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TORAH'S DIAL OF DESTINY

"All is in the hand of heaven except fear heaven" (Brachos 33b)
Destiny is in our hands. Through moral discipline and Torah study we enjoy the best Earthly life through pursuing wisdom and fostering harmony with others. We benefit from God's providence to ensure health and success, and we earn God's greatest gift of eternal life, or forfeit it through sin.

Addressed in this week's issue in, **"The Greatest Man"** and **"The Greatest Mitzvah."**

PERFECTION

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Greatest Mitzvah

"And if a stranger shall sojourn among you and perform the Passover to God, according to the ordinance of the Passover he shall do. There shall be one law for you, for the convert and born Jew." (Num. 9:14).

that anyone who converts to Judaism must immediately bring the Passover offering (Ibid.)

One might think that if somebody converts in August, he must bring a Passover sacrifice at that moment. But Passover is not until next spring! How do we understand the Paschal Lamb in the summer? (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Rashi comments:

One might think that this verse implies

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Rabbi Israel Chait responded. He first proved that Passover is not integrally a “calendar” event, as those who were not able to bring the Passover sacrifice, Torah says they would bring it a month later (Ibid. 9:11). Rabbi Chait stated that the Paschal Lamb is a “mitzvah par excellence.” He cited the verse “withdraw and take” (Exod. 12:21) and Rashi’s comments (Exod. 12:6):

“Withdraw” your hands from idols and “take” unto yourselves a lamb of a divine command (Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 12:2:1).

Here we find Rabbi Chait’s meaning of the Paschal Lamb being a “mitzvah par excellence.” The general purpose of mitzvah is to redirect man away from fallacy towards truth. For example, the prohibition to steal redirects man from wrong ego feelings of deserving, towards recognizing others as equals. Lulav, tzedaka, tithes, Shmitta, Jubilee and freeing slaves redirect man from wrong feelings of ownership, towards recognizing God as the sole owner of everything. But some mitzvahs are greater than others: Tefillin redirects man away from the fantasy of many powers, towards recognizing the single God, who displayed His exclusive and unopposed control over the heavens and Earth throughout the 10 Plagues. After the last plague—firstborn deaths—tefillin was commanded (Exod. 13:9) which contains written accounts of Passover’s events and commands, acceptance of God alone, and the rejection of idolatry as God’s plagues exposed Egypt’s gods as lies.

Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal cited support for Paschal Lamb’s great importance:

If one acknowledges idolatry, it is as if he denies the entire Torah; and if one denies idolatry, it is as if he acknowledges the entire Torah (Sifrei Deut 54:4)

The Paschal Lamb (and circumcision) were the conditions for Israel’s redemption from Egypt’s idolatrous culture. Those Jews were required to kill the Egyptian lamb god to demonstrate agreement with the most fundamental principle: God alone created and runs the universe; the

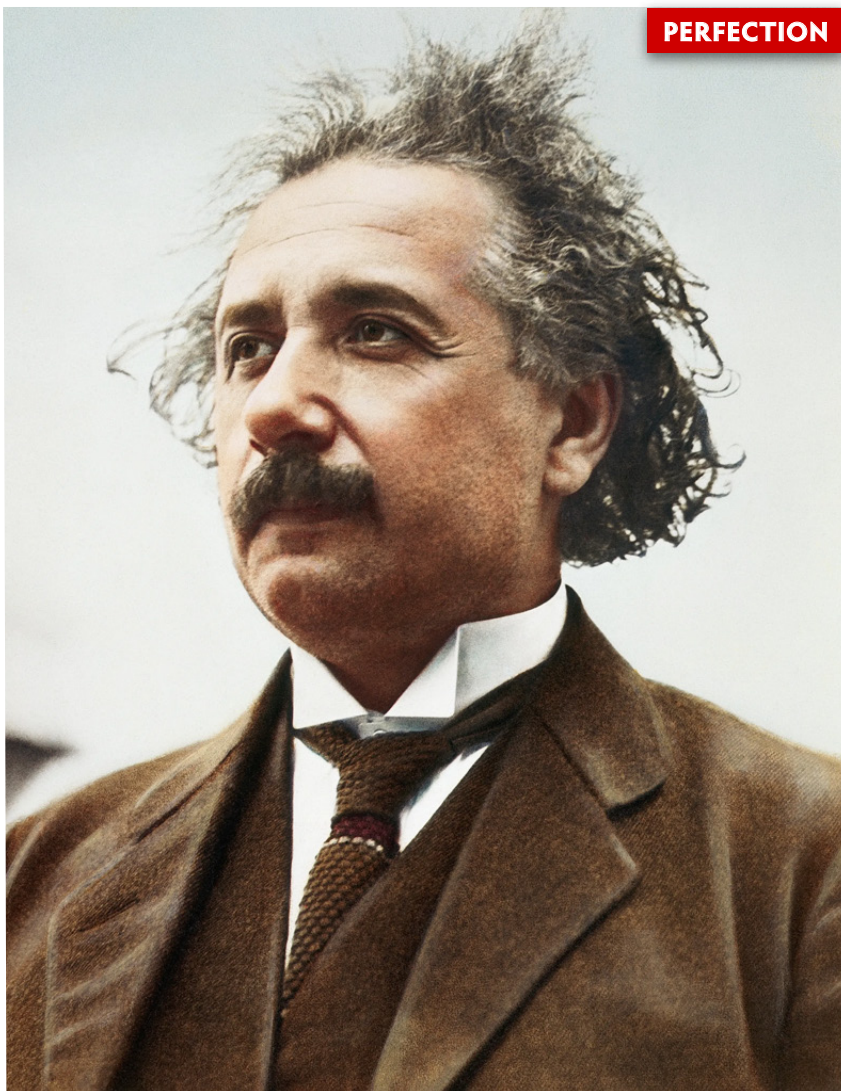
lamb god is fallacy. Some commands focus on one point, whereas the fulfilling the Paschal Lamb command is akin to fulfilling the entire Torah; it is a “mitzvah par excellence.”

Rabbi Chait explained that “On account of this God took me out of Egypt” (Exod. 13:89) refers to the Paschal Lamb, as Rashi states. Meaning, the Paschal Lamb alone earned the Jews redemption. It is a “mitzvah par excellence.”

Passover and circumcision were required for the Jews to be redeemed from Egypt. They are the only positive commands for which failure to fulfill results in excision of one’s soul (karase). What severity do these two commands share? Rabbi Chait explained that circumcision targets the control over the instinctual drives, while the Paschal Lamb targets the recognition of fundamental truths. These two commands address man’s two parts: his instincts and his intellect. Only the person controlling both parts of his nature is worthy of redemption.

One converting from idolatrous religion to Judaism—to knowledge—parallels the Egyptian Jews who converted and accepted God by rejecting Egypt’s lamb god as mere food. We might think that like the Egyptian Jews, the convert too must immediately bring the Paschal Lamb. But Torah says, “There shall be one law for you, for the convert and born Jew.” Therefore the convert cannot bring the sacrifice, except on the same date as the nation; Torah adherents require unified national practice. But the convert must immediately be circumcised because this is not a national matter like the Paschal Lamb, but an individual’s flaw that undermines a primary goal of Judaism, and like Abraham, must be remedied immediately upon following God. ■





The sages taught in the language of the Mishnah. Blessed be He who chose them and their teaching. 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.

Earth exists solely for man to study and enjoy God's wisdom. The only purpose in Earth's creation is that it reflects God's wisdom to an intelligent perceiver: man. Inanimate elements, plants, and non-intelligent beasts do not exist for themselves. God brought the animals to Adam to name them, so animals are subservient to man. Sacrifice, and God's provision of animal skins as clothing to Adam and Eve teach this lesson to the absolute degree. The person who learns Torah with no ulterior motive, but solely for the interest in witnessing God's wisdom, becomes the purpose of Earth's creation: "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.

As Rabbi Israel Chait taught, a friend is one with whom you share every secret. And when one learns Torah purely for witnessing God's wisdom, he hides nothing between himself and God, the definition of "friendship." His entire life from beginning to end, from his innermost thoughts to actions is something that he is aware of, and that God is aware of. He uses this bare knowledge of himself to come closer to God. He will admit to God his most embarrassing sins, as hiding from God is ridiculous, and attempts to avoid repentance. His love of God results in the love of God's will, which means loving other people like himself. Gladdening God means he's acting completely in line with God's will, and gladdening mankind is a result of a person who does not oppose other peoples' egos. His focus is God and His will and all others see this. Thereby, they are not threatened by him as he does not threaten their egos. This allows them to be glad with him.

And the Torah clothes him in humility and reverence

Being clothed means his outward expression reflects no ego, and his inner life is reverence towards God. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

THE GREATEST MAN

(PIRKEI AVOS 6:1)

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
& HOWARD SALAMON**

And equips him to be righteous, pious, upright and trustworthy

He is only “equipped” to be righteous, because righteousness is not attained in a single act. God told Abraham, “Walk before Me and be complete.” Walking refers to a duration, not a discreet act.

As he has no focus on himself, he does not express greed or arrogance, but he is righteous, he even leans more towards the extreme by being pious. This refers to his inner morality, but he also expresses external morality by being upright and trustworthy with others. His immediate actions are upright, and his word about future promises is fully trusted.

Torah keeps him far from sin, and brings him near to merit

His absorption in the life of wisdom of Torah taps all his energy away from the instinctual, meaning sins. This results in gaining great merit as every ounce of his energy is directed towards wisdom.

And people benefit from his counsel, sound knowledge, understanding and strength, as it is said, “Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, strength is mine” (Proverbs 8:14).

One who loves wisdom explores every detail until he exhausts all possibilities of every topic. As such, he can offer the greatest advice and counsel. Through his broad and complete knowledge and understanding he knows all possibilities: which is the most choice path to take, and what leads to the greatest success and avoiding pitfalls. But if one lacks this great love of wisdom, he does not exhaust all areas, and he cannot provide the best advice to others. The reason he is called strong is for two reasons: his excitement fuels his studies with the greatest energy, and his strategic mind yields success after success. That is the definition of strong, when you overpower any opposition. Here the opposition is error.

And it bestows upon him royalty, dominion, and acuteness in judgment

As this person has such wisdom, he is recognized as being the prince of humanity, and he is exalted over others, because people wish his direction. Being exalted means that others accept his leadership.



To him are revealed the secrets of the Torah

God's providence relates to such a person who loves Torah by rewarding him with greater understanding of Torah's mysteries. As he becomes the most choice human being, God provides him with the greatest good, that being the mysteries of Torah.

And he is made as an ever-flowing spring and like a river the grows strong

This lover of wisdom has an insatiable thirst to see greater wisdom, and he does, discovering and sharing unyielding reservoirs of wisdom. This is because the design of wisdom is such that every new discovery uncovers new questions and new insights, exponentially. He is like a spring with an endless source of water. He is also equated to a river that grows stronger, which is a metaphor for his energies that are invigorated by his new discoveries.

And he becomes modest, long-suffering and forgiving of insult

A person who learns for learning sake, does not view himself as significant, and therefore, he is modest internally. He is long-suffering to those who insult him come, and he is forgiving. All these traits are of a person uninvolved in ego whatsoever because his focus is on God and His brilliance.

And it magnifies him and exalts him over everything

The wise man becomes great and elevated overall others as mankind recognizes wisdom to be the greatest value. ■



A Great Mind on why we're Not Great

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim
& Howard Salamon

MAIMONIDES 8 Chapters (chap. 4)

Philosophers tell us that it is most difficult and rare to find a man who, by his nature, is endowed with every perfection, moral as well as mental. This thought is expressed often in the prophetic books, as, "Behold in His servants He places no trust, and His angels he accuses with folly" (Job 4:18), "How can man be justified with God? Or how can be pure one that is born of woman?" (Job 25:4), and, "For no man is so righteous upon earth that he should do always good, and never sins" (Koheles 7:20).

Maimonides famously writes in the style of the Written law, where his precise wording adds more ideas to the raw content. Part of that precision is that when he quotes many verses, as he does here, it is not a single lesson with three supports, but three lessons are intended. The different lessons are derived from the differences in the verses.

How can man be justified with God? Or how can be pure one that is born of woman?"

How does "born of a woman" teach more than just "born" or "man"? A woman expresses emotions and instincts to a greater degree than a man. And as man is born from a woman, he shares her psychological design, and thus, shares her instincts. Here, Maimonides offers an argument of "quality": man's imperfection (instinctual nature) is based on his quality of possessing instincts.

"For no man is so righteous upon earth that he should do always good, and never sin."

To what degree can a man perfect himself? We are taught here that even the most righteous man on Earth cannot avoid sin. This teaches that man's great "quantity" of righteousness cannot avoid the instincts' opposing influence.

But these two verses are relative to man. There is a third verse, which now addresses God, a verse that shows why in absolute terms, man is imperfect:

"Behold in His servants he places no trust, and His angels he accuses with folly"

The operative word here is "His," now bringing God into the equation. God is the only being without flaw, as He faults His servants and even angels. The only existing intelligent beings are God, angels and man, and only regarding these is imperfection applicable. But animals and inanimate life have no free will and therefore follow natural law perfectly.

Thus, Maimonides' lesson is that Torah exhaustively presents all reasons why man is imperfect:

A. Relative to Man:

- 1) Man possesses the instinctual quality (born of a woman),
- 2) Man's instincts cripple even a quantitatively great person (the most righteous can't avoid sin),

B. Relative to all Existence:

- 3) God alone is perfect. ■



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TRAGEDY

in the Wilderness

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's Parsha, Shelach, depicts the great tragedy of the Spies, which had a lasting effect on the Jews throughout history. The time had come to embark on the final step of the Exodus journey, the conquest and settlement of the land which Hashem had designated for His chosen nation.

Moshe conveyed the command to "Go up and inherit" the special place where they would establish a national homeland and proceed to become a "light unto the nations."

The Mitzvah was received by the people, who responded by requesting that Moshe send forth a team of scouts to report on the military aspects of the land they would have to wage a war over.

The great commentator known as Ramban (Nachmanides) believes that their solicitation of a spying mission was actually appropriate and praiseworthy. Nor did it imply any lack of faith in Hashem. That is because man is never to "rely on a miracle." He must always take whatever action is possible in the framework of the natural order. At the same time, he is obliged to recognize that "everything is in the Hands of Hashem" and he must therefore solicit Divine assistance, through prayer and good deeds, for the success of his endeavors. True faith requires acceptance of man's responsibility to operate in the framework of reality, while at the same time acknowledging the role of

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Providence in the determination of what happens on earth.

Thus, according to Ramban it was eminently fitting for Moshe to send forth a spying mission to get as much information regarding the anticipated military invasion of the land, as possible. Notice also, that in spite of the debacle of the Spies which caused the people to wander forty years in the Wilderness, Joshua commissioned another reconnaissance mission prior to the actual invasion of Eretz Yisrael, which he led.

But things didn't work out right. The Torah does not reveal at what point the spies decided to sabotage the plan to invade the land. We only know that in their remarks to the assembled nation, they conveyed a sense of profound fear of the land's inhabitants. "We cannot ascend to the people, for it is too strong for us!" (BaMidbar 13:28)

The nation was thrown into a panic by the words of the spies and called for choosing a new leader who would return them to Egypt.

In light of what the Jews had experienced in Mitzrayim and at the Yam Suf it is very difficult to understand what they were afraid of. Hashem had smitten the firstborn of Egypt and had totally decimated Pharaoh's Expeditionary force at the Reed Sea. So what was there to fear about the "scary" giants of Canaan? Hashem had created them and could "easily" destroy them. How is it possible that those who had witnessed the great miracles first hand suddenly caved in with fear of the mighty warriors who occupied the territory of Eretz Yisrael?

Perhaps the answer lies in the nature of the command to "Go up and conquer." Until now, Hashem had done everything for them. At the Yam Suf the Jews were instructed to "stand down" passively and to merely watch what Hashem would do to the Egyptians on their behalf, "Hashem will wage war for you and you should be silent" (Shemot 14:14).

And when attacked by Amalek, the entire nation was not mobilized for war. Rather, Yehoshua chose certain select individuals of high moral caliber who were ready and able to go and fight. Even so, Moshe stood atop a mountain with hands raised in prayer to Hashem. This gesture inspired the fighters and gave them the edge necessary for victory.

But the command to conquer the land was of an entirely different order. This was a national responsibility. The people now had to step up and launch an aggressive war against fearsome opponents. To their credit they did not seek to dodge their responsibility but rather solicited Moshe to send out spies. So what went wrong?

The genuine Jewish fighter must develop a sense of confidence based on his own abilities and his Bitachon (trust) in the word of Hashem. On the basis of this attitude, he must courageously enter the battle and fight with all of his energy. Of course, he never knows the outcome. Rather, he recognizes that he is

living in accordance with Hashem's Will, in spite of the danger to himself, and this motivates him to fulfill his divinely assigned responsibility.

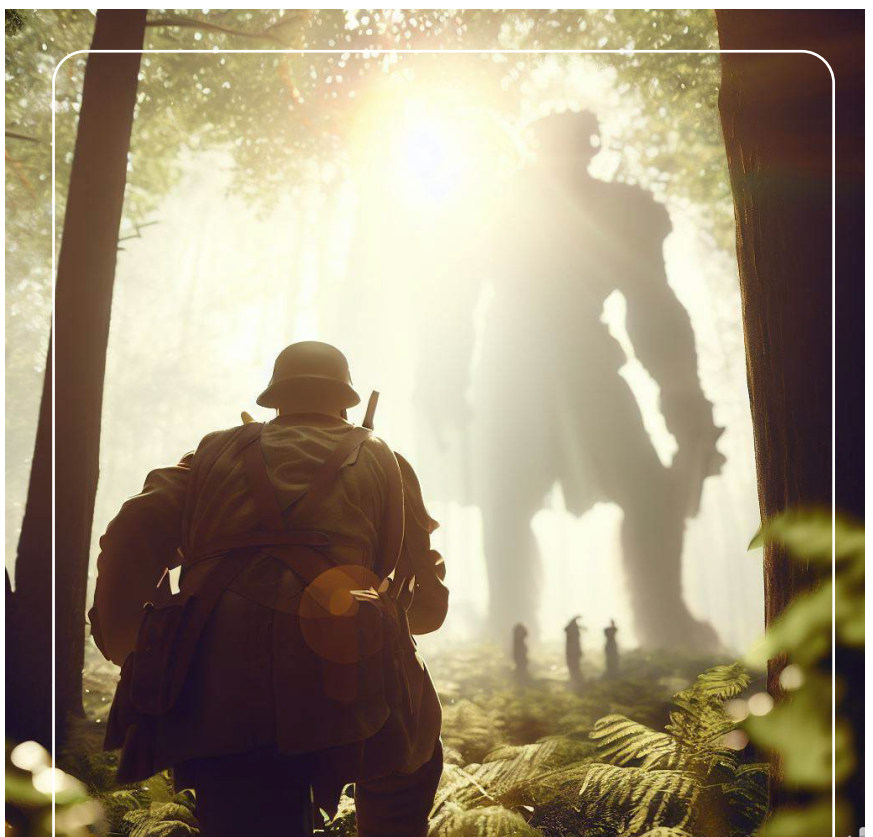
Apparently, the Jews had not reached the level of Emunah in which they would risk their lives because of a Divine promise of protection. They preferred a situation of absolute security and safety, but were unwilling to go so far as to place themselves in the line of fire.

Thus, they eagerly awaited the report of the spies. If they asserted that the inhabitants were pushovers who could easily be defeated and dislodged, they would rally and fight. But if, as it turned out, the outlook was dismal and the defenders were more powerful than they were, their morale was destroyed, and they could only see gloom on the horizon.

A true servant of Hashem must cultivate a degree of courage to fulfill his responsibilities. In many instances, he will come in conflict with the powers that be, who will seek to harm him. This can be clearly seen in the lives of the Avot who did not run and hide when the going got tough. The Patriarchs were great fighters who took up hostilities when that became necessary. In no case did they know what the outcome would be in advance. Rather they operated on the basis of their unique faith as the verse says, "The Tzadik lives by his Emunah" (Chabakuk 2:4).

The Jews in the Wilderness had not reached this level of Emunah. They sought to be in a situation where they could not lose. Don't we all? But reality doesn't work that way. The requirements of a true faith based existence are more complex and demanding. May we strive to obtain the Emunah and Bitachon of our illustrious spiritual heroes throughout our glorious history.

Shabbat Shalom. ■



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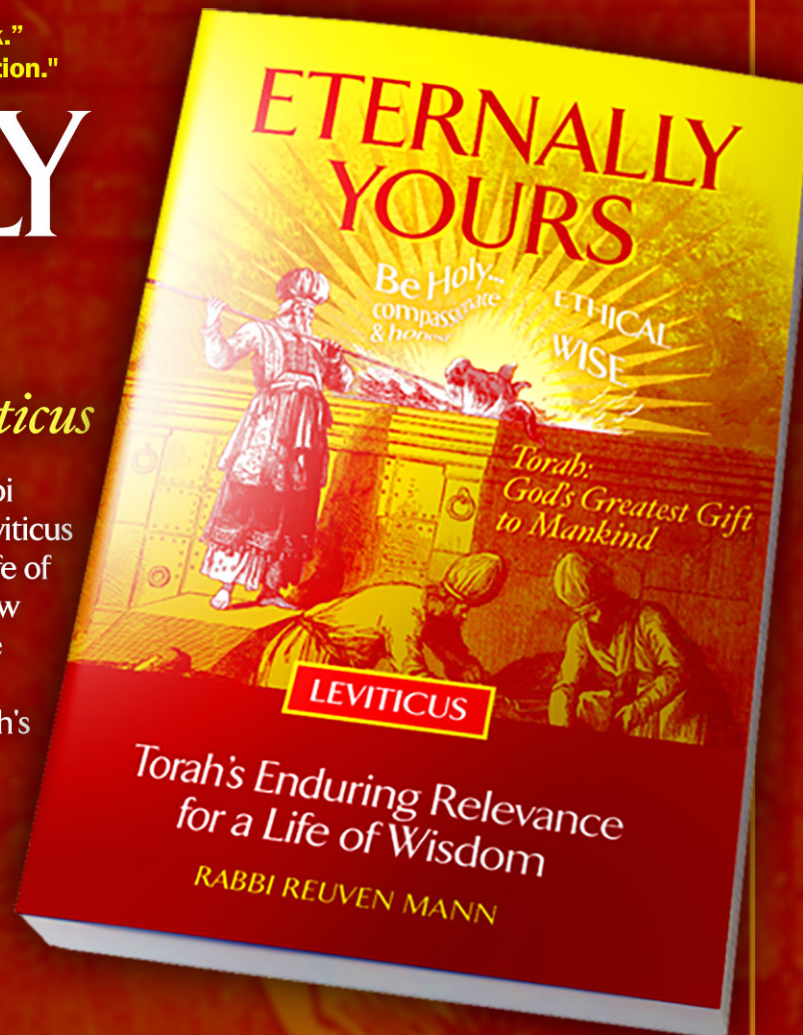
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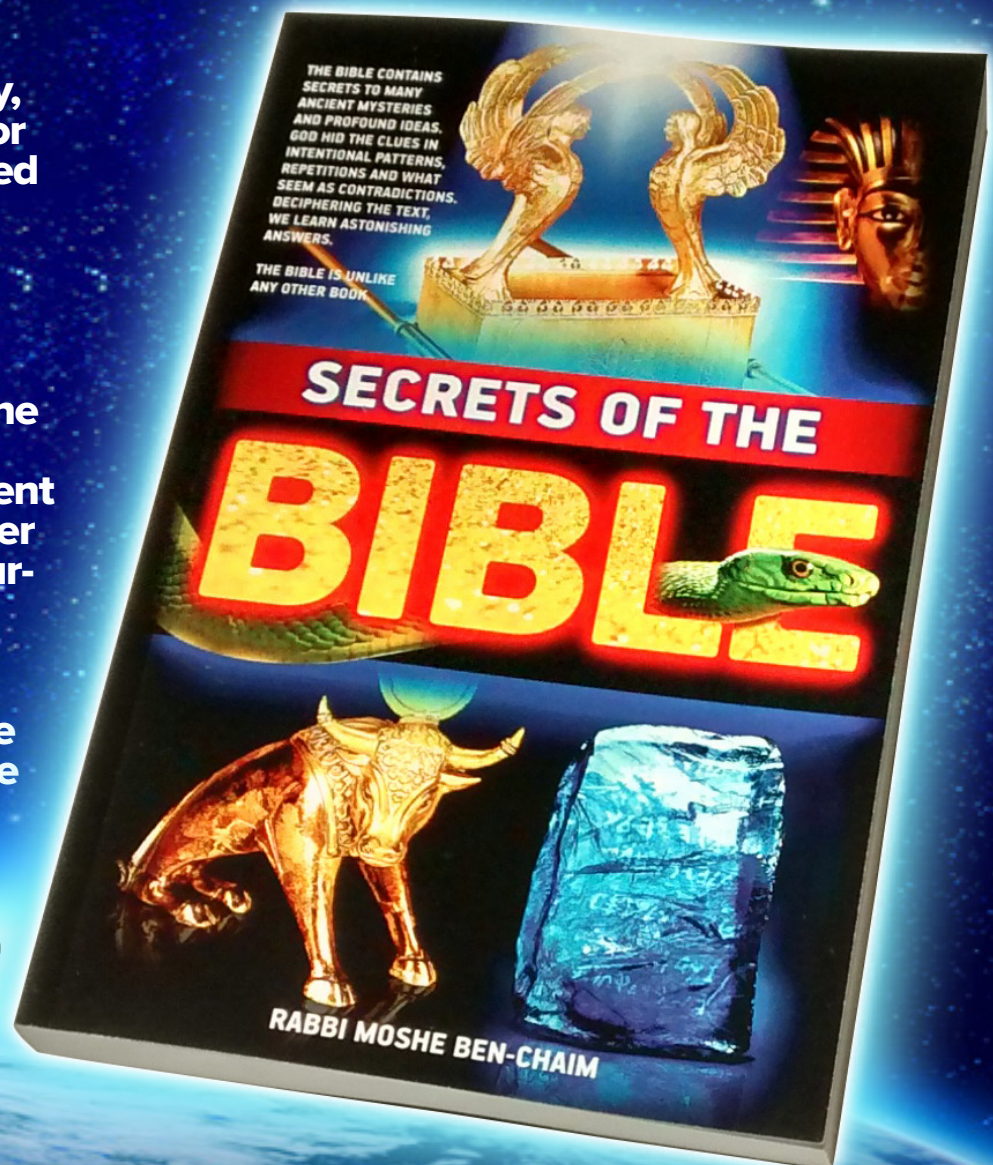
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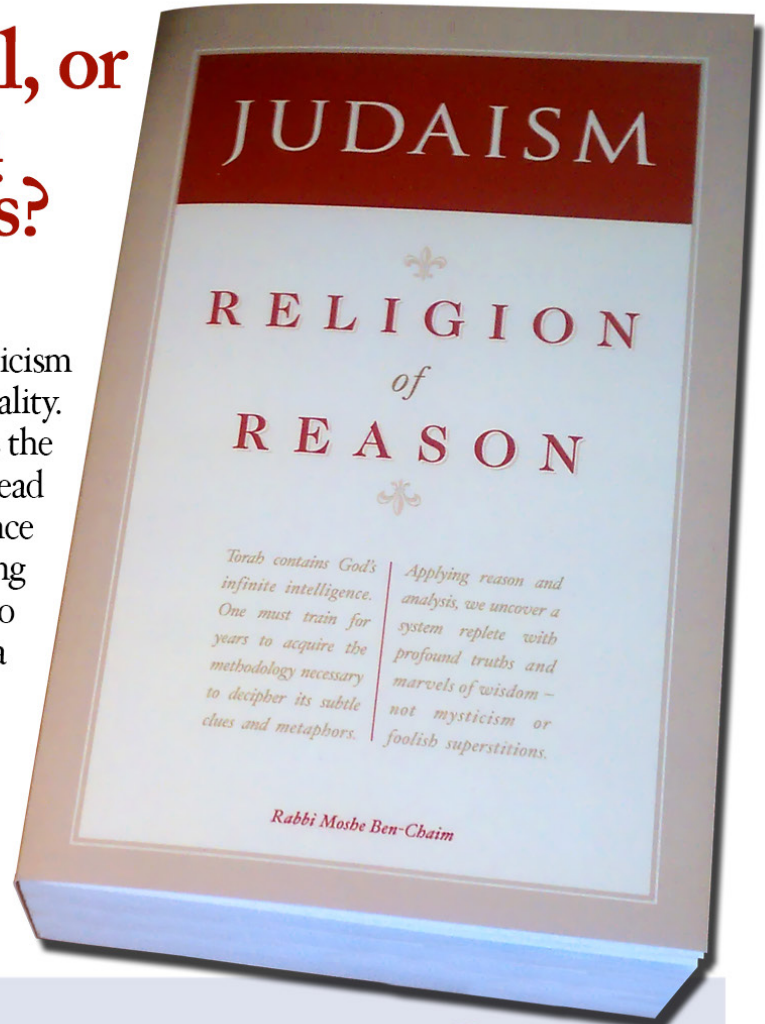
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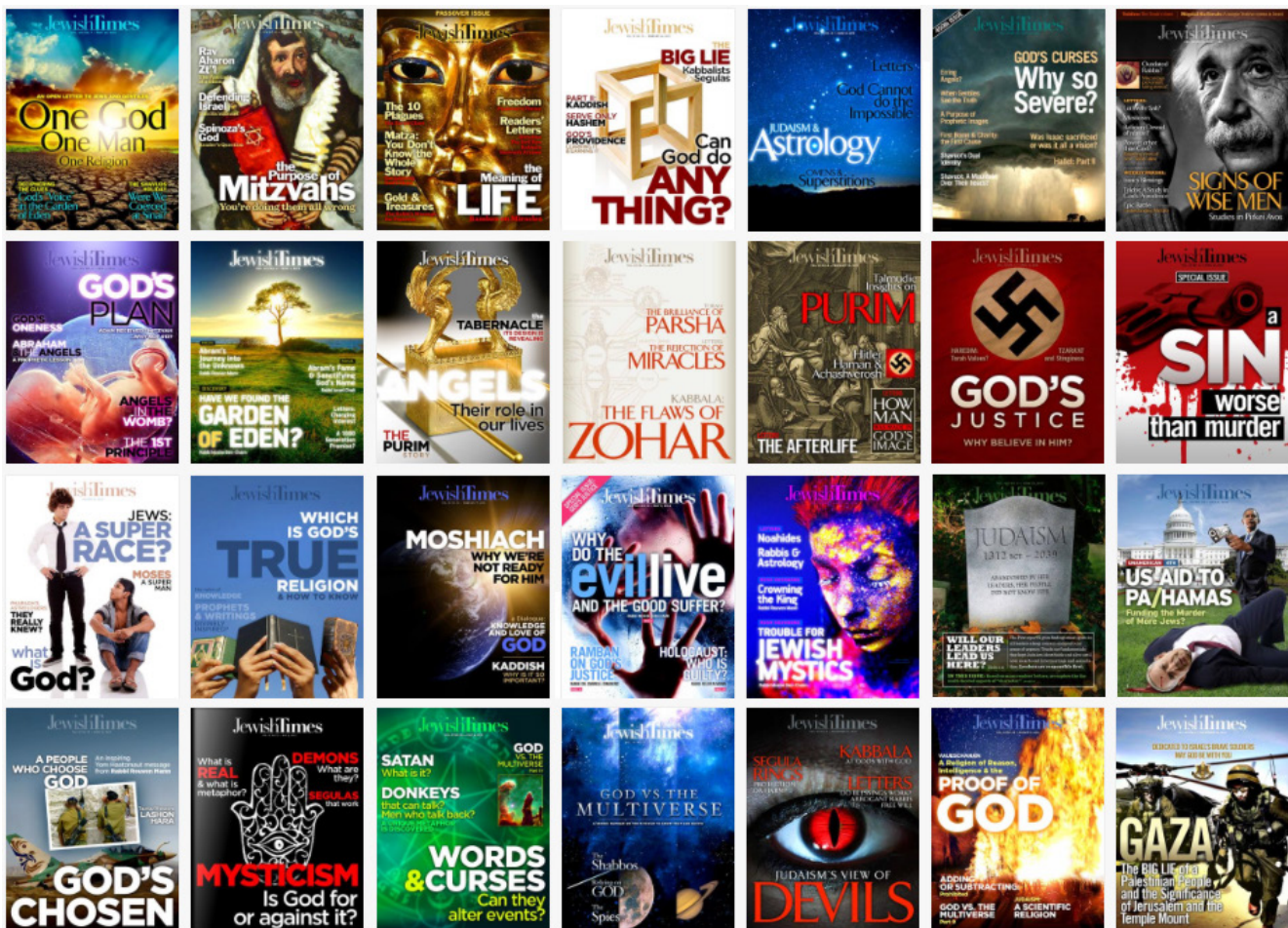
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