

This issue dedicated to: Dan, Callie and Jamie Corro. -Robin Feigelis

TO DEDICATE AN ISSUE, WRITE US:  
INFO@MESORA.ORG

**Shulchan Aruch [Yoreh Deah 178:1]:**

The Vilna Gaon cites the Tosefta in Talmud Shabbos (chap. 7) declaring the red string as "ways of the Emorite". The Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chaim; 301:27) also states that objects with no recognizable value may not be worn on the Sabbath, making the red strings prohibited based on Shabbos laws as well.

ESTD  
1997

# JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification  
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume IV, No. 26...April 1, 2005

[WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES](http://WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES)

and Print Free

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

PARSHA: SHEMINI	1,6,7
PASSOVER	1-5
TZEDAKA	8

**NEW AT MESORA:**

SEE THIS AND OTHER FEATURES AT OUR SITE

**Subscribe Free**

Receive the JewishTimes free each Friday morning. Send any email to: [subscribe@mesora.org](mailto:subscribe@mesora.org)

**Weekly Parsha**

## Shemini

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Speak to Bnai Yisrael and tell them to take unblemished animals: a goat for a sin offering, a yearling calf and a lamb for a burnt offering, and a bull and a ram for a peace offering." (VaYikra 9:3)

Our parasha describes the sacrifices offered on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishcan. Our

(continued on page 6)

# EGYPT

PASSOVER TEACHES US NOT TO REPEAT THEIR IDOLATRY. ARE WE LISTENING?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

As Passover quickly approaches, it is time that we realign ourselves with its fundamental: the unequivocal rejection of idolatry. I felt it apropos to reiterate some of the major themes plaguing Judaism today, unfortunately accepted by many observant Jews. It is essential to one's knowledge of God, that all forms of idolatry are identified and rejected, regardless of the number of Jewish adherents.

(continued on next page)



*Although a Torah command,  
Jews have successfully degraded the  
Mezuzah into an idolatrous,  
protective device - violating God,  
the rabbis, and reason.*



## AYIN HARAHAH

Rashi states that when the brothers of Joseph came down to Egypt, they were commanded by their father Jacob to enter Egypt through separate entrances so the Ayin Harah should not have power over them. Does this mean that Ayin Harah is a magical force existing in this world? Can people successfully cast a "spell" or curse on someone else? If so, when does a person finally reach this level, and how does he achieve it? We don't see that God gave this power to anyone, nor has anyone ever witnessed such abilities in others. It would be quite cruel of a God to create a destructive force, and not tell the members of the human race that He created this force. Are we just supposed to suffer by it until we figure it out? Would this not contradict the idea that God is just? These types of questions have no rational answer, as the question is based on that which is not true.

Don't be led to believe something because many others (even Jews) follow it. This is no proof. Many people following a "belief" does not show the belief to be accurate. You must follow your mind.

Assuming a supernatural force is unnecessary here. One should try to give an explanation, which assumes the least. This principle is called "Occam's Razor". For example, when we witness a ball being dropped, and it's bounce keeps diminishing until it finds itself at complete rest, we don't assume that there is a creature inside the ball moving progressively slower, and this is why the ball behaves as such. We look for a simple, logical explanation. We don't assume what is unnecessary. If we can explain the phenomena by understanding the nature of the item at hand, we should look no further.

The same applies to Ayin Harah.

Ayin Harah can be explained very simply: It refers to a psychological state of the person. If one says, "My...what a beautiful baby," Others will say, "Don't give it an Ayin Harah". Does this mean that this statement of admiration of an infant can cause some change in the baby? Not at all. Words have no power, other than producing a change in the listener. What might happen is, that another mother will be jealous that this statement wasn't made about *her* child, and unconsciously, she develops jealous aggression towards the favored baby or the mother. The unconscious of a person is very cunning; usually going undetected, and needs satisfaction. This jealous mother might unconsciously, "accidentally" pour some of her drink on the mother, or the child. But the act of spilling doesn't assume a new power in the universe. It is explained as an existing emotion -

jealousy. The fact that spilling occurs on the heels of the statement of admiration is not due to a power, but to jealousy acting out through the unconscious. This mother can't tolerate another child receiving more admiration than hers, and unconsciously pours her drink on the other mother, taking out her aggression.

No mystical explanation of Ayin Harah has to be employed to explain this scenario. A person with chachma (wisdom) of human nature will explain this very easily.

### Ayin Harah in Reference to the Brothers

The same applies to the brothers as they entered Egypt. Jacob knew that his sons were of great stature, as we see that only two of them were able to destroy an entire city. Jacob figured that 10 men of great stature coupled with a foreign appearance walking through the gates of Egypt would raise some eyebrows. Imagine 10 tall foreigners walking through Tel Aviv Airport. Security would definitely be suspicious. There was no reason for the brothers to bring undue suspicion upon themselves. Jacob wisely commanded them to each enter through a separate gate. This would minimize any attention. Jacob's suggestion was a smart one, and was not based on a fear of mystical powers. Rather, it was based on his understanding of human psychology and the desire for his son's safety.

Additionally, we find the term "Ayin Tova" in Pirkei Avos (Avos 2:9). The Bartenura and Maimonides both describe Ayin Tovah to be a person who is satisfied with what he has, and the Ayin Harah to mean person who is never satisfied. Both Rishonim do not make mention of any mystical powers. Let us follow the Rishonim, and not the simpletons of today's society.

We must endeavor to catch ourselves when we sense a need to explain something mystically. We should patiently try to understand the Rabbis words with rational thought, not with excited fantasy.

## MEZUZAH

There are many Jews who believe that the mezuzah has some "power" of protection. Ask these people if you can light a match to a mezuzah and it should not burn, and they will respond, "of course it burns." Our obvious response, "If a mezuzah cannot protect itself, how can it protect anything outside itself?"

Foolish people who look to the mezuzah for physical protection have already been admonished by Maimonides, (Hilchos Mezuzah, 5:4). There, he calls such people fools for

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

## Passover



seeking protection. He states that they take a command, which is in fact for the lofty purpose of guiding us towards profound ideas on the Unity of God, His love and His service, and they make it into an amulet of benefit. Maimonides states they have no share in the next world.

These unfortunate individuals make the same error as those who wear red bendels. Just as the Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath (Chap. 7) says red strings on fingers are prohibited, so too those who mock God's command of mezuzah. I would like to quote the Shulchan Aruch, in the Gilyon M'harsha, Yoreh Daah, 289, page 113 on the bottom: **"If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by G-d. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes"**. These are very strong words from this very well known Rabbi. But what is his lesson? He is teaching us that God is the only source of protection, and that physical objects have no power. Rather, if one feels they do, these objects, even a mezuzah, will be the opposite, "knives in his eyes" - something destructive. We say every day, "He (God) alone is the Master of wonders". Do we not listen to ourselves as we pray? He is "alone" in His role of Master.

It is of the utmost importance that above all, we have the correct notion of God. He alone is the only source of power in the universe. Magic, enchanters, psychics, voodoo, etc., are all hoaxes. Even the Egyptian astrologers of old were correctly explained as having used slight of hand. (Saadia Gaon in "Emunos v'Daos") There is no such thing as witchcraft. God's distinction is exclusive. To assume other powers in the universe means to assume a diminution in God.

I would add one important observation: The notion that mezuzas have powers is actually the opposite of its real purpose. Mezuzah, tefillin and tzitzis serve to take man's investment of security in physical objects, and redirect it towards God. Man invests strength in his limbs, ego in his clothing, and security in his home. God commands us to realize our error, and redirect our security towards Him alone, as this is the truth, and our thoughts are false. We are to remind ourselves of God as we enter our homes and see the mezuzah. We reflect on our frail bodies as we don tefillin. And we loosen the grip of the ego as we incorporate tzitzis into our wardrobe. Maimonides groups mezuzah, tefillin and tzitzis under one heading, and I believe it is for this reason. Similarly, leprosy strikes one's home, then his clothing, and finally one's body - the same three objects. The purpose? To teach a sinful individual that he is a victim of evil speech. But God teaches man in a merciful

fashion: first, through objects of his identification before attacking his body. Identification is closely related to security.

If we understand the mitzvot by in depth study as God desires, we will protect ourselves from all foolish notions, which unfortunately circulate with appeal among our brethren. As long as one abandons Torah study and simply "follows the leader", Jews will remain victims of nonsensical notions and forfeit their "World to Come." Only he or she who uses their mind will learn what is real, and will abandon that which is false, and which the Rabbis collectively admonished us to repel.

## SEGULAH

**Reader:** In my community people are too involved in what's called a segula. Can you please elucidate what this is and explain what is the right way to approach it? By the way, I was wondering where you learned this approach to the Torah. I am subjected to all these nonsensical ideas about ayin hara, segula and the like. Fortunately I went to the proper school and was taught to think the correct way.

**Mesora:** Segula is nothing more than another attempt by the insecure mind to guard oneself with physical objects. This is obviously foolish and affords no security. Furthermore, it is a form of idolatry, as it is a projection of powers onto creation.

Why there is such a thing as segula? Haven't people already "protected" themselves with the other falsehood, that mezuzas protect us? Perhaps, people aren't always in proximity to a mezuzah. This creates insecurity. So they create a mobile, protective device. What people do with segulas, is to force a physical object into their Judaic practices, and call it a segula, a salvation of sorts. They need it to fit into Judaism because an outright claim that a mere physical object has powers is something their view of Judaism won't tolerate. So they say that this device will either help one get married, protect children, or give financial success...all things which satisfy their idea of the essence of Jewish life.

But if we examine the true, Torah authorities, the patriarchs, the Rishonim and all Jewish leaders in the Torah and Prophets, we find no segulas. They relied upon God alone. The intelligent Jew is not impressed with physical objects. Did not King David state in Tehillim:147, "Not in the legs of a man does He (God) favor, God favors those who fear Him". If one should not rely on an animate being, but rely on God, certainly, one should not rely on these inanimate objects known as segulas.

One should realize the fact that only God has

(continued on next page)

*This idolatrous amulet is called a chamsa from the Hebrew word relating to five (hand); it foolishly refers to the hand of God, thereby violating Torah fundamentals and equating God to the physical. It is popular among Jews and Muslims, used to 'banish' assumed, evil powers.*

*This chamsa includes a number of 'good luck' symbols, such as an eye to ward off the evil eye and the Hebrew word chai, meaning life.*

*Items as these violate the Torah.*

*(continued from previous page)***Passover**

*The small bird exiting its hole contrasts the larger man-made Horus bird deity engraving of ancient Egypt.*

*It is the way of idolaters to forfeit reality in place of fantasy. In Egypt, man's internal fantasy world dominated the true, external world.*



## THE BENDEL

power. If you can show this to other people, you will be doing them a great service. Saving one from the false ideas of the times can make the difference between their receiving Olam Haba, or not. Rambam talks about people who believe mezuzas have powers, and claims they have no world to come. These foolish people are making a mistake in the most serious of areas. They remove God's distinction as the Sole Creator when they ascribe power to other objects.

Keep asking questions and don't accept that which has no source in the Rabbis' words, in Torah, or in reason. Let only that which makes sense to your mind enter your value system. Do not be impressed by mere numbers. Just as millions of people suggesting  $2+2=5$  will never sway your mind, so too, thousands of Jews who err must not affect what you see as truth, what you see as true Torah ideals.

To answer your last question, this approach, is the only approach: reason. One, who studies the Rabbis, the Talmud, and the Torah accurately, will arrive at what is sensible. It is only when Jews fail to study, that their emotions are not in check, and they manufacture falsehoods.

**Reader:** You've come down awfully hard on Jewish women who wear Red Bendels, or mothers who tie red ribbons on their children's cribs and baby carriages. I'm looking at the peace of mind benefits, the good feeling of possible protection derived from these actions.

We live in a world loaded with FEARS! I don't believe that any previous generations had as much FEAR awareness as we have now. Pick up any newspaper, magazine, Jewish or secular, and what do we constantly read? This person, child, adult, or group is killed or injured. The media thrives on calamity! T.V. is no better! How come, when we switch channels at news time, they all are presenting the same news: calamity, kidnapping, robbery, injury, fires, crashes, murder, terrorism, and sickness?

The mad actions of degenerates have created a generation of phobics! The mad actions of "hopeless" societies have dominated the world scenes. FEAR is being created in our minds every second of the day.

Forget about degenerates. Lets look at the medical profession. We know how they work. First create FEAR in their patients, and then they

*(continued on next page)*



get the automatic return visit, or a recommended procedure. One of the largest purchasers of T.V. advertising is the drug industry. They are constantly offering safe remedies, but with possible dangerous side affects. These commercials are a constant reminder to sicknesses. So, whichever way we turn, we have FEAR breathing up our necks, into our brains, into our souls.

So let's be realistic! Anything, which can give us relief, a false sense of safety, a false feeling of a counter-balance to FEAR, is a good! Isn't a red Bendel or red ribbon helping certain people squelch their FEARS?

If these items give some peace of mind, extra comfort, to a nervous mother, isn't the benefit more important than adhering to Torah and don'ts? It's all very nice and good, when you quote ancient Rabbis' decisions and opinions, observing events and evaluating peoples' actions in the twelfth century. But how much FEAR was their generation subjected to? They weren't made aware of Holocausts and wars occurring 60 years before. They weren't able to see movies and photos and newspapers vividly depicting the horrors we have in our memory banks today. They weren't able to see the horrible results of a bus bomb, which had just taken place 7,000 miles away. Their FEAR was limited to their small shtetl. Maybe they were better off without T.V., without state of the art communications. How do we weigh the benefits of a good, against the infringement?

Let's look at the FEAR of making a safe car trip, a safe boat trip, and a safe plane trip. When someone receives a coin, or a bill to take with him or her, to have a safe trip, is this not the same as the red ribbon? Isn't it another article of protection? Doesn't this schleach gelt offer the same opposite to FEAR? Some people say there is no infringement because the traveler is on a mitzvah mission. So using a red Bendel is not allowed, but using a dollar bill, is allowed? I think we should focus on the benefit, rather than on the vehicle possibly producing the benefit. And what is the benefit? Subduing the FEAR. Affording a little extra comfort.

**Mesora:** First, I would distinguish between the real Torah merit of charity, and man's manufactured red bendels. But I don't feel one should assume with 100% conviction that he will be protected on board a jet because he plans to give \$1.00 when he arrives in Israel.

However, more central to your comments, you already answered your own question above, "isn't the benefit more important than adhering to Torah?"

Torah knowledge is absolute reality, i.e., truth...and all that opposes Torah, is falsehood. Similarly, we view God's other creation, the

universe, and observe real laws. Any theory contradicting these laws is false, as our eyes and our experiments do not lie.

We realize all that God created - be it in His universe, or in His Torah - are what is truly "real", and all that contradicts His universal laws and Torah, as complete falsehood: we detect gravity, so a theory that gravity does not exist is falsehood. We sense that heat is conductive; hence, a theory that heat does not spread is false. Similarly, we realize that God is responsible for all that exists, so a theory that physical objects override His will or His system of "Reward and Punishment", is false. Red strings, rabbit's feet, horse shoes and the like have no demonstrable properties that can remove life's troubles. They are therefore viewed as lies.

We can lie to our lives, assuming to combat real issues with manufactured panaceas. Or we can analyze our fears and problems, detect their source in reality, and then address those very real causes with real solutions and strategies, resulting in a happier existence. It's all up to you...do you wish to pretend, and fantasize away your fears, or live in reality, and eliminate your troubles in a real way? A rational person would desire his problems to cease permanently in reality, and not temporarily in his imagination.

The truth is, your position is contradictory: for if you feel you may fantasize away your fear using a red string, why don't you just "imagine" to be wearing that string as well?

However, your very act of "wearing" a red string implies that you affirm "cause and effect" methods: the cause is "wearing" the string. Certainly you feel that if you do not wear the string, it cannot help you. But if you truly agree with cause and effect, study these red strings, and see if you determine any effect it may have. If you see no benefit in reality, you must abandon wearing these strings. Here's an experiment for you: take 2 eggs, and tie a red string around one. Drop both of them off of your roof. If the egg with the string does not break, then keep wearing it.

I will end with a quote from one of Judaism's greatest thinkers:

*"Those with empty brains say 'were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues."*

(Ibn Ezra, Leviticus, 19:31) □

(continued from page 1)

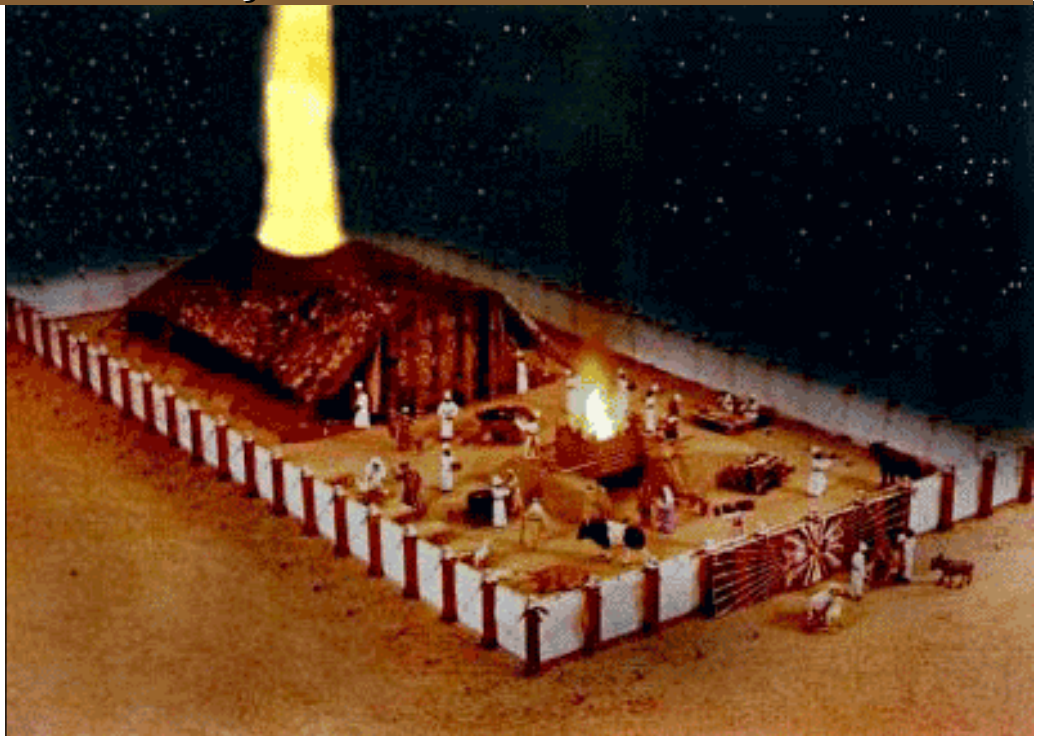
pasuk indicates that Bnai Yisrael offered a sin offering and two Olah sacrifices. Why were these specific sacrifices required? Gershonides observes that these sacrifices are similar to those required to atone for idol worship. If the nation unintentionally engages in idolatry, it must atone through sacrifices. The required sacrifices are a goat as a sin offering and a bull as an Olah sacrifice. In our case, a goat was brought as a sin offering. However, two Olah sacrifices were required. One was a calf and the other was a lamb. Gershonides asks the obvious question. Why did the Olah offerings differ from those typically brought to atone for idolatry?

Of course, there is a more basic question. If these sacrifices were intended to resemble the atonement for idolatry, the nation must have been guilty of that sin. What act of idolatry had the nation performed? Gershonides suggests that the calf was intended to atone for the Egel HaZahav - the Golden Calf. The lamb was offered because the Egyptians had worshiped this animal. This explains the significance of these two offerings. Nonetheless, we are still left with a question. We can understand that the need to atone for the Egel. However, why was the nation required to offer a lamb representing the deity of the Egyptian? Initiation of the Mishcan required an absolute repudiation of the idolatry. Bnai Yisrael had been influenced by the idolatry of the Egyptians. The nation was now required to again reject these practices. The Egyptians worshiped the lamb. Through the Olah offering, Bnai Yisrael rejected the Egyptian deity. This does not completely resolve the issue.

The nation had already performed the service of the Pascal lamb before leaving Egypt. This service certainly demonstrated the nation's rejection of Egyptian practices. Why was this further demonstration needed? The answer lies in the second Olah offering. This Olah was a calf. It represented atonement for the Golden Calf - the Egel HaZahav. Through constructing the Egel, the nation returned to idolatrous practices learned in Egypt. Therefore, Bnai Yisrael was required to again repudiate these attitudes.

The Midrash Torat Kohanim offers a different reason for offering a goat as a sin offering. This sacrifice atoned for the goat slaughtered by Yosef's brothers. The brothers killed a goat and dipped Yosef's cloak into the blood. They sent the garment to Yaakov and suggested that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal. With this deception, the brothers attempted to conceal their own treatment of Yosef. Why was it necessary at this point to atone for this sin? What is the relationship between the inauguration of the Mishcan and the brother's plot against Yosef?

We must consider the brothers motivation for wishing to destroy Yosef? One factor was Yosef's claim that he would assume a position of



authority over the brothers. Yosef told the brothers that they would not all be equals. He would be a leader over the others. The brothers rejected this vision. They were unwilling to accept the arrangement Yosef described. Bnai Yisrael was now faced with a similar situation. The service in the Mishcan would be performed by a single tribe - Shevet Leyve. The other tribes would not participate in this service. The nation was required to demonstrate acceptance of this arrangement. The goat offering provided this demonstration. Through offering this sacrifice, the nation rejected the view of Yosef's brothers. The nation acknowledged the right of Shevet Leyve to assume a leadership role. The people confirmed that the tribes would not be entirely equal.

**"And a fire went forth from before Hashem. And it consumed the Olah sacrifice and the fats from upon the altar. And the nation saw. And they sang out and fell upon their faces".** (VaYikra 9:24)

The Mishcan was completed and inaugurated. Ahron, the Kohen Gadol offered his first sacrifices. A flame came forth, directed by the Almighty, and consumed the sacrifices from upon the altar. The nation of Israel responded in song. Targum Unkelos explains that the song of the people was not a mere expression of joy. The song was composed of praise of the Almighty. Why did Bnai Yisrael feel compelled to praise Hashem at this moment? The Almighty is the Creator of the Universe. He is exalted above all of His creations. Yet, He relates to and cares for humanity.

It is easy for us to misinterpret this relationship.

We can become egotistical about this special attention. There is an even greater danger. Chovot HaLevavot explains that we can begin to take G-d's kindness for granted. We may even begin to believe that we deserve this attention from the Creator and He owes us this special treatment. The Torah requires that we never forget the greatness of Hashem. He does not act with grace towards humanity to satisfy His needs. He has no needs or wants. We must realize that the Almighty's love for us is an expression of His unfathomable kindness. We cannot explain His benevolence. We can only conclude that it emanates from His incomprehensible essence.

The flame descended and consumed the sacrifices upon the altar. Praise was essential at this moment. Bnai Yisrael must be reminded of Hashem's greatness. The people could not allow the Almighty's attention to lead to a diminution of His greatness. This praise helped assure that the people remained focused upon the infinite greatness of Hashem.

**"Moshe said to Ahron, "This is exactly what Hashem meant when He said, 'I will be sanctified among those close to Me, and I will be glorified'". And Ahron was silent."** (VaYikra 10:3)

Ahron's sons Nadav and Avihu offer a sacrifice that is not authorized. They are killed by the Almighty. Moshe consoles Ahron. He tells Ahron that he had realized that the sanctity of the Mishcan would be demonstrated through the death of a righteous individual. Nadav and Avihu have provided this demonstration. Ahron accepts this consolation. Moshe communicates a second

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

message to Ahron in his consolation. Ahron is required to offer the sacrifices on this eighth day of the inauguration. This will prevent Ahron from mourning his sons. Ahron accepts Moshe's direction. He does not forsake his responsibilities as Kohen Gadol. Instead, he continues to serve in the Mishcan. Rashi explains that Ahron was rewarded for his silence and his acceptance of Moshe's direction. As a result of his response, Ahron received a commandment directly from the Almighty.

Hashem rewards us in a manner that corresponds with our merits. How did this reward correspond with Ahron's behavior?

Maimonides explains that a person cannot receive prophecy when sad or mourning. This is the reason Yaakov did not receive prophecy during the period he mourned for Yosef. Yet, Ahron experienced prophecy almost immediately after the death of his sons! How is this possible? Moshe's condolences were not merely aimed at comforting Ahron. Moshe did not want Ahron to allow his personal tragedy to interfere with the inauguration of the Mishcan. According to Rashbam this was the essence of Moshe's message to Ahron. Through continuing to serve in the Mishcan, Ahron would demonstrate that this service was more important than mourning his sons. Ahron's silence indicated that he had accepted Moshe's counsel. We can now understand the relationship between Ahron's silence and the prophecy he received. This prophecy was a direct result of Ahron's response to Moshe's words. Ahron realized that it was not appropriate to mourn. He continued to serve the Almighty in happiness. As a result, he was fit to receive prophecy. Hashem rewarded Ahron in a manner that demonstrated Ahron's remarkable character.

**"To distinguish between the unclean and the clean and between the animals that may be eaten and the animals you may not eat."**  
(VaYikra 11:47)

The Torah discusses the species that are prohibited and those that we may consume. This discussion ends with the above pasuk. On a superficial level the pasuk is explaining the reason for the preceding discussion. The Torah requires that we distinguish between the clean and unclean animals. We must know which species are permitted and which are prohibited. In order to fulfill this obligation, a body of law is required. The lengthy discussion provides the legal basis to perform our obligation.

Sforno offers an alternative explanation of our pasuk. He explains that the Torah is revealing the reason for the prohibitions. Certain species are permitted and others are prohibited. The reason for these laws is to teach us to distinguish between the prohibited and the permitted. This explanation

is difficult to understand. In short, Sforno is saying that the Torah requires that we distinguish between various species so that we learn to distinguish. This seems circular!

Sforno is teaching us an important lesson. To understand his message we must remember that the human being is composed of a material element combined with a spiritual component. The mission of the human being is to exert the power of the spiritual over the material. How is this accomplished? We cannot ignore our material element. We must eat and respond to other material needs! How do we prevent ourselves from becoming excessively involved with our material element? The Torah responds to this dilemma. It provides a means by which the material function of eating can be converted to a spiritual expression. Through following the laws of the Torah we learn to guide our desires by a system of law. Eating becomes an expression of halacha rather than a purely instinctual function. This is Sforno's message. The laws teach us to distinguish. This process of discerning the permitted and the prohibited transforms the act of eating into a spiritual activity. □

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shegagot 12:1. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Rabag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1997), pp. 119. Rabbaynu Bachya ibn Paquda, Chovot HaLevavot, Part 3, Chapter 2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 2, chapter 36. Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 10:3. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 11:46.

## Spring Rates

# New

Purchase a Mesora HTML email ad, and receive 2 more ads **FREE**: one here in the JewishTimes, and an ad on our homepage. Inquire here:  
[info@mesora.org](mailto:info@mesora.org)



# \$895

**HTML Email Ads**



# Tzedaka the Perfections of

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## THE 8 LEVELS OF CHARITY

[SHULCHAN ARUCH, YOREH DEAH; 249:6-13]:

- 1) ASSISTING THE POOR PERSON SO HE NO LONGER REQUIRES CHARITY, I.E., GIVING HIM A JOB
- 2) WHERE THE DONOR AND RECIPIENT ARE BOTH IGNORANT OF EACH OTHER (THIS REMOVES EGO FROM THE DONOR, AND HUMILITY FROM THE RECIPIENT)
- 3) THE DONOR ALONE KNOWS THE RECIPIENT, BUT NOT VICE VERSA
- 4) THE POOR PERSON KNOWS THE DONOR, BUT BUT NOT VICE VERSA
- 5) BOTH KNOW EACH OTHER, AND THE DONOR GIVES PRIOR TO BEING ASKED
- 6) YOU GIVE THE POOR PERSON WHAT HE ASKS, ONLY AFTER HE ASKS
- 7) YOU GIVE THE POOR PERSON LESS THAN WHAT HE ASKS, BUT WITH A PLEASANT COUNTEenance
- 8) YOU GIVE THE POOR PERSON BEGRUDGINGLY

The Torah saw it necessary to record two accounts of tzedaka. This is because I believe there are two basic concepts regarding tzedaka.

One story is about Avraham, after he defeated the five kings, where Malkitzedek brought out bread and wine to nourish Avraham, and Avraham gave a tenth of his possessions to Malkitzedek. The second account, describes Jacob, upon his flee from his brother Esav, where God, in the famous dream of the ladder, assured Jacob of His Divine providence. Here we find Jacob swore to give a tenth. We learn two ideas about tzedaka from these accounts.

Regarding Avraham, as Malkitzedek greeted him with the bread and wine, it says that Malkitzedek blessed Avraham. However, Avraham did not respond. But in the next passage, Malkitzedek blessed again, only in this blessing, he is blessing God, not Avraham. In this very same sentence, it records that Avraham then gave Malkitzedek a tenth of all that he had. Why did Avraham wait for the second blessing? I believe that the Torah is indicating here that there must be a proper recipient for tzedaka. Once Malkitzedek blessed God, he defined himself as that proper recipient.

In connection with Jacob, there is a different lesson. Here, I believe the focus is not on the recipient, but on the benefactor, namely Jacob. Jacob's tenth displayed 2 objectives: 1) he wanted to demonstrate that all which he received was directly from God. Therefore the concept of returning possessions to God made sense. 2) He had no fear that by being charitable, that he was in any way placing himself in monetary risk. He was certain that God would continually provide.

The gain then that one receives by giving tzedaka is that he is constantly affirming his belief that God provides, and will provide for him. The charitable person has no problem parting with his money. Firstly, this is not his central value system, the pursuit of wisdom is. Secondly, he does not look at this as a loss. We learn in Malachi (3:10) that God tells the Jews that charity is the one area a person is allowed to "test" God, to see if He will return to us financial success. God states, "...and test Me please with this, says the Master of Hosts, (see) if I do not open up the storehouses of heaven, and empty out (for you) a blessing until you have more than enough". God is guaranteeing that by giving

tzedaka, we assure for ourselves financial security, and not an average income, but "until we have more than enough".

We learn from Abraham and Jacob that one must give to a worthwhile recipient, and that one affirms his convictions in God's kindness and generosity towards man when we are charitable. We lose nothing in the process, but rather, we secure God's blessings. We also affirm our convictions that the very monies we give, are in fact from God, by giving to those who follow God.

One might listen to these words with a bit of disbelief and ask, "How will God accomplish that? I give tzedaka, and God will give me financial success?"

To this person I would ask, "Did not God create the heavens and earth? The sun and moon? The innumerable number of spheres in space? Is it not then a small thing for Him to give financial increase? Recognition of those who have less than us is commanded many times in the Torah. There are many reasons for us to adhere to this command. As Maimonides states in the Mishneh Torah, "this commands must be followed more carefully than all other positive commands". One who thinks this through will arrive at the truth, that he should experience no sense of risk when he gives his tzedaka.

Tzedaka is not defined merely as giving money as its own ends. The obligation of tzedaka when giving to the poor is to also restore one's sense of self so he may function inline with Torah. Therefore, as Jewish law states, if one had a high level of living, where, for example he had a servant-pulled horse, and became impoverished, one's obligation is to restore to him a servant and a horse. Even if the one giving doesn't live this high, it is irrelevant, as the goal is to restore one to a state where he feels his self image restored, and can function once again, achieving the lifestyle outlined by the Torah. When we give to the poor, our intent to not simply to provide finances, but to raise this person's state of mind to a level of self-sufficiency and happiness, that he feels well enough to realign himself with the Torah lifestyle.

The Shulchan Aruch states that the highest level of charity is 20% of ones profit. Not the commonly assumed 10%. 10% is mentioned as an average person's tzedaka. But the highest form is 20%. ■

## MESORA THANKS OUR RECENT SUPPORTERS:

INA G.	SIMON Z.
GEORGE H. G.	JASON S.
HARRY K.	SERGIO R.
STEVEN M.	BRIAN F.
S. HAROLD L.	TOVA R.
THEODORE M.	MARC U.
STANLEY N.	NATHANIEL B.
JOAN G.	JACQUES B.
GUY T.	JEANNE C.
SIDNEY A.	RUTHIE G.
ALICE F.	ALEJANDRO A.
BENJAMIN W.	MR. C W.
ALAN G.	KATHLEEN B.
LILA S.	R W S.
CHARLES N.	ALEN K.
SHALOM E.	MICHAEL B V.
BRIAN B.	GENADIY G.
EVA G.	DIANE D.
GLENN E.	MARC D. P.
PACEY S.	BRUCE H.
ROBIN F.	KIM M.
PHILIP B.	SAUL P. H.