

JewishTimes

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PARSHA

A Strange Confession

RABBI REUVEN MANN

SOLOMON'S WISDOM

BIRTH VS DEATH

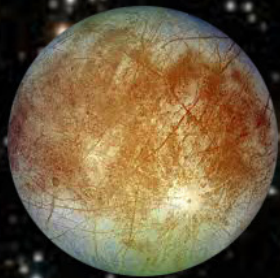
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to Angels

Star Worship

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W/O MERIT



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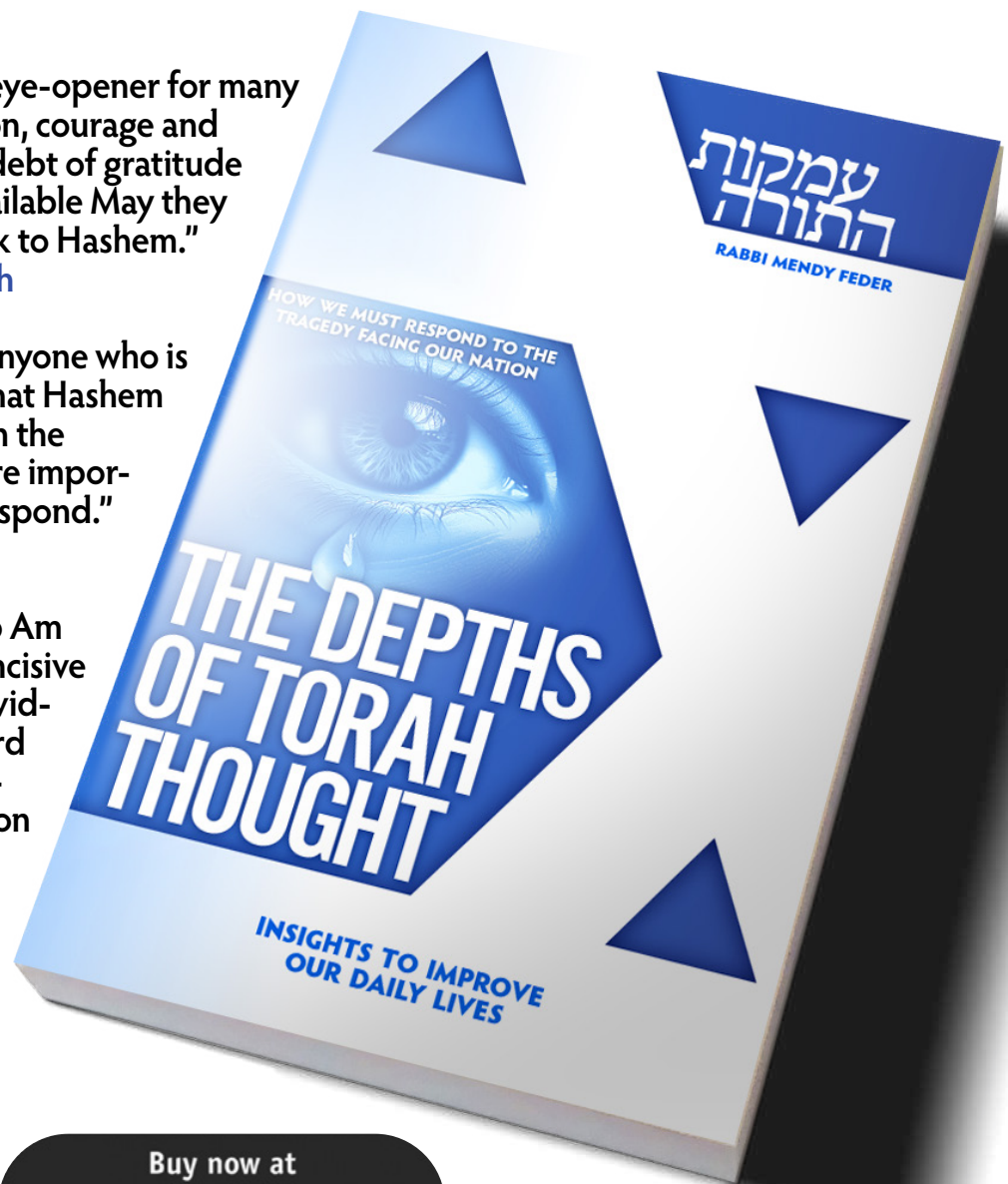
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EXPECT GREATNESS

If you don't seek brilliance, you will be satisfied with mediocrity. But if you continue to learn Torah and science, your recognition of God's awesomeness is realized and increased...your expectation of brilliance is anticipated, and your intolerance of mediocrity will earn you brilliant insights.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Why Copy God's Enemies?

When Hashem, your God has cut down the nations that you have come there to inherit them from before them, and you inherit them and you dwell in their lands. Be careful that you do not stumble after them, after they are destroyed from before you, lest you inquire of their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods and I will do the same?" Do not perform this to Hashem your God, because all abominations to God, which God hates have they done to their gods, for also their sons and daughters they have burned in fire to their gods (Deut. 12:29-31).

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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM: Why did the Jews seek to copy the practices of the nations that God just decimated? The Jews should have despised their practices, explaining why God destroyed them! What could possibly motivate a desire to emulate those whom God killed? Interesting is Torah's method of hints: "God has cut down the nations," is followed by "after they are destroyed." This repetition "cutting down" and "destroyed" is to raise our attention to that which evokes a misplaced mercy in the nations. The Jews sensed a guilt that other people were wiped out from before for them. A person feels uncomfortable when favored. He feels others will be jealous of him, just as he would be jealous of others being favored. To assuage that insecurity, the Jew identifies with the underdog and seeks to emulate his practices. His need for peer approval—even from a dead nation—overrides God's prohibition of idol worship. God's response is that these nations sacrificed their children in fire to their gods. These people show no mercy to those (their own children) who most deserve mercy. Telling the Jews to be aware of the nation's cruelty intends to eliminate the Jews' mercy on them and prevent their idolatrous emulation. ■

Torah Defeats Enemies?

JESSIE F.: What is the connection between setting a fixed location for prayer or Torah study, and God foiling one's enemies?

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, "Setting a fixed place for prayer is so important that one who sets a fixed place for his prayer, his enemies fall beneath him, as it is said, 'And I will appoint a place for My nation, Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place.'" (Brachos 7b)

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM: What character exists in the opposite personality, namely the one who does not establish a fixed place for Torah study? He is less rigid and less concerned with his learning...he learns "on the fly." Anywhere

is OK. But setting a fixed location creates a familiar environment where there are no unexpected distractions, which do exist and distract one in unfamiliar settings. Such a person so deeply values the greatest mitzvah of Torah, that he creates the environment most conducive to learn. A fixed place contains nothing new around him, as he has been there many times before. With no external stimuli, his study is fully focussed. As he desires unimpeded study, God helps him by eliminating that which can disturb him: his enemies.

JESSIE F.: Why enemies particularly?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM: Perhaps people (enemies) are unpredictable, so God helps man here. But independent of the need for God, man can take protective measures against disturbances of a known character, like weather. ■

Praying to Angels

TOVA: Where in Torah are we prohibited to pray to angels? I see where Torah prohibits heavenly phenomena and animated life. But not angels.

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT: Yes, in the Ten Commandments it says that you are not allowed to worship anything in the heavens above or the Earth below (Exod. 20:4,5). ■

Why Oral Law is Oral

Howie: Why was the Oral Law originally restricted from being written?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Talmud says "The purpose of study is definition" ("tachlis shmaitta svara"). This means the arrival at the underlying definitions of halacha is our goal. Definitions are ideational matters, they are thoughts. Thinking is man's greatest activity, as it alone enables man to pursue the infinite world of God's wisdom. As God wishes man to recognize this, the metaphysical world of ideas is highlighted through maintaining the Oral Law in our minds, not

on parchment. Furthermore, had the Oral Law been written, its limited number of books would indicate there is a discreet corpus of knowledge, and nothing further. But God's knowledge is endless for man. Why then is there a Written Law? Perhaps, as Torah must apply to all people at all stages of intelligence, a purely memorized system would not survive. A concrete tangible framework is required. ■

God isn't Wrong

If one follows even those commands viewed as a light matters, will one benefit from God's treaty and kindness with the Jews (Rashi, Deut. 7:12). What is the reasoning? What prevents one from following matters viewed as "light" is one's rejection of God's evaluation, and instead, following one's own subjective assessment. In this manner, one rejects God's authority. Thereby, he forfeits God's favor and providence promised to only those wholly devoted to God.

Rejecting part of God's treaty nullifies the treaty completely. ■

Cashing in on Mitzvah?

Why do the righteous not wish to be answered due to their merit, but instead, seek God's "free" gift of His kindness?

Why not seek repayment for their righteous lives? (Rashi, Deut. 3:23)

The righteous follow Torah based on a love of its truths. They don't view their good deeds and mitzvos as "currency," as a claim against God to be repaid. They perform Torah as they see the truth in all God's commands, and they are attached to the truth. It's natural for them. Therefore, when in need, they seek God's free kindness, as they are not of the mindset to cash-in on their acts which they never viewed as a claim against God. One would not say to God, "Look, I saved my son's life, now repay me." That lifesaving act was performed for itself, and that father is glad to have performed that act, with no feeling of deserving reward. The righteous act the same way regarding all God's commands and philosophies. ■

Benefit w/o Merit?

*God's creation of
man proves man
benefits without
man having
merited it*

HOWARD: Since children, longevity and money are not due to one's merit (Moade Kattan 28a), what is it we say on Yom Kippur below?

"Who will live and who will die, who will become rich and who will become poor? But teshuva, tefilah and tzedaka avert the evil of the decree."

Poverty and life are 2 of the 3 cited in gemara Moade Kattan 28a that are independent of merit. How then does teshuva, tefila and tzedaka play a role?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT: Teshuva changes the person's internal make up. He can then naturally succeed without God's help, according to the laws of chance which we call "mazel." Tefila—prayer—is a different track; it's asking God to directly intervene in the laws of nature. God's response to prayer is due neither to merit or nature. And tzedaka is also a separate phenomenon, it is also a separate track. God says He will "Open the windows of heaven and pour out a bracha on us until we tire of saying enough." (Malachi 3:10).

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM: I thought into what Rabbi Chait said above. He explained these three phenomena as altering our fate. Teshuvah is akin to Joseph's plan to succeed, despite the seven years of famine. Rabbi Chait previously taught that when Pharaoh heard the

forecast of the famine, he felt incapacitated. He was a mystical fatalist. Joseph's response was greatly different: although there was a divine decree of famine, this does not mean that man is crippled and can't engineer a plan around it and succeed. Joseph acted like a person doing teshuva: he regrouped and made a new plan with the new information of a famine. Even without God's interaction, he succeeded. So too, a person who changes his internal make up through teshuva will make better choices and have a better year. This is 1 of 3 ways man's fate can be avoided.

I wondered why prayer and tzedaka earn a response from God, regardless of our merit. Perhaps God's justice demands that the creatures that He made dependent upon His kindness, should be answered when they pray, as the talmud says:

"Rav Yehuda said: A covenant was made with the thirteen attributes that they will not return empty-handed, meaning that if one mentions them, he will certainly be answered, as it is stated in this regard:

"Behold, I make a covenant" (Exodus 34:10). And also in God's justice is that He validates man's act of tzedaka by replenishing his charity. And this has nothing to do with merit or nature.

Thus, there are 3 ways to avert a decree: 1) internal change that avoids a poor fate, 2) tefila which invokes God's response to care for those creatures He decreed are dependent, and 3) tzedaka, God endorsement of man's acceptance of a higher system that overrides nature. God's will is that He care for needy creatures by intervening when one prays, and that man's belief in a metaphysical guiding world is endorsed by God's return of his charity.

Man's greatest concern is self-preservation, which is expressed through his concerns for physical health and wealth. But in God's eyes, most prominent to man should be his Torah studies. Therefore if health, wealth or children would negatively impact his Torah studies, God will adjust their relationship to the person to optimize his Torah studies. Some people might be unaffected by wealth, but one man might be harmed by the needy knocking on his door all day, thereby diminishing his Torah study. God, knowing all variables, determines that there might be two equally righteous people like Rabbi Chisda and Rabba who's prayers were answered, but Rav Chisda had greater physical success than Rabba. ■

PARSHA



Come Fly with Me

RABBI REUVEN MANN

It is no simple matter to evaluate the significance of any Mitzvah. Our Sedra illustrates this point. In this week's Parsha Ki Teitzei, we encounter the commandment of the "Bird's Nest." This stipulates that if one comes upon a nest where a mother is sitting upon her eggs or chicks, he may not take the offspring in the presence of the parent. Rather, "You shall surely send away the mother and take the young for yourself so that it may be good for you and that your days may be lengthened" (Devarim 22:7).

At first glance, this may not seem like the most earth-shaking statute, but the rabbis regard this verse as alluding to eternal life in Olam HaBah (the World to Come). As they interpret:

"That it may be good for you and that your days may be lengthened" (Devarim 22:7) ... the verse "that your days may be lengthened" is referring to the world that is entirely unending, and "that it may be good for you" means in the world that is exclusively good" (Chullin 142a).

In other words, the ultimate reward Judaism offers to the righteous—eternal bliss—is stated in the chapter that deals with the command to send away a mother bird before taking its chicks. Why is this great reward offered for this seemingly simple Mitzvah? One may retort, "Who are we to begin making judgments on the relative importance of any of Hashem's commandments?" That point is valid, but here the Torah has associated the Mitzvah of the bird's nest with the reward of the World to Come. We must make the effort to understand why.

My interest in this matter increased some time ago when I noticed that a dove had built a nest on a window ledge of my Dirah (dwelling) in Jerusalem. It sat upon two eggs for some weeks before they hatched. The mother was very dedicated to her task, sitting there day and night, except for short breaks when she left to tend to her own needs, which clearly took a back seat to those of her offspring.

The mother's dedication persisted with the advent of the chicks, whom she nurtured until they reached the point where they could fly off and be on their own. I was fascinated by this whole process and found myself photographing the nest at various stages and sharing the photos with my

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

students. I have given this matter some thought and believe there are valuable lessons we can learn from a mother dove.

First and foremost is the absolute steadfast dedication she displayed to her young. She was on the job 24/7, sitting first on the eggs and later on the chicks. At no point did she appear bored or tired of what she was doing. She seemed totally content with her assignment and didn't regard it as an infringement on her freedom to do as she pleased. All her time, energy, and focus were dedicated to her children's well-being.

How fortunate is the creature who is absolutely committed to and joyful in the ability to do what he or she was created for!

This recounting of the bird's excellent nurturing skills and unwavering dedication may arouse pangs of envy or even guilt in some of us, but that is not my intention. Inevitably, observing birds causes us to look within, make comparisons, and come up short. This can be a humbling and ego-deflating experience.

In defense of humans, certain things need to be placed in perspective. It's patently unfair to judge our species by the behavior of animals. They, in general, lead uncomplicated lives. Birds have the luxury of being single-minded. They have no responsibilities aside from tending to their chicks. The mother can contentedly nest on them endlessly with no distractions.

But humans are altogether different. We cannot be single-minded. We have many diverse needs beyond the care of offspring—and many wants and desires that clamor to be satisfied. We also have numerous responsibilities to which we must attend and which cannot be put aside.

We humans need to be jugglers and masters of the art of multitasking. The big challenge we face is to balance our obligations so they do not consume us, thereby depriving us of the time and energy needed to engage in "higher pursuits." We humans are the only creatures that can relate to the category of "higher pursuits."

We are also moody beings who get bored, resentful, and require lots of breaks and diversions. It is inevitable that we will fail at times, have bad days, and make faulty decisions. Our Matzav (situation) is more complicated than that of animals. The procedure of the mother bird is to spend less

and less time with the chicks as they get bigger and stronger. She doesn't stay with them more than she has to. She does not want to keep the chicks dependent on her. Her goal is to facilitate their maturation and ultimate independence. Human parents should note this. Do we overly coddle our young ones because we unconsciously seek to keep them dependent on us? That approach can be counterproductive.

The relationship between the mother bird and her chicks is limited in time. Once the job is completed, she has no further role to play and retains no connection to her offspring. And she seems none the worse for it. She does not expect any gratitude for what she has done, nor does she seek any Nachat (gratification) from the little ones. Her service is truly one of love. She is happy to do it and serves without any expectation of reward.

As we ponder the wonders of creation, we see that it is embedded with moral principles. Not only do the inanimate constellations of the stars perform the tasks assigned to them, but living creatures do so as well. In the blessing for the new moon, we depict the heavens as "joyous and glad to perform the will of their Master—the Worker of truth, whose work is truth."

Man is an exception to the rule of "joyous service" found in the universe. We are much more complicated creatures with minds and wills of our own. Our challenge, in the words of Pirkei Avot 2:4, is to "cancel our will before His Will."

When we observe the way a bird fulfills her responsibilities, it might cause us to pause and be in awe of the purity of her actions. This realization can lift us to a worthier level of divine service. As we contemplate and admire her characteristics, we might be inspired to elevate our conduct to a higher level more in line with the Divine Will.

This may very well be an additional reason why the great reward of Olam HaBah is alluded to in the Mitzvah of displaying compassion to the nesting bird. It is a commandment that brings us "up close and personal" with the moral principles that G-d has embedded in His universe, which, when properly implemented, render us worthy of eternal life.

May we merit to achieve it.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

Rabbi Reuven Mann has been a pulpit Rabbi and a teacher of Torah for over fifty years. He is currently the Dean of Masoret Institute of Judaic Studies for Women and resides in Arnona, Jerusalem.

Questions? Comments? Please reach out to Rabbi Mann on WhatsApp 050-709-2372 or by email at: rebmenn21@aol.com or to Mitch Rosner on WhatsApp 054-426-3419 or by email at: mitchrosner@gmail.com. Additionally, I have a new series of YouTube videos called "Rabbi Reuven Mann Torah Thoughts": <https://bit.ly/49N8hyX>

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Rabbi Reuven Mann – Deuteronomy

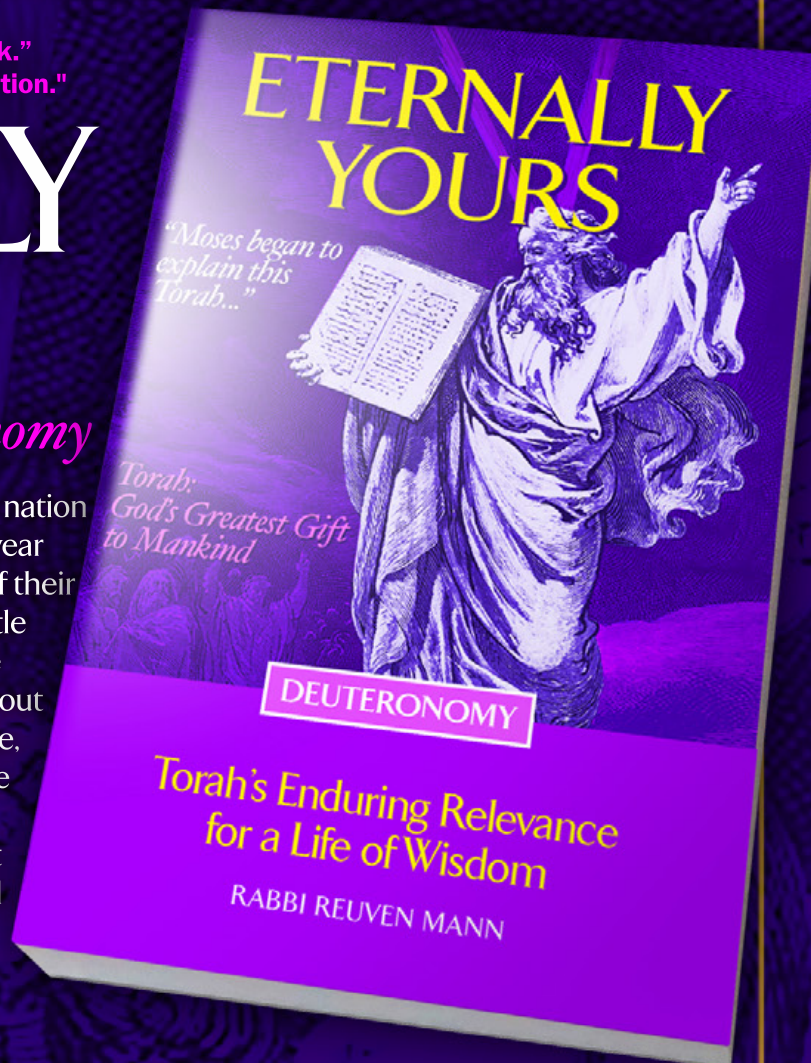
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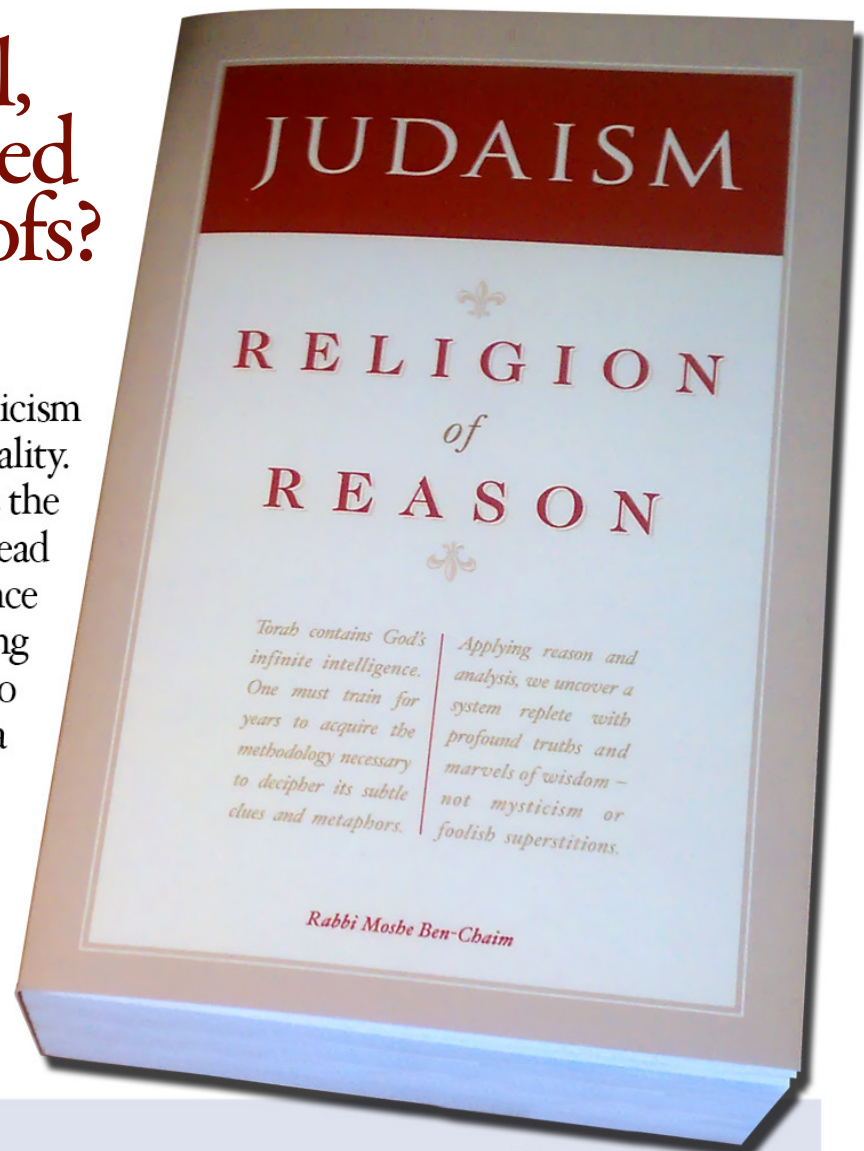
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“Better is reputation than fine oil, and better is the day of death than the day of birth.”
(Koheles 7:1)

King Solomon was only second in wisdom to Moses. What false notion is the king correcting, and what is the comparison between fame/oil and death/birth? As Rabbi Israel Chait taught, a single verse in Torah, Prophets and Writings contains related topics, explaining why God includes multiple elements in a single verse. The false notion is that death is an evil; generated from one's false fears. But Torah teaches that great people like the patriarchs, Aaron and Moses were very calm about the approach of their deaths. They had a full grasp of the great good that God grants one for his or her righteous life. God promised the patriarchs goodness upon their death (Gen. 15:1). The eternity of

the afterlife is infinitely greater, and its metaphysical goodness is immeasurable when compared to the temporal physical good scent of fine oil. But this is in earthly terms.

On the eternal metaphysical scale, as Ibn Ezra teaches, at birth, we do not know whether this person will be good or evil. But when one dies after a righteous life, this is of definite, greater value than his unknowable potential at birth. Death seals one for eternal bliss, while birth determines nothing. Ibn Ezra also explains the two halves as indicating that one with a good name will have a great afterlife, as he now enjoys the release of all his toil and his eternal reward. ■



Koheles

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Star Worship

**DANI ROTH &
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

If there is found in your midst in one of your cities which Hashem your God has given you, a man or a woman that has performed the evil in the eyes of Hashem your God to transgress His covenant, and went and served other gods and bowed to them, to the sun or to the moon, or to any of the stars that I have not commanded (Deut. 17:3).

DANI ROTH: Why does God say, “that I have not commanded”? Of course God won’t command one to commit idolatry. Ibn Ezra comments on “other gods” as referring to man-made idols, and he comments on “The sun, the moon or any of the host of heaven” as referring to the work of God. When God says “that I have not commanded,” Ibn Ezra might be saying, “Certainly man-made idols must not be worshiped, but perhaps things God made might deserve man’s worship.” Of course, this is not so, but this might be man’s faulty elevation of God’s creations over man’s creations. Nonetheless, God says even of His own works, “I have not commanded” man to worship.

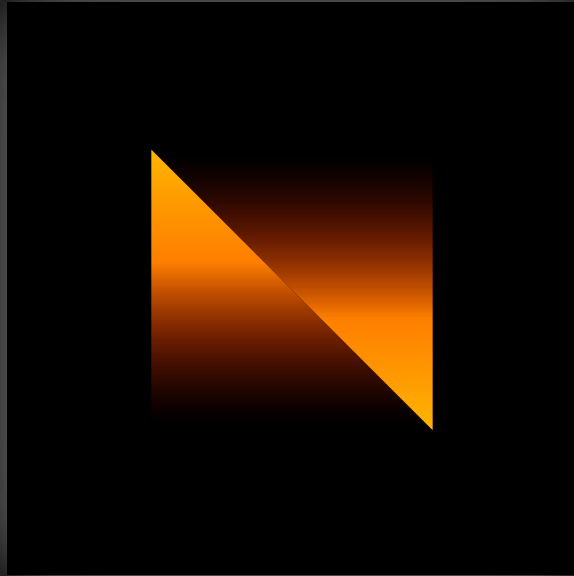
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM: Dani, you made an astute distinction between idols, and between the sun, moon and stars: idols are replicas, while the sun, moon and stars are the real thing. Again, one might feel “real” things are more worthy of esteem. Here, we make recourse to more verses:

Don’t act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, the form of any beast on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish that is in the waters

below the earth. And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven (Deut. 4:16-19).

Dani, you are correct: God does not say “the likenesses of the sun, moon or stars” but the actual entities themselves are prohibited. There is a distinction: man makes replicas of earthly creatures, but not necessarily replicas of heavenly spheres. However, this grouping above of replicas in Deut. 4:16-19 along with the sun, moon and stars indicates that the idolatrous crime is equal: whether worshiping replicas (idols), or the physical entities themselves (sun, moon, stars), man is blamed for worshiping anything but God. When discussing this with Dani, we noted that God made creations called angels which do have will. As this is so, one might assume the sun, moon and stars to equally have will, like angels. But here, God clarifies this is not the case; these inanimate heavenly entities deserve no esteem. Sforno shares this view: “That I have not commanded”—which I had not appointed to act independently.”

Thank you Dani for your question and good insights. ■



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How Torah Perfects Us

A Strange Confession

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's Parsha, Ki Tavo, discusses certain Mitzvot (commandments) that come into play when Bnei Yisrael (the people of Israel) live in the land Hashem has granted them, Eretz Yisrael. Farmers must bring their first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem and express their gratitude to Hashem for the gift of this bountiful homeland.

There is another Mitzvah called Vidui Maaser (Confession of Tithes). This takes place after the third year of the Shemita seven-year cycle, when one must dispose of all his tithing obligations. After seeing to it that all the special priestly gifts have been given, the owner must pronounce the following declaration:

"I have terminated all the holy things from my house and I have given it to the Levite, the convert, the orphan, and the widow in accordance with all the Mitzvot that You commanded me; I did not violate any of Your commandments, nor have I forgotten. I did not eat of it in a state of bereavement, nor did I consume it while ritually impure, nor did I use it for the needs of the deceased; I have listened to the voice of Hashem, my G-d, and I have acted in accordance with everything He has commanded me. Look down from the abode of Your holiness, from the heavens, and bless Your nation, Israel, and the land which You swore to our fathers, a land that flows with milk and honey. (Devarim 26:13-15)"

At first glance, this "Confession" seems somewhat strange. If it is vital for a person to declare his scrupulous observance of G-d's commands, why is this only required with the giving of the Maasrot (Tithes)? There are numerous other laws that require exactitude in their performance. Passover, for example, is not an easy holiday, especially regarding the removal of Chameitz (leavened products) from one's possession, the Kashering (rendering kosher) of utensils, and the preparation of strictly kosher meals. Yet the Israelite makes no declaration about the conscientious manner in which he fulfilled all his Passover obligations; to actually do so would seem, to say the least, a bit immodest.

Yet here, the Israelite landowner confidently asserts, "I have done all that You have commanded me!" That may be truly wonderful, but shouldn't a pious individual maintain a modicum of humility and refrain from boasting about his religious accomplishments? What is the meaning behind this seemingly strange practice?

In my opinion, the underlying purpose of this "Confession" is to express the genuine significance of the Mitzvot. Many people resist this aspect of Judaism, essentially because it impinges on their freedom to do as they please.

According to Rashi, when the people complained in the Wilderness that "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt for free..." (BaMidbar 11:5), they really meant, "free of the Mitzvot" (Rashi). People, in general, want to have G-d on their side, but they don't want to be burdened with all types of obligations and certainly don't want to be told what to do, even by the Creator of the Universe.

Notice that all religious movements that "grew out" of Judaism curtailed the quantity and quality of the 613 Commandments—not to mention the numerous Rabbinic ordinances that were intended to bolster the observance of G-d's laws. Once the Christian religion sought to attract gentile members, it canceled the applicability of virtually all the Mitzvot. Today's Conservative and Reform Jewish sects have jettisoned traditional Torah positions on vital matters

such as abortion (“Choice”), gay, lesbian, and queer sexual orientation, and transsexualism. Their “theological” positions reflect the contemporary liberal orientation and not scrupulous adherence to Torah. If they were thoroughly honest, they would admit that they reject the Torah and longingly hearken back to “the fish they consumed in Egypt for free!” They believe that abandoning the Covenant is actually the pathway to “freedom.”

In my opinion, the objective of the “Confession” is not to boast of how efficiently I have performed the required procedure. To the contrary, it is a statement that means I am, by nature, disinclined to be generous and give away whole portions of my hard-earned yield. Were it not that G-d gave me no choice, I would have kept everything for myself, family, and friends. Maybe I would have left a little something in the charity box, just to make me feel good.

But if that is not what I actually did, it is for one reason only: I had no choice but to “give to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow according to the Mitzvah which You commanded me. I did not deviate from Your Mitzvot, nor did I forget” (Devarim 26:13). Judaism does not believe in the “natural goodness” of man. In fact, one can say that Yahadut (Judaism) is very suspicious of the human being. How can one not be? Consider the atrocities that have been committed throughout history—not the least of which were perpetrated by zealous adherents of various religions. While man has free will, he simply cannot be trusted to overcome his base instincts and behave with justice and compassion.

The question thus arises: If man is to be the instrument through which G-d’s plan for the perfection of the world is to be achieved, and man himself is corrupt, how can the world ever be redeemed?

The answer is Mount Sinai. A small group of people were chosen from the human species because they were descendants of G-d’s spiritual elite: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. These moral giants attained, through their own prodigious efforts, the most perfect understanding of G-d and the type of life that was pleasing to Him.

In addition, they strove to transmit this lifestyle to their children.

“Hashem said (regarding the destruction of Sodom), ‘Shall I hide from Avraham that which I am about to do? Avraham is going to be a great and mighty nation, through which all the nations of the world will be blessed. For I am [close to him] because he commands his children and household to guard the way of Hashem, to perform charity and justice, in order to bring onto Avraham that which Hashem said concerning him’” (Bereishit 18:17-19).

Since children are most likely to follow in the pathways of their illustrious parents, He chose their descendants to be the bearers of His special Covenant and, through their exalted wisdom, illuminate the pathways of mankind. However, the question still remains: What will cause the descendants of the Patriarchs to follow in their footsteps, especially after thousands of years, when it is natural for each new generation to carve out its own distinctive identity and lifestyle?

The answer is, that it is their acceptance of the system of Mitzvot which established Bnei Yisrael as G-d’s Chosen People. This idea can be seen in the “Confession of Tithes.” The confessor is declaring the extraordinary bountifulness with which he has donated to the various classes of people in need. Is this because he is just a naturally wonderful and giving individual? The answer is, decidedly, not! In fact, he is a selfish and greedy person who wants to keep what he has earned for himself and those close to him.

However, he says, I did not follow my base inclinations but listened to Hashem’s statutes and was excruciatingly careful to act precisely as He instructed. Thus, the Vidui Maaser is not a glorification of one’s ego but, to the contrary, is an expression of humility and a recognition that only the divinely ordained Mitzvot constitute a program that can effectuate spiritual transformation. The Mitzvot make the foolish wise, the selfish generous, and give clarity of purpose to those who drift aimlessly. We can now understand why this “Confession” of the successful discharge of responsibilities is required in the matter of the Tithes. It is precisely in the area of sharing one’s hard-earned wealth that emotions of greed come to the fore. The person is affirming that without the commandments, he would not

have attained the appropriate level of generosity to give what he has given. And that is why he makes the bold declaration: “Look down from Your holy abode in the heavens and bless Your nation, Israel, and the land that You have given us, as You swore to our fathers, a land that flows with milk and honey” (Devarim 26:15). According to Rashi, it is as if he is saying: “We have done what You decreed upon us, now You do what is upon You to do, as You said, ‘If you walk in my Statutes... then I will give you the rains in their seasons’” (VaYikra 26:3-4). Talk about bold! Does one presume the temerity to remind G-d of what He must do?

However, the intention is not to be inappropriate. Rather, the person expresses the fact that he serves Hashem according to the terms of the Covenant which He has established. For, “Were it not for the Covenant, day and night [says Hashem], I would not have set up the laws of Heaven and earth” (Yirmiyahu 33:25). It is only via the Covenant—which means the Taryag (613) Mitzvot—that man can find favor with Hashem and endure.

The goal of Judaism is to transform a person from a non-thinking instinctual being into a rational, just, and compassionate individual, i.e., into one who functions as a person who possesses a Tzelem Elokim (divine soul). This great change comes about as a result of the person’s dedicated commitment to the system of Mitzvot.

In the “Confession,” the person is saying that he realizes he is not by nature a righteous being. However, he has been forced into goodness by virtue of the “decree” that Hashem has imposed on him in the Covenant, which is what makes human existence possible. As a result of studying the Torah and consistently performing the commandments, he has elevated himself to a higher spiritual level of existence.

He now calls upon G-d to do what He has promised: “If you keep my commandments...” (VaYikra 26:3). He does this in order to affirm his absolute faith in the validity of the Brit (Covenant) through which Hashem relates to the humans He has created and wishes to sustain.

May we merit to appreciate the supreme value of Torah and Mitzvot and achieve the level where we will be worthy of all His blessings. Shabbat Shalom. ■

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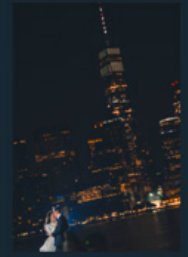
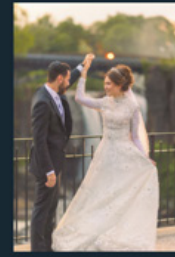
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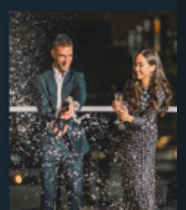
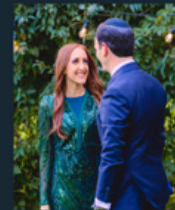
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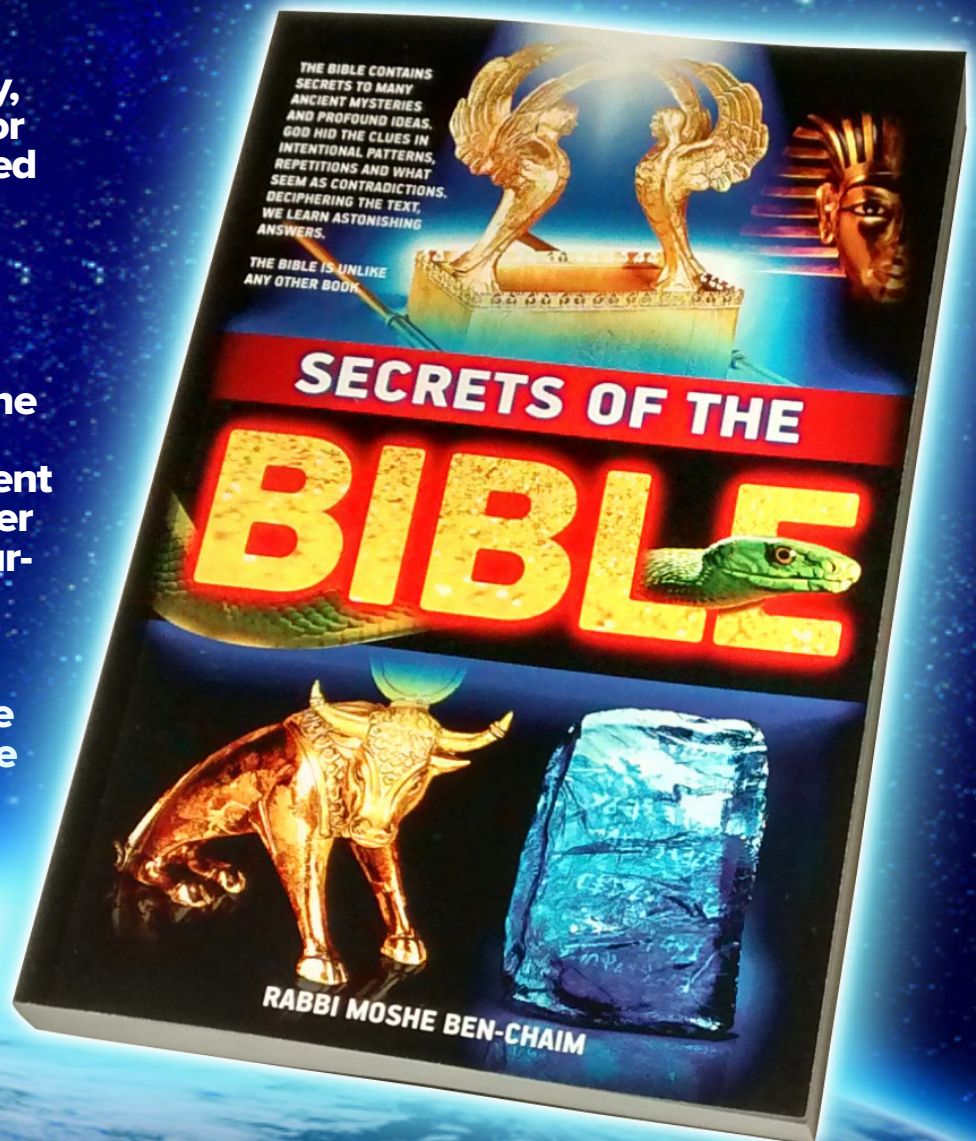
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