

# JewishTimes

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## AWE, FEAR & HUMILITY

Avos 6:5 teaches 48 traits essential to acquire the "crown of Torah," the above 3 form part of those 48. Without awe of Torah, we'll be satisfied with mediocre insights, but God's wisdom demands we settle for nothing less than awesomeness. Fear is required next: we must fear saying more than what God's words demand. And humility follows, demanding we do not feel we have successfully exhausted our current topic. Torah is God's wisdom; we've only scratched the surface.

## PSYCHOLOGY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## How Kosher Perfects Us

**W**hy is there is no dietary restriction on vegetation, but only on animal life? We observe that predominantly all indications of kosher species are found in the animal's method of movement: split hooves, fins, multiple legs,

belly crawlers, ground creepers, talons and paws.

That which moves generates human identification, explaining why our pets are not inanimate rocks or trees, but are animals. Man cannot

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identify with an inanimate object. Now, if man would identify—through eating—with animal species that are disgusting, this would break down the barriers of human disgust and allow man to act in vile fashion in many areas of life. Eating certain creatures engenders identification with them; they enter our very bodies. And eating vile creatures, man would identify with them and become vile. Once man has no restriction in one emotional area, it will overflow into other areas. If a person is vile in his diet, he will become vile and his actions; he will abandon Torah.

To retain the barrier of disgust, God prohibited man from eating disgusting creatures, with which he might identify. God prohibited eating animals that creep on the “ground” which remind man of the grave (Rabbi Israel Chait). God does not want man living a morbid life, but a joyous existence. When the time comes, man can concern himself with death, but until then, death should be far from his thoughts to maintain his equilibrium and happiness. King Solomon said, “God planted the world (eternity) in man’s heart” (Koheles 3:11) as Rashi says, “For if man knew that the day of his death was near, he would neither build a house nor plant a vineyard.” Rabbi Reuven Mann taught that the high priest embodies this philosophy in his prohibition of engagement in death and burial.

Now, as grains, fruits and vegetables are inanimate and do not have behaviors, there is no dietary restriction on vegetation whatsoever. There’s no “personality” or anything vile in inanimate vegetation with which man might identify through eating.

The additional prohibition against eating pawed animals (Lev. 11:27)

intends to generate mercy in us. We are to maintain merciful personalities by not consuming animals that resemble ourselves: they use their paws like we use our hands. This creates identification of a good kind, that we must preserve by not eating such creatures. One who eats his pet has a cruel personality. Thus far we see that kosher is a barrier against disgust, and also that which supports human mercy.

But what is the idea behind chewing cud? This too is a sign.

Eating is highly pleasurable; it carries the danger of overindulgence. Part of Adam’s curse for disobeying God by eating the forbidden fruit, was to eat grass like the animals. However, Adam had difficulty being sentenced to eat the same food as animals; it degraded him. He complained. God was then merciful and allowed man dignity through eating a dignified food: bread. After the flood, God permitted animals to be eaten. Perhaps the sign of chewing cud—grass—is a reminder of Adam’s sin in eating that fruit which was prohibited; grass was the curse. Therefore, when we eat today, kosher laws provide an additional lesson that like Adam, we too can succumb to excessive and prohibited appetites, over choosing God’s will. Creeping creatures is one food prohibition, that of the vile “quality” of the animal. But we can also sin in “quantity”: Adam ate more than what was allowed. As eating is one of our two base drives, our perfection demands restraint on our appetite. Cud reminds man of this second danger of “excess” gratification. Following God’s law that we eat animals that chew cud, we are reminded of Adam’s sin of seeking excess. ■





THE MOST  
CRUCIAL

R. MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

CREATION

**T**he Three Weeks, commencing with the 17th of Tammuz, focused us on the tragedies contributing to this day's sorrowful nature. Talmud Taanis 28b records Moses' smashing of the tablets as one of these tragedies. As he descended from Sinai with those two sapphire tablets bearing God's laws, he encountered the Jews sinning with the Gold Calf. He responded by breaking the tablets. A wise Rabbi explained he did so, lest the Jews continue their sin, projecting their idolatrous expression onto these divinely inspired objects, just as they were doing regarding the Calf. Moses broke the tablets to eliminate this possibility, to which, God agreed. We might think the service of the Gold Calf as more worthy of making the list of tragedies. But as a friend suggested, sin is not a "loss," but a waste. A true "loss" is the removal of something of value or a failure to realize a gain. That loss was the tablets. The removal of the positive is loss, not the engagement in the negative, the latter being "harm." Similarly, we mourn the loss of the Temple, and not the idolatry or enmity between the Jews that precipitated those two losses, although the latter are evils for which we must repent. But to truly comprehend the loss of the tablets, we must understand: 1) what they were and 2) why God gave them to us. The indispensable need for the tablets is derived from God's granting to Moses a second set of tablets after he smashed the first set..

What I will eventually suggest herein astonished me, but I feel Maimonides' words point to this discovery...

*The Guide for the Perplexed (Book I, chap. lxvi)*

*"And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord," e.g., "These see the works of the Lord" (Psalms cvii. 24): and the description of the several things in nature, as plants, animals, winds, rain, etc., is followed by the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold*

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are thy works!" (Psalms civ.24). Still more striking is the relation between God and His creatures, as expressed in the phrase, "The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted" (Ibid. 16): the cedars being the product of nature, and not of art, are described as having been planted by the Lord. Similarly we explain.

"And the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16): the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words "written with the finger of God" (Ibid. xxxi. 18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of "the work of thy fingers" (Psalms viii. 4) this being said of the heavens: of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Ibid. xxxiii. 6). Hence you learn that in the Bible, the creation of a thing is figuratively expressed by terms denoting "word" and "speech." The same thing, which according to one passage has been made by the "word," is represented in another passage as made by the "finger of God." The phrase "written by the finger of God" is therefore identical with "written by the word of God," and if the latter phrase had been used, it would have been equal to "written by the will and desire of God."

Onkelos adopted in this place a strange explanation, and rendered the words literally, "written by the finger of the Lord." He thought that "the finger" was a certain thing ascribed to God; so that "the finger of the Lord" is to be interpreted in the same way as "the mountain of God" (Exod. iii. 1), "the rod of God" (Ibid. iv. 20), that is, as being an instrument created by Him, which by His will engraved the writing on the tables. I cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation. It would have been more reasonable to say, "written by the word of the Lord," in imitation of the verse "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made." Or was the creation of the writing on the tables more difficult than the creation of the

stars in the spheres? As the latter were made by the direct will of God, not by means of an instrument, the writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument. You know what the Mishnah says, "Ten things were created on Friday in the twilight of the evening," and "the writing" is one of the ten things. This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation, as we have shown in our Commentary on the Mishnah (Avos, v.6)."

### Understanding Maimonides

We must pay attention to Maimonides' words. He opens with "And the tables were the work of God." His intent is to first discuss the tablets—not their writing. He first explains how the tablets are made via "nature," meaning by God. They are not "works" or "art." By definition, if natural objects are used in a new construction or form, like woodworking or paintings, we call this "carpentry" and "art" respectively. But if something is formed undisturbed by external influence, as leaves are formed with veins and trees with bark, this we call "nature" and not art. Therefore, when addressing the tablets, Maimonides writes, "they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called 'the work of the Lord.'" This means that the tablets formed naturally independent from the rest of the sapphire that formed in that area of Sinai. That is quite amazing. We will get back to what this means. But they were not works of carpentry or art. Remain mindful of this distinction.

Maimonides then addresses the tablets' writing: "And the writing was the writing of God." He argues that although the Torah says the writing was "written by the finger of the Lord," this writing was no less natural than the tablets themselves, or God's natural creation of the heavens. He disputes Onkelos' suggestion that a tool was used to form these letters, and insists that those letters were created without a tool, just as God created the heavens, by His will alone. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)





But focus your attention on Maimonides' insistence that the writing was "natural" and not an act of carpentry or art. What does he mean by this? You must know that Maimonides bases himself on the verse that references both, the tablets and the writings: "And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16). Maimonides teaches that this verse is not redundant, but with it, God intentionally directs us to realize that not only were the tablets a natural phenomenon, but so too was the writing. This is essential to our discussion.

So, we must delve into understanding the distinction between writing that is natural, and writing that is art. How are they different?

We must ask a number of questions. God communicated 10 Commandments, shortly afterwards they would be committed to the Sefer Torah Moses would write. Therefore, for what purpose did God create the tablets with the same record of this communication? Is this not a redundancy? Let's briefly recount the history. God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai, he remains in commune with God for 40 days and nights and then he receives the two tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf and that He will destroy the nation. Moses prays and God refrains from destroying the Jews. Before Moses descends the mountain we read these words, "And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two tablets of Testimony were in his hands; tablets written from both sides[1], from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they explained on the tablets." (Exod. 32:15,16) Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the tablets? Why was this description of the tablets not included

earlier (31:18) where we read, "And God gave to Moses—when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai—two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." This division of the tablets' details into two Torah portions requires explanation, as does the term "tablets of testimony"... testimony to what exactly? And we wonder why "two" tablets are needed. Could not a larger tablet contain all the words; could not smaller letters accomplish the same message on a single tablet?

Maimonides also cited the Mishna in Avos, "Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening," and "the writing" is one of the ten things." Maimonides wishes to draw our attention to the necessity for God to have created the tablets and their writing, at the end of the six days of Creation, just before God ceased His creation. What is his message?

In Exodus 34:1, God instructs Moses to hew a second set of tablets, and He says He will write on them the matters that "were" on the first tablets. Why doesn't God say He will write on them the matters that "He wrote" on the first tablets? He uses a less descriptive term.

I also wonder if there was more to Moses' breaking of the tablets than already explained.

## Revelation

Revelation on Sinai was intended to remove all doubts that a Supreme Intelligence created all, sustains all and communicates with man. However, God desired this message not end at Sinai's closure. My friend suggested that the tablets were intended to be an everlasting "testament" (tablets of Testimony). This explains why upon God's completion of His communication with Moses atop Sinai, we read, "And God gave to Moses—when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai—two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." That is, once God concluded His

Revelation to the people and to Moses, He desired an everlasting testimony of this Revelation, to serve as enduring and conclusive evidence that He alone created and sustains the universe. Thus, "testimony" appears in this verse, and not later in the second description of the tablets. In order that this testimony is everlasting, the words are embedded in a permanent object: stone. So "stone" is also in this verse. But can't anyone write words in stone? Of what proof are these tablets? The testimony God intended is to the truth that He alone is the source of the universe. We read that these tablets were "written with the finger of God." Maimonides said this was a "natural" phenomenon. Here now is the amazing idea and how these tablets "testified"...

## Astonishing Tablets

These miraculous tablets contained something not found elsewhere in nature: naturally formed letters, sentences and commandments! Imagine a tree cut down, where its inner rings viewed closely were actually lines of text forming intelligent sentences, or lightning bolts that formed words as they streaked across the sky. That is how astonishing these tablets were. The Torah says the text could be seen from both sides of the tablets (Exod. 32:15). Some wish to explain this to mean that the letters were hollowed through, but that would not appear miraculous as a human being can carve letters into a stone. My opinion is that the letters were formed internally through the sapphire's grain. And as sapphire is translucent, one can see the letters "from both sides." The only explanation for words existing in the inside a stone is if the words formed naturally. That means the creator of the stone intentionally embedded His messages within the stone. As God formed these tablets over time at the end of Creation, so too, He formed the "writing" simultaneously, and naturally. The commands were not subsequently carved into the tablets,

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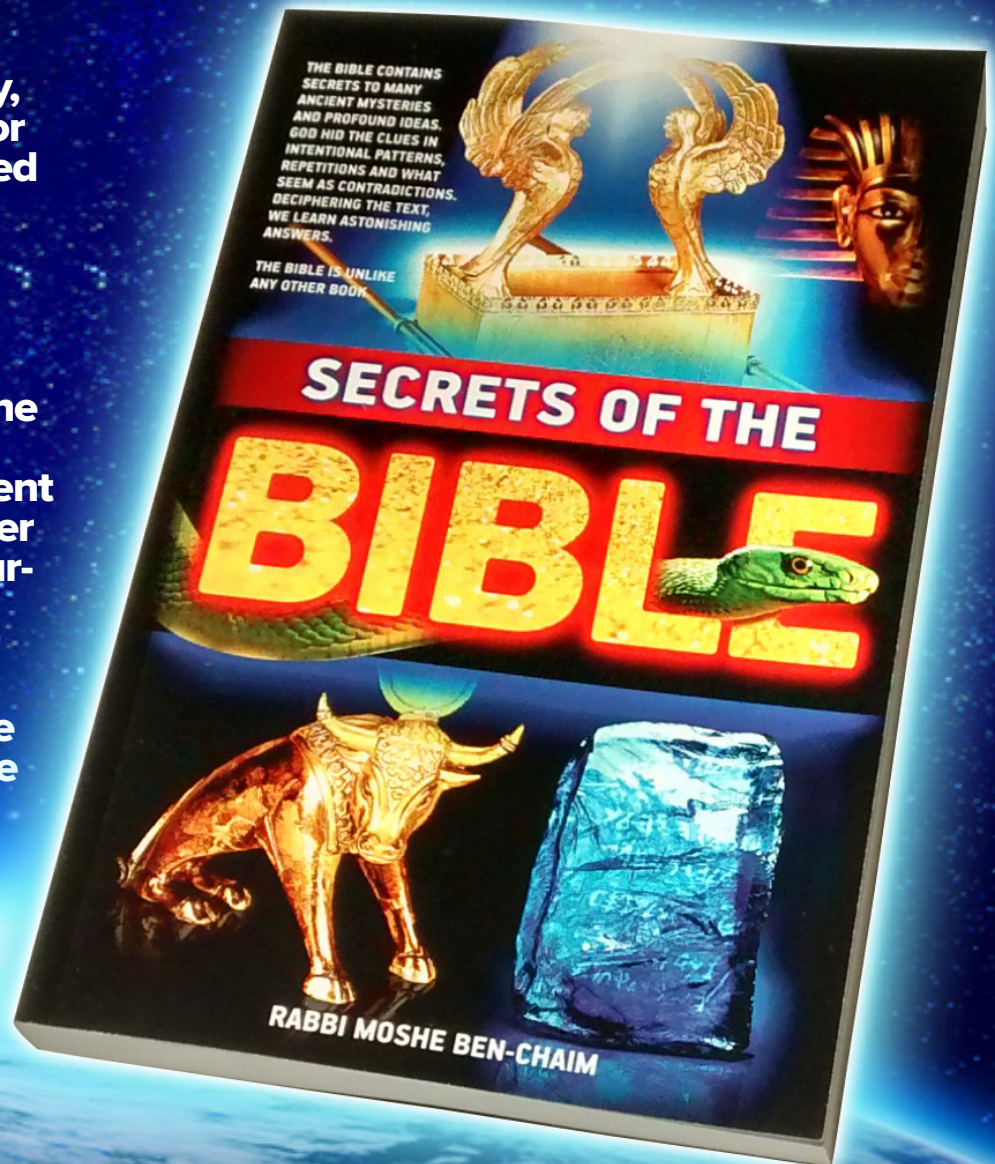
# CODES FOUND IN THE BIBLE

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but they literally grew inside the stones grain as the stones naturally formed over time: “And the writing was the writing of God,” as Maimonides said above, this means a natural phenomenon. This explains why God tells Moses that He will write on the second tablets the matters that “were” on the first set, and not matters that He “wrote” the first set. For God did not do an act of “writing” on the first tablets. Yes, the words appeared “written” as the verse states[2], but not through an act of one thing acting on another resulting in writing. Again, the verse does not say, “I wrote” on the first tablets, but rather, “were” on the first tablets. The letters in the first tablets formed within the tablets. This is an amazing idea, and a phenomenon not seen elsewhere in nature. Perhaps for this reason, Maimonides includes in this chapter his critique of Onkelos’ suggestion that the stone tablets were carved through an instrument.

### The Need

What consideration demanded that God create such a phenomenon? Although the exact words appearing on the tablets were duplicated in the Torah scroll, it was not the words per se that demanded the tablets’ existence, but the “manner” of existence of these words. This natural formation of words and commands is God’s clear message that He is behind the natural world, and Torah. Both form one unit. This is needed, for many people view nature as devoid of God’s creation and rule. Man becomes accustomed to matters by his very nature. The sun rises and sets, plants and animals grow, and species beget their own kind. We take all for granted, thinking all occurs due to the nature itself...and not God. But with the existence of naturally formed words and commandments in natural objects, we can no longer maintain a view of an unguided world. Nature is finally understood to be the expression of an intelligent being: God. How can one ignore a natural object that has words

naturally imprinted and not the work of art? This was the lesson of Sinai, and the sustained lesson of the tablets. Therefore, the Torah scroll’s account of God’s communicated commands sufficed for the ‘content’ of His words, but not for an everlasting “testament” which was revealed through natural stones containing intelligent words! And perhaps to remove all doubt that this occurred without God’s intent, there were two stones, not one. A freakish natural incident can possibly be dismissed if it occurs once...but not twice.

We can no longer separate nature from God. His very words are embedded in these stones in truly natural manner. Why didn’t God give the tablets to Adam the First? Perhaps Adam had no need for them. God’s original plan was that man use intellect to discover God. The beauty and precision of natural law is sufficient for a person following a life of wisdom.

However, at this era in mankind’s development, these tablets were intended to offer mankind a new leap in our wisdom of God. The ability for nature to produce such a phenomenon would offer us tremendous appreciation for the Creator of this nature. They were to be viewed and not placed in an ark.

But as these tablets were being delivered, the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf. The extraordinary lesson of the tablets would not be realized with those Jews. These first tablets required destruction. However, a lesson was required: the nation must now have a reminder of what they lost. God instructed Moses to hew a new set of stones; their tablet form would not come about naturally, but by human craft. God also “wrote” the matters on this second set; again, no longer a natural phenomenon of words that were part of their natural design. A gap now existed between the Jews, and God. The intended, intimate relationship that could have been, was now lost. To emphasize this break from God, these tablets must be stored out of

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sight; in an ark. Perhaps this explains why King Solomon hid the ark and no other vessel. He reiterated this message of “distance” between God and the nation through digging caverns to eventually hide the tablets and the ark.

### **“Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening”**

As natural law needed to tolerate these unique tablets, they had to be planned with the creation of the substance of sapphire. This could not be created later, for the very blueprint of how sapphire forms must contain natural laws that would generate stones with embedded communication. As this would be a “property” of sapphire’s substance, it must be set at the time that God endowed sapphire with its formative properties: during Creation.

### **“And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two tablets of Testimony were in his hands; tablets written from both sides, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the tablets.”**

Why is Moses’ descent interrupted with this detailed description of the tablets? Why was this description of the tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, “And God gave to Moses”... “two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” It appears to me that the first account expresses the “purpose” of the tablets: testimony. Thus, we learn that the testament is in durable stone, and that the testament is a unique phenomenon. But when Moses is about to descend to the sinful Jews, we are told of the tablet’s nature that conflicts with their idolatry: the tablets were “God’s work,” intended precisely to fend off

idolatry. This aspect is relevant in connection with the idolatrous Jews, and therefore not mentioned until its relevance surfaces.

Now we understand the loss of the tablets: our knowledge of God has been impaired. This is the ultimate tragedy. What an amazing sight they must have been. Perhaps in the future, this will be the means by which God will make His name fill the Earth. For we do not know if the tablets were the only natural elements in which God embedded natural communication. And as this was God’s will at Sinai, perhaps in the messianic era He will unveil this again to a more fitting generation. ■

Footnotes:

[1] Ibn Ezra rejects the notion that the letters Mem Sofit and Samech (shapes like “O”) had miraculous center pieces floating. The letters were not hollowed from one side completely through to the other. They were simply written on the two faces of the stones, as the stones were thick. Alternatively, I suggest the letters were internal facets in the translucent sapphire, that could be seen on “both sides,” like a crack can be seen from any side of a diamond. Furthermore, God does not perform impossibilities, so to have legible writing passing through a stone, with the exact wording seen on the opposite side, is not possible. God can do miracles, but not impossibilities. Similarly, God cannot create a circle that is a square.

[2] Exod. 32:15







# Tabernacle & Noah's Ark

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**T**his week's Parsha, Terumah, conveys the instructions that Hashem imparted to Moshe regarding the building of the Tabernacle. According to Ramban (Nachmanides) its main purpose was to be a representation of Mt. Sinai which was the location where the entire nation was present to witness the Divine Revelation. The Mishkan (Tabernacle) was the designated place where Hashem would communicate additional Mitzvot and instructions to Moshe.

It must constantly be remembered that the foundation of the Jewish religion is the "event" which took place at Sinai approximately three and a half thousand years ago. Thus, we must seek out the (often hidden) wisdom contained in the Torah, for it is the teaching of the Creator Himself. It is because of the Divine origin of

Torah that I have entitled my series of books, "Eternally Yours—G-d's Greatest Gift to Mankind."

The Torah cannot be changed nor altered, for to do so would be to assert that it is man-made and thus of limited and temporal applicability. If studied properly and with appropriate reverence, the Torah's hidden wisdom may be unearthed and its moral relevance to all times and places can be elucidated. A major function of the Messiah will be to educate mankind in the genuine ideas of the Torah and to demonstrate compellingly their validity and beauty.

In studying the Mishkan, we note that scripture reveals with great precision all the dimensions of the Sanctuary and its vessels. No detail related to the construction of this edifice is omitted. Why is so much

space dedicated to providing information whose importance is not readily apparent?

There is another place where the Torah provides specific information about a special structure. In the narrative of the Flood, Hashem commands Noach to build the Ark, on which he will be saved from the great Deluge, according to very specific dimensions. There is thus a parallel between the establishment of the Tabernacle and the ship on which the designated few were to be saved from the obliteration of the world.

It emerges that the building of the Mishkan was not just a practical endeavor, i.e., a necessary means to obtaining the resultant edifice. The very construction was itself regarded as a performance of Mitzvah. Thus, it had to be done according to the strict

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guidelines dictated by Hashem, without deviation. Additionally, the people selected for the task were not just superbly skilled sculptors but talented craftsmen who were on an exalted level of true piety and spiritual wisdom.

The Ark on which Noach was saved, and the Tabernacle, were special places of Divine Providence. Our Rabbis tell us that many miracles occurred in the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple). For example, they say that in the days of the First Temple, a special fire came down from Heaven to consume the offerings. This was not the case at the time of the second Temple, when the spiritual level of the people had declined precipitously.

A similar idea can be stated about the Ark. It was an extraordinary place where Divine Providence was manifested. Indeed, one shouldn't imagine that it was the ship built by Noach that saved him. Had some other, non-deserving person been aboard the Ark, he would not have been spared, for the Ark in and of itself had no unique power to protect from the raging Flood. Rather, Noach was saved by a special Hashgachat Hashem (incidence of Divine Providence) which manifested itself there. And Noach himself had to prove worthy of this Divine protection.

Thus, building the Ark according to the exact specifications revealed to him was a Mitzvah which gave him merit, and his behavior during the time of the Flood was extremely righteous and holy. He displayed great Chesed (loving-kindness) by feeding and tending to the needs of the animals.

In addition, Rashi points out that by instructing the men and women to

board the Ark separately, Hashem was communicating that they should refrain from sexual relations while the waters raged. (This Command to remain chaste was communicated via euphemism because no hint of vulgarity may be found in the Torah).

This teaches us that while tragedies abound in the world, one shouldn't indulge his ordinary carnal lusts. Thus, on the Ark, Noach lived according to a higher spiritual standard in terms of compassion for other beings and Perishut (refraining from the gratification of his personal instinctual necessities).

We can now understand certain aspects of the Noach story. It does not end with the conclusion of the Flood. The Torah describes the process by which the waters abated until the earth became fit for habitation once again. Noach began to send forth birds to see whether they could survive outside the Ark. Finally, they stopped returning, and Noach knew that it was now safe to disembark from the Ark and take up residence on dry land.

However, despite this, Noach remained aboard the Ark until he received word from G-d that it was time to descend and resume normal existence on the terrain. But why did that move require a special dispensation from Hashem? Why couldn't Noach use his own judgment that it was safe to depart from the Ark?

I believe it is because the sojourn on the Ark was an experience in which Noach lived under the Hashgachat Hashem and reached a higher spiritual level which would enable him to endure successfully in the new postdiluvian world. Thus, only Hashem knew when the process of his spiritual transformation

was complete and that he could now safely descend from the ship. The Ark was Noach's personal Mishkan, where he existed in the presence of G-d and elevated himself to a higher level of holiness.

We do not have the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) today, but yearn for its restoration. Are the Jewish People worthy of having this holy place in their midst? They must ascend to a higher level of human existence through the practice of Chesed to man and animal and the cultivation of appropriate Perishut.

Then, just as Hashem told Noach that the time had come to leave the Ark, so He will instruct us to rise to the most exalted level of Kedusha (holiness) and pray to Him in the holiest of our holy places. May it happen soon.

### Postscript

It should be noted that the forty-year duration in the wilderness was also a period in which the Jewish People lived directly under the shadow of Providence. The daily Manna was a manifestation of Hashem's beneficence, as were the Cloud which led them by day, and the Fire which guided them at night.

The Festival of Sukkot recalls the Clouds of Glory that accompanied the Jews on their wilderness trek and protected them from all harm. The Torah attests that during this time the Jews "lacked nothing" and their clothing did not become worn nor did their "feet swell". Our goal must be to discern the signs of the Divine Providence which continues to sustain us and to react accordingly by striving to live according to the exalted moral ideals of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom. ■



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# ETERNALLY YOURS

*Rabbi Reuven Mann – Deuteronomy*

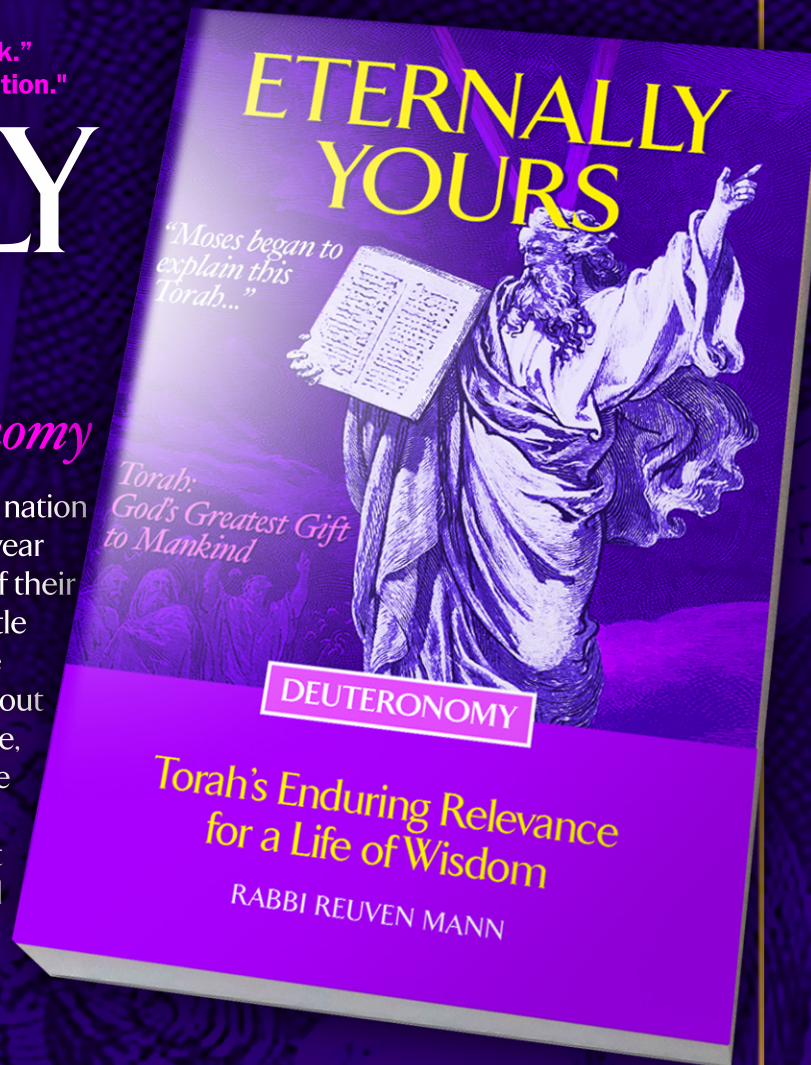
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FUNDAMENTALS

# Bible's 1st Command: To Know God

## How Do We Fulfill It?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

*"I am God your Lord who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slaves" (Exod. 20:2).*

This forms the first of the 10 Commandments. What response does this impose on man? Thank you to Rabbi Ruben Gober for raising this matter and his questions on the difference between Ramban and Maimonides. What are these great rabbis' definitions of this command?

Ramban says knowledge of God imposes an obligation to serve God:

*This Divine utterance constitutes a positive commandment. He said, "I am God, your Lord," thus teaching and commanding them that they should know and believe that the Eternal exists and that He is G-d to them. That is to say, there exists an Eternal Being through Whom everything has come into existence by His will and power, and He is G-d to them, who are obligated to worship Him.*

But Maimonides' formulation of "I am God, your Lord" and the command to know God's unity indicates no obligation to serve God...merely to accept a truth. Only in Mitzvah #5 (Sefer Hamitzvos) does Maimonides discuss the mitzvah to serve God, derived from other verses.

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On knowing God Maimonides writes:

*The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being. (Foundations of Torah 1:1)*

*This Existence is the God of the world and the Lord of the entire earth. He controls the sphere with infinite and unbounded power. (Ibid. 1:5)*

*The knowledge of this concept is a positive commandment, as [implied by Exodus 20:2]: "I am God, your Lord." Anyone who presumes that there is another god transgresses a negative commandment, as [Exodus 20:3] states: "You shall have no other gods before Me" and denies a fundamental principle because this is the great principle upon which all depends. (Ibid. 1:6)*

*This God is one. He is not two or more, but one, unified in a manner which [surpasses] any unity that is found in the world; i.e., He is not one in the manner of a general category which includes many individual entities, nor one in the way that the body is divided into different portions and dimensions. Rather, He is unified, and there exists no unity similar to His in this world.*

*If there were many gods, they would have body and form, because like entities are separated from each other only through the circumstances associated with body and form.*

*Were the Creator to have body and form, He would have limitation and definition, because it is impossible for a body not to be limited. And any entity which itself is limited and defined [possesses] only limited and defined power. Since our God, blessed be His name, possesses unlimited power, as evidenced by the continuous revolution of the sphere, we see that His power is not the power of a body. Since He is not a body, the circumstances associated with bodies that produce division and separation are not relevant to Him. Therefore, it is impossible for Him to be anything other than one. The knowledge of this concept fulfills a positive commandment, as [implied by Deuteronomy 6:4]: "[Hear, Israel,] God is our Lord, God is one." (Ibid. 1:7)*

Maimonides repeats: "to know" (1:1), "The knowledge of this concept" (1:6), and again, "The knowledge of this concept" (1:7). Unlike Ramban, Maimonides says knowledge of God does not form an obligation to serve God. In his *Sefer Hamitzvos*, mitzvah #1, Maimonides again teaches that "I am God, your Lord" commands us in a belief: "I am God is part of the 613 commands and it is a command in belief." Maimonides leaves no room for doubt: "I am God, your Lord" is a command in belief, requiring no obedience or service like Ramban says. What is the distinction between Maimonides' and Ramban's theories, leading them to debate this command's requirements?

In *Sefer Hamitzvos*, mitzvah #1, Maimonides felt it necessary to teach that 611 commands were received through Moses, while the first two commands—"I am God, your Lord" and "Have no other Gods"—were received through God. What is the necessity of this lesson inserted when describing the command "I am God, your Lord"? In his *Guide*, Maimonides teaches that the Jews did not hear any distinct commands from God but "God commanding the first two" means that regarding them, prophets have no advantage over ordinary Jews:

The Israelites "heard the first and the second commandments from God," i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses. For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect (*Guide*, book ii, chap. xxxiii).

Maimonides means that these first two commands are of mind, and not of action: not of service or worship. Belief alone is the command.

According to Ramban, "I am God, your Lord" creates an obligation of worship: "He is G-d to them, who are obligated to worship Him." According to Ramban, God's very capacity as our Lord imposes worship. Man's realization of God cannot be without worship. True knowledge is gauged by human response. One who claims to value charity, but never gives, has no conviction in charity's value. Similarly, realization of God as Lord must follow through with our worship of Him. But this is all in the context of post-Sinai Torah, and why Maimonides disagreed. Maimonides identifies God as the cause of all existences, disconnected from Torah, a belief alone. And disconnected from Torah, means disconnected from obligation. Therefore, Maimonides did not include in this law an obligation for worship. *Talmud Sanhedrin* 56b says even Adam had the command of not accepting any other gods; that was pre-Torah. This proves Maimonides' point. This command today is part of Torah, but it refers to pre-Torah, to creation, to "reality" as Rabbi Chait and Rabbi Gober stated, that long predated Torah. Reality existed prior to Torah, and a command without obligation highlights this. That God did not give Torah for 2448 years after Adam indicates that man can follow God without Torah. This may also be one of the reasons Torah commences with the patriarchs who had no Torah. They had reality.

I thank Rabbi Gober for sharing his intriguing questions and answers with me. ■



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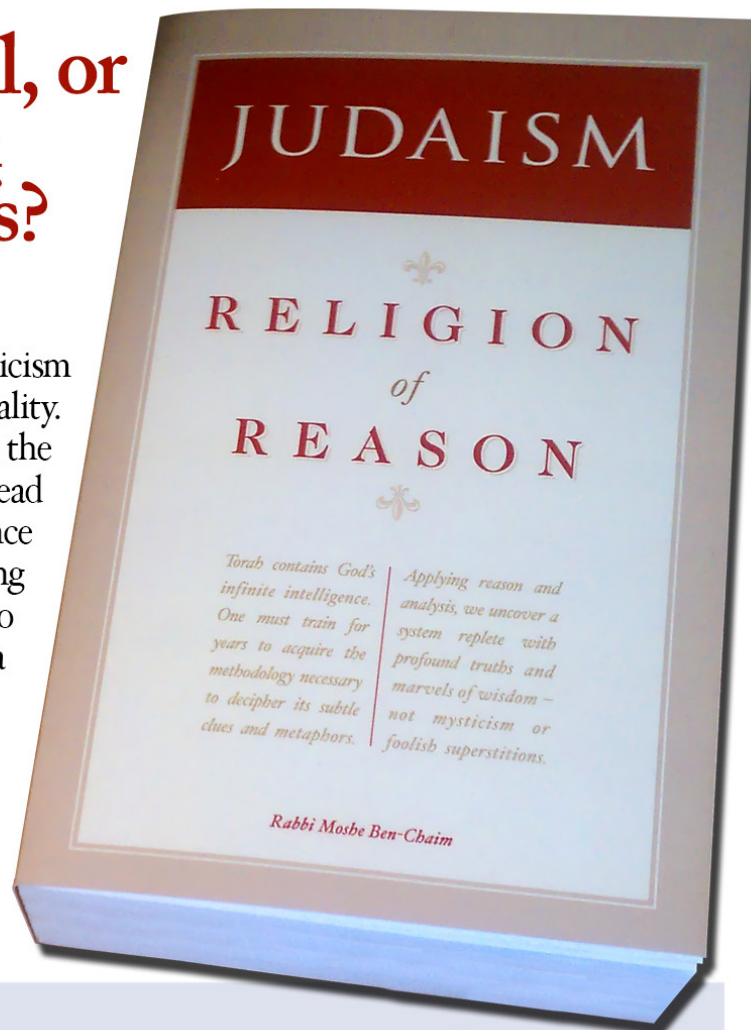
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