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ME VS. GOD

"This is His world and functions by His rules."

Before a humble child grows into an arrogant adult, train him/her in this reality, that God determines how the world operates and that we should abandon any thoughts that conflict with Him. How sad it is for one who argues with God.

PARSHA

RABBI ELIEZER BARANY

God: With Us in Exile

And you return to your God the Lord, and you and your children heed God's command with all your heart and soul, just as I enjoin upon you this day, then your God the Lord will restore your fortunes and take you back in love. [God] will bring you together again from all the peoples where your God the Lord has scattered you. (Sefer Devarim 30:2-3)

God in Exile

In this week's set of double parshiot, Netzavim-Vayelech, Moshe is in the midst of telling the Jewish people that they will sin in the future and be exiled from the land that they are about to enter. However, Moshe

says that God will return the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. Rashi notices though, that the phraseology that the passuk utilizes should be somewhat different to convey the message that Hashem will return the people. As Rashi explains:

To express tis idea it ought to have written, "then He will bring back your captivity." But our Rabbis learned from this that, if one can say so of God, His Divine presence dwells with Israel in all the misery of their exile, so that when they are redeemed, He makes Scripture write "Redemption" of Himself — that He will return with them (Megillah 29a). (Commentary of Rashi on Sefer Devarim 30:2-3)

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Rashi quotes the Gemara which explains that Hashem, as it were, accompanies the people of Israel into exile. In fact, Rashi adds that not only does He join us, as it were, but He is there while we experience the pain of exile. This echoes the words of Dovid Hamelech who writes that, “I (God) will be with him in distress” (Psalms 91:15).

Hashem Shares our Pain

In a somewhat similar vein, Bechor Shor quotes another passuk, which teaches us an additional lesson:

And the Rabbis expounded from here that the Holy One Blessed be He is in distress with the distress of the children of Israel, as it is written “In all their troubles to Him was trouble.” (Yeshayahu 63:9) (Commentary of Bechor Shor on Sefer Devarim 30:3)

Kri u’Ktiv

Bechor Shor not only mentions that God, so to speak, is with the people of Israel in exile, but that He likewise shares in the distress of the people. This passuk has a kri uktiv, which means that a specific word is written one way and read a different way. The word “lo” is written with an aleph and read with a vav. So the word expressed is either “no” or “to Him.” As such, the two readings of the passuk would be, “In all their troubles (no) [to Him was] trouble.” Bechor Shor quotes the comment of the sages (Sotah 31a) that explains that this passuk says that Hashem was in pain, as the continuation of the passuk proves, which is why He sent an angel to save them. Rashi on the other hand explains the passuk according to the way it is written:

He did not trouble [them] – He did not trouble them according to their deeds, that they deserved to suffer... (Commentary of Rashi on Sefer Yeshayah 63:9)

Rashi explains that the word means “no” and not “to Him,” explaining the passuk to mean that Hashem did not cause them a certain type of distress. Ibn Ezra however says differently:

The true meaning of the word is to Him; and Unto Him was trouble. He was afflicted, has the same meaning as “And His soul was grieved” (Shoftim 10:16). It is a figurative expression. He was, as it were, in distress, therefore He hastened to deliver them. (Commentary of Ibn Ezra on Sefer Yeshayah 63:9)

The Radak (Yeshayah 63:9) explains that there are two different explanations of the passuk, depending on the kri or the ktiv. He essentially agrees with both Rashi and Ibn Ezra. However, why are there two different

explanations of the passuk and how do they connect? Additionally, what does it mean that God is in distress and that God is with us? The commentators unanimously point out that Hashem is not actually in distress, as He is unchanging, and that He is not really exiled, because He is not physical and does not occupy any location. As such, what kind of idea is it that God moves with us and is in pain with us, if it were possible to say? What is meant to be learnt?

The Will of God

Rashi explains that this passuk in Yeshayahu is similar to a passuk in Shoftim:

They removed the alien gods from among them and served God; and the soul of God was shortened because of the pain of Israel. (Sefer Shoftim 10:16)

The passuk explains that the people of Israel repented and that “the soul of God was shortened because of the pain of Israel.” Again, the commentators point out that He is not really pained. Rashi adds the famous term “as it were” to describe this pain. Additionally, many commentators quote the Rambam’s explanation, “And His will (nafsho) to trouble Israel ceased” (Moreh Nevuchim Part 1 Chapter 41). After Radak quotes this explanation of the Rambam, he adds:

And according to my understanding, “because of the pain” is as it sounds, and the explanation of “and His soul diminished” is like it was saddened to His heart. And all this is a way of parable and the Torah speaks in the language of man. (Commentary of Radak on Sefer Shoftim 10:16)

So the Radak first quotes the Rambam as explaining the passuk by saying it does not mean that Hashem was actually saddened. Then he says, well actually, the passuk is as it sounds, and there was sadness before Hashem. Then Radak goes back on what he said and points out what many of the commentators mention, that the Torah spoke in the language of man. Therefore, it doesn’t really mean that God was saddened. So what kind of argument is Radak having with the Rambam?

Divine Providence

And now I have chosen and consecrated this House that My name be there forever. My eyes and My heart shall always be there. (Sefer Divrei Hayamim 2 7:16)

In discussing the Temple, Divrei Hayamim chronicles that Hashem’s eyes and heart will always be on the Temple. However, again,

what does it mean that His eyes and heart will be on the Temple? Additionally, the Temple is not in existence, so it doesn’t seem like His eyes and heart are there forever. The Sefer Haikarim explains, “The meaning is, My providence and My good will, indicating that God desires its permanent existence” (Sefer Haikarim Part 2 Chapter 14).

Sefer Haikarim explains that the Temple had God’s eyes upon it. What that means is that it received a certain level of Divine Providence, a certain type of observation. Additionally, when the passuk says “forever” it is speaking about the permanent desire of Hashem for the Temple to be in existence.

What it means to say that Hashem will be with us in exile is that He will still watch over and guide us. We shouldn’t think that since we were exiled that Hashem has abandoned the nation of Israel. Rather, His influence goes with us. Additionally, “Hashem is in pain with us” means that it is not God’s will for us to be in exile. It is His will, His desire, so to speak, that we live a life in Israel with the Temple.

Therefore, it is not His desire that we remain in distress in exile. And this week’s Torah portion proves just that, as the Rambam explains:

All the prophets commanded [the people] to repent. Israel will only be redeemed through Teshuvah. The Torah has already promised that, ultimately, Israel will repent towards the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed as [Deuteronomy 30:1-3] states: “There shall come a time when [you will experience] all these things... and you will return to God, your Lord.... God, your Lord, will bring back your [captivity].” (Mishneh Torah Laws of Repentance 7:5)

Two Different Purposes

There are two ways to understand the passuk found in Sefer Yeshayahu. The Ktiv, of Hashem not actually being pained, is the objective fact that God is unchanging. However, the kri expresses the message being conveyed in the passuk. It is explaining that God is with us and that it is not His will for us to be in pain. Radak is expressing that the Rambam is explaining the ktiv. No one can argue with that. However, Radak shares what he believes the message to be of the kri, but he warns us not to make the mistake and think that this is objective definition of the passuk.

We don’t know all of the ways and thoughts of God. However, we can know that it is His desire that we be in Israel, and that He does not want us to be exiled and punished. Moshe was comforting the people and telling them that when the people repent, not if the people repent, they will be readily accepted. What could be more comforting than knowing that our nation will not be abandoned by God and He will be there with us in our sorrow! ■



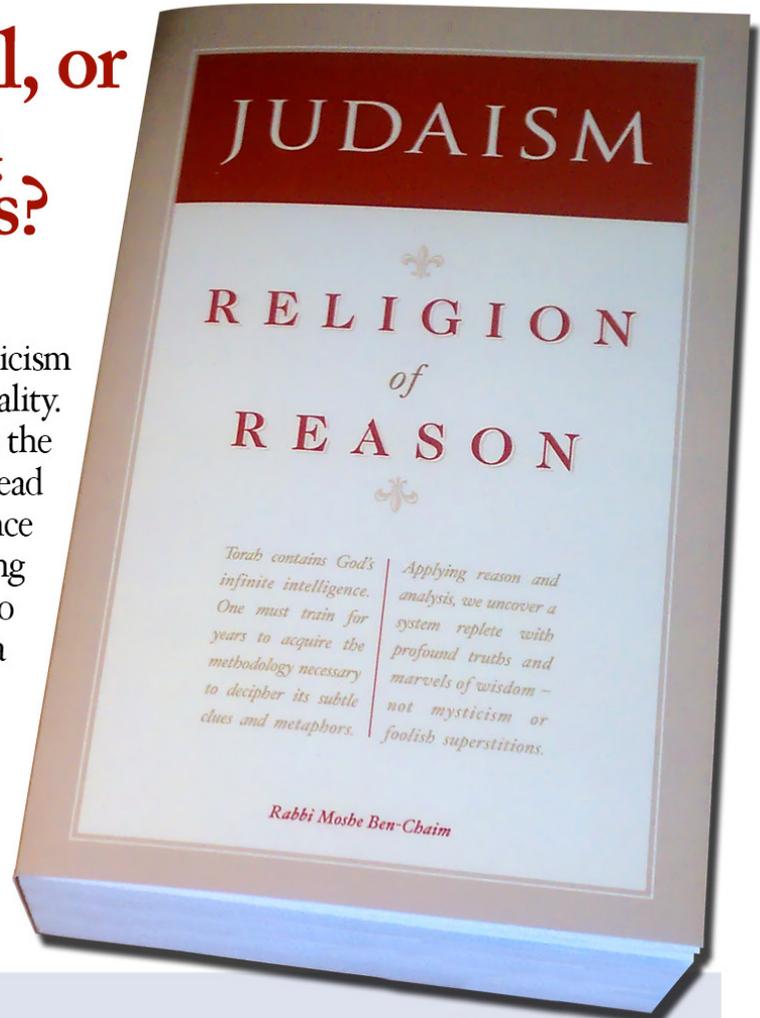
Book Reviews

Rabbi Reuven Mann — *Rabbi of Young Israel of Phoenix*
Rabbi Steven Weil — *CEO, Friends of the IDF*

Judaism: mystical, or rational based on reason and proofs?

by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Jews have succumbed to mysticism and pop-kabbala, in place of rationality. Ten years in the making, the author cites the Rabbis, unveiling the fallacy of widespread beliefs. He focuses on Torah's brilliance and method of decryption; unraveling metaphors and interpreting texts to reveal hidden gems. Readers will enjoy a long overdue, rational exposé of cultural beliefs, and a unique look at Torah's deep insights.



Partial chapter listing:

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| What is God? | Afflictions |
| Rabbis' blessings | Ayin harah – “Evil eye” |
| Can God do Anything? | The age of the universe |
| Superstition | God isn't everywhere |
| Astrology | How God teaches man |
| Praying to the dead | The meaning of life |
| Reincarnation | Does idolatry work? |
| Bashert | Angels |
| Why the good suffer | The secret of the Ark |
| Is God running my life? | Shivim Panim l'Torah |
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**WE CAN LOSE
OUR MITZVAHS**

How God Judges

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

For you know that we dwell in the land of Egypt and that we passed through the midst of nations that was traversed. And you have seen the detestable things and the fetishes of wood and stone, silver and gold, that they keep. Perhaps there is among you some man or woman, or some clan or tribe, whose heart is even now turning away from our God to go and worship the gods of those nations—perchance there is among you a “root sprouting poison weed and wormwood” [metaphor for idolatrous thoughts]. And it will come to be, when hearing the words of these curses, and one blesses himself in his heart saying, “I shall have peace, for I follow my heart’s will.” Therefore I will add the moist to the dry [convert his inadvertent sins to intentional]. God will never forgive that party. Rather, God’s anger and jealousy will burn against that man, till every sanction recorded in this book comes down upon him, and God blots out his name from under heaven. God will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for misfortune, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant recorded in this book of Torah. (Deut. 29:15-20)

What is the flaw of “blessing oneself in his heart,” and is he punished for idolatrous thoughts alone, without worship? We also wonder how God can convert previous inadvertent sins into intentional sins; how can the past intent be changed? God says this using a metaphor, “adding the moist (accidental sins) to the dry (intentional sins).” What gain is served by this use of metaphor? And what precisely is the difference between inadvertent sins and intentional sins? Next, why doesn’t God ever forgive this person? Furthermore, God’s anger “burning” against this person is quite severe; what mandates this harsh response? And again we have another metaphor, “root sprouting poison weed and wormwood” referring to one’s corruption of mind and emotion. How is metaphor preferable than a literal statement?

A person who blesses himself in his heart means that he is convinced that his subjective view is reality: his idol is real and God is not. He does not entertain error, God’s authority or

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other opinions. He cannot change; he cannot be forgiven. God responds, “I will add the moist to the dry” which Rashi explains as God converting his inadvertent sins to intentional. But this is not literally possible since a sin committed inadvertently is sealed in history as an inadvertent sin. History cannot be changed.

If someone righteous turns away from righteousness and does wrong, practicing the very abominations that the wicked person practiced, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they did shall be remembered; because of the treachery they have practiced and the sins they have committed—because of these, they shall die (Ezekiel 18:24).

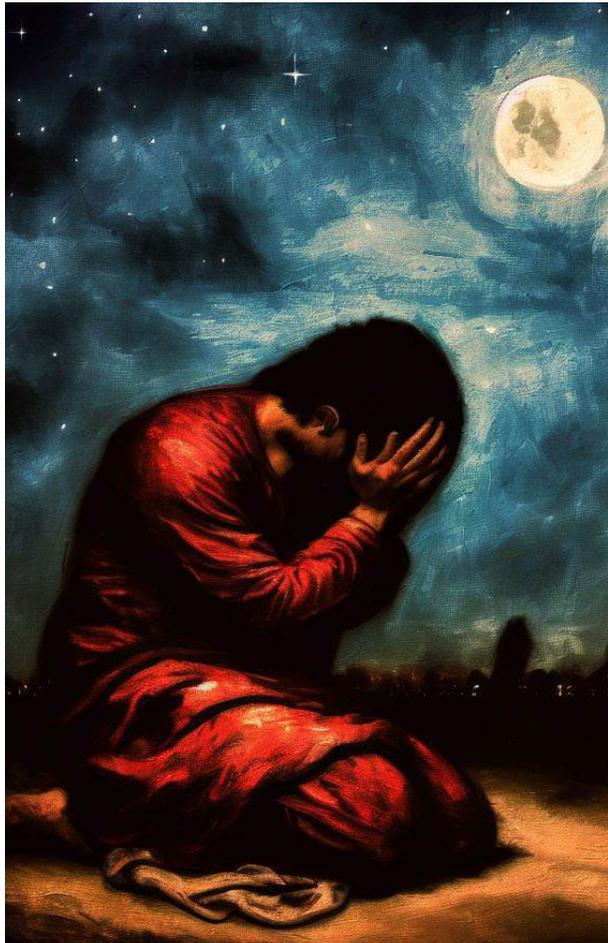
No righteous deeds are remembered because God's method of judgment is a summation of a human being. If a person is presently an idolater, it is irrelevant that he was previously a monotheist. This is the meaning of converting inadvertent sins to intentional. It is “as if” the sins are converted because this person partakes of none of the good of his previous years and regrets his former good acts (Chazal)...as if those good actions never existed. It may be that regarding other sins God will weigh the good of the person against his evil. If he has more good (measured not by quantity, but by the gravity of those actions) God then seals him for life. This is because regarding sins other than idolatry, he still functions within the context of accepting God. But here we are discussing idolatry, and the rabbis say whomever commits idolatry is like he rejects the entire Torah. As he rejects God, any good he did is completely inconsequential because it is not done as following God.

Such a person is not forgiven and suffers severe calamity—“God blots out his name from under heaven”—as God intends to dispel any validity of idolatry. To show that God alone reigns as the sole source of the universe, God delivers severe calamity to the idolater evoking this response from the world: “Because they forsook the covenant that God of their ancestors made with them upon freeing them from the land of Egypt; they turned to the service of other gods and worshiped them” (Deut. 29:24,25). A severe response is vital to discount explanations of natural disaster. God intends the world abandons all belief in idolatry and uses this person as example. The idolater's false gods did not come to save him, and God's Torah curses which threatened this response came true.

Is this person judged for idolatrous thought alone? It can very well be, as idolatry is a sin of the mind...one sins as soon as he rejects God and accepts belief in idols. The 10 Commandments' first five laws are in the order of laws of thought, speech and action. Accepting God and rejecting

idolatry are first two laws pertaining to the mind. Regarding the use of metaphor, God has decided that idolatry must be viewed as a poisonous growth: it is evil and contagious. Metaphor always intends to call upon a person's familiar frame of reference to eliminate what might be vague and deliver a precise message with no ambiguity.

The lesson from this Torah portion is to show the calamity and tragic irrevocable loss to a person convinced in his subjective false views. God intends Torah to move man away from his fallacies and to teach him what is objectively true, not only for the benefit of God's providence when we follow him, but for the joy God designed us to experience when continuing our Torah studies and seeing His brilliance. It is a person's insecurity and ignorance that forces his belief in emotionally satisfying but untrue idolatry to protect him, and comfort his fears. We must apply this lesson and teach our children humility and an unwavering commitment and trust in God's wisdom. Our message to them: “This is His world and functions by His rules.” Before a humble child grows into an arrogant adult, train him in this reality, that God determines how the world operates and that we should abandon any thoughts that conflict with Him. How very sad it is for a person who argues with God. ■



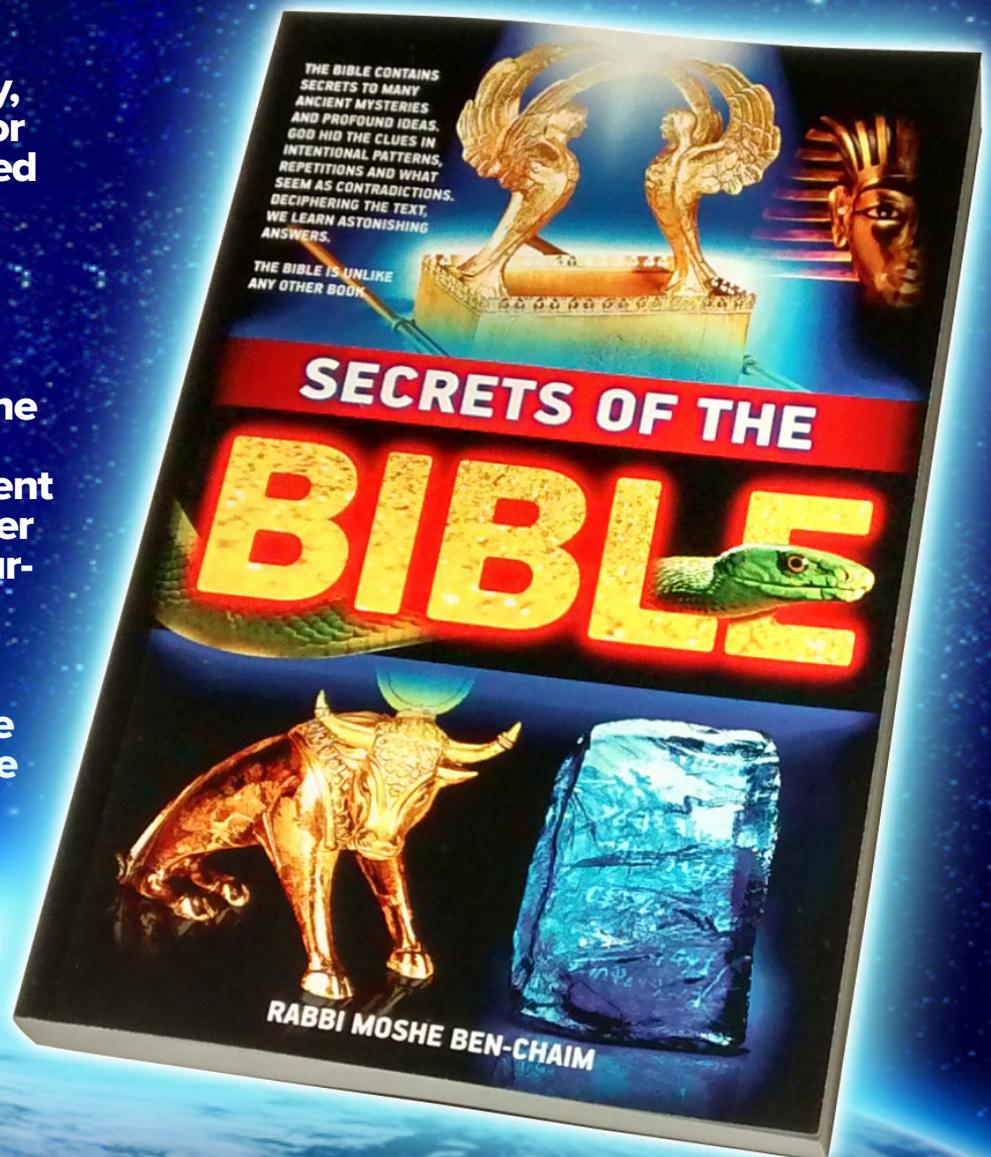
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PARSHA

Whims of the Heart

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's Torah readings of Nitzavim-Vayeilech contain a description of the special covenant that was executed between Hashem and the Jewish People. What is unique are the particular "curses" that are attached to it. This is serious business. Every Jew that ever comes into existence is bound by the terms of G-d's special relationship with His Nation.

In this regard, a question has been raised regarding the difference between the original people who were redeemed from Egypt and willingly agreed to enter the Covenant on Mt. Sinai and the later generations who accepted no such undertaking. Why are the future descendants of the "early ones" bound upon pain of serious imprecations to observe all the requirements of a religious system they never voluntarily signed on to?

In my opinion, there was a major difference between the Jews redeemed from Egypt and the subsequent generations. The role they played was to establish a unique People which would be governed by the dictates of Hashem's Torah. When they accepted the Torah, a new nation came into being, the Jewish People.

There is no doubt that there is an element of chance in the determination of the social context in which a person is to be born. One is not given any choice to determine which culture he wants to be part of or which parents he wishes to have. These are all matters over which one has no control or say. It's part of the terms of human existence. Let us bear in mind that everyone is born into a culture, religion or society which will impose responsibilities which he has never agreed to assume. This is the way of the world as every group seeks to establish mechanisms which will assure that its cultural, religious and political norms will be perpetuated for future generations.

This is the way things operate in the realm of Torah as well. Here, too, the new generations are Jews by birth and must

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observe the obligations of the group. But let us remember that this group bases its existence upon the laws and ordinances revealed by the Creator, which are intended to lead one to the highest level of perfection. It is, therefore, a privilege and an honor to be a member of the group with which Hashem has fashioned a special covenant.

There is, in our Parsha, one particular individual who seems to be singled out for special treatment. The verse states:

“Lest there be among you a man or woman or a family or a tribe whose heart turns today away from our G-d to go and worship the gods of those nations...And when he hears the words of this oath he will be at ease in his heart saying ‘I will be at peace for I will go according to the inclinations of my heart’... Hashem will not forgive him, for then the anger and “jealousy” of G-d will flare against that individual and there will come down upon him all of the oaths that are written in this Book; and Hashem will obliterate his name from beneath the heavens. (Devarim 29:17-19)”

One wonders why so much wrath is directed against this person. His crime seems to be that while he outwardly conforms to the requirements of Jewish law, in his inner heart of hearts he is resolved to act according to Sherirut Leebo (the whims of his heart). At first glance, this does not seem to be the greatest crime, but the Torah makes it clear that it is quite serious. We must try to understand this phenomenon more precisely.

The ultimate goal of the Torah is to fashion a person who bases his behavior on the Wisdom of Hashem as it has been revealed to us. The greatest resistance to this endeavor stems from the stubbornness of man, whose ego prevents him from yielding to the authority of G-d.

Man has an innate sense of certitude about the meaning of life and matters of right and wrong. In most cases, this is based on his personal desires and preferences. Many people regard what they find subjectively attractive as being objectively worthwhile. However, the Torah does not believe in the sanctity of man’s moral conscience. That is why

Hashem gave us Torah and Mitzvot and commanded us to diligently study them so that we could incorporate their teachings into our emotions and conduct.

Let us note that the basic philosophy of contemporary hedonistic man can be summed up as, “If it feels good, it is good”. In fact, Ernest Hemingway expressed it by saying that the good is anything that you do and don’t feel bad after. In other words, man has his own inner mechanism which lets him know if something is good or evil.

Judaism asserts that G-d’s moral law is not inscribed in the feelings of man. In fact, there actually is little correspondence between what is appealing to man’s moral conscience and what is actually righteous. Let us remember that the most heinous atrocities were committed by people who were convinced that they were doing a good thing. The Torah attests that very religious idol worshippers, with the best of intentions, offered up their own children to the deity known as Molech.

And the Nazis were thoroughly convinced of the absolute ethical imperative to put an end, in the most gory fashion, to every Jew, man woman and child, in the service of their racial ideology.

So the individual who outwardly yields to the Torah but inwardly denies it is, in fact, an idol worshipper who deifies his inner moral feelings as being the arbiters of right and wrong. His outer observance which doesn’t penetrate to the heart will give him a certain legitimacy in the eyes of other Jews, who will be drawn after his emotionally appealing deviations. That is why he must be treated so harshly.

As we approach Rosh Hashana let us remember that we must commit to the absolute veracity of Hashem’s Revelation. We must study it in depth in order to discover its great wisdom and thus enable it to enhance all areas of our endeavors. There will be times when the demands of Torah are beyond our ability to comprehend, or where they may seem to be contrary to our understanding of things. In those instances we must, as Rabbi Soloveitchik taught, put our emotions aside and Surrender to the A-Mighty. May we merit to achieve this.

Shabbat Shalom. ■





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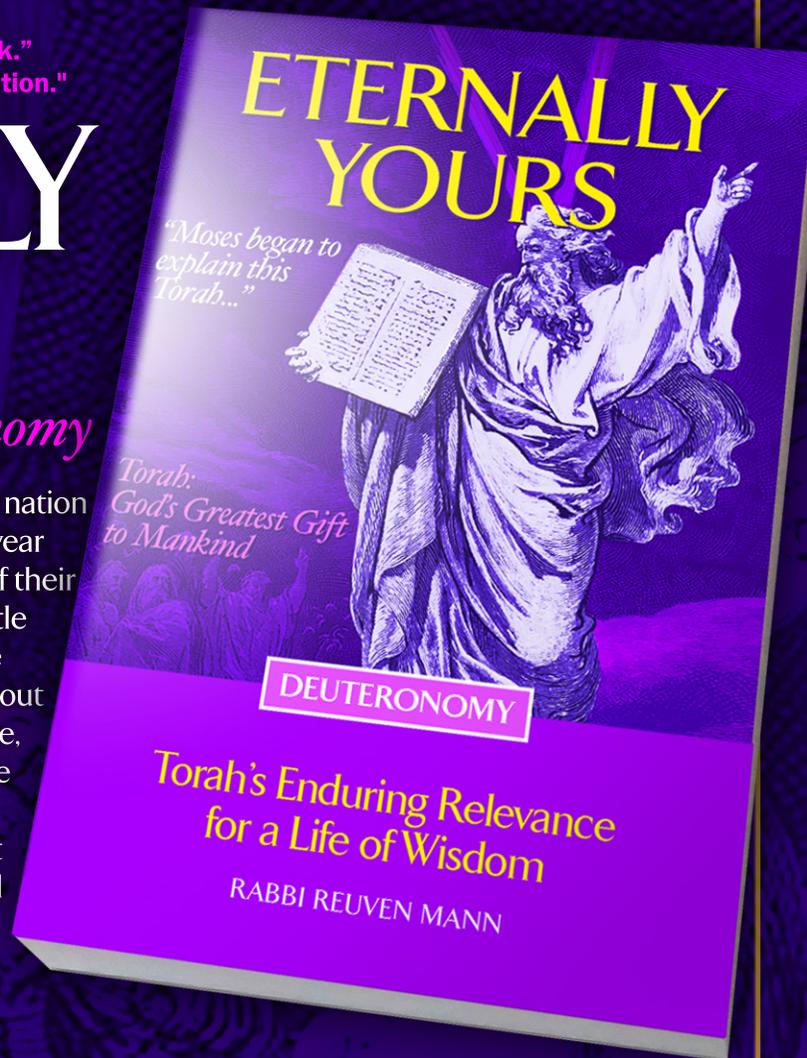
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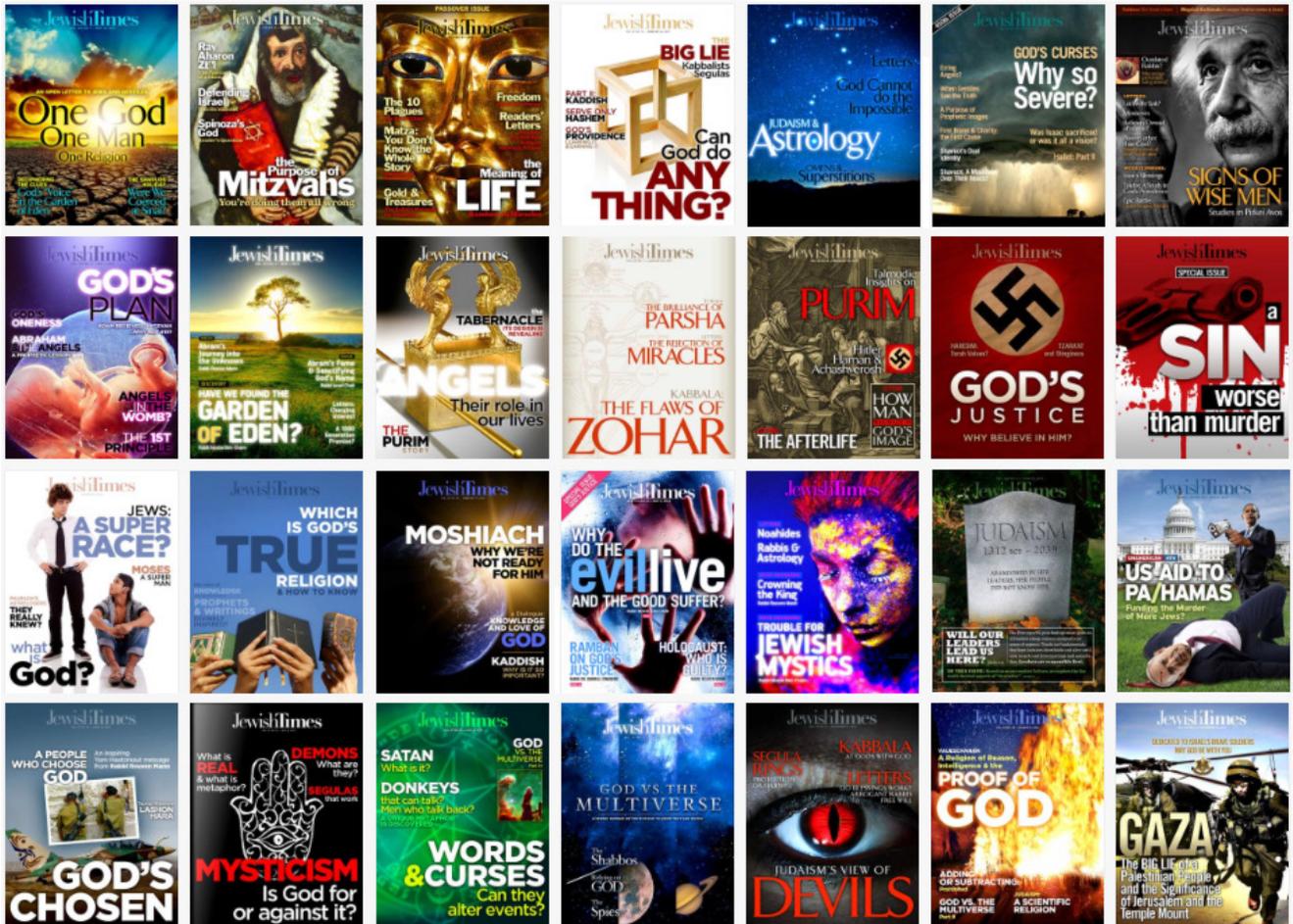
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NOT ALL WHO ENGAGE MUCH TIME IN BUSINESS BECOME WISE (Avos 2:5)

Maimonides comments:

Torah is not found in haughty people or in those who travel to distant lands. And the rabbis tie this to a verse in a metaphoric sense: "It is not in heaven, that one should say, 'Who might ascend to the heavens for us and take it for us and we will hear it.' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it." (Deut. 30:12-14) So the rabbis said, "Torah isn't found in haughty people (heavens), nor in those who travel the sea for business."

Maimonides teaches that there is an element of haughtiness in business that is an obstacle to becoming wise. What is the common denominator?

When referring to one becoming wise, we refer not to one who amassed facts, but to one whose nature is that he loves wisdom. Who is attached to wisdom? There are two possible attitudes of the psyche. Man's energies are great and seek satisfaction. One personality finds satisfaction in the self. He is convinced he is a great person. This is referred to as "the heavens"—arrogance. The other personality is in search of something: "Once I acquire that object, I will be happy." This is the "across the sea" personality. Either, one has found his satisfaction in the self, or his happiness is to be found in the next conquest. In both personalities, there is no Torah. In the haughty personality, there is no Torah, as his energies are satisfied. In the other personality there is no Torah, as his energies await the next conquest. Who then is an individual who possesses Torah? What type of nature does he have? It is the personality that does not have the satisfaction of the arrogant individual, nor does he find satisfaction in that next conquest "over there." The one who possesses Torah seeks satisfaction in the here and

NOW. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

PARSHA

Business & Wisdom

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by a student

The thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to observe it.

When a person recognizes this truth, he is then open to Torah. This is the state of mind necessary for becoming wise. This is Maimonides' view and the first explanation in Rashi. Once one learns Torah and enjoys the experience of Torah study, his energies are consumed in the here and now. The person of Torah lives in the present. The philosophers said, "Life is strange: the future is not here, the past is gone, so one's whole life is lived in the split second of the present." The person of Torah lives in the present: he is not the person of the future or of the past.

It is important to be mindful when learning Pirkei Avos, and personalities are depicted, not to think of that person as one with a "fixed" personality. We each partake of all personality types. Pirkei Avos isolates these personality types to best focus us on positive and negative values and traits. A normal person has parts of him that are "across the river" and "in the heavens," and perfection requires us to unravel these parts of our nature in order to improve ourselves. One must not label himself or others, otherwise he forfeits the process of perfection.

Rashi offers a second explanation:

If one wishes to become wise, he must engage in all areas of societal improvements, whether it's business or other areas of wisdom, so that he understands all areas.

According to Rashi, becoming wise does not refer to abstract intellectual thought, because from business dealings, this will not occur. This happens only when studying the sciences. Rashi refers to a certain kind of perfection. To achieve this perfection requires one to understand the panorama of all human activities, since all activities stem from man's soul. To understand psychology, no area of human involvement can be ignored; one must examine all human expressions. This is Rashi's meaning of "understanding all areas." Through this knowledge, one can perfect himself.

Why can't man simply read books on this? That would be suitable for intellectual perfection. However, to perfect one's complete nature, one must not simply learn cold facts, but he must deal with his nature and his emotions and relate to them as they interact with various phenomena. [Witnessing one's own feelings and reactions as he engages all areas of human activity, one can monitor his emotions and gain greater knowledge of how the human experience affects man, and apply that knowledge to his life. This cannot be gained by reading books.]

When Sigmund Freud wrote to Albert Einstein about his discovery, Einstein went to observe certain neurotics to see how such people operate. He was not satisfied to simply read about it; text cannot convey the knowledge that reality offers. This explains why King Solomon did not study human nature with intellectual analysis alone, but he engaged in activities to experience the phenomenon in reality. A philosopher can tell you about the proper lifestyle, but he cannot help one stop living the improper lifestyle. He can tell you it is foolish, but that will not help you if you are attached to certain emotions. King Solomon used himself to

experiment with the many emotions and human pursuits to uncover how and why one is drawn to certain areas. The midrash says only King Solomon was on the level to be an objective observer of his own emotions. King Solomon was unique in that he functioned like two people: he subjected himself to the various pursuits and then stepped back and objectively analyzed their effects on himself like an impartial outsider. Rashi did not say one should merely observe business, but one must engage in it. However, this is only one aspect of societal improvement. One must expose himself to government and to other areas too.

Most people live a reactive lifestyle; their actions are responses to arising situations. And as all people need to earn a living, their activities are typically limited to business and no other societal activities. Therefore, "Not all who engage much time in business become wise" means that people are not focused on other areas of society. Thereby, they lack the understanding of man's other expressions and pursuits. This leaves one with little knowledge of man.

Therefore, it is not the reactive personality that becomes wise, but the proactive personality who guides himself outside the directive to work. He explores all areas of society and life from an internal quest to understand mankind, himself, and to apply that knowledge to perfect himself.

Torah says, "And Moshe grew older and he went out to his brothers and observed their affliction" (Exod. 2:11). Chazal argue whether Moshe was 40 years old or 80 years old. Did he not know about the Jews' servitude until that age?

Moshe Rabbeinu was an unusual person. Most people are attracted to politics because of emotional reasons; Moshe was not. He spent his life in wisdom. Before pursuing politics, one must know what justice is. Moshe was not naturally attracted to politics, but to wisdom. Once he mastered wisdom, he felt he was in a position to enter politics. Now he understood justice and was thereby equipped to determine if the Jews were subjected to true justice or not, and if not, how he could change it. Once a person attains knowledge of perfection, he can then determine how a country should be governed.

Today, the separation of church and state is an absurdity. Since a government governs human beings, and as human beings by nature have ethical questions, the two issues cannot possibly be separated. One choice the government can make is to abstain. However, as no one can determine when life begins, if the government permits abortion, this could be committing murder. What the government could do is allow people to act only when they do not affect another person. Also, if suicide is not permitted, the government is making an ethical decision, and this does not reflect the separation of church and state. The separation of church and state is impossible to resolve logically. That is why Judaism's laws incorporate all areas, including ethics.

I mention Moshe Rabbeinu because Rashi holds that one must obtain knowledge before he explores all areas of society, just as Moshe did. Without knowledge, one cannot understand society in all of its forms. Thus, one must study from books and teachers first and then immerse oneself in experiences to gain further insight. Abstract thought must precede experience so that one has the tools with which to gain from those experiences. ■

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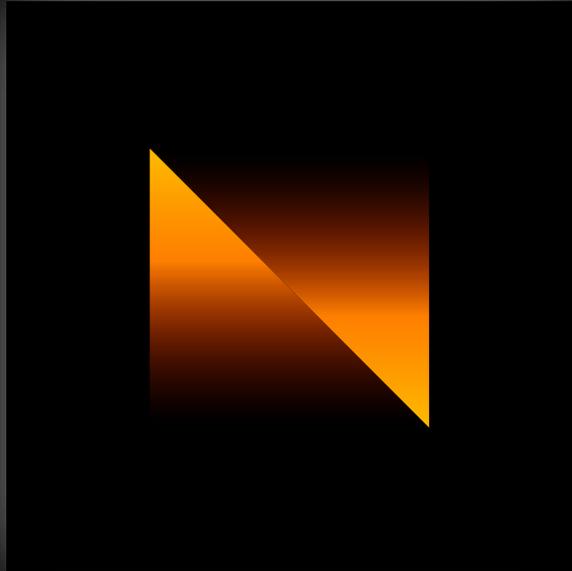


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