

JewishTimes

VOL. XIX NO. 25 — JULY 9, 2021

IDEAS

IDOLATRY'S
ROOTS

METHOD OF
THOUGHT

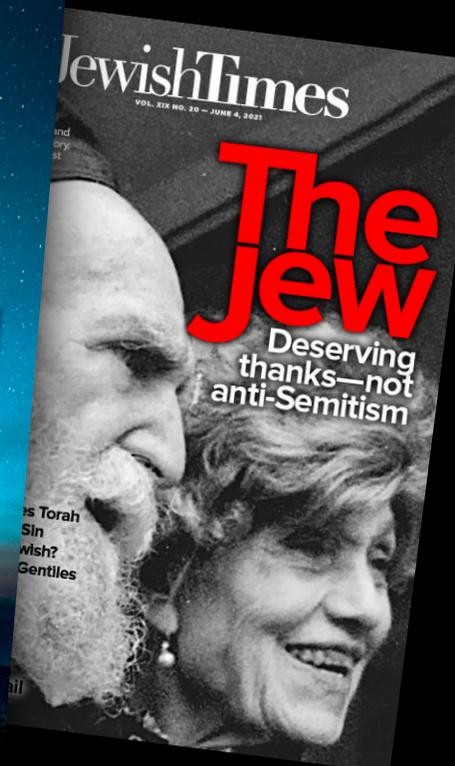
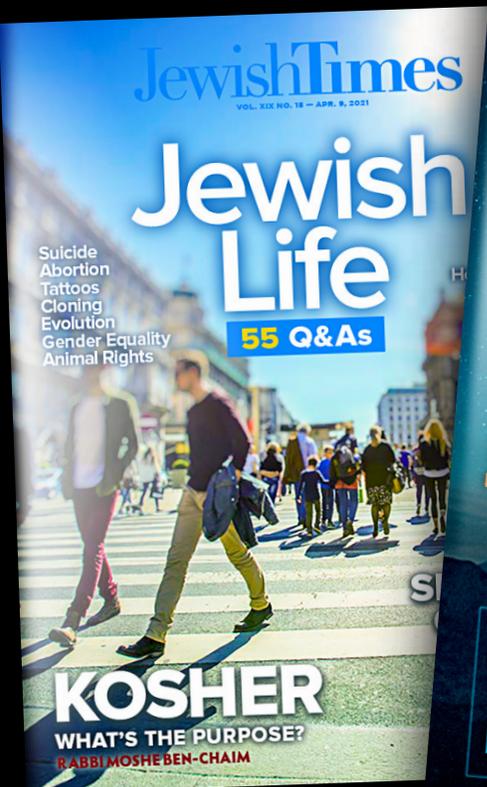
LETTERS

JEWISH PRIVILEGE

LETTERS

DOES GOD
KNOW ALL?

DOES HE HAVE
FEELINGS?



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JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

| Please send letters and questions to: Comments@Mesora.org |

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LETTERS

Reader's questions addressed.

9 Ultimate Conquest

RABBI REUVEN MANN

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6 Jewish Privilege

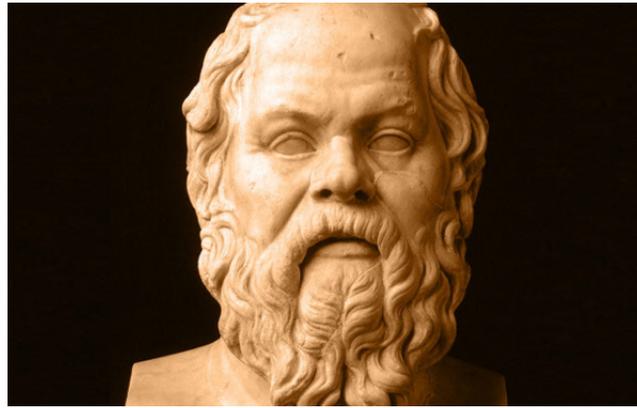
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader's question on last week's issue regarding human equality.

14 A Good Man

DAVID ISRAEL

Sen. Jim Risch is standing between Biden's \$50M and Ramallah.



"There is only 1 good: knowledge. And only 1 evil: ignorance."

SOCRATES

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Does God Know Everything?

READER: What is the meaning of the phrase, "...if not, I will know" (Gen. 18:20, 21)? It certainly can't imply that God is anthropomorphically descending, without adequate knowledge of the situation!

—Turk Hill

RABBI: The full context is as follows:

Now the Lord said [to Himself], "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." Then the Lord said [to Abraham], "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is heavy. I will go down to see whether if according to their cry that has reached Me I will annihilate them, or not. I know." (Gen. 18:17-21) (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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No, God is not physical so He cannot occupy space or move within space, downward or upward. God already knew the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah; He is not ignorant of anything. But God was educating Abraham. As Abraham will teach others, certain matters about God's justice undetectable through human reasoning, required divine revelation to Abraham. Abraham understood and agreed that wicked people should be punished and that righteous people should be protected. Nothing in nature could possibly reveal to Abraham that a wicked person should be spared. That goes against human assessment of God's justice. But the human mind is incomparable to God's thoughts. Therefore, God revealed to Abraham the hidden concept that in certain situations, God will spare the wicked. That situation is where there exists righteous individuals that can influence the wicked people to repent. This is the meaning of, "I will go down to see whether if according to the cry that has reached Me I will annihilate them or not." Meaning, the cry was definitely great, and their sin was heavy; they deserved annihilation. But there still existed the possibility that God would not annihilate them, "will I annihilate them or not." This revelation that the wicked can be spared intended to prod Abraham to consider why wicked people should be spared. This was an unknown area of God's justice that God shared with Abraham as he would be a teacher to mankind. Abraham then realized that as the merit did not exist within the wicked people, the only other place merit could exist is with righteous people. Therefore Abraham correctly concluded that if there was a certain quantity of positive influence, God would spare the wicked. That is why Abraham proceeded to ask—commencing with 50 and concluding with 10—what that number of righteous people was required to salvage the wicked through educating them. ■

Does God Need to Test Man?

READER: What is the meaning of Genesis 22 (Akedah, the binding of Isaac)? Why did God feel the need to test Abraham? Didn't God already know the outcome? Isn't God all-knowing? Ralbag (and possibly ibn Ezra) felt that God is not all-knowing. God only knows generalities but not the details.

RABBI: Rabbi Israel Chait explained that this test was not for Abraham, but for the Torah reader: we should be inspired by Abraham's level of perfection. The test was not for Abraham, for he already

possessed the perfection that enabled him to sacrifice Isaac. The trial is for us today, that we should see how we are required to increase our perfection and strive to live as Abraham. And yes, God knew the outcome, which is why He asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Regarding Ralbag and Ibn Ezra, they cannot possibly reject any knowledge is unknown to God. The reality of God rewarding and punishing man means He is aware of all man does and thinks. As idolatry is the worst sin, and this is a matter of a mindful acceptance, not only action, God punishes the idolater for accepting alien gods in his mind. Prayer makes no sense if God is unaware of man's thoughts. No Rabbi or sage could ever entertain that God is ignorant of anything. Psalms 33:10 reads, "The Lord frustrates the plans of nations, brings to naught the thoughts of peoples." Psalms 33:15, "He who fashions the hearts of them all, Who discerns all their doings." Psalms 94:9 says, "Shall He who implants the ear not hear, shall He who forms the eye not see?" As God created man's mind (heart) He certainly knows its operations. ■

Method in Thinking

RABBI: A reader defended sefirot: emanations or parts of God, which Maimonides teaches is heretical. God is not physical, and therefore, He is not subject to division into parts or emanations, whatever the latter means. The reader supported sefirot but without explaining what sefirot is. My reply: "Your defense of sefirot is of no substance. It is irrelevant that the Gra or others wrote about them. For if you cannot explain what they are, you can't merely echo a Rishon as say, 'Since he said it, it must be true.' Ramban argues with Maimonides. I cannot simply say, 'Since Ramban said such and such, it is true,' as I have not grasped his position in order to defend it. Additionally, as Maimonides argues on Ramban, what makes Ramban any more correct? You see, merely quoting even the greatest mind without grasping their intent is of no value. It is as of you say "XXXX is true."

Defense of our great Rabbis is poor lesson taught today. For the Rabbis themselves did not subscribe to such a philosophy of defending great people, simply due to reputation. Instead, they followed their intellects and reason, which alone dictated what they accepted as truths. They argued on each other. That is their lesson to us: reject any idea when reason dictates it is false, regardless of the author, and never defend a position when you cannot grasp it, or explain it. ■

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Idolatry's Roots

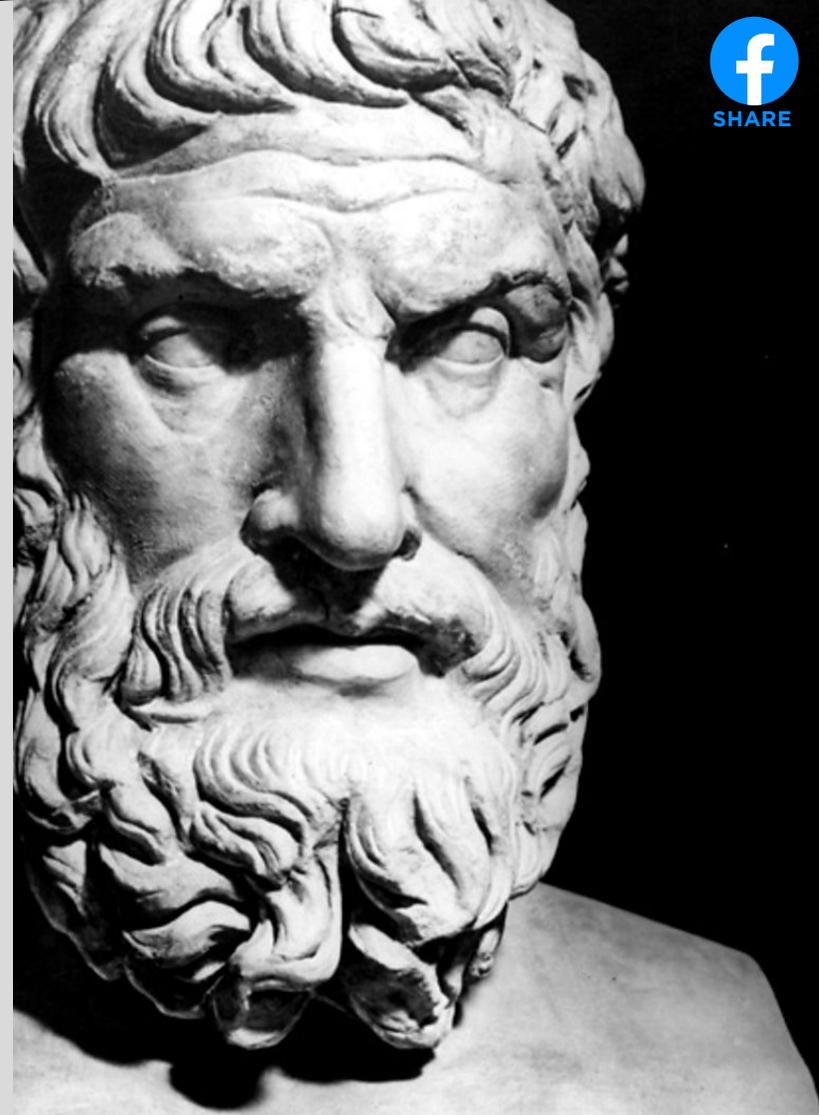
RABBI: When young, a child craves security from the parent. His natural insecurities seek to be calmed and assured of safety. When one matures, the path one should take is to abandon the view of the parent as a “super being,” as this is a child’s view. But many young teens sense a void when they realize the parent is not a superpower and that they are equal to them. They replace the parent with either Jesus, a dead rabbi who they pray to in his grave, or idolatry, in order to maintain this psychological crutch of security in some power that protects them. But Torah’s mandate is to replace the parent with God alone. “Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous man collapse” (Psalms 55:23). God designed the way humans enter the world, through parents. The institution and design of parents intends to cultivate a sense of respect for authority into man. This respect for authority is to then be transferred onto God. Thus, honoring parents is rightfully placed in the first tablet of the 10 Commands addressing laws between man and God. One might think honoring parents should be placed in the second tablet concerning laws between man and man. But as parents intend to direct our respect for authority towards God, the law of honoring parents is rightfully placed in the first tablet. ■

Does God Have Feelings?

READER: Why does Scripture say that after the Flood, that God’s “heart was saddened”? Does God regret? Rambam did not think that God has emotions. “I am God who does not change” (Mal. 3:6). And if He were sometimes angry and sometimes happy, He would be changing (Rambam, Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah, 1:12). What is your view?

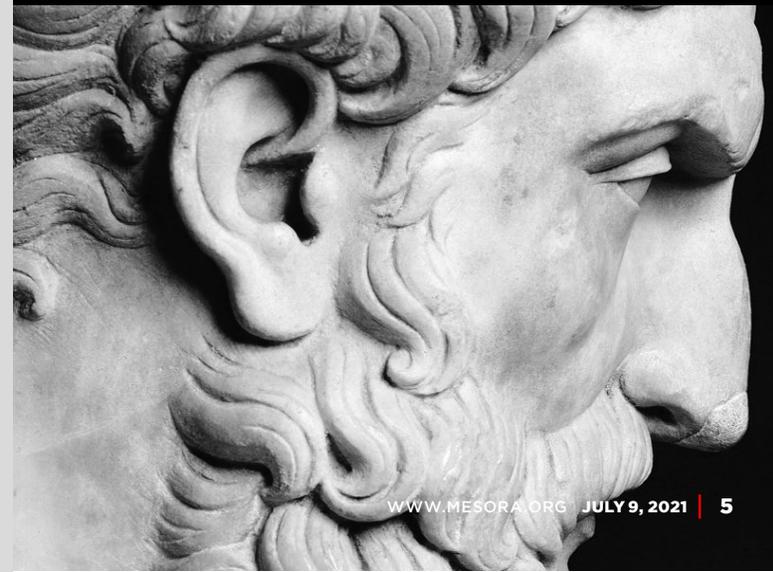
RABBI: “Torah speaks in man’s language” (Maimonides, Torah Fundamental 1:9). God formulated His Torah lessons so they relate to all levels of people, and thereby educate and motivate them. God’s “regret” over man’s sins means man has not attained the level God wishes. But of course, as God created human emotions, He does not possess them. Equally true is that God does not change, as you quoted. Change would imply ignorance, for change means that God would need to react (change) to what was unforeseen before Him. More essentially, God is above time, as He created it, and does not function in time, which is what change means. ■

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“DON’T DESTROY WHAT YOU HAVE BY DESIRING WHAT YOU HAVE NOT.”

EPICURUS



LETTERS

JEWISH PRIVILEGE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I would like to comment on your article “God’s plan and the 9th of Av” in the Jewish-times, 2nd of July edition. You wrote about human equality and that the greatest people began life as children to Gentiles, such as the patriarchs & matriarchs, Ruth ,Unkelos and many Rabbis. You explained that if a Jew or a Gentile follow God completely, he/she is equally loved by God.

The article then goes on to explain that the Gentile who engages in Torah is like the High Priest and that the Gentile who converts surpasses even the greatest Jew. However I am confused with the following statement: “For how humbling it must be for a gentile to accept his or her very being is not on par with the highest level of one obligated to observe the 613 laws.” This statement seems to contradict your earlier statement that a Jew (who is obligated to observe 613 laws) and a Gentile (who is obligated to observe 7 Noahide laws) are equally loved by God.

Kindly confirm if a Gentile who observes the 7 Noahide laws and Torah is on par with the Jew (including the Gentile convert) who observe the 613 laws. In addition, please confirm if there is a distinction between the Gentile who follows God yet choosing not to convert and a Gentile who converts to Judaism.

—Sharon Savage
Malaysia

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RABBI: We can't know why God creates one person to Jewish parents, and another to gentile parents. As the Creator, God has full rights—and certainly a plan—for His decisions of whom is born to whom. God knows which situation will be most beneficial for each and every personality. He does not place any man or woman in a state doomed for failure. Creating one person to Jewish parents and another to gentile parents in no way determines one's merit, as merit and sin are free will decisions made by all people. All God's acts are beneficial: "God is good to all, and His mercy is over all His works" (Psalms 145:9). We also read:

For the Lord does not reject forever, but first afflicts, then pardons in His abundant kindness. For He does not willfully bring grief or affliction to man, crushing under His feet all the prisoners of the earth. To deny a man his rights in the presence of the Most High, to wrong a man in his cause; these the Lord does not choose (Lamentations 3:31-36).

Thus, God performs only what is good.

Great gentiles who converted did not question God's justice on how He created them, for they have free will to follow all God's laws, just like a Jew. Gentile or Jew, neither was created with limitations preventing their respective human perfection.

It is humbling for a gentile to remain following only the 7 Noahide laws, while he knows a more beneficial system is to follow Bible's 613; certainly, more laws offer more human perfection. It is equally humbling if a Jew does not follow the 613.

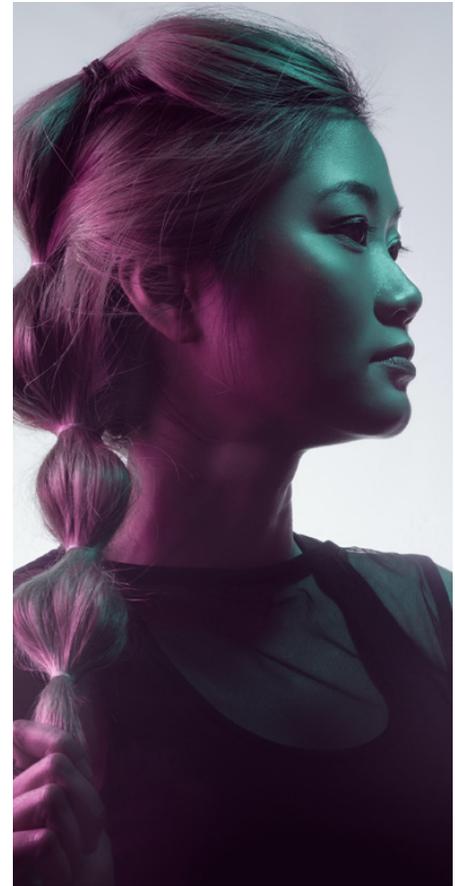
All mankind descend from the identical couple, Adam and Eve. Thus, we are equals. Our equality spans the spectrum of all human faculties including biology, psychology and intellect. Thus, all humans possess equal capacity for all action, emotion and intellect respectively. Although people differ genetically from others in accidental features like skin color, eyelid shape and hair, essentially we all bleed, breathe, cry, laugh and find wonder in God's creation and in His ideas shared with man in His Bible and through His prophets. All this refers to human "design."

Another fact concerns not human design, but man's obligations; his role. During an era where the world was idolatrous, God selected a group of monotheists to receive his

Bible and teach the world. His appointment of Abraham and his descendants—the Jews—did not make the Jew superior in design. Rather it imposes on the Jew an obligation of study, acting and teaching. Thereby, God taught mankind that there is a higher level of living for which man was created, and which man can attain by following Bible's laws and principles. Jew and gentile are equally less perfected when not following these laws, but the Jew alone is punished by his abstention from following these 613 laws.

"How humbling it must be for a gentile to accept his or her very being is not on par with the highest level of one obligated to observe the 613 laws" is not a commentary on one's capacity or design, but on his decisions. Thus, there is no conflict with what is stated earlier regarding human design, that all humans are identical. The gentile who remains following only the 7 Noahide laws must be humbled for opting not to live in a perfected Torah lifestyle. The same applies to the Jew who does not follow the 613. Neither Jew nor gentile should remain in this lesser state, even though the gentile is not obligated to accept all 613. Both should recognize the greater perfection and happiness attained by following the 613 Biblical laws, and all the subsequent rabbinic laws. Both should wish to follow the complete Bible. Both are equals, and both possess identical potential. Both forfeit human perfection when following less than all 613 commands, and both are humbled in that lesser state. One must not err thinking the gentile is obligated in only 7 Noahide laws, and therefore that is what God ultimately wishes from him. This is not so, as the 7 Noahide laws are only a minimal threshold for one to retain a right to live. But these 7 laws are not a system of perfection, as is the 613.

The gentile who chooses to convert and follows all 613 is equal the Jew who observes the 613 laws, as God says numerous times, "One law for the convert and the born Jew" (Exod. 12:49, Num. 9:14, Num. 15:16, Num. 15:29). And in one respect the gentile surpasses the Jew with his/her admirable decision to convert, when the Jew did not undergo that decision. But a gentile following only 7 laws cannot be equally perfected to a gentile or Jew following 613, as more commands generates greater perfection. In the end, Jews and gentiles are identical creations, and neither is privileged. ■



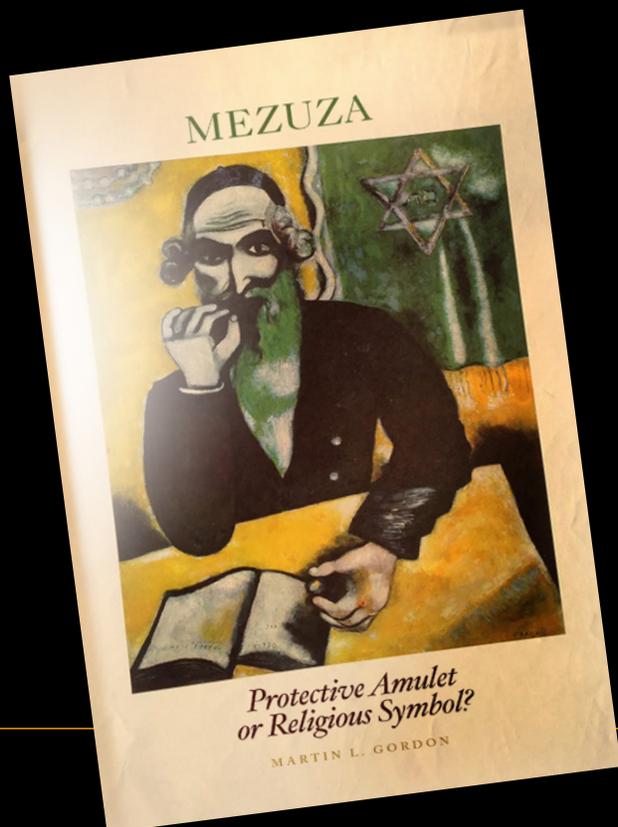
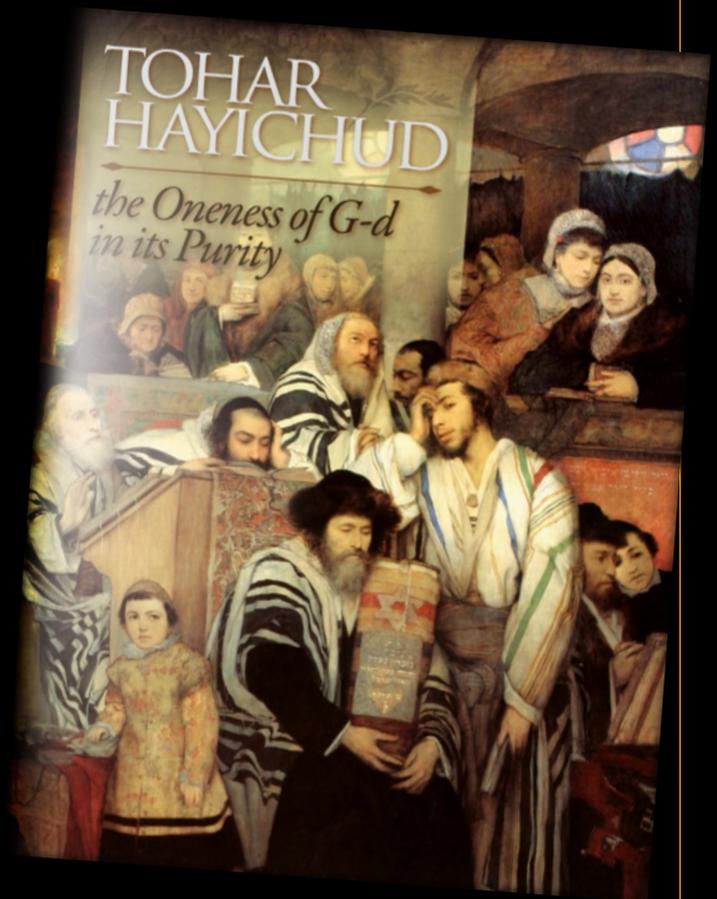
“In the end, Jews and gentiles are identical: neither one is privileged.”

2 MUST READS THIS SUMMER

Tohar Hayihud is a masterpiece of intelligent Torah thought. The Rabbi cites authentic Torah sources, Rishonim and great minds who, over the centuries, have rejected Kabbala's claims as contrary to Torah.

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The ULTIMATE CONQUEST

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's Torah reading, Matot-Masei completes the 4th Book of the Torah, Bamidbar. This Sefer began on a high note as the Jews completed all the tasks associated with the building and transportation of the Sanctuary. At that point there was every expectation that they would embark on the journey to the Promised Land and assume independent national existence as G-d's Chosen People.

The spirit of confidence and expectation was captured by Moshe as he passionately exhorted his father in law, Yitro, to join with the Jews on their epic journey: "We are traveling to the land of which Hashem said, 'This I will give to you'. Come with us and we will treat you well for Hashem has promised good for Israel."

However, the enthusiasm voiced by Moshe was in vain. The Jews did not merit to fulfill the goal of conquering the Holy Land. A series of inexplicable rebellions broke out which culminated in the catastrophe of the "Spies". As a result Hashem decreed that the adults who had exited Egypt would die in the wilderness over a period of 40 years.

The Book of Bamidbar ends with the Jews poised on the Eastern side of the Jordan in possession of the vast lands which had constituted the kingdoms of Sichon and Og two mighty warriors who made the mistake of attacking them. Led by Moshe the Jews fought back and with Hashem's help emerged victorious.

In effect the Biblical narrative ends at this point. The last Book of the Torah, Devarim,

consists of the final teachings and moral messages of Moshe. However the Biblical story ends with the death of Moshe. The Torah does not include the account of the invasion and conquest of the land of Canaan and instead consigns it to the first Book of the section of Nach (prophets), Joshua.

But the question arises; wasn't this supposed to be the main theme of Bamidbar? The sedra of Shelach describes the mission of the Spies. Let's imagine for a moment what would have happened if the Spies had returned with a very positive report and would have encouraged the people to embark on the great campaign. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that the Torah would then have included the narrative of the successful battles for the conquest of Eretz Yisrael.

My question is, was the story of the capture of Canaan supposed to be included in the Five Books of Moshe? Again, it seems clear that had the Spies not sinned the Torah would have described the subsequent war and victory. Of course, the Spies intimidated the people and the conquest was postponed for 40 years and it was conducted under the leadership of Yehoshua. But why was that not recorded in the Torah (and was, instead, written up in the Book of Joshua)?

In my opinion the Torah would have incorporated the narrative of the invasion and possession of Canaan if it had happened under the leadership of Moshe Rabbenu. For in that case it would have represented the highest level of Kibbush (conquest). The Rabbis say that if Moshe had led the Jews into

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

the land he would have built the Beit Hamikdosh and it would have never been destroyed!

The conquest of Yehoshua was on an inferior level. Not all of the idolatrous natives were eliminated from the land as had been required. At a certain point the people got tired of fighting and retired to their inheritances to work the soil. Subsequently the idolaters who remained became a source of trouble for the Jews. Thus it was not the ideal conquest that was envisioned and would have come to pass had Moshe been in charge.

Perhaps this enables us to understand why Moshe prayed so incessantly for Hashem to rescind the decree against his entry into the land. He understood how vital it was for the future wellbeing of Klal Yisrael that the foundation of the Jews in the land be established properly. He knew that he was singularly qualified to bring this about and beseeched Hashem to let him do so until Hashem finally told him, "It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to Me any further on this matter."

This matter is very relevant to the contemporary state of Israel. The Zionist "conquest" of Eretz Israel in the last century was incomplete and left the door open to many problems. At the present time an Arab-Israeli party which does not recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish state is a member of the governing coalition. To this day Israel is confronted by numerous enemies from within and without. There are many nations who do not recognize the legitimacy of Israel's presence in the land.

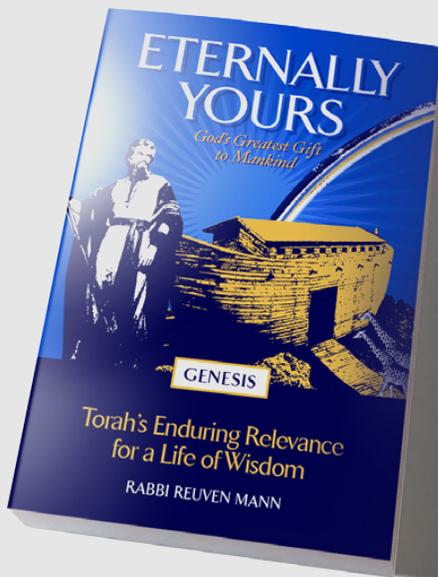
The return of the Jews to Eretz Yisrael and the establishment there of an advanced democratic society ranks as one of the greatest miracles in Jewish and human history. But it must be seen that the ultimate goal has not yet been attained and we have a long way to go.

At this time of mourning for the destruction of the first and second Temples and for all the calamities we have suffered as a result of the exile let us determine to learn the lessons of the past. We must resolve to eschew brotherly hate and to join together to strengthen the foundations of Jewish existence, wellbeing and security in the land that Hashem said, "This I will give to them".

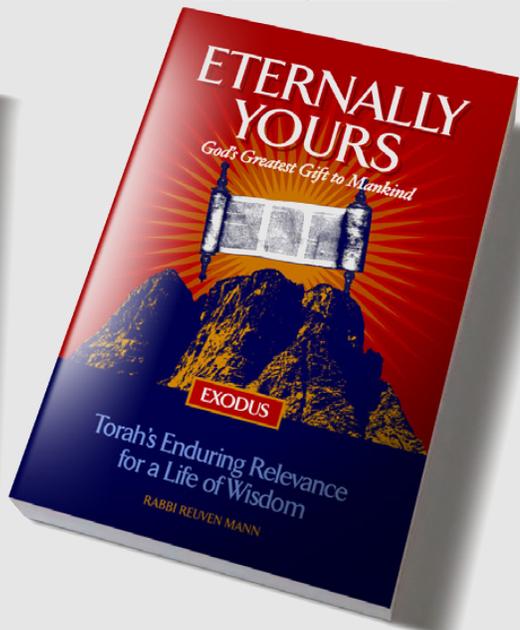
Shabbat Shalom ■

RABBI MANN ON AMAZON

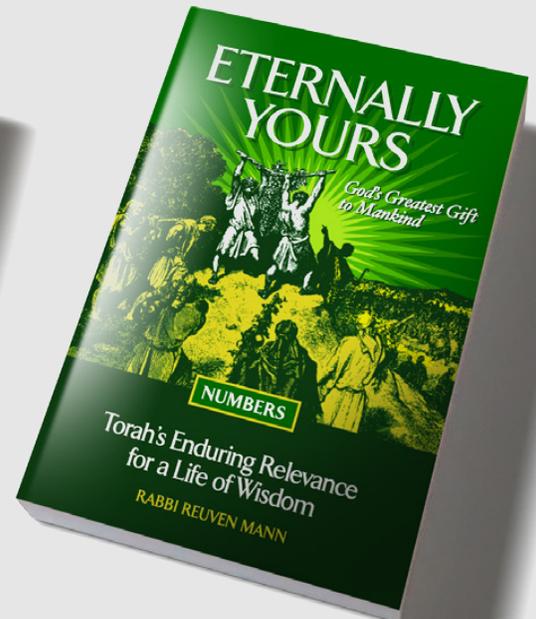
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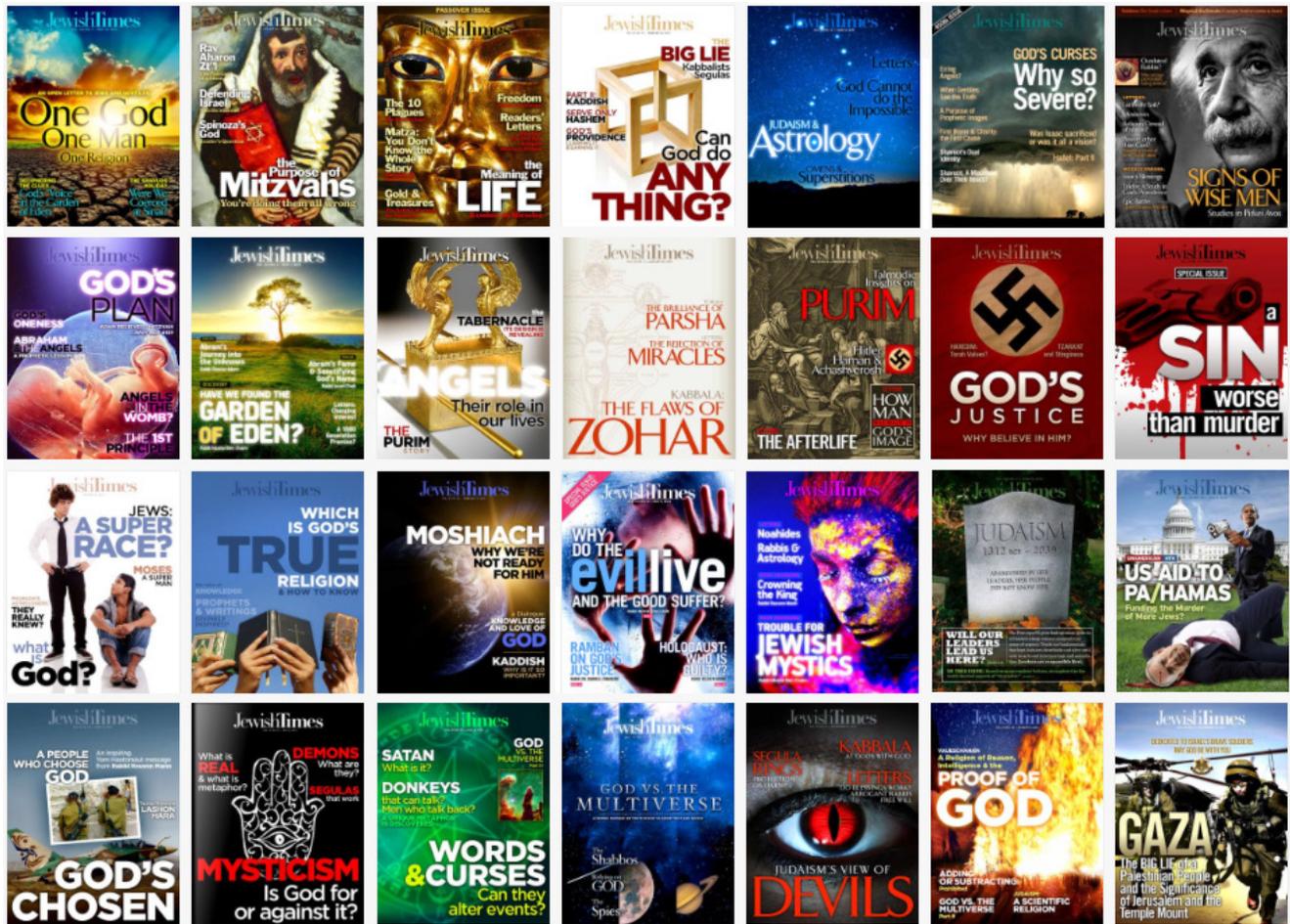
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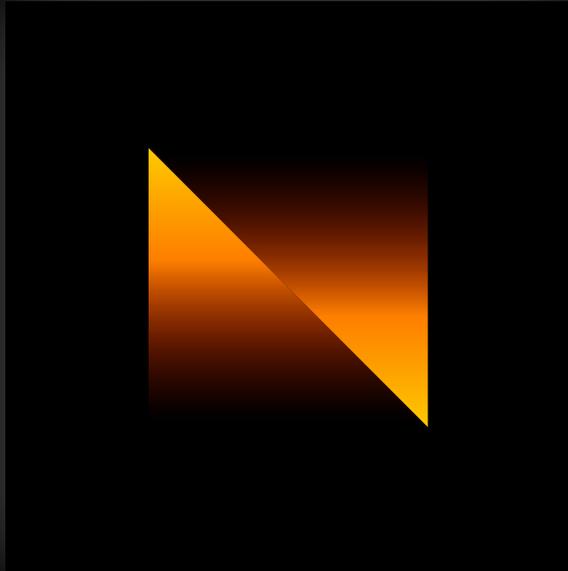
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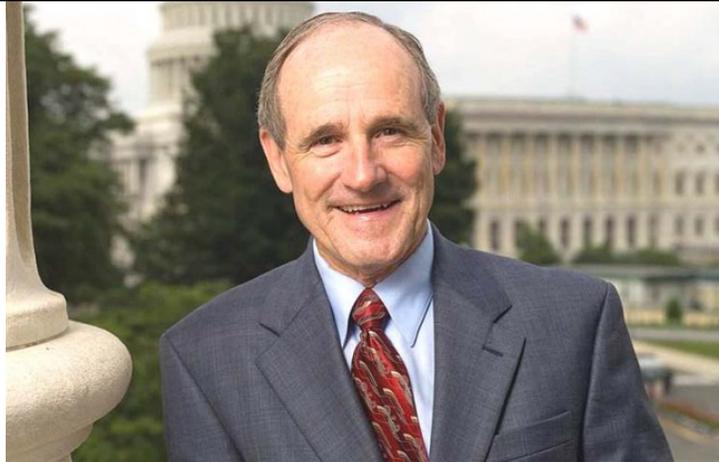
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Idaho Republican Standing between Ramallah and Biden's Promised \$50 Million

By David Israel

Jim Risch, the junior GOP Senator from Idaho and the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in late May placed a hold on \$50 million out of an overall \$360 million in assistance Secretary of State Antony Blinken had promised the Arabs in the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of Operation Guardians of the Walls.

A spokeswoman for Risch issued a statement saying, "Humanitarian assistance is not subject to congressional notification and holds. Senator Risch remains in close contact with the State Department and USAID to ensure that any additional Palestinian initiatives are compliant with US law, to include the Taylor Force Act."

The Taylor Force Act stops American economic aid to the Palestinian Authority it ceases paying stipends through its Martyr's Fund to individuals who commit acts of terrorism and to the families of deceased terrorists. The Act was signed into law by President Donald Trump in March 2018, and immediately cut a third of US foreign aid payments to the PA. In August 2018, the Trump administration cut more than \$200 million in direct aid to the PA and stopped all aid—\$100 million—to UNRWA.

"While the PA and the PLO continue to promote violence through the pay to slay program, the ranking member will continue to provide rigorous oversight of taxpayer dollars to ensure this money does not benefit terrorists," Senator Risch's spokeswoman said.

Needless to say, this is not going over well in PA Arab circles. Ahmad Abuznaid, executive director of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, told Al Jazeera on Wednesday: "I just don't see any justification for withholding the release of funds, other than the continued dehumanization, ridicule and collective punishment of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza." He added: "It's a part of the consistent collective punishment of the Palestinian people, particularly the people of Gaza."

In early June, a large group of House Democrats wrote Senator Risch: "We write with a great sense of urgency to respectfully request that you

release your hold on tens of millions of dollars in appropriated humanitarian aid that is so desperately needed to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians rebuilding their lives in the wake of the fighting between Hamas and Israel earlier this month."

They continued: "Gaza is experiencing a humanitarian catastrophe. Buildings lie in rubble. Access to clean water and electricity is sporadic or nonexistent. Food insecurity is spreading. COVID-19 is running rampant and thousands of people have been displaced and rendered homeless. The magnitude of the crisis is staggering."

Secretary Blinken met PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas on May 25 and pledged \$75 million in longer-term development and economic aid to "the Palestinians." Shortly thereafter, Risch and other Republicans blocked the bulk of the aid, based on the fact that the PA pays out about \$150 million annually to terrorists behind bars in Israel and to the families of terrorists who killed Israelis.

"Sadly, just after the Biden administration announced additional assistance to the West Bank and Gaza, PA President Abbas issued a \$42,000 martyr's payment to a Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist who stabbed two Israelis to death in 2015. This is outrageous," Risch wrote on June 15, adding, "This abhorrent practice concerns me deeply and should be repugnant to all members of Congress."

Senator Risch is one of those dyed in the wool American friends of Israel who are occasionally angrier than Israelis and Jews are over the offenses directed at them. On May 27, he introduced a resolution condemning global anti-Semitism, noting incidents of anti-Semitism outside the United States, and going after the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement whose activists fuel anti-Semitism around the world.

In a spirit similar to the German government's recent decision to ban Hamas flags over their ties to anti-Semitic attacks, Senator Risch wrote that "while anti-Semitism is on a rise across the world, the recent violence between Israel and Hamas has led to an increase in attacks against Jewish communities. This violence is further fueled by support here in the United States for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS), a global Palestinian-led effort to promote boycotts, divestments, and economic sanctions against Israel. The BDS movement is dangerous and contributes to the rise of anti-Semitism."

And lest you conclude that he is just a Republican lackey, on January 6, when Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol, Senator Risch called the attack "unpatriotic and un-American in the extreme" and suggested it was egged on by "deep distrust in the integrity and veracity of our elections."

Maybe he's just a principled man? We still have those, apparently. ■

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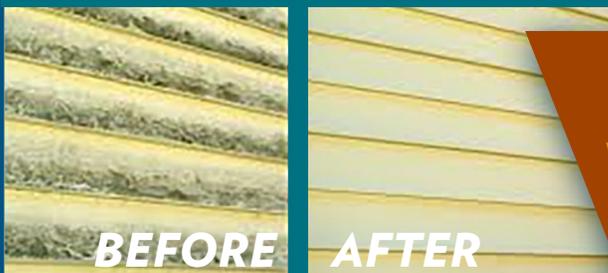
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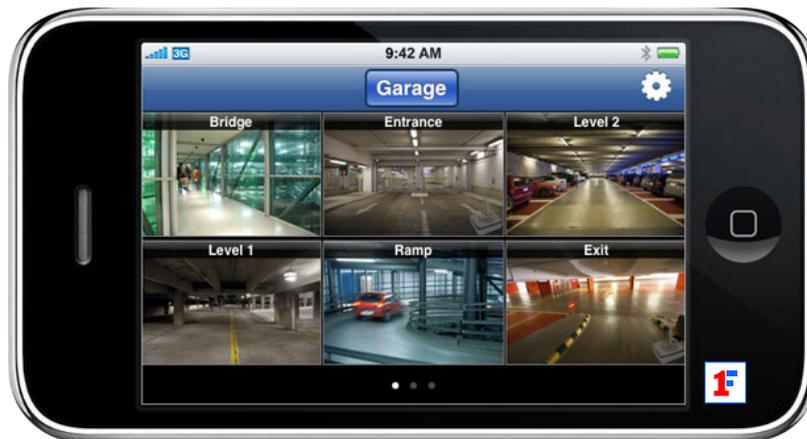
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