

# JewishTimes

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## MYSTICISM OR GOD: NOT BOTH

There is no "debate" since mysticism does not rely on reason and proof. Mysticism is just another baseless belief manufactured by insecure minds needing assurances. God's gift to man of five senses and intellect proves that He wills these validate truths, and reject what is not sensed or reasoned to be real: "mysticism."

### PARSHA

DANI ROTH

## God Controls it All

**P**arshas Bo starts off in the middle of the plagues, just after the plague of hail. In Exod 10:2, just before the plague of locusts, God says, "And that you may recount in your child's ears, and of your grandchildren how I made a mockery

of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am God." How will the plague of locusts prove that He is God? To find the answer, we must look at the "stated" purpose of this plague:

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*The locusts shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail (Exod 10:5)*

*The locusts will eat up all the grasses in the land, whatever the hail has left (Exod 10:12)*

*The locusts ate up all which the hail had left (Exod 10:15)*

Such repetition is God's way of calling our attention to an important phenomenon. Why did God have to make the locusts devour the "remnants of the hail"? Couldn't He have destroyed all their crops with the hail alone, without the help of the locusts? Of course He could have! There must be a reason that God used 2 natural methods—not just 1—to destroy the vegetation.

**Hail or locusts alone could have destroyed all vegetation. But what is significant is that both plagues worked together for a single cause. This "working together" must have a Designer that orchestrated the identical goal of both plagues.**

This is seen from the verse in Exod. 10:5, "They shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail." Exodus 10:12 and 10:15 repeat that the locusts would devour the "remnants" of the hail.

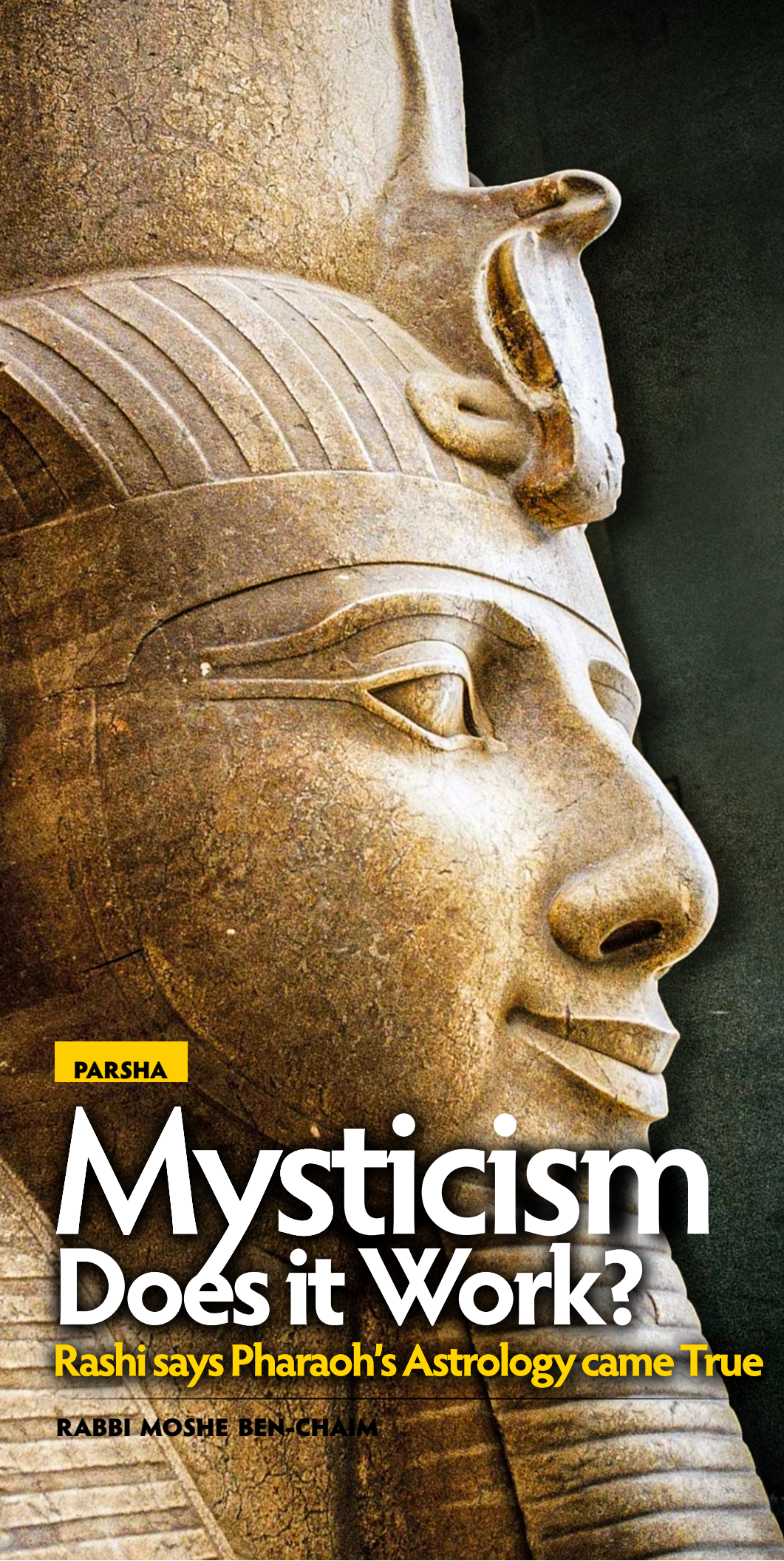
Torah repetitions indicate significance. The lesson is that God controls the heavens (hail) and animal life (locusts). When both realms are harnessed for a single objective, God shows there is a single "Controller" of all natural law.

This answers both questions. The identical objective in both plagues proves a divine plan, as stated in Exod. 10:2, "In order that you may know that I am God." And the reason God used two plagues for the same objective is to show His rule over all parts of creation.

This was a lesson targeted specifically at Egypt who imagined many forces were relegated to the many realms of the universe. Now, they saw Moses' God controlled weather, animals, and all corners of the universe. If both meteorology and animal life act with the same objective, this means that there is some Designer that controls the heavens and the animals, and directs them for the same objective. God thereby taught Egypt there are not multiple gods, as they believed.

We again see God's great wisdom in how He teaches man. ■





PARSHA

# Mysticism Does it Work?

Rashi says Pharaoh's Astrology came True

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**M**oses approached Pharaoh once again, warning him of the onslaught of the 8th plague of locusts that would devour all Egypt's produce. Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall Moses be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the Lord their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is devastated?" (Exod 10:7) Pharaoh appears to give in and free the Jews. But when Moses said to Pharaoh he would take the entire nation including children, Pharaoh told Moses "you are facing evil." A simple understanding is that Pharaoh meant that Moses was asking too much; children aren't needed to offer sacrifices. But Rashi cites a midrash (allegory) about what the evil (ra-ah) is:

*Pharaoh said, "There is a certain star the name of which is Evil (Ra-ah). By my astrological art I see that star rising towards you in the wilderness to where you travel. It is a sign of blood and slaughter." Later, when Israel sinned by worshipping the calf (in the wilderness of Sinai) and God intended to kill them, Moses said in his prayer, "Why should the Egyptians say, 'God brought them out together with evil intent (ra-ah)'?" This is exactly what Pharaoh said: "Evil is before you." Immediately, the Lord retracted the evil (killing the Jews), and He changed the blood of death to the blood of circumcision when Joshua had them circumcised later. This is the meaning of what is said, "This day have I rolled off from you the disgrace of the Egyptians" (Joshua 5:9).* (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



In short, Pharaoh seems to astrologically forecast Jewish blood in the desert. Once in the desert, the Jews worship the Gold Calf. God wishes to punish them with death. Moses prays to save the Jews so God doesn't appear evil in Egypt's eyes, saying that He took the Jews out of Egypt just to kill them. Due to Moses' prayer, God doesn't kill the Jews, but He doesn't completely remove the blood, as He converts it to blood of circumcision in later years.

Questions:

1) Most glaring is the suggestion that Pharaoh's astrology accurately forecasted the Jews fate of blood in the desert! And in fact, God would have fulfilled that forecast, had Moses not asked God to save the Jews. Are we to then say Pharaoh's astrology was correct?

2) Does God need Moses to alert Him to avert creating an evil reputation, that God only freed Jews to slaughter them? Didn't God know this without Moses saying so?

3) The midrash says that after Moses prayed, "Immediately" the Lord retracted the evil. What is this "immediacy"?

4) What is the significance of the wilderness mentioned twice?

5) Why does God "convert" the blood of killing into blood of circumcision? Why not simply terminate the blood altogether! On the surface, God appears to be retracting His plan to kill the idolatrous Jews in order that Pharaoh should not be correct. That seems as odd reasoning. Why should God be concerned with what Pharaoh says, since the Jews deserved to be killed, God should kill them.

The first step is to explain the puzzling correlation between Pharaoh's false astrology, and reality. God's wish to kill the Jews aligning with Pharaoh's forecast indicates that Pharaoh's astrology partook of reality...in some respect. But as astrology is false, we must look into man's psyche for this correlation, as that is the originator of astrology.

Man is worried and insecure about his

unknown future; astrology was a method to offer man a glimpse into his future. Be it a good or evil forecast, at least with astrology, man would not be walking in the dark. The unknown is more disturbing than a known problem. So man conjured up a system based around the "mystical" heavens that can predict his future.

But besides time (the future), man worries about other matters: places.

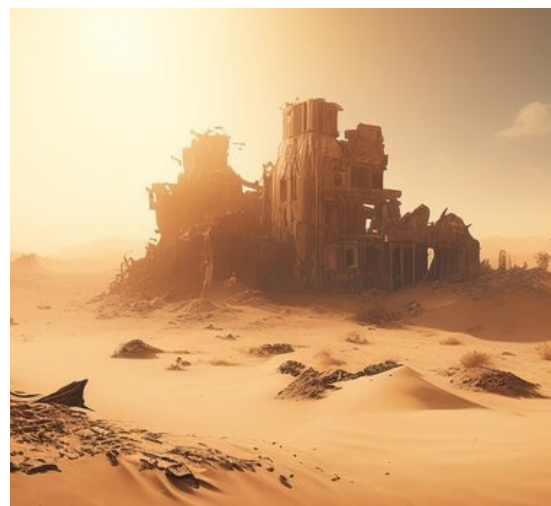
*Some lost their way in the wilderness, in the wasteland; they found no settled place. Hungry and thirsty, their spirit failed. In their adversity they cried to the Lord, and He rescued them from their troubles. He showed them a direct way to reach a settled place (Psalms 107:4-7).*

The desert is a place of isolation and hunger...a place of worries. Talmud Gittin 66a (Tosfos) says demons are seen only in 4 places, and one is the desert. This means that places of isolation generate worries, and imaginary people are conjured in man's psyche to remove isolation. Leviticus 17:7 says, "And that they may no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat-demons after whom they stray." The Jews sacrificed to demons in the wilderness—the open fields—possibly to appease the demons of their imagined fears. And Isaiah writes (13:19-21):

*And Babylon, glory of kingdoms, proud splendor of the Chaldeans, shall become like Sodom and Gomorrah overturned by God...nevermore shall it be settled nor dwelt in through all the ages [desolate]. No Arab shall pitch his tent there, no shepherds make flocks lie down there. But beasts shall lie down there, and the houses be filled with owls; there shall ostriches make their home, and there, shall demons dance.*

Again Torah teaches that desolate, isolated places like deserts produce fears in man where his fears conjure-up imaginary destructive forces.

Torah's repeated themes—as compared



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to singular instances—indicate a primary phenomenon. Astrology is a response to human insecurity. Therefore, astrology aligns somewhat with psychology. Here, the psychological lesson concerns the desert—a predominant fear.

Pharaoh—like all other men—possessed a fear of the desert. This explains his astrological forecast of blood for Israel in the desert. But how was he right?

Israel miscounted Moses' descent from Sinai. When Moses didn't arrive as they anticipated, they panicked. Had the Jews not been in the desert when they miscounted Moses' descent from Sinai, they might not have been compelled to create the Gold Calf. The desert and its associated fears caused the Jews to overreact and create a Gold Calf to replace Moses. Moses prayed to God, "Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that God delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains'" (Exod. 32:12). "Mountains" refers to the wilderness of the Sinai desert.

Pharaoh didn't predict anything, but merely shared the same fear of the desert which the Jews feared. This is the alignment of Pharaoh's astrology and the Jews' reality.

*Immediately, the Lord retracted the evil (killing the Jews), and He changed the blood of death to the blood of circumcision when Joshua had them circumcised later.*

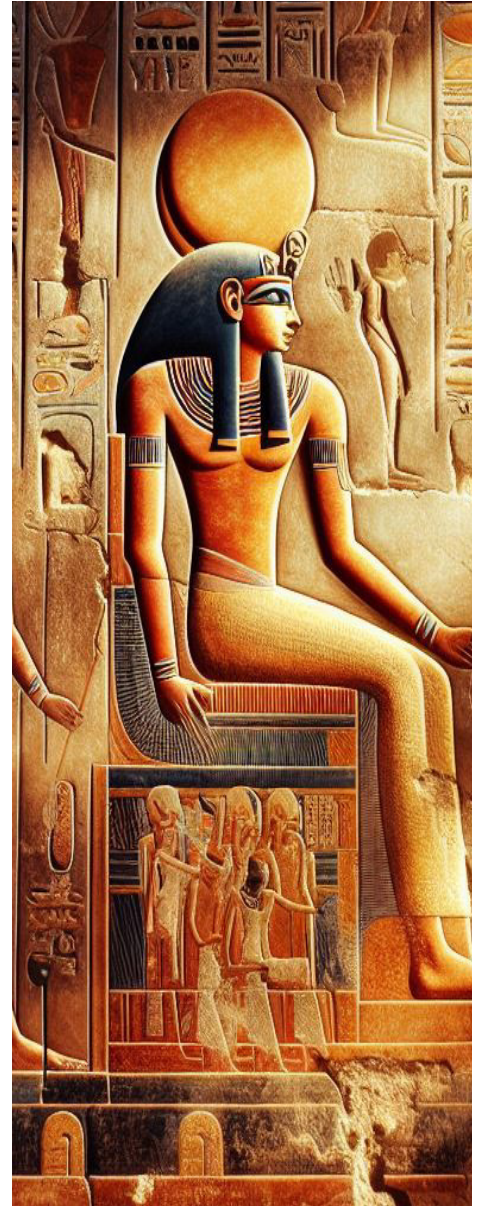
Immediacy means God was quite ready to cancel His decree; He didn't need Moses to raise the consideration of what Egypt would say of God. But God wished that His retraction of death be clearly understood as a concession to man, to Egypt's impression of God. Therefore He waited until Moses raised the concern about Egypt's view of God. In this manner, God is responding to Egypt, a concession. The world's impression of God overrides punish-

ment of a small group of mankind.

But as the Jews sinned, a response was still warranted. In place of killing the idolatrous Jews, God converted the blood of death, into the blood of circumcision. This means that He would address the instinctual drive that leads to idolatry by minimizing human instinctual gratification. This is the purpose of circumcision. After circumcision, the Jews would have far less instinctual drive that could manifest in idolatry.

In the end, we realize that man's fear outweighs reality. Desolate places present danger, but only from wild animals, weather, and lack of food. King David killed a bear and a lion (I Samuel 17:37). He could anticipate their natural movements and from what angle and distance he should attack. Man can use wisdom to kill wild beasts, and certainly to shield from the elements and prepare food for long journeys. But to invent demons of the mind violates reality, and Torah. Pharaoh catered to this baseless fear when he said the star Ra-ah forecasts doom. There are no forces outside of God, nature and man. This is a fundamental, and why Torah repeats the theme of demons in deserts.

We appreciate the rabbis' ingenuity in scripting midrashim. They follow God's style of encrypting wisdom, and the prophets' metaphoric writings as seen on Proverbs. Encryption drives the mind to analyze, compare statements, search for the meaning of selected words, and unveil a deeper message than surface meanings. Doing so, our minds become more sharpened and probe greater depths. Such abilities are required as we are venturing to explore God's wisdom, which, by design, is not surface information, but is many strata of interrelated wisdom. To plunge to deeper levels, one requires a mind that can analyze and interpret. Midrashim enhance these skills. ■





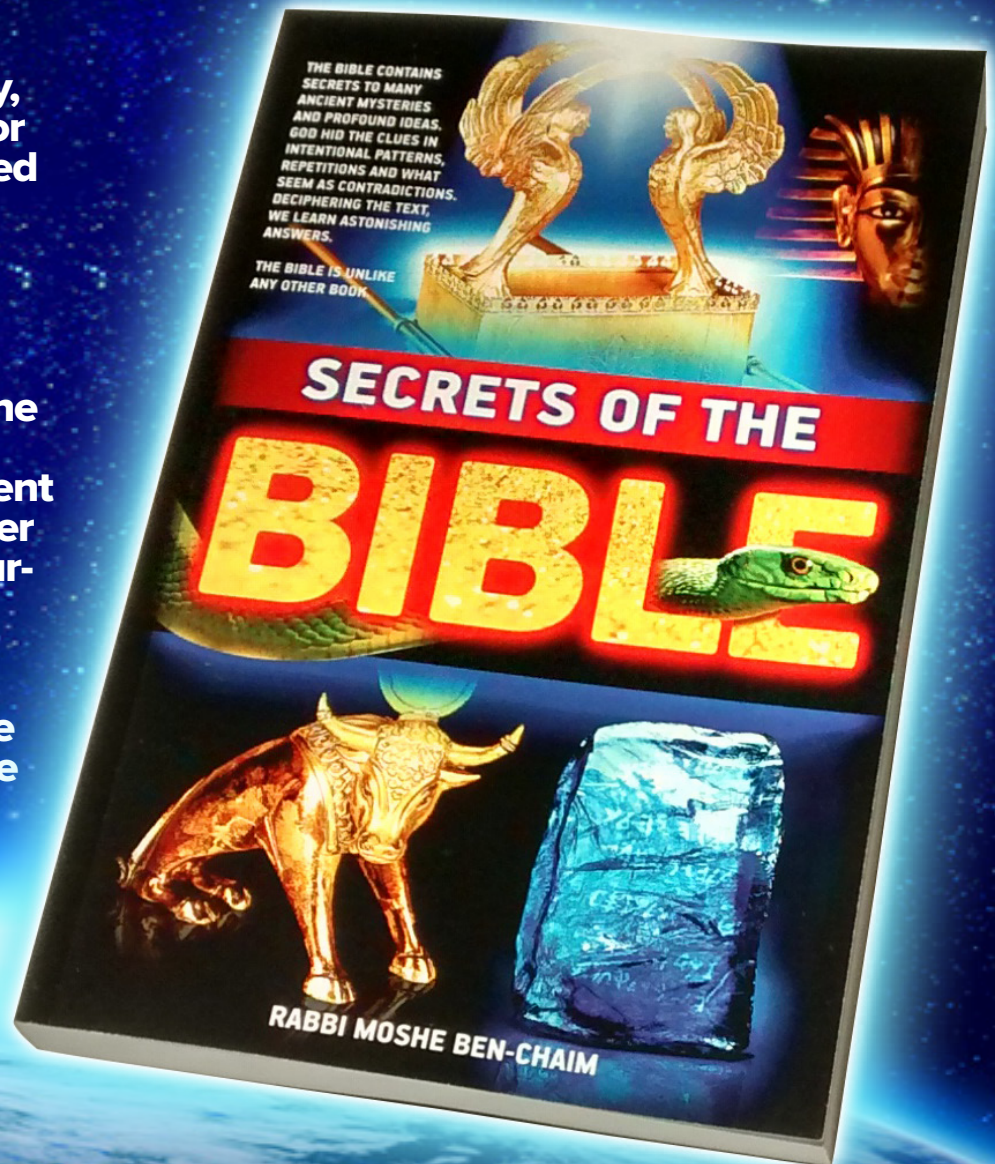
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Hashem wanted the Jews to request the goods from their Egyptian acquaintances personally. What was the importance of that?

It seems to me that the reason was psychological. The monetary plunder of their labor was not the sole harm rendered to the Jews. Of much greater significance was the blow to their ego and sense of human dignity. The slavery experience could leave a permanent feeling of insecurity and worthlessness, which could prevent a person from leading a creative and meaningful life.

Hashem wanted the Jews to be restored to a sense of healthy self-worth and this would come about through the admiration of the Egyptians, their former masters who would, bountifully, provide them with their finest apparel and accessories. Only by personally confronting the Egyptians would the Jews experience the newfound respect and awe with which they were regarded.

At the same time, we must ask, how did it come about that the Egyptian's attitude to the Jews had become so favorable that they willingly lavished on them their most cherished (and personal) possessions? The Torah provides a hint as to how this happened. "And Hashem placed the favor of the People in the eyes of the Egyptians; also, the man Moshe was very great in the eyes of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Paraoh, and in the eyes of the people" (Shemot 11:3).

We see from here that very deeply ingrained prejudices can be revised and even transformed. Indeed, an attitude of disparagement can be converted to one of great admiration. The people who had looked down upon the Jews now considered it an honor if they would accept their gifts. But can we trace the psychological process by which this was accomplished?

Most ordinary people unquestioningly accept the basic morality of the society into which they are born. For example, there was a time when slavery was not considered abhorrent in America. Even highly esteemed people who were otherwise regarded

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# From Hatred to Admiration

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**T**his week's Parsha, Bo, describes the mighty blows that Hashem rained down on Paraoh because of his recalcitrance in obeying the commands of Hashem. However, on various occasions when he seemed about to crack under the severity of the suffering, somehow at the very last moment the tyrant refused to yield. Except, of course, when it came to the final Makkah (plague), the slaying of the firstborn. This was so fearsome that a loud cry of panic engulfed the land, enveloping the King, whose own eldest son was included among the smitten.

The great and mighty King could not withstand the terror to which he was subjected and summoned Moshe to round up his People and leave immediately for their wilderness rendezvous with their G-d. And all of Moshe's conditions would be honored. This was absolute and unconditional surrender. Let the example of Paraoh be a lesson to all would-be dictators and enslavers of man; there is no way you can emerge triumphant if you have chosen to wage war against the Creator of the Universe.

There was another seemingly miraculous event that occurred as the

Jews prepared for exit from Egypt. In communicating the advent of the final plague, Hashem said to Moshe, "Please speak in the ears of the people, that each man may ask from his friend and each woman from her friend articles of silver and gold" (Shemot 11:2). The purpose of this instruction was that through it, Hashem's promise to Avraham that when his descendants departed the foreign land, they would do so with great wealth would be fulfilled. The Gentile friends and neighbors of the Jews would be motivated by a spirit of favor and generosity to lavish their finest clothing and jewelry on the former slaves.

At first glance, this appears incomprehensible and would seem to constitute a great miracle on a par with the other "signs and wonders" that Moshe performed in Mitzrayim. We must ask, why did Hashem decide to convey great bounty to the Jews in this roundabout manner? Had he instructed Moshe to order Paraoh to pay a sizable indemnity from the Egyptian treasury to compensate the Jews for their stolen labor, Paraoh would have complied under the pressure of Makkat Bechorot (plague of the firstborn). However,



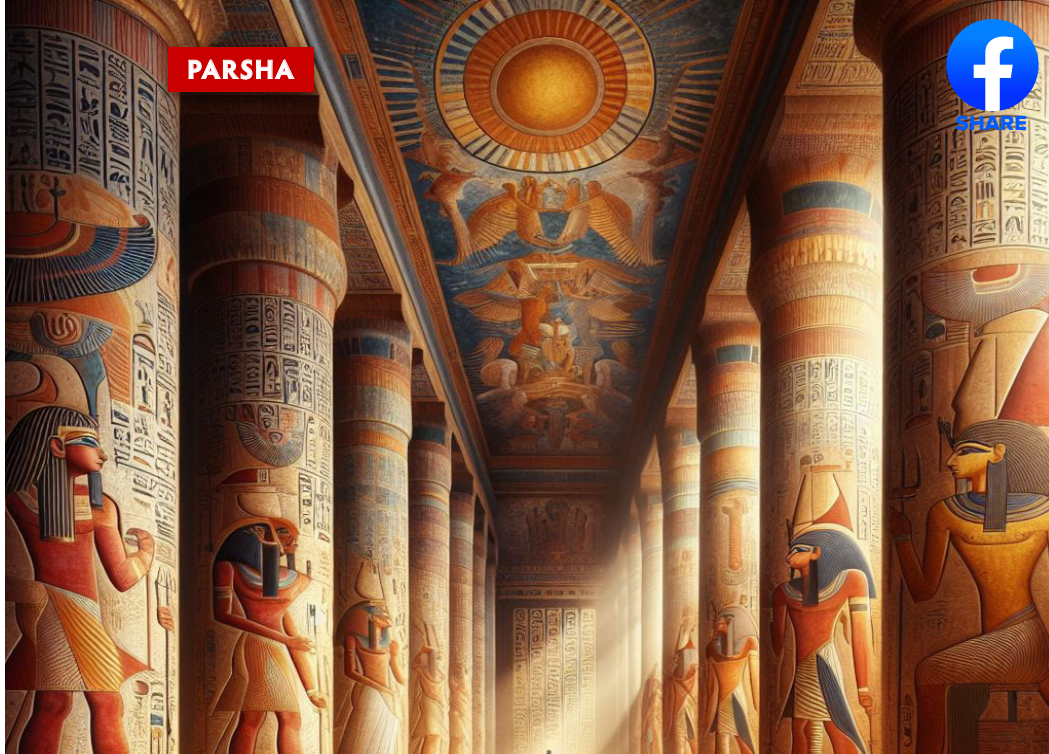
as true champions of human freedom were at peace with it. Rare is the individual who subjects all the ethical premises of his homeland to a critical examination.

This enables us to appreciate the uniqueness of Moshe. He was raised in the royal palace and subjected to its philosophical outlook on contemporary issues but endeavored to investigate the system of slavery which was a basic component of the Egyptian economic and social structure. He uncovered its wickedness and rose against it. Not only that, but he chose to identify with his downtrodden brethren, even though it cost him his special place within the societal establishment.

But this was not the approach of the ordinary Egyptian. He had no reason to question the wisdom of Paraoh who had asserted that the Jews posed a danger and who would very likely join with an enemy that waged war against Egypt. He most probably went along with the mistreatment of the Jews as it provided everyone with a cheap and readily available source of labor.

But things began to change with the advent of Moshe and the plagues. Suddenly there were consequences to be had for the enslavement of the Jews. The conversion of all the water sources of Egypt into blood was a traumatic event. When people wanted water, they had to dig deeply in order to find some. Moreover, the idea that the Nile which hitherto had been a source of life and prosperity, had now become an enemy which brought suffering and shook people to their core.

With time, matters got worse, and people wanted to know what Egypt was being punished for. They were informed about the negotiations between Paraoh and Moshe, which had snagged over the demand to allow the slave workforce a brief furlough to worship their G-d. Slowly, under the pressure of the Makkot (plagues), public opinion began to sway in support of the Jews. Suffering has a way of clarifying one's thinking. The Egyptians reacquainted themselves with the true history of the Jews. Their ancestor, Joseph, had saved the



country in the time of the famine. The rest of the family had come in at the request of Paraoh, and they had always been loyal. In fact, it was they who had built the cities of Pitom and Ramseis.

At a certain point in time the general feeling emerged that the Jews were a creative and loyal people and Egypt had sinned grievously in afflicting them. Pharaoh could not prevent the truth from asserting itself. Extreme travail awakens the mind and stimulates great clarity of thought. The Egyptians came to the realization that they had sinned terribly against innocent people, whose virtues now aroused enormous respect and admiration. The Egyptians suddenly had great regard for the Hebrews and their leader Moshe and wanted to express that with demonstrations of appreciation.

Thus, when the Jews came knocking and asking for clothing and jewelry, they were overwhelmed with a desire to give very generously. In describing the reaction of the Egyptians to the request of the Jews, the verse states; (Exodus 12:36) "Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they lent them—so they emptied Egypt." Rashi comments: "Even that which the Israelites did not ask of the Egyptians, they would give to them. You say that you want one? Take two and go."

What happened in Egypt was that an entire nation recognized that it had

been intentionally misled by its leaders into vilifying an innocent People. They now abandoned the official falsehoods and opted for the truth. It is important to note that the phenomenon of people rejecting inherited untruths and embracing the correct view will play a significant role in the redemption of the Jews and all mankind.

When the Mashiach appears and accomplishes the monumental tasks of defeating all the Jew's enemies, bringing the entire nation to a proper and full observance of Torah, overseeing the return of the exiles, and, finally, building the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) in its place the entire world will acknowledge that he is the genuine authentic Messiah whose advent all the prophets predicted.

In the words of the Rambam; (Laws of Kings and Their Wars 11:4) "When the true Messianic King will arise and prove successful, his position becoming exalted and uplifted, they will all return and realize that their ancestors bequeathed them a false heritage and that their prophets and forefathers caused them to err."

When the world recognizes the terrible crime of anti-Semitism and discovers the true virtues of the Jews and their Torah, the ultimate redemption of mankind will ensue. May it happen quickly and in our time.

Shabbat Shalom. ■



# Trust in God

Rabbi Morton Moskowitz

*If someone flees and no one is chasing him, that is a wicked person. But the righteous are like young lions and they are secure (Proverbs 28:1).*

Why does one flee without someone chasing him; what is he running from? Is a righteous person so perfect without any mistakes, that nothing can go wrong and no one will come after him? That's egoistical and not righteous.

Metaphors are employed to provide something additional to what you would attain without the metaphor. What is added by "like a young lion?" (We refer to a lion in its prime, not an infant cub.) Young lions are secure because they have no

predators. They have no animal above it in the food chain that they must fear. The same applies to the righteous person: he relates to the world realistically. While nature can harm wicked people, the righteous person follows natural law to comply with it and avert problems. And what is outside his control, he trusts in God. He accepts God's will, be it good or bad. Therefore, the righteous person fears nothing. He knows how to deal with natural law and occurrences, and he trusts in God for all else that is outside of his control.

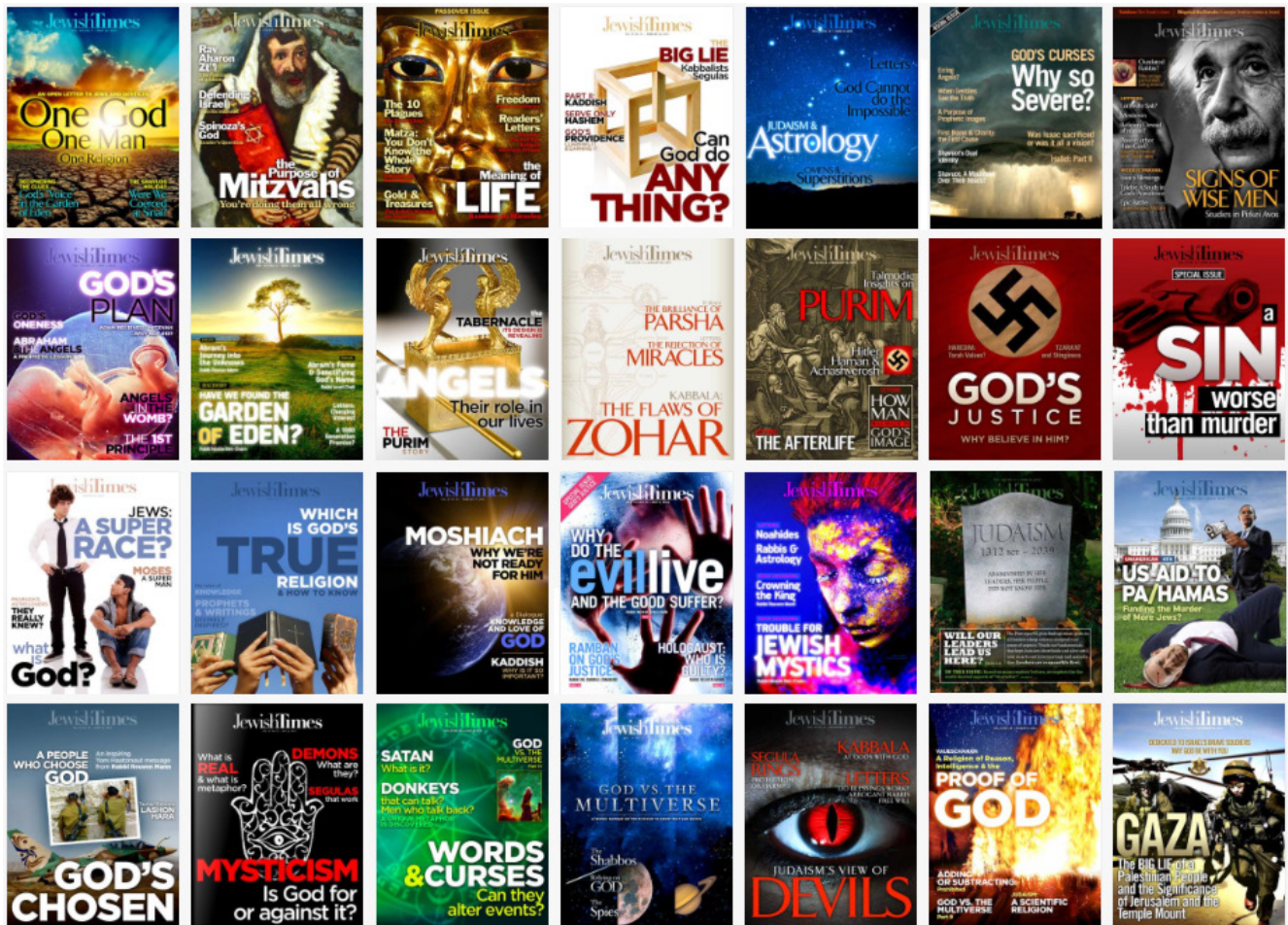
There is nothing to fear, just like a young lion. That does that mean the righteous person is without mistakes or that there aren't real problems, but he is not afraid. He addresses practical matters to the best of his abilities and trusts in God for that which is outside of his hands. And he accepts God's will.

Why is the wicked person fleeing? The first step is that he is not relating to the physical world as reality. Instead, he has a subjective emotional view which he treats as real. His view may have very little to do with reality. He projects his subjective incorrect reality onto the world. For example, a cynic feels that all people act with evil motives: he says a good act is bad or is motivated by evil. The cynic truly acts only for himself. But as he cannot accept that poor self image, he projects his personality onto everyone else. Based on his view of others, he cannot have friends or relate to anyone. Similarly, wicked people create a certain philosophy. Most great tyrants felt that they were infallible. Dissenters are wrong and deserve death. Just as his intent is to destroy others who oppose him, he fears others seek to hurt him. The evil person flees from his fabricated reality. He becomes very frightened of the personalities he fabricated, and there may not be anyone chasing him. ■



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# Darkness

**M**oses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness was upon all the land of Egypt for three days. No man saw his brother and no one rose from his place three days, but all Children of Israel had light in their dwellings (Exod. 10:22,23).

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Seeing one's fellow Egyptian and visiting him were both impossible during the Plague of Darkness, and this is significant enough to be recorded. That's how God leads us to deep insights: He records only certain matters, and with precise wording. Why did God cause these 2 affects?

Like all peoples, Egyptians sought reinforcement for their culture through camaraderie. One wishes to see his brother/countryman act as he does as this provides him security in their shared culture. As he sees others sharing his philosophy and his way of life, this emboldens his sense of validity in that culture. Common clothing and language further strengthen this conviction in one's

culture. But with this dark isolation, this identification and cultural validation was lost. Not seeing his brother, he would attempt to rise and find him, but this too the verse says he could not do because of the darkness. As Ibn Ezra said, "Where could he go?" Darkness forced everyone to stay in their place, and not endanger themselves.

This is why the last part of the verse says that the Jews had light in their dwellings in order to contrast the Jewish culture to the Egyptian culture. The Jews did not seek to bolster their beliefs through common culture.

Perhaps God's objective was to first strip each Egyptian of his validation for Egyptian treatment of the Jews. This was achieved by 3 days of not seeing one's brother. This opened the door to each Egyptian to reflect on himself as an individual. Isolation forces one to look at oneself and assess his life. Perhaps this contributed to the Egyptians' remorse for Jewish slavery, driving them to give of their wealth when the Jews departed. ■



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*Rabbi Reuven Mann – Deuteronomy*

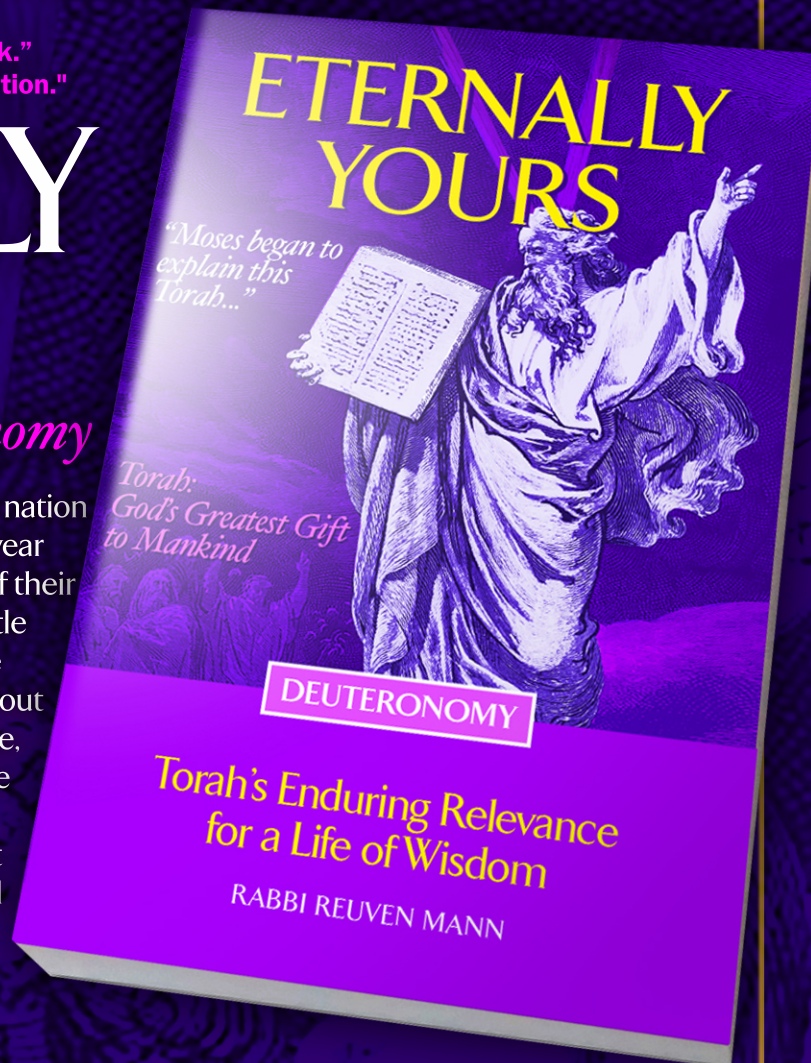
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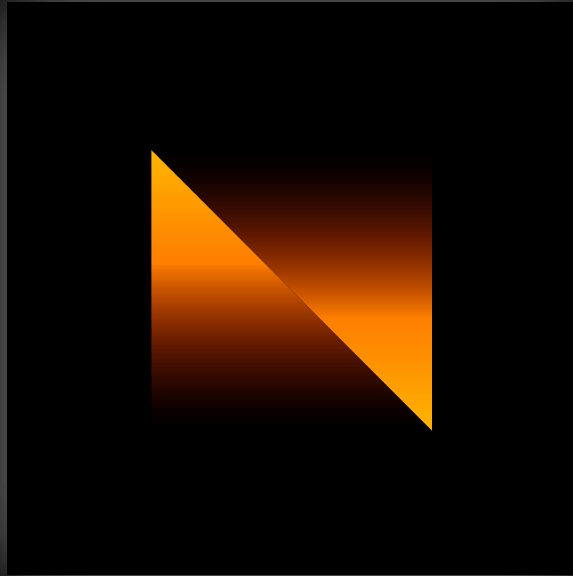
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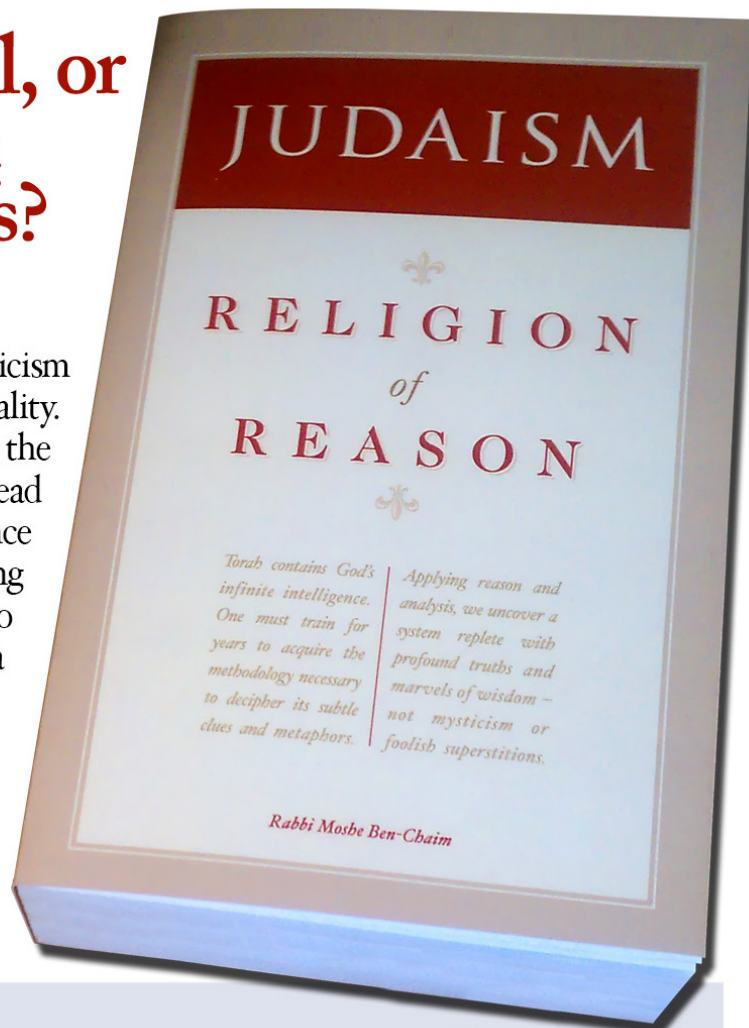
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Why the good suffer  
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Segulas & amulets  
Shadim – “demons”  
Reward and punishment

Afflictions  
Ayin harah – “Evil eye”  
The age of the universe  
God isn't everywhere  
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