

JewishTimes

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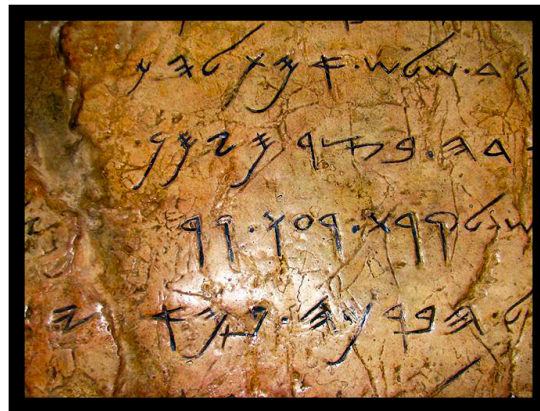
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THE ORIGINAL BIBLE

Translations change God's precise words and sentence structure which embody His infinite knowledge. To know Bible, means to know Hebrew and the methods of derivation tracing back to Moses.

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A Proper Distance

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hacohen Kook ZT"l was one of the most outstanding Gedolim of the last century. He was born in 1865. At a young age he was recognized as a very special student. Before he was twenty he received Smicha from Rav Yichiel Michel Halevi Epstein the author of the Orech Hashulchan. In 1904 he immigrated to Israel and in 1921 was elected the

first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine. He was a prolific writer and amongst his many writings he compiled Mishpat Kohen, dealing with laws applicable to Eretz Yisroel. One section is devoted to Hilchos Beis Habechirah, where he suggests a novel explanation of the opinion of the Ra'avad (see last week's article). The Ra'avad takes issue with the Rambam and

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according to most authorities he permits one who is a Tmei Ha'met (impurity by contacting the dead, cemeteries, etc.) to enter the Azara (the zone of the Temple Mount that is distinguished by its sanctity). There exists many Gemaras that support this idea.

For example the Gemara at the end of Makos and the Yerushalmi that we quoted in last week's article. The Gemara in Berachos on page 30a states:

"If one is standing outside of Israel, he should turn towards Israel...If he is standing in Jerusalem he should turn towards the Sanctuary. If he is standing behind the Kapores (the covering of the Holy Ark in the western part of the forecourt of the Beis Hamikdash) he should imagine himself to be in front of the Kapores."

Where exactly is he standing when it states, "if he is standing behind the Kapores"? Rashi explains he is standing in the eleven Amos that are between the Western Wall of the Kodesh Hakadoshim and the western wall of the Azara. That would mean that he is standing in the Azara. Rashi then disagrees with the Rambam and holds that a Tmei Met may enter the Azara and agrees with the Ra'avad. This is what the Meerie means (see last week's article) when he says, "the accepted practice is to enter there" i.e. the Azara. The Ra'avid therefore is not a unique opinion, but many Rishonim supported his idea that today it is permitted to enter the Azara (Note: Rambam has a different text in the Gemara in Brachos [see Hilchos Tefilah Chapter 5 Halacha 3]).

Rav Kook maintains that if you look closely at the closing argument of the Ra'avad he states, "There is no Kares" meaning but there is a prohibition from the Torah to enter the Azara (Rambam Hilchos Beis Habechira Chapter 6 Halacha 14 [see Mishpat Kohen Siman 96 Sif 6,7]). Therefore according to Rav Kook there exists three major opinions regarding entering the Azara:

- 1) Rambam who holds today it is prohibited incurring Kares
- 2) Ra'avad who holds it is prohibited by Biblical law but no punishment of Kares
- 3) Rashi, Meeri and others who hold it is permitted

Furthermore, there is another point that we must take into consideration. Many of our early Rishonim who are Halacha-oriented did not write on topics dealing with the Beis Hamikdash, as access to the Beis Hamikdash was not available to us during the long period of Galus, exile. Most of the Jewish population lived too far away to travel. Those that did live in Israel—and it was available to ascend the Har Habayit—nevertheless it was under the terms of the ruling authority. For this reason the Rif, the Rosh, the Tur and many others did not write on these topics. Consequently, there is no standard Shulchan Aruch on these topics, making a halachic decision more difficult. Whenever we find a psack Halacha by one of our accepted Achronim in these areas, it carries much weight. Magen Avraham (Rebbi Avraham Ben Chaim Halevi 1634-1682) became accepted as one of the great commentators of the Shulchan Aruch. His work is standard on every printed Shulchan Aruch today. In Siman 561 Sif 2 of the Shulchan Aruch on Orech Chaim, Magen Avraham Sif Katan 2 makes it very clear that the Halacha is like the Rambam in the debate between the Rambam, the Ra'avad and the other Rishonim. He



concludes that whoever enters the Azara and is a Tamei Met (as we are today) is Chayav Kares, meaning outside of the Azarait is permissible. The Mishna Berura ibid. Sif Katan 5 concurred with the Magen Avraham (see also Biur Halacha Siman 94 Sif 1 Paragraph "He was standing"). Note, Magen Avraham explains the Gemara in Berachos that states "If he is standing behind the Kapores" to mean if he is standing further west of the Beis Hamikdash i.e. outside of the Azara.

In conclusion it is clear that the Halacha is like the Rambam; meaning entering the Azara today is assur from the Torah and carries the punishment of Kares. However, it is equally clear that one may walk up to the Chel (a level promenade or a rampart ten amos high running around the Azarah, a safeguard put there by the Chachamim to prevent people from inadvertently entering the Azara.) Therefore, entering the Har Habayit today is permissible as long as one does not cross the Chel, and one then fulfills the Biblical Mitzvah of Mikdashe Terau.

That is why HaRav Moshe ZT"l doesn't even mention the isur of Rav Kook in his teshuva on the Har Habayit (see Igros Moshe Orech Chaim Chelek 2 Siman 113, last paragraph), because the Halacha is clear, up to the Chel it is permitted to enter. However, he does bring the concerns of the Brisker Rav, because the Brisker Rav is trying to identify the correct Western Wall, whereas Rav Kook is placing a new ban on entering the Har Habayit and this we cannot do.

Furthermore, we can understand the point of Rav Kook who added the Ra'avad to those whose opinion is that a Tmei Met cannot enter the Azara, albeit without an isur of Kares. Rav Kook, however, must admit that up to the Chel it is permissible for a Tmei Met to enter. So why then did he place a ban on entering the Har habayit? To be continued.

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NOTE: One should not ascend the Temple Mount without proper Rabbinical instruction:

- 1) You should be informed of the various routes that are available according to the different Rabbinical opinions.
- 2) You must immerse in a Kosher Mikvah that meets the standards to be kosher med'orasa.
- 3) You must receive instructions for the proper preparations for the Mikvah (Chafifah) ■

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the Most Crucial Bible Laws

**Which Principles
are Most Important?
How to know?**

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

What is Bible? It is God's guide for man's most fulfilling life. The Rabbis teach (Ethics 2:1) that not all Bible topics are of equal value; some topics are fundamentals, and others are of lesser importance. But all are important and obligatory. As Rabbi Israel Chait taught, "There are many facets to human perfection, and we cannot perfect our full range of faculties by practicing only a few of Bible's laws." For this reason, God did not reveal the rewards for the commands, perhaps people would perform only those laws with the greatest reward, and abandon all others. The entire Torah exists as each law refines yet another element of our personalities and values. We require all laws.

My intent in this essay is to share important ideas, that will surface only through our patient sensitivity to God's carefully-articulated verses.

Last week's Torah reading of Leviticus (11:44-46) concluded with these words addressing Kosher laws:

44 — You shall not draw abomination upon yourselves through [eating] anything that creeps, (1)you shall not make yourselves impure therewith (2)and thus become impure.
45 — For I am your God: (1)you shall make yourselves holy, (2)and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make yourselves impure

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through [eating] any swarming thing that moves upon the earth.

46 — For I Hashem am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy, for I am holy.

Verse 44 prohibits being abominable; a negative matter. Verse 45 commands us in being holy, the positive flip-side of that same coin. But we notice a redundancy in both verses:

Verse 44 says:

- (1) you shall not make yourselves impure
- (2) and thus become impure

Verse 45 says:

- (1) you shall make yourselves holy
- (2) and be holy

What is lost if Torah says just once in 44 “Don’t be abominable” and says just once in 45, “Be holy”? Why do both verses duplicate their messages? But be mindful that duplication does not exist in Bible. God does not repeat Himself. Even apparent duplications contain some distinctions and additional lessons.

Another interesting aspect of these verses is Rashi’s comment on verse 46, “For I Hashem am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt”:

In all other places it is written, “I took you out of Egypt,” and here it is written “I brought you up.” This difference was explained by the school of R. Ishmael: “If I had brought up the Jews from Egypt only for this one matter—that they do not defile themselves by eating creeping things as do the other peoples—that would be sufficient for them to be brought up from Egypt (Bava Metzia 61b).

And this is a “high” level for the Jews, and why God used the language of who “brought you up” from the land of Egypt” [“brought you up” as in “raised you to a high level.”]

The school of R. Ishmael explains this unique change of language. Usually, God says He “took us out of Egypt.” But here He says, “brought you up from Egypt.” So we wonder:

A) What is the unique element in abstaining from eating creeping creatures, that this alone warranted our Exodus?

B) What is this “higher level” attained through abstaining from eating creeping things?

C) And why isn’t abstinence from idolatry or murder greater?

We asked about the duplication in both verses. Rashi comments:

44 — If you become defiled thereby on earth, I will treat you as defiled in the world-to-come and in the heavenly academy.

45 — Because I will then treat you as holy, above and in the world-to-come.

Rashi brings the afterlife into the picture. The duplication in both verses is in fact not redundant. The first matters in both verses address our actions on Earth, and the second matter refers to the resulting state of our souls after we die. Rashi means this: if we (1)contaminate our souls here, we thereby (2)decrease our portion in the afterlife. But if we (1)control our appetitive lust for creeping animals here, we thereby (2)increase our afterlife.

No Redundancy

Rashi removes the question of redundancy. But he raises a new question. Torah doesn’t say, “Don’t steal or murder, lest you lose your afterlife,” ...it simply prohibits the sin. How is the afterlife more relevant to restraining our appetitive lusts than other matters, that Torah chooses to mention it here?

Unrestrained Instinctual Gratification

Man has a flaw which is corrected by controlling his appetites. That flaw is the desire for unrestrained



Paleo-Hebrew
Possibly the original Bible’s script

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instinctual gratification. A base individual does not welcome any restraint or rebuke; he wants to do as he feels: "Do not rebuke a scoffer, for he will hate you" (Proverbs 9:8). His ego also contributes to his deafness towards Torah's rebuke. But knowledge of one's mortality directly weakens unrestrained instinctual satisfaction, as the realization of death tells us this unrestrained pleasure will face a most definite restraint. Man eats several times daily; a most prevalent instinctual gratification. Mortality has the greatest impact on our greatest gratifications. In what we crave most, we find the most disappointment when considering our mortality. Therefore, to cure us of excess, in these verses God connects mortality to an unrestrained appetite, to curb us in the matter where we are most excessive. If we don't want a desire to end, if we crave unrestrained gratification, the best cure is God telling is that it does end...we die... and our souls pay an eternal price.

Therefore, Rashi understands these verses as reminding man that his good or evil here on Earth, makes an indelible effect on his soul in his eternal afterlife. The afterlife is attained by those who channelled their energies away from lusts and towards wisdom. Our energies attach either to instinctual drives, or to wisdom. The Rabbis teach "Not all whom engage in business become wise" (Ethics 2:5). This is because when immersed in business, there are no energies left to immerse in wisdom and Torah. They also teach one who is sexually aroused to attend the study hall: "For if it is metal, it will melt." Torah taps all man's energies, and he cannot be engaged in both Torah study and sexuality. In fact, Torah study uses man's energies to the greatest degree, as there is no frustration when delving in to wisdom. But all other pursuits cannot use all man's energies, as they are limited in time or in satisfaction, and then man is frustrated as he has not satisfied all his energies. Only Torah results in pure satisfaction.

What is Perfection?

Most primary is that we don't simply follow our emotions and instinctual drives. But sadly, this is the fate of a person oblivious to the inner world of psychology: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea" (Isaiah 57:20). Those blind to their emotions are controlled by them; one cannot steer away from what he cannot see.

Instead, by studying and then constantly monitoring our many instincts, we remain on guard of our psychological faculties and their dynamics. We can then detect when an emotion is exerting an urge, and we can thereby use our other component—our intellect—to choose whether to satisfy a desire, when to satisfy it, in what degree to satisfy it, and with what or with whom to satisfy it. But even this is not the end goal. For controlling and managing our desires merely sets the stage for us to redirect our contained energies towards pursuing God's wisdom.

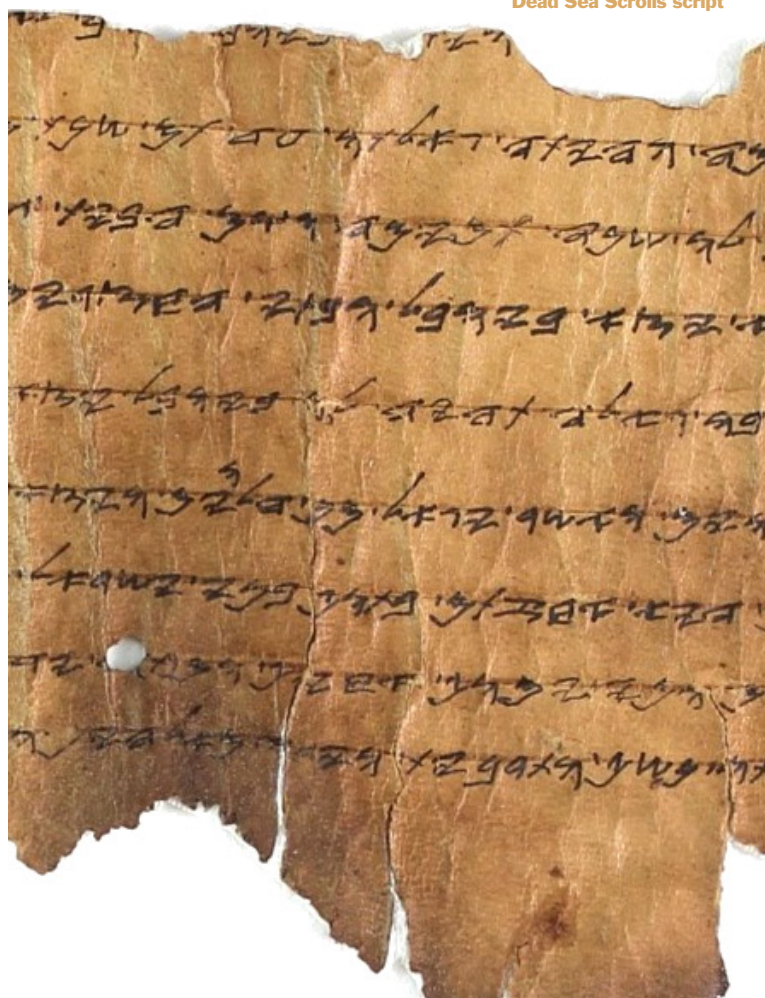
The school of R. Ishmael taught, "If I had brought up the Jews from Egypt only for this one matter—that they do not defile themselves by eating creeping things as do the other peoples—that would be sufficient for them to be brought up from Egypt."

The act of perfection—mastery of one's internal psychological world—surpasses studying volumes of Talmud (Rav Yisrael Salanter, Rabbi Israel Chait). Self control and keen moral values comprise perfection, while study does not guarantee perfection. The patriarchs and matriarchs validate this. God's inclusion in Bible of their lives attests to perfection as a lifestyle, not the amount one's studies. Our highest level is love and fear of God, when our actions conform to God's will, not to our own desires. For this reason, Kosher law—restraint of our appetite—is a primary Biblical priority. Only one who becomes aware of his instincts, and guards against their rule over his actions, can achieve perfection, and the afterlife. Therefore, Kosher laws are

most perfecting, to the point, that Kosher alone sufficed our redemption. This is Bible's priority.

In contrast, although refraining from stealing and murder are of course crucial, situations of violation do not present themselves multiple times daily, like eating. Thus, Kosher laws have a far greater reach and impact on man training his instincts away from gratification—"you shall not make yourselves impure"—and towards a life of wisdom—"you shall make yourselves holy." ■

Paleo-Hebrew
Dead Sea Scrolls script



Worse than a Sin Murder

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

The Torah reading of Tazria describes skin conditions which miraculously afflict those who engage in evil speech, Lashon Hara. As one of a few sins that meets with a divine affliction, Lashon Hara must be a severe crime.

Maimonides says Lashon Hara equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba, the afterlife. What is his equation?

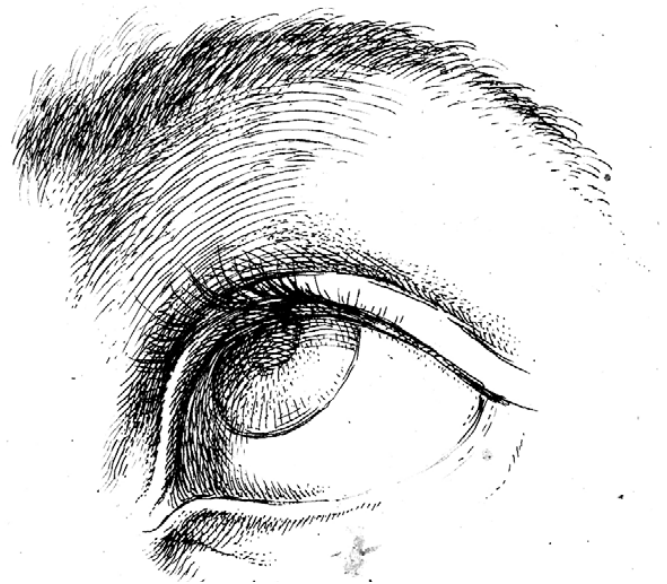
As God structured all laws, there must be great insights far surpassing our simple understanding of “degrading others.” Hopefully the sources quoted herein will sensitize us to the damage we cause others, and ourselves, acting as a deterrent.

The Torah Prohibition

The primary source for any Torah law is derived from the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Other references to that law from Prophets or Writings only elaborate that primary law, but cannot be the original source of a command.

Leviticus 19:16 says, “Do not go as a talebearer in your people, and do not stand by the blood of your friend, I am God.” Maimonides explains (Hilchos Dayos 7:1) why the talebearer is placed in the same verse as a murderer: it is because from the tales we spread, we can cause many deaths. Maimonides cites the example of Doeg the Edomite whose words—although not negative in themselves—caused the murders of many innocents. We may also add that slander is character assassination. When we slander, on

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some level we wish the demise of the person we attack. King Solomon said “one has thrown arrows” at the other party.

Maimonides states that this case of Doeg is an example of the head category, “Richiluss.” Richiluss is the act transferring private information from one to another; that which is not yet public knowledge. The Rabbis argue whether this information must be negative, or as Maimonides teaches, even neutral information. But all agree that the violation is in spreading gossip. Maimonides already explained what is so negative about this: many can die. But what lurks inside the gossip, this instigator? Let’s list the other three subcategories of Richiluss first. They are subcategories, since they are only quantitatively different from Richiluss.

Richiluss is spreading information, but the “manner” in which we do so may come under one of the three other headings. Maimonides then formulates the second category:

There is yet another sin much greater than this, in this category, and it is called Lashon Hara. It is the act of speaking of the negative aspects of one’s friend, even though he speaks the truth.

Maimonides’ third category is Motzei Shame Ra, or character assassination. This refers to one who spreads lies about others. But quite interesting is Maimonides’ fourth and final category, “Bal Lashon Hara—Master of Lashon Hara.” Why is this its own category? Maimonides defines this infraction as this:

One who sits and recites matters about another, that his forefathers were such and such people, and that he heard certain matters concerning him, and all he says are matters of derision. On this [case] does the Torah say, “God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters” (Psalms 12:4).

Let’s start to understand Lashon Hara...

King David on Lashon Hara

“God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters.” This verse in Psalms commences with “God.” Why is this so? Many verses in the Torah that cite evildoers merely address the evil, and God is not mentioned in the verse. I believe “God” is included here to pinpoint the sin...

Imperfect man wishes self-aggrandizement. Egos are very powerful, always seeking satisfac-

tion. And when one senses someone he estimates (correctly or not) is superior, his ego senses a threat and goes into defense mode. But perfected people have come to learn that competition is against the goals of the Torah. Therefore, King David carefully wrote, “God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters.” God is mentioned, as a purposeful contrast to the sinful objective of the talebearer, whom King David says wishes to “speak grandiose matters.” The speaker is attempting to elevate himself. Therefore, King David pits God against man in this verse to highlight the issue. Man should not seek competition and advantage, but rather, he should seek God and be humble.

The next verse in Psalms continues this theme:

That they say, “With our tongues we shall become powerful; our lips are with us, who will rule over us!”

Maimonides states that these people deny God, as they say, “Who will rule over us!”

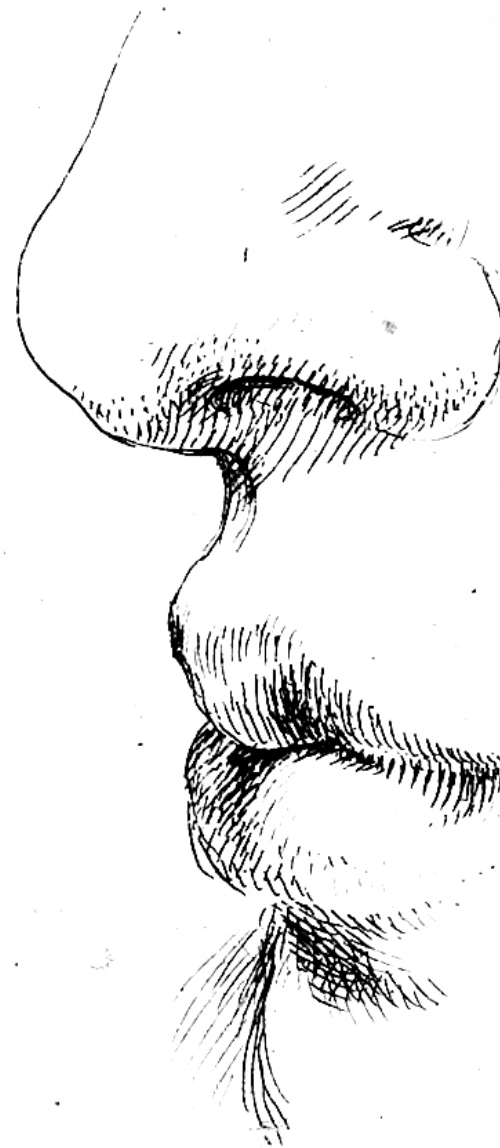
What are the additional aspects of the sin highlighted in this second verse of Psalms?

The ego senses that with the power of speech, one may project a grandiose self-image. He imagines he inflates his greatness...cause much damage. That is the first lesson of “with our tongues we will become powerful.” But this is all imagination. For intelligent people who see others boast, know that reality has not elevated such boasters. The only realm in which the boaster is greater is his own imagination.

Then they say something strange, “Our lips are with us.” Who else would they be with?! But this unveils a deep emotion. Man feels that what is under his control, is his right to do with as he pleases. Another aspect of the ego is thereby unveiled: limitless rights. Since “my lips are mine, I can do with them as I please” he feels. The ego does not accept opposition. It wants complete reign. Case and point: A lecturer in his fifties succumbed to an intolerant, screaming frenzy when someone much younger than himself corrected him during his lecture. Such types wish their words went unopposed. They do not seek truth, but rather, a platform for projecting their “greatness.” “Who will rule over us!” is not a question. They are saying, “No one will rule over us!” Lashon Hara seeks unrivaled expression, and pity the person who stands in opposition.

We must realize this unruly part of human nature. “Sin” has many references: mistake, crookedness, and wantonness. This last one is called “peshah,” and what we address here: the unruly tendency.

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Why So Many Types?

Why must a person ridicule others? This stems from one's own insecurities. Had he valued studying God and His creations, instead of elevating his reputation, he would not need to reduce others to elevate the self. The gossip is an insecure person who unloads news on others whom he hopes might side with him.

But we can violate gossiping in four ways. Richiluss is when we contribute to defaming others, although we do not necessarily utter negative words, like the case of Doeg above. We are instigators. But our corruption is present. We are merely distributors of what we hear. Lashon Hara is when we actually talk negatively: originating the content and citing truths. And Motzei Sham Ra is when we lie.

But what is the difference between Lashon Hara, and Bal Lashon Hara? Maimonides tells us that the Bal Lashon Hara talks about the person's forefathers. That seems quite odd. What does this have to do with the slanderer's attempt to destroy another person?

The Bal Lashon Hara does is clever. He doesn't take a single jab, as does the Lashon Hara individual. No, the Bal Lashon Hara is not seeking to vent against another person, but desires to completely ruin the other party. He doesn't mean to tarnish one's reputation, but to throw a knockout blow. This is a totally different type of viciousness. He desires to obliterate the individual. And how does he do this? By saying that his very "inception" was evil, "Look at who his parents were!" With such a statement, he gives the listeners no chance to view him in a good light. "He came from bad blood" as they say. "He is essentially no good." The Bal Lashon Hara most closely approximates the act of murder, as he seeks to thoroughly destroy another person.

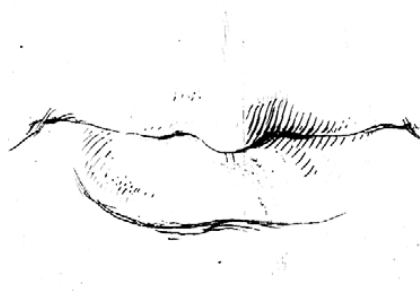
Viciousness

We briefly noted that viciousness is part of the sin. Talmud Archin 15b cites a metaphor:

In the future, all beasts will approach the snake and ask, "The lion tramples and eats, the wolf tears and eats...of what benefit then is there to you snake, that you bite, and do not eat?" The snake will reply, "And of what benefit is there to man who speaks evil?"

Rabbi Israel Chait taught that just as the snake has no motive in biting and does so by nature alone, so too, man is vicious by nature. There is no need to find a reason or any benefit. Just as the snake bites not for eating purposes, but merely to afflict, man as well has a desire to be vicious. In that Talmudic portion, God metaphorically says, "What more can I do to prevent Lashon Hara? I created the limbs upright, but the tongue lying down [to keep it dormant]. All limbs are external, but the tongue is inside [to restrain it]. I created around the tongue, a wall of bones [teeth] and a wall of flesh [lips] to halt Lashon Hara."

Rabbi Chait explained this to mean that speaking Lashon Hara is practically unavoidable, as if "God did all He can do, with no success." Of course, since we receive great punishment for Lashon Hara, we are to blame. But this portion has one message: Lashon Hara is generated by strong, almost unavoidable impulses. Therefore, we must be stronger, and more knowledgeable so as to fight it.



Most Severe

Why does Maimonides say Lashon Hara equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba?

What is murder? It is the attempt to eliminate another from one's reality. Lashon Hara does the same; one reduces another with speech.

Sexual immorality is man's unbridled instinctual expression. Lashon Hara too is the same: man unleashing his instinctual drives of aggression, ego, and other drives.

But how is Lashon Hara akin to idolatry? What is idolatry? It is not the mere prostration to stone or metal statues. Idolatry is an attempt to view reality as "we wish." It is where man seeks to validate his infantile fantasies, projecting them onto his daily activities, making them "objective" reality,

and no longer subjective whims. Man circumvents reality and imagine an alternative reality. Some pray to Jesus to save them. Many actually feel he does, although nothing in reality validates this. Others think amulets are protective. This is idolatry, where one does not seek any reasonable lifestyle, but imaginary protection. Since reason is not engaged, sinners are not discouraged when told that statues are inanimate. That does not register. When being idolatrous, one does not seek evidence. Now let's apply this to Lashon Hara.

When one speaks Lashon Hara, he harnesses speech to cater to that delusional egotistical world. One who lives competitively, feels threatened by greater individuals and therefore needs to "correct" this. So he speaks derogatorily to those who will share his resentment. In his mind, the target person suffered a downfall. The sinner now feels on top; the world is good again. When we view human insecurity this way, we realize how nonsensical evil speech is.

Summary

We now appreciate how we are so corrupt when we cater to Lashon Hara: we live in a fantasy world, we desire to hurt others who may not deserve it, and we outlet base emotions like animals, without thinking. If someone is wrong, we must withdraw and allow God to manage His creations' reward and punishment. It's not our battle, unless we were wronged and then we must defend ourselves from harm, or if we feel we can help the person by waiting for an opportunity time to help them see their error.

Lashon Hara rejects God's will that we abandon petty issues, when we should strive towards perfection. Lashon Hara also seems to go unnoticed; as we speak so much, and we deny we did anything wrong with those few words. Because of its subtleties, we must be all the more sensitive to our motives when we talk...and talk only when necessary.

We can correct our tongues, only after we correct our hearts. And the competitive emotion that drives us to seek fame and honor is at the root of this sin. If we study Torah properly, we will realize that God created us not to focus on ourselves, but on Him and His wisdom. We will then view ourselves properly: "And the man Moses was exceedingly humble from all men that are on face of the Earth" (Num. 12:3). ■

This Sabbath is also the New Moon. On this day, our regular Additional (Musaf) service is altered. Instead of the regular prayer, we recite “Atah yatzarta olamcha m’kedem; You formed Your world from long ago.” We must ask: Why was this prayer changed on account of the Sabbath/New Moon coincidence?

Looking at the altered text, we notice the altered concepts: 1) God’s creation, and 2) from long ago. The first step in approaching this question is to define the two days of Sabbath and the New Moon, independent of each other. We will then be better equipped to understand what concept their combination highlights.

The Sabbath has the unique distinction of God’s creation of the universe from nothingness, “creation ex nihilo.” All matter was brought into existence and completed, and God refrained from any additional creation from the seventh day and forward. The Rabbis teach^[1] that the miracles throughout time were “programmed” into Creation. God did not enact new changes “in time,” primarily because He is above time, and also because His omniscience allows for His earlier plans. Maimonides teaches that time itself too is a creation. If this is so, that Creation was complete, why then do we recite “You formed Your world from long ago” only on the Sabbath/New Moon coincidence? We should recite it every Sabbath!

What is the New Moon? The New Moon is different from the Sabbath. On it, we do not commemorate the completion of Creation, but the completion of the circuit of the Moon. How is the Moon’s circuit different than Creation? It too was designed by God!

There is a distinction. Creation, celebrated by the Sabbath, addresses God’s creation of the universe from nothingness. Sabbath addresses the “material” of creation. The New Moon embodies a different phenomenon: natural laws.

God created two things; material and natural law. On the first Sabbath,

although all matter was complete, the laws governing their behavior could not be seen in their completion. For example, the Moon’s orbit of the Earth is about 29 days. By definition, on the first Sabbath, the completion of the Moon’s cycle had a few more weeks to go. In truth, all of Creation could not be witnessed on the first Sabbath, as many of God’s laws would not display their complete cycles of behavior for months, and for the planets and stars, even years.

What happens on the Sabbath/New Moon combination? On this day, both systems coincide, displaying a completion of both; God’s physical creation of substances (Sabbath) and the fulfillment or completion of the universe’s laws (New Moon). On this special day, it is appropriate to offer this unique praise to God, “You formed Your world from long ago”: formation of the world corresponds to the Sabbath, but “long ago” corresponds to a system, which, although enacted at a prior time, only fulfills its mission much later. “Long ago” is a reference to time and laws—not substance. Physical creation can be beheld in a glance, but a system of operation unfolds its design only after a span of time.

Both aspects of Creation are witnessed on this special Sabbath/New Moon: Sabbath recalls physical creation, and the new Moon testifies to God’s laws operating in their completion.

Postscript

While it is true that sunrise or sunset can teach this idea observed in the New Moon, perhaps its frequency and familiarity diminishes its significance in man’s eyes. Therefore, the New Moon was selected by the Rabbis as the more impressive phenomenon on which to establish praise to God.

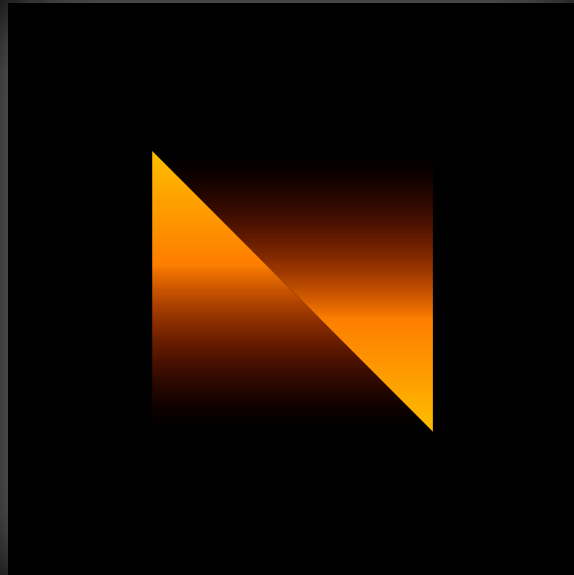
I believe this second aspect of Creation, i.e., its laws, are alluded to in Genesis 2:4. ■

[1] Ethics 5:6

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CONDÉ NAST



Patriarchs & Matriarchs



God commences His Bible with them, highlights their morality, and creates the Jews from them.

But they had no Bible.

It's evident that their perfection which God praises, is the proper morality we too all can discern, even without the Bible.

Prayer:
Not for God,
but for us.

Most interesting is that all our prayers and actions that God commanded, are not for Him, they are all to benefit us.

DANI ROTH

The Torah has many complex laws about conditions that require an individual to be separated from the community for a period of time or to be restricted from entrance into the Sanctuary. These laws of “tumah” (impurity) and “taharah” (purity), describe the various situations which bring about these separation, the lengths of time of the different separations and how this status requiring separation can be spread to other through forms of contact. The parsha of Tazria opens with a description of the restrictions that are placed upon a woman who has given birth. The parsha then focuses on the restrictions of someone who contracts a skin condition termed “tzaraas”, which is often imperfectly translated as the chronic infectious disorder called “leprosy”, due to having some similar characteristics. The Torah states in Vayikra (13:1-3):

1. And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:
2. If a man has a se'ith, a sappachath, or a bahereth on the skin of his flesh, and it forms a lesion of tzaraas on the skin of his flesh, he shall be brought to Aaron the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim.
3. The kohen shall look at the lesion on the skin of his flesh, and [if] hair in the lesion has turned white and the appearance of the lesion is deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a lesion of tzaraas. When the kohen sees this, he shall pronounce him unclean.

Maimonides (“the Rambam”), in his philosophical work, “The Guide for the Perplexed”, discusses the condition of “tzaraas” and how it is a miraculous disorder through which God punished the sin of slander. The condition was limited to the Jewish people, once they entered the land of Israel.

The uncleanness through tzaraas we have already explained. Our Sages have also clearly stated the meaning thereof. All agree that tzaraas is a punishment for slander. The disease begins in the walls of the houses (Lev. xiv. 33, seq.). If the sinner repents, the object is attained: if he remains in his disobedience, the disease affects his bed and house furniture: if he still continues to sin, the leprosy attacks his own garments, and then his body. This is a miracle received in our nation by tradition, in the same manner as the effect of the trial of a faithless wife (Num. v. ii.). The good effect of this belief is evident. Leprosy is besides a contagious disease, and people almost naturally abhor it, and keep away from it. (Guide Book 3, Chapter 47)

When the Jewish people lived in the Holy Land under God’s undiminished providence, the connection between the natural order of the physical world and the moral order of the world (reward and punishment) was more apparent than in the world today. Although we are enjoined by the Torah to reflect on our actions and repent when we experience disease or other

DEATH & Defilement

Rabbi Richard Borah

hardship, as well to praise and thank God when we experience success or joy, we do not perceive with any clarity the pattern of connections between these two areas. Occasionally we gain a glimpse of this continuity between nature and judgment, but when the Jews lived in the land in the time of Joshua and the prophets, the connection between these was much more apparent. In the case of “tzaraas”, according to Maimonides, the punishment proceeded from the walls of the home, to the person’s clothing and then to the skin, stopping at the earlier stages if the person repented. Nachmanides (“the Ramban”) writes about the miraculous nature of the punishment of “tzaraas” in his commentary on Vayikra 13:47 (“And when the plague of leprosy is in a garment”). He explains that the punishment of “tzaraas” is for any type of sin—not only slander. He states:

This (tzaraas) is not in the natural order of things, nor does it ever happen in the world (outside Israel) and similarly leprosy of houses (is not a natural phenomenon). But when Israel is wholly devoted to God, then His spirit is upon them always, to maintain their bodies, clothes and houses in a good appearance. Thus as soon as one of them commits a sin or transgression, a deformity appears in his flesh, or on his garments, or in his house, revealing that God has turned aside from him...And in the Torah Kohanim the Sages further interpreted that a house does not contract impurity until after the conquest and division (of the Land by Israel) and until after each and every individual clearly knows his portion. The reason for this law is that only then do they have the ease of mind to know the Eternal and the Divine Glory dwell among them.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (“the Rav”), in his major essay “Halakhic Man”, clarifies a fundamental aspect of Judaism as it relates to “tumah” (ritual impurity) and provides a united principle for the underlying structure of the law in this area. He explains that the source of “tumah” is contact with the dead and that this halakhic structure reflects the “this-worldly” focus of Judaism and that life, in all its physical, mortal aspects, is precious and holy. The Rav states:

Judaism has a negative attitude toward death; a corpse defiles; a grave defiles; a person who has been defiled by a corpse is defiled for seven days and is forbidden to eat any sacred offering or enter the Temple; a Nazirite who has been defiled

by a corpse cancels his previous count and must carry out the shavings of his head for defilement and bring an offering; the priests of God are forbidden to defile themselves with the dead. He whose holiness is of a higher order than the holiness of his fellow is subject to a more severe prohibition against defilement...Death is the symbol of the most intense defilement; therefore he who is holy unto the Lord must keep far away from such defilement. (pgs. 31-32)

We can speculate about how this “defilement of death” relates to the punishment of “tzaraas”. The person with “tzaraas” has sinned either with slander or in some other way and, as a result, receives a lesion that defiles and renders the person unable to enter the sanctuary or even to live among his or her fellow Jews. Death and sin are closely related according to the Torah. As King David states in Psalm 101:5: “Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure.”

Meaningful, truly human life has at its core the person’s experiencing of the presence of God. Sin as the primary cause of a person’s separation from God, it is a diminishment of life for the person. This is stated beautifully in a Midrash on the verse in parsha Vayishlach (31:4) “Hashem said to Moshe: behold, your days are drawing near to die.” The Midrash derives from the structure of the sentence that, just as days do not die, neither do the righteous. The Midrash states: “The righteous are considered alive, even in death, while the wicked are viewed as lifeless and dead even when they are alive.”

“Tzaraas” renders the person into a type of living corpse. The sins the person has committed have reached the point where he or she is so distant from the presence of God that the person is “dead even when they are alive”. They are defiled, as well as having a powerfully defiling influence on others with whom they come in contact, similar to the defilement resulting from the contact with a dead body. By punishing the person with “tzaraas,” many positive outcomes are accomplished. The person who is involved in slander (according to Maimonides) is separated from the community, which minimizes the person’s ability to continue to damage other with slander. The person is given a powerful, disturbing and clear sign of his sin and his need to repent. The person with “tzaraas” is given the opportunity to see how their actions are removing them from life in the presence of God and making them more dead than alive, as their existence lacks the true essence of the human being’s purpose and desire. ■

Redemption

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This Shabbat, which is Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we read the last of the four Special Torah readings, Parshat HaChodesh. This reading, contains the specific preparations the Jews in Egypt had to make, in anticipation of the forthcoming redemption from the land of their enslavement.

Up to this point, Moshe's directives were primarily to Pharaoh and his ministers; but the focus now turned back to the Jews. They were the victims of Pharaoh's oppressiveness, and the one's whom Moshe, at the behest of Hashem, had come to rescue.

But they were unlike any other enslaved people, who had powerful adversaries. If this were an ordinary man-made story, the emphasis would be solely on the measures taken to coerce Pharaoh, to "do the right thing". That is clearly a prominent feature of the narrative, but the victims here were also expected to play a major role in the drama of redemption.

For at that point in time, the Jews were not on the level where they were deserving of Hashem's miraculous interven-

tion. And the fact that they were the aggrieved party, was, by itself, not enough. They had to be transformed to a new level of existence.

At Hashem's behest, Moshe commanded them to set aside a sheep on the tenth day of the month of Nissan, in preparation for its sacrificial slaughter, which would take place on the fourteenth. The night of Makkat Bechrot (slaying of the firstborn), was one in which the Jews performed—in conjunction with their families and others, who had arranged to be partners in the Passover lamb—the Mitzvah which Hashem had commanded them.

Thus, they were not permitted to exult over the suffering which the Egyptians were experiencing, but had to spend their time absorbed in the service of Hashem. The lesson, was thereby made clear; it was not because of any innate superiority that they were being spared, but only because of their commitment to the Mitzvot of Hashem.

The sheep, of course, was the animal that the Egyptians established as their deity; in the

course of their lengthy sojourn there, the Jews had also worshiped this animal. They were commanded to break away from their association with Egyptian culture and religion and assume a new identity, that of Avdei Hashem (Servants of Hashem). For on this night, G-d would "pass over" the homes in which the Jews lived, and which had the Paschal blood sprinkled on its doorpost.

This was the night of the formation of Klal Yisrael, when Hashem distinguished us from the nations. This required commitment, as all males had to undergo circumcision, which is the sign that one joins the covenant with Hashem. One thereby proclaimed, that he embraced a lifestyle based on obedience to Hashem's Will, and attainment of personal holiness.

The lesson of the Korban Pesach is very relevant today. For more than three thousand years, the Jews were tortured and oppressed, by all the Peoples with whom we have interacted; and only recently have we begun to recover, from the decree of annihilation at the hands of the Nazis Y"SS.

In the wake of the devastation of the Holocaust, a new determination to prevent a repeat of the extermination took hold, expressed in the words, "Never

Again!" This spirit found fulfillment in support of Israel and the development of its formidable military prowess.

Israel and the Jews, have every right and, indeed the obligation, to oppose their lethal enemies, with all the resources at their disposal. But the lesson of Parshat HaChodesh, is that the even though redemption does require the destruction of our enemies, it also demands that we become worthy of Hashem's protection, by dedicating ourselves to His service.

In this season of Geula (Redemption)—let us be inspired to rededicate ourselves to fulfilling our spiritual ideals and adopting intelligent policies—to counter the insidious schemes of our numerous enemies. May we merit to experience the complete Geula speedily and in our times. Shabbat Shalom. ■

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—Rabbi Reuven Mann

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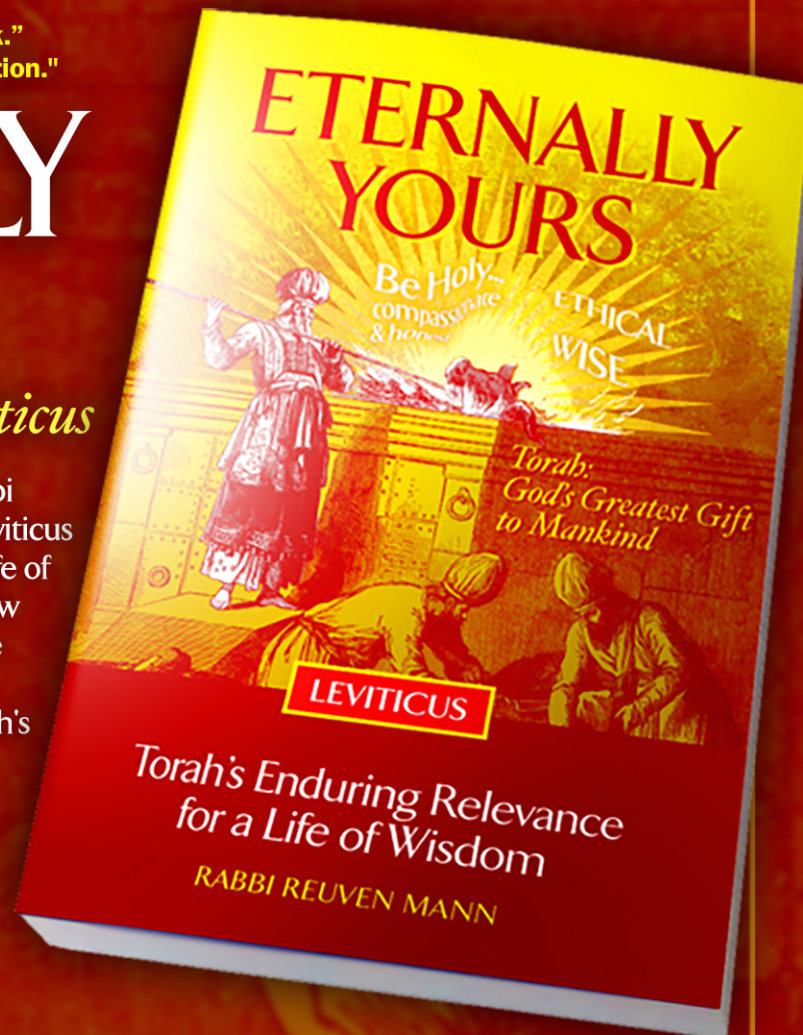
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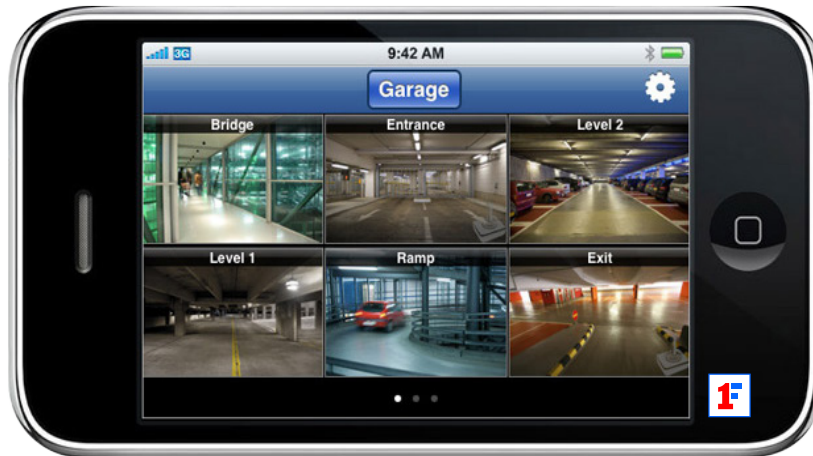
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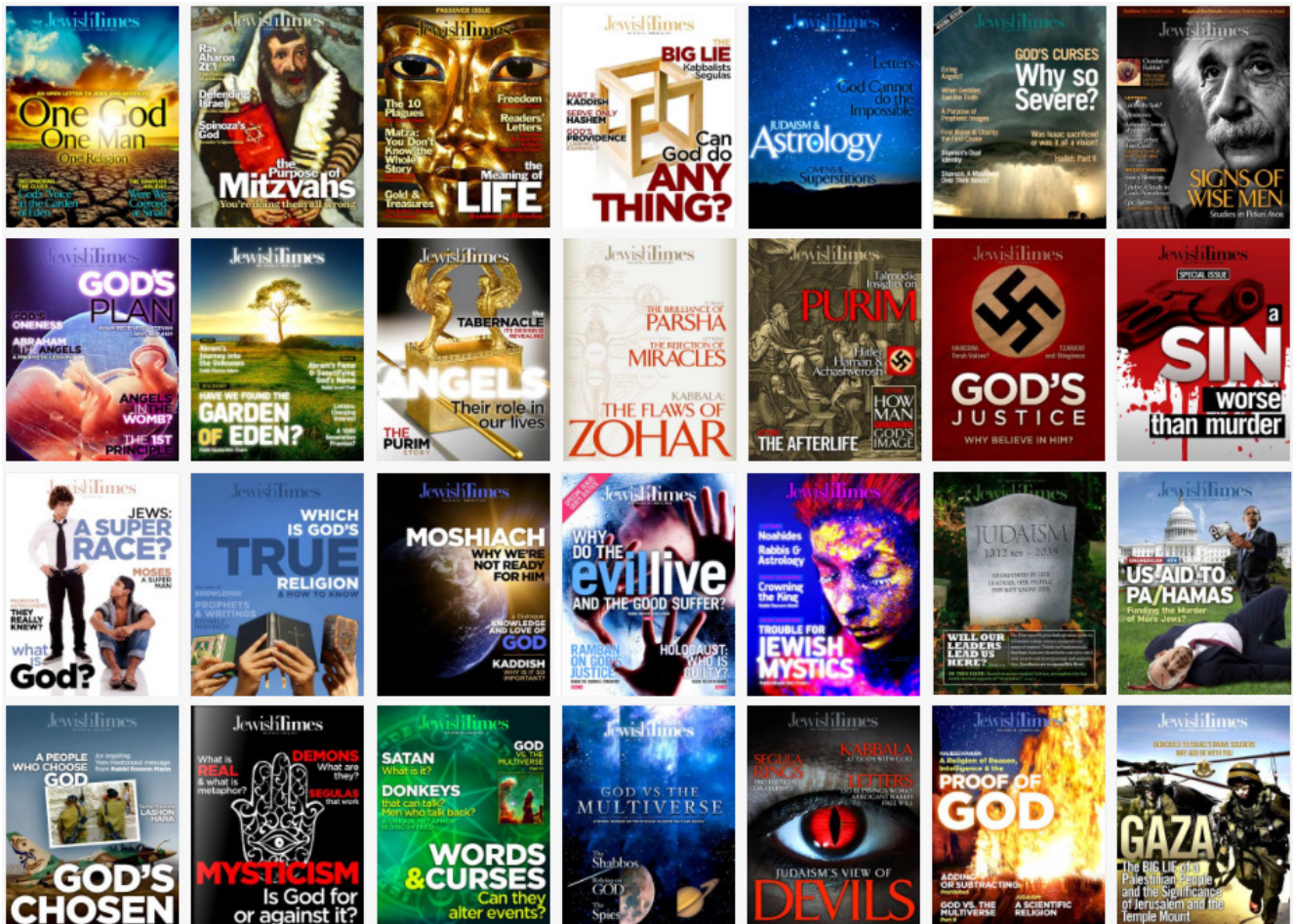
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