

JewishTimes

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A Time for Optimism

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Scapegoat

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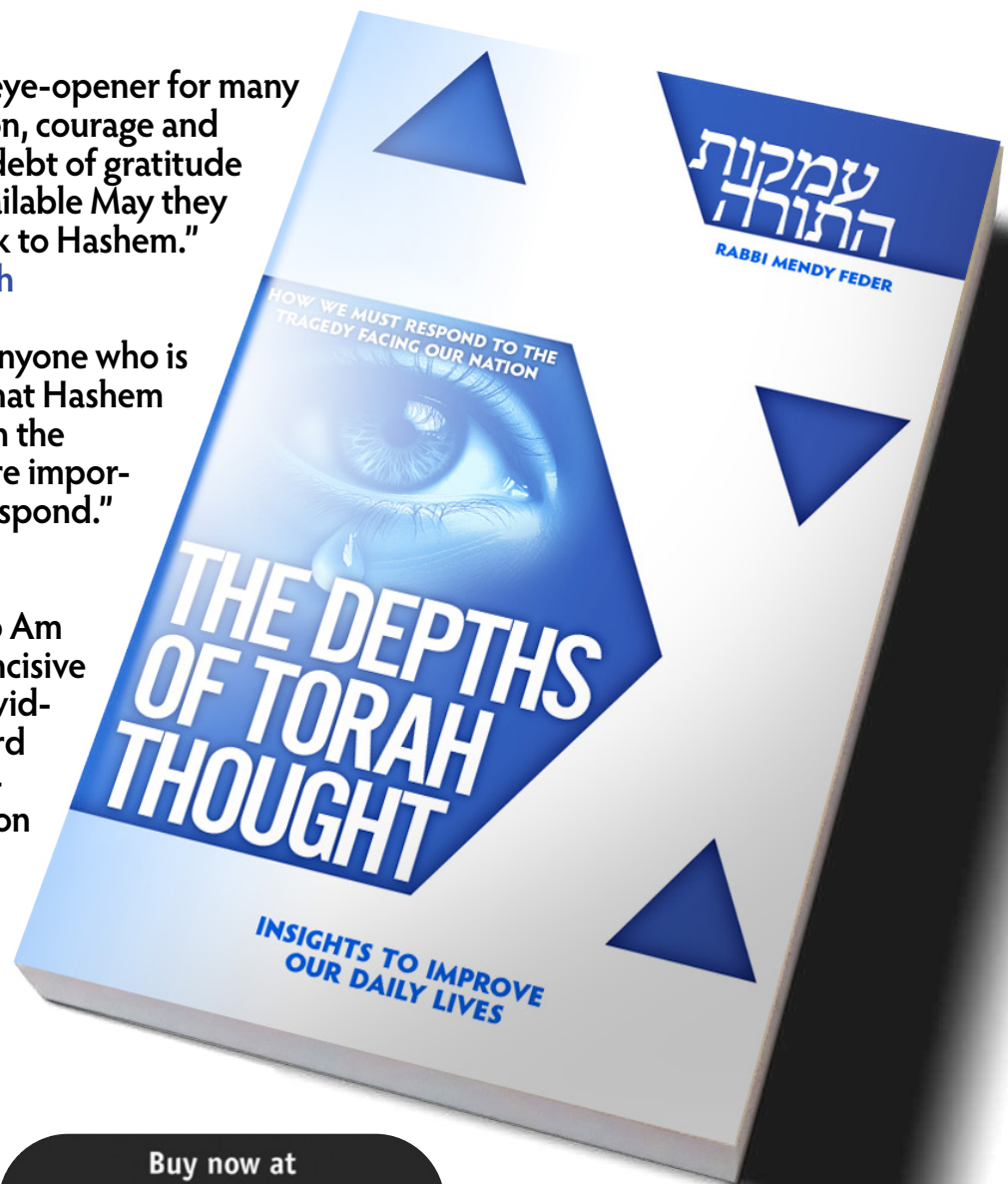
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| LIFE, HEALTH, WEALTH, PEACE |

God seals our fates on Yom Kippur.
Let us each search ourselves, right our wrongdoings,
correct our poor traits, seek forgiveness, grant forgiveness,
and ask God's atonement.

DISCUSSIONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM & HOWARD SALAMON

Is God in Heaven or on Earth?

These 2 verses present an apparent contradiction:

"[God] gaze from Your holy abode, from heaven" (Deut. 26:15).

"But will God really dwell on Earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built!" (Kings I, 8:27) (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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King Solomon is correct: the heavens do not contain God. How do we prove this? God created everything, that is the definition of “God”: “the sole cause of everything.” Not only the amazing universe, but the space the universe occupies too is a creation, as Genesis says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and Earth.” The sequence is logical: space—“heaven”—had to be created first, and only then Earth, planets and stars could be created within that space. But prior to all creation, there was no such thing as space or location. That means God exists without physical dimensions, without any physical characteristic, even without location.

As this reasoning fully endorses King Solomon, how do we explain “[God] gaze from Your holy abode, from heaven”? This suggests God does have a location, in the skies...as does this verse: “God in heaven above and on earth below” (Deut. 4:39).

Maimonides taught that Unkelos was diligent in correcting any Torah anthropomorphisms, lest people think God is physical in some manner. On this last verse, Unkelos adds 2 words: “God’s shechina is in heaven above and His rulership is on earth below.” Thereby, Unkelos clarified that God Himself does not occupy the skies or Earth. Rather, His shechina (brilliance of creation) is evidenced in the heavens, and His rulership is evidenced on Earth, as Howard Salamon explained, through His reward and punishments.

As Unkelos felt this verse required clarification, why then did Unkelos not clarify “[God] gaze from Your holy abode, from heaven”?

Why did Unkelos not deem this verse as equally requiring clarification to avoid viewing God in the skies?

It is because the verse itself discounts that notion by satiating “Holy abode”—holy means unknown and not in space. Okay, that’s reasonable, but the verse continues to mention that God should answer man’s prayer for rain (Rashi) “from heaven!” This seems to throw God back into physical space.

This is answered by saying that heavens refers to the source of rain, not to God’s location. For this is what the Jews are now praying for: that God irrigates their crops. Therefore, this verse reads as follows: “God should recognize us from His holy bode (unknown existence), but from heaven—rainclouds—should be His response of rain.

We must finally ask why Torah leaves things unclear and allows some people to assume God does have a location, forcing our great rabbis to clarify. Why not make this clear directly from the verses? This question is strengthened through God’s employment of phrases “God’s hand” and “God’s strong arm” which also suggests anthropomorphism.

The response here is that the rabbi’s teach, “Dibra Torah b’lashon b’nei adam; Torah speaks in man’s language.” Torah must reach people on all levels, including those first starting to learn, yet unaware of God’s non-physical nature. To allow anyone to be aware of God’s strength, even if the term hand or arm must be used. Of course, these terms must be corrected as one matures in his learning. ■

HOLIDAYS

If you are not Torah observant, now is a vital time to make that change. Prior to Yom Kippur, we rise early and recite selichos (forgiveness prayers). With God's looming judgment, we return to our senses and realize that we are His created entities, with conditional existence. This realization is lost throughout the year as our focus on earning, family and health obscures our mortality, and our debt to God for our very lives.

This particular Selicha 57 below references Pirkei Avos' warnings and advice regarding significant human flaws. The Rabbis desired that all people benefit from a Torah life that earns us the most satisfying earthly existence, and an eternal afterlife. For there is no greater loss than losing our soul's eternal existence once we physically pass away. Many Jews sadly reject God's will, and some are yet ignorant. But we are fortunate for our Torah knowledge and must now apply it.

Selicha 57

Let the wicked one forsake his path and humble his arrogant heart. Let him return to God.

While he is not yet cut off, nor his [last] day come. Forsake, O son of man, forsake!

Arrogance is singled out as the primary cause of sin, for with it, one rejects God. Thus, he is told to "return to God."

Forsake the grime [of sin] and evil talk, before you go flying from this world like doves to their cote, and the Collector comes to retrieve the pledge (your life that was on loan). Therefore, repent! And remember the day that must come, for the day is short and the work is great. O, who will take this to his heart! While he is not yet cut off, nor his [last] day come. Forsake, O son of man, forsake! (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

OUR JUDGMENT

3

DAYS LEFT

**RABBI MOSHE
BEN-CHAIM**

Specific sins are now listed starting with evil talk. Arrogance propels man to deride his brother to inflate his self worth. But this is fantasy: evil talk changes nothing of your status, as status is imaginary. God tells us He will retrieve our lives at some point, "That day must come." Death is inevitable, and this realization should direct man to fear punishment for sin, and follow what secures eternal life. The repeating stanza "While he is not yet cut off..." aims to impress upon us that vivid reality we wish to hide from. For we all will definitely pass on. Now is the time to face our mortality, and accept our temporary existence so we might repent.

Forsake the vain indulgences of this world, distance yourself (from them), for tomorrow you shall weep over what you laugh at today. And in your Adversary's book your writing will not be erased; no payment will avail nor a bribe secretly passed. The workers are lazy, the Employer urgent, for the Adversary (your evil deeds) is coming, he stands ready with his case (to accuse you at death). While he is not yet cut off, nor his [last] day come. Forsake, O son of man, forsake!

Here we are directed to accept the brevity and severity of seeking vain pleasures. And if we remain sinful until death, there is no changing our crime, for which we must pay: "The adversary stands ready with his case" refers to our history of sin which is recorded indelibly and testifies against us. Anticipating regret can help us get passed the momentary urge to sin, and appreciate the larger and eternally-damning view of how we harm our soul for a mere moment of pleasure: a tragic trade-off. "Lazy workers" and the "urging Employer" help us contrast our feeble natures against God's relentless insistence, which can motivate us toward repenting. The inevitability of our responsibility and loss can quell our sinful desires.

Forsake the world's ephemeral values, for Gehinnom is arranged with every flame and torch. Please remember your end when you will robbed of all, for every brother will say, "pitiful you" and every friend, "you wandered off." Therefore repent! And prepare yourself in the vestibule (this world) in order to enter the banquet hall (the World to Come). While he is not yet cut off, nor his [last] day come. Forsake, O son of man, forsake!

The theme of caving to our lusts continues, now highlighting punishment. But we are encouraged to view earthly life as only a preparatory stage—a vestibule—not a destination. Man's immortality fantasy fools him that all that exists is an earthly life. Not so, we all die, but we can ensure our souls transcend Earth and endure eternally in a blissful manner. How can you not want this?

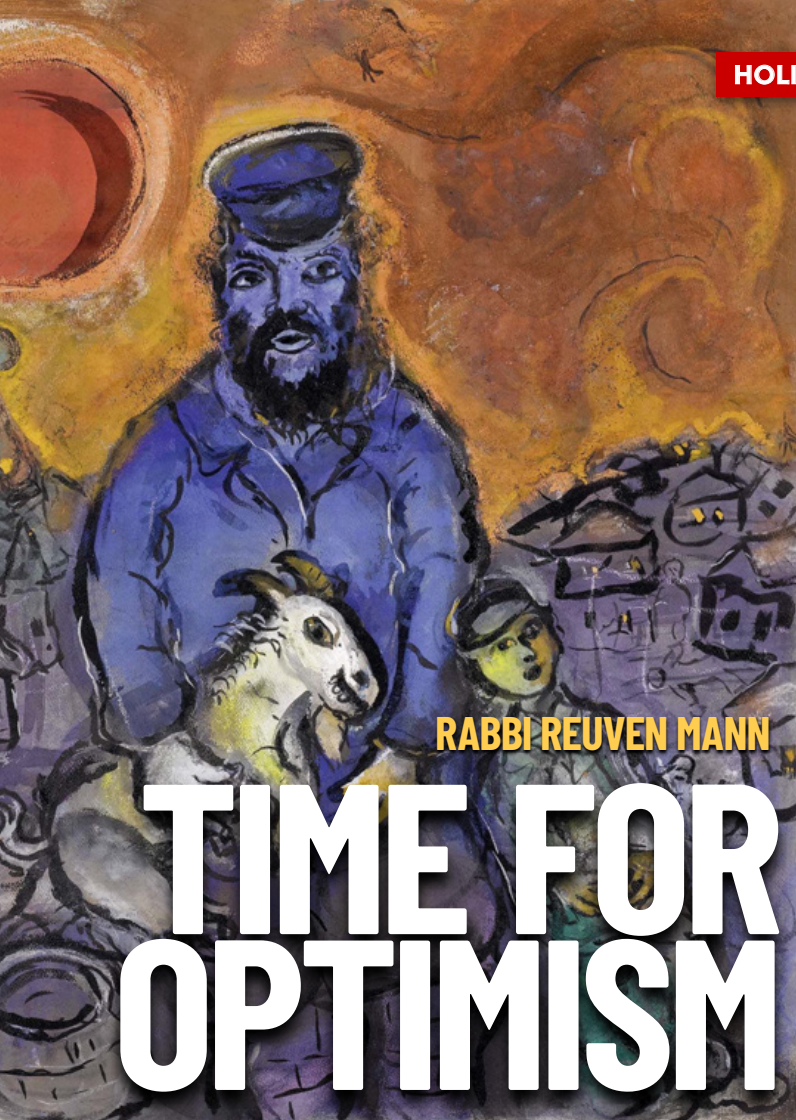
Forsake the Evil Inclination that your soul loves, and say, "My soul, better that you should be in pain, than be gratified by drawing from another well!" And if your soul should say, "Who will testify what I do lying in bed?" [The reply is] The book is open, and the Hand is writing, so repent, and be worthy in the time to come. While he is not yet cut off, nor his [last] day come. Forsake, O son of man, forsake!

We are warned to address our evil inclination in dialogue, treating it as an animated being that opposes what is best for your soul. Turn your emotions on the evil instincts and be angry with them: tell them to go unsatisfied, "be in pain." Treating your instincts like a villain, you might find greater energy to fight them, as you would fight a robber.

Forsake this world's pleasure and joy before your spirit wanders in every corner and direction, and your eyes see an open Gehinnom, where your soul will be burned and cut off. For you come from a putrid drop (semen), and you go to a place of ruin, the grave, and you will render an account to God, who makes the clouds his chariot. While he is not yet cut off, nor his [last] day come. Forsake, O son of man, forsake!

Rabbi Israel Chait taught that by recalling your inceptional state as a putrid drop of semen, knowing you came from nothing, you can weaken your pride, which fuels sin. Knowing we encounter the grave also drains our self-image and halts sin. "Rendering an account to God" focuses us on our accountability for our sins.

Your time is running out. But God immediately forgives us during these last few days until Yom Kippur ends...if we sincerely repent. Do so, that you might inherit the good God makes available to you. ■



RABBI REUVEN MANN

TIME FOR OPTIMISM

In the days of the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple), the Yom Kippur service was the most consequential performance of the year, since the atonement of Am Yisrael (Nation of Israel) depended on it. This unique divine-service could only be performed by the Kohen Gadol (High Priest), and therefore, great pains were taken to ensure he would be in the best possible condition to discharge his complex tasks on the Sabbath of the Tenth (Yom Kippur).

The law requires that he be sequestered for one week before the big day. Thus, he left his home and close family and took up residence in the quarters designated for him in the Temple called the Lishkat Palhedrin (chamber of the king's counselors). During those seven days, he familiarized himself with all aspects of the sacrifices and other religious performances that were to be performed on the upcoming Tzom (Fast Day).

On Erev Yom Kippur, he would stand by the Eastern Gate, and a parade of the various animals that were going to be sacrificed passed before him. However, while he was shown bulls, rams, and sheep, the display pointedly omitted any goats. This seems strange since a very significant aspect of the Avoda (Divine Service) consisted of the scapegoat sacrifice, which required the offering of two goats.

In addition, there were other sin offerings requiring the sacrifice of goats. If it was deemed important to view the animals he would be offering, why was he prevented from looking at the goats that would constitute a major part of the day's program?

The Gemara (Talmud) explains that since the goats are utilized to

expiate transgressions, it was feared that the sight of them might arouse distress by reminding the Kohen Gadol of the sinfulness of Am Yisrael. This could have had a negative psychological impact on the Kohen Gadol and affected the manner in which he would perform his tasks.

At first glance, this reason is difficult to comprehend. The entire point of the animal parade is to help familiarize the Kohen Gadol with the order and details of the sacrifices. So, shouldn't he also be prepared for the various goat offerings? And if this sight is going to cause him to become doleful, why does that matter so much? He is going to encounter the goats the following day anyway, so why not see them now?

In my opinion, the objective of the sequestration was to prepare the Kohen Gadol to be in the best possible condition to perform the Yom Kippur service. Thus, it was crucial to familiarize him with all the complex details of the extensive rituals and allow him to practice the activities he was going to perform. Halachic (Torah legal) education and hands-on training were thus essential components of the week of preparation.

However, of equal significance was the mental state of the High Priest. It mattered greatly if something were to cause him to become demoralized or despaired of the possibility of gaining Kapara (Atonement) for the sins of Klall Yisrael (the Israelites).

This is because on the Holy Day, the acquittal is achieved not simply by discharging the particulars of the Temple service in a technically correct manner. The attitude and disposition of the Kohen Gadol are major elements of the Avoda and key factors in determining whether it would "find favor" with Hashem or not.

The goal was not just discharging the ritual requirements of the day but doing so in a manner that would elicit the "favorable reaction" of Hashem. Therefore, the mindset and sense of purpose with which the Kohen Gadol operated on this exalted day were crucial to achieving the objective.

The most consequential aspect of the Kohen Gadol's mentality was his sense of absolute confidence in the likelihood of obtaining a Kapara. For the Avoda was not limited to just the physical act of sacrificing; on a certain level, it constituted an expression of fervent prayer for forgiveness.

In the Viddui (Confession) he recited on behalf of his family and all of Klal Yisrael (the Nation of Israel), he beseeched Hashem to pardon their sins and grant them atonement. Therefore, this representative of all Israel who entreats Hashem for their sake must believe with unwavering certainty that what he is doing will be efficacious in the sight of Hashem.

Optimism in Times of Crisis

We therefore withhold from him the sight of goats because we don't want him to contend with any feelings of pessimism as he enters Yom Kippur. We don't want him to be plagued with self-doubt about whether he is capable of faithfully executing his assignment. Of course, he will encounter the goats tomorrow, but at that time, he will be actively involved in performing the Mitzvot of the day and will not fall prey to disenchantment or doubtfulness.

This teaching has great relevance for us today. The national morale of Israel is understandably at a low point. This has been a year of

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

great trials and unprecedented tragedy brought about by the terrorist incursion of October 7. Our guard was down, and the crazed hordes swooped in and carried out one of the worst atrocities in history. People were terrorized in their own homes and forced to watch helplessly as their loved ones, including children and babies, were slaughtered in the most brutal fashion.

In the ensuing war, Israel was forced to contend with numerous enemies, including Iran and her proxies. All this is bad enough, but the most troubling factor is the internal divisions that have arisen and threaten to undermine the sense of brotherhood and unity that is vital to sustaining the nation at this time.

Is it true that we are our own worst enemies? Have we lost confidence in the ability of the government, the IDF, and the people of Israel to arise from these setbacks, defeat our enemies, and emerge victorious and stronger than before? How important is it to retain a sense of confidence in ourselves and the cause we are fighting for?

The importance of maintaining a sense of self-confidence can be illustrated in the words that Yehuda uttered to Yaakov in trying to convince him to allow Benjamin to return to Egypt in his charge. The viceroy had told the brothers that they could not revisit Egypt to obtain provisions unless they brought their younger brother with them. Yaakov, fearing what could happen to his only remaining son from Rachel, was reluctant to place him in their hands. Yehuda rose to the occasion and made a unique offer to his father:

“Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; so [that] we will live and not die, we, as well as you, as well as our children. I will personally guarantee him, from my own hand you can demand him; if I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned to you for all time. For had we not delayed; by now we could have returned twice!” (Bereishit 43:8-10)

The gist of Yehuda’s offer was that he assumed total responsibility for the mission and accepted that failure to fulfill it properly would render him a sinner before his father Yaakov, forever. However, Yehuda did not stop there. He then added that had they not tarried, he could have gone and returned with Benjamin two times. But we must ask: what did this add to his proposal, and what did he seek to achieve by saying this?

In my opinion, Yehuda realized that the substance of his guarantee would be an important factor in influencing Yaakov’s decision to entrust him with Benjamin. However, by itself, it would not be enough. Yaakov would also take into consideration the emotional state of Yehuda. Does he believe in his ability to pull this off? Does he operate with a lot of self-doubt, or is he fully confident that he can do this? The bold statement of Yehuda—that he could already have

returned twice—was meant to convey his absolute conviction that he was thoroughly capable of succeeding in his mission. And Yaakov responded to that.

National Unity and Hope for the Future

As the High Holidays approach, and we all stand together as one to be judged by Hashem, we must seriously recognize our need to do true Teshuva (Repentance) and renounce the hatreds and animosities that we harbor toward each other. We must apologize to those we have offended and forgive those who sinned against us and now seek our pardon. For on this day, the angel Samael, who normally acts as an accuser against Am Yisrael, suddenly becomes their defender and argues before Hashem:

“Master of the Universe, You have one nation on earth that is like the ministering angels in Heaven. Just as the angels are barefoot, so are Bnei Yisrael barefoot on Yom Kippur. Just as the angels do not eat and drink, so too Bnei Yisrael do not eat on Yom Kippur... Just as the angels are at peace with one another, so too is there peace in the midst of Israel on Yom Kippur.” (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 46:10)

[Please note: The idea of Samael is not meant to be taken literally, but rather to communicate important ideas relevant to an understanding of the scapegoat sacrifice.]

The need for internal peace at this time is not just a religious matter. It has very practical consequences as well. If we are firmly united as one People under G-d, then we will confidently go forth, defeat our enemies, and lead our nation to a new level of national achievement.

Let us take these matters to heart as we approach our most holy season. Let us resolve to do Teshuva on the personal and communal levels and strive to renew our sense of Ahavat Hashem (Love of G-d) as well as Ahavat Yisrael (Love of Israel).

We have every reason to be hopeful. We have every reason to believe that we will be worthy of obtaining pardon from Hashem. We have every reason to be confident in our ability to come before Hashem on Yom Kippur as one nation in fasting and prayer, with bonds of love between us.

And let us indeed believe that with a renewed sense of conviction in the righteousness of our cause, and in the ability of our amazing Chayalim and Chayalot (male soldiers and female soldiers) to continue to work their magic, we will defeat our enemies and emerge to a glorious new chapter in our history.

“May Hashem grant strength to His nation, Israel. May Hashem bless His nation with peace.” (Tehilim 29:11)

Shabbat Shalom. Gemar Chatima Tova. ■

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.

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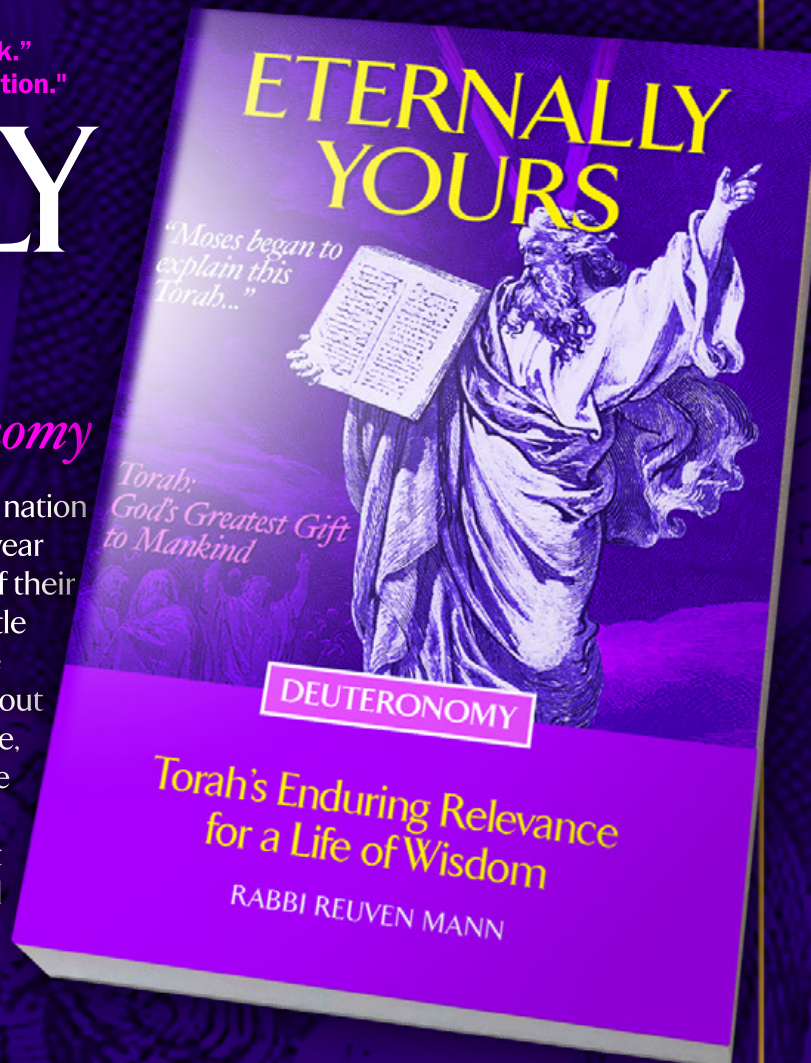
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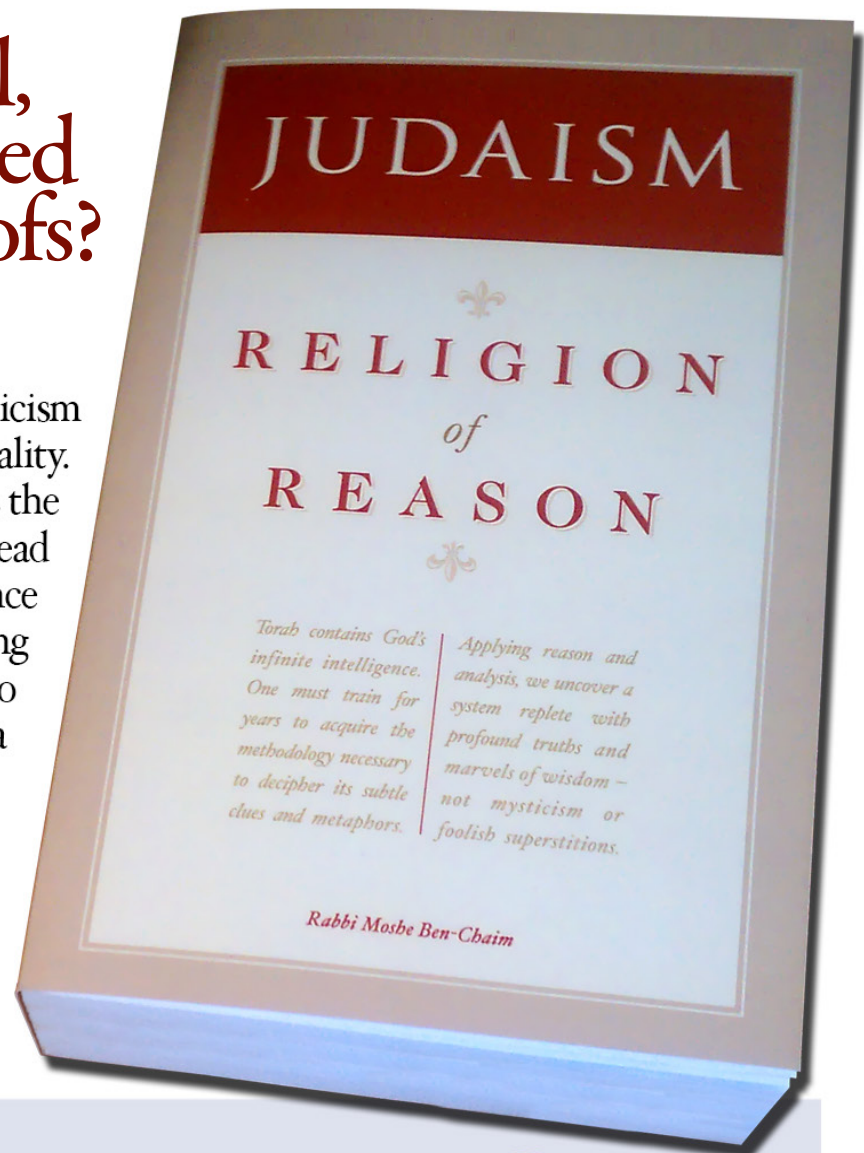
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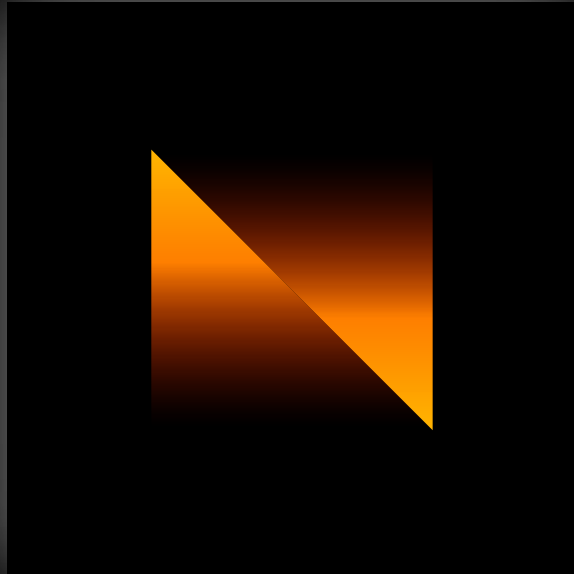
DANI ROTH

"It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe 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." (Devarim 30:11-14)

Moshe is responding to some reluctance in the Jews. What does Moshe think the resistance is? Why would it be necessary for Moshe to mention two metaphors describing the difficulty in pursuing Torah? How do the two metaphors differ? How does Moshe's response address these issues? What is heaven? It is something that man views as too far away and too vast...impossible to conquer. So too, the Jews view Torah as impossible to complete. Because of this, they see no worth in pursuing it. However, the Jews err in this assessment: due to their egos, they wrongly render Torah into yet another "accomplishment." But, "Rabbi Tarfon said, 'It is not your duty to finish the work' (Avos 2:16). Here too, Moshe corrects the people's wrong feeling: "If I can't complete it all, it's not worth engaging." This stems from viewing Torah as an accomplishment, when in truth, it is not, but a matter to engage for its amazing insights. Learning Torah "Lishma"—for the ideas themselves—is the proper level God asks we attain, as the daily blessing says, "To learn Torah Lishma." We must not learn Torah or practice Torah for the sense of pride in our accomplishment. Others view Torah as requiring much effort, like traversing great seas. They don't see the task as

impossible, rather, that the benefit is not worth the effort. People are lazy by nature. And Avos says further in that mishna, "But neither are you at liberty to neglect it."

Moshe's response is that neither form of resistance is valid. As we possess Torah she'bicsav and Torah she'ba'al peh" (Rashi: "For it is close to you") when Moshe says, "It is in your mouth and heart to observe it," he means that having the "guide" in front of you removes the fear of failure that people have of starting something they can't accomplish. This is because they already have some mastery over Torah. Moshe does not try to eliminate the ego emotion of accomplishment, which is how the Jews currently operated, because eliminating a person's current motivation can leave him no motivation whatsoever, which is very dangerous. Moshe wishes to start them on the path, even if not for the proper value. So he feeds their sense accomplishment. And following Torah is not as difficult as traversing the sea, for we can immediately pursue Torah through reading and thought: "The thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it." This responds to laziness, as the first step of attaining Torah are already covered. By eliminating some needed steps, the work is reduced, so there's less to be lazy about. ■



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Transcribed by a student

The Scapegoat

Rabbi Israel Chait

The Scapegoat is a very unique sacrifice. All other sacrifices require slaughter and blood sprinkling, which is the fulfillment of the sacrifice and reflects the presence of atonement. However, the Scapegoat is brought to a desolate place and is brutally killed by being thrown over a precipice. Chazal teach us that the nations of the world criticize the B'nai Yisroel for its practice of the Scapegoat as being solely ritualistic and ceremonial. Although the gentiles have ritualistic practices, they are symbolic and their performances engender some emotional satisfaction unlike the Scapegoat. Judaism prides itself on the fact that one's commitment to the Torah is based upon his intellectual conviction and that its commandments are ethical and moral principles. We must therefore explain the significance of the Scapegoat and the intellectual insight the Torah is imparting to us.

The Eben Ezra gives us a clue as to the secret of the Scapegoat. He states that a basic secret of the Scapegoat is after the word "azazel" and when you are 33 years old you will know this secret. If one counts 33 verses from the word "ha'midbarah", the word after "azazel", which appears in Leviticus, chapter 16 verse 10, one may get a clue. The verse that is being referred to is 17:7. The verse states: "They should no longer sacrifice their sacrifices unto the satyrs that lead them astray. Rashi explains the word l'saeirim to mean l'shaydim, unto the demons. The

Eben Ezra is teaching us that if one desires an insight into the Scapegoat he [sic] must recognize that adhering to this practice will lead one to the practice stated in chapter 7 verse 17. The Israelites will no longer turn astray and sacrifice to the demons as the nations of the world. We will explain this insight after we examine several salient laws with respect to the Scapegoat. It is interesting to note that the Rambam holds that the Scapegoat renders atonement without repentance for all commandments that are not punishable by kares, excision. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's position in the Talmud, although we do not rule like him, is that even the "day of Yom Kippur" itself effectuates atonement. We must appreciate how atonement works, if the sinner is not repentant. Halachically, Teshuva implies that one must return to God. His relationship with the creator must be rekindled as a result of his recognizing the cause of his sin and being able to elevate himself to a higher intellectual level. The individual is a changed person, one who is no longer drawn by the temptations of the instinctual nor the frailties of the emotional components of his nature, which causes him to commit the sin. We therefore must understand how does the mere practice of the Scapegoat grant atonement to a sinner?

The last Mishna in the tractate of Yumah quotes a statement of Rabbi Akiva, which states "Happy are you Israel before whom you are purified, and who purifies you, your Father in heaven." This is a puzzling statement. Anybody who performs Teshuva and returns to God, as a result of his own actions, is purified before God. This applies even to a Gentile. Why then does Rabbi Akiva specify a Jew; and furthermore it seems from his statement that Teshuva is extraneous to this purification process. We must try to comprehend Rabbi Akiva's teaching. Nachmanides comments on the Eben Ezra, explaining the service of the Scapegoat discusses a Medrash. The Medrash says that the children of Jacob give Samael, their prosecuting angel, a bribe on Yom Kippur. This bribe is the sacrificial Scapegoat. It is given so that he should not annul their sacrifices. The Scapegoat has all the sins of the Children of Israel on its head, as set out in the verses in the Torah. The Medrash continues, "as a result Samael will see that there is no sin on Yom Kippur and will explain before God, 'Creator of the world, there is one nation in this world which are akin to the ministering angels. Just like the ministering angels are bare footed, so too on this day the Jews are bare footed.'" Samael makes similar observations when addressing God with respect to eating, drinking, standing all day, making peace amongst themselves and being free of sin. In all these activities the Jewish people on Yom Kippur are comparable to the ministering angels. The Holy One upon hearing these testimonies from the prosecutor Samael, makes atonement for the altar, the sanctuary, the priests of Israel and for all the people of the assembly of Israel. This is the Agadah that the Rambam quotes to help us understand the Scapegoat.

This Agadah raises several questions: Who is Samael and how is he bribed? Originally the purpose of the bribe is so that the sacrifices should not be annulled, however the seeming result of the bribe is that it is responsible for the entire atonement of Yom Kippur. Maimonides, in his "Guide for the Perplexed" states that Samael is the appellation applied by our sages to Satan. The derivation of the word Samael is "Sam-El", the blinding of God. Samael represents that part of human nature, which blinds the individual from perceiving the ultimate reality, God. The Yetzer Hara and Satan are used interchangeably by Chazal and represent man's evil inclination which is rooted in his physical nature. Chazal use the term Satan, which implies something external to man, to signify that this part of man is not

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

his essence. Rather the tzelem Elokim – intelligence – is man's essence. Chazal use the term Yetzer Hara to teach us that although it is not man's essence, we are nevertheless responsible for this part of us. The key to understanding the Scapegoat is appreciating its inexorable connection to the atonement of Yom Kippur. There were two goats, which were subject to the lottery. One was designated for God and was brought upon the altar as a sacrifice. The second goat was designated l'azazel and was the saeer ha'mishtaleyach, the goat that was sent away to meet its final destiny in the desert. The atonement of the day of Yom Kippur was really a result of the goat that was designated l'azazel and not the one that was brought as a sacrifice. The atonement of Yom Kippur is unique because it atones for many sins, kalot vechamurot, lenient and stringent sins. Whereas a korban chatas is brought for a particular maaseh aveira, act of violation, and atones for that particular sin. On Yom Kippur "lifneh Hashem tetaharu", we are purified before God. The essential character of the day atones. This is a different type of forgiveness than a specific korban chatas, a sin offering. Yom Kippur is related to the state of the gavra, the individual. The day atones the individual. A person, who appreciates the sanctity of the day, demonstrates that he, as an individual, is worthy of forgiveness. Consequently, this new status results in the removal of the particular sins. An understanding of the service of the Scapegoat gives us insight into the essential nature of the sanctity of Yom Kippur and its function as a purifier. The Scapegoat atoned for all the sins of the Jews. Leviticus Chapter 16, Verses 21 and 22 tells us that Aaron placed his hands on the Scapegoat and confessed all the sins of the Children of Israel and all their transgressions, and placed them on the head of the Azazel goat. How does this goat serve to forgive all the sins of the Jewish people? The Torah is teaching us that the sins of man are really separate and extraneous to his essential nature. Aaron was capable of removing all of man's sins and placing them on the head of the goat. The Scapegoat as stated, represents the Satan, man's evil inclination, the part of man driven by his fantasy. This service signifies that the part of man, which is based upon his emotions and fueled by his fantasy, is really not reflective of man's true essence, his Tzelem Elokim, his intelligence. This part of man, his instinctual nature, may be severed from his true nature. However, if man follows his fantasies and his evil inclination, he is doomed as the Scapegoat, to face a brutal and lonely death. The Midrash quoted by Nachmanides can now be understood. We bribe Samael and give him the Scapegoat. We, as Torah Jews, recognize that the pursuit of the fantasy blinds us from perceiving "chachmas haboreh", the wisdom of

our Creator. We acknowledge by the service of the Scapegoat, that there is a spiritually higher nature to man, his true essence that we value. As Torah Jews, we thereby attempt to lead our lives based upon the Tzelem Elokim. By bribing Samael, we acknowledge that there is a part of man's nature, which is overpowering. However, we cannot deny our instinctual nature, but must acknowledge that it stems from the lower part of man's being, and as such, must be dealt with. If we deny our instinctual nature "Samael", it can have tragic consequences. On the contrary, we recognize the instinctual part of man's nature but acknowledge our life long struggle as Torah Jews to separate that part of our nature from the Tzelem Elokim. Only by "bribing" Samael and recognizing the potent powers of fantasy, can we hope to ever be successful in combating these forces and removing them from overwhelming our actions as Torah Jews. We demonstrate that ultimately if one is led astray by the powers of the fantasy, he will surely perish and be doomed to spiritual genocide. The Scapegoat was taken to the desert by the "ish iti", a specially prepared man. This demonstrates that the ultimate destruction of the Scapegoat is not fortuitous. Rather, it is a necessary result that the pursuits of the fantasy will lead to one's downfall. That is why the ish iti was mezuman l'kach, was prepared for this job, to ensure and guarantee that the Scapegoat would meet its eventual destruction. This recognition by Klal Yisroel that we appreciate the overwhelming force of man's instinctual nature and constantly strive to overcome it and elevate our lives to a higher spiritual plane, makes us akin to the mal'achey hashares, ministering angels. This causes Samael to remark that on Yom Kippur the Children of Israel are like the Ministering Angels. The Ministering Angels are not under the influence of the instinctual, they are not swayed by emotions. Similarly on Yom Kippur the Jewish people demonstrate through the prohibitions of the day (eating, drinking, cohabitation, and wearing leather shoes etc.) that we abstain from these physical pleasures to demonstrate that there is a higher part to man's existence.

This explains how the Scapegoat atones for all sins. Since man recognizes this concept and appreciates that his physical existence leads him on the path of Samael, he must strive through chachma, wisdom, to live life based upon his Tzelem Elokim, and thus become a different type of person. Yom Kippur is a day of reality whereby he recognizes the dangers in his daily existence of Samael, but elevates himself on this day to be purified before Hashem. This explains that although a person did not do teshuva on a particular maaseh aveira, act of sin, but since he recognizes the consequences of Samael and that man's true essence is chachma, he has elevated himself to higher

spiritual level and he is a being worthy of forgiveness.

We can now understand the reason why there are two goats, one for Hashem and one for azazel. This represents man's dual nature, his intellect that is l'Hashem and his instinctual which is l'azazel. In order to have the sacrifice to Hashem, you must have the Scapegoat. One cannot be successful in his struggle as a talmid chachom unless he recognizes the lower part of human nature. Intellectual perfection cannot be achieved if one simply represses his instinctual nature. By repressing one's instinctual nature it still remains an influential part of his personality. The many meticulous details with respect to the performance of the Scapegoat also evidences this concept. A person is driven to the life of the physical by many powerful forces. Each of these drives is shattered by the method of performance mandated by the Torah by bringing the Scapegoat. A person is drawn to the life of the material because of the enticements of the physical pleasures that one imagines is comforting when living an instinctual existence. This is why the Scapegoat is brutally thrown over the cliff to a torturous death. This represents that visions of physical pleasures are illusory and transitory and ultimately will result in a painful shattering of such false emotions. A person is also drawn to the life of the physical because he feels that material success garners respect and popular acceptance by the masses. Therefore the Scapegoat is sent out with one man, alone without any fanfare, to a desolate and lonely place in the desert. This demonstrates that leading a life of materialism will ultimately and invariably result in a lonely and desolate existence. Lastly, a person is fooled by the entrapments of a physical existence in order to insulate himself from the limited nature of such an existence and to cater to his fantasy of immortality. Thus the Scapegoat always meets the same destiny, a harsh and cruel termination, to help emasculate any such fantasies that a person may harbor.

We can now appreciate Rabbi Akiva's statement quoted in the last Mishna in Tractate Yumah. "Happy are the Children of Israel because they are purified before God." Although it might be possible in isolated cases for individuals to come to the true recognition of God, however, for a nation of people, on such a large scale, it is impossible. How fortunate are we Torah Jews who have a system of Torah and Mitzvos, (that contains the abstract and beautiful practice of the Scapegoat), a system based upon chachma that allows us to recognize man's true nature and remove ourselves from living a purely physical existence, the life of fantasy that ultimately leads to man's downfall. Therefore Rabbi Akiva exalts "how happy are we the nation of Israel that we are fortunate to such a blessing." ■

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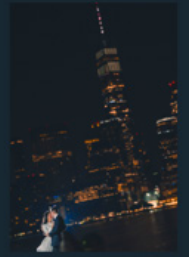
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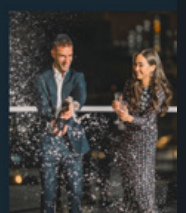
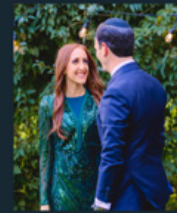
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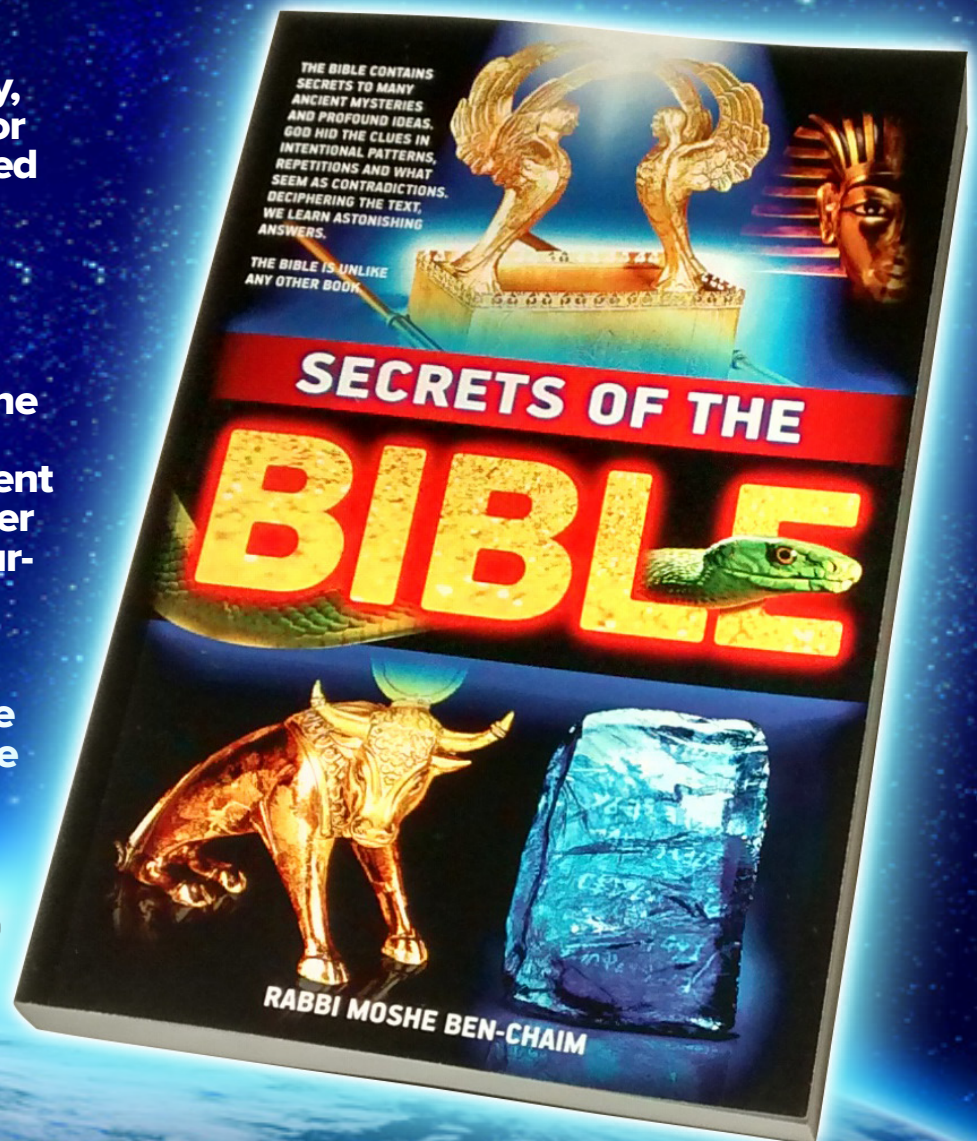
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“For you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we passed through the midst of nations that was traversed. And you have seen the detestable things and the fetishes of wood and stone, silver and gold, that they keep. Perhaps there is among 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 [converting inadvertent sins to intentional, increased punishment]. 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)”

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

HOW GOD JUDGES

Read the quote above. 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 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).

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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 He 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. Idolatry is exposed as false, and God is validated as truth.

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. ■



ALL FOR ONE



The thought of our own lives hanging in the balance - who will live and who will die, who will have peace and who will have torment, who will be wealthy and who will be poor - is certainly enough to bring us all to a state of deep concentration at some point on Rosh Hashana. But maybe there's something even more inspiring and more meaningful that we can all aspire for - especially on this Rosh Hashana.

The centerpiece of Musaf is the brachos of Malchios, Zichronos, and Shofros. Let's review the basic structure of each of these brachos. Each begins by developing its theme - Malchios: that Hashem is the King of the world; Zichronos: that He is all-knowing; Shofros: that He reveals Himself to man. After developing its theme, each bracha cites ten pesukim from Tanach to support its prevalence in Kisvei Kodesh. Finally, each bracha culminates in a request - Malchios: that Hashem should reign over the whole world; Zichronos: that He should "remember" us for the good; Shofros: that He should reveal Himself to us with His great shofar of redemption.

Although, we use ten pesukim for each bracha, what's the minimum amount needed? The conclusion, based on the gemara in Rosh Hashana 32a, is that we need at least three pesukim. Why? The gemara suggests two possibilities. The first is that three corresponds to Torah, Neviim, and Kesuvim. This explanation makes intuitive sense - in order to show the prevalence of each theme in Torah She'bichsav, we illustrate its expression in each segment of Tanach.

The gemara then offers a strange alternative explanation for the minimum of three pesukim. That is, it corresponds to kohanim, leviim, and yisraelim. While this may sound nice, we are left wondering:

What in the world is the connection of kohanim, leviim, and yisraelim to the number of pesukim in musaf on Rosh Hashana? While it's true that all these groups daven Musaf, why should this determine the number of pesukim? Perhaps this seemingly tenuous connection is made to properly direct our attention on this awe-inspiring Judgment Day. The issue is that the thought of judgment often causes us to turn inwards - to worry about our lives, our families, and our bank accounts. As important as these things are, there's more to Rosh Hashana than our personal fate. There's the fate of the Jewish nation. And there's the fate of the entire world. Look carefully at the Amida of Rosh Hashana. Does it focus on ourselves? Not at all. The focus involves Hashem's kingship being expressed in the Jewish nation and in the world at large; it discusses Hashem remembering the covenant and the Jewish nation for the good. The message is that on Judgment Day, we should strive to elevate our attention above ourselves and to think about the bigger picture.

While we may hesitate to disregard our personal concerns on this all-important day of judgment, this isn't really necessary. Ironically, the route to improving our own judgment is to (almost) forget about ourselves and instead think about what is truly much more significant - Hashem, His nation, and His world. We should recall that our own success is intimately tied up with the success of the Jewish nation. And we should internalize the fact that our own judgment is in large part commensurate with the degree that we can elevate above our self-centered desires and fears and view them in the context of Klal Yisrael and Hashem's entire world.

We can now understand the gemara's second explanation for the minimum of three pesukim. It teaches us that whether we happen to be a kohen, levi, or yisrael, we should each strive on Rosh Hashana to think about all the Jews in all of these groups. We should think about all our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael and throughout the Diaspora and recognize that whatever group of Jews we identify with, we are all for one common mission - to sanctify the Name of Hashem in this world. While we may each daven in our own shul, we should jointly pray that it won't be long before we collectively experience that awesome day when "everyone who has breath in his nostrils will say 'Hashem, God of Yisrael is King, and His kingship reigns supreme over all.'" ■

Bio: Rabbi Elie Feder PhD, a Rebbe at Yeshiva Bnei Torah and a math professor at Kingsborough Community College, is the author of *Gematria Refigured* (2022) and *Happiness in the Face of Adversity* (upcoming). He is also a co-host of the podcast "Physics to God" and the host of the podcast "Simply Deep."

Rabbi Elie Feder PhD



Why Jews Abandon God

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Haftorah of Masai:

Hear the word of God, O House of Jacob, every clan of the House of Israel! Thus said God: "What wrong did your ancestors find in Me that they abandoned Me and went after delusion and were deluded? They never asked themselves, 'Where is God, Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and darkness, a land nobody had traversed, where no human being had dwelt?' I brought you to this country of farmland to enjoy its fruit and its bounty. But you came and defiled My land. You made My possession abhorrent. The priests never asked themselves, 'Where is God?' The guardians of the Teaching ignored Me; the rulers rebelled against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and followed what cannot help. Oh, I will go on accusing you"—declares God—"and I will accuse your children's children! Just cross over to the isles of the Kittim and look, send to Kedar and send and ponder carefully. See if anything like this has ever happened: Has any nation

changed its gods? Even though they are not gods. But My people has exchanged its glory (true God) for what can do no good. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be horrified, utterly dazed!"—says God. "For My people have done a twofold wrong: they have forsaken Me, the fount of living waters, and hewed out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that cannot even hold water" (Jer. 2:4-13).

Jeremiah accused the Jews of abandoning God. But he does not openly tell us why they abandoned Him. However, Torah does not hide matters, but shares clues. It teaches us truths, including exposing human flaw so we can repair our false notions and behaviors and return to God. Where is the lesson here?

The priests never asked themselves, "Where is God?" The guardians of the Teaching ignored Me.

Jeremiah says the Jews failed to inquire, they also rejected Torah.

Send to Kedar and send and ponder carefully. Has any nation changed its gods?

Can God actually credit idolaters for loyalty to idolatry?

Fantasy is emotionally appealing. Despite God saving us from Egypt and protecting us 40 years in the desert, the Jews rejected God. Once Moses was ostensibly delayed on Sinai, the Jews panicked and created a Gold Calf, as they said, "The man Moses who took us out of Egypt, we don't know what happened to him" (Exod. 32:1). This teaches that they were attached to the "man" of Moses. Even at Sinai witnessing God's intervention, the need for a tangible leader forced the Jews to create a molten image.

Here too during Jeremiah's era, the Jews abandoned an intelligent approach to life: "The priests never asked themselves, 'Where is God?' The guardians of the Teaching ignored Me." They did not engage their minds; they ignored Torah. "The priests never asked themselves, 'Where is God?' means God is intangible and needs to be found through the mind, but the Jews chose their emotions instead.

They ignored God's Exodus and safe desert travels 40 years. They caved to the idolatrous need for tangible religiosity. "They have forsaken Me, the fount of living waters, and hewed out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that cannot even hold water." They sought emotional satisfaction despite its practical failure to provide.

When God says that the other nations never betrayed their gods, it is not a praise, as He continues with His rejection: "and they are not gods." Despite their gods' lifelessness, the nations didn't abandon their gods. But the Jews experienced God's goodness: "Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, etc." and yet, they abandoned God! In other words, the Jews are more to blame than others, as God benefitted them. "For My people have done a twofold wrong: they have forsaken Me, the fount of living waters, and hewed out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that cannot even hold water." The Jews abandoned a benefiting God while the nations were loyal to lifeless gods. Thus, Jeremiah does in fact reveal the Jews' sin of rejecting God: "They abandoned Me and went after delusions." ■

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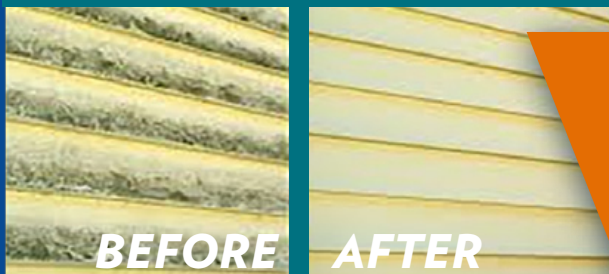
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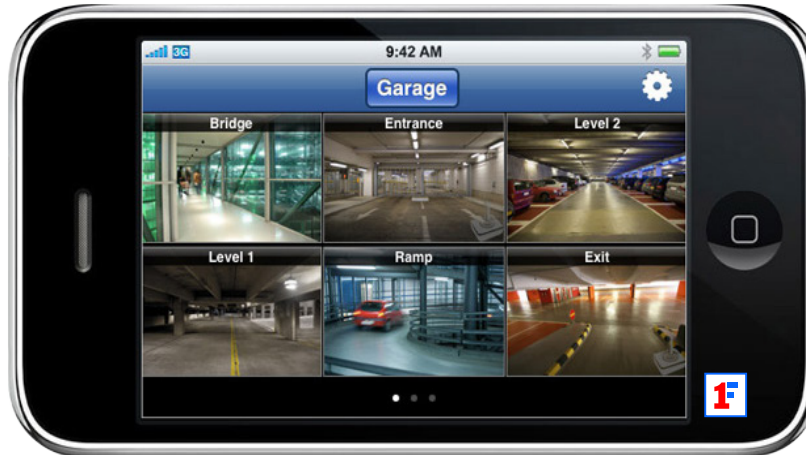
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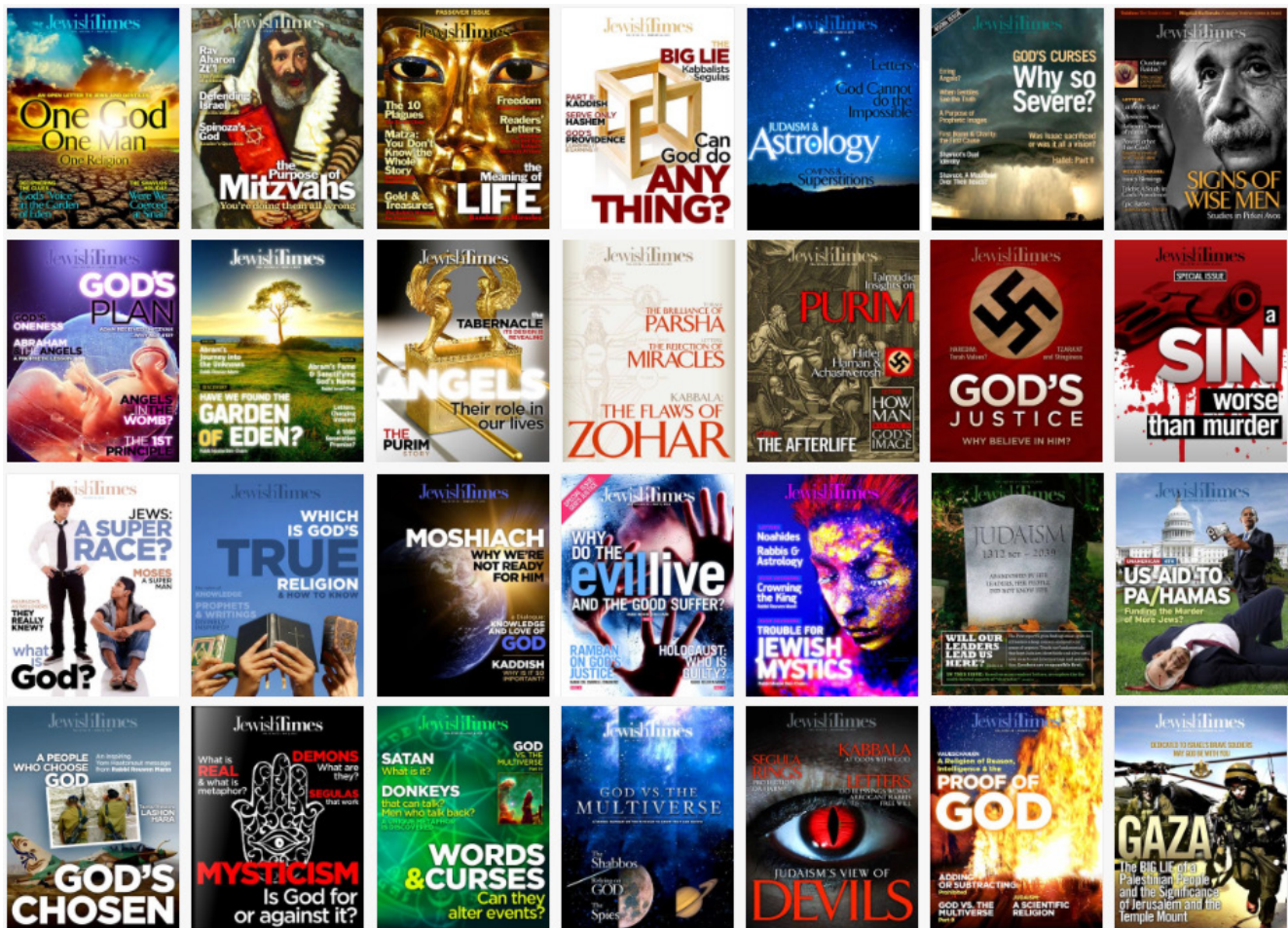
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