Him through teshuva.

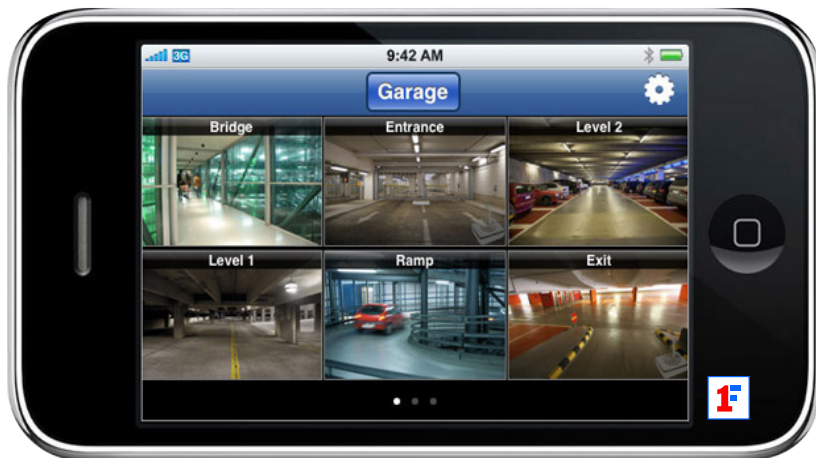
My friend Howard explained well that, "those carried in the stomach" also teaches that just as an infant prior to exiting the womb is free of sin, so are we able to be via repentance. This statement alludes to our inherent capacity to be as pure as we were before birth.

The renewal of the moon each month is to remind man that he was created with the ability to exercise his free will, which is what distances him from sin.

“And to exalt their Creator for the sake of the glory His kingdom”

This teaches that repentance is not the final goal, but the goal is to recognize God's greatness. Maimonides teaches that repentance targets a reestablishing of a relationship with God. It is insufficient that man apologize to others for his wrongdoings, if his objective is not to reconnect with God. Teshuva means return, a return to God. This explains why teshuva requires a dialogue with God, vidduy, where man addresses God and confesses his sins. ■

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