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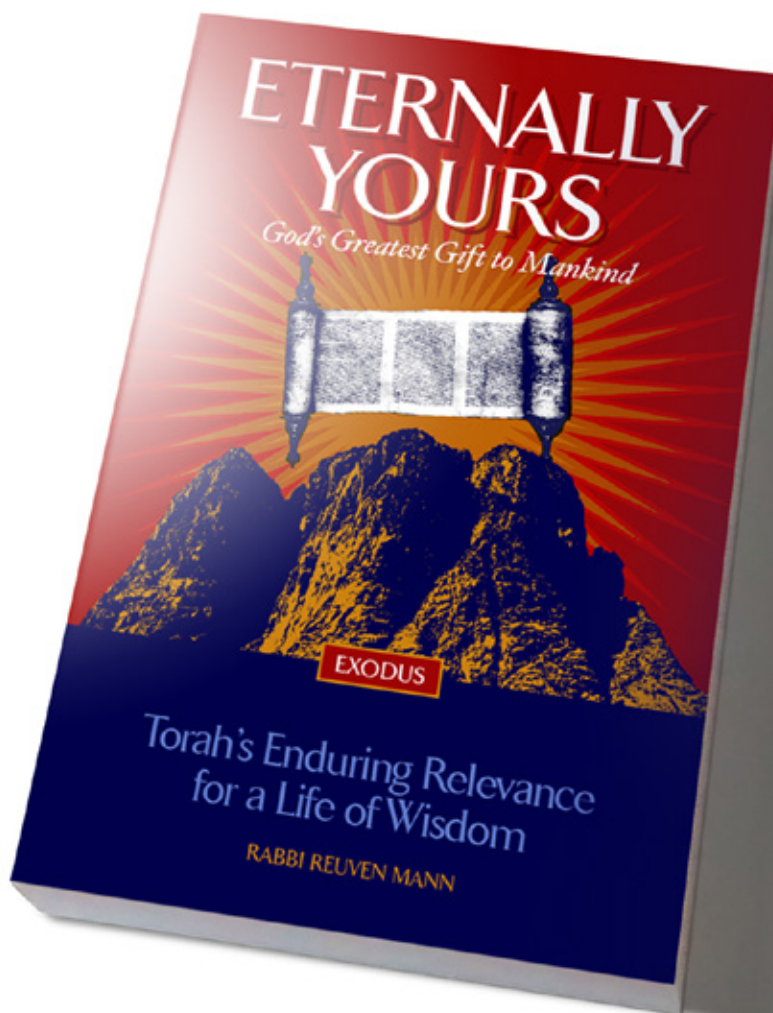
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



**SCRIPT WAS FORMED
NATURALLY IN THE STONE**

Exodus

The 2nd of the Five Books of Moses is one of the most fascinating and inspiring stories ever written. It describes the formation of a unique and eternal People, from their cruel enslavement by King Pharaoh, to their miraculous redemption and emergence as a nation via a public Revelation on Mt. Sinai.



The themes in this Book are eternal and applicable to every time and situation. Throughout history downtrodden Peoples, identified with the oppressed Jews and composed inspiring hymns which depicted Moses confronting Pharaoh and commanding him to “Let my People go!” The purpose of this book, “Eternally Yours” is to examine the underlying ideas contained in Exodus. My governing premise is that there is deep wisdom hidden beneath the surface which if properly apprehended will enlighten our lives. I analyze the emotional forces at work in the drama and this yields new insights into human psychology with great practical consequences for our understanding of the dynamics of social interactions. It also provides a deeper insight into the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and demonstrates that the pattern depicted in Exodus has recurred many times in history. This contains important lessons for confronting this problem in our time. The analyses and resolutions presented in this book lead to meaningful conclusions that are relevant to a deeper understanding of the challenges we face today as individuals and a society. My hope is that the book will enhance the reader’s appreciation of the Bible’s stories and that he will come to regard it as a source of enlightenment, enjoyment and inspiration. While it is written from the perspective of an Orthodox Rabbi, I firmly believe that people of all faiths and backgrounds who have an interest in the Bible will find it useful and gratifying. It contains no religious preaching, only a search for and analysis of, the eternal wisdom of the Book of Exodus.

Rabbi Reuven Mann

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Q&As

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Tefillin's Purpose: God's Mighty Hand

Question: Of all Torah concepts, why is God's "mighty hand" (repeated four times) which redeemed us from Egypt committed to sacred writing inside the tefillin (Exod. 13:1-16), which are worn on our heads and on our arms facing our hearts? Are no other concepts fit for such practice? And what about the wearing of boxes containing this Torah portion on our "heads and arms?"

Rabbi: Our heads and our hearts represent our minds and our emotions; our two faculties over which we determine our values and our choices. It was only through the Exodus that we were freed to engage both faculties. God's "mighty hand" refers to His unparalleled power through which Egypt's gods were vanquished and dismissed of any truth or value.

Not once did Pharaoh request that his magicians terminate any of the ten plagues, but he always sought Moses to beseech God. For Pharaoh recognized the true God, but God hardened his heart so he might receive his just rewards for his evil, that the world might know that God gives man only so far to repent and no further, and that God's fame would fill the Earth.

Wearing tefillin on our bodies is an essential daily reminder of that freedom—our bodily movements—and of that redemption that God granted us. At the Passover seder we state that had God not freed us back then, we today, our children and our grandchildren would still be slaves to Pharaoh. We must grasp this sensual visual of our bodies wrapped in tefillin and recognize that the two—our bodily freedom and God's Exodus—are not unrelated, but that tefillin's portions describing God's "mighty hand" commemorate the very cause of our freedom. Wearing tefillin on our physical bodies relates that our physical freedom was due to the events described in the tefillin: God's mighty hand went unopposed by Egypt's lifeless stone deities. Our minds and our emotions are free to follow God because He freed us for that purpose of following His commands. ■

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Why Don't God's Miracles Occur Instantaneously?

Question: Why couldn't the plagues occur instantaneously, like Creation, which was the sudden split-second existence of a massive universe from nothingness? Of what lesson is it that the splitting of the Reed Sea was effectuated by an east wind that "blew all night?" (Exod. 14:21) We again see this in a prior case in the plague of locusts where "the east wind blew all day and all night" (Exod. 10:13) which brought the locusts?" As God instantly created the world from nothingness, He could have—in a split second—rendered the sea split without wind. The same applies to the locusts. Why this delay and use of nature?

Rabbi: Yes, God created the entire universe from nothing; it is amazing. But I would also call it "unfathomable." But that was then, and this—miracles—is now. "Now" referring to the existence of a species of beings possessing intelligence. Before man's existence there would be no purpose in operating with natural law, as there would be no impression offered; no intelligent life form existed that might perceive the precise design of natural miracles. Evidently God wants there to be something fathomable in the miracles cited above, and in all miracles. Not one of the 10 plagues were unrelated to nature. Hail did not "suddenly appear" mid-air, but it descended, as all precipitation does. The lice were not made from nothingness, but from the sand. Blood was a transformation of an existing body of water, and so it was true about the remaining seven plagues...except for the death of the firstborns.

Had God instantaneously split the sea, the human mind would be disengaged as there was no evident cause (mind only works with sensory perception). As God created the universe as evidence of His wisdom, He desires that man study recurring laws which we call "nature." Detecting patterns and causal relationships is only possible if the laws that we study are sustained. But if nature changed every second or if events took place that were unfathomable, our minds would be disengaged as such phenomena would offer no opportunity to reflect on God's wisdom. Man would attribute such instantaneous miracles to some imaginary force outside of nature, disconnected from the Creator of nature, precisely because he cannot connect it to a physical cause. He would assume a force outside of God. As God does not want our minds to be disengaged but rather to be engaged, for the purpose of recognizing Him—and this does not benefit God at all but it is for man's good—God utilized natural causes such as winds to bring about the miracles in order that man attribute the miracles to the Creator and Controller of natural law. Creation itself intends to offer man an observable harmonious system through which he detects great wisdom and attributes it to the Cause of what he sees before his eyes. God's miracles too are displays of His natural design and His ability to alter it.

Therefore, God does not make instantaneous changes that would confound our minds, but He uses physical causes to engage man's mind and stand in awe of Him as the "Creator." ■



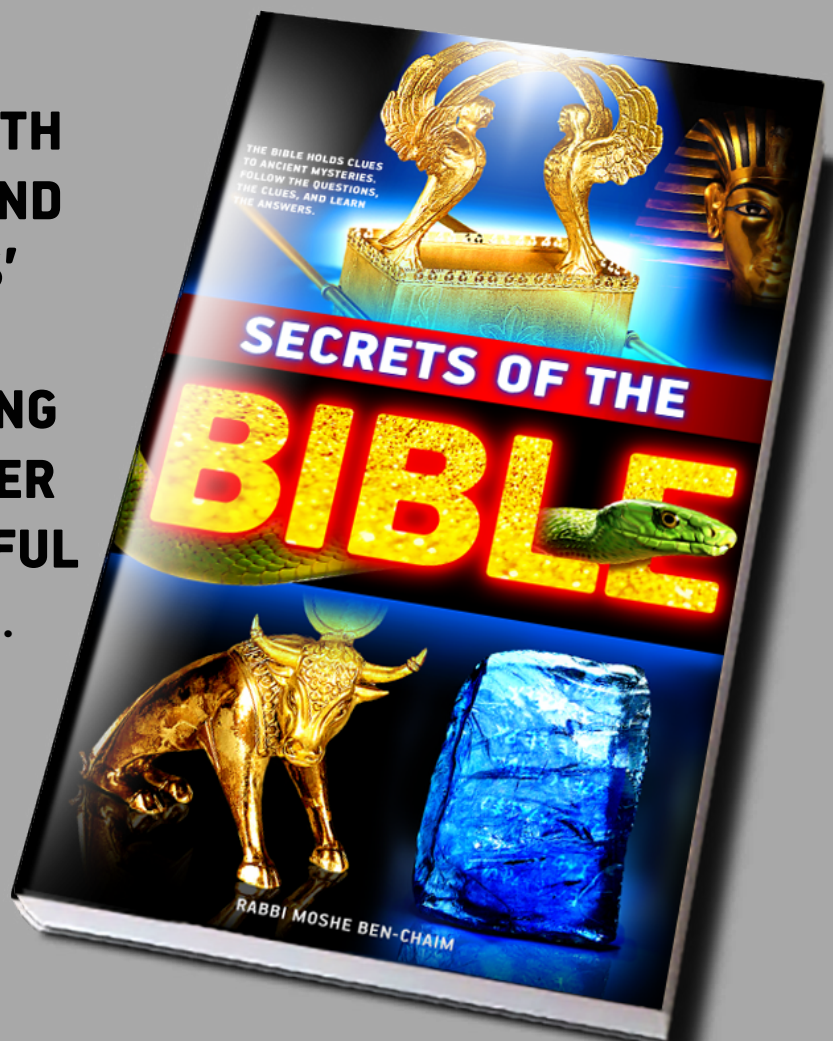
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PATTERNS ARE PURPOSEFUL
CLUES TO GOD'S WISDOM.**

BY JEWISHTIMES PUBLISHER
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The Ten Commands

The Miracle of the Sapphire Tablets

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



The Three Weeks, commencing with the 17th of Tammuz, focused us on the tragedies contributing to this day's sorrowful nature. Talmud Taanis 28b records Moses' smashing of the tablets as one of these tragedies. As he descended from Sinai with those two sapphire tablets bearing God's laws, he encountered the Jews sinning with the Gold Calf. He responded by breaking the tablets. A wise Rabbi explained he did so, lest the Jews continue their sin, projecting their idolatrous expression onto these divinely inspired objects, just as they were doing regarding the Calf. Moses broke the tablets to eliminate this possibility, to which, God agreed. We might think the service of the Gold Calf as more worthy of making the list of tragedies. But as a friend suggested, sin is not a "loss," but a waste. A true "loss" is the removal of something of value or a failure to realize a gain. That loss was the tablets. The removal of the positive is loss, not the engagement in the negative, the latter being "harm." Similarly, we mourn the loss of the Temple, and not the idolatry or enmity between the Jews that precipitated those two losses, although the latter are evils for which we must repent.

But to truly comprehend the loss of the tablets, we must understand: 1) what they were and 2) why God gave them to us. The indispensable need for the tablets is derived from God's granting to Moses a second set of tablets after he smashed the first set."

What I will eventually suggest herein astonished me, but I feel Maimonides' words point to this discovery...

The Guide for the Perplexed (Book I, chap. lxxvi)

"And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord," e.g., "These see the works of the Lord" (Psalms cvii. 24): and the description of the several things in nature, as plants, animals, winds, rain, etc., is followed by the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" (Psalms

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civ.24). Still more striking is the relation between God and His creatures, as expressed in the phrase, “The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted” (Ibid. 16): the cedars being the product of nature, and not of art, are described as having been planted by the Lord. Similarly we explain.

“And the writing was the writing of God” (Exod. xxxii. 16): the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words “written with the finger of God” (Ibid. xxxi. 18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of “the work of thy fingers” (Psalms viii. 4) this being said of the heavens: of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Ibid. xxxiii. 6). Hence you learn that in the Bible, the creation of a thing is figuratively expressed by terms denoting “word” and “speech.” The same thing, which according to one passage has been made by the “word,” is represented in another passage as made by the “finger of God.” The phrase “written by the finger of God” is therefore identical with “written by the word of God,” and if the latter phrase had been used, it would have been equal to “written by the will and desire of God.”

Onkelos adopted in this place a strange explanation, and rendered the words literally, “written by the finger of the Lord.” He thought that “the finger” was a certain thing ascribed to God; so that “the finger of the Lord” is to be interpreted in the same way as “the mountain of God” (Exod. iii. 1), “the rod of God” (Ibid. iv. 20), that is, as being an instrument created by Him, which by His will engraved the writing on the tables. I cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation. It would have been more reasonable to say, “written by the word of the Lord,” in imitation of the verse “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” Or was the creation of the writing on the tables more difficult than the creation of the stars in the spheres? As the latter were made by the direct will of God, not by means of an instrument, the writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument. You know what the Mishnah says, “Ten things were created on Friday in the twilight of the evening,” and “the writing” is one of the ten things. This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation, as we have shown in our Commentary on the Mishnah (Avos, v. 6).”

Understanding Maimonides

We must pay attention to Maimonides’ words. He opens with “And the tables were the work of God.” His intent is to first discuss the

tablets—not their writing. He first explains how the tablets are made via “nature,” meaning by God. They are not “works” or “art.” By definition, if natural objects are used in a new construction or form, like woodworking or paintings, we call this “carpentry” and “art” respectively. But if something is formed undisturbed by external influence, as leaves are formed with veins and trees with bark, this we call “nature” and not art. Therefore, when addressing the tablets, Maimonides writes, “they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called ‘the work of the Lord.’” This means that the tablets formed naturally independent from the rest of the sapphire that formed in that area of Sinai. That is quite amazing. We will get back to what this means. But they were not works of carpentry or art. Remain mindful of this distinction.

Maimonides then addresses the tablets’ writing: “And the writing was the writing of God.” He argues that although the Torah says the writing was “written by the finger of the Lord,” this writing was no less natural than the tablets themselves, or God’s natural creation of the heavens. He disputes Onkelos’ suggestion that a tool was used to form these letters, and insists that those letters were created without a tool, just as God created the heavens, by His will alone.

But focus your attention on Maimonides’ insistence that the writing was “natural” and not an act of carpentry or art. What does he mean by this? You must know that Maimonides bases himself on the verse that references both, the tablets and the writings: “And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God” (Exod. xxxii. 16). Maimonides teaches that this verse is not redundant, but with it, God intentionally directs us to realize that not only were the tablets a natural phenomenon, but so too was the writing. This is essential to our discussion.

So, we must delve into understanding the distinction between writing that is natural, and writing that is art. How are they different?

We must ask a number of questions. God communicated 10 Command-

ments, shortly afterwards they would be committed to the Sefer Torah Moses would write. Therefore, for what purpose did God create the tablets with the same record of this communication? Is this not a redundancy?

Let’s briefly recount the history. God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai, he remains in commune with God for 40 days and nights and then he receives the two tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf and that He will destroy the nation. Moses prays and God refrains from destroying the Jews. Before Moses descends the mountain we read these words, “And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two tablets of Testimony were in his hands; tablets written from both sides[1], from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they explained on the tablets.” (Exod. 32:15,16) Why is Moses’ descent interrupted with this detailed description of the tablets? Why was this description of the tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, “And God gave to Moses—when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai—two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” This division of the tablets’ details into two Torah portions requires explanation, as does the term “tablets of testimony”... testimony to what exactly? And we wonder why “two” tablets are needed. Could not a larger tablet contain all the words; could not smaller letters accomplish the same message on a single tablet?

Maimonides also cited the Mishna in Avos, “Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening,” and “the writing” is one of the ten things.” Maimonides wishes to draw our attention to the necessity for God to have created the tablets and their writing, at the end of the six days of Creation, just before God ceased His creation. What is his message?

In Exodus 34:1, God instructs Moses to hew a second set of tablets, and He says He will write on them the

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matters that “were” on the first tablets. Why doesn’t God say He will write on them the matters that “He wrote” on the first tablets? He uses a less descriptive term.

I also wonder if there was more to Moses’ breaking of the tablets than already explained.

Revelation

Revelation on Sinai was intended to remove all doubts that a Supreme Intelligence created all, sustains all and communicates with man. However, God desired this message not end at Sinai’s closure. My friend suggested that the tablets were intended to be an everlasting “testament” (tablets of Testimony). This explains why upon God’s completion of His communication with Moses atop Sinai, we read, “And God gave to Moses—when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai—two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” That is, once God concluded His Revelation to the people and to Moses, He desired an everlasting testimony of this Revelation, to serve as enduring and conclusive evidence that He alone created and sustains the universe. Thus,

“testimony” appears in this verse, and not later in the second description of the tablets. In order that this testimony is everlasting, the words are embedded in a permanent object: stone. So “stone” is also in this verse.

But can’t anyone write words in stone? Of what proof are these tablets?

The testimony God intended is to the truth that He alone is the source of the universe. We read that these tablets were “written with the finger of God.” Maimonides said this was a “natural” phenomenon. Here now is the amazing idea and how these tablets “testified”...

Astonishing Tablets

These miraculous tablets contained something not found elsewhere in nature: naturally formed letters, sentences and commandments! Imagine a tree cut down, where its inner rings viewed closely were

actually lines of text forming intelligent sentences, or lightning bolts that formed words as they streaked across the sky. That is how astonishing these tablets were. The Torah says the text could be seen from both sides of the tablets (Exod. 32:15). Some wish to explain this to mean that the letters were hollowed through, but that would not appear miraculous as a human being can carve letters into a stone. My opinion is that the letters were formed internally through the sapphire’s grain. And as sapphire is translucent, one can see the letters “from both sides.” The only explanation for words existing in the inside a stone is if the words formed naturally. That means the creator of the stone intentionally embedded His messages within the stone.

As God formed these tablets over time at the end of Creation, so too, He formed the “writing” simultaneously, and naturally. The commands were not subsequently carved into the tablets, but they literally grew inside the stones grain as the stones naturally formed over time: “And the writing was the writing of God,” as Maimonides said above, this means a natural phenomenon. This explains why God tells Moses that He will write on the

These tablets contained naturally formed letters and commandments! Imagine a tree where its inner rings viewed closely were actually lines of text or lightning bolts that formed words as they streaked across the sky.

second tablets the matters that “were” on the first set, and not matters that He “wrote” the first set. For God did not do an act of “writing” on the first tablets. Yes, the words appeared “written” as the verse states[2], but not through an act of

one thing acting on another resulting in writing. Again, the verse does not say, “I wrote” on the first tablets, but rather, “were” on the first tablets. The letters in the first tablets formed within the tablets. This is an amazing idea, and a phenomenon not seen elsewhere in nature. Perhaps for this reason, Maimonides includes in this chapter his critique of Onkelos’ suggestion that the stone tablets were carved through an instrument.

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The Need

What consideration demanded that God create such a phenomenon? Although the exact words appearing on the tablets were duplicated in the Torah scroll, it was not the words per se that demanded the tablets' existence, but the "manner" of existence of these words. This natural formation of words and commands is God's clear message that He is behind the natural world, and Torah. Both form one unit. This is needed, for many people view nature as devoid of God's creation and rule. Man becomes accustomed to matters by his very nature. The sun rises and sets, plants and animals grow, and species beget their own kind. We take all for granted, thinking all occurs due the nature itself...and not God. But with the existence of naturally formed words and commandments in natural objects, we can no longer maintain a view of an unguided world. Nature is finally understood to be the expression of an intelligent being: God. How can one ignore a natural object that has words naturally imprinted and not the work of art? This was the lesson of Sinai, and the sustained lesson of the tablets.

Therefore, the Torah scroll's account of God's communicated commands sufficed for the 'content' of His words, but not for an everlasting "testament" which was revealed through natural stones containing intelligent words! And perhaps to remove all doubt that this occurred without God's intent, there were two stones, not one. A freakish natural incident can possibly be dismissed if it occurs once...but not twice.

We can no longer separate nature from God. His very words are embedded in these stones in truly natural manner.

Why didn't God give the tablets to Adam the First? Perhaps Adam had no need for them. God's original plan was

that man use intellect to discover God. The beauty and precision of natural law is sufficient for a person following a life of wisdom.

However, at this era in mankind's development, these tablets were intended to offer mankind a new leap in our wisdom of God. The ability for nature to produce such a phenomenon would offer us tremendous appreciation for the Creator of this nature. They were to be viewed and not placed in an ark.

But as these tablets were being delivered, the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf. The extraordinary lesson of the tablets would not be realized with those Jews. These first tablets required destruction. However, a lesson was required: the nation must now have a reminder of what they lost. God instructed Moses to hew a new set of stones; their tablet form would not come about naturally, but by human craft. God also "wrote" the matters on this second set; again, no longer a natural phenomenon of words that were part of their natural design. A gap now existed between the Jews, and God. The intended, intimate relationship that could have been, was now lost. To emphasize this break from God, these tablets must be stored out of sight; in an ark. Perhaps this explains why King Solomon hid the ark and no other vessel. He reiterated this message of "distance" between God and the nation through digging caverns to eventually hide the tablets and the ark.

"Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening"

As natural law needed to tolerate these unique tablets, they had to be planned with the creation of the substance of sapphire. This could not be created later, for the very blueprint of how sapphire forms must contain natural laws that would generate stones with embedded

communication. As this would be a "property" of sapphire's substance, it must be set at the time that God endowed sapphire with its formative properties: during Creation.

"And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two tablets of Testimony were in his hands; tablets written from both sides, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the tablets."

Why is Moses descent interrupted with this detailed description of the tablets? Why was this description of the tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, "And God gave to Moses"... "two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." It appears to me that the first account expresses the "purpose" of the tablets: testimony. Thus, we learn that the testament is in durable stone, and that the testament is a unique phenomenon. But when Moses is about to descend to the sinful Jews, we are told of the tablet's nature that conflicts with their idolatry: the tablets were "God's work," intended precisely to fend off idolatry. This aspect is relevant in connection with the idolatrous Jews, and therefore not mentioned until its relevance surfaces.

Now we understand the loss of the tablets: our knowledge of God has been impaired. This is the ultimate tragedy. What an amazing sight they must have been. Perhaps in the future, this will be the means by which God will make His name fill the Earth. For we do not know if the tablets were the only natural elements in which God embedded natural communication. And as this was God's will at Sinai, perhaps in the messianic era He will unveil this again to a more fitting generation. ■

[1] Ibn Ezra rejects the notion that the letters Mem Sofit and Samech (shapes like "O") had miraculous center pieces floating. The letters were not hollowed from one side completely through to the other. They were simply written on the two faces of the stones, as the stones were thick. Alternatively, I suggest the letters were internal facets in the translucent sapphire, that could be seen on "both sides," like a crack can be seen from any side of a diamond. Furthermore, God does not perform impossibilities, so to have legible writing passing through a stone, with the exact wording seen on the opposite side, is not possible. God can do miracles, but not impossibilities. Similarly, God cannot create a circle that is a square.

[2] Exod. 32:15

the Objectives of Shabbos

Rabbi Bernie Fox



For in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth and all that is within them and He rested on the seventh. Therefore, Hashem blessed the Shabbat day and He sanctified it. (Sefer Shemot 20:10)

And you should recall that you were a slave in the Land of Egypt and Hashem, your L-rd, took you forth from there with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. Therefore, Hashem, your L-rd, commanded you to observe the Shabbat. (Sefer Devarim 5:14)

Differences in the two texts of the Decalogue

The Aseret HaDibrot – the Decalogue – is presented twice in the Torah. It is presented first in our parasha and a

second time in Parshat VaEtchanan. There are various differences in the texts of the Decalogue in these two presentations. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra dismisses many of these as inconsequential. He explains that in Parshat VaEtchanan, Moshe is reviewing the content of the Decalogue for the nation. His intention is to communicate its content, not to repeat it verbatim. Therefore, he chooses the words and phrases that he feels best communicate the material without regard to inconsequential deviations in the wording.[1]

However, some of the differences between the two presentations are not minor. Some are fundamental differences in content. One of these major differences is in the two presentations of Shabbat. The first quotation above is from our parasha. We are commanded to observe the Shabbat in order to reinforce a fundamental tenet of the Torah – the universe is the creation of Hashem.

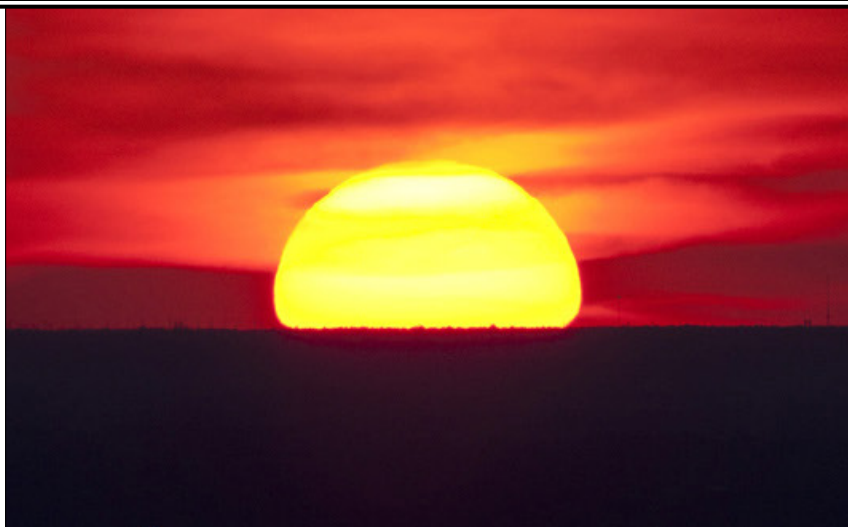
The second quotation above is from Parshat VaEtchanan. This is Moshe's presentation or review of the imperative to observe Shabbat. He explains that we observe Shabbat in order to recall our redemption from slavery in Egypt. Moshe makes no mention of Shabbat memorializing creation. In other words, each version presents its own explanation for the observance of Shabbat. This is not a minor discrepancy. How can it be reconciled?

Among the commentators there are a number of responses to this problem. We will focus upon the solution and insight suggested by Maimonides. This solution resolves the apparent contradiction between the texts, it addresses additional issues, and it suggests an important message regarding our values and priorities.

Moshe's objective was to motivate

Maimonides' solution is based upon an implicit premise. What was Moshe's objective in reviewing with the nation the Aseret HaDibrot before his death? Maimonides seems to assume that his objective was not limited to recapitulating the content. Moshe was also focused upon encouraging the people to observe the commandments. This objective impacted his presentation. It determined the elements of the Decalogue that he

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addressed and how he presented them. In other words, the original presentation of the Decalogue in our parasha is focused solely upon the fundamental content of the commandments. Moshe's review has a broader or different perspective. It is designed to encourage and even admonish the people to carefully observe the commandments.

Let's consider an analogy. It's Friday afternoon and a parent wants his son to straighten up his room before Shabbat. As soon as his son arrives home, the dad instructs his son of the expectation. These instructions are detailed. Of course, the son has other things to do before he gets to this task. Shabbat is approaching and the father realizes that if the room is to be straightened-up, the chore requires immediate attention. He speaks to his son again and reviews the expectation. This review of the expectation is different than the original presentation. There is no need for the father to review the details. He wants to make sure the chore is completed. In this presentation, the dad focuses upon the importance of preparing for Shabbat and explains that this is the son's opportunity to participate in honoring the Shabbat. In both presentations the father is discussing the same task. However, in the first the focus is upon the substance of the task. In the second, the substance of the task requires less attention. Now, the father focuses on motivating.

This illustration demonstrates how the same task will be presented differently as required by the situation. Maimonides employs this principle to explain the discrepancy between the presentations of Shabbat in the two iterations of the Decalogue.

The meaning of Shabbat

He explains that in the first presentation – found in our parasha – the Torah is presenting the basic concept of Shabbat. In this context, the Torah's focus is upon the innate meaning of Shabbat. It communicates the significance of the day. It is in this context that the Torah explains that Shabbat recalls the creation. Hashem created the universe. He fashioned it in six days and then rested on the seventh. The observance of Shabbat recalls and memorializes the universe's origin.

Shabbat was given to the Jewish people

Moshe's review focuses on our obligation to observe Shabbat. It explains Bnai Yisrael's selection for the role of observing this commandment.[2] We were selected because we were redeemed from Egypt. Our redemption endows this commandment – which is a day of rest – with a special significance. In other words, because of our redemption from slavery we are uniquely fit to observe this commandment. How does our experience of bondage and liberation endow us with this unique suitability?

Maimonides explains that in Egypt there was no day of rest. Our activities and our lives were controlled and fashioned by our masters. If on some occasion we did have a respite from our heavy burden, it was granted to us at the sole volition of a master. Such a hiatus in a slave's labor is not truly a respite; it is a reprieve that will soon be terminated at the whim of the master. Only a free person – one who is empowered to act upon his own volition – can experience

authentic rest from labor and toil. According to Maimonides, our emergence from bondage into freedom uniquely prepared us to experience a day of rest. Any person can select a day of the week and decide to not labor on that day. But for us the designation of a day as a period for respite and contemplation has unique meaning.

Again, let's employ an analogy to understand this insight. A baseball team fields nine players. The coach must decide who will play shortstop. He considers his options and he selects a player who is very agile, has an accurate throwing arm, and is focused and alert. The position of shortstop has its own unique objectives. The shortstop covers the gap in the infield between second and third bases. He fields most of the infield grounders or one-hoppers hit in his direction and often has to handle line-drives. It is his job to throw out runners to first base and sometimes make a play to second, third or even home. This is the position. In selecting the player to play the position, the coach needs to consider the requisite skills, gifts, and talents. These are agility, accuracy in throwing, focus, and alertness. Returning to our discussion, Shabbat commemorates creation. Bnai Yisrael were selected to observe Shabbat because background and history rendered us uniquely suited for the role.

Let's summarize before continuing. The first iteration of the Aseret HaDibrot focuses upon the objective of Shabbat. Its objective is to recall that Hashem is the creator of the universe. The second iteration focuses upon the selection of the Jewish people for the role of observing Shabbat. In order to understand our selection, we must recognize how Shabbat communicates its message. The means is through observing a day of rest, every week. The character of the day as respite from labor and dedication to contemplation is most intensely experienced by a people who has emerged from slavery to freedom. Therefore, we were selected to receive the Shabbat.

Shabbat summarizes Hashem's love for us

Maimonides adds that these two presentations of Shabbat combine to create an integrated and comprehensive message. The observance of Shabbat

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recalls Hashem's creation. Our selection as the nation who observes Shabbat reminds us of our redemption from bondage. These two messages merge into a comprehensive expression of Hashem's lovingkindness toward the Jewish people. He has provided us with a spiritual legacy – a Torah that teaches us the most fundamental truths. He has provided us with the foundation for material advancement – our liberation from slavery.[3]

The Shabbat liturgy reflects the two version of the Decalogue

Maimonides' insight resolves a number of additional problems. The Friday night Amidah for Shabbat focuses upon Shabbat as commemorating creation. Its central blessing includes the passages from the creation narrative that discuss Shabbat. The Amidah of Shabbat morning does mention the meaning of Shabbat but its focus is overwhelmingly upon the selection of Jewish people to observe Shabbat. Based upon Maimonides' insight, we can easily understand these two treatments.

The central benediction of Shabbat Amidah of Friday night begins with the statement:

You sanctified the seventh day for Your name. It is the completion of the creation of heavens and earth. You blessed it from among all of the days and sanctified it from among all periods of time.

This introduction sets the tone for the benediction. It mirrors the first iteration of the Decalogue. Its focus is upon the meaning of Shabbat. Therefore, the blessing discusses Shabbat as the memorial of creation and does not make mention of our redemption.

The Shabbat morning Amidah is not focused upon the objective of Shabbat. Instead, its focus is almost entirely upon our selection to observe it. This focus is derived directly from the second iteration of the Aseret HaDibrot. The theme of this second iteration was adopted by the Sages in this Amidah. Therefore, rather than focusing upon the meaning of Shabbat, the central benediction discusses our selection for the role of observing Shabbat.



Wealth and its meaning and purpose

Finally, Maimonides' insight provides us with an important message regarding priorities. As he explains, Hashem's lovingkindness is expressed in the spiritual and material gifts that he bestowed upon us. Shabbat is one of these spiritual gifts. It focuses upon one of the great and fundamental truths of the Torah – Hashem's creation of the universe. It also reminds us of our rescue from Egypt. This is a material gift. Our freedom is the foundation of every material achievement that has followed and been built upon it. Shabbat is designed to remind us of both of these expressions of Hashem's lovingkindness. The integration of both messages within Shabbat suggests their intimate relationship with one another. Let us further explore and delineate this relationship.

The experience of liberation gives the Jewish people the capacity to more fully appreciate a day of rest. In other words, material achievements create the foundation for a spiritual encounter. Also, the observance of Shabbat gives meaning and purpose to our liberation. The two acts of kindness complement one another. Liberation makes us more intensely appreciate Shabbat; observance of Shabbat endows freedom with meaning and purpose. This is an excellent model for the optimal interaction and relationship between our material and spiritual endeavors.

Our material achievements provide us with the opportunity to advance our spiritual development. Conversely, our spiritual endeavors provide meaning to our material achievements. Ultimately, Maimonides' message reminds us to devote ourselves to spiritual development.

Focus on material achievement as an end in itself cannot really provide fulfillment and satisfaction. Once a person has provided for oneself and one's family, the pursuit quickly resolves into an exercise in greed or psychological insecurity. Greed can never be satisfied and deep insecurities do not yield to reason. Consequently, the single-minded pursuit of the accumulation of wealth does not end in fulfillment. However, the person who utilizes one's material wellbeing to support pursuit of spiritual development will endow these material accomplishments with real meaning. Furthermore, one who nurtures a strong spiritual life, will discover meaning and fulfillment. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary of Sefer Shemot, 20:1.

[2] Maimonides' interpretation of the message of the second Decalogue is not completely clear. One could argue that we were selected to receive the Torah; Shabbat is one of its mitzvot. No special explanation is required for our selection to receive a specific commandment. Abravanel, in his commentary on Maimonides' comments, suggests that we would expect Shabbat to be included in the laws given to the descendants of Noach. Its message that Hashem is creator is universal. It is relevant to Jew and non-Jew. Maimonides understands the second text of the Decalogue to address this issue.

Possibly, Maimonides' position can be understood in the context of his comments in Hilchot Melachim 10:9-10. There, he explains that generally, a non-Jew may adopt observance of any of the Torah's mitzvot. For example, a non-Jew may adopt observance of the mitzvot of kashrut. However, a non-Jew may not adopt observance of Shabbat. From these comments, it is clear that the relationship between the Jewish people and Shabbat is different than the relationship with most other mitzvot. We enjoy an exclusive relationship with Shabbat; a non-Jew may not join us in its observance.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 2, chapter 31..

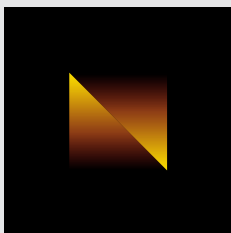
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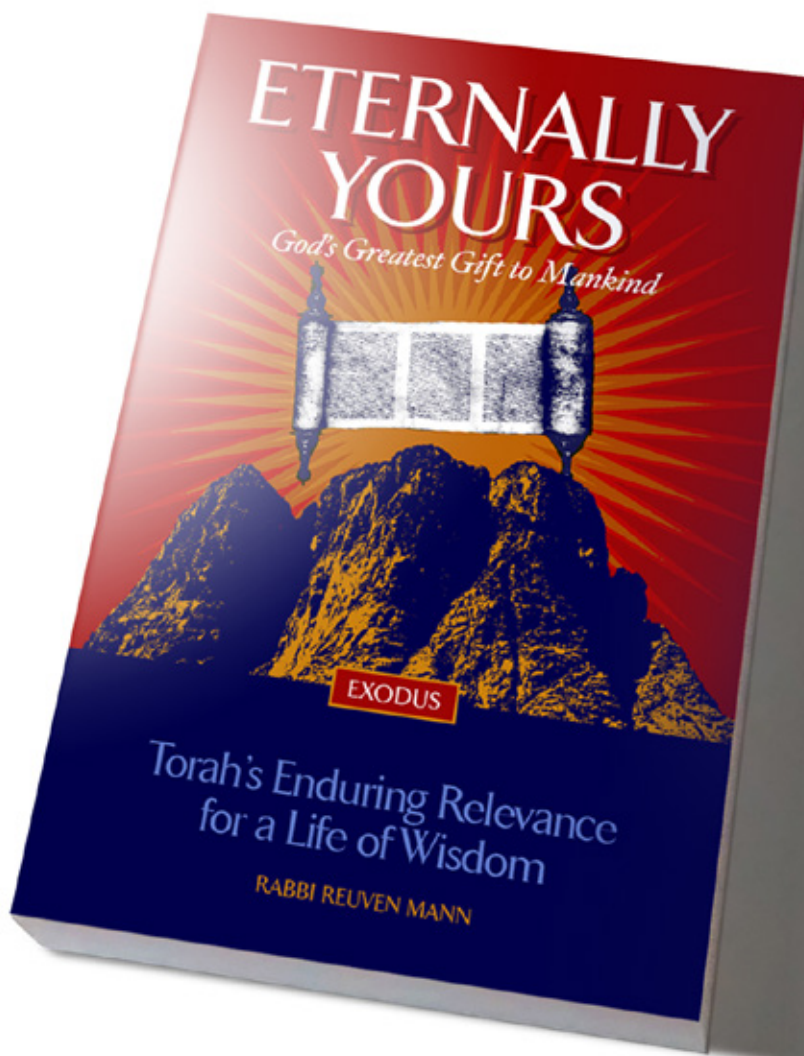
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PARSHA COMMANDED TO BELIEVE?

RABBI REUVEN MANN



This week's parsha, Yitro, describes the most monumental event in human history, the Revelation on Mount Sinai and the proclamation of the Ten Utterances. The conventional term, "commandments," is actually a misnomer, as that word, actually, denotes a mitzvah.

In Hebrew they are called dibrot, which can be translated as "statements" or "utterances." These ten proclamations contain many more than ten mitzvot. They should rather be regarded as major Divine imperatives that can be broken down into a number of specific commandments (mitzvot).

For example, the fifth is "Honor thy father and mother," which sets out for us the proper relationship we are to maintain with our parents. This subject is bracketed by a number of mitzvot. We are commanded to fear, not to curse, nor to inflict a wound on our parents, each of which constitutes a distinct commandment.

This great Revelation begins with a dramatic introduction: "I am the Lord Your G-d who took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves." There is a controversy about the religious implication of this verse. Is it simply a transmission of vitally important information, that is, that the Creator of the universe is the selfsame One who arranged your Exodus from Egypt? Or is it more than that?

There are significant commentators, among them the Rambam, who regard this as a commandment to believe in the existence of Hashem. However, others disagree and we thus have a major theological dispute as to whether it is a mitzvah to believe in G-d.

This is a tantalizing issue which warrants a deeper investigation. The more challenging position is the one that denies that the statement ordains a religious obligation. That is because everything in Judaism is centered around our belief in Hashem. For example, we are commanded to both love and fear Hashem.

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The purpose of Shabbat is to proclaim that He is the Creator of the universe. And the law of shmitta, that the land must lie fallow in the seventh year, is to declare that Hashem is the true “owner” of the world and all its resources.

Nevertheless, those who deny that there is a mitzvah to believe present fascinating and compelling reasoning. Such an enjoinder, they maintain, would have no meaning. They assert that it is impossible to command a person to believe in something. For the question would arise, does the person have faith or not? If he already does, there is no point in the obligation. And if he does not, a commandment is meaningless, for how can you order a person to believe in something? Even if he wanted to with all his heart, he would be unable to comply.

To illustrate, it would be impossible to command a young man to be in love with a certain woman (or vice versa). Love doesn't work that way. It is determined by many complex emotional and psychological factors, but obligation is not one of them. Such is the reasoning of those who contend that the “first statement” does not establish a mitzvah.

The Rambam disagrees. In his famous codification of Jewish law, Mishneh Torah, he states, “The ultimate foundation and pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a First Being who brought everything else into existence. Everything in heaven and earth, and all that is between them, exists only as a result of the reality of His existence.” After making a number of important points he concludes, “The knowledge of this matter is a positive command as it says ‘I am the Lord your G-d...’ (Fundamentals of Belief, ch. 1).

The Rambam thus maintains that it is, indeed, reasonable to command someone to believe. But how does this make sense?

In my opinion, it has to do with how one understands the term belief, in this context. As we have seen, the Rambam regards the existence of the Creator as a discoverable truth, no different than any other. Thus, it is part of our body of knowledge.

So we can recognize Hashem by the use of our minds, primarily through the study of nature, the Torah, and the history of the great Revelation at Sinai. We most definitely can be commanded to study those matters that will lead us to a certain conclusion. For the Rambam, the key meaning of emunah (faith) is that we can attain, through contemplation, the conviction that G-d, the Creator of the universe, exists.

After writing these words, I consulted the Malbim, a preeminent Biblical commentator of the 19th century. He considers our problem and says, “How can there be a commandment to believe in something? Surely, believing or disbelieving is not something that one chooses freely. But by carefully analyzing the words of Maimonides, we will realize that there is no commandment to ‘believe,’ but rather to ‘know,’ as Maimonides himself writes: ‘The pillar of wisdom...is to know that there is a first cause...Knowing this is a positive mitzvah, as it states, I am Hashem your G-d.’ Knowing, not believing.”

This constitutes a unique dimension of our religion of Divine revelation. It is not for nothing that the very first request we make in the Amidah prayer is for knowledge, wisdom, and discernment. May we increase our efforts to study the wonders of Hashem as they are revealed in His universe and in His Torah.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

Note: Along these lines, I remind you that Shabbat is a day that's just made for study. It's a time we get together with family and friends and socialize. Some meaningful conversation about a tantalizing religious issue can really make it a memorable experience. My new book, *Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift to Mankind*, on Exodus, provides stimulating questions and unexpected answers that will generate energetic conversation. Please visit <http://amzn.to/2G6V3QI> to obtain your copy.

REVELATION AT SINAI

Everlasting Impact

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg



The communication between God and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai is no doubt the climactic moment of the weekly portion of Yitro. With the completion of the transmission of the Ten Commandments, the Torah turns its attention to the subsequent reaction by the Jewish nation (Shemot 20:15-16):

“And all the people saw the voices and the torches, the sound of the shofar, and the smoking mountain, and the people saw and trembled; so they stood from afar. They said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear, but let God not speak with us lest we die.’”

The dramatic and desperate plea begets a strange response (ibid 17):

“Moses said to the people, ‘Fear not, for God has come in order to exalt you (nasot), and in order that His awe shall be upon

your faces, so that you shall not sin.’”

The answer appeared not to offer much solace (ibid 18):

“The people remained far off, but Moses drew near to the opaque darkness, where God was.”

We can see from the above verse two seemingly discrete reasons offered by Moshe as to why the Jewish people need not fear God. The first is the “nasot” idea (the meaning of this term being vague), while the second is the notion of God’s awe being upon their faces. What ideas are being conveyed with these two reasons?

Various Midrashim stray far from the simple meaning of the verse. The word “nasot” is altered to “nes”, meaning miracle. What miracle is being referred to here? Simply put, the Divine communication between God and the Jewish people.

Moshe was therefore telling the Jewish people God’s intention in speaking to them was to raise their stature among the nations of the world (Rashi takes this approach as well). The transcending of the natural order present at Sinai would serve as evidence to the world of the unique position held by the Jewish people. The second part of the response by Moshe focused on embarrassment (busha). Another result of the transmission would be a sense of busha felt by the people, as it is a positive trait for a person to constantly have a sense of feeling embarrassment (bayshan). A bayshan, as per the Midrash, is not quick to commit a sin. The fear of sin is strongly felt by the bayshan, and the Divine communication would have produced the same effect. A person lacking this trait is more likely to commit a sin.

How do these explanations fit the verse?

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Why would Moshe be relaying these concepts to the Jewish people?

Ramban offers a different explanation, where he attacks Rashi's idea of a projection of greatness to the nations of the world. Rather, Ramban understands Moshe's response as one unit. The objective of the communication was to solidify the belief in God required by the Jewish people. In speaking to them, the unquestionable belief in Him became clear, a part of their souls, never able to be removed. In recognizing this awesome truth, a fear would naturally arise in the entire nation, a part of us forever. Thus, Moshe's response is referring to a process of sorts.

Clearly, Ramban is taking a completely different approach than both Rashi and the various Midrashim. What was bothering Ramban about the first explanation? Can we get a better understanding of the idea Ramban is conveying?

The initial explanation offered by the Midrashim is picking up on an important detail in the sequence of verses after the Divine communication. The Jewish people, in a sense, broke off the stream of communication, pleading with Moshe that it needed to cease. In fact, there are various interpretations which suggest the entire Torah was supposed to be given over directly to the Jewish people. After the initial set of commandments (how many is a subject of a different debate) was given, it would appear there was a premature end to the entire process. Moshe would now be the intermediary concerning all future commandments. If indeed the perception of the Jewish people was an abrupt ending to a much longer anticipated process, the question would be: what was the rationale for this entire episode? If the objective was for it to be a "complete" communication, then it was a failure. If not, then what was the point? Moshe was then addressing this question. The first reason offered in his response was the projection of greatness. While acknowledging the transmission may have been incomplete for the Jews, it served to demonstrate to the world the unique relationship God had and has with the Jewish people. An event of such a magnitude would result in a clear and undeniable recognition of the stature of the Jews, regardless of the specific content. There was also an internal benefit to this communication, the idea of *busha*. How would that emerge? Knowing that God communicated with them would produce a different type of clarity. As children, we are taught by our parents what is right and wrong. There is always an incident where a child does something wrong, but knows without a doubt it is the

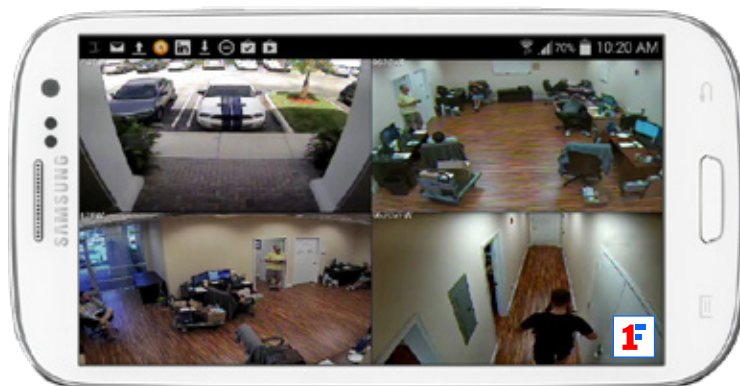
incorrect thing to do. When confronted, a sense of embarrassment overcomes the child, as the knowledge of what was correct was right in front of him. Choosing to ignore what someone knows without question is right results in a feeling of sheepishness. It is an important check on a person's straying from the true path. The effect of this feeling serves as a powerful deterrent to committing sin. The Divine communication consecrated into the minds of the Jewish people the truth of God and the Torah, and would therefore be a permanent part of their psychological makeup in thwarting the attraction of sin.

Ramban challenges the overall assumption of the Midrashim. The impact of the communication was intrinsic to the growth of the Jewish people, and its supposed "interruption" was inconsequential. The objective, no matter the degree or quantity, was the philosophical conclusion of the reality of God. The overall concept here harks to a greater debate among the great Jewish medieval thinkers as to the path one should take in believing in God. According to some, the reality of God can be found through probing the natural world and seeing God's infinite wisdom throughout. Thus, for example, an emphasis on areas such as physics would be of the utmost importance in achieving this end. Others, though, saw the event at Sinai, and its subsequent historical veracity, as the key to belief in God. The idea of a Divine Revelation to a mass of people, and their personal recollections passed down from generation to generation, serves as the bedrock for belief in God. Ramban appears to be focused on this path of belief. God speaking to the Jewish people was an undeniable reality to those at the event. The clear conclusion was belief in God. Once they internalized this belief, the natural result was a fear, an awe concerning the greatness of God in comparison to themselves. A true philosophical internalization of this ideal can only produce a resultant trepidation.

There is an important idea to be derived from both of the explanations. The receiving of the Torah and its commandments represented the transitional point in the Jewish nation's role as servants of God. However, the act of communication between God and the Jewish nation has its own realm of importance. The interaction on display was something unique in the pantheon of history. Its impact affects us to this very day. ■



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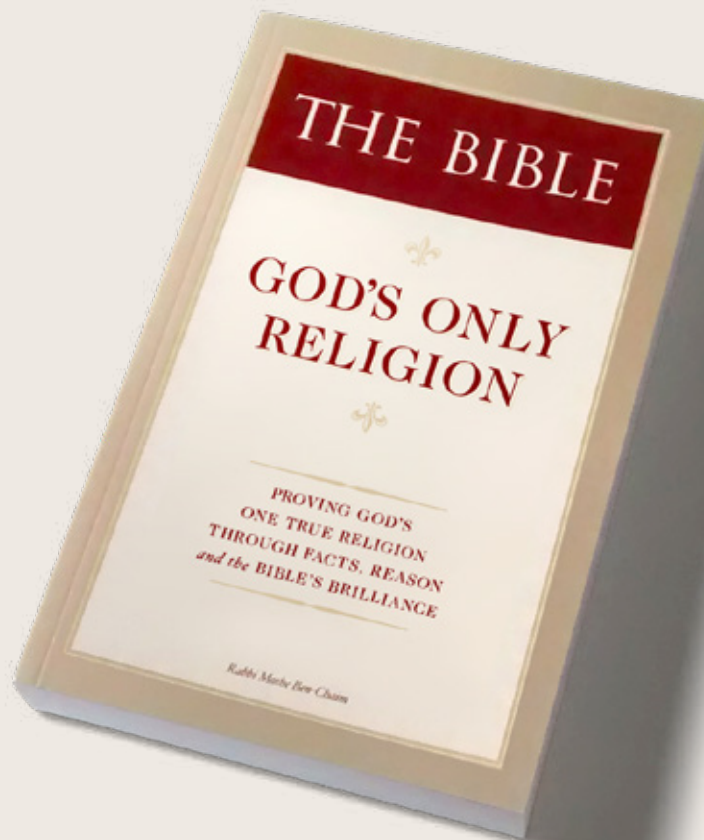
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