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TORAH & MILITARY

"It is very difficult for me to understand the hostile attitude assumed by certain "Charedi" groups toward military service. The greatest Torah personalities such as Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbenu, Yehoshua and King David, to mention just a few, were great fighters who protected their people and sanctified Hashem's Name by visiting violence against those who hate Him." (Rabbi Reuven Mann)

PARSHA

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Can Man Overcome Fear?

A major subject of Parshat Shoftim is that of Milchama (war). It is clear that Judaism is not a pacifist religion and while it doesn't glorify combat it refuses to shy away from it either. Our religion is very much rooted in reality and frowns upon those who seek to evade or escape its responsibilities.

We are commanded to establish a national entity and to locate it in the land of Israel, which Hashem designated for the Jewish People. We must constantly remind ourselves and teach our children that our absolute right (and obligation) to reside in this land comes from the Creator of the universe, who gifted us with His Torah. This, of

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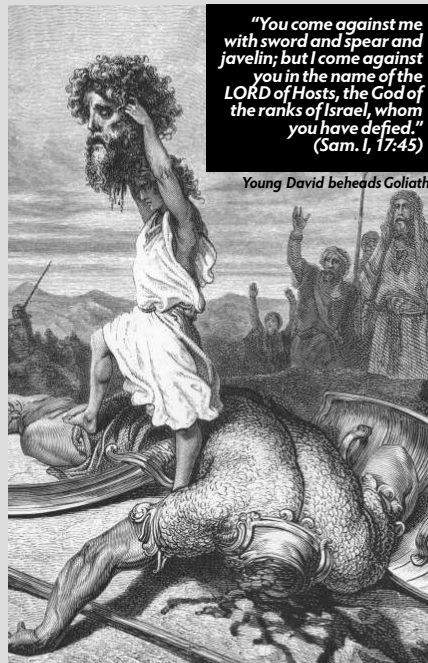
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course, presupposes that we recognize and acknowledge the divine origin of Torah and commit ourselves to its observance. A Jewish people that rejects Torah cannot long endure.

We are obligated not only to establish a nation in Eretz Yisrael, but to preserve it as well. Fighting for the defense of the land and the people constitutes a great Mitzvah. In my opinion, the Chayalim and Chayalot (soldiers) are great heroes who deserve every Jew's gratitude, for where would we be without them? Of course, it is true the Hashem is the ultimate protector of the land, but He commands us to do our part which, if we have merit, He promises to support. But if we get lazy or foolish and fail to maintain a state of military readiness, we might be in for very harsh times. It is because of the great significance of defending Israel that the Torah addresses so much space to laws of warfare. It delineates the categories of people who are excused from fighting an optional war, although they are still required to contribute to the military effort in secondary ways. However, in a war of self-defense there are no exemptions as everyone must go out and fight. [In light of this, it is very difficult for me to understand the hostile attitude assumed by certain "Charedi" groups toward military service. The greatest Torah personalities such as Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbenu, Yehoshua and King David, to mention just a few, were great fighters who protected their people and sanctified Hashem's Name by visiting violence against those who hate Him.] The primary obstacle that stands in the way of being a warrior is that of fear. Most people have an innate fear of death, which is firmly rooted in the formidable instinct of self-preservation. Yet in order to fight properly, one must put all thoughts of personal well-being aside and put his life on the line.

Indeed, the Torah recognizes that there are some people for whom this will be impossible. Thus, included among those who are released from service is the coward. The officers proclaim; "Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, and let him not melt the heart of his fellows like his heart" (Devarim 20:8). The Torah recognizes the great danger that an outbreak of panic in the ranks can cause, and commands those who are prone to it to stay home.



"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied." (Sam. I, 17:45)

Young David beholds Goliath

However, the matter is not that simple, since virtually all the soldiers who don't take the "coward option" nevertheless partake of the inevitable fear of dying. So how is one supposed to deal with this? What is the Torah's prescription for the vast majority of soldiers who are not paralyzed by their trepidations but still are affected by them? Before the army marches out to battle, the specially designated Kohen addresses the formations. "When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot—a people more numerous than you—you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d is with you, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Devarim 20:1). He further states, "...let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid and do not panic, and do not be broken before them. For Hashem, your G-d is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Devarim 20:3-4).

One may ask, why is it necessary for the Kohen to review for the soldiers such seemingly ordinary ideas. Every religious Jew prays three times a day for Hashem's protection from his enemies. The belief in Divine Providence and protection for His nation is a fundamental aspect of Judaism, which virtually all Jews are familiar with. So why must this doctrine be reiterated at this point?

Perhaps the answer is that it is one thing to assert these ideals from the safety of one's living room. It is possible for someone to be a firm believer in the doctrines of Judaism in

a purely abstract sense. But this does not necessarily mean that he has internalized these principles on the visceral, emotional level.

Do the beliefs that one affirms actually govern his feelings and actions? The soldier encounters a moment of truth when he faces all the lethal weaponry that the enemy will be hurling at him. The advent of war creates a situation in which the soldier will have to transform himself from an abstract believer to a functional one. The Chayal/Chayelt (soldier) who masters their emotions and fights with great bravery raises himself to the highest level. In the words of the Rambam;

"Once a soldier enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the 'Hope of Israel and their Savior', in times of need. He should realize that he is fighting for the sake of the Oneness of G-d's Name. Therefore, he should place his soul in His hand and not show fright or fear" (Hilchot Melachim UMilchamot 7:15).

"Anyone who fights with his entire heart, without fear, with the intention of sanctifying G-d's Name alone, can be assured that he will find no harm, nor will bad overtake him. He will be granted a proper family in Israel and obtain merit for himself and his children forever. He will also merit eternal life in the World To Come as it says (I Samuel 25:28-29) 'Hashem will certainly make my lord a faithful house, for my lord fights the wars of G-d and evil will not be found with you....and my lord's soul will be bound in a bond of life with G-d'" (Hilchot Melachim UMilchamot 7:15).

Thus, military service in the Jewish army is not just a civic responsibility but a most significant religious one as well. Not only that, but it provides an opportunity to reach the highest level of spiritual perfection. One's ability to overcome fear is directly proportional to the quality of his faith in Hashem. Thus, in our history, the people on the highest level of Emunah (faith) were also the bravest warriors. The ultimate cure for fearfulness is one's ability to place his trust in Hashem and live according to His Will. As the Rabbis say, "Cancel your will before His Will. (Pirkei Avot 2:4)" May we merit to reach this exalted standard. Shabbat Shalom. ■

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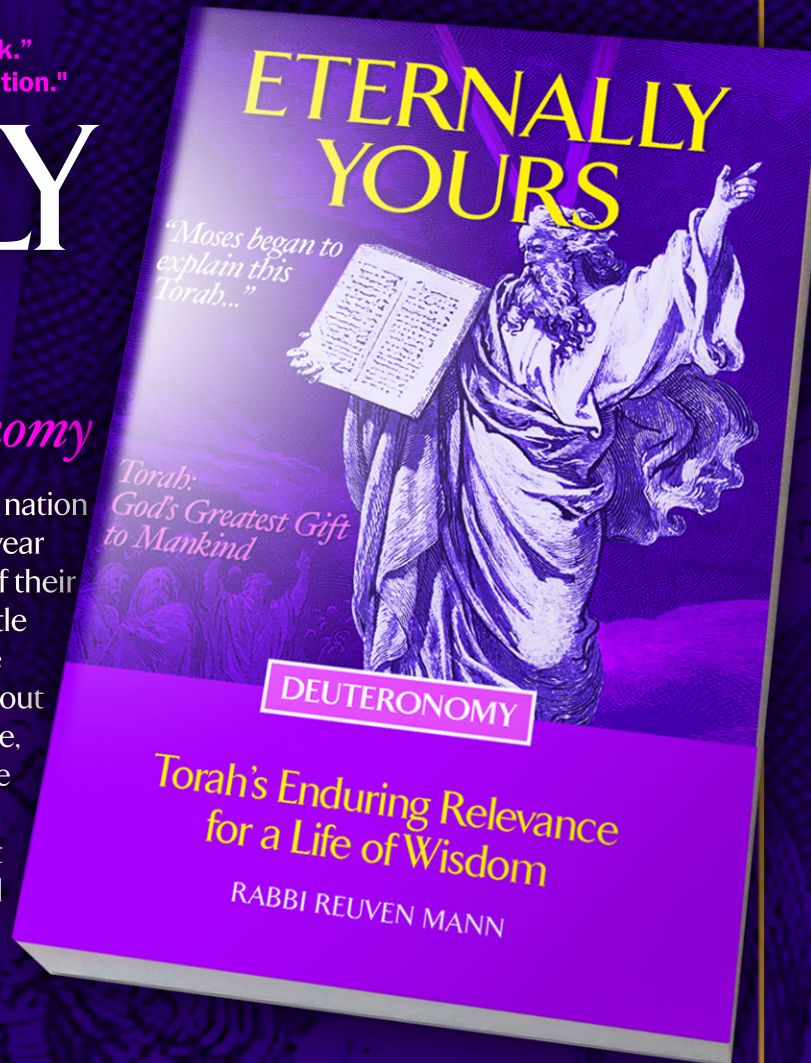
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God gave Israel to Abraham and his descendants from Jacob, for they were the only monotheists in a world of idolaters. God did so, as He desires all mankind to follow Abraham's monotheism, and a country of unique people is recognized by the world. God protects the Jews defending Israel, as Israel is the beacon of Judaism; Torah Judaism is Israel's purpose. The country exists not for Jews, but for knowledge of God.



Small Sins

**RABBI
ELIEZER
BARANY**

If, however, a man who hates another lies in wait and sets upon [the victim] and strikes a fatal blow and then flees to one of these towns... (Sefer Devarim 19:11)

Hatred

In this week's parsha there is discussion concerning the accidental death of a person, along with intentional murder as well. In the above pasuk, the Torah tells us that if someone intentionally kills another, they are held culpable. However, the pasuk also mentions that the murderer hated his victim. This apparently unnecessary addition is what prompts Rashi to quote the words of our Rabbis:

BUT IF A MAN HATE HIS FELLOW [AND LIE IN WAIT FOR HIM] — It is through his hatred that he comes to such a point as to "lie in wait for him". From here they (the Rabbis) derived their statement: "If a man transgresses a light command he will in the end transgress a weighty command; — because he transgressed the command" (Leviticus 19:17).

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart", he will in the end come to such a point as to shed blood. It is for this reason that it is stated here, apparently redundantly, "but if a man hates his fellow [and lie in wait for him]", for it ought to have written only: "But if a man rises up and lie in wait for his fellow and smite him mortally" (Sifrei Devarim 186:2). (Commentary of Rashi on Sefer Devarim 19:11) (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Rashi explains that this "extra" word is teaching us a valuable lesson. A connection is being made between a person not hating someone in their heart, and murder. As he puts it, a small sin of hating another leads to the big sin of murder. Therefore, the Torah warns us not to commit this small sin lest we come to be involved in this big sin.

But it's a Big Deal!

What is very strange about the words of our Rabbis is that they are contradicted elsewhere. Is hating another really a small sin?

Rebbi Eliezer said: He who hates his fellow belongs to the shedders of blood, as it is stated, "If any man hate his neighbor, and lie in wait for him, and rise up against him, and smite him, etc." (Tractate Derekh Eretz Rabbah 11:12)

Rebbi Eliezer explains that a person who hates his fellow belongs in the class of murderers. This seems to be a very strong statement made about this prohibition. While one may argue that this statement may be hyperbolic, Ibn Ezra reminds us that the Rabbis did not think this was the case. In speaking about the prohibition of not hating in your heart, the Ibn Ezra reminds us of a very important point:

Israel will dwell in the land when they observe them, for the Second Temple was destroyed because of hatred of one's neighbor for no reason. (Ibn Ezra Commentary on Sefer Vayikra 19:17)

While Rebbi Eliezer's comment does not necessarily have to line up with the rest of Chazal, our Rabbis have confirmed that hatred for a fellow person is such a severe sin that for 2,000 years we have been unable to rebuild the Temple because of it! The Gemara explains:

Why was the Second Temple destroyed? Due to the fact that there was wanton hatred. This comes to teach you that the sin of wanton hatred is equivalent to the three severe transgressions: Idol worship, forbidden sexual relations and bloodshed. (Mesechet Yoma 9b)

So the Rabbis explain that the destruction of the Second Temple was caused by baseless hatred. For thousands of years we have been unable to return to the Temple; that seems to reflect a severe sin! In fact, the Rabbis explain that hatred is equivalent to idolatry, forbidden relations, and bloodshed. So what could it mean that hatred is a small sin?

Big Implications

If one were to say that the punishment determines what a small sin is or how much it affects another could make it a small sin, then how could the Rabbis explain hatred to be equal to the big three sins and the cause for the destruction of the Temple? The Ramban even felt there should be a halachic ramification based on these kind of statements. In commenting on the Rambam's lack of inclusion of lashon hara as its own separate command, the Ramban takes the words of the Rabbis so seriously that he explains:

And how is it possible that, concerning slander which is as weighty as bloodshed, there should not be a real negative commandment against it in the Torah, or at least a negative commandment derived from a positive commandment! (Commentary of Ramban on Sefer Devarim 24:9)

So despite whether lashon hara is considered a separate command or not, the Ramban, along with the Ibn Ezra, takes very seriously the warning of the Rabbis. So how can these two seemingly disparate views about hatred be taken into account? Is it a small sin or is it one of the worst?

Effort

And nonetheless hatred of the heart is worse than all revealed hatred, and [so] the Torah especially warns about it. The root of the commandment is well-known — as hatred of the heart causes great evils among people. (Sefer Hachinuch; Positive Command 238)

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that hatred in the heart is worse than all hatred. In fact, he says that it is what causes the greatest evils amongst people. This seems to be quite a severe sin, or trait at the very least. I believe his words help explain what is already included in the words of Rashi. The first point that must be stated is that despite it appearing to be one, Rashi is not making a value judgement. He is not stating that hatred is an insignificant sin. As we pointed out, the words of the Rabbis, which are taken very seriously, reject such an approach. What I believe Rashi is saying is that hatred is a small sin in terms of effort.

When someone cuts us off in traffic, we tend to very easily acquire a level of vehemence for that individual. In our eyes, this driver in front of us is now the worst person in the world. When a person says a nasty comment about us, we instinctively respond with vile. Now this may not cause a lot of damage or be worthy of punishment, but it is not insignificant.

The Sefer Hachinuch explains that this is what causes the other sins and therefore is the most basic of all. The Rabbis are warning us that one should not think that just because we have not damaged others doesn't mean we should take this lightly. Rashi is giving us a strategic plan, not a value statement. He is saying that one should treat this sin of hatred vigilantly and not give in to how little effort is required to succumb to that hatred.

The violent acts that follow this hatred are much bigger in terms of effort. The amount of planning, thought, physical exertion, and anxiety produced, can be very overpowering. If a person is carrying a load and it starts to slip, helping at that point will be significantly easier than picking the load up once it falls. So too here, Rashi is sharing with us what is the easier one to respond to. We should be careful with what may come to us easily and not tend to think that it isn't a big deal. Hopefully we can stay strong and direct our energy away from hatred and turn it to loving our neighbors. ■

“Behold to God, your Lord, belong the heavens, and the heavens of heavens, the land, and all that is in it. But it was in your fathers that God desired to love them, and chose their lineage after them from all the peoples, as it is true today” (Deut. 10:14,15).

God contrasts the universe and man to reveal His “desire.” His lesson is that within creation, God elevates man's existence. For what purpose can be served by brute animals and inanimate matter which cannot recognize God? However, man alone has this profound ability, so God's immense wisdom is not wasted. If man ponders the universe and recognizes God, God's creations find their purpose.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



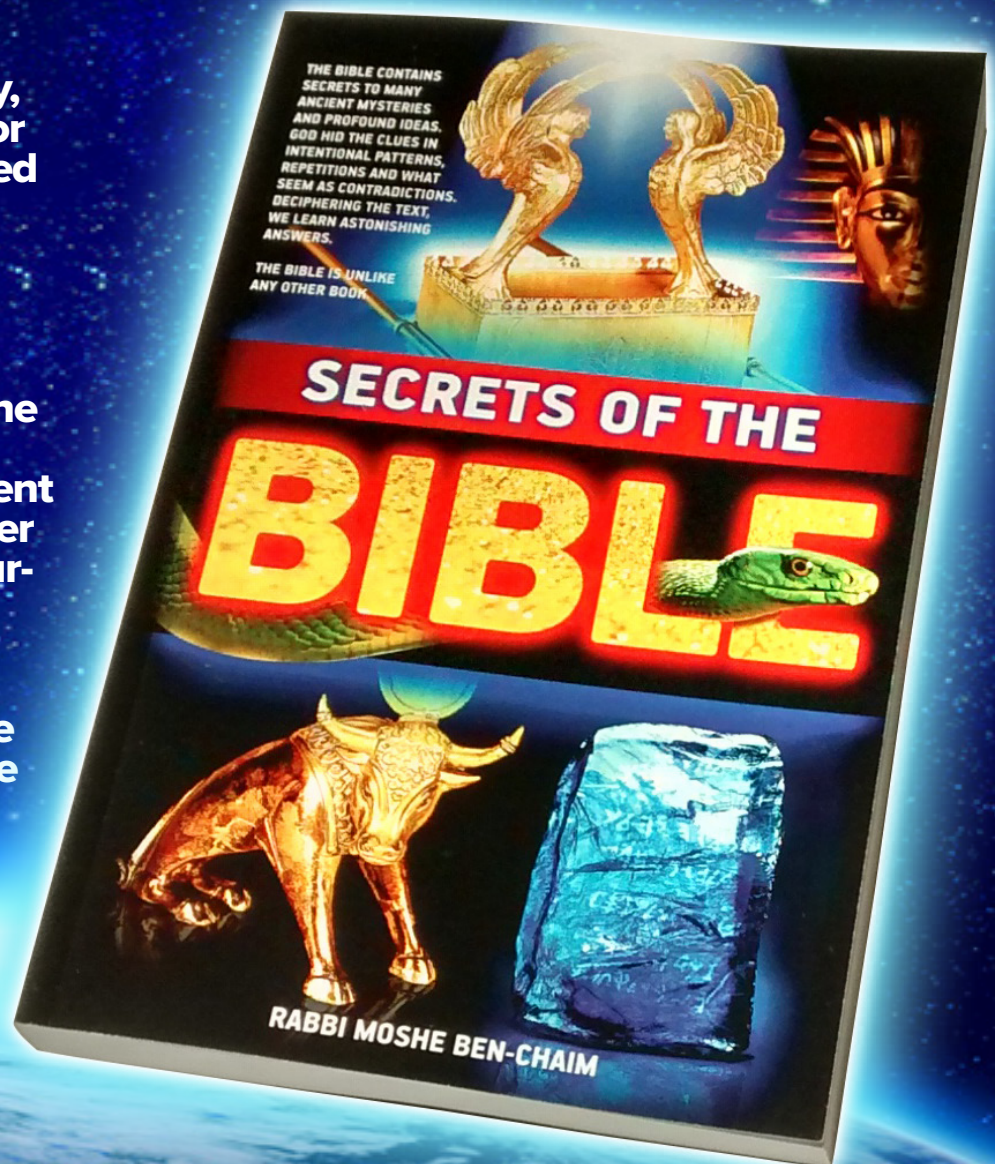
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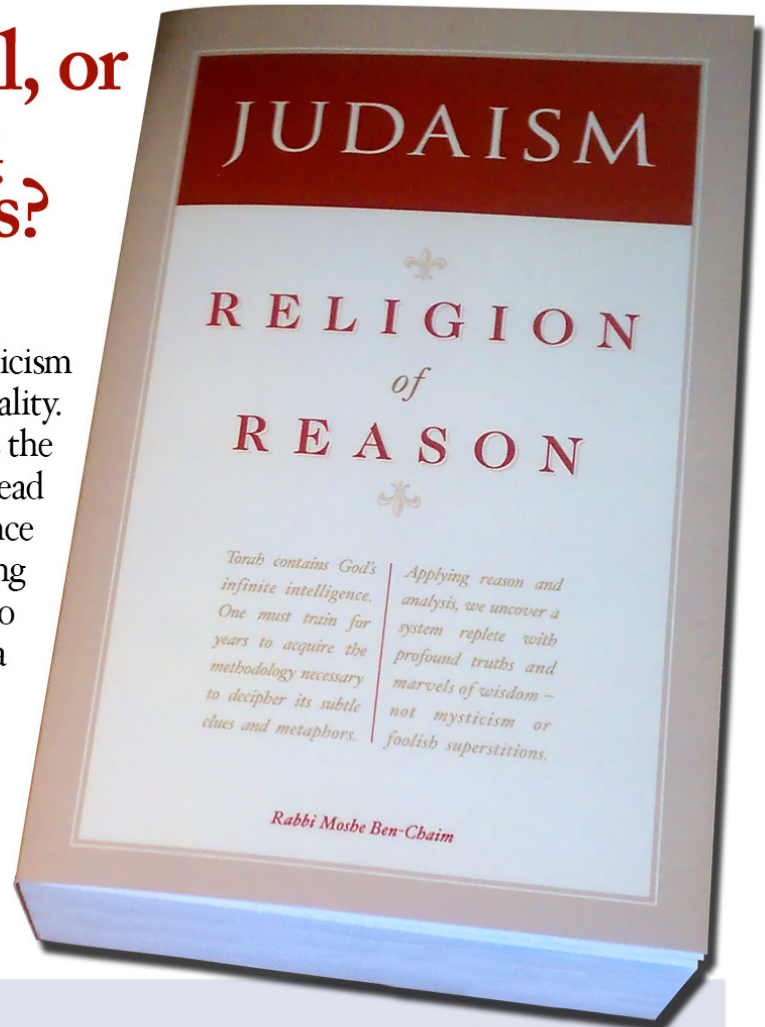
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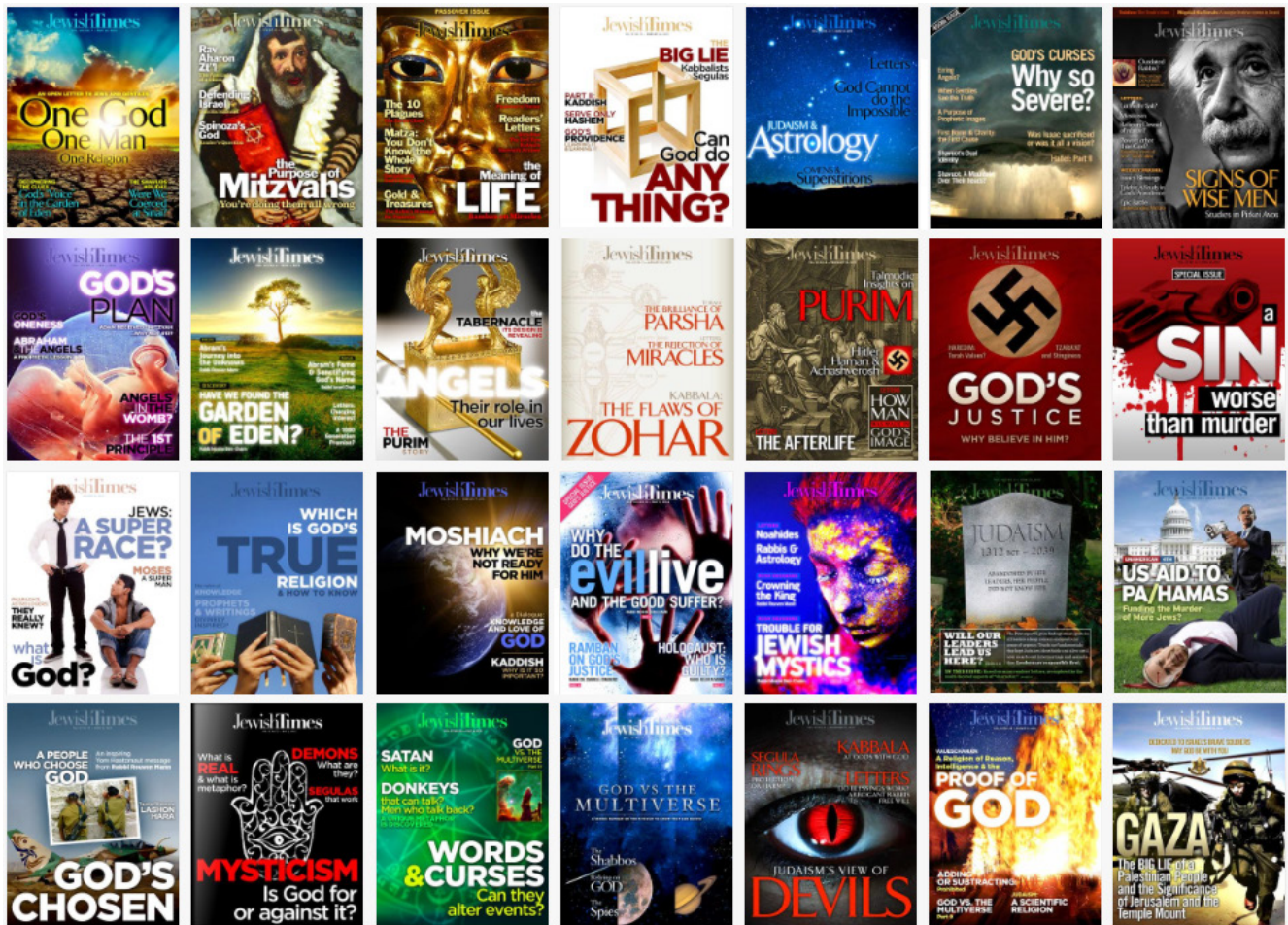
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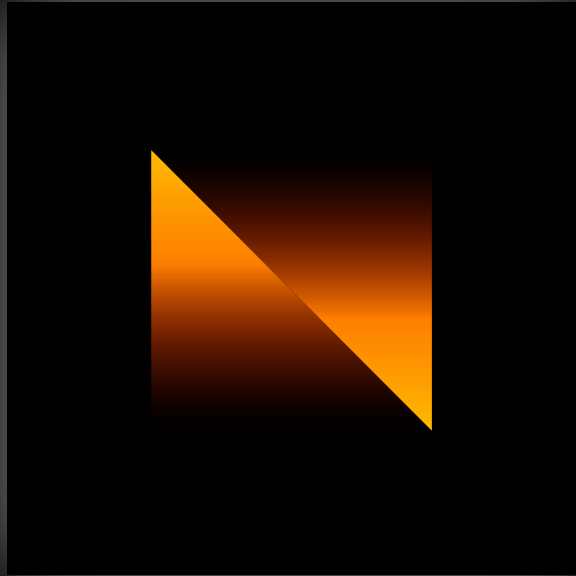


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