

JewishTimes

VOL. XX NO. 30 — AUG. 19, 2022

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"Please test me in this [tzedaka] said the Lord of hosts. I will surely open the store houses of heaven and empty out for you a blessing that is more than sufficient" (Malachi 3:10).

Rabbi Israel Chait said, "God must return the kindness because God is the source of all kindness, of all tzedaka." God wishes man's benefits to ultimately trace back to Him. Therefore, God repays the charitable person, so the recipient gains not by man, but actually through God. God will not allow man to be a benefactor, for God wishes the recipient to thank God, not man. For God created the institution of kindness, and man merely copies God.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Birds Carry Our Words?

READER: My question pertains to Lashon Hara. I understand that if you are speaking against another person to someone else, that is Lashon Hara. My question is, what if someone has hurt you so deeply and caused such grief because of lies and theft and you speak out when you are alone [to vent]? I know

G-d hears all, but is it also considered Lashon Hara when expressing your pain without an audience?

RABBI: You committed no sin if you spoke privately. As Rabbi Israel Chait stated, Lashon Hara is where—by sharing a corrupt picture of another person

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or distorting truths—one person distorts another person's perception of reality, be it about of people or about facts. There must be an audience in order to commit this sin.

Nonetheless, you intelligently ask if degrading speech per se expressed when alone is harmful. Although not Lashon Hara, verbalization even while alone is damaging as you do not contain your aggressive expression. Speaking in private, you allow yourself to get one step closer to the actual sin.

It is also advantageous practically that one contains their speech, even when in private:

“Do not say something that cannot be heard, for in the end it will be heard” (Ethics 2:4).

Rabbeinu Yona comments:

“As a person must guard and be careful from the possibility. Hence if you have a secret, do not tell it even to someone whose soul is bound to your soul [confidant]. And don't say, “[It is] impossible that this thing be heard, as there is no stranger among us to transport these words.” ‘And in the end, everything is heard.’ Even between you and yourself, do not make it heard to your ears, as the rabbis, may their memory blessed, metaphorically said (Berakhot 8b), “Do not talk among the walls, for the walls have ears.” And about this, King Solomon—peace be upon him—said, “For a bird of the air may carry the utterance, and a winged creature may report the word” (Koheles 10:20).

“Birds will carry your words” and “walls have ears” must be understood; both make no sense literally. As birds don't speak, and walls don't hear or speak, how will one's evil speech reach others, bringing harm on oneself? There's only one possibility...

These metaphors identify man's lack of restraint. Man has such a yearning to degrade others, such a burning lack of control, that this psychological disposition is viewed as if “birds and walls will hear and carry his words.” Ethics, and King Solomon's

beautifully crafted metaphor convey this self-destructive part of human nature, where ego's desire to degrade others is so irresistible that it outweighs the ultimate self-destruction generated by our spoken words. King Solomon scripted this metaphor to warn man against harming himself. For although speaking privately cannot hurt us, venting our ego and aggressive speech privately incites our emotions, making us weaker to control ourselves when others are in our presence, when our damning speech will come back to bite us. The inevitability of our egos to harm us is depicted as “listening birds and walls.” If we don't exercise self-control, we doom ourselves as if the birds and walls are telling others.

But we must distinguish between egoistical degrading speech, and your case of simply crying out due to oppression. Your case is akin to the Jews who groaned due to the oppressive Egyptian bondage: “The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out” (Exod. 2:123). Those Jews did nothing wrong. Their cry was not premeditated, but a natural, uncontrollable response to pain. The same can be said of your cries. ■

Abraham Didn't Need Torah. Why do We?

READER: I heard—according to Rambam—that Abraham did not have the Torah; Abraham relied on reason. So why do Jews today need the Torah when reason “can do it” like it did for Abraham?

RABBI: Most people today are not on Abraham's level; Torah is required. Furthermore, originally, God's plan was that man use his well-equipped mind to recognize God, arrive at truths and act morally. But man regressed, idolatry became rampant, societies became immoral, and a Torah system was now required for mankind. Therefore, due to both cultural and intellectual compromises, Torah is required. ■

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Who Loses His Soul?

READER: What is the penalty in Judaism legally and spiritually for someone who insults a Rabbi or religious scholar personally over a non religious issue and over a religious issue? What if he mocks or insults, in front of a Rabbi, Scholar, aspects of Judaism that are law....opinions that are not legal [not accepted halacha]. What does G-d say to blasphemers and heretics who do this around secular but self identifying Jews? What about Jews who do not convert but speak up for Jesus as G-d, a prophet, a messiah in front of religious Jews including Rabbis and everyday religious Jews?

RABBI: I am not in a position to comment about legal penalties, but I will cite sources addressing the damage to the soul. All these below lose their afterlife:

Rav and Rabbi Hanina both say: This (an apikores) is one who treats a Torah scholar with contempt. Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say: This is one who treats another with contempt before a Torah scholar. (Sanhedrin 99b)

And, the following are they that have no share in the World to Come but suffer excision and loss of identity, and are damned for ever and ever for their exceeding wickedness and sinfulness: atheists, infidels, traducers of the Torah, dissenters of resurrection and the coming of a redeemer, apostates, enticers of many to sin, seceders from the congregation, a public perpetrator of sins emulating Jehoiakim, informers, leaders who cast fear upon the congregation not for the sake of God, shedders of blood by defaming people in public, evil-tongued people, he who abolishes circumcision. (Hil. Teshuva 3:6)

There are five categories of atheists (Min):

- (1) he who says that there is no God and no Omnipotence;
- (2) he who says that there is an Omnipotence but that there are two or more such;
- (3) he who says that there is One Lord; but that He is corporeal and has a form;
- (4) Likewise one who says that He alone is not the First Cause and Creator of all;

(5) likewise he who worships a star, or planet, or any other as a mediator between him and the Lord of the universe; every one of these five is an atheist. (Hil. Teshuva 3:7)

There are three categories of infidels (Apikores):

- (1) he who says that prophecy is altogether an invention, and that no knowledge reaches the heart of the sons of man from the Creator;
- (2) he who denies the prophecy of Moses our Master;
- (3) and he who says that the Creator knows not the affairs of the sons of man; every one of these three is an infidel.

There are three categories of Torah traducers (Kofer):

- (1) he who says that the Torah is not God given, even if he says that a single Verse or one word thereof was spoken by Moses on his own authority is, indeed, a traducer of the Torah;
- (2) he who denies its Oral explanation, that is the Oral Torah, or its teachers as Tzaduk and Bysos did;
- (3) he who says that the Creator switched one mitzvah for another and that the Torah had been nullified long ago, though it really was God given; every one of these three is a traducer of the Torah. (Hil. Teshuva 3:8)

There are two categories of apostates (Mumar) in Israel:

- (1) an apostate against one commandment;
- (2) an apostate against the whole Torah. The apostate against one commandment is; one who emboldens himself to transgress a given commandment consciously so that it becomes his habit of doing it publicly, even it be of the minor commandments, for instance, he persistently wears garment mixed of wool and flax, or rounds the corners of his head, as a consequence whereof it appears that such commandment no longer exists in his world, such one is, indeed, an apostate in this matter, if he does such spitefully. An apostate against the whole Torah is, a convert to the religion of the idolaters, for instance, at a time when they issue arbitrary edicts and he cleaves to them, saying: "Of what profit is there for me to cleave to Israel who are down-trodden and persecuted; it is rather best for me to cleave to these in whose hand lies the power", he, assuredly, is apostate against the whole Torah. (Hil. Teshuva 3:9) ■

Proving the One True Religion

RABBI MOSHE
BEN-CHAIM

translated as carved or incised, but merely as somehow “present” in the tablets. What is Maimonides’ message that the writing was “natural”?

5. Earlier (Exod. 31:18) Torah says, “When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the pact, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God.” Why does God divide the tablets’ description into 2 Torah sections?

Appreciating the details and hints about Sinai’s astonishing miracles, God’s precise Torah formulations direct us to the answers...

Exodus 32:15,16 reads as follows:

And Moses turned and descended the mountain and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hand: tablets written on both sides, from this side and that side they were written. The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing, embedded (charuss) on the tablets.

Fire: The Source of Torah is not Biological

In front of 2.5 million Jews, God created a voice to emanate from the fiery mountain. Maimonides says the Jews heard no distinct words, only the “sound” of words, following the verse, “The Lord spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no form—nothing but a voice” (Deut. 4:12).

Life exists in all substances and regions, in ice, under sand, and in water. But all biological life perishes in fire. A voice emanating from fire teaches that this intelligence is not earthbound. But as Maimonides says the Jews heard no distinct words, only the “sound” of words [intelligent patterns], validation was yet required that Torah’s “content” was divine. The voice emanating from fire taught that God is not physical. But how was God’s communication verified?

“Tablets written on both sides, from this side and that side they were written”

“From both sides” cannot not refer to surface etching, as wrongly depicted in medieval paintings. If that were the case, the Jews could have suspected it was not God, but Moses who fabricated that writing, thereby stripping the tablets of their divine nature. And proof that this was possible was that as Moses “hewed” a second set of stones (Exod. 34:4), certainly he could etch letters on their surfaces. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

God’s revelation of Himself and His Bible to 2.5 million Jews at Mount Sinai was the world’s greatest event. This event renders Judaism the only religion based on mass witnesses, and thereby, the only proven religion.

This event contained a few unique elements: God created a voice emanating from fire, He gave 2 tablets of sapphire bearing miraculous text of the 10 Commandments, and He caused lightning, thunder, earthquakes and the sound of a shofar. Can we understand why God orchestrated Revelation in this precise form?

1. Why must revelation include fire? This question is strengthened as 9 times in Deuteronomy Moses reminds Israel that, “God’s voice emanated from inside the fire.”

2. Why are tablets needed? Why can’t those 10 commands be written in Torah like all other 603 commands, and do away with the tablets? The need for these tablets is further seen, as after Moses breaks the tablets, God instructs him to hew a replacement set.

3. What is the plain meaning of the tablets’ script written “from both sides”? What purpose does this serve? Moses broke the tablets, as Rabbi Israel Chait said, lest the Jews worship them as they worshipped the Gold Calf. The tablets were significantly superior to other stones. How so?

4. What is meant by “God’s tablets” and “God’s writing”? “Charuss” (Ibid. 32:16) can be understood as Maimonides states, naturally formed letters, not subsequent engraving upon the tablets:

“The tablets were God’s work, and the writing was God’s writing” (Exod. xxxii. 1:6), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art, for all natural things are called “the work of the Lord.” The writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument (Guide, book I, chap. lxxvi).

Ibn Ezra offers no conclusive translation as he says Torah contains no other instance of “charuss.” Therefore, charuss need not be

Rather, “From both sides” means this: as sapphire is translucent, the internal sapphire grain is viewable from both sides, from all angles. God selected a translucent object for this purpose. As these 2 bricks of sapphire formed during creation (Avos 5:6), sentences also formed “naturally” (through God’s will) inside the sapphire. This is a feat impossible for Moses to have fabricated; there is no manner in which Moses could have written “inside” the stones. Only the One who formed sapphire, also authored Torah text within the sapphire. These stone tablets must have been an amazing sight. It is akin to cutting a tree open to find the rings inside are composed of Torah text! The creator of trees is Torah’s author.

This means that the sapphire—creation—is subordinated to Torah. That is, nature is harnessed to share Torah...the physical world is subservient to Torah. The message at Sinai was that Earth was designed for a goal: for man to find God through studying Torah and nature. This message of nature facilitating the greater goal of sharing Torah is also demonstrated in the voice God created emanating from fire: God harnessed fire and sound, and enabled Torah to emanate.

The Rabbis teach, “God viewed Torah and created Earth.” Meaning, Torah is Earth’s blueprint; Torah is prior and superior to Earth. Rashi on Avos 2:8 says, “If the Jews don’t follow Torah, God will reverse creation back to voidness.”

Additionally, the verse says they were “tablets of God.” This means that each individual tablet was naturally formed. Naturally-formed complete tablets with no human tampering complements the proof that the writing was not created by Moses, as the tablets were in their complete “natural” form.

All Creations are His

Shofar blasts cannot be produced naturally, but only by intelligent life. At first, Torah records that the shofar accompanied the thunder and lightning (Exod. 19:16). This demonstrated that the natural thunder and lightning was not separate from an intelligence (shofar). Torah then isolates the shofar, this time adding that it grew louder and louder (Ibid. 19:19) to stress that this was not a human production. When man blows a shofar, his breath weakens until he must stop and inhale once again. Thus, this endless shofar blare conveyed the presence of a divine intelligence.

God also “descended” on Mt. Sinai (Ibid. 19:20), and Deuteronomy 4:36 says that God spoke from the heavens to demonstrate His control is not limited to Earth alone. And the mountain shaking (Ibid. 19:18) displays God’s control over Earth as a whole. All in heaven and Earth are shown to be guided by God’s will.

2 Accounts of the Tablets

“When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the pact, stone tablets...”

Here, the operative word is “finished.” Yes, God finished speaking to Moses, but He did not wish this lesson to be “finished.” This explains why only here God mentioned the tablets “stone” nature. God selected stone as a means to encapsulate His commands in an eternal substance. His prophecy to Moses finished, but His lessons for man live on eternally. But the second account of the tablets does not mention stone at all. Rather, it highlights the tablets’ miraculous nature. Why? As Moses descended Mt. Sinai to the idolatrous Jews, God highlights the tablets’ miracle, in contrast to the imagined deity of the Gold Calf. The tablets’ miraculous nature was now

relevant to contrast the inanimate Gold Calf and teaches a lesson about what to deify: God alone.

Summary

Sinai’s lessons were now complete: Fire taught that God is not physical, not biological, not of this world, and that He is the source of Torah. The miraculous stones and their writing taught what are His commands, and that they were not Moses own inscriptions, but were miraculous writing which only God could have created inside the translucent stones for all to see. And lightning, thunder and shofar demonstrated God’s complete control of the world.

A theme emerges: fire with intelligence (voice), stones with intelligence (writing), and heavenly and earthly phenomena with intelligence (shofar). The lesson is that the physical world is subservient to God, whose will is that man pursues Torah over all else. When giving the Torah, God compromised the nature of fire, earth (sapphire tablets) and the heavens (thunder and lightning) to share His Torah. The



Jews learned that all that is, exists only for man to study God through Torah.

God proved His supernatural existence amidst flames, Torah’s commands were validated as divine, and the tablets “testified” as such, earning their title “Tablets of Testimony.” And God demonstrated His dominion over heaven and Earth. Heaven and Earth were put in service of God imbuing mankind of Torah’s vitality.

3334 years ago, God gifted mankind a system to direct our lives towards the most happiness and fulfillment, in pursuit of God via His wisdom shared in His Torah. God orchestrated Revelation on Mt. Sinai to serve as everlasting validation of His metaphysical existence, His Bible authorship, and His control over creation. Harnessing creation to display Torah through tablets and God’s communication through fire, teaches man that Earth is subservient to Torah. Our earthly lives were created for the purpose of Torah study. No other religion offers mass witnesses of divine revelation; they demand blind faith, and faith is not proof. Judaism remains the only religion offering proof of divine origin. ■

Better as a Jew?

READER: In an article you answered entitled "Am I better off as a gentile or a Jew?" you stated:

"Torah study is also the greatest command, for in its pursuit, man elevates his highest element, his soul. He attains greater wisdom of God. And this too is open to a gentile; he is to study his laws, and if he takes on more than his minimal 7 laws, which he is allowed to do, he is to study those laws too. And he can convert to attain equal status to a Jew, and enjoy the same portion of the afterlife."

Do you mean that only the person who converts will enjoy the same portion of the afterlife? This is very important for me. Thank you for your answer.

Blessings,
Peter

RABBI: Conversion to Judaism is not required for one to attain the afterlife. For God promised the patriarchs that they would enjoy afterlife and they were not Jews. There were no Jews until Torah was given at Sinai 3300 years ago. But the greater the person's perfection, the greater is his afterlife and when one converts and takes on more laws he will have a greater portion.

But even without conversion, one can keep all of the commands [except for Sabbath, holidays and tefillin] so you can attain the same level of perfection as a Jew. It's not the act of conversion per se that secures our perfection, but it is the following of the laws and Torah study which you can do just like a Jew. So on Sabbath and holidays make sure you light a match to demonstrate that you're not keeping Sabbath completely. The reason why a gentile cannot observe Sabbath is because the Jew must maintain the exclusive role of Torah's authorities. This protects Torah's accurate transmission. For of gentiles not well versed in Torah observe the Sabbath or wear tefillin, they give the impression of being a Jew, and others will trust him to learn Torah, and due to his lack of Torah obligation and thus study and practice, he will distort Torah teachings. ■



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Should a Leader Only Criticize?

Rabbi Reuven Mann

In Parshat Eikev Moshe continues to subject the people to severe criticism for the egregious sins of the past. Moreover, he is very concerned that they might develop a false sense of superiority because of the wondrous things that Hashem is going to do for them. He warns them:

Do not say in your heart, when Hashem pushes them away from before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness did Hashem bring me to possess this Land; and because of the wickedness of these nations did Hashem drive them away from before you.' Not because of your righteousness and the uprightness of your heart are you coming to possess their Land; but because of the wickedness of these nations does Hashem your G-d, drive them away from before you, and in order to establish the word that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And you should know that not because of your righteousness does Hashem, your G-d, give you this good Land to possess it, for you are a stiff-necked people. (Devarim 9:4-6)

Moshe goes on to prove his point by citing the numerous instances of rebelliousness that the Jews manifested in the wilderness. He wants, very much, to disabuse them of any feelings of innate moral advantage over the idol-worshipping nations, who were being evicted from the Land of Israel.

This habit of scrupulous honesty is a prominent feature of Moshe's relationship to Klal Yisrael. He believed that they need to be cognizant of all their failures and shortcomings so that they can rectify them and reach a higher level in their Avodat Hashem (Divine Service). It is hard to think of any subsequent Jewish leader who was as severely critical of the people as Moshe. One must search very diligently to find instances where Moshe actually praises the Jews and lifts their spirits.

We must understand that Moshe had a vital role to play in molding the Jews into the Nation which served Hashem and adhered to His Torah. This required that he be very demanding of them and critical of their behavior when necessary.

However, we must ask, can a leader only rebuke, can he just point out flaws and weaknesses and refrain from singing the people's praises? It would appear that this was not Moshe's primary task, but that Hashem had provided him with a leadership partner to fill this void.

The administration of the Holy Temple Service was designated for Aaron and his male descendants. With regard to this, Moshe was considered a Zar (stranger) punishable by death if he should perform the Temple ritual.

In fact, the most crucial Temple Service of the year, that of Yom Kippur, could only be performed by the Kohen Gadol (chief Kohen). Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik goes further and asserts that it could only be done by Aaron, himself. Therefore, says the Rav, all future priests who minister on Yom Kippur do so as represen-

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tatives of Aaron the Kohen. No other member of the priestly class has permission to serve in the Holy-of-Holies on Yom Kippur.

Why could the Yom Kippur Service be performed only by Aaron and by none other? Rabbi Israel Chait once explained, that Aaron's uniqueness which qualified him to perform the initiation ceremonies of the Mishkan, was that he was beloved of the people because he "loved peace and pursued peace." It emerges that Hashem's plan called for two distinct leaders for His people, one to instruct and rebuke and the other to pursue peace and elevate spirits.

(Note: Korach viewed Moshe's appointment of his brother to the priesthood as a blatant expression of nepotism. But he was simply projecting his own emotions on to the situation. He failed to understand the unique qualities that only these two leaders possessed.)

Neither leader could be successful without the other. Any approach, based exclusively on reproach and correcting mistakes, will produce a deficiency of confidence. A person who responds to all challenges in life with the singular objective of avoiding error will not be creative. And one who is only encouraged and informed how wonderful he is will not rectify his weaknesses and reach new heights.

A great leader must find the proper balance between the need to instruct, indicate flaws and criticize. This was the domain of Moshe, and he was able to speak harshly when the situation required it.

But it remained for Aaron to love peace and pursue it. In this endeavor, Aaron put aside all personal emotions and sacrificed his own dignity for the sake of preserving love and harmony among B'nei Yisrael. Moreover, Aaron conveyed the vital element of love. He communicated that he personally cared about each and every Jew and was there to help. However complicated the problem, he would figure out what was needed and provide it.

This lesson has great relevance to the contemporary religious and political leadership of the Jewish people. One gets the sense that some very religious individuals have a negative, disparaging attitude to those they deem to be less pious than them. They don't refrain from speaking harshly of other Jews whose level of observance is not to their liking.

The attitude of personal demonization can also be seen in the political arena, where intense divisiveness and hatred has become the norm. The proliferation of new political parties comprised of former allies who could no longer get along has paralyzed the system and made it impossible to form a vigorous and effective governing coalition.

In this season of Nachamu (Consolation), we should consider the major lesson of Tisha B'Av: Baseless hatred caused the Exile and the destruction of our Holy Temple. And we should remember that Hashem established the Jewish nation with the King who implemented justice, the Prophet who rebuked the sinners and the Kohen Gadol who exuded love and sought peace.

Those of us who claim to be religious should remove all anger from our hearts, cultivate a feeling of love for our fellow Jews (and humans) and cheerfully teach the message of Judaism with confidence and optimism.

Shabbat Shalom.

Dear Friends,

My newest book, Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra was recently published, and is now available at:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of VaYikra and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com. Additionally, for those in Eretz Yisrael, my books are available at David Linden's bookstore located at Emek Refaim Street 21, Jerusalem and at Pomeranz Book store, Be'eri 5 Jerusalem. They are very nice stores to visit and browse. —Rabbi Reuven Mann

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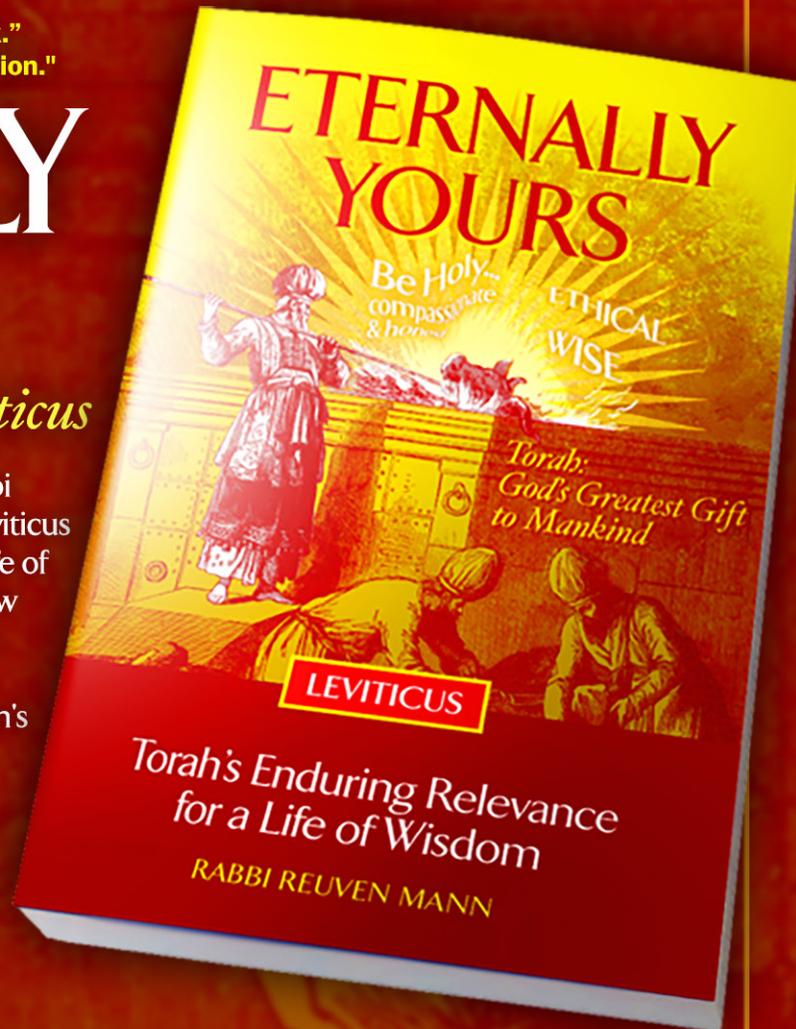
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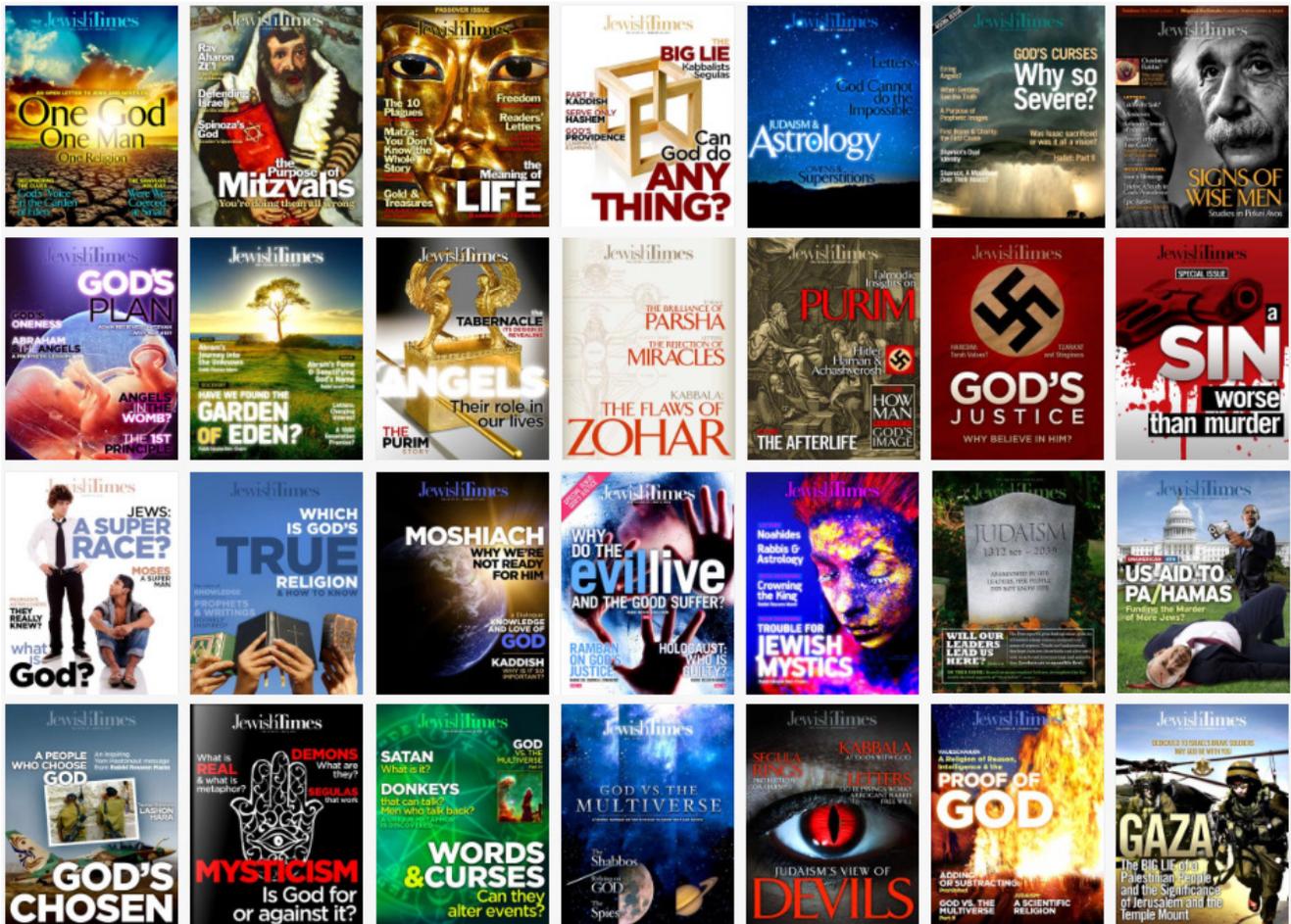
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