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GOD'S WILL FOR MAN

Once one errs about God's will, he cannot fulfill his purpose in existence, for he does not know it. His life results in a complete waste. That is the greatest loss. God created man to gain truths, and with errors about why we exist and what God intends for man, the greatest good God wished to bestow on us is lost.

THE RABBIS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Fallen from Heaven?

When the spies returned from exploring Israel, they frightened the nation by saying, "We saw the Nephilim (giants) there—the Anakites are of the Nephilim—and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so too were we (small) in their eyes" (Num. 13:33).

Rashi comments: "Anakim were descendants of Shemchazai and Azazel who fell from heaven in the generation of Enosh" (Ibid.).

RABBI: "Fallen from heaven" doesn't mean those human giants originated as angels in heaven and fell to Earth. It means that (from heaven) God reduced their stature and fame (Rashi, Num. 34:2). ■

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Be Careful What You Pray For

RABBI REUVEN MANN



The Power and Paradox of Prayer

A major feature of the Book of Devarim is Moshe's retelling of the events which transpired during the Wilderness sojourn. Especially prominent are the incidents of the Golden Calf and the Spies, both of which brought the very existence of the Jews to the brink.

Hashem informed Moshe that He would destroy the nation and create a new one out of him. Fortunately, however, in both of these cases, the doomsday scenario was averted because of the prayerful intervention of Moshe. [Note: If ever we need proof of the effectiveness of prayer these cases should provide it.]

We can't help but note that while Moshe's Tefillot (Prayers) for Klal Yisrael (the Congregation of Israel) achieved their purpose, those that were uttered on behalf of himself did not. For in this week's Parsha, VaEtchanan, he vociferously entreated Hashem to allow him to enter the Promised Land. His request was rejected, and instead he was (unceremoniously) told, "Do not speak to Me any further on this matter" (Devarim 3:26). The question arises, why did Moshe's intercessions for the People achieve success while those for his personal desires did not?

Perhaps we need to have a deeper understanding of the subject of Hashem's answering of prayers. How G-d chooses to respond to the petitions of humans is clearly an area that is far beyond our comprehension, but perhaps we can glean some basic principles.

The Torah teaches that one may entreat Hashem for "anything that troubles him" (Melachim I 8:38). Indeed, some of the things people can pray for may seem very strange, even outrageous to us. The Gemara records that the mother of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would provide supplies for the family of those who were exiled to the "City of Refuge" so that they wouldn't pray for the death of her son.

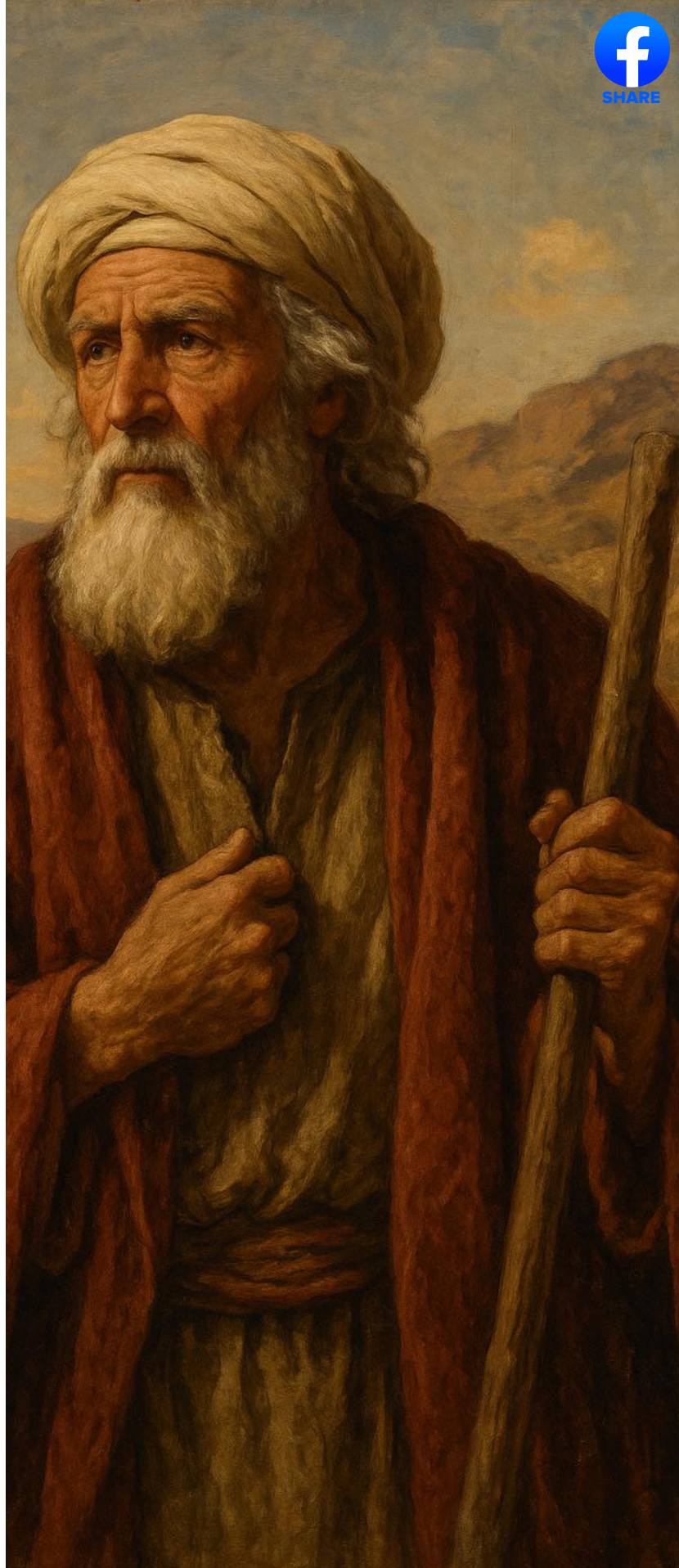
[Note: Those consigned to the city of refuge are permitted to return home only upon the death of the High Priest.]

Yet, one wonders why should the Kohen Gadol, presumably a righteous individual, die simply because someone who stood something to gain from his death prayed for it? This is obviously a very complicated matter, but it's certainly another example of the "long reach" of Tefilla (Prayer).

However, just because one is permitted to pray for any of his heart's desires, is it always wise to do so? Can there be any truth to the popular expression, "Watch out what you wish for, you just might get it"? What does this mean?

I believe it means that there are many things we would like to have,

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



but that wouldn't be good for us and, in fact could actually bring us harm. Unfortunately we do not know ourselves well enough and simplistically imagine that if we were to attain great materialistic success or unusual fame our lives would be greatly improved. But that is not always the case.

Many people strove and prayed for great financial gain and their prayers were answered. However, this brought out unanticipated emotions of superiority and arrogance and caused them to abandon many spiritual values they had previously lived by. As a consequence of their newfound "values" cherished relationships that had been a significant aspect of their lives were ruined. They didn't truly know themselves, and had aspired to things that were not actually good for them. Be careful what you pray for!

Moshe's Spiritual Rectification

Perhaps Hashem's refusal to rescind the decree against Moshe was not a punishment for his transgression but a necessary step in its rectification. The idea I will now present is not my own but was communicated to me many years ago by a significant Torah scholar. In attempting to understand this matter we must remember that Moshe had brought himself to near ruin when he postponed the circumcision of his son on the journey back to Mitzrayim. Thus, the Torah scholar concluded that, although Moshe was the most morally perfected individual in history, he was still human, with emotions that could interfere with his reason and cause him to err (i.e., sin). The Torah scholar suggested that even though Moshe was at first very opposed to becoming the leader of Klal Yisrael, his attitude might have undergone a change over the years. Although Moshe was fully dedicated to the physical and spiritual welfare of Klal Yisrael without selfish motives, could he have become emotionally invested in succeeding in the mission Hashem had entrusted to him? This personal and very reasonable "ambition" might have been the factor that caused him to err in choosing to "arrange his lodgings" before circumcising his son.

Additionally, in the matter of Mei Meriva (Waters of Contention), his fear that the Peoples' sin of complaining about the lack of water might bar them from entering the land, may have played a significant role in affecting his behavior in this episode. Thus, said the Talmid Chacham (Torah Scholar), the sin indicated the presence of an emotion within Moshe that interfered with his reason and caused him to distort the message of Hashem. I believe that the words of the Rambam, which outline the prerequisites for prophecy, have great relevance here.

"It is a foundation of our religion that Hashem grants prophecy to man. Prophecy is only bestowed on a very wise sage of a strong character, who is never overpowered by his natural inclinations in any regard. Instead, he rules with his mind over his inclinations at all times." (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 7:1)

On the basis of this interpretation, I believe that we can understand why Hashem refused to nullify the punishment of Moshe. It was more important for Moshe's spiritual perfection that he be prevented from entering Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) and realizing his desire for success in his mission. Because of this, he was compelled to work on himself to identify the emotion and bring it under the control of his reason.

And perhaps that is the meaning of Hashem's message, "Do not speak to Me any further on this matter" (Devarim 3:26). Hashem was telling him to recognize that he would not be going into the land, and therefore he should focus all of his energy on coming to grips with and overcoming the impulse which had led to his transgression.

It was necessary for Hashem to instruct Moshe to no longer pray on this matter, for as long as there is hope that one might attain his heart's desire, he cannot focus all of his energy on relinquishing the dream and uprooting the longing for it from his heart.

Learning from Yaakov: Letting Go for Teshuva

We find a perfect example of this in the case of Yaakov Avinu (our Forefather). He had a very intense love for his son, Yosef, and as the Pasuk (verse) states it clouded his judgement and caused him to favor him in a manner which aroused the envy of his siblings, which led to tragic consequences. Eventually, Yosef came to the realization (from his interpretation of the dreams) that his task was to engineer the circumstances which would compel the various parties to engage in Teshuva (repentance), for their sins.

After losing Yosef, Yaakov did not engage in introspection or confront the powerful emotions which had led to his 'excessive love' of Yosef. Instead, he transferred those feelings onto Yosef's brother Binyamin, who became a substitute for Yosef in the psyche of Yaakov. In order to properly engage in Teshuva and overcome his extreme attachment, it was essential that he be forced to part with Binyamin who he had not sent to Egypt with his other sons because of the dangers of that journey, which was another example of favoring one son over the others.

When the brothers returned from Egypt and told Yaakov that in order to go back there again they would have to bring Binyamin, he, at first, vociferously demurred. As the need for supplies increased, Yaakov finally accepted the guarantees of Yehuda and entrusted Binyamin to his care, saying,

"May Keil Shakkai (G-d Al-mighty) grant you mercy before the man that he may release to you your other brother as well as Binyamin; and as for me, as I have been bereaved, so I am bereaved" (Bereishit 43:14).

Only when Yaakov accepted the reality that his son was lost to him could he engage in the inner process of freeing himself from the emotion that had distorted his thinking. This Parsha holds great relevance for us. The philosophy of Torah is not that one should blindly pursue his dreams in life. We should not assume that just because we yearn for something or are infatuated with someone that having them is necessarily good for us. Occasionally, when our persistent prayers remain unanswered, we should consider the possibility that we are better off not obtaining the object of our desire. This is not necessarily indicative of personal faults, but at the same time it is an important opportunity to reflect on and free us from powerful longings for the wrong things.

[Note: Of course, when we pray for worthwhile things like Shiduchim (marital prospects) or children, we must persist in our prayer and Hishtadlut (religious efforts) for a long time, as the Matriarchs did in their desire for children.] Sometimes, we may have fallen deeply in love with someone who is just "unsuitable" for us. The feeling can be so compelling that we might rush into a disastrous marriage simply because we cannot see beyond our fantasies. It is therefore crucial to remember that while prayer is very significant, there are times when we must refrain from it. To continue praying is to deny the reality that the thing you crave is harmful to you, and this prevents you from grappling with the emotion and overcoming it. Ultimately, in order to serve Hashem properly, we can't allow ourselves to be enslaved to unruly feelings. We must be in complete control of our emotions so that we can attach them to activities, people, and pursuits fostering growth in Torah, righteousness, and perfection, so that we can achieve a higher degree of Ahavat Hashem (Love of G-d). May Hashem assist us in this significant endeavor. Shabbat Shalom. ■

Questions? Comments?
Please reach out to Rabbi Mann on WhatsApp at 050-709-2372 or by email at rebmann21@aol.com

If Your Idea of GOD is False

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM & DANI ROTH



DANI ROTH: Moses' critique of idolatry is that wood and stone idols are man made, they "cannot see, hear, eat or smell":

When you have begotten children and children's children and are long established in the land, should you act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, causing your God displeasure and vexation, I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you that you shall soon perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess; you shall not long endure in it, but you shall be utterly wiped out. God will scatter you among the peoples, and only a scant few of you shall be left among the nations to which God will drive you. There you will serve gods of wood and stone, made by human hands, that cannot see or hear or eat or smell. (Deut. 4:25-28)

But even if the idols could "see, hear, eat or smell", that would not make them gods. Furthermore, God Himself doesn't do these actions. So what is Moses' critique? (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

RABBI: Moses critiques the Jews' belief in idols on 3 counts:

1) Stone and wood are inanimate and can't move, or help man. 2) Idols are man made, meaning, a true God isn't made by another entity. Furthermore, the idol can't do more than its maker can do, and the maker (man) himself isn't worth worship. 3) stone and wood have no senses, so man's fantasy that his idol recognizes him so as to help, him is false.

Moses is not denying powers of a living deity, as God does in fact recognize man in His own way, although not through human vision or hearing. God knows and controls all since He created everything.

Moses' critique is that idols don't even possess the basic properties of a deity. What then motivates one to make the error of idolatry? Earlier in Deut. 4:16-19, Moses says:

Do not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, the form of any beast on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish that is in the waters below the earth. And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them, which your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven.

Notice the first idols Moses mentioned are man and woman. This reveals the motivation behind idolatry: replacement of parents. A child begins life as a dependent infant who projects great powers onto his parents. As he matures, the intelligent course is to reject the previous belief that parents are super-human. The intelligent teen now accepts that all people are identical, with powers limited to muscles alone. He should then replace his authority figure with God. But many adults remain too attached to that which is tangible; they cannot abandon their physical parent. So they replace the parent with either Jesus, a mystical rebbe or a human idol. The next type of idol simulates the human figure, as those animal idols also have eyes and facial expressions, expressed in Egyptian animal gods. And then as Rambam cites, man will also deify the stars and planets. 9 times in Torah Moses warns the Jews that they saw no form at Revelation on Mount Sinai; they witnessed only a voice. Moses urges the nation to abandon any belief in or attachment to a fantasy physical authority figure. The creator of everything physical—by definition—is not physical. As before God created the universe, before all physicality, there was nothing but God alone. This is the definition of what God is: the first, and not physical.

Regarding the last verse above, "God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven," I think it was you Dani who once explained that

as God created the stars and planets, this renders them creations—not deities—and a creation means it is not the Creator, so we should worship the stronger being!

DANIEL ROTH: Rambam's Laws of Idolatry reads as follows:

During the times of Enosh (Adam's grandson), mankind made a great mistake, and the wise men of that generation gave thoughtless counsel. Enosh himself was one of those who erred. Their mistake was as follows: They said God created stars and spheres with which to control the world. He placed them on high and treated them with honor, making them servants who minister before Him. Accordingly, it is fitting to praise and glorify them and to treat them with honor. [They perceived] this to be the will of God, blessed be He, that they magnify and honor those whom He magnified and honored, just as a king desires that the servants who stand before him be honored. Indeed, doing so is an expression of honor to the king.

You say that Enosh and his generation believed God was literally "in heaven" having a location in the skies, and Enosh believed the stars and planets were "close to God's proximity" thereby deserving human honor. But if that was the idolaters' belief, that God has location, why doesn't Rambam clearly accuse the original idolaters' for believing God has location in the sky? Why doesn't Rambam say that the mistake of the original idolaters was thinking God was physical?

Rambam says 3 times that the mistake of the original idolaters was in wrongly assuming God's will. So Rambam is not saying the mistake was thinking God was physical.

RABBI: When Rambam says about the stars and spheres, "God made them servants who minister before Him," he says the idolaters equate this to a king who desires his servants who "stand before him" be honored. This is where Rambam accuses the idolaters' view that God is in heaven. While Rambam says 3 times that the mistake of the original idolaters was in "[wrongly] assuming God's will," that was not their only mistake. They made a few prior errors leading them to their worst error, of assuming God's will. Included in those prior errors was assuming God is literally "in" the heavens.

Now, as Rambam says, what's so great about their mistaking what is God's will?

Once one errs about God's will, he cannot fulfill his purpose in existence, for he does not know it. His life results in a complete waste. That is the greatest loss. God created man to gain truths and eternal life, and with errors about what God is, why we exist and what God intends for man, the greatest good God wished to bestow on us is lost. ■



Our Special Mission

Rabbi Mendy Feder

In today's times we are plagued by the prevalent anti-Semitism that is manifest throughout the world. Many are puzzled that the world is siding with vicious Hamas slaughterers and seem to blame the nation of Israel for the consequences of uprooting evil. The distortion of what is obvious and rational is blurred by the insidious hatred of the Jew which in every generation rears its ugly head. Many ask why we cannot obliterate this expression of anti-Semitism by rational arguments dispelling the false narrative. We concede that anti-Semitism exists as Chazal teach us that "Esau hates Jacob," and from Mount Sinai hatred of the Jew descended upon the world. However, the question remains why can't we rationally obliterate the inane expressions of the fabricated rationale to hate Jews?

We must first appreciate the teachings of Chazal as to the origins of anti-Semitism. It is human nature to hate any individuals that seem to represent themselves as being special and different than they are. This hatred is accentuated when outsiders are treated differently and somehow appear to be inferior. When the Torah was given at Sinai the Jewish nation was chosen to be a moral light unto the nations of the world. This was our special mission and unfortunately projects a notion that we are a special people. As such, this can be the source of great anti-Semitism as no one appreciates the notion that somehow they are not worthy of being special. It is very difficult to explain to the world that "Jews" are not special, rather, the Jews' "mission" is what is special. It is our obligation to teach the world to live a life based upon ethics and morality and proclaim the kingship of our creator. The Amalekites hate us specifically because they reject the notion of the kingship of our creator. They believe in the greatness of man and reject the notion of Hashem's royalty. Thus, the nation of Israel is hated by the Amalekites because that essentially is our very mission. We have a special mission that is antithetical to their way of life. At Sinai we were given the special mission to proclaim God's kingship for which Amalek obviously detests us. However, other religionists hate us because God chose us as the purveyors of the true will of our Creator. From Sinai



hatred descended upon the world. This is one form of anti-Semitism.

Additionally Chazal teach us that Esau hates Jacob. This is an indisputable fact as attested to by the unspeakable horrendous actions that unfolded on October 7. The hatred of Esau is a personal hatred. They view the nation of Israel—descendants of Jacob—as a group from which they are excluded. Jacob received the special blessings of God's providence as the rightful heir to the teachings of Abraham and Isaac. This is a personal hatred that stems from their forefather Esau and is pronounced today in the Arab world.

The different nuances of anti-Semitism have been forged a long time ago and are

entrenched in the human psyche. No one likes to feel excluded from a group which they feel projects a notion of being special. Unfortunately many in our nation somehow obfuscate the difference between having a special mission and feeling special. This attitude fosters arrogance and breeds greater anti-Semitism. The Jewish nation was honored with the privilege of being servants of God and to proclaim his kingship to the world. We are chosen to be a moral light to the nations of the world and to teach them to live an ethical and truthful existence. The question remains, why can we not expose the roots of anti-Semitism and rationally obliterate the hatred towards our people? We know that when Messiah comes God's kingship will be evident and accepted by the world. The Jewish nation's revered role as servants of God will be manifested by the rebuilding of the temple and our offering of sacrifices to Hashem, the king of the world. We will be worthy of the advent of Messiah when we fulfill our special mission to be a light unto the nations of the world. However this vision can become a reality only when we recognize that "we" are not special but it is our "mission" that is special. Only then will anti-Semitism be obliterated. This phenomena actually represents the attribute of God's compassion. When anti-Semitism is prevalent and the Jew is hated, then any attempts of assimilation is recognized as futile. We are different. We have a special mission to live a moral existence guided by the gift of Torah that God gave us at Sinai. Anti-Semitism and the virulent expressions of hatred by the nations of the world shocks us into the realization that we cannot assimilate and partake of the values of a hedonistic woke society. Such an existence is void of any moral and ethical values. Thus, when this idea is raised to the consciousness of the Jewish nation we will appreciate that we are different because we have a special mission. We will be appreciated by the nations of the world as the chosen people committed to follow the dictates of Torah from Sinai and lead a moral and ethical existence. We will be a light unto the nations of the world and God's kingship will be respected by mankind. Then anti-Semitism will be obliterated and replaced by an appreciation of the Jewish nation's special mission. ■



Book Reviews

Rabbi Reuven Mann — *Rabbi of Young Israel of Phoenix*

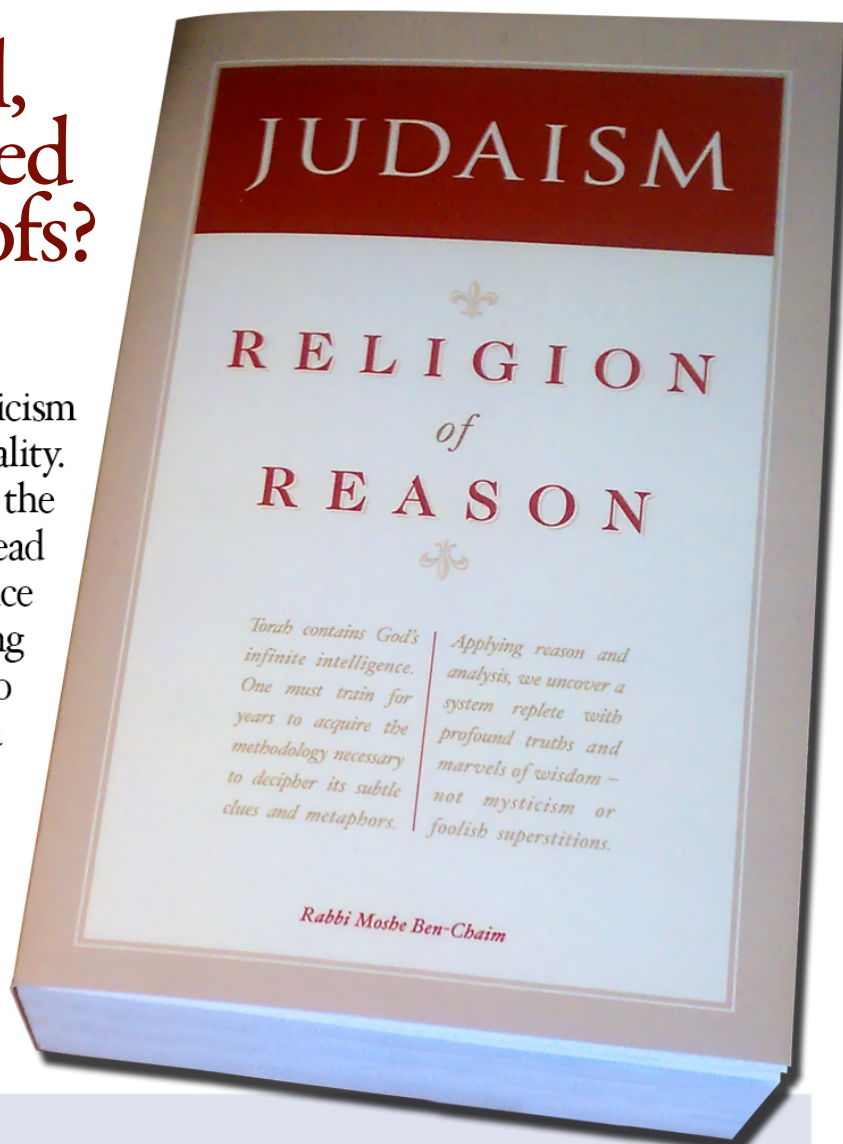
Rabbi Steven Weil — *CEO, Friends of the IDF*

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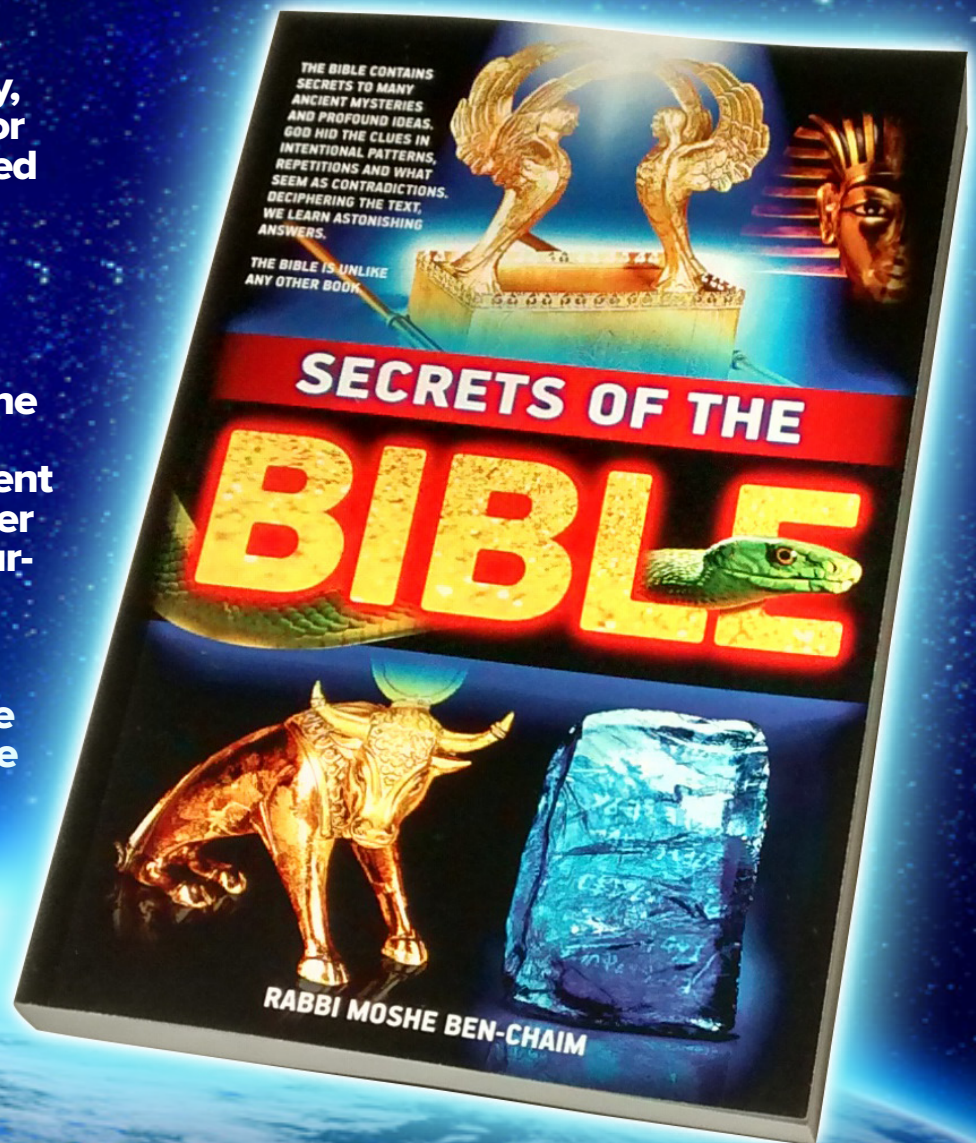
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Sapphire tablets where the 10 Commands grew internally proves the Creator created Earth for Torah.

These tablets were as astonishing as cutting open a tree and finding Torah text in the tree's rings.



1 of the 2 tablets bearing the 10 Commands

As Torah includes the 10 Commands, the tablets aren't a redundant record, but were made to teach another idea: Earth was created for Torah.

PARSHA

The past 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... (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

MAIMONIDES

The Two Tablets: An Extraordinary Idea **RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**



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 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

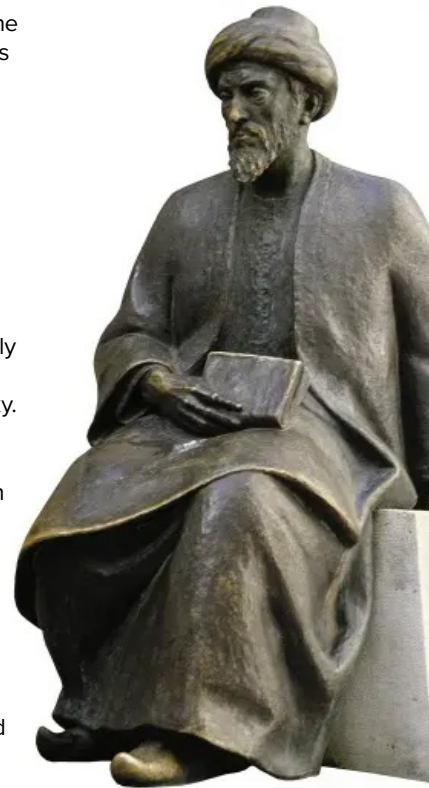
Revelation on Sinai was intended to remove all doubts that a Supreme Intelligence created all, sustains all and communicates with man. However, God desired this message not end at Sinai's closure. My friend suggested that the tablets were intended to be an everlasting "testament" (tablets of Testimony). 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, but they literally grew inside the stones grain as the stones naturally formed over time:



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“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 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 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.

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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. ■

[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



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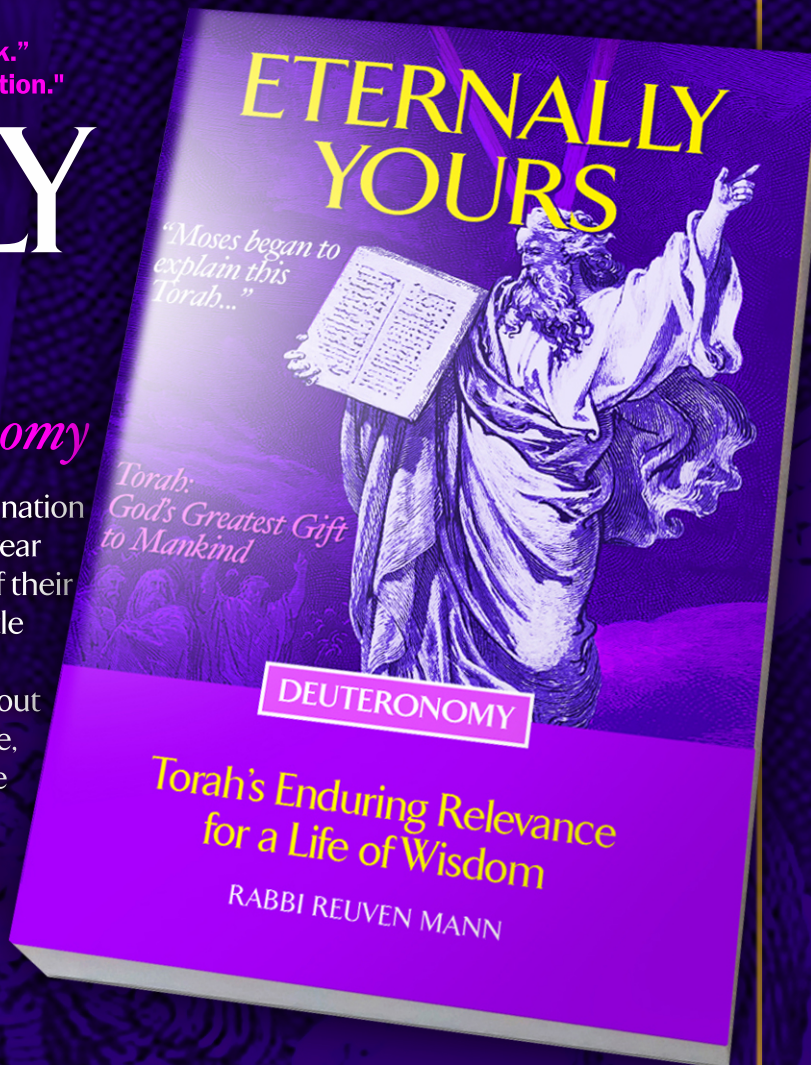
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