

JewishTimes

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Bible's Greatest Story

MIRACULOUS TABLETS

RABBI MOSHE BEN CHAIM

The Other Side of Sinai

WORLD SILENCE

RABBI REUVEN MANN

IMAGE:

Moses receiving the Ten Commandments upon Mount Sinai 3332 years ago. The commands' letters formed inside the sapphire's grain, created during the Six Days of Creation (Avos 5:6).

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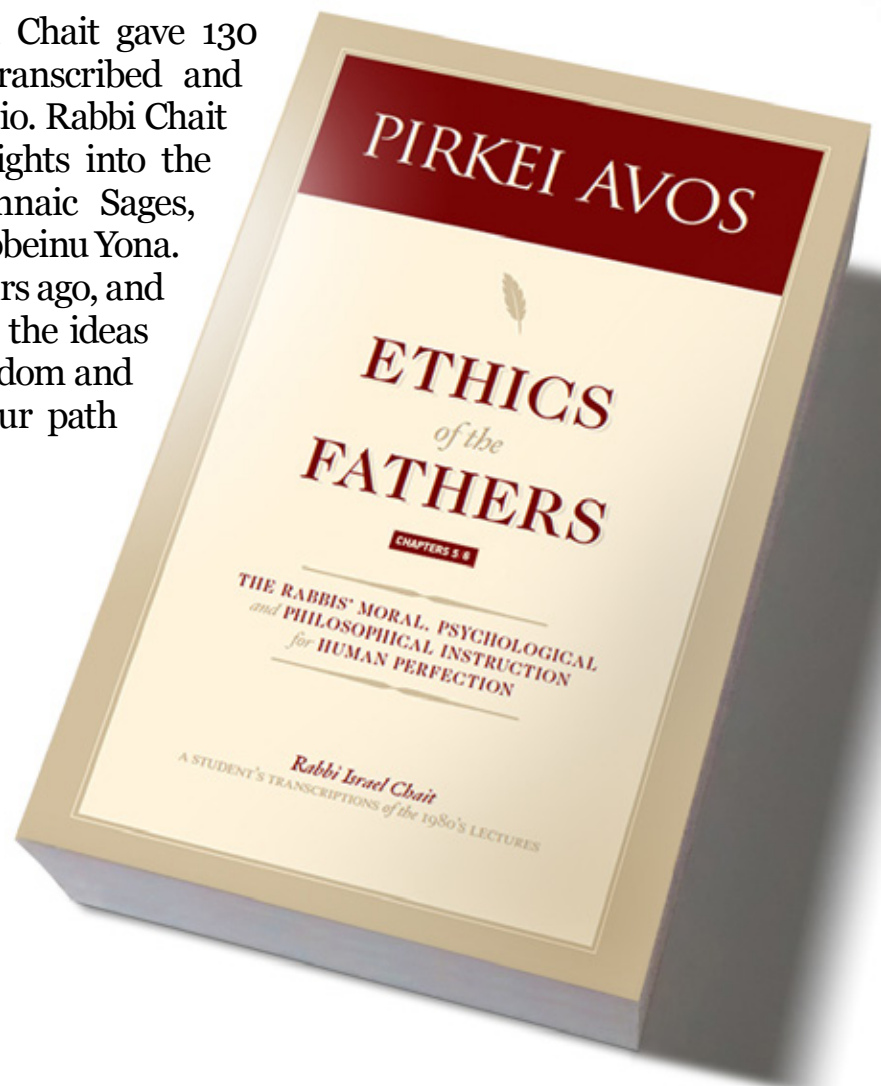
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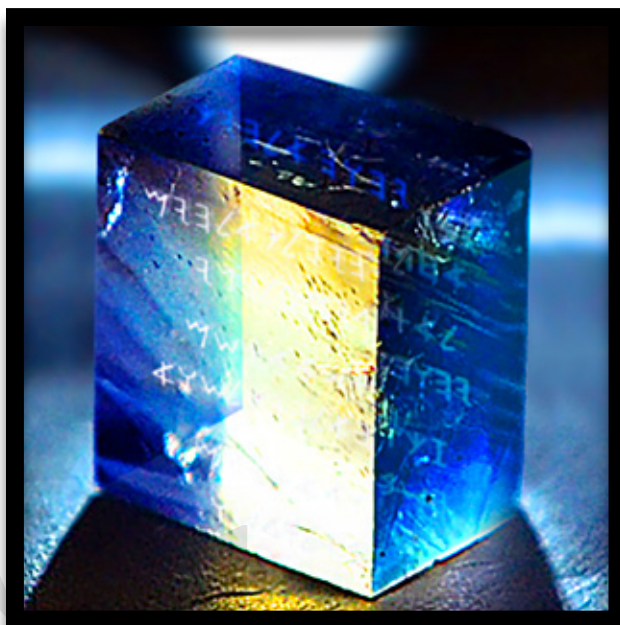


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Parshat Yitro

Now I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods. For it is in the manner that they acted wickedly He punished them. (Shemot 18:11)

Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, comes to meet Bnai Yisrael in the desert. Moshe tells Yitro of the miracles of the redemption. Yitro reacts with joy to the account. He sees the work of an all-powerful Creator. Yitro is impressed with the appropriateness of the punishment applied to the Egyptians. He seems to refer to the drowning of the Egyptians in the Reed Sea. The Egyptians had attempted to destroy Bnai Yisrael through drowning the male children. The Egyptians had met their end when the sea crashed down upon them.

Targum Unkelos offers an alternative translation to the pasuk. Unkelos explains that Yitro was impressed by a different aspect of the Egyptians fate. Their punishment corresponded with the evil they had conspired to do to the Jews. Unkelos stresses a relationship between the punishment of the Egyptians and their plans not their actual actions.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik ztl explained the meaning of Unkelos' translation through a story. Rav Yitzchak of Volozin ztl was approached by a minister of the Czar. The minister asked Rav Yitzchak to explain the meaning of a pasuk from Tehillim. The pasuk states, "Glorify Hashem all peoples. Praise Him all nations. For His kindness to us is overwhelming." The minister asked, "Why should the nations of the world praise G-d because of the kindness He shows to the Jewish people?"

Rav Yitzchak explained that the Jews have no knowledge of the various plots developed in the ministries in Petersburg to undermine and persecute them. When the Jews are saved by Hashem it is the ministers who designed the devious plans that have the best opportunity to assess G-d's intervention. The pasuk instructs those who seek to destroy the Jewish people to consider the outcome of

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their plans. This reflection should inspire the plotters to repent and recognize the greatness of the Creator.

This explains the meaning of Unkelous' translation. The Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin teaches that Yitro was not always a friend of the Jewish people. Before meeting Moshe, he had been one of Paroh's three principal advisors.¹ He was involved in designing the campaign against the Jewish people. He had intimate knowledge of Paroh's plans to harass and destroy the Jewish people. He recognized the thoroughness of Divine justice. G-d's judgment was not limited to evil actions of the Egyptians. The punishment even extended to the wicked conspiracies that were not successfully executed. This established, for Yitro, Hashem's omniscience and omnipotence.²

And Hashem said to Moshe, "I will come to you in a thick cloud so that the nation will hear as I speak to you. And also they will believe in you forever." (Shemot 19:9)

At Sinai, the Jewish people will hear the Almighty address Moshe. This event will permanently establish the authenticity of Moshe's prophecy. This issue is critical. The Torah was delivered to the Jewish people through Moshe. The legitimacy of the Torah is derived from the authenticity of Moshe's prophecy.

Why is Sinai the irrefutable of proof Moshe's prophecy and the legitimacy of the Torah? Maimonides explains that until Sinai Moshe had not proven, beyond doubt, that he was G-d's messenger. He had performed wondrous miracles, led Bnai Yisrael out of Egypt, and brought the sea crashing down upon Paroh and his army. But all these events were only circumstantial evidence of Moshe's unique relationship with the Almighty. The wonders performed by Moshe were consistent with his claim. However, these miracles were not direct proof of Moshe's authenticity. A circumstantial proof can seem very convincing. But it always remains circumstantial.

Hashem designed the Revelation to correct this shortcoming. At Sinai, the people saw Moshe enter the thick cloud representing the Eternal's presence. They heard Hashem call out to Moshe from the cloud. They listened as Hashem spoke with their leader, Moshe. No longer was the validity of Moshe's prophecy dependent upon circumstantial evidence. Three million people witnessed the relationship between G-d and His greatest prophet. No evidence is more respected than the testimony of an eyewitness. Revelation was designed to create a nation of witnesses to the truth of the sacred Torah.³

These comments of Maimonides explain the importance of Sinai for the generation of the Revelation. He seems to feel that this episode also serves as a validation of the Torah for all generations. But our generation was not at Sinai. How can we know that these events occurred?

Our Sages maintain that often the most important

elements of our religion are the most easily demonstrated.⁴ The existence of a Creator is evidenced by the boundless wisdom contained in the universe. Science has yet to offer any feasible alternative account for the origin of our universe, with all of its wondrous components. Similarly, our Sages argue that the unity of G-d is far easier to substantiate than alternative theologies of polytheism. We should not be surprised, if the proof of the authenticity of Revelation is obvious. We should also not be influenced by others who deny the Torah. In areas of religion and personal philosophy we cannot expect logic alone to triumph. We need look no further than the fervent "religious" belief of many scientists in a godless universe.

How do we know that any historical event occurred? After all, none of us knew Joan of Arc. Can anyone alive today claim to have visited with Ganges Kahn? Sophicles, Zeno, Plato and other figures from antiquity are accepted as having truly lived. Yet no one alive today can personally confirm these claims.

Generally, in assessing historical claims we take a critical view. We ask one simple question. Could this claim be a fraud and fabrication? If Genghis Kahn had not existed, could he have been manufactured in the imagination of some fanciful historian? This seems unlikely. Genghis Kahn conquered vast territories. He ruled an immense empire that included many millions of subjects. Imagine our fanciful historian wished to invent Genghis Kahn. He would have had quite a job convincing millions of people that they or their ancestors were ruled by a king of whom they had never heard. Let us put this in a modern context. Could we be convinced that a great earthquake had totally destroyed New York in 1805 or London in 1600. We would never accept such a claim. We would say, "If that is true, why have we not heard about it until now?"

If you want to fool the people about history, you are limited to events that the masses would not expect to be part of historical tradition. A historian can claim that Kennedy would never have allowed the United States to intensify the war in Vietnam. He can posit that DaVinci's Mona Lisa was an imaginative self-portrait. How do we know? But he will never convince us that DaVinci never lived.

The Sefer HaChinuch applies the same reasoning to Revelation.⁵ We must treat this event as we would any other historical claim. Could the claim of Revelation be a fabrication? To test the hypothesis, imagine Sinai was a fabrication. So, some imaginative leader came to the Jewish people and tells them that their ancestors were at Sinai and witnessed Revelation. Let us pick Ezra as our hypothetical revisionist. Would the people believe him? He is describing an event that occurred to their ancestors. Certainly, they would have been suspicious of a claim of such magnitude. They would react as we would to the stories of the destruction of New York and London. Revelation passes the test. It simply is not possible to fool a whole nation with an obvious fabrication.

Now, the comment of Maimonides can be fully appreciated. The validity of Moshe's prophecy was proven through the three million witnesses of Revelation. The reality of Revelation is established soundly through the same critical analysis applied to all historical claims.

Honor your father and mother, so that your days will be lengthened upon the land that Hashem your L-rd gives you. (Shemot 20:12)

This statement of the Decalogue commands us to honor our parents. The Talmud explains in Tractate Kiddushin that this mitzvah requires that we care for our parents and provide for their needs.⁶ However, it is clear from the discussion in the Talmud that the obligation is not limited to material services. The command requires an attitude of extreme deference and respect toward our parents. The Talmud even seems to say that it is impossible to fully discharge this obligation. Rashi, in his comments, comes to this very conclusion.⁷ Why is this command so difficult to completely fulfill?

This issue can be understood through consideration of another comment of the Talmud. The Sages explain that the honor required towards our parents can be equated to the respect due the Creator.⁸

This statement indicates that there are two aspects to the command to honor and respect our parents. We are obligated to provide material services to our parents. In addition, we must recognize our debt to our progenitors. The Almighty, through our parents, provides us with our very life. How can we repay such a debt? We cannot. The first aspect of the command, requiring specific services, can be discharged. We can fully provide for our parents' needs. Yet, the second aspect, the debt, can never be repaid.

This analysis is reflected in the equation between our relationship to our parents and our relationship to Hashem. We are obligated to appreciate all that the Almighty does for us. A prerequisite is that we acknowledge our debt to our parents. The benevolence of the Creator may, at times seem abstract. But the debt to our parents should be easier to grasp. If we cannot recognize this more concrete debt, we have very little chance of appreciating our duty to Hashem. Conversely, acceptance of our obligation to our parents is a step towards recognizing our debt to the Almighty. ■

1 Meschet Sanhedrin 106a.

2 Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chidushai HaGRIZ on T'NaCH and Aggadah, Parshat Yitro.

3 Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 8:1-2.

4 Rav Elchanan Wasserman, Kobetz Ma'amarim, Essay on Conviction.

5 Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Introduction.

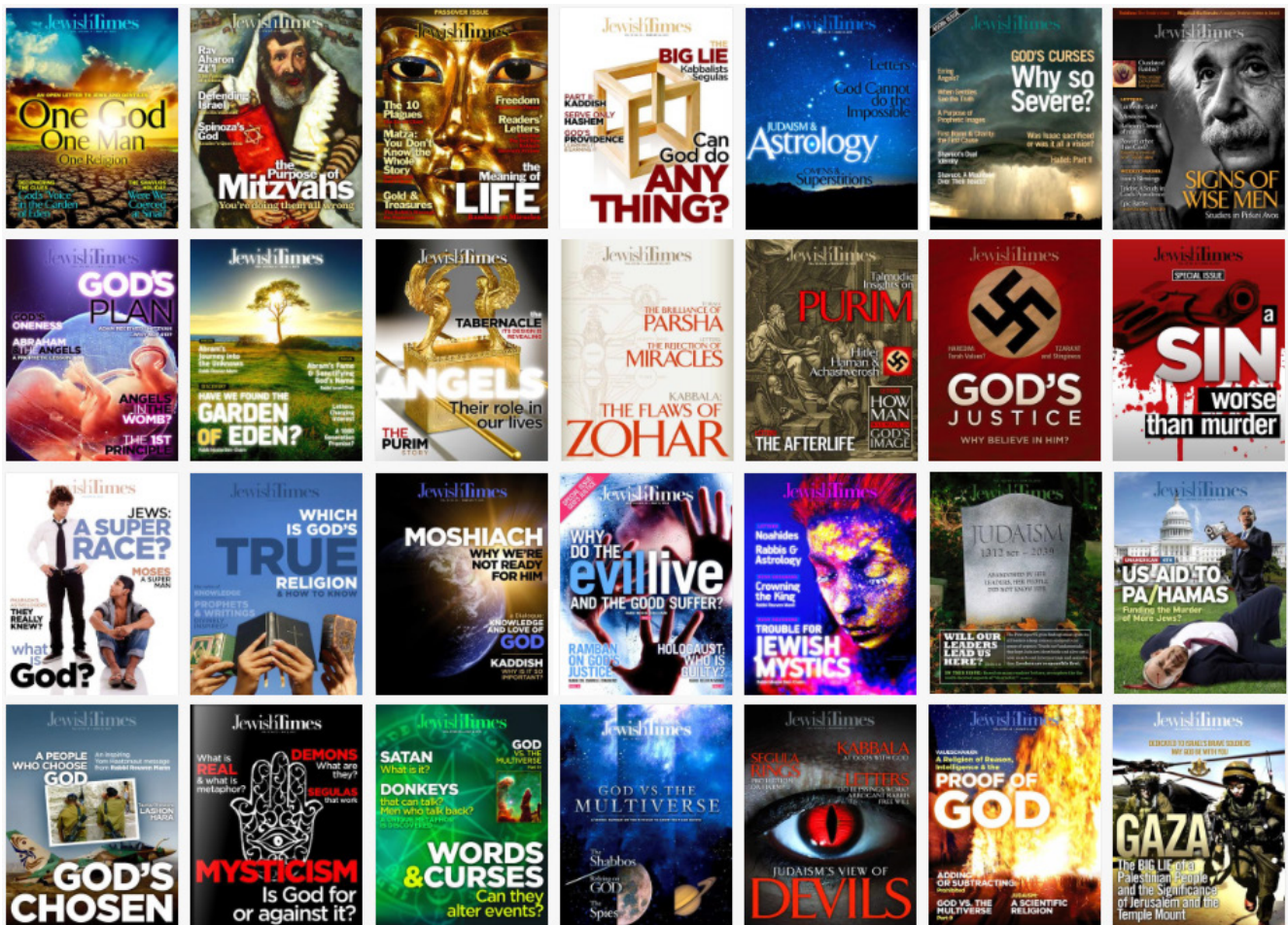
6 Meschet Kiddushin 31b.

7 Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Meschet Kiddushin 31b.

8 Meschet Kiddushin 30b.

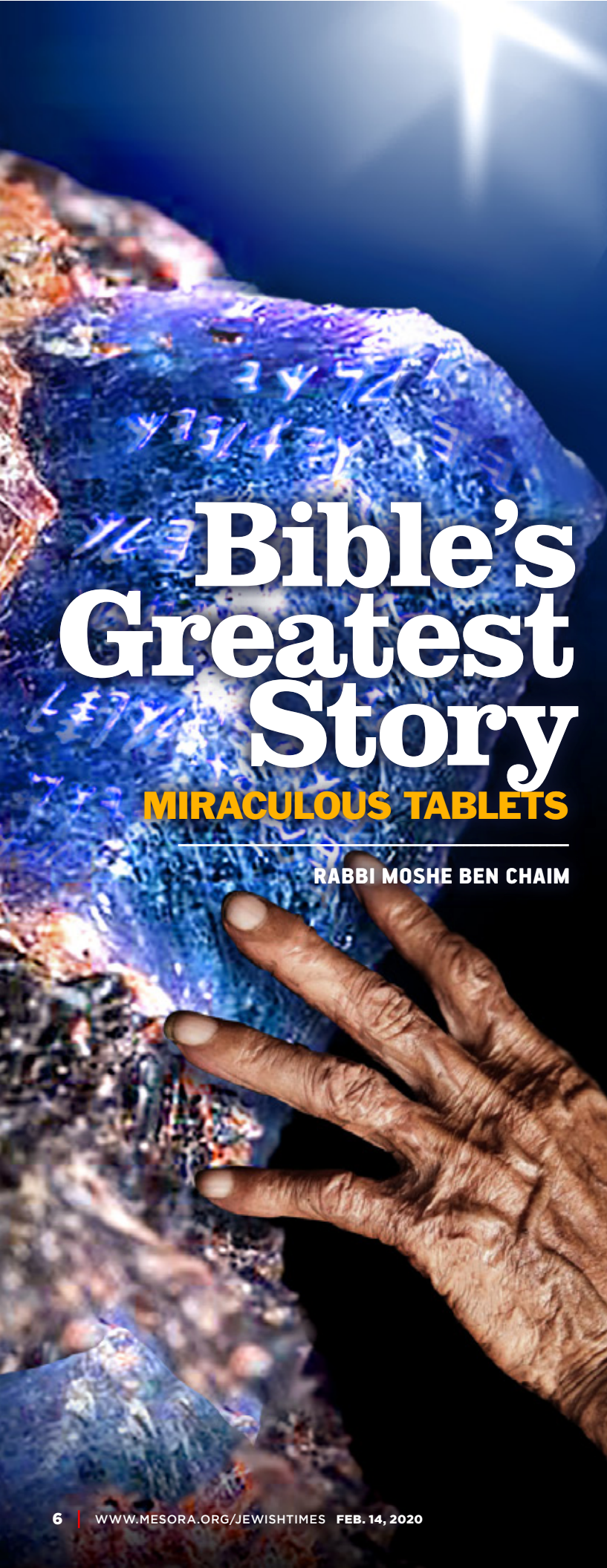
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Bible's Greatest Story

MIRACULOUS TABLETS

RABBI MOSHE BEN CHAIM

Guide for the Perplexed (book I, chap. lxvi)

“And the tablets 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.” Similarly we explain, “And the [tablets’] writing was the writing of God” (Ibid).

Maimonides’ words are revealing. He opens by citing “And the tablets 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,” by God. They are not “art.” Manipulating nature as in woodworking or in paintings is “art.” But if something is naturally 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. 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 Commandments, 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?

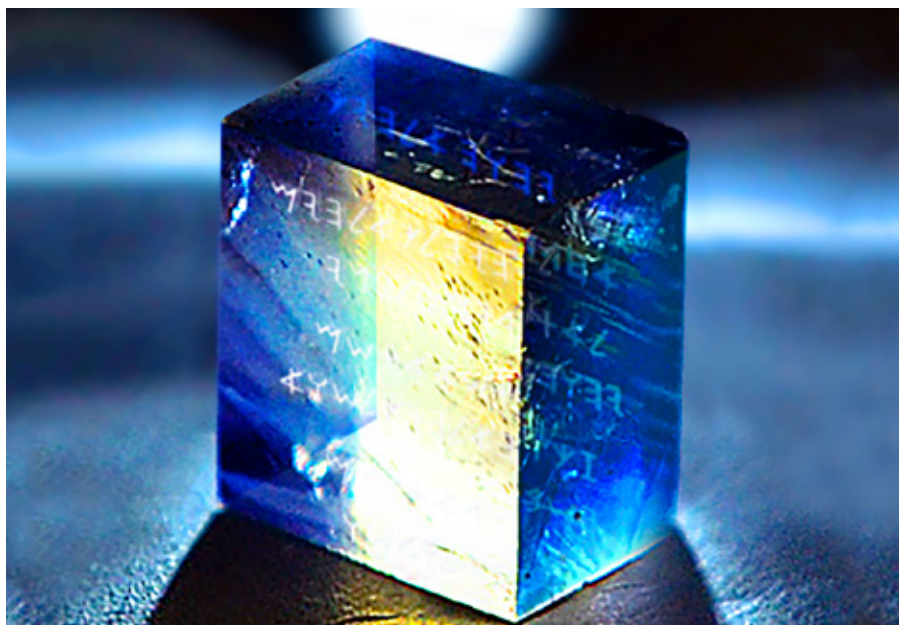
Let’s briefly recount the history. God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai, he remains in commune with God for 40 days and nights and then he receives the two tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold 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

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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 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 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 sapphire 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 actual 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 stone’s 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 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.

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. By nature, man becomes accustomed to natural matters. The sun rises and sets, creatures 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

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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 was 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. ■

Embedding Torah into creation, God teaches that the universe has a purpose: Torah study. Yes, we are to marvel at God's wisdom revealed through creation. But Torah advances man's knowledge of God to a greater degree. As Rabbi Israel Chait said, "Torah gives man a jump start" over studying nature, as we are not relying on frail human deduction, but with Torah, we have God's articulations that point man towards truths to a far greater degree than man's crude natural observations and derivations.

[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

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The Other Side of Sinai

Rabbi Reuven Mann



This week's parsha, Yitro, describes the greatest event in human history, the Revelation on Mount Sinai. An entire nation gathered there in the midst of "thunder, lightening, a thick cloud, and a very strong blast of the shofar" to hear Hashem's "voice" from heaven proclaiming the "Ten Utterances."

Jews remember and celebrate this event on the holiday of Shavuot. It seems strange that the other world religions choose to ignore this special day.

This is curious, because the great Revelation is quite germane to the faiths of the Western world. To put it bluntly, they would not exist were it not for the event at Sinai. Christianity and Islam both affirm the divinity of (what they call) the "Old Testament." [I want to make it absolutely clear that I reject that term, as I regard the Tanach as the only Testament. I only use it for the purpose of description when I am referring to the book that other people know by that name.]

Christianity, especially, asserts the validity and truthfulness contained in every aspect of the "Jewish Bible," beginning with the Ten Commandments that G-d revealed to the Jews. And since Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism, that religion could not exist if the "mother religion" had not come into being.

Indeed, prominent evangelical theologian John Hagee, a passionate supporter of Israel, has said explicitly that, "Judaism

does not depend on Christianity for its validity, but Christianity is completely dependent on Judaism." Since Torah MiSinai is the foundational point of all the religions, which couldn't exist without Judaism, why do they fail to celebrate the day on which the Revelation of the Ten Commandments took place?

In the Talmud, the Rabbis asked, "Why is the Mountain on which the Torah was given named Sinai? They answered that it is because "from there hatred (the Hebrew word for hatred is Sinah, which is related to the word Sinai) went forth to the entire world."

Many theories have been espoused to explain the complicated and multifaceted phenomenon of antisemitism. According to the Rabbis, it is because of the envy aroused when G-d presented the Jews with His Torah. This would seem to be a case of the jealousy that is stimulated when the "Father" favors one child over another. Still, this implies that the "nations," on some level, recognize the truth and great benefit of Torah and want it for themselves.

But this seemingly contradicts another famous saying of the Rabbis, who assert that, prior to communicating His Law to the Jews, Hashem offered the Torah to other nations. For G-d did not want them to have grounds to assert that "if we had been solicited we would have accepted it."

Therefore, "He came and revealed Himself to the sons of the wicked Esav and

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asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They: What is written in it? He: 'You shall not kill.' They: But that is what we have inherited from our father, as it is written, (Genesis 27:40) 'By your sword shall you live!' He revealed Himself to the sons of Ammon and Moav and asked them: 'Will you accept the Torah?' They: 'What is written in it?' He: 'You shall not commit adultery.' They: 'But we are all the sons of incest, as it is written, (Genesis 19:36): 'And the two daughters of Lot conceived from their father. How then shall we accept it?' He came and revealed Himself to the sons of Ishmael and asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They: What is written in it? He: 'You shall not steal.' They: But this is the blessing by which our father was blessed, as it is written, (Genesis 16:12) 'And he [Ishmael] shall be a brutish man, etc.' And when He came to Israel (Devarim 32:2), 'In his right Hand, the fire of the Law for them,' they all opened their mouths and cried. (Exodus 24:7) 'All that the Lord says, we shall do and we shall hear!' " (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:2:4)

On the one hand, the Rabbis assert that the nations are jealous of Israel because they were deprived of the Torah, and on the other hand, they are emphatic that, though Hashem offered it to every one of them, they all had a reason to reject it. How can we resolve this seeming conflict?

I believe that the answer lies in human nature. Often we find ourselves jealous of people who, by dint of great effort and sacrifice, have reached high levels of success

in life. We feel envious and believe that we have somehow been cheated of our due. But in fairness, have we put in the hard work and made the sacrifices over a long period of time that produced the results we covet?

We don't want to confront the truth of our basic laziness and therefore deny that successful people earned it through extraordinary efforts that we are unprepared to make. So we prefer to hate the winner, because that relieves us of our own sense of inadequacy.

And this is part of the story of Sinai. The gentiles are envious because they desperately want to be G-d's Chosen ones and resent that that honor belongs to the Jews. But they neglect to consider that they too could have had the Torah, but rejected it. Why? Because of the "Thou shall nots." They would have had to yield their instinctual freedom and sanctify themselves by refraining from harmful behaviors that had become part of their nature.

But the Jews came at it from a different angle. They were the descendants of exalted Patriarchs and Matriarchs who taught and modeled the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, and compassion. When the Creator of the Universe offered to reveal to them His own guide to moral and ethical perfection they instantly committed "to do and to hear". That is why we celebrate the joyful day of the Revelation, but the gentiles avoid it, because it holds no pleasant memories for them.

However, in giving the Torah to the Jews, Hashem was not depriving the gentiles. The non-Jewish world is welcome to come and

learn from us. And we will be very generous in teaching them the principles of the righteous life that it contains, for they too can earn a share in the World to Come.

With Sinai comes the obligation to implement the Torah in so intelligent and appealing a manner that we will accomplish our mission to be "a light unto the Nations." May we merit to fulfill this.

Shabbat shalom. ■

P.S. Have you finished reading the essays in Eternally Yours: Genesis and are feeling a bit sad that you no longer have thought-provoking material to look forward to reading on Shabbat?

Good news, because Eternally Yours: Exodus is now available. The articles offer a new and original perspective on the weekly parsha that will encourage you to think and enhance your appreciation of Torah and enjoyment of Shabbat.

And now we are close to finishing the third in the Eternally Yours series on Bamidbar. Please stay tuned.



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