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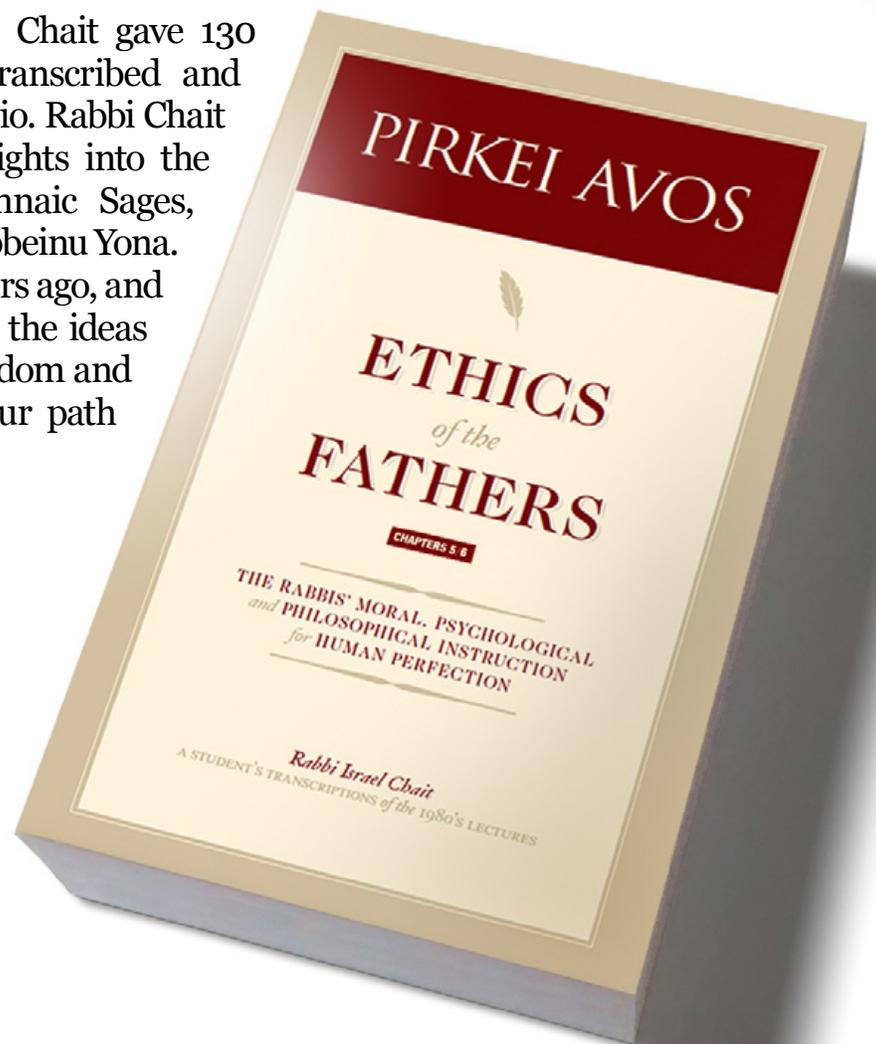
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LETTERS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



Proving God to a 6-year-old

Reader: My son recently asked me a question but was hesitant in saying it because he said he didn't want to disrespect HaShem. I told him every question is a good question, and by asking and learning we get "closer" to Him. His question was very sincere: "How do we know that He exists?" I tried to answer but my answer ended up being a bit complex, and even

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though he said he understood, I'm not sure he did. How would you answer that question? He would love to read it.

Rabbi: One argument you can give to him is based on design. Ask your son if he thinks a book can be created accidentally. Is it possible that ink flying around can land on many pages of paper and create words, sentences and stories that make sense? Can those pages somehow come together in order, and tie themselves together into a logically ordered book? Can a book cover somehow, accidentally be created with no artist or writer and land on those pages, glue it self to those pages, and create a final book?

Of course your son will say that this is impossible, and he is right. Now if we look not at a single book, but at the entire universe and the earth and see the amazing wisdom necessary for planets and stars to be created and animal life and human life to exist. And that these animals and people have stomachs and lungs that require food and air, and it happens that food air is created. And we look at the human body and see that blood delivers all of the vitamins to the whole body from the inside. And then we look at the ability of the body to close a cut on the skin and heal. Then we look at the need of water in plants and animals and people, and we see a weather system that uses clouds to bring water to every part of the earth...and what about the very existence of water itself?

So if we agree that a simple book cannot be created by accident, and there must be an author with ideas which he writes in order, then we most certainly say that there is an "author" or a creator for the entire universe. It is impossible that such tremendous design and a plan should happen by itself. A very smart designer with a plan must be in existence, and we call him God. Without God, the universe cannot exist.

You can also tell your son that things can't create themselves. Everything we see in the universe was somehow created. People, animals and



plants are the products of previous people, animals and plants. Stars and planets came into existence from previous matter. And if we keep going back in time, we get to a point about 14 billion years ago where there was a tremendous explosion which we call the Big Bang. This explosion is the earliest point in time which caused our current universe to be in a constant state of expansion today. Everything in the universe is still moving quite fast from that great explosion. Scientists tell us that galaxies are moving at great speeds away from each other. So if we go back in time, all galaxies were closer together. And if we go back further in time, all galaxies were all part of one original piece of matter at that moment of the Big Bang. Think of the universe when it started as a hand grenade, and when the hand grenade explodes, it shoots out all parts of its metal in all directions at very fast speeds. The billions of galaxies that exist are like those pieces of metal shooting out from the center where that hand grenade was. That is exactly how the universe came into existence.

And Torah tells us that God is the only one who existed before the universe, and He alone created that original matter and made it explode. But we cannot know what God is and how He existed always. But based on these ideas, we know that

He must exist. And since God knows everything because He created everything and He created us, we have a relationship with Him and we can talk to Him in prayer and ask Him to help us in our lives. And Torah spends a great amount of time discussing this exact idea of how God helped out very good people whenever they needed him.

Here's a side question for your son. What is so important to know that grasshoppers will come in large numbers, and they will eat what is "left over from the hail." If you remember, the last plague before the grasshoppers was the hail that was mixed with fire that came down from the skies and destroyed a lot of the trees and the food. Now God sends a plague of grasshoppers that will eat all fruits and vegetables that the hail did not destroy. What is the idea that these grasshoppers will continue the same job of destroying food as the hail did? This is repeated three times.

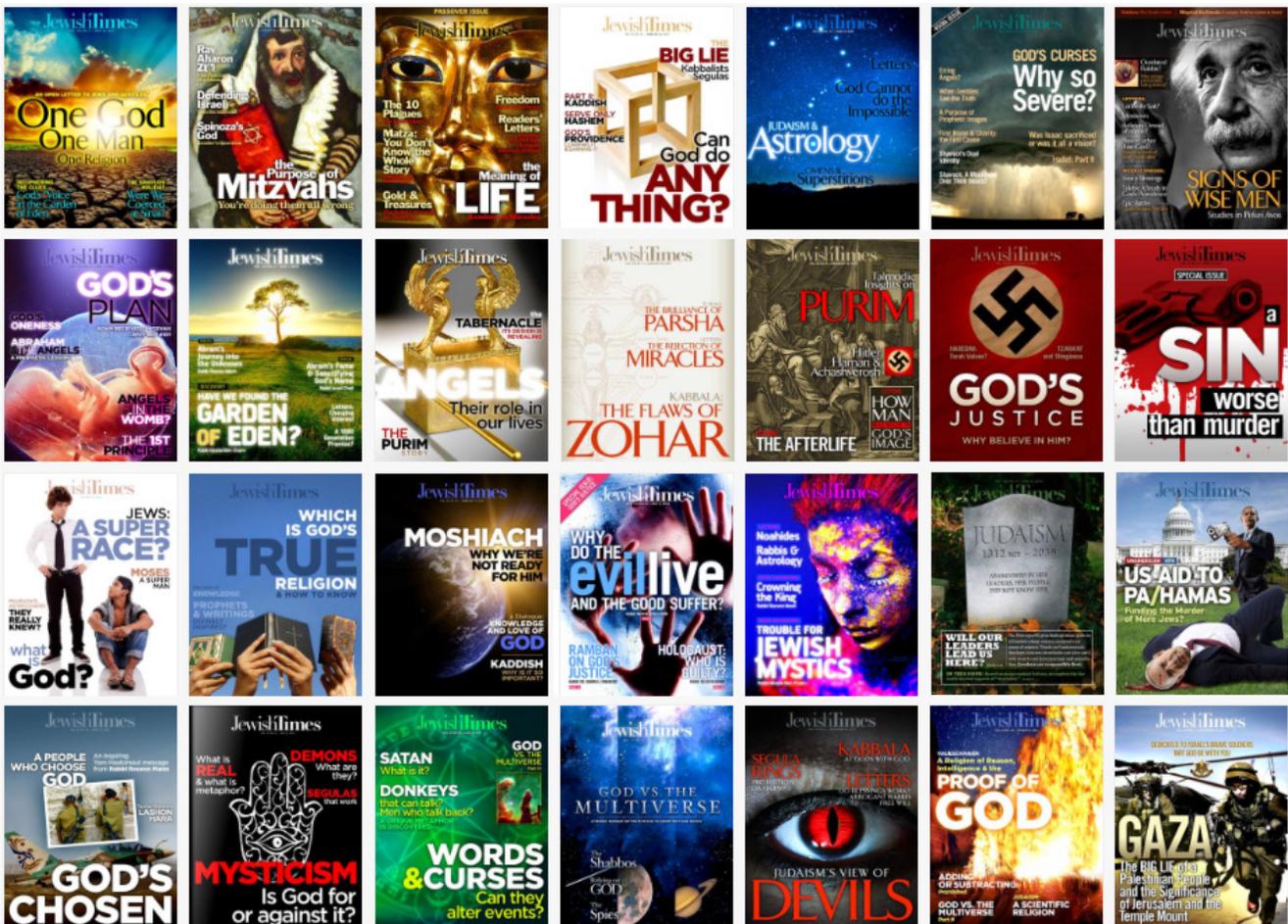
Reader: My son said, "Because Pharaoh told Moshe to stop, the hail didn't finish destroying the food. So when Pharaoh went back to do whatever he wanted to do, HaShem had to send the grasshoppers to finish the work."

Rabbi: Excellent answer! Very good! That's right! I also thought now about another answer...

Pharaoh didn't believe that Hashem is powerful, and controls ALL parts of the universe. This lesson was that Hashem makes weather, and animals (insects)—two different parts of the world—which perform the same objective, destroying food. It can't be by accident that two events—hail and grasshoppers—just "happen" to do the same thing...but it must be that someone (Hashem) is planning this and controlling both the weather and insects, and He can make them all do His will. Two independent areas of the universe that follow each other and share the same objective indicate that something is planning their identical purposes. There is a Planner, Hashem. ■

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TORAH: For All People?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Readers: Should a gentile read Torah? Are these scriptures a guide for all people, or for the Jew only? I find that these scriptures are primarily directed to Israel and do wonder if I should continue reading it.

In addition, I have looked into Islam previously and read the Quran (in English translation). The Quran is more universal in the sense that most of its message is for mankind in general.

Almost all products made by man come with some sort of manual. I believe that G-d as Creator would have also

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given a “manual” for His creation i.e mankind to follow. However the “manual” i.e Torah is directed to Israel. As an example, the prohibition against idolatry in the Torah or Tanach in general is directed to Israel and not to the nations at large. So why is it wrong then for the nations to commit idolatry?

This is not the situation in the Quran, where prohibition against idolatry is directed to all of mankind.

Thank you for looking into this query and appreciate your feedback.

Rabbi: The Torah is for all people. This is expressed through the Talmud’s statement (Avoda Zara 2b) that God offered the Torah to other nations, but they rejected it. This is not historical fact, but a homiletical lesson that Torah’s principles are intended for all people.

God did not create different types of humans; we all descend from Adam and Eve. Thus, we all possess the identical design and potential. Therefore, multiple religions is a nonsensical idea. The “best life” can be achieved by all peoples through the identical Torah system. It is a great misnomer that people are different, justifying various religions. History proves that God never gave a religion other than Judaism at Mt. Sinai 3,330 years ago. This was witnessed by millions, and why other religions adopt this as historical fact. But all other religions are fabricated and do not claim mass witnesses, for they had no event, and thus, no witnesses. Therefore, all other religions are based solely on belief and blind faith alone; they possess no proof of their claims.

The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) their wives and children were not Jews. They preceded Judaism by centuries. Thus, they were gentiles, as were all members of the human race. Their distinction was that they were monotheists, while the world served idols. God selected them to be the forerunners of Judaism, a formalized religion with Torah, monotheism and intelligence at its core, and Jews as its teachers to mankind. Yes, the Torah’s focus is on its adherents, the Jews. But it clearly states in many places that Torah is to be followed by the convert, just as the Jew follows it. God does not impose conversion, but allows one to decide to convert, and the wise individual will convert, as all other religions are man made built on primitivism and falsehoods to assuage insecurity about their lives and fates. But if one does not convert, there are a number of Noahide laws a gentile must follow, which include the prohibition of idolatry. These Noahide laws were followed by the patriarchs prior to Torah and Judaism.

God intended the Jews to be distinct through



his laws, in order that the true Torah authority (the Jew) is not confused with others who do not have Torah obligations as the Jew, and therefore, will not be as rigorous in Torah study. This would lead to inept people teaching Torah. Therefore, Torah focusses on the Jews’ obligations, and prohibits gentile Torah study (except for that which they wish to observe) and also prohibits gentile Shabbos observance, which would blur the lines as to who is the true Torah authority. Appearing as a Jew (through Shabbos observance and Torah study) the gentile—through his lack of Torah competency—will destroy Torah. But if he studies Torah to convert, he is equal to the born Jew after conversion. Kings David and Solomon and our future Messiah descend from Ruth the convert. Our greatest teachers like Unkelos and our Talmudic Rabbis were converts, or descended from them, like Rabbi Akiva. What greater proof is there that God views all humans as equals, and that Jews and Judaism recognize the same?

Torah is not simply the Five Books of Moses, but there is also the Oral Law, which is Mishna and Talmud. Torah cannot be understood without the Oral Law. The Talmudic source I cited above is an example of how at first, you did not think Torah was for all people, but Talmud clarifies that. God created two Torahs (Written and Oral) as His will is that man engage his mind, and probe God’s wisdom throughout his life. Thus, the Oral law’s “interpretive” nature of the Written law (the Five Books) follows many principles and rules that act as keys which unlock greater and greater wisdom as one probes. The Torah’s process of study takes years to master, is unmatched in pleasure, and amazes man at every turn.

God created one mankind. He formulated and gave man only one religion: Torah. All other religions are fabrications, and thus, are not of divine origin, but of human fantasy. As all people share one human design, one religion is applicable for all people. God’s intent is for all mankind to benefit from this lifestyle. In

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“...the most fortunate gentile is the one who recognizes all that is mentioned in here as truth, and decides to convert, as Torah exemplifies through Jethro and Ruth: two intellects who left their false religions to embrace the only truth, Judaism.”

contrast, idolatry is the most severe sin and applies to all people, as Torah states. God killed many idolatrous nations, as through that sin, they forfeited their purpose in life: to recognize God.

“God’s appointment of the monotheist Abraham to lead mankind, His destruction of idolatrous peoples, and that such histories are included in Torah, are clear lessons that Torah addresses all people, and that idolatry is prohibited for all people.”

You must take a step back. Before quoting the Quran or the New Testament, you must first question these two books’ claims of divine origin. You will find that not only these two religions, but no religion except Judaism proves its divine origin. This disqualifies any content of these religions, and certainly your question as to why Quran seems to address all people. It is meaningless that it does so, since Quran, the New Testament and every other religion’s texts are not God’s word. History is proven only one way: mass witnesses. No religion except Judaism has such a history of masses witnessing God’s communication. Thus, all other religions are human fabrication, easily detected in the psychological needs to which each of these religions caters. Man fabricated these religions to satisfy his infantile psychological needs for a father figure, maternal care, to alleviate guilt, physicality, righteous indignation, and other core emotions. In contrast,

Judaism focuses not on the self, on fantasy and psychological dependency, but on external reality, scientific proof, validated history, intellect...and centrally, it focuses on a Creator and His wisdom that permeates all creation and Torah.

Talmud goes into great detail concerning gentile obligations and prohibitions. As I mentioned, God gave the Written Law, and also the Oral law. Talmud is part of the latter and in it you will find very satisfying sections clearly demonstrating how Torah—the written and oral portions—address all people, not just Jews. God made all people as He equally desires all people to exist. He desires all people to know that He gave only one religion to man. Therefore, He never again gave a religion after giving Moses’ Torah.

You also asked if it’s wrong to be idolatrous, as you don’t think Torah prohibits idolatry upon gentiles. Now that we have corrected that false assumption, you must also know that even without Torah, it is against reason to carve a tree or stone into an idol, and ask it to protect you. Judaism abhors worshipping anyone or anything except God, for He alone caused the universe. Nothing else has power. This is why Jesus worship, rebbe worship, consulting the dead, superstitions, and all such acts are most severe Torah violations. We pray to God alone. Only he can answer.

Yes. A gentile should learn the Torah portions that apply to his Noahide commands. And as Maimonides teaches, if he desires to accept more than the Noahide laws, he should learn all about those laws too. However, the most fortunate gentile is the one who recognizes all that is mentioned in here as truth, and decides to convert, as Torah exemplifies through Jethro and Ruth: two intellects who left their false religions to embrace the only truth, Judaism. ■

Plaguing Questions

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Question: Torah says the astrologers could not stand before Moses because “the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt” (Exod. 9:11). First, it seems irrelevant that others had boils; the verse is addressing why the astrologers could appear before Moses, not the rest of Egypt. Secondly, boils don’t affect posture, as a skeletal or muscular disease would. So how did the boils prevent the astrologers’ “standing”?

Answer: Standing before others, also means to “present one’s self”...to appear before others. The astrologers attempted to reproduce the plagues, only to expose their inabilities. When they could not reproduce the plague of lice, they hid their inability behind the lying claim, “...it is the finger of God (Exod. 8:15).” It is significant that God records their feeble attempts. So significant, that it appears from the very few words concerning the plague of boils, that the objective of this plague was precisely to disarm their claims of superiority through astrology and magic. Torah verses are selective in their messages, not merely recounting every single historical occurrence. Our verse means to teach that boils purposefully targeted the astrologers.

“And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt.” This refers not to posture, but to their ability to sustain their dignity...they could not “appear” before Moses, who outperformed them. They were ashamed. But why were they any more ashamed during the plague of boils? The answer is the second part of the verse: “...for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt.” Boils exposed the astrologers as no superior to any other Egyptian. The astrologers who claimed to possess powers, were powerless to rid themselves of the painful boils. They were exposed as liars, and Torah never mentions them again.

God displays His wisdom in all His actions. Here, God unveiled the astrologers as charlatans, reserving honor only for Himself. Man is powerless.



Question: What is significant about the locusts eating “remnants the hail?” This is repeated 3 times. Hail destroyed much produce. Now, God sends locusts to eat all produce that the hail did not destroy. What is the idea that these locusts will continue the same job of the hail? Why didn’t God simply use hail to destroy ALL produce?

Answer: Pharaoh didn’t believe that Hashem controls ALL parts of the universe. This is expressed in Egypt’s many deities. Hashem makes weather, and animals (insects)—two distinct parts of the world—perform the same objective. The lesson: It can’t be by accident that two events—hail and locusts—just “happen” to target produce, and in sequence...but it must be that an Orchestrator with a plan exists. There is a single being with complete control over all parts of the universe.

God displays His wisdom in all His actions. Here, God dispelled Egypt’s belief in polytheism, the belief in many gods. As God controls all and has no partners. ■



PARSHA



Confronting Pharaoh

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's parsha, Bo, continues the saga of Moshe's engagement with Pharaoh, as the blows that Hashem rained down on Egypt grew ever more harsh and devastating.

We must never entertain the idea that the Creator of the Universe is indifferent to human suffering. Virtually all of the attributes we use to describe Him are those of mercy, compassion, and graciousness.

What a world it would be if we would permit ourselves to be "instructed of the Lord" and were motivated to emulate the ways of Hashem. Unfortunately, we frequently eschew this course.

As a result, the great catastrophes of history can be attributed to the corruptions of man. Hashem has graced us with a divine soul, an exquisite creation that enables us to rise above the level of animals and partake of wisdom.

Do we properly appreciate the magnificence of this endowment? The Rabbis saw fit to insert, as the first request we make in our prayers, the petition for knowledge, discernment, and intelligence.

The great irony is that we do not sufficiently value our capacity to obtain understanding and prefer to live a life based on the pursuit of emotional gratification and the satisfaction of our instinctual drives.

Man's insatiable lust for power and glory is the primary cause of human strife, conflict and devastating warfare. The suffering of Egypt came about in spite of Hashem's compassion.

This can be seen in the very gentle manner in which he treated Pharaoh. The wicked Egyptian rulers unjustifiably enslaved the Jews, subjecting them to backbreaking labor and decreeing murder against their male newborns. Who would have accorded them

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any mercy?

Only the Holy One, blessed is He, whose infinite goodness and ways of kindness are beyond our comprehension. He sent the greatest of His prophets, Moshe Rabbeinu, to become, as it were, a private teacher and spiritual guide to the oppressor of His people.

Moshe's goal was to instruct Pharaoh about the existence of the true G-d and His demand that the Jews be granted the freedom to worship Him. Moshe did this gently, using argument and persuasion. When Pharaoh asked for proof, it was provided through the miracle of the serpents, which caused no harm or pain to anyone.

G-d knew that getting the Egyptians' attention would require plagues that would disrupt their lives and cause them pain. Here too, we see how punishment was tempered by mercy. For at first, the plagues were relatively mild, more like annoyances than injurious blows.

However, we must never underestimate the full force of human stubbornness. Pharaoh brought great suffering on himself and his people as the attacks worsened, but he could not subordinate himself to Hashem.

An interesting aspect of Moshe's encounter with Pharaoh is the amazing forbearance the Egyptian tyrant had for his Jewish antagonist. Moshe seemed able to enter Pharaoh's presence at will and bring down harsh consequences with no fear of retribution. It is amazing that Pharaoh did not seek to take Moshe's life and terminate the abuse his country was undergoing. Perhaps Pharaoh's indulgence of Moshe can only be attributed to

divine providence.

Whatever its cause, his forbearance finally came to an end. In Moshe's conversation with the King after the plague of Darkness, Pharaoh inexplicably seemed to "snap." Seemingly out of the blue, he ordered Moshe out of his presence and threatened to kill him if he attempted to see him again!

How can we understand what motivated this strange shift of attitude? What triggered Pharaoh's abrupt reversal of behavior toward Moshe? In my opinion, it was something that Moshe had said in the course of their discussion. In response to the plague of Darkness, Pharaoh gave permission for the Jews to leave and serve Hashem, but "only your sheep and cattle must remain."

To which Moshe responded, "You too, will send with us sacrifices and burnt-offerings and we shall serve the Lord our G-d." This retort triggered Pharaoh's harsh threat. But the matter requires elucidation. What was so vexing about what Moshe said?

Moreover, ask the commentators, where do we find that Pharaoh actually acted in accordance with this prophecy? The Torah does not record that Pharaoh entrusted Moshe with animals to offer on his behalf when he left Egypt.

However, the Ibn Ezra interprets Moshe's statement differently. He says that Moshe was telling Pharaoh that he ought to send sacrifices to be offered to Hashem. In my opinion, this provoked Pharaoh's anger. Until now, he understood Moshe to mean that every group should have the right to practice its religion, and that this should be accorded to the Jews

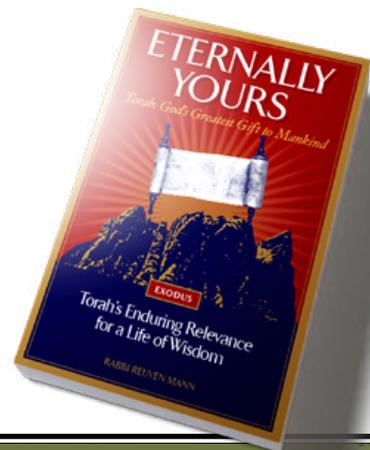
as well.

But now he was proclaiming that Hashem was the true G-d of the Universe that all mankind had to acknowledge and worship. This meant that Pharaoh's religion was false and that he needed to renounce it and serve Hashem. This was too much of a blow to his ego, and he could no longer abide Moshe's teachings.

The case of Pharaoh illustrates clearly that man is the major cause of much of his own suffering. He was provided with clear and compelling evidence of Hashem's existence and power. His inability to relinquish his pride and to embrace the truth brought unimaginable devastation to an entire population.

May we learn to appreciate the supreme value of truth and develop the moral capacity to put aside all other considerations to grasp it and live by it.

Shabbat shalom. ■



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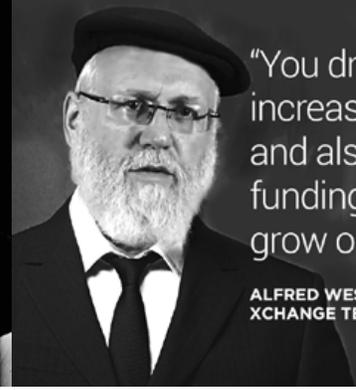
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