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| BEAUTY |

"A gold ring in the snout of a pig, so too is a beautiful woman bereft of reasoning" (Prov. 11:22).

The primary lesson is that we value personal integrity over beauty. However this would also indicate that a beautiful woman with wisdom is praiseworthy, for despite her looks, she chose God's Torah over vanity.

What is the value of beauty? God certainly made beauty to cause romantic attraction and generate respect, as in leaders (the matriarchs were beautiful). King David overlooked punishing his beautiful son Adoniyahu (Kings I, 1:6). Although this was improper of King David, it teaches how attraction can help people overlook wrongdoings. However, here, King Solomon wishes to stress that the more important element is one's character, and that the wayward woman obscures her beauty just like a pig completely obscures the gold ring in its nose. Beauty captivates, it has its place, but we must value character—one's accomplishments—over inherited beauty for which one deserves no praise. An intelligent person values others of integrity, and senses the shallowness of beautiful people seeking vanity. God designed us that we have an accurate sense of what is good, real and valuable...and what is phony and worthless.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is God?

READER: Thank you for your thought provoking article "God is not Here." It generated the following contemplation: Among our discussions on Pesach, we spoke of the great challenge the Jews had in altering their concept of God. Heretofore, they had lived with the gross misconception of their Egyptian upbringing, viz. that God had some form of corporeality. It was a tangible entity with which

they could connect. Now they were expected to accept the concept of Hashem, this mysterious, unknowable Deity that was somehow totally transcendent, beyond description, with zero chance of even grasping an iota of His essence. This was indeed a tall order for the Jewish people, a supreme challenge.

As a result of these ideas, we came to our own challenge: If Hashem is totally beyond

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grasp, so what exactly is our thought when we pray? To whom or what are we addressing? To Hashem in His essence, that is impossible; to some this-world entity, a creation, then we are dangerously treading upon the precipice of idolatry.

So what then should be in our thoughts [of what God is] when we pray?

Somewhat confused and seeking clarification.

Thanks. Kol Tuv.

RABBI: Rabbi Israel Chait answered:

"First we must negate the premise of the idolaters, mainly [their misconception] that the only thing that's real is the physical. Then we say just the opposite: What is truly real is not physical, and He is the source of all existence; He has created and controls everything that exists. This is all subsumed under the first of the 10 Commandments, "I am God." In the second commandment—"Do not have any other gods"—we posit that we can't worship anything physical, even if we believe that the non physical is the source of all existence."

Rabbi Chait says that we must accept God as being non-physical and exclusively in control of all else. He also says that, even if we do accept this, we cannot worship anything else. Thus, we must agree that all that exists is due to something non-physical, and we also must not worship anything else.

Since God told Moshe that "man cannot know Me while alive" (Exod. 33:20), it is impossible to have any concept of God. Maimonides explained that we cannot have any positive knowledge of God, but only negative knowledge: i.e., He is not cruel, He is not unjust, He is not ignorant. What we can know are His actions and his words. Our concept of God is that He is the sole source of the universe and the author of Torah, the being that has Providence over the righteous and over the Jewish Nation.

It is for this reason that our morning prayers start with "Blessed is the One who spoke and the world came into existence." Before commencing our prayers we must first define before whom we pray. And this is the Creator of all. ■

Mitzvah's True Worth

READER: Please explain Ibn Ezra on Exod. 31:18:

Brainless people ask, "What did Moses do on the mount for forty days and forty nights?" They do not know that if Moses doubled and quadrupled his years with God, he would barely know one thousandth of God's work and ways and the secret of all the precepts which God commanded him!

People think that actions are most important [so Moses could have learned all Torah's required actions in a few days. He did not need 40 days, they think]. This is not so. What is important is [not mechanical action, but] heart together with deed. Heart and tongue train a person [to observe the commandments]. We thus read, "It is in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (Deut. 30:14). Our ancients said, "God desires the heart." Loving God and cleaving to Him with all of one's soul is the basis of the commandments. This cannot be completely accomplished if a person does not know the ways of the Lord and is not acquainted with God's work in the upper and lower worlds. [Actions alone cannot accomplish this.] The prophet thus states, "But let him that glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows Me" (Jer. 9:23). It will then become clear to a person that God exercises mercy, justice, and righteous, in the earth (Ibid.).

A person cannot know God if he does not know his own spirit, soul, and body. For of what use is a person's wisdom to him if he does not know the makeup of his soul? Now Moses, who prophesied in the desert for forty years and was party to many secrets which God revealed to him on Mount Sinai, said before his death, "O Lord God, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness" (Deut. 3:24). Thus it was only then that Moses first began to understand God's greatness and that the Lord's greatness was shown to him. This is truth, for His greatness is unsearchable (Psalms 145:3).

RABBI: Ibn Ezra stresses human error: people think the objective of Torah is action, performing the commands. As most people are more attached to the physical, they elevate

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the importance of physicality and activity. But in fact, Ibn Ezra teaches what is most important is the heart: intellectual and emotional conviction. Man's perfection is achieved only through his highest element, his soul. Mechanical performance is quite easy. But grasping God's wisdom takes time and the greater capacity of intellect.

Ibn Ezra refers to the "upper and lower worlds": the metaphysical world of wisdom and God's providence, and how they relate to the lower physical world and mankind. Without understanding this reality, a person cannot know the ways of God. We must know "that God exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness in the earth." That is: God and His Providence and laws in the upper world relate to man in the lower world.

He then says, "A person cannot know God if he does not know his own spirit, soul, and body. For of what use is a person's wisdom to him if he does not know the makeup of his soul?" Here, Ibn Ezra teaches a great fundamental: without our appreciation of our design, psychologically, intellectually, metaphysically and bodily, we cannot appreciate God's plan for man, because we do not know what "man" is. Only after study of man's full design can a person appreciate God's plan for mankind. But with ignorance of what we are, we assume what is most important are simple mechanical acts of mitzvah. And [people erroneously think] Moses could have learned all 613 commands in a few days, if that's all there was to Torah.

Thus, Ibn Ezra's answer to "Brainless people asking what Moses did forty days and nights" is the following, by way of example:

Kosher is not simply abstaining from eating certain species of animals. This is a "brainless" approach limiting Kosher law to simple, mechanical performance. In fact, Torah provides tremendous details. It distinguishes the terms "impure" relating to beasts, from the term

"loathsome" regarding insects and crawlers. Something about creeping animals requires our attention. Most animal features indicating dietary prohibition are found in the animals' modes of movement, such as multiple legs, belly crawlers, hoofs, fins, claws, creeping, and paws. Torah separates beast classifications: some requiring "split hoofs" to be edible, and "pawed" animals indicating prohibition. What's the difference between a paw and a hoof? This too is a clue. And a glaring omission is that Kosher does not apply at all to vegetation, only animals. Why?

All these details clearly show a thinking person that Kosher is not simply about dietary restriction. God is teaching us that there's something about animal life that presents a danger, whereas vegetation does not have this danger. What is this danger? That the signs are found in the animals' mode of "locomotion" reveals which aspect of animals presents the problem, whereas vegetation does not. What is that aspect? See last week's *Jewishtimes* (#636) for greater elaboration on Kosher. But for this essay's purpose, we appreciate that simple, mechanical activity is not God's objective for man. That is brainless. Rather, God desires our hearts and souls to investigate His generous clues that reveal His brilliance, the true benefit of Kosher. This is the purpose of all commands. The vast scope of Torah is further expressed in volumes of Oral Law requiring decades to master.

This is why, had Moses stayed in communion with God—even doubling or quadrupling his time—he would not grasp even one thousandth of God's wisdom.

Finally, perhaps Ibn Ezra was very select with his word "brainless" to indicate Torah's purpose is intellect, not action. It is precisely those people who do not use their brains, who lack the appreciation of the commands. ■

What We Celebrate

Rabbi Reuven Mann



Israel is currently in the midst of celebrating significant and interrelated “Days”. It begins by commemorating the Holocaust with Yom HaShoah which is followed by a Day of remembrance for fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism and culminates with Yom Ha’atzma’ut (Independence Day). It is now seventy-five years since the state of Israel was established, after a more than three thousand year lapse of national sovereignty. The question is, should religious Jews view this as a miracle and celebrate accordingly?

When you consider the events of the twentieth century, which witnessed the extremes of destruction and rebirth, it is hard to conclude that everything occurred in a normal, natural manner. Two World Wars had to occur in order to divest, first the Ottoman Empire and then the British Administration, of their control over the Land of Israel. Many things of an apparently miraculous character had to transpire in order for there to be a Jewish State, not the least of which was the emergence of a modern Jewish army.

Remember that Jews had been defenseless victims

for most of their arduous exile. Surrounded by hostile Arab States lusting for their destruction, few gave the Zionists a chance in the event of hostilities. Indeed, President Truman warned the Jewish leaders not to declare statehood, for that would trigger a war in which the U.S. would not come to their assistance. The plucky Zionist leaders went ahead and declared a Jewish state and, indeed, the Arabs attacked. And “miraculously” the underdogs emerged victorious.

But not everyone will agree that the founding of modern Israel was orchestrated from Heaven. There were no overt departures from the laws of nature, such as the splitting of the Red Sea. Whatever occurred can be explained and accounted for without reference to a Higher Power. Without the guidance of a genuine prophet, we cannot know with certainty how these things transpired.

I therefore believe that we have to view this event from a different perspective. In my opinion, virtually all of Jewish history is an exemplification of Divine Providence as clearly expressed in the Torah. Hashem warned ample times that the punishment for grievous sins would be exile from the Land.

True to this prophecy, Jewish history has been marked by exile and dispersion to all corners of the globe, with constant expulsions and persecutions. The Jews were universally hated and mistreated. Nobody ever developed a liking for us (except for short periods of time when our economic expertise was greedily solicited). Both of the major world religions were guilty of justifying and encouraging the most egregious forms of anti-Semitism.

Christianity was especially to blame for formulating the basic tenets of Jew hatred and marketing the theology of contempt. The main crime they attributed to the Jews was that of “deicide”; that’s right, the murder of their god. Can you believe such a thing? It’s not certain who killed Jesus, but it is clear that he was an ordinary human, not a deity. The Christians invented the fiction that he was god and thus the crime of killing him was automatically upgraded to deicide. This would be a laughing matter except for the fact on the basis of this absurdity every Jew for all time was tainted by an imaginary sin for which there was no remedy except the gas chambers.

The Islamic religion was not enamored of the Jews either. Religious envy has played a significant role in history. If G-d chose the Jews to be His people as is clearly stated in the Torah (which Islam accepts as Divine), then how can the Muslim religion be the true one? However you consider it, the Jews stand in the way of any religion that puts forth the claim that it comes directly from G-d. You would like to be the “Chosen One” but what can you do about the numerous and unequivocal declarations in the “Bible” (Torah) that Hashem has selected the Jews to be His People and, accordingly, has given them the Land of Israel?

These truths are very painful to many people (including some Jews). It’s a factor which causes them to hate and demonize the Jews. This allows them to solve their theological dilemma by saying that maybe the Jews were chosen once upon a time, but due to

their multitude of sins they have been subsequently unchosen. According to this distortion, G-d regretted having selected the Jews and replaced them with either the Christians or the Muslims.

History confirms the authenticity of G-d’s promises to the Jews. We have been exiled, dispersed, demonized and persecuted in the most tortuous manner. We enriched mankind with our moral teachings and scientific discoveries, but the hatred of Eisav could not be dissipated. All of the brutality culminated in the Holocaust, which would have been a fatal blow to any other people except the Jews. Consider that all of the great Kingdoms that arose to destroy us have been banished from the world stage, never to be heard from again.

But the Jews are still here, alive and vigorous and, in the realms of theology, science, technology and the arts serving in their familiar role as a “light unto the nations”. And after roughly three and a half thousand years they have returned to their G-d given land and developed it into a modern, thriving state. This in spite of the fact that in the interim numerous Empires coveted the land and took control over it. All the temporary landlords of Israel could not endure and eventually were displaced. What happened?

In the Book of VaYikra the Torah lists the curses that will come upon the Jews for their failure to observe the Torah. Hashem says that if disobedience persists they will be driven out of Israel and the land itself will be laid to waste. “I Myself will make the land so desolate that it will be desolate of your enemies who inhabit it” (Vayikra 26:32). Rashi points out that this constitutes a hidden blessing so that the enemies of the Jews will not be able to successfully cultivate the land and make it prosperous and never leave.

The absolute desolation of Israel was attested to by no less a figure than Mark Twain, who toured the country in the nineteenth century and saw in this phenomenon the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy. The connection of the Jewish People to the land of Israel was such that only they could successfully cultivate it, but all strangers would fail in this endeavor. So in spite of the efforts of all the world’s major empires to take over the land which G-d gave to the Jews, they were unable to do so. The land remained faithfully desolate until the rightful owners made their return.

To me, the significance of Yom Ha’atzma’ut does not lie in the specific events which attended the establishment of the Medina (State). Rather, the return to Israel represents the great miracle of Jewish survival and the fulfillment of all the historical promises pertaining to the exile and return. This is the time to recognize the existence of Hashem and His mighty Hand in human history via His special relationship with Am Yisrael. It enables all of us to proclaim with renewed confidence, “I believe with a complete faith in the coming of Moshiach—and even though he may tarry, nevertheless I wait for him, on every day that should come”. May this happen speedily and in our time.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

God Made Earth for Whom?

*"The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims His handiwork. Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out. There is no utterance, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard. Their voice carries throughout Earth, their words to the end of the inhabited world."
(Psalms 19)*

Creation "speaking" is a metaphor. Creation "speaking of God's greatness" means that the intent of all creation is to communicate God's wisdom to intelligent beings. This supports Rashi (Avos 2:8) who says Earth will endure only if we study Torah, and Earth would be destroyed if man fails to study. Earth exists only for humans; animals, plants and minerals have no purpose of themselves, as Avos 6:11 states:

Whatever the Holy Blessed One created in His world, He created only for His glory, as it is said: "All who are linked to My name, whom I have created, formed and made for My glory" (Isaiah 43:7), And it says: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever" (Exod. 15:18).

Thus, inanimate creations do not exist for themselves as this does not honor God. "God's honor" refers to a recognition of God's greatness, capable only by man or angels. Why then did God create inanimate existences? It is so man and angels see God's brilliance in their designs and purposes. All on Earth exists for man to perceive God's wisdom. Thus far, King David refers to "entities" God created. But there is one other creation...

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Why God Made Earth

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



“Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out”

King David’s new point is that not only did God create physical entities, but He also created “laws and systems.” The cycle of the day—the repetition of day after day and night after night—as well as others repeating patterns, are systems. Repeating phenomena are “laws.” King David impresses upon us to appreciate God’s two primary creations: 1) physical entities and 2) the laws that govern them. As we cited in last week’s Jewish-times issue, the special blessing when Sabbath coincides with the new moon reads, “God, You created Your world from long ago.” On Sabbath alone we cannot say this because a single Sabbath day cannot embody the 29-day moon cycle. Only after a duration of time, does man witness the existence of laws, in addition to the existence of entities like the luminaries. Therefore, on the Sabbath/New Moon, we can speak of the entire world God created long ago. And the entirety of the world includes systems that take time to real themselves.

There is no utterance, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard. Their voice carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the inhabited world

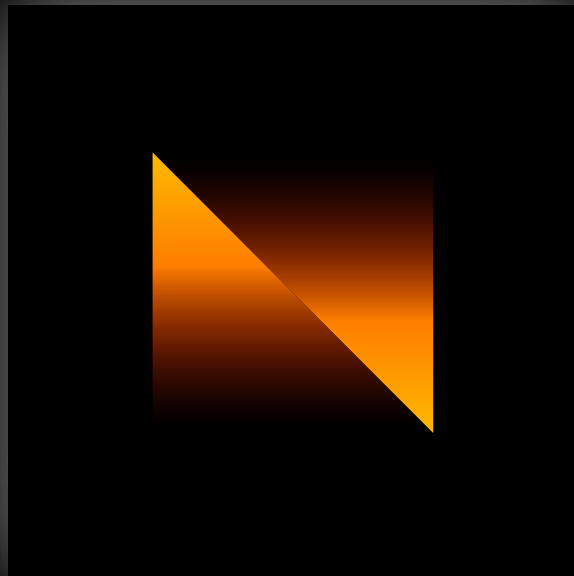
King David says the brilliant design of the universe, including all entities and laws, intends to impress intelligent beings.

Therefore King David says, “this communication reaches the Earth and inhabited lands” ...inhabited by man. Man is the objective of Earth’s creation. No other creature has a mind. All of God’s brilliance is wasted if man does not pursue God’s wisdom.

Pirkei Avos also discusses this:

Rabbi Meir said: “Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake, merits many things; not only that but he is worth the whole world. He is called beloved friend; one that loves God; one that loves humankind; one that gladdens God; one that gladdens humankind” (Avos 6:1).

The man who studies for the sake of wisdom alone—no ulterior motive—gives worth to Earth, as this is God’s wish. “Gladdening God” means that he’s living exactly as God wishes. Gladdening others indicates the obliteration of one’s ego, for this is what allows other people (who are egoistical) to be happy with him: his humility caters to their egos, making them happy. He also views others as equal to himself, as equal expressions of God’s will. So he treats them as good as he treats himself, again making them happy. It also indicates the person’s focus is God, not people, explaining why he does not cater to his own ego. This further explains his absorption in God’s wisdom. ■



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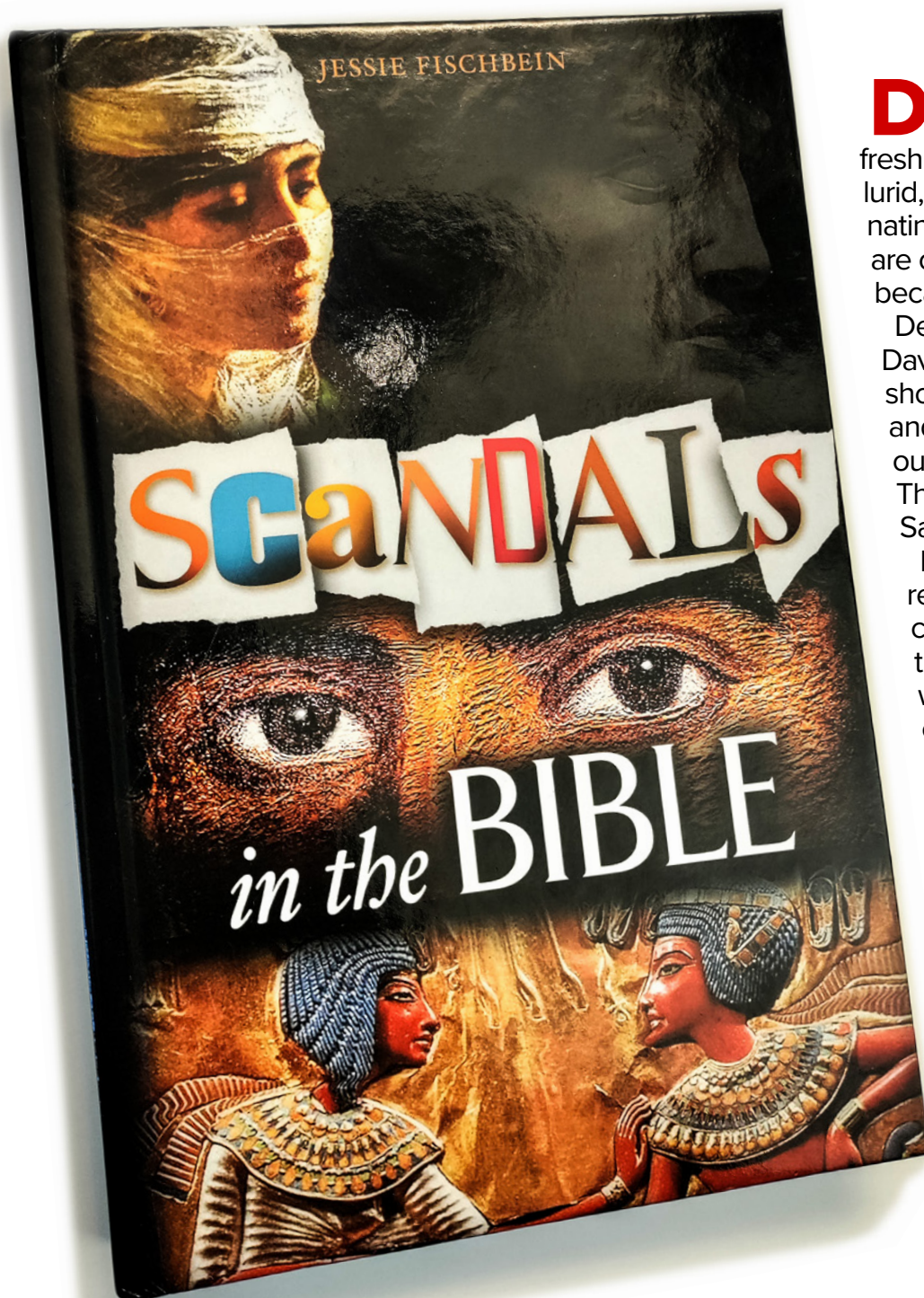
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Jessie Fischbein has a great fondness for the nuances in Biblical text and commentaries. She lives with her husband and children in Far Rockaway, within walking distance of her grandchildren and a beautiful beach, which she visits often. She also loves doing backflips and handsprings.

Gematria is a polarizing topic. While many love it, many others view it with skepticism.

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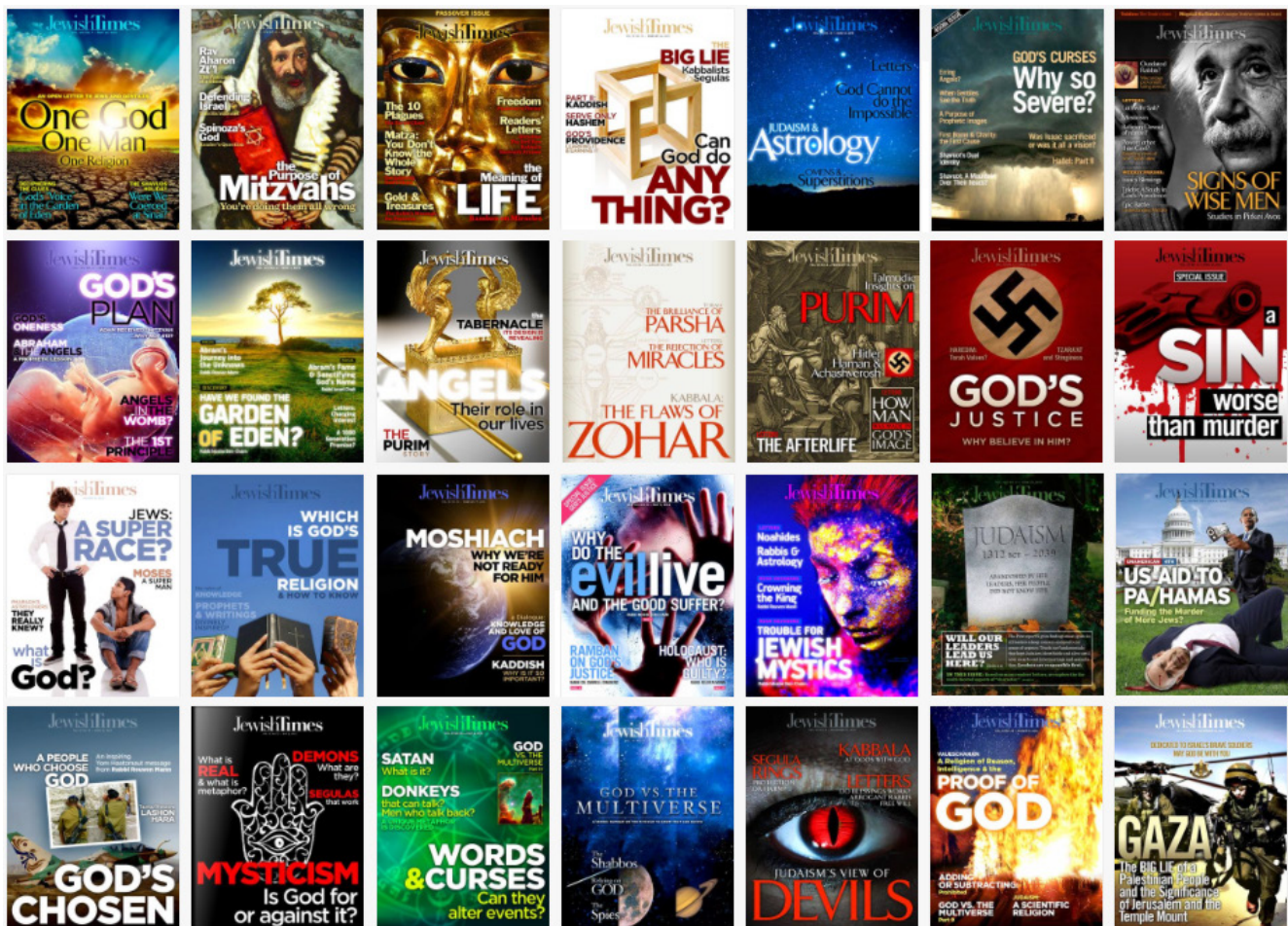
Gematria Refigured presents the discoveries that led to the author's transformation from a gematria skeptic to a gematria lover. It develops a theory which elucidates how the Torah and Chazal use gematria to direct us toward a very specific type of idea. Through its many examples, this work illustrates how gematria can help us uncover novel insights, while providing interesting and clearly formulated perspectives into many mitzvos, themes, and stories in Tanach.

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