

False Hopes

Ignoring
responsibility,
we harm
ourselves



Does All Happen
for a Reason?

The Jew's
Mission

Success &
Happiness

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The basis for mourning is loss, not sin.



POPULAR FALSE BELIEFS

Baseless beliefs that placate us, block due reflection on our errors.

Do not blindly accept nonsense...even from Jewish masses.

Be convinced based on Torah sources alone.

A mezuzah burns when ignited. It cannot protect itself, so the belief that it can protect man is false. Meharsha and Maimonides say the correct idea is that by following God's commands, we earn merit, but not that physical objects—even a mezuzah—can protect.

The punishment for such idolatrous beliefs is loss of the afterlife.

(Hilchos Mezuza 5:4)

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“There’s a Meaning for Everything”

Some say, “There’s a meaning for everything.” But is that validated? Someone just got to the airport, realized at the gate he forgot his wallet, and had to reschedule his flight. He felt, “There’s a meaning for this delay.” Perhaps there’s no “meaning” out there forcing your delay; it’s just an oversight of forgetting

your wallet. “A meaning behind everything” is not validated by reality. It inexplicably excuses our faults, suggesting we’re being “mystically guided” by powers other than our free will...but it’s a false pacifier. Nothing in reality says, “There’s a meaning behind everything.” Yes, for perfected people like the prophets, God did

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guide all their affairs. But as the Sages teach, most people are not on that level and live by chance...where their errors cause their own misfortunes. When we blame imagined mystical forces for our troubles, we conveniently avoid self-critique, and forfeit self-correction to prevent future failures. And conversely, when we feel everyone we meet is "for a reason," we again create troubles by giving others undue credit and leeway. Instead, we should follow the Rabbis who teach "respect and suspect everyone." Be cordial to all, but don't trust others with your time and money without critical thinking and examining their actions over time. ■

"When the Time is Right, God will Make it happen"

These fabricated "comforting" words are false, never enunciated by God. Although repeated by the masses, Torah alone must be our authoritative source. God runs the Earth, not people with comforting anecdotes.

Maimonides and Sforno state that only people on a high level are under God's Providence; most others are left to chance, "including most Jews and all gentiles" (Sforno, Lev. 13:47). Relying on some imagined "fate" to compensate for our mistakes is a Doomsday device. Waiting for things to automatically turn right in our lives when we continue in our same errors is a prescription for continued failure. Maimonides teaches that most people's errors are self-inflicted. Unless we change our choices, there will be no change in our lives, and God won't relate to us without improvement.

Fantasizing that "everything is for the good" is also not found in Torah. To change our lives we must change ourselves and this takes serious work. We got ourselves into this mess, not God. Therefore, we must reverse behaviors and poor decisions that caused our problems. God doesn't tamper with our free will, that's why He gave it to us!

If you continue to delude yourself with such anecdotes which are not found in Torah, which lead you to believe that "everything will work out for the best," you will have a rude awakening, because the errors you made that caused your failure now, and have yet gone uncorrected, will continue to keep you in ruin. Instead, consult with a wise person to help you to detect your errors and make calculated improvements in your choices. ■

The Jew's Mission

FRIEND: My question is about the Alenu prayer we as Jews recite 3 times daily:

It is our obligation to praise the Master of all, to ascribe greatness to the Creator of the Beginning: that He has not made us like the nations of the lands, and has not positioned us like the families of Earth; that He has not assigned our portion like theirs, nor our lot like that of all their multitudes. For they prostrate themselves to vanity and nothingness, and pray to a god that cannot deliver. But we bow, prostrate ourselves, and offer thanks before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One blessed is He, Who spreads the heavens, and establishes Earth, and the seat of His glory is in heaven above, and the abode of His splendor is in the loftiest heights. He is our God, there is nothing else. Our King is true, there exists nothing else but Him. As it is written in His Torah, "And You shall know this day and place on your heart that Adonoy is God in the heavens above and upon Earth below, there is nothing else."

Alenu's first paragraph ends citing a Torah verse. Does this mean we bow to God only because Torah says He is the creator? Rather, shouldn't the imperative to bow to God (serve Him) be the "natural reality" of God being Creator, regardless of God writing a Torah verse?

RABBI: Alenu says about other nations, "They pray to a god that cannot deliver." Rabbi Israel Chait asked why we don't counter that by saying, "We pray to a God who does deliver!" Rabbi Chait answered that Alenu depicts the flaw of other nations: they wrongly pray for deliverance—salvation—a god that serves them, that saves them.

Praising God only for what "He can do for me" compromises God's greatness. He was great long before He created man! That is the message of Adon Olam: "The Master of the world who reigned before all He formed." Rabbi Chait asked on this phrase, "How can God reign without a kingdom yet in existence?" He explained this refers to God's unity: "God reigning before all He formed means to reject other gods...He was then alone before all else." This precludes other gods.

Returning to other nations, God's greatness is not contingent upon what He does for man, as other religions imagine, and selfishly seek. Man

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should not seek God for His capacity to cater to man; that is a mediocre view of God. In contrast to other religions, Jews—Bible followers—don't seek personal benefit (salvation). Rather, we seek to function as God intended: to engage our intellects, to perceive and relate to reality, "The Holy One blessed is He, Who spreads the heavens, and establishes Earth." Thus, we don't pray for salvation as do others, but we relate to reality, and reality is that there exists a Creator.

If so, why does Alenu need to cite a Torah verse? Shouldn't the imperative to relate to God be the "natural reality" of God as Creator, regardless of a Torah verse? Howard, this is your question.

What is the message of Alenu?

"Alenu" means "it is upon us"—meaning the Jew has a role distinct from others. We are no different in human design, but in obligation we are, as we must adhere to Torah and teach the world. "Alenu"—this role is "upon us." While all others are obligated only in the 7 Noahide Laws.

God created the universe for all to study, but for the Jew, 613 Bible laws are an additional obligation. A Torah verse in Alenu is needed to express this obligation. Torah validates God's will for man. Without a Torah verse, we can still follow reality. But with a Torah verse, we now display that our actions as Jews are to be subservient to the Creator's will. This is why Alenu concludes with a Torah verse, "And You shall know this day and take into Your heart..." Torah is God's will and command for the Jew alone. Alenu teaches us that we don't only follow reality, but we do so as this is the Creator's will for the Jew.

Reality teaches a Creator exists; nothing can create itself. The universe's wisdom demands a brilliant Planner. But subservience to God cannot be perceived by studying the universe. We find no indication in the universe that man is to recognize God as an authority and obey Him...for there are no commands embedded in nature. We see God's brilliance in every inch of His creations, but in them we do not see an authoritative relationship between God and man. In creation, we don't see God expressed as an "authority," or man as His "servant." Talmud states God gave Adam one prohibition: idolatry (Sanhedrin 56b). This means Adam could not have recognized God as an authority by studying the universe alone: a

command was required to create the relationship of authority and servant. Only through God's "command" was Adam introduced to this relationship. Now we must understand why this relationship of God as authority and man as servant is crucial to our human existence.

The universe is stupendous...praise is due to God. That's how Alenu commences. But aside from praising God and witnessing brilliance in the physical world, there is an entirely different world of "human perfection." Man misses the mark if he views the universe as only to reflect God's greatness in creation, and fails to grasp that Earth also exists for man to perfect himself...straddling not only concepts of God, but morality too.

Creation lacks instruction for human perfection. "God's Torah is perfect" (Psalms 19:8). Saadia Gaon (Ibid.) said, "This verse is missing the words 'It said.'" Meaning, the verse should read as follows: "It (the sun) said that God's Torah is perfect." In other words, the physical world (sun) attests to the greater perfection of Torah, which is lacking in the physical world. How is it lacking? The physical universe verse does not offer man instruction on morality, character refinement, equality, kindness, justice, and a host of other ideals crucial to human perfection. Only Torah offers laws and character examples that lead to such human perfection. That's how Torah is perfect, and where the universe falls short.

Now we understand why this relationship of God as authority and man as servant is crucial to our human existence. Without God's Torah commands, man forfeits God's intended human perfection only possible for most of mankind through Torah. Rare individuals—the patriarchs and matriarchs—were on the level to perfect themselves without Torah. That's why God did not have to give Torah at first. But societies regressed, demanding a guide book.

"He has not made us like the nations of the lands, and has not positioned us like the families of Earth"

This means God differentiated the Jews with a Bible. Thus, we must cite a Torah verse in this blessing, as that is the core of what we bless, that we—not others—received a guide book. ■



Success & Happiness

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Rabbi Nehorai says:

I leave aside all the trades in the world, and I teach my son only Torah, as all other trades serve one only in the days of his youth, when he has enough strength to work, but in the days of his old age, he is left to lie in hunger. But Torah is not like this: It serves a person in the time of his youth and provides him with a future and hope in the time of his old age. With regard to the time of his youth, what does it say about a Torah scholar? "But they that hope in God

shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31). With regard to the time of his old age, what does it say? "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of sap and richness" (Psalms 92:15) (Kiddushin 82b)

What was Rabbi Nehorai's strategy for his son's success? Isaiah's full context:

Youths may grow faint and weary, and young men stumble and fall; But they who trust in the Lord shall renew their strength As eagles grow new plumes. They shall run and not grow weary, they shall march and not grow faint. (Isaiah 40:30,31).

Rabbi Nehorai saw that tradesmen enjoyed success only while working. Apparently in his generation, income was limited to labor input. Back then, profits were directly commensurate with one's wares, farming, flock, etc. Physical property is limited, and therefore so was profit. But today, a person can make a few clicks in his trading app and

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secure great wealth to outlast his years. Today, profit does not depend on physical property, but even projected growth can skyrocket a stock's value.

Rabbi Nehorai understood that more than a trade, man's mind is the primary driving force behind success. Teaching his son a trade does not teach him knowledge outside that sphere of business. But teaching one Torah provides one with cunning, analytical and strategic thought, resourcefulness and far more skills that one can apply to all situations. A tradesman will starve when old, but a skilled Torah scholar can explore other opportunities when physically weak in old age and will find ways to sustain himself. More than this, one dedicated to Torah also earns God's providence.

But Rabbi Nehorai understood even more. Isaiah said God gives strength to the young. Strength for what? It is the strength to labor onwards. While other youths weary and tire, a youth dedicated to Torah does not. Why? It is because youths who seek money as an end eventually find dissatisfaction with money alone: "One who loves money is not satisfied with money" (Koheles 5:9). God designed man to be dissatisfied with the physical as an end. Man is designed to find happiness only in wisdom. Therefore, youths seeking success alone become frustrated. But a youth who is dedicated to Torah and wisdom will be invigorated by the excitement of Torah study; he will not weary in his physical labors as he performs them eagerly in order to support his return that day to his Torah studies. Philosophically and psychologically the person dedicated to wisdom is always excited about the adventures he will encounter in his next Torah study session. And when he grows old and his body weakens, Isaiah does not say God gives him strength, but he is creative producing "fruit in old age" and he is lucid and full of vigor.

God supports our two stages of life with what is needed in each stage: in youth man is designed naturally to find renewed strength, provided to his focuses on wisdom. And in old age Torah wisdom again invigorates one's mind and psyche with creativity and complete happiness. This is not providential, but it is the natural human design working properly, offering man success and happiness as is God's will for one dedicated to Torah. ■



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Sin vs. Calamity

DANI ROTH

RABBI: Why on the 17th of Tammuz do we recall the breaking of the Tablets, but not the cause, which was the Gold Calf idolatry?

DANI ROTH: The reason is because human action is not the “loss,” but the “sin.” What we mourn is loss: the negative impact our actions bring. Moses destroyed the Tablets that could have offered greater knowledge of God. That was a great loss. All tragedies are the ruin man brings to himself. The tragedy is not the wrong actions we make, which we can control. ■

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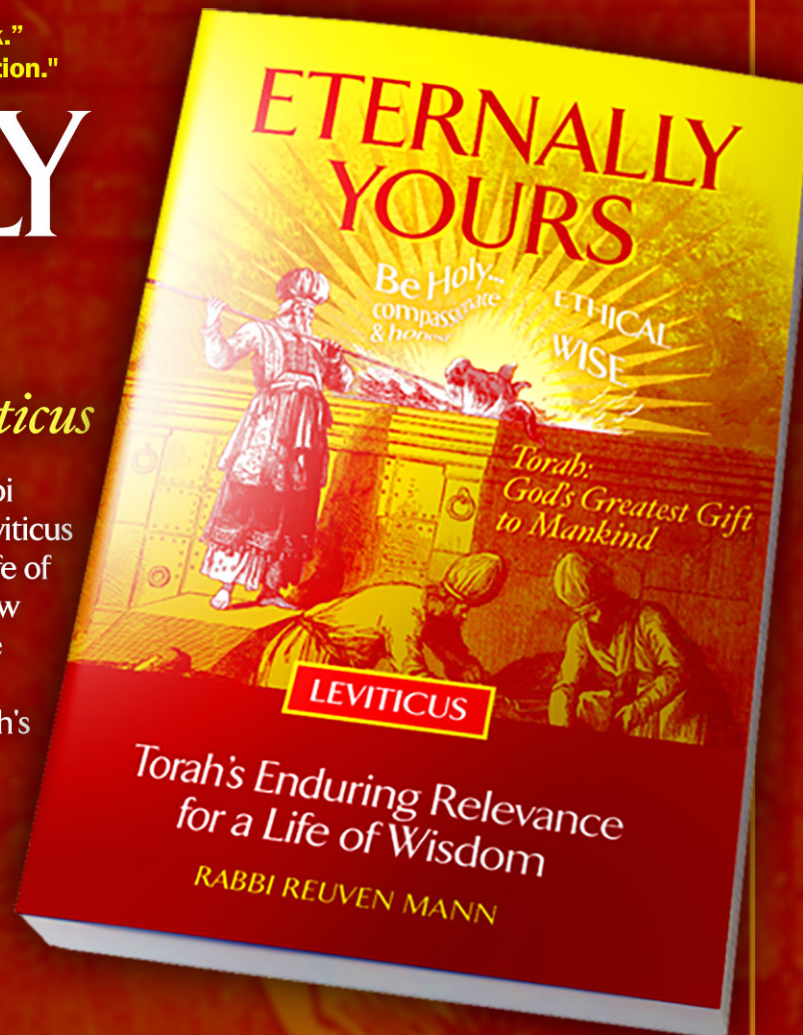
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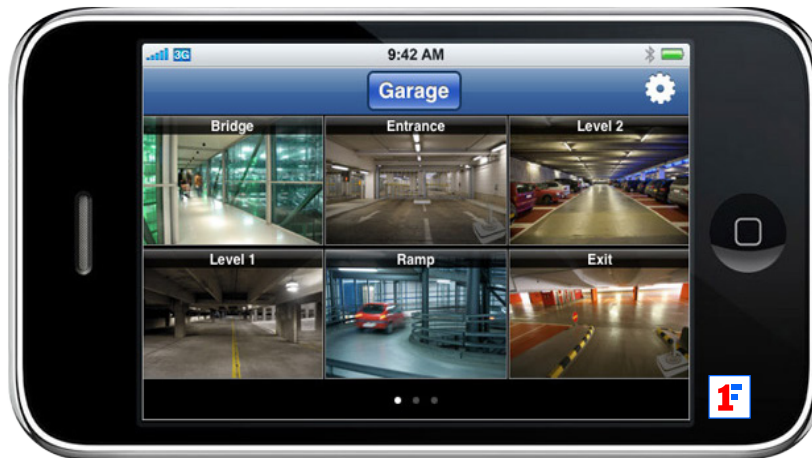
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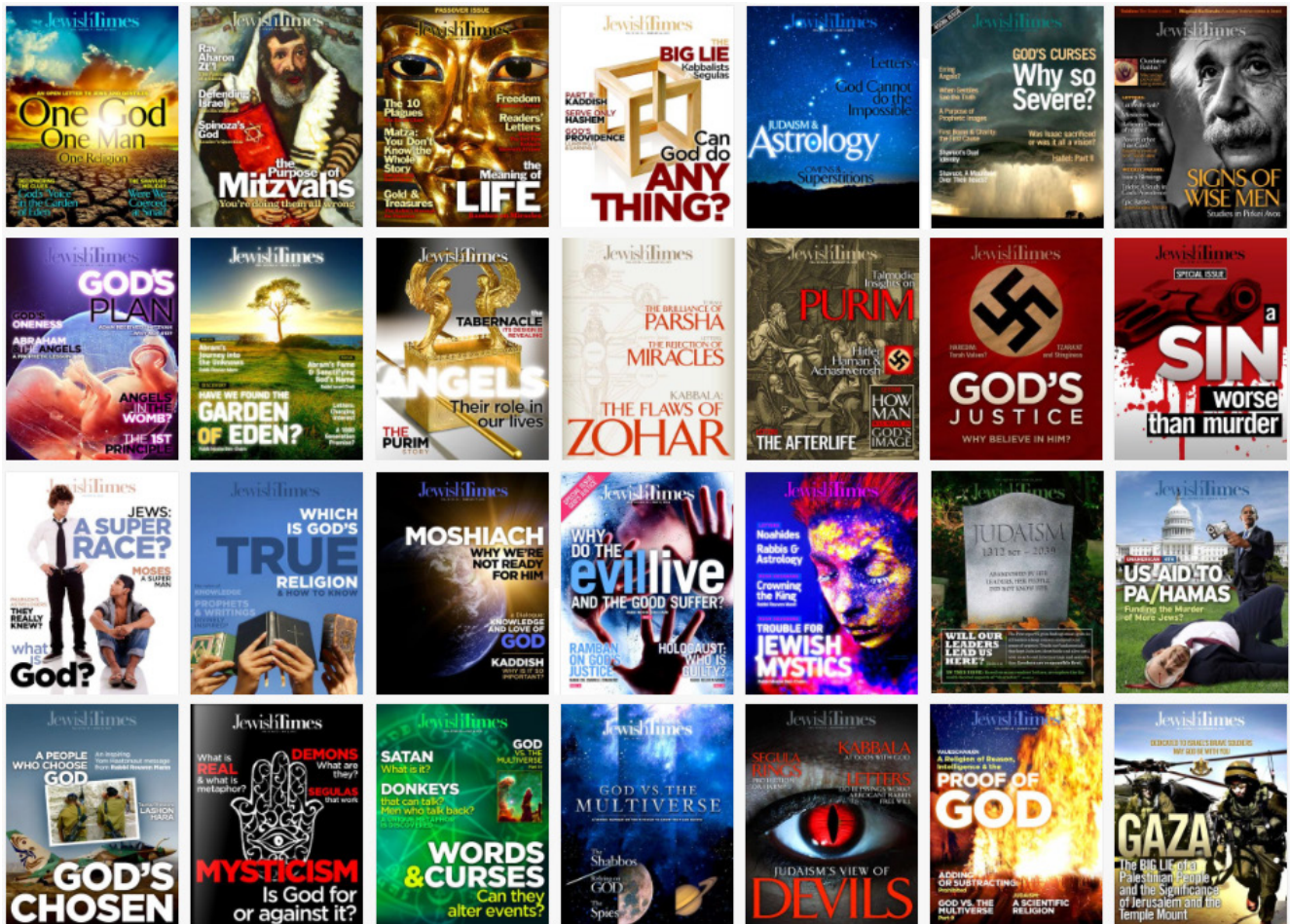
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