



Ki Tavo 5769

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Mysticism – Indolence – Fraud

[From "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Parashat Ki Tetze 5769
– translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: People avail themselves of all sorts of mystical channels to solve their problems: astrology, praying at the graves of the righteous, reading tea leaves, mystics and miracle workers, energy transfer, battling the evil eye, etc. Is there any truth to these things? People claim that mysticism can solve all your ills, and the fact is that it works! What is certain is that many people are attracted to these things. After all, mystical Torah secrets exist in this world! Not everything is rational in life!

Answer: Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, said that not everything people say is true, and that only the fool believes everything. At the same time, you can't deny everything. Some of it is true. One thing is certain: the spread of such things does enormous damage to mankind (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, Bereshit pp. 310-313). Indeed, the result is great harm, involving man's becoming accustomed to indolence and idleness, fantasies and illusions, and to distancing himself from hard work. Our Sages taught us the way of the Torah, that "Man is born for toil" (Iyov 5:7), as Ramchal explains in Mesillat Yesharim (Chapter 9). Everything is toil. Even prayer is toil, and not sensory reverie. Even spiritual elevation is toil, and not a free gift of pleasure from a charismatic personality...

In a word, people have created an alternative Torah-bypass route, devoid of toil. There are several ways to tell a fraud, and one way is monetary. A true healer does not seek money from the unfortunate. Rather, his goal is to be benevolent. Quite the contrary, he distributes money to them. You can tell false mysticism when they demand money for holy water, standing bank orders in exchange for rectification of the soul, and even your political vote in exchange for all the blessings of this world and the next.

They're big experts in "Kabbalah" [Hebrew: "receiving"] and what they receive is money, and usually they hand out no tax receipt, and many of them have been sued by the tax authorities.

Wisdom is generally lacking as well. There's nothing holy about them, and they carry no approbation from the great halachic authorities. Undoubtedly, people are attracted to this out of curiosity, idleness, or disappointment with science. Obviously, I'm not talking here about blessed scientific curiosity, but about unhealthy curiosity. Magic is always captivating. Without a doubt, science occasionally disappoints us. Certainly, it doesn't have answers for everything, and there are cracks in its surface. Yet we mustn't make it out to be worse than it is.

One can have no claims against the child for having a childish mentality, for believing in magic. Yet people have to get over that. They have to grow up and shake off that mentality. Alas the flight from common sense cuts across national and sectarian boundaries.

Does mysticism work? Certainly! This is because 80% of illnesses cure themselves spontaneously. A third of pains disappear with the help of sugar-pills and placebos. To verify the efficacy of a treatment, you need a controlled, random study, being carried out identically in two different places. Certainly the mystical secrets of the Torah really exist, yet none of the things described above fit that category. The secrets of the Torah constitute profound wisdom which deals with the most profound questions: G-d's rule over the world, the meaning of life, reward and punishment, etc. By contrast, all of this nonsense and fraud is enormously superficial. The problem is not that the practitioners in question are not rational. Certainly there are things that transcend the intellect. Yet none of the things described above are secrets of the Torah. They simply are not Torah, but another pathway, an alternative religion. Instead of serving God, instead of mitzvot, they invent things that are not part of the Torah, and that sometimes diverge from the Torah.

Certainly our Sages mentioned paying visits to the graves of the righteous, yet even the dead admit that this is not the main thing in the Torah. The evil eye is mentioned as well, but not in the shallow meaning that people attribute to it (see Ein Aya, Berachot 20).

Certainly Ruach Ha-Kodesh - Divine intuition - exists, but it does not easily rest upon a person, but only following the protracted journey described in Mesillat Yesharim, consisting of achieving nine distinct spiritual levels, each one higher than the one preceding it: caution, alacrity, wholesomeness, separation from sin, purity, saintliness, humility, the fear of sin, and holiness.

It is well-known that many people believe in astrology, the evil eye and reading tea leaves. Yet we, disciples of Avraham and disciples of Moshe, say, "Have complete faith in Hashem, your G-d" (Devarim 18:13), and gradually, the Torah's light will spread.



Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah," "Olam Ha-Katan" and "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Eumnah." Here's a sample:

Q: Is it permissible to put Tefillin on my toupee?
A: No. You should put on Tefillin at home with a blessing while not wearing your toupee and then put them on in shul without a blessing on the toupee.

Q: Is it permissible to pray in sandals?
A: Yes, if your feet are clean.

Q: Is it permissible for a father to daven if he has a baby in a front or back baby carrier?
A: Only if there is no choice.

Q: I have finally been drafted into the Holy Army of Tzahal. Should I recite Shehechyanu?
A: Yes, over being drafted and over the uniform – with incredible joy.

Q: Do I have to tear my garment when I visit the Kotel after a long time?
A: We do not tear at all since it is under Jewish sovereignty.

Q: Should a woman giving birth on Shabbat travel to the hospital in an ambulance or car?
A: Whichever is more comfortable for her.

Q: I am a security guard for a settlement. If a resident brings me food in his car on Shabbat, can I eat it?
A: No, but do so with wisdom in order not to offend him.

Q: Is it permissible to go to the dentist on a fast day since you have to put water in your mouth and spit it out?
A: It is permissible, but not on Tisha Be-Av.

Q: Is it permissible to use non-kosher bait for fishing?
A: Yes.

Q: I accidentally swallowed a fly. Am I fleischig?
A: No.

Q: A soldier in my unit is looking for a verse from the Tanach for his tattoo. Is it permissible to help him?
A: Certainly not. It is forbidden to get a tattoo. It is also forbidden to bring a verse from the Tanach into the restroom, etc.

Q: Is it permissible for a man to grow long hair in order to donate it to cancer victims?
A: No, we do not perform a mitzvah through a transgression.

Q: Is it permissible to read my horoscope each day to see what will happen to me based on the stars?
A: It is forbidden and nonsense.

Q: Should I turn to a homeopath?
A: There is no scientific proof that it is valid; therefore do not become involved with it.

Q: I am 15 and want to visit Maarat Ha-Machpelah but my parents do not allow it because of the security situation. Is it permissible to pressure them or should I give in to them?
A: Try to convince them and if you cannot, go beyond the letter of the law and give in to them.

Q: Is it possible to learn Torah at an advanced age and become a Torah scholar?
A: Certainly, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Eliezer and many other great Torah scholars throughout the generations prove it.

Q: Is it permissible to learn Torah with a Rabbi who read Harry Potter? Isn't his brain filled with nonsense?
A: It is permissible, a person is judged by the majority of his actions.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Teachings from the mouth of our Rabbi from the Chafetz Chaim

1. The Chafetz Chaim said: Fulfilling a mitzvah in the Land of Israel is twenty times greater than outside of the Land (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah – Vayikra p. 265 and Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 1 p. 160, 202).

2. Ha-Gaon Reb Leib, the son of the Chafetz Chaim, told our Rabbi that when they began to build "Rishon Le-Tzion" his father said to him: "Leib, it has started," i.e. the beginning of the Redemption has begun (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah – Bereshit pp. 457-458 and Devarim pp. 485-486).
3. "A few years ago, a Torah scholar told me that a few young men wanted to avoid military service in a non-Jewish army and wasting time from learning Torah. They wanted to physically injure themselves and disqualify themselves from Polish military service. But the Chafetz Chaim opposed this: 'A person is not permitted to injure himself. The body is not his. And why avoid? Practice in the Army. The Messiah will arrive soon. There will be a State. And when there is a State, there will be a need for an army. Prepare here. You have the opportunity to prepare for the army of the State of Israel'" (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah – Devarim p. 263).



Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

"Kol Isha"

Q: What is Ha-Rav's opinion regarding "Kol Isha" (the prohibition of hearing a woman sing)? In modern times, may a man listen to the voice of a single woman singing – live?

A: The basic halachah is that it is forbidden to listen to a woman sing whether she is alone or in a group and whether it is alive or recorded.

*From Rav Aviner's Commentary on Birkat Ha-Mazon,
entitled Shir Ha-Ma'a Lot*

The Guest's Blessing

The Guest's Blessing has its source in the Talmud (Berachot 46a) which says, "What does the guest bless? May it be the will of God that the host not be shamed in this world nor humiliated in the World-to-Come. And Rebbe (Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi) would add the words: And may he be very successful with all his possessions, and may his possessions and our possessions be successful and close to the city. And may no evil impediment reign over his handiwork nor over our handiwork. And may there not appear, neither before him, nor before us, any thought of sin, transgression or iniquity, from this time and forever." Although the Shulchan Aruch rules that a guest should recite this (Orach Chaim 201:1), it is surprising that it is omitted in many siddurim and one fulfills his obligation with the shorter statement: "May the Merciful One bless our host and our hostess, themselves, their home, their children and all that is theirs." The long version, however, is in printed in Maran Ha-Rav Kook's siddur, Olat Re'eyah (vol. 1, pp. 368-369).

Expressing thanks to a host is a great element of ethics, as is explained at length by Rabbenu Bachya in the book "Hovot Levavot - Duties of the Heart" that expressing

thanks is the central building block of all the worship of Hashem. This is the Alef-Bet - the ABC - of the ethics teachings.

"May it be the will of God that the host not be shamed in this world." Maran Ha-Rav Kook, explains: "That a guest who is eating not of his own, will necessarily not be saved from some measure of shame." "One who eats food which is not his is ashamed to look into the face of the one who gave it" (Jerusalem Talmud, Orlah 1:3 quoted in the Tosafot to Kiddushin 36b d.h. Mitzvah). Therefore, to counteract this, the guest blesses the host so that "his fee will be paid without a touch of shame and disgrace being mixed with it" (Olat Re'eiyah vol. 1, p. 368).



Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for
the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Intimacy

Dear couple, as you know, Adam and Chava were alone in the Garden of Eden, therefore please learn from them and make sure that every day or, at least, every few days take time to be just the two of you. In this way, you will have the Garden of Eden. You can simply talk, not for any purpose but because it is nice to be together. Even if you are older and have 10 children, 100 grandchildren and 1000 great-grandchildren – nonetheless! At least, on Shabbat. Please don't accept invitations every Shabbat and do not invite guests every Shabbat. At least talk before going to bed. What a wonderful delight!

Do you remember the Third Decree? It appears that you do not. At the beginning of the Kibbutz movement, there was incredible self-sacrifice. There were not enough places to sleep. There was some room in the chicken coop and barn. But this also was not enough, so they divided each tent in half with the help of a cloth. But this also was not enough, so each couple took in a single man or woman. What self-sacrifice! What damage to a couple's intimacy. "You expel the women of My Nation from their pleasant houses" (Michah 2:9) - "This is one who sleeps in a room where a couple dwells" (Eruvin 63b). I assume that you do not have a guest in your bedroom, so take advantage of the opportunity and exchange a few loving words before going to sleep.

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