

# JewishTimes

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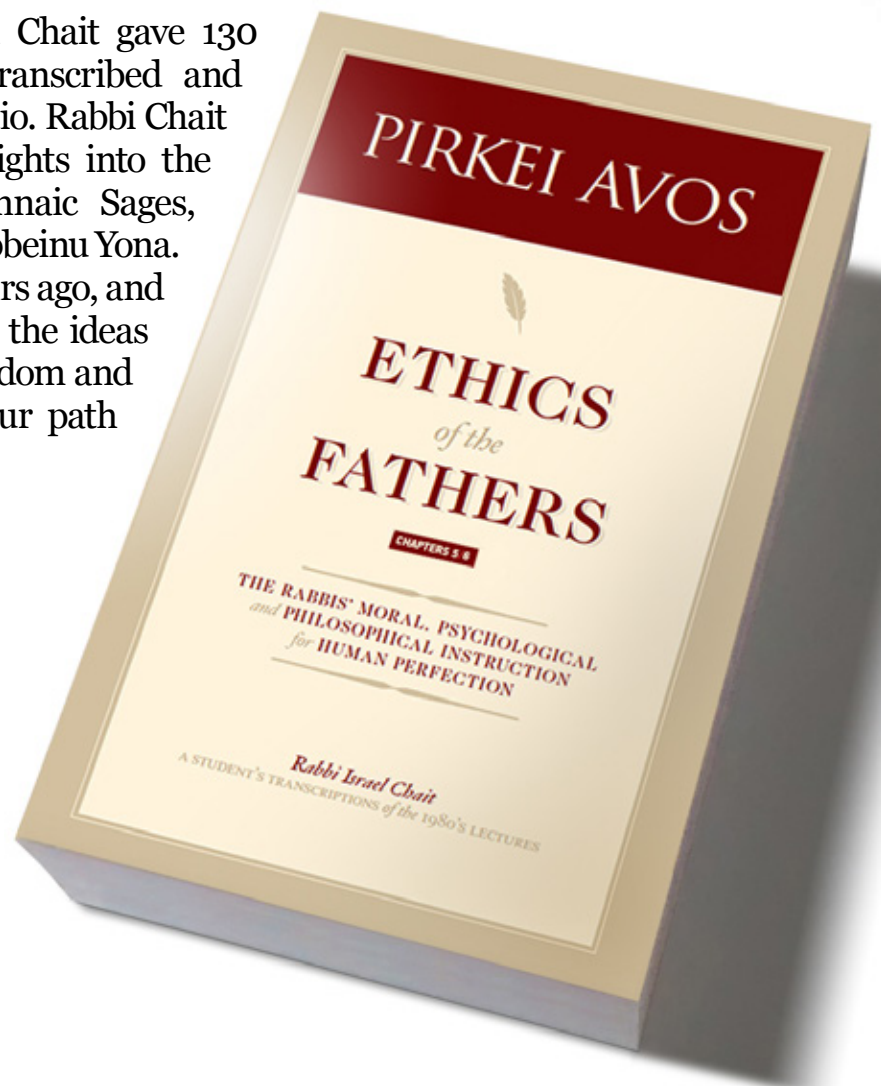
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## LETTERS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

## Follow Truth, Not People

**Reader:** I have read many of your articles on rationalist Judaism and have often been surprised by your not infrequent positive references to the Ramban. How do you explain this given the fact that the Ramban was an opponent of Maimonides and his whole method and worldview. Ramban was a kabbalist and mystic, who believed in dark forces, astrology and zodiacal medicine (cf.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Perush HaTorah on Devarim 18:9) and added prohibitions to the Torah. Yet, you cite Ramban, while you oppose mysticism.

**Rabbi:** No man is perfect, not even Moses. And in the days of the medieval rabbis, they may have relied on the sciences of their times, including astrology, which later has been unveiled as false. We also must separate between a rabbi's jurisdiction which is Torah, and between secular knowledge like sciences, in which, we have no obligation to follow a Rabbi. So, we can value Ramban on Torah and disagree with his secular positions. ■

## Angels & Demons

**Reader:** Do you consider it rational to say that mysticism does not exist, as well as demons, and yet promote the Christian idea that there are angels with wings? This is alien to rational Judaism. True, Maimonides mentions angels in his Mishneh Torah but, in some places of the Guide, he refers to them only as the natural forces, for example, the rain and winds. G-d does not need helpers. Also, Rambam writes that he will purposely contradict himself in the introduction of the Guide. Thus, it is no surprise that in other places in the Guide he expresses his belief in the existence angels. Nevertheless, Rambam taught reason via the five senses and the importance of developing the intellect to improve ourselves and society. It, therefore follows, that we [rationalist Jews] do not believe in angels.

**Rabbi:** Nothing Christian is promoted by Torah. Mysticism refers to that which is not detected by the senses, by the intellect or authorized by God. Thus, it is not accepted as truth. This includes literal understandings of demons and angels. Angels exist, but refer to intelligent beings without a physical component, without wings. Angels' "wings" are metaphoric when discussed in Prophets. The Rabbis teach that wings denote alacrity in fulfilling God's decrees, just as birds use wings to move swiftly. Meaning, angels have no component that opposes God's will, as do man (his emotions). Yes, angels also refer to natural forces, "He makes His angels winds; His ministers flaming fire" (Psalms 104:4). And demons refer to a psychological phenomenon of hallucinations, not earthbound physical entities. The rabbis teach that demons are seen only in 4 situations: on mountain tops, in deserts, in caves and at night. These 4 situations share a commonality: isolation. That is, when man is isolated, his powerful social drive creates hallucinations of others, fabricated to destroy the intolerable loneliness. So painful is loneliness, solitary confinement is the harshest punishment. ■

## What is Wisdom: Part II

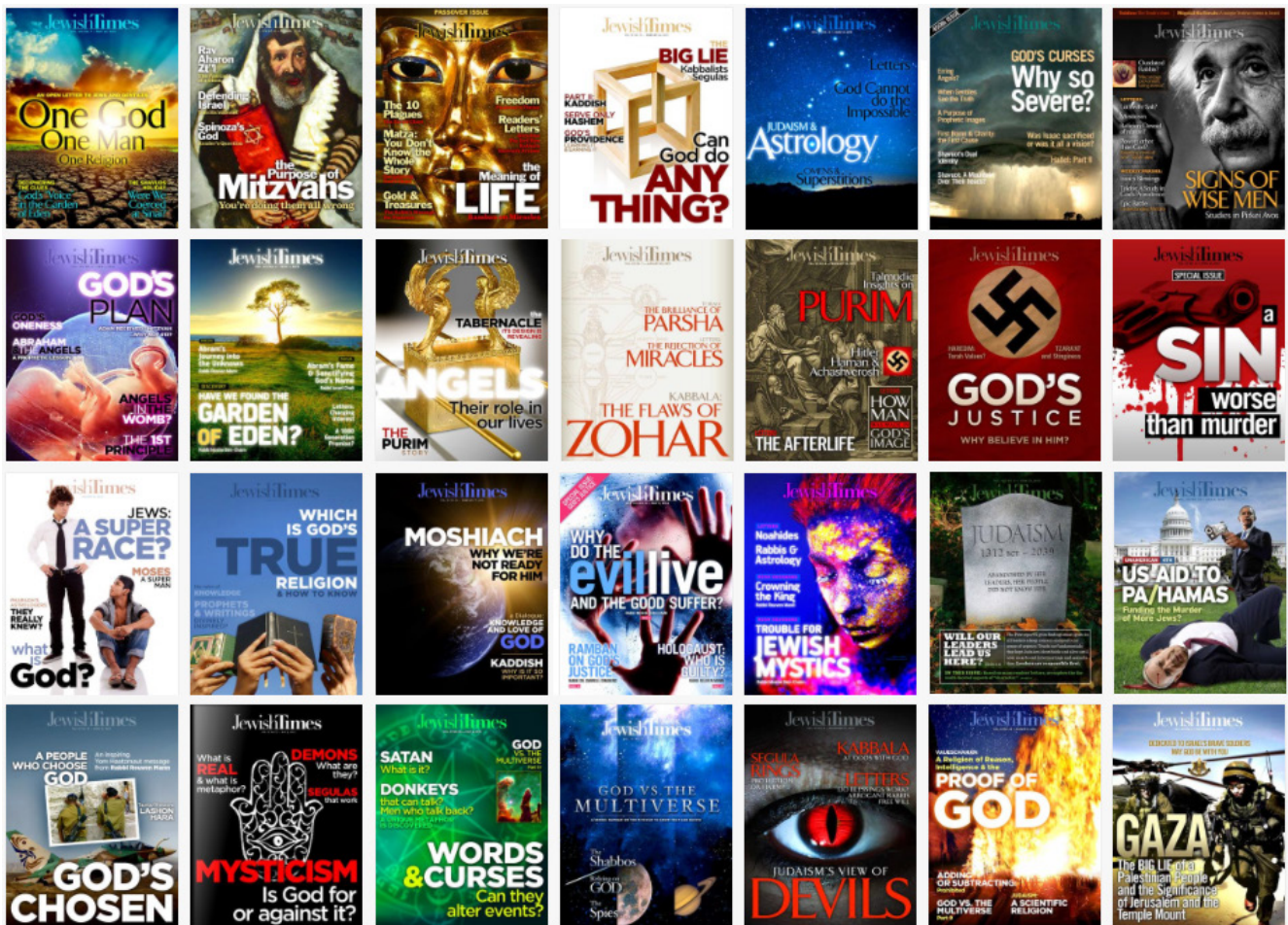
**Reader:** In your recent essay you write, "Alexander asked the sages, 'Who is wise?' The sages replied, 'One who anticipates the outcome of his acts' (Avos 2:9)" (Tamid 32a). I would like to add that Ben Zoma said: "Who is wise? He who learns from all men," as it is written (Psalm 119:99) "I have gained understanding from all my teachers." Thus, Maimonides was correct when he said, "the truth is the truth no matter what its source." Thank you for another thought-provoking essay.

**Rabbi:** I would elaborate that, "learning from all men" is not a practicality, as there are certainly some people from whom nothing is to be learned. "Learning from all men" refers to the will to learn from anyone. Meaning, one does not follow ego emotions initially discounting another human being from offering him knowledge. The praise here is of a person who seeks wisdom, and his ego does not play any role. He can accept criticism and education from anyone. He will become a wise person. ■



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# RESPECT

## Torah's Definition

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT



**R**abbi Elazar ben Shamua says, “Let the honor of your student be dear to you as your own, and the honor of your fellow be like the awe of your teacher, and the awe of your teacher be like the awe of Heaven” (Avos 4:12).

Rabbeinu Yona had a different version:

*Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as the honor of your friend, and the honor of your friend should be as dear to you as the honor of your teacher, and the honor of your teachers should be as dear to you as the honor of God.*

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

*This does not mean to give the same honor to a*

*student as one gives to his friend, or to treat one's friend as one treats one's teacher, or to treat one's teacher as one treats God. Rather, treat each person in his proper measure. But just as you cannot diminish your friend's honor, so also do not diminish the honor due to your student. Thus, the mishna means that one must be as cautious with his students as he is with his friends, and as cautious with his friend's honor as he is with his fear for his teacher, and the fear/awe he shows his teacher should equate to that which he shows to God. One should take seriously those of lesser status. We learn that since one's teacher represents Torah, one should treat him with the same awe as he treats God. The teacher teaches a person to fear God [and*

*therefore one must relate to his teacher with that awe].*

Awe is reserved for God and for a teacher who teaches one to fear God. But honor is applied to a friend or to a student. Rabbeinu Yona continues:

*As one is to relate to students as he does to his friend, and he must relate to his friend as he does to his teacher, and to his teacher as he relates to God, it ends up that one must relate to students as he relates to God.*

Why is the mishna written in a step-by-step format? It should just say that all four parties should be treated equally, as Rabbeinu Yona says

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that all four are on one level.

Rabbeinu Yona says that there are two ways one acts regarding interpersonal relationships. Typically, one relates to his friend emotionally. One also relates to his students emotionally, but of course not as he relates to his friend. There is a certain natural emotional relationship with a student, and the same applies to how one relates to his teacher. One has different social relationships with different people.

Chazal teach that one should not act typically and carry out his various relationships based on his natural psychological expressions. Because when one functions in relationships psychologically, it is not just that the student is accorded less honor, but honor for the student becomes less important than honor for one's friend. And honor for one's friend becomes less important than honor for his teacher. Chazal say this is wrong. In truth, all people should be equated and treated with the honor one gives to God; when relating to any person, one is not to relate to him based on his role or his personality, but one should relate to him as God's creation. The importance of the honor accorded to any person must be equal, as everyone is an expression of God's will. We are not to relate to others psychologically. One who functions properly must maintain his relationships on a metaphysical level. The equality of relationships with every person is derived from halacha. The same Torah that demands honor for students also demands honor for God. The one source of halacha thereby equates all acts of relating to others. Thus, when one relates to another, he should do so based on halacha and not based on his psychological feelings. This explains Rabbeinu Yona's summation that all are [to be treated] equal. One's friend deserves honor as one shares the precious entity of Torah with him, and the same applies to a student:

*Just as the students are obliged to honor the rebbe, so is the rebbe obliged to honor his disciples with deference and to draw them near. Thus, said the sages, "Let the honor of your disciple be dear to you even as your own" (Avos 4:12).*

Maimonides says, "just as" (ki'shem), but this does not refer to the amount or the quality of honor, as one's teacher deserves awe, unlike students. Maimonides says that just as one has an obligation to honor one party, so too he has an obligation to honor the other party. Maimonides continues:

*And it is essential for a man to care for his disciples and to love them, for they are the sons who make life enjoyable, both in this world and in the World to Come (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:12).*



Jacob blessing his sons

Thus, honor to others is to be expressed on an objective plane. Maimonides continues:

*The students increase the master's wisdom and broaden his heart. The sages said, "Much wisdom have I learned from my masters, more than that from my colleagues, but from my disciples more than from all of them combined" (Ta'anit 7a). Even as a small branch kindles the big one, so too a small disciple sharpens the mind of the master, to the end that he brings forth from him, by his questions, a beautified wisdom.*

The rebbe should appreciate his students, because, as Maimonides says, they increase his Torah.

Why doesn't the mishna simply say, "Treat all people equally, as one treats God" instead of using this progressive format [i.e., student, friend, teacher, God]?

The progressive format provides a means of teaching us how to act. By saying that one should treat a student like his friend, the mishna offers a reasonable comparison: "Should I treat my students as students, or should I treat them as I treat my friend?" The leap is a small one and one that a person can entertain within reason. But had the mishna said, "Treat everyone as one treats God," the leap from student to God would be too great to entertain. Thus, the mishna provides an acceptable step to attain the goal of treating the lowest like the highest, but in a gradual fashion. Therefore, one can realize and entertain the principle. The mishna teaches the idea and offers a method of application.

Once a person stops treating his student with less honor than he does his friend, he releases himself from that emotional niche. Thereby, one removes himself from relating to his student emotionally, allowing him to relate to the student as halacha demands: on a rational

and halachic plane.

Maimonides possessed a different version of the text: "The honor of your student should be like your own honor." When it comes to a student, one should introduce the concept of treating him as you do yourself. Regarding the treatment of a friend, fear is introduced [as opposed to honor]. And in one's relationship to his teacher, the fear of Heaven is introduced. Fear expressed toward a teacher is one matter, but the fear of Heaven is a metaphysical fear/awe. In each relationship, one introduces a [new and] different aspect. In each relationship, one removes himself from the emotional plane by introducing a new element.

Having fear for one's friend does not mean one must be in awe of his friend, but that his treatment of his friend equates to his treatment of his teacher. Treating a friend with awe removes the natural expression of a psychological relationship. One elevates himself in this manner.

The world feels if anything except emotions are involved in relationships, the relationship is deficient. With this mishna, Judaism revises human relationships. Judaism says that the emotional relationship alone is weak, empty, unstable, and is not an expression of the higher form of man. Judaism differs not only from the world but also from the philosophers, for no philosopher could ever work out such a system. Without God providing a halachic system, it would be nonsensical to make up arbitrary values.

Saadia Gaon asked why it was necessary to have Mattan Torah, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, [for even] without Mattan Torah we agree that the Torah's ideas are true. Thus, a great intellect could arrive at the Torah's conclusions on his own, just like Abraham did. Maimonides cites certain Greek philosophers who arrived at the same ideas that the Torah expresses, but one could not arrive at halachos as stated in our

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mishna without the Torah. One could never assume that he should treat his teacher the same way he treats God. Judaism maintains that all relationships must be of an objective halachic quality. That is the true relationship, unlike what the world seeks in its purely emotional relationships. Judaism frowns upon such relationships. This applies to spouses as well—a marriage must be based on objective halachic concepts. If the halachic element is lacking in any relationship, one fails to act as an adam [an intellectual being].

Parshas Vayechi provides an example. As Jacob was approaching death, he called his son Joseph to ensure that he would not be interned in Egypt. Typically, a father in this situation would tell his son, “I am your father, this is what I want you to do.” But Jacob did not operate this way:

*And when the time approached for Yisrael (Jacob) to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, “Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: Please do not bury me in Egypt. When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place.” Joseph replied, “I will do as you have spoken.” And Jacob said, “Swear to me.” And Joseph swore to him. Then Yisrael bowed at the head of the bed (Gen. 47:29-31).*

Jacob expressed the perfection that the honor for one’s student [son] should be just like one’s own honor. Jacob spoke to Joseph with great respect; they did not have a typical father/son relationship. We are to always recognize that we are relating to a tzelem Elohim [an intelligent creature], which is an objective entity, and therefore the relationship must operate on that basis.

Rashi says that Jacob bowed to Joseph even though Jacob was greater than Joseph. But Joseph was a king and Jacob showed him honor. Later we read, “Yisrael (Jacob) strengthened himself and sat on the bed (Ibid. 48:2).” Chazal say:

*“Even though he is my son, he is a king and I will give him honor.” From here we learn that one must give honor to kingship.*

First, Jacob made a political gesture, “Then Yisrael bowed at the head of the bed.” But when Jacob “strengthened himself and sat on the bed” it is referred to as giving honor to kingship. What is the difference? It is also interesting as this is his own son. But even so, Jacob did not simply relate to Joseph in an emotional framework, as a father to a son. Rather, he conducted all his relationships using wisdom.

**“This is one of the most important concepts in Pirkei Avos, for one must revise his whole way of living. Not only is this important for relationships, but [more] for one’s philosophical perfection, shleimus ha’adam.”**

In the first case, Jacob offered a political gesture. One must be aware that a king (Joseph) is in a different mental framework; one must be aware of such a person’s emotions. And just because Jacob was related to Joseph, this did not give him the right to relate to Joseph differently from any other king, whose mentality must be treated accordingly.

In the first case, Jacob bowed to Joseph after he promised Jacob that he would do as he had asked. Jacob’s bow was a political gesture. In the second case, why did Jacob “strengthen himself [to sit up] on the bed?” He did so before Joseph entered the room. Jacob was ill and could have remained in a reclining position, but by strengthening himself before Joseph came into the room, he showed that it was not a political gesture. Here, Jacob carried out an objective action; as Chazal said, he gave honor to kingship. This was a halachic act; the first case was political. Even Moshe showed honor to Pharaoh.

In the span of a few verses we see the perfect person’s relationships. First, Jacob honored his son, which is in line with “Let the honor of your students be dear to you as your own....” Second, Jacob also respected Joseph as a great political figure and bowed to him. Third, Jacob acted halachically and sat up on the bed before Joseph entered the room.

This is Judaism: a completely different approach in relationships. No relationship is exempt from being raised to an objective plane, especially the relationship between husband and wife. Problems arise in relationships because spouses desire to benefit emotionally from the union without any wisdom applied. But as long as one functions on an infantile

plane, he cannot be successful, because one partner’s infantile needs—which are endless—face off against the other partner, whose own infantile needs are endless. Such a relationship is impossible to succeed.

A psychologist said that when analyzing a person, all parts of the personality must be scrutinized. He gave the following analogy: If the police said they would patrol all places except for one town, surely all the criminals would relocate to that unpatrolled town. The same is true with the human personality. If all but one part of the psyche is scrutinized, that one area is where one will vent all his emotions. Therefore, halacha governs all relationships, demanding an objective treatment of all people.

The Rav said, “At the Passover Seder we serve God through our stomachs.” Every step of the Seder is guided by halacha. So too in human relationships. Judaism tells a person to enjoy his relationships, but he must also guide them using his intellect, his tzelem Elohim. The personal satisfaction received by one who follows the Torah is a greater psychological satisfaction than one who fully immerses himself in pleasures. Judaism does not want a person to forfeit this world’s pleasures, but requires that these pleasures be enjoyed within a framework as a means. As an end, following pleasures drives one crazy. Even a person on the level of a prophet should enjoy a walk and appreciate nature. Physical enjoyments provide a person with a pleasant state of mind, but one’s primary focus must be to engage his intellect. The distorted man plunges all his energies into earthly pleasures. [Man cannot satisfy his energies in the physical, or else his end will be frustration.]

The perfected person derives greater satisfaction from personal relationships since he relates to others as he was designed to do, and in the proper perspective. Therefore, his relationships are purely pleasurable and without pain. But one who seeks to derive all his satisfaction from personal relationships will meet with impossible results.

This is one of the most important concepts in Pirkei Avos, for one must revise his whole way of living. Not only is this important for relationships, but [more] for one’s philosophical perfection, shleimus ha’adam. A person who lives this way must live on a different plane. The emotions that seek satisfaction are usually the unbridled social emotions, which are the most devastating emotions. As a point of mussar [moral instruction], this is the essence of Pirkei Avos: Halomeid v’aino oseh (one who learns but does not put into practice) has a serious defect. One should therefore practice what he learns. ■



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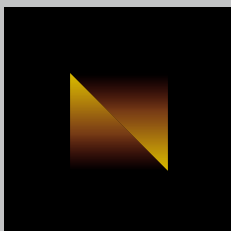
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**HISTORY**

# JUDAISM

## God's Only Religion

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Judaism is unlike any other religion: it is the only religion proving its claim of divine origin. In fact, everything in Judaism traces to this proof, thereby validating every Torah ideal as proven. In contrast, all other religions are based on belief and blind faith, and none even attempt to offer proof for their fabricated histories. In fact, the demand for blind faith demonstrates its lack of any proof. For why would a religion ask a person to close their minds and “believe,” if they possessed a valid proof for the claims? We don’t “believe” in history; we know it. Judaism’s proof is the same proof that validates history. Judaism proves its divine origin through 2 million Israelite witnesses at Mount Sinai 3300 years ago who heard an intelligent voice emanating from the flames. Had this event never occurred, Moses would not succeed in convincing





strangers that they witnessed such a miraculous event, when in fact they were at their homes or elsewhere that day. Had Moses lied and told strangers that they heard a voice emanating from a mountain on fire, they would view him as psychotic. And certainly not one person Moses attempted to convince would then replace their own history and lie to themselves or their children; the story would die and never reach us. But it has. Had this event of God giving the 10 Commandments not taken place, as Jews, Christians and Muslims accept as true, and transmit, we should possess at least an alternate Jewish history. But the fact that there is a singular history of the Jews which includes family names, populations, locations traveled, dates, and the unanimous transmission of this Revelation at Sinai that we possess today, Judaism thereby offers the same proof that any history offers: mass witnesses. And as there is no alternative history during Caesar's reign, and as he was witnessed by masses, just as we are fully convinced of Caesar's existence, we are fully convinced of God's Revelation at Sinai where God gave His Torah to the Jewish nation. This is the only time in history were masses witnessed God giving a religion to man. This is the crucial point which exposes every other religion as false. The absence of any event validating divine origin exposes every other religion as false. Every other religion is a religion without God's authorization and completely fabricated by man. They are all deceptions.

Every religion aside from Judaism is human fabrication. This means that the human psyche—not God—is responsible for the beliefs and practices of those religions. The invention of a man-god in Christianity and elsewhere is a projection of the infantile mind dependent on parents. They create their god as the "man" Jesus to satisfy this infantile psychological need for the father. Ancient religions too created idols in human form, for this reason. This religion is not only false based on the reasons stated so far, but it also damages a person by inhibiting his maturation, emotionally and intellectually.

And aside from formal religion, there are individual fantasy beliefs and practices that again are fabricated by man's insecure psyche to placate his fears and assure him of success. These practices include superstitions like rabbit's feet, lucky horseshoes, broken mirrors, black cats, witchcraft, astrology, seances, omens, signs, and other foolish baseless beliefs. It is the insecure and weak minded person seeking security that believes in anything promising success, even though it has no validation in reality. Jews too are guilty by believing in red bendels, holy books, incantations, locations, and placing notes in walls and in graves. Torah says intermediaries are false, and certainly lifeless ones. God gave man senses and intelligence to

distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy. And both our senses and our intelligence dismiss all these practices and religions as offering no compliance with reality. Judaism demands that intelligence determines everything we believe and do.

Following the principle of seeking truth and using one's senses and intelligence, a person can dismiss most of the falsehoods accepted by the world today. But then a person must confront another emotion. People are fooled by the masses. A person has a natural inclination to assume that when many people believe in something, it must be valid. In this dynamic, the public plays the role of the parent. Just as the infant assumes the parent is correct at all times, an adult who is not intellectually mature will project the same parental validity on the masses' actions and beliefs. But this belief is easily rejected. For there are many religions, each having masses of followers, and each contradicting each other. As two contradictory views cannot both be correct, at least one of those religions is false, regardless of the number of its adherents. Thus, mass followers does not validate a belief, and with this understanding, a person can dismiss most of the falsehoods accepted by the world today.

And as a great philosopher said, "There is a disease that people believe that which is found in books, and the older the book, the greater the belief." But according to this view, one must accept a stone god as valid, if that practice is written in a book. The fallacy of this belief is now exposed, and one can no longer respect any idea simply because it is in print, regardless of the age of that publication. Neither masses or books validates: masses can be wrong about their beliefs, and falsehoods could have been printed in books thousands of years ago. The only criteria that validates any history is mass witnesses. Judaism alone offers the only proof of God's only religion ever given to man.

As Judaism was designed by the same creator who designed the human being, Judaism complies perfectly with the human design to offer the most pleasant and beneficial life. In contrast, other religions demand belief in nonsense, superstition, idolatry, and worse, as they have murdered innocent people in the name of their religions and their false gods. Every Torah law complies perfectly with human nature. This means that Judaism directs a person to the happiest existence. But it is not just the practices that are pleasant. When we study the formulation of each and every command we find beautiful principles and laws that are structured with great intelligence. Upon witnessing this intelligence we are filled with an appreciation for God and this is a highly enjoyable state. And when reading of the great Torah personalities and their perfections, we grow in our appreciation for the wisdom God created, which they followed and found enriching lives.

One following other religions should ask himself why he is so careful about choosing doctors and selecting jobs, always following an intelligent plan, but when it comes to religion, he suspends any intelligent thought and throws himself into the abyss of blind faith. There is no good answer for this because it is completely foolish to make any decision without intelligence. But as the masses speak of "belief" and "faith," and as they deify Jesus and fabricate saints, these personalities and notions rise to the level of cherished unquestioned values. The blind following the blind. But this too can be easily dismantled by asking such a believer "Will you have faith and belief in an employer who promises a yearly salary paid in one lump payment on Dec. 31?" No intelligent person would sacrifice a year of work based on belief alone. That is far too risky when

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there are many bills that must be paid and stomachs to feed. Such reluctance to accept this type of arrangement should be applied to religion as well. One should not accept anything as true without validation.

One should also be sensitive to emotions to reject Judaism due to its restrictive quality. A person naturally desires complete freedom and anything which opposes that freedom is viewed in a negative light. Since Judaism has many laws, some people might prefer freedom over the benefits of those laws. But a simple example is helpful. If a person becomes ill and must take a number of medications in different quantities and at certain times each day, he will not look at this as restrictive, but as a benefit, as a means to sustain a healthy life. Now the person who is convinced of the existence of the soul and knows what can damage it and what can give him eternal life, will value the Torah's laws and will not view them as restrictive. He will know that God intends good for mankind and His Torah can only give a person goodness and happiness. He will abandon the infantile approach to rejecting any control over his life, and he will welcome God's prescription of Torah.

There are many obstacles when transitioning from the unquestioned life, to Torah life. You must be sensitive to every emotion you sense, and to every thought that occurs to you, and follow reason, seeking truth and not following your feelings. Doing so, you live in reality and can achieve the greatest happiness. But if you choose to follow only that which feels good, many times you will select what harms you and leads to falsehoods. Imagine the person who eats only foods that taste good. In a short time he will be overweight and ill. The intelligent person studies the body and understands what is healthy, eating only those healthy foods and in the right quantities. He also realizes that exercise is also required. Although exercise requires exertion and removes the person from peace and rest, those good feelings of peace and rest are not to be catered too, if he is to be healthy.

The same applies to religion. A person can choose to follow ideas that please him emotionally, like accepting a familiar human statue of Jesus as a god, instead of the less familiar feeling of the true abstract, non-physical God. It is more comfortable to believe Jesus died for your sins than taking personal responsibility and applying the effort to change your behavior. But as we now know that reality is dictated by God, who also gave us only one religion, this one religion of Judaism alone is what is true and how God relates to man. Praying to the dead Jesus or believing in baseless notions of atonement, you pray to a non-existence. You do not relate to the true God, but in fact distance yourself from reality. Fantasies cannot answer your prayers. Dead men are functionless. But the Creator can do anything. We do not know what God is, but we know He created and runs the world. We must remove any idea and physical image of God from our minds, if we are to be relating to the true God when we pray. He is the God of creation, of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and of the Torah. There are no other powers or forces in the universe.

If we truly seek happiness, we must live in line with how we are designed, and that is achieved only by following Torah. Only by following God's prescription for our lives will we find happiness. God designed man. God designed Torah. ■



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God's prescription for the  
human being.

God designed man.  
God designed Torah.  
God designed happiness.





# Living in God's Presence

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**T**his week's parsha, Vayechi, depicts the final days of our last Patriarch, Yaakov. He had two serious concerns about where he would be buried. One was that he not be interred in Egypt. The second was that he be brought back to the family gravesite known as the Me'arat Hamachpelah.

Why was the location of his final resting place a matter of such importance? Perhaps it is related to the idea that one may not reside in a place of immorality and sinfulness, as this might influence a person toward similar behavior.

Indeed, to this very day, there is a serious Biblical prohibition against living in Egypt. Since that is the case, how was it permissible for Yaakov to dwell there and later in history for the Rambam to reside in this prohibited land?

When the brothers came to Egypt (with Pharaoh's direct consent), they expressed themselves very carefully when meeting with the ruler. They said, "We have come to sojourn in the land, since there is no grazing for your servant's flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan; now if you please, allow your servants to dwell in the region of Goshen."

The Passover Haggadah confirms this by asserting that "Yaakov did not descend to Egypt to 'dig in' there, but only to (temporarily) sojourn there." The emphasis is on the fact that Yaakov's and indeed the brothers' stay in Mitzrayim was short. However, Yaakov, Yosef's brothers, and the Rambam lived in the forbidden land for quite a while. How can this "sojourn" be characterized as temporary?

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

In my opinion, a sojourner is one who, while physically located in a certain place, is psychologically an outsider. This is not the place he chooses to be, but circumstances beyond his control have conspired to place him there. His duration in that place might span many years, but it is temporary in character, because he will leave at the first feasible opportunity.

That was the type of sojourn that Yaakov experienced in Egypt. He was not there by desire or choice. He never decided that he wanted to become a citizen of Egypt.

We can now understand why it was so important for him not to be buried in Mitzrayim. Burial there would create a permanent association with it. And that would contradict the idea that he was a reluctant sojourner whose life and fate were tied up with the philosophy and culture of a different and holy land.

The same is true for the Rambam. When forced to flee his original country, Spain, because of Muslim persecution, he sought safe haven in other places. Finally he made his way to Eretz Yisrael, but conditions were too adverse for him to remain there. So he went to Egypt, where there was a Jewish community that desperately needed his services.

Like Yosef Hatzaddik, he rose to supreme prominence because of his special relationship with the ruler, whom he served as

personal physician. Thus, he was able to exercise substantial influence, which benefitted the general Jewish community. Like Yaakov, however, the Rambam made sure he would be brought to Eretz Yisrael for kevura (burial). He wanted to affirm that he associated himself only with the G-d of Israel, who "dwelled" there.

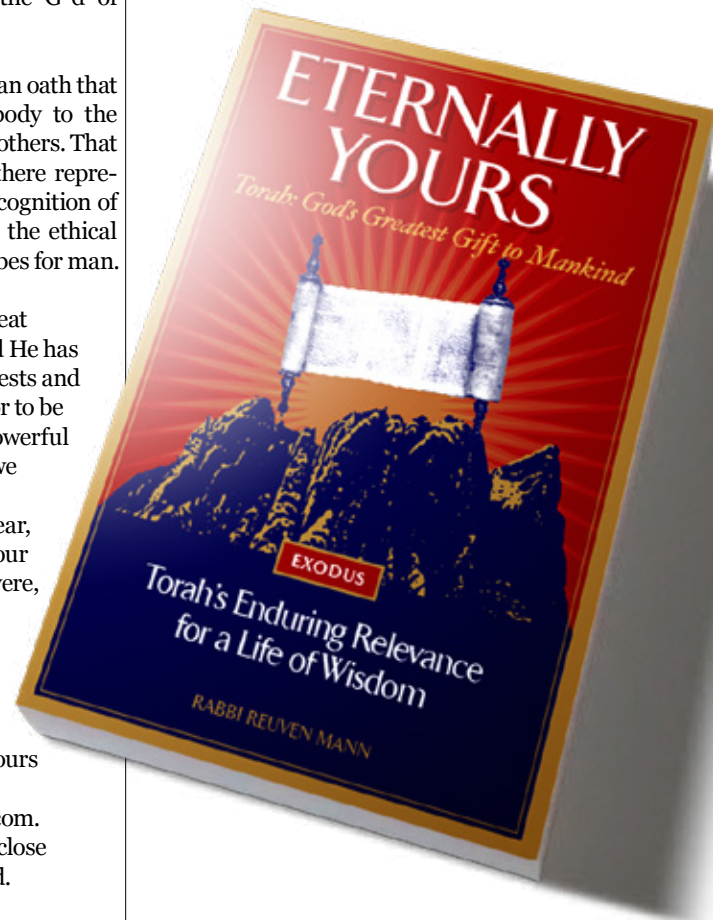
Yaakov had his son Yosef take an oath that he would return his father's body to the burial place of his fathers and mothers. That place and the people interred there represented a way of life based on recognition of the true G-d and adherence to the ethical and moral principles He prescribes for man.

Hashem has granted us the great opportunity to dwell in the Land He has designated as a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." It is a great honor to be buried there, as it expresses a powerful statement of the eternal values we identify with.

But, as the Rambam makes clear, it is much greater to be there in our lifetime, so we can reside, as it were, in the Divine presence. May we merit to do so.

Shabbat shalom. ■

P.S. my two books *Eternally Yours* on Bereishit and Shemot are currently available on Amazon.com. The third book, on Bamidbar is close to publication. Please stay tuned.



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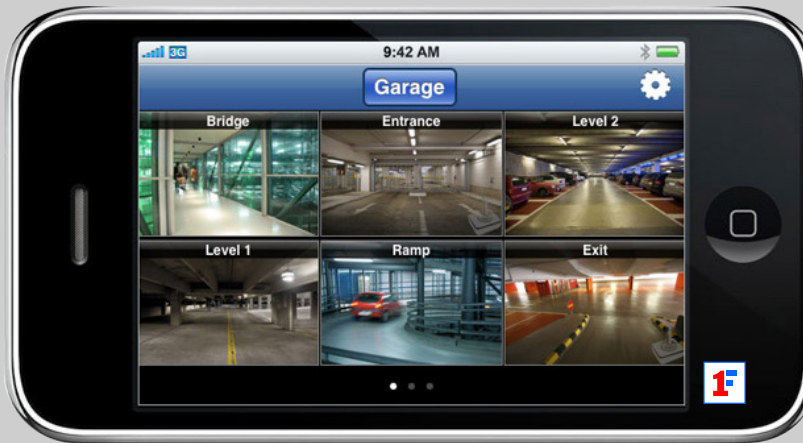
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## OPINION

Originally published by *The Seattle Times*



# Why are Seattle's Leaders Silent About Anti-Semitism?

Regina Sassoon Friedland

**S**eattle's political and civic leadership acted in unison with appropriate and necessary horror when an African American City Council candidate's campaign sign was defaced with racist graffiti days before Election Day.

Ominously, though, that same reflex was absent when vile acts of anti-Semitism have occurred in our city. Two recent incidents are particularly telling.

In June, my organization asked Mayor Jenny Durkan and other city officials to condemn unequivocally and without delay the death threats against City Council candidate Ari Hoffman and his family. A full eight days later, the mayor issued an important statement on anti-Semitism, but it was sent only to me, not issued publicly.

Our repeated requests for the mayor to share her statement on the city's website, on the mayor's page or in her weekly Friday newsletter so the general Seattle community could be made aware of the problem of anti-Semitism and the need to combat it were ignored.

Last month, during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, two visibly Jewish individuals were assaulted by an antifa activist shouting anti-Semitic epithets as they erected a Sukkah in Westlake Park. The Sukkah, a temporary

dwelling where meals are customarily eaten during the weeklong holiday, was built with the necessary municipal permit.

But recognition of the treasured American freedom to practice one's religion does not shield Jews from abuse. A few days into the holiday, the same hostile individual stormed into the Sukkah, as three people were peacefully enjoying their festive meal. He spewed more anti-Semitic tropes and again threatened to kill them. The following day he stalked two of the same people as they walked downtown after leaving their synagogue and asked them if they were "going back to the hut," the Sukkah.

One of the victims, a rabbi, shared with me his shock that anti-Semitism, including blatant threats of violence, does not incite outrage from our elected officials. Indeed, Seattle leadership said nothing after the perpetrator was arrested and charged with a hate crime and criminal harassment.

Seattle's political and civic leadership are not responsible for the existence of anti-Semitism in our city, but the inexplicable resistance to speak out on anti-Semitism in our city is telling. Those in leadership roles must be held accountable for failing to respond, especially when that same leadership appropriately responds so forcefully to other manifestations

of hate.

A new national poll of American Jews revealed how deeply worried they are about anti-Semitism in the United States. The American Jewish Committee survey found that 88% say anti-Semitism is a problem in the U.S. today, with more than a third (38%) calling it a very serious problem. Anti-Semitism in the U.S. has increased, say 84% — and a plurality, 43%, say it has increased a lot — over the past five years.

Moreover, the survey confirmed that American Jews see anti-Semitism coming from three primary sources. The extreme political right poses a threat to American Jews, said 89%, with 49% saying it's a very serious threat; 64% said the extreme political left; and 85% said extremism in the name of Islam.

There is a tendency in the Pacific Northwest to almost exclusively blame elements on the far-right for hate crimes while averting pernicious acts of anti-Semitism from factions on the far-left with the same equivalence. This myopic approach is an affront to Jews and allows a threat to the wider community to grow unhindered. One can see a similar hesitancy to identify the individuals, obviously not white supremacists, who have carried out a rash of attacks on Jews in New York City. Americans would do well to view anti-Semitism with a trifocal lens.

The latest FBI Hate Crimes Statistics report should move us all to respond with determination to fighting anti-Semitism in any form it presents. The FBI data shows that Jews again topped the list of all religious bias crimes in 2018, despite making up less than 2% of the U.S. population.

The failures of Seattle's leadership to respond to anti-Semitic incidents with immediacy, publicly and forcefully, underscores just how legitimate those fears are. Anti-Semitism is deep-seated in our society and, like a cancer, will continue to metastasize if not confronted. And, as we know from history, anti-Semitism begins with the targeting of Jews, but if left unchecked, will ultimately threaten other minorities and society at-large.

Hate is hate. Discrimination and bigotry, whether based on race, religion, sexuality, gender or ethnicity, should never be tolerated or ignored. Why is it so difficult to call out anti-Semitism and take action to effectively fight it? ■

*Regina Sassoon Friedland is director of the American Jewish Committee, Seattle region.*



# "Never Open Your Mouth to Satan"

**"Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, 'One should never open his mouth to Satan'" (Ketubot 8b).**

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish advised against this, so we must understand the danger. More primarily, what specific act is considered "opening one's mouth to Satan?" The example the Talmud cites is the first chapter of Isaiah where the Jews blamed themselves:

*Your land is a waste, Your cities burnt down; before your eyes, the yield of your soil is consumed by strangers—a wasteland overthrown by strangers! Fair Zion is left Like a booth in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city beleaguered. Had not the Lord of Hosts left us some survivors, we should be like Sodom, another Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:7-9).*

Isaiah ridiculed those Jews, using their own characterization:

*Hear the word of the Lord, you chieftains of Sodom; Give ear to our God's instruction, you folk of Gomorrah! "What need have I of all your sacrifices?" says the Lord. "I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and suet of fatlings, and blood of bulls; and I have no delight in lambs and he-goats" (Ibid 1:10,11).*

Isaiah called the Jews Sodomites just as they called themselves. The Jews "opened their mouths to Satan." But as this is ill-advised, what harm is their in debasing oneself as a Sodomite? No powers or forces exist, as foolish people believe; calling oneself a name generates no harm.

But their is a harm: through self debasement, one views himself in a negative light and will either continue to sin through such identification, or won't feel capable of repenting. This is why Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish advised against "opening one's mouth to Satan," which we define as "reinforcing negativity; reinforcing one's instincts."

Meharsha comments:

*This matter, even in thought, arouses God's judgment, to the point that Satan convicts and the sinner admits to his sin that he is fit to get punished. And that is what is meant by, "We should be like Sodom, another Gomorrah." They accepted their indictment, and through Isaiah's prophecy they were told they were fit for the punishment, as Isaiah called them "chieftains of Sodom."*

The Jews' poor self-assessment as Sodomites deserved ridicule from Isaiah. Instead, they should have repented and abandoned their Sodomite role playing. But as they remained with that self-assessment as Sodomites, they strengthened their instinctual drives (referred to as "Satan convicts"). The Jews should have controlled their instinctual drives instead of identifying with them. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish taught that "opening one's mouth to Satan" refers to reinforcing one's instincts (Satan) which is harmful and must be avoided. ■

## Condemnation is Self-Ridicule

**"Anyone who condemns others is flawed, he will never praise others, and with his own flaw does he condemn" (Kiddushin 70b ).**

Such a person flawed because condemnation reveals one's preoccupation with man, not God. He is competitive. Instead, one should be occupied with perfection, with his relationship with God, and not with man. Preoccupation with others stems from ego and insecurity. Such a person lives a psychological life, where the social is a primary value. But Torah teaches that man is to be humble, which stems from disconcert for human acceptance, and a value for God and His wisdom. Torah dismisses social statuses and the need for human approval. Moses—the greatest man—was the most humble man. This was God's praise of him. The social realm is not man's perfection. The perfected person cares nothing for the approval of others, as he understands that reality exists to offer man the opportunity to uncover God's wisdom. But imperfect man views reality as a platform to project his ego.

Another aspect of this social lifestyle is self esteem. One assesses his specific trait or behavior as good or bad typically based on societal norms. Here again, one values public approval. And when one possesses a trait he deems negative, his ego shields him from self criticism, and instead, condemns another possessing that trait. He needs to vent his ridicule of the trait, but as he cant condemn himself, it is that specific trait he finds fault with in another person, although that other person may have 5 other flaws. ■

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