

# JewishTimes

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WHAT IS REAL & HOW TO KNOW?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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## LETTERS

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Makes  
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True?



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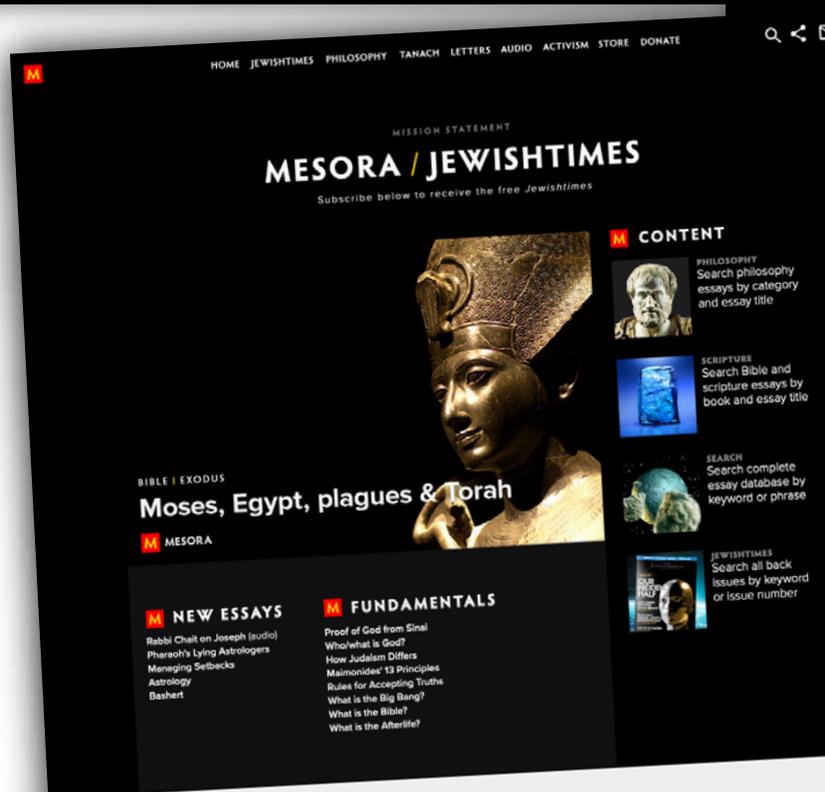
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## OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

**Kindness:** As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

**Racism:** A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it. Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

**Insecurity:** Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

**Happiness:** Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

**Pleasing Others:** Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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# ASK THE RABBI

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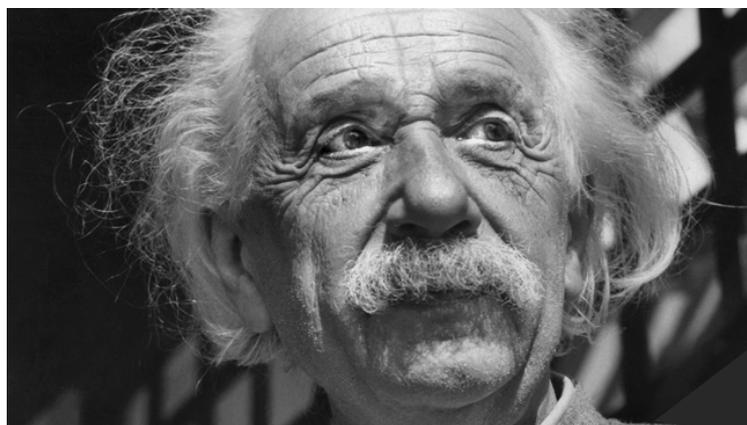
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The Passover Exodus intended to reject mysticism and idolatry and help man to recognize reality.



"One thing I have learned in a long life: that all our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike, and yet it is the most precious thing we have."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## What Makes Judaism True?

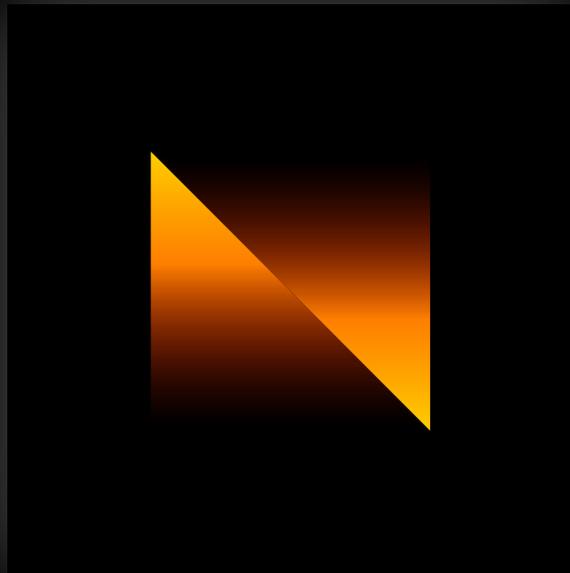
**READER:** The Kuzari writes that a multitude witnessed the Sinai revelation: masses could not be wrong. Judaism, therefore, is a historically-proven religion. However, Christianity also claims mass witnesses of Jesus performing miracles. Constantine and his army saw a cross with the words, "Conquer by this sign!" The Aztecs saw a white eagle land on a cactus eating a snake at Tenochtitlan, and many Native American tribes, ancient Greeks, and African peoples have their legends. One billion Hindus saw their gods drinking milk...far more numbers than 600 thousand. Shouldn't you be a Hindu? Or how about being a Christian, since Jesus fed 500 people with a few loaves of bread? How do you reconcile this and address the Torah's unique claim to Sinai Revelation?

**RABBI:** Claims of mass witnesses found in a book is not Judaism's proof. It is circular to prove the book from the book, but it's what all other religions do to promote their fabrications. Judaism's proof is the nations' unanimous verbal transmission tracing back to Sinai's mass witnesses. There is no alternative Jewish history, as we find with the conflicting Gospels. Revelation equates to the account of masses who witnessed Caesar and Alexander, which too trace back to real events. All history is validated when the event was easily grasped, and when it contains masses. But in all other religions there is no transmission back to events, but to written fabrications which claim witnesses. Writing a lie cannot create the event! But tell a lie enough, and it becomes fact. The religions' fabricated stories—not events—are their origins. If you research any other religion, you will trace back to a date when their story originated, before which, those recorded people never existed, or are not named. You will find fallacy in their stories. But Torah contains great detail of people's names, their tribal names, their offspring, their numbers, their journeys and dates. ■

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CONDÉ NAST



# CREATION

## Did it occur, or is all eternal?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**H**ow do we define “reality”? Does reality refer to only the physical world, like what we see or hear, or does it refer also to our mind and what we think? Maimonides wrote that we accept as true (what is real), only 1 of 3 matters: 1) what we sense, 2) what our minds determine, and 3) what is learned from the prophets or the righteous (Letter to Marseilles). Therefore, we accept the tree exists which we sense with our eyes, we accept the equation  $2+2=4$  which our minds determine is accurate, and we accept what Moses taught us, i.e., Torah.

However, is it possible that any of these 3 truths can contradict another? It would appear that such a contradiction is impossible, as such a contradiction means that reality can contradict itself: that something is and isn't true. (I'll explain shortly.) For example, if a science suggests that flowers cannot exist, that science must be wrong, as our senses override that theory. Senses provide facts, and facts override theory. But can mind override senses? Our minds say  $2+2=4$ . Now, what would we accept as true, if we see 2 rocks placed on a table next to another 2 rocks, and we then see only 3 rocks on that table? Do we trust senses or mind? Unlike the debunked theory of flowers not existing,  $2+2=4$  requires no corroboration; it is a most simple formula with no margin of error. So we explain this phenomenon as some sleight of hand which removed 1 rock. Here, our minds determined an absolute truth, and therefore our senses must have missed something. Both—mind and senses—can assess absolute truths, but both are also subject to error.

Now, why can't our senses accurately assess that which conflicts with ideational truths, or natural law? It is because true natural laws determine physical reality. Physical reality is not operating in its own sphere, while nature operates unrelated to it. No. Nature is the very blueprint determining how all physical reality exists. Maple trees produce only maple leaves and not

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pine needles due to a law guiding it continues identical nature. The law exists not “in” the tree, but outside the physical world. This applies to all creations. Thus, there cannot be any contradiction between what is true ideationally (laws) and what is true physically. We can deduct laws by studying creation, and we can also determine how creation must exist, if we arrive at a true law with our minds.

What determines when mind override senses (proving a false sensation), and when senses override mind (disproving a decision)? In the case of the 4 rocks, we don’t deny our senses, or our mind: we first saw 4 rocks, and then we saw 3 rocks. We trust that what we now see—3 rocks—is accurate, but we deduce that we did not see all the motions of the performer: he must have covertly removed 1 rock. There is no contradiction between senses and mind. And we can easily explain what we did not witness: the 4th rock is up his sleeve. In the flower case, again, our minds and our senses are not in contradiction. For the theory was only a theory, and as many theories go, it was proved false. It was not that we held something definite as  $2+2=4$  which was subsequently disproved. As that equation cannot be disproved, just as one cannot suggest a circle is a square.

When a sensation conflicts with an idea, one or both must be wrong. But both cannot be correct, as the totality of all truths—physical and ideational—are in compliance. That is what we call “reality”: what exists as physical entities, their properties, their moments of existence and all their abstract governing laws. For other than God, angels and metaphysical knowledge (i.e., justice, righteousness, morality), our ideas relate to the universe: they either refer to the physical world or to its governing laws. Again, reality refers to all which exists in substance and its properties. So when we say a diamond is the hardest substance, that idea refers to its capacity to scratch all else. The physical world complies fully with ideational truths. There is 1 reality. From the physical world we derive these truths. And inversely, if we accurately arrive at natural laws using our mind, the world will comply.

We answer our question by saying that senses don’t override mind, or vice versa, as true sensations and ideas are complimentary.

### What is Proof?

Proof for ideas is attained when the

physical world complies with a given idea, thereby validating it. Thus, scientific theory is provable. But subjects like justice and morality are not subject to proof, as nothing in the physical world relates to—nor can validate—murder, abortion, robbery being right or wrong. Morality can only be determined by life’s Creator. Morality is authoritative and not scientifically subject to experimentation. This covers mind and morality.

Are sensations provable? There is no need, as sensation is the very validation: if we sense something, there is a something. Senses are more accurate than ideas, since human thought is diluted with imagination. Man has a difficulty separating truths and reality from his subjective wishes and fantasies. Human emotion clouds and distorts one’s thoughts. But pure sensation in healthy beings, by definition, is fully accurate. All healthy people will see blue skies, not red skies. And they will hear thunder as loud, and birds chirping as softer.

In another measure, mind is superior to senses, as man can arrive at conclusions without continued sensation. Einstein correctly forecasted astronomical phenomena. Following a line of thought, building laws upon other laws, deducing and inducing, Einstein grasped new true principles without observation.

### Is the Universe Eternal?

We now address Maimonides’ third category of truths: historical tradition, or Torah transmission. When in conflict, do the 2 other methods of sensation or intelligence override history and Torah? Maimonides says yes:

*Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe: and it is for this very reason that the noblest minds spent and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory [the eternity of the universe], the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it. (Guide for the Perplexed, book II chap xxv)*

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Maimonides says that proof overrides Torah. The reason for this rejection is based on the nature of these 3 methods of determining truth. Sensation inherently validates phenomena and mind too can arrive at truths. But transmission refers to “events”—i.e., if and when the universe was created—and relies on neither first hand knowledge (sensation) nor principles (mind). No one witnessed creation (and certainly not an eternal universe), and there’s no principle deciding between an eternal or created universe. Without proof, we trust Torah. But proof—either physical evidence or a principle—will override any transmission.

### Is Man Left in Doubt?

We have no question regarding Maimonides’ 1st principle: God is the cause of all else. But a cause, as Aristotle maintains, can be simultaneous with the result. For example, one causes a shadow by his mere existence, and not by his will. So too, one can view the universe as God’s shadow, as a result of His being. But Maimonides 4th principle is that God preceded all else, meaning that God willed the universe in to existence. Maimonides determined that the universe is not a natural result of His existence, but that God preceding all else is one of the most vital truths. What compelled Maimonides’ acceptance of this idea and its vital nature? This question is strengthened by Maimonides’ acceptance of an eternal universe, had Aristotle provided a proof. Clearly, Maimonides must remove his 4th principle if Aristotle had proof. This principle is only vital within a Torah system.

Accepting Aristotle, Revelation at Sinai too must be rejected. For if the universe and all natural laws were eternal and not arranged by God’s will, God could not interfere with that which he did not set in motion. This is not Torah’s view, but that of the philosophers. In other words, Sinai is not “proof,” since Maimonides says had Aristotle offered a “proof” for an eternal universe, Torah would be rejected, including Revelation at Sinai. Aristotle’s proof would be greater than Sinai, for as we said, Sinai is based on transmission, not sensation or a principle. The



### The Tablets

The sapphire Tablets God gave Moses upon Mt. Sinai contained God’s 10 Commands which naturally developed within the stone’s grain during Creation. As sapphire is translucent, one could see the internal text. This internal writing could not be the work of man, as they were inside the sapphire, not etched upon the surface. This miracle proved that God controls—and created—the universe. God’s control of the universe allowed Him to create a few sapphire tablets that naturally grew 10 statements internally. Both, the Tablets and their script are 2 of the 10 miracles which Pirkei Avos 5:6 says were created at the close of Creation.

As God could have informed Moses of these 10 Commands prophetically

just as He informed him of the other 603, what demanded the creation of these miraculous tablets? It is to teach that God did not leave man without an answer: the universe is not eternal. As God created sapphire and embedded statements in side them, God demonstrated His control of the universe. So, although Maimonides says, “the noblest minds spent and will spend their days in research,” this does not apply to the Jewish nation who are in receipt of truths derived outside creation: through prophecy. When learning truth, Jews are not limited to the physical world. And not only did these tablets teach that God controls the universe and created it, but that Earth’s purpose is that man study God through His creation and His Torah. Creation and Torah—sapphire and commands—are synthesized in the tablets. The purpose of Earth is man’s study of the Creator (Rashi on Pirkei Avos 2:8).

God intended man to observe these tablets as indisputable proof that He created the universe, and that the universe serves to display God’s wisdom. But Moses saw that the Jews were not ready to accept such a blunt and clear reality. Moses broke the tablets. Perhaps in the future we will once again be given a similar proof in some other form.

Perhaps Torah commences with the teaching that God created the universe, since man cannot apply his mind using his senses or intellect to time prior to creation. We can’t answer the question of an eternal universe based on science. Our senses and thinking work only from creation and forward. And while science has discovered that the universe is expanding from some point of origin—Big Bang’s location—from which all was hurled at great speeds away from that center 14 billion years ago, we can’t posit anything prior to that Big Bang. Was there something else in existence prior, or as Judaism holds, did all come into existence from nothingness? Maimonides’ great honesty is that he would accept a proof for an eternal universe and reject Torah, since God designed the human mind to accept what is proven, over tradition. But as no proof exists, we accept Moses’ prophecy that God created the universe. ■

# Proud to be JEWISH

RABBI REUVEN MANN



**P**assover is a time for commemorating the most significant events in Jewish history. We do not engage in Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim (telling the story of the Exodus) from a neutral objective perspective but from that of one who has experienced those awesome events. The Hagada states; “In every generation one is obligated to view it as though he, himself, left Egypt as it says, And you shall tell it to your children on this day, because of this did Hashem do for me when I left Egypt. Not only our fathers did The Holy One redeem but also us did He redeem with them.”

At first glance it is not easy to understand the nature of this requirement. For in point of fact it was our ancestors, not ourselves, who went through the enslavement experience. And thousands of years have passed since it happened. Are we supposed to let our imaginations run wild and somehow manage to mentally reenact the plight of our forefathers in Mitzrayim? And why would that be so important? Is it not enough to become intellectually familiar with all aspects of this great story?

To answer this we need to understand the purpose and significance of “telling the story of Passover.” It seems clear that this is not intended as merely an abstract mental exercise. This point is clearly expressed in the Hagada when we declare at the outset, “Even if we are all wise, all men of discernment, all elders, all people who know the Torah it is a Mitzvah for us to tell the story of the Exodus and whoever increases his discussion of this story is praiseworthy.”

This passage indicates that the Mitzvah of telling the story cannot be qualified or quantified in a purely objective manner. There is a significant subjective element which comes to the fore and compels a person to become immersed in the subject to the point where he extends his exposition of the story. But how are we to understand the requirement to see it as though we were actually slaves in Egypt?

In my opinion we are obliged to understand that the Exodus is not only an event which occurred to a specific group of people who existed at a certain point in history. These people were the progenitors of the Jewish nation of which we are an integral part. The story of the enslavement and Exodus is therefore a key segment of our history and the events which transpired happened to us. This idea is clearly enunciated at the outset of the Seder as we say, “And if the Holy One had not taken out our fathers in Egypt then we and our children and children’s children would be slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt.” The story we tell on the night of Passover is the formative event in the genesis of the Jewish People. It is therefore the personal story of every Jew who attends

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a Seder to fulfill the unique Mitzvot of that night.

The obligation to view it as though one has himself left Egypt has consequences. The Hagada spells them out; “Therefore we are obligated to acknowledge, praise extol...the One Who has done all these miracles for us and our fathers, He took us out from servitude to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to great light, from subservience to redemption, and let us sing before Him a new song.”

The retelling of the narrative of enslavement and redemption must evoke within us deep feelings of gratitude to the Creator. The recitation of Hallel (songs of praise to Hashem) is a vital component of the the Mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim and this must flow from the heart and not be mere perfunctory enunciation. But how is one to achieve the exalted emotional state depicted in the Hagada?

In my opinion it all depends on the attitude one has to his Jewish identity. Please consider these “Four Questions”. How important is it to you that you are a Jew; Is it a matter of indifference or does it have profound significance? Are you proud that you are the descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Hillel, Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides and countless other moral and intellectual giants, up to the present day, who have illuminated the path of mankind in every area of practical and spiritual endeavor? Are you proud and inspired to belong to a community that has been charged by the Creator to declare His glory to mankind and teach them about the moral lifestyle He desires? Is your Jewishness a fundamental facet of your self-identity which fills you with a sense of joy and purpose? Consider that you have the privilege to be part of a unique, heroic nation which overcame every enemy and challenge which confronted it and emerged stronger and more committed to its moral mission.

The more one appreciates the wisdom of Torah and the beauty of its lifestyle the more can he take joy in his Jewish identity and in his love of the Jewish People. From that standpoint we can look back on the key formative and historical events in the life of this nation and regard them as our personal heritage. We can reach the point where we view the story of the Exodus as deeply personal and feel a profound sense of gratitude to Hashem for all the great miracles of salvation and Revelation that He has granted us.

At this time last year the world was just beginning to come to grips with with the dangers imposed by the Corona virus. The celebration of Passover at that time was greatly restricted as social distancing requirements precluded the gatherings that were a hallmark of the traditional Seder experience. It has been a terrible year of suffering and loss and the gloom is not entirely behind us. But, thanks in great part to the speed of the discovery, manufacture and distribution of the COVID vaccines, the situation has greatly improved.

As Passover arrives things seem to be returning to normal and it appears that the holiday will be celebrated together with family and friends in the time honored manner. For this we must be grateful to all who participated in the miracle of the vaccines which have allowed us to gain control over this terrible malady.

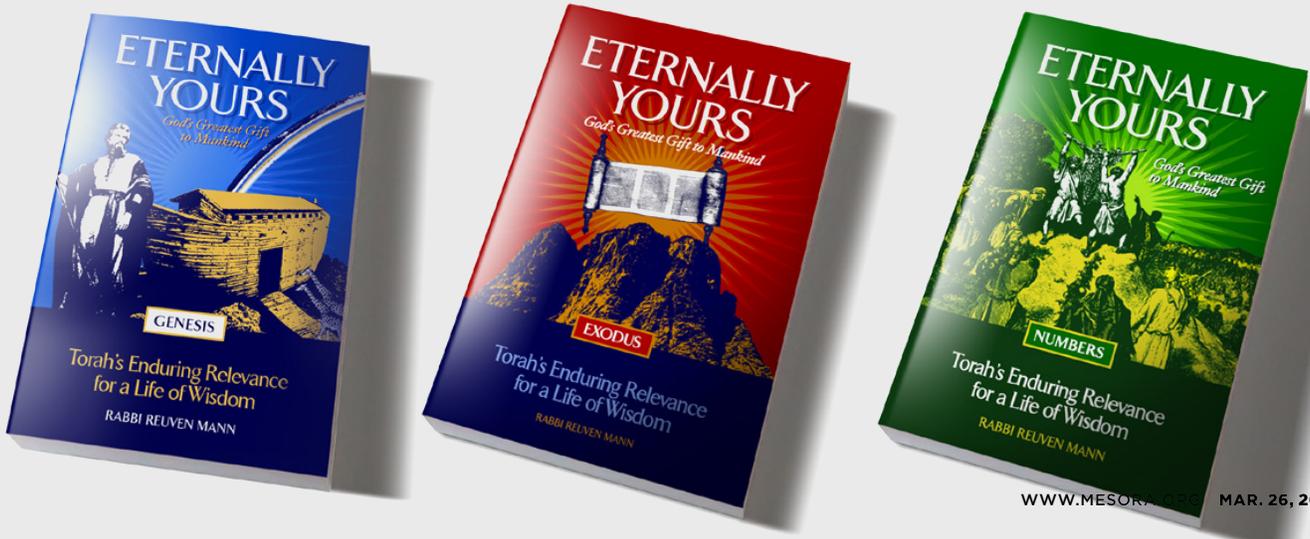
And most of all we must have gratitude to Hashem who “has kept us in life and maintained us and brought us to this time.”

Shabbat Shalom V'Chag Pesach Sameach. ■

Dear Friends,

In this time of social isolation, we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online. But that can only take you so far.

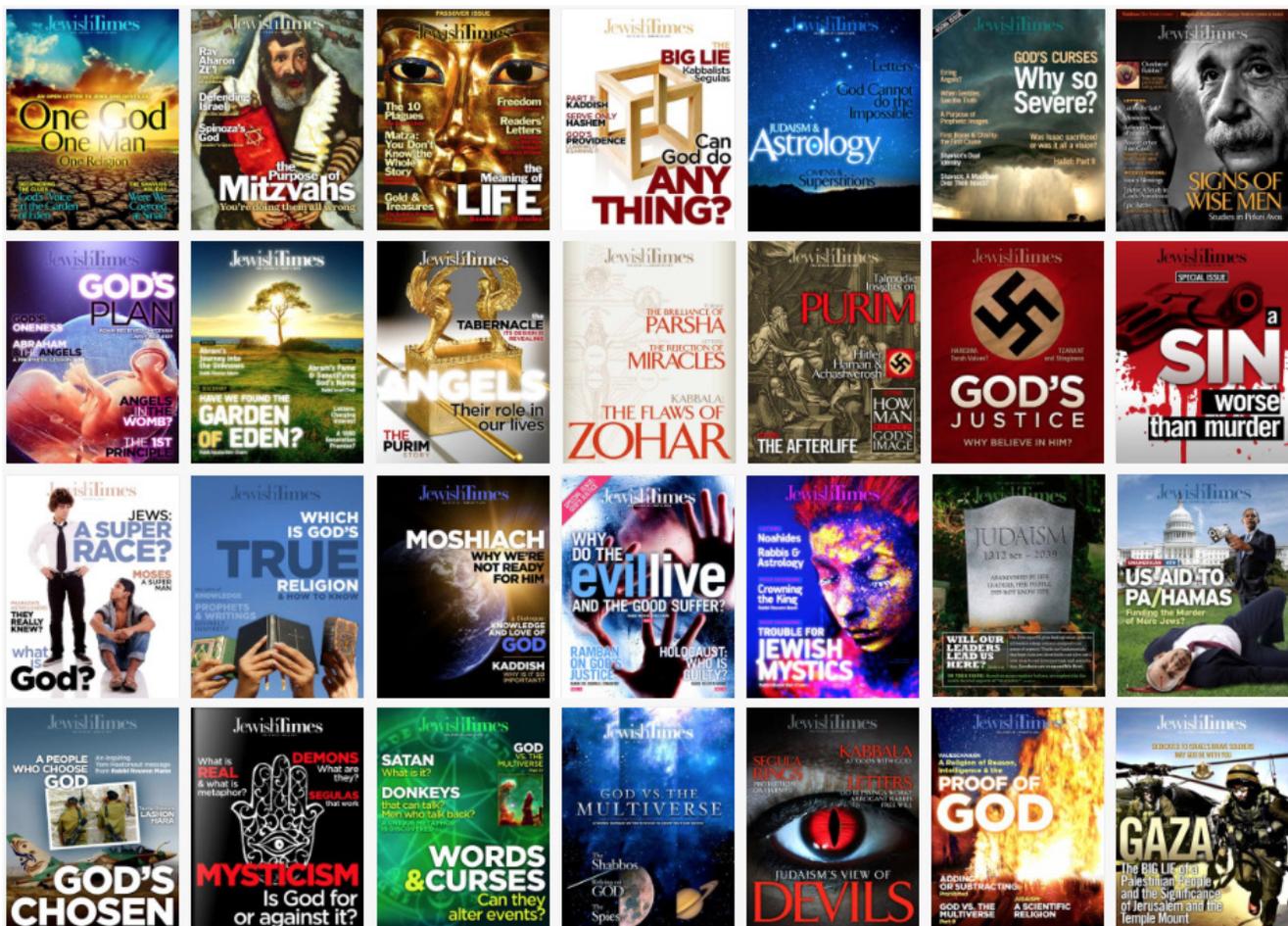
Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.



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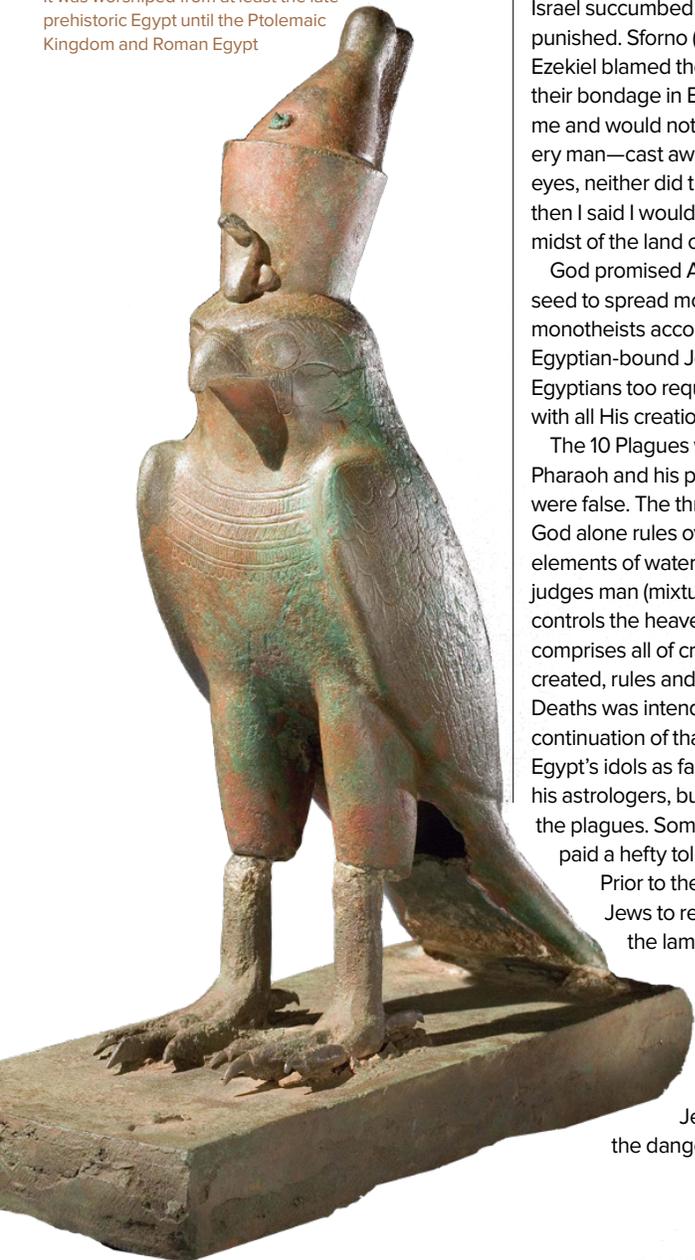
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# Passover: Mysticism vs. Reality

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Horus was a significant ancient Egyptian deity which served many functions, most notably god of kingship and the sky. It was worshiped from at least the late prehistoric Egypt until the Ptolemaic Kingdom and Roman Egypt



**P**assover conjures up many associations: the 10 Plagues, matza and maror, the four cups, Mah Nishtanah and the Haggadah and much more. But if asked what the essence of this holiday is, what would you say?

To recap, the Jews descended into Egypt by Joseph's invite to provide during the famine. After Israel and his twelve sons passed, the Children of Israel succumbed to Egyptian idolatry and were punished. Sforno (Gen. 15:13) says the Prophet Ezekiel blamed the Jews' idolatry as the cause of their bondage in Egypt: "But they rebelled against me and would not hearken to Me; they did not—every man—cast away the detestable things of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; then I said I would pour out My fury upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt" (Ezek. 20:8).

God promised Abraham the land of Israel for his seed to spread monotheism. A land identified by monotheists accomplishes this. But the Egyptian-bound Jews first required repentance. The Egyptians too required lessons, as God is concerned with all His creations.

The 10 Plagues were intended to demonstrate to Pharaoh and his people that their mystical beliefs were false. The three sets of plagues revealed that God alone rules over all. He rules over the Earth's elements of water and soil (blood, frogs, lice), God judges man (mixture, animal deaths, boils), and God controls the heavens (hail, locusts, darkness). This comprises all of creation, teaching that God alone created, rules and judges the world. (Firstborn Deaths was intended to eliminate the leaders and continuation of that culture.) The plagues exposed Egypt's idols as false, as Pharaoh never summons his astrologers, but always calls Moses to remove the plagues. Some Egyptians saw the light; others paid a hefty toll.

Prior to their exodus, God commanded the Jews to reject of the Egyptian god by killing the lamb. They were also commanded in circumcision. These 2 commands corrected the Jews' religious ideas (rejecting idolatry) and restrained harmful lusts adopted in Egypt (circumcision). Now the Jews were ready to be freed. But the danger existed that they would indulge

freedom, without recognizing the objective of the Exodus: to accept a rational religion at Sinai. Rashi teaches that the Jews trusted God would provide for them in the desert into which they journeyed. Yet, in that very verse (Exod. 12:39) the Jews were baking the dough they carried out of Egypt. We wonder how Rashi can say they trusted God for food, while also baking the dough! And why did God oust the Jews with such speed, that the dough didn't rise, limiting it's potential to matza and not bread?

The Jews did not take the dough for consumption; they desired to embody the image of a free people, explaining Exod. 12:34, "they rolled the dough in their garments, carried on their shoulders." The dough was a badge of sorts paraded on their shoulders. They placed it in their clothing, as clothing expresses man's dignity. Egyptian bread was merely the means to this image. However, freedom per se was not God's plan, so He rushed out the Jews, inhibiting the dough's rising to prevent the Jews' identification with free Egyptians. Thereby, matza became the icon of this holiday. It embodies God's thwarting of the Jews' desire to embody an image of freedom, without religious direction towards reality. Freedom alone was not God's plan. We don't refer to God as our freer, but as our redeemer: He "replaced" our negative status with a positive state, not merely removing bondage. God desires mankind to follow his mind and what experiences teach us: to follow what is real, not what is imagined. Egypt's mystical forces could not halt the Plagues, the primary message to Egypt and the sinful Jews.

"Exodus" means to leave. We can blindly follow our peers like our ancestors, or we can leave false, mystical notions behind and follow God's words. Sadly, many religious Jews proliferate mystical beliefs. Yet, the Torah rejects mysticism:

*To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of heaven, do not fear, for the nations fear them. For the statutes of the nations are futile, for a tree from the forest they cut, the work of an artisan with an adze. With silver and gold they adorn it; with nails and pegs they strengthen it so it does not disconnect. They are like a sculpted palm tree and they cannot speak, they are carried about for they cannot walk: do not fear them, for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good (Jeremiah 10:1-5).*

Jeremiah equates astrology to idolatry. Thereby, Torah unequivocally rejects mysticism as idolatrous. No powers exist outside God. And mysticism refers to all beliefs in powers unsupported by reason or experience. It doesn't matter if the object is a rabbit's foot, or a mezuzah. Maimonides teaches, those who believe the mezuzah has powers, are fools. (Hilchos Mezuzah 5:4)

The 10 Plagues offer an eternal lesson: they distinguished Egypt's imagined mystical forces from God's created reality. We can gain from this message if we apply it to ourselves. We should review our beliefs and abandon all mystical notions, despite the number of Jews and even Rabbis who might endorse such mysticism. Let us follow God's words, not mortal man's whims. ■



**Wishing you all  
a Happy Passover!**

**M MESORA**

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