

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE LIMITS OF DESIRE

“In the third month of the Exodus of the Children of Yisrael from the land of Egypt...” (19:1)

The greatest desire of G-d for His People — Yisrael — was revealed in the giving of His “marriage pledge”, His holy Torah.

If so, why didn't G-d give us the Torah immediately after we left Egypt? Why did we have to wait three months to consummate this Divine union?

You can't say it was a function of distance, that it took three months to get to Sinai, because even for Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, G-d supernaturally truncated his journey, and without a doubt He would have certainly done this also for His People.

Rather, G-d wanted the impurity of Egypt to gradually fade from us and leave us worthy to join Him under the marriage canopy of Sinai.

This is the meaning of the above verse:

“In the third month of the Exodus of the Children of Yisrael from the land of Egypt...”

Because they were coming “from the land of Egypt” and were still steeped in its impurity, so only “in the third month of the Exodus” of the Jewish People were they ready to receive the holy Torah at Sinai.

This understanding of the verse is borne out by the fact that immediately after their period of purification came to an end the Torah tells us “on that day”, i.e. on the same day that they traveled, so too did they arrive. As soon as they were they really ready to travel to Sinai they arrived there.

You might still ask: If the period of waiting was to allow the miasma of Egypt to fade from the Jewish People, why then did we have to endure a *journey* of three months through the desert? Why couldn't we have just arrived at Sinai and waited there for seven weeks?

Human words cannot express more than human feelings, but if one can say it, from here we can discern the tremendous “overwhelming” desire of G-d to give the Jewish People the Torah. G-d didn't want us to arrive at the “wedding hall” early, for He would have to ‘endure the overwhelming suspense’ of waiting to be joined to His beloved People.

He knew that if we were already under the Chupa, we would not be able to hold back from taking ourselves to Him.

• Source: *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in Tallalei Orot*

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

GITTIN 51 - 57

Rabbi Yossi said, “I never called my wife ‘my wife’... but rather ‘my home’.”

This statement of Rabbi Yossi is part of a *beraita* on our *daf*. Rashi explains that his wife handled all the needs of the home and that she was the mainstay of their home. We similarly find that the women are called “*bayit*” or “home” at the time of the giving of the Torah: “Moshe ascended to G-d, and the L-rd called to him from the mountain, saying, “So will you say to the house (“*beit*”) of Yaakov, and tell the sons of Yisrael... (Ex. 19:3). Rashi, in explaining this verse, cites the *Mechilta* that teaches that “Beit Yaakov” refers to “the women”.

I have also heard another explanation for referring to the wife as the home. We find in *Mesechta Sotah* (17a) that Rabbi Akiva states, “If a married man and woman are meritorious, the Divine Presence is with them.” Rashi writes, “G-d took His Name (of *Yud* and *Heh*) and divided it, and caused it to dwell with *both* of them — the letter *Yud* in “*ish*” (man, i.e., husband), and the letter *Heh* in “*isha*” (woman, i.e., wife).” A man alone does not an ideal home make. Only if the man is with a wife, living in marital peace and harmony, is there a true Jewish home, blessed with the Divine Presence.

• *Gittin 52a*

Rabbi Yochanan said, “The humility of Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus destroyed our Beit Hamikdash and burned our Heichal and exiled us from our Land”.

This statement concludes the well-known story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish People by the Romans. When Bar Kamtza was ejected from a certain celebration, he sought revenge by telling the Roman Caesar that the Jews were rebelling against him. The Caesar sent an animal with him to be sacrificed in the Beit Hamikdash to test their loyalty, but Bar Kamtza intentionally made a blemish in the animal as he took it to Jerusalem. The Sages had a great dilemma. If they refused to offer the Caesar’s sacrifice and word of their refusal got back to the Caesar, they and the Jewish People were likely to face serious consequences. Many Sages were therefore inclined to either offer the Caesar’s sacrifice or kill Bar Kamtza, thereby removing the danger. However, Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus “in his humility” convinced the Sages to neither offer the sacrifice nor to kill Bar Kamtza, resulting in destruction and exile.

Why does the *gemara* attribute this decision to his “humility”? Where do we see his humility in this decision? It would seem that the more correct description for the basis of his decision would be his “righteousness” or his “piety”. (In fact, Rashi translates “*anvatanuto*” in the *gemara* not as “humility” but rather as “patience”, which is not the “normal” translation, and begs explanation). Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus was an outstanding Torah scholar of his generation and had the authority to declare a temporary “overriding” of Torah law for the sake of the welfare of the Jewish People. Nevertheless, he was extremely humble, and did not feel that he was a great enough Sage to actually *carry out* either one of the suggested rulings that would have spared the national tragedy. And for this “misplaced” humility our *gemara* places blame on him for the ensuing disaster. (Maharitz Chiyut)

• *Gittin 55b-56a*

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

KEREM BEN ZIMRA — NAMED FOR A SAGE

Located about eight kilometers west of Tsefat is the Moshav Kerem ben Zimra, which Jews built on the site of the village, evacuated by the Arabs during the War of Independence.

The name of the moshav stems from the tradition that buried in that area is the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Yossi



ben Zimra.

One of the statements for which this Sage is famous goes like this: “Just as a woman is not ashamed to ask her husband for the needs of her family, so too are the prophets not ashamed to ask G-d for the needs of His people.”

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names *Yeter*?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe..." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Yitro

Why Does Moshe Need Yitro's Advice?

In the beginning of this Torah portion Moshe's father-in-law, Yitro, meets him in the desert. Seeing that Moshe is constantly besieged by the people seeking council, clarification and resolution of disputes, Yitro offers a solution. He advises Moshe to appoint "leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties and leaders of tens. They shall judge the people at all times and they shall bring every major matter to you, and every minor matter they shall judge, and it will be eased for you." (Exodus 18:21-22)

Abarbanel asks two obvious questions. Firstly, how is it possible that Yitro is teaching Moshe something so obvious? Didn't Moshe realize that one individual could not possibly deal with all the issues of a nation of over three million people? Secondly, the number of judges or leaders that Moshe accepts as the required number adds up to 78,600 individuals to judge a nation of 600,000 men between the ages of twenty and sixty. Why would such an enormous number be necessary?

Abarbanel explains that, first of all, the encounter between Yitro and Moshe occurred just before the Torah was given at Mount Sinai. Since the details of the law had not yet been given to the entire nation, there was no one to whom Moshe could delegate authority. Only Moshe had the prophetic understanding to deal properly with the nation's legal concerns. Yitro, however, was not aware that the Torah would soon be given, and Moshe did not inform him of this fact. He assumed that the current untenable situation would exist indefinitely and therefore offered his advice. Even though Moshe intended to institute such a system in the very near future, the verse states, "Moshe heeded the advice of his father-in-law and did everything that he had said." (Exodus 18, 24) The Torah's intention is to show us the degree to which Moshe honored and respected Yitro's advice while in his presence. Forty years later, when Moshe recounts the history of the Exodus and the sojourn in the desert he omits any reference to Yitro, and attributes the delegation of responsibility to himself when he says that he took the heads of the tribes and appointed them leaders of thousands and leaders of hundreds.

In regard to the second question, Abarbanel offers a com-

pletely different understanding of the nature and number of these leaders. He posits that the Torah is actually referring to several different scenarios. The first possibility is that the numbers 'thousands', 'hundreds', 'fifties' and 'tens' refer neither to the people nor to the leaders, but rather to the personnel staffs that the leaders may require to carry out their judgments. The size of these staffs would depend on the individual merits and requirements of the leaders.

A second possibility is that the number 'thousands' refers to the maximum number of people that a leader could have responsibility for. A single leader or judge can deal with thousands or even tens of thousands of individuals, but not more. The other numbers refer specifically to the organization of military units. Here, small-unit leadership is essential and is addressed by having leaders of hundreds, fifties and even tens.

Abarbanel's third approach takes us even further from the simple reading of the verses. Firstly, depending on location and circumstances, the numbers could refer to the wide variation of sub-specialties in the law which could require additional manpower. Some areas may experience a wide variety of cases, involving, for example, nuances in commercial law, property law and criminal law. Secondly, these numbers could refer to the monetary amounts under consideration. Cases involving large monetary claims could be dealt with in different venues and by different judges than those dealing with smaller claims. Thirdly, the numbers may refer to the entire array of governmental bodies required by a populous society. Some issues can only be decided by a council of a thousand or more individuals, others by councils of fewer individuals. (Abarbanel here makes reference specifically to the various governing bodies in the city of Venice where he lived in the early years of the 16th century.)

Abarbanel concludes his analysis with the following summary: "These appointed individuals function at all times, so that when their subjects come to them they can make decisions expeditiously. In this way, everyone can live in peace, since everyone will know where to turn when a problem arises, and every judge and leader will know his particular area of responsibility and how to adjudicate properly. The result will be that truth and peace will be judged in your gates."

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at Mount Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice

emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d, 2. Don't worship other "gods", 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain, 4. Observe Shabbat, 5. Honor your parents, 6. Don't murder, 7. Don't commit adultery, 8. Don't kidnap, 9. Don't testify falsely, 10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

THE CHARIOT OF FIRE AND THE BURNING BUSH

From: David

Dear Rabbi,
We are told that Moshe was the greatest of prophets. Yet we find that he remained in this world and died a natural death, which is not the case with Eliyahu who was conveyed into the spiritual realm in a chariot of fire because of the great spiritual heights he attained. Would this not indicate that Eliyahu was on a higher spiritual plane than Moshe?

Dear David,

I understand the logic of your question, but to understand my answer, it will help to revisit Eden.

Mystical sources teach that Mankind — Adam and Chava — were created primarily as spiritual beings in bodily form, where their bodies were so illuminated by the light and power of their souls that their bodies were actually more soul than matter.

This is because their five levels of soul — *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama*, *chaya* and *yechida* — were harmoniously fused within their being in this world, and G-d infused and energized them with a spiritual illumination that made them more beings of light than flesh.

When Adam and Chava transgressed, they greatly severed and occluded their spiritual connection such that they simultaneously plummeted and were pressed into materialism, where the lower levels of soul — *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshama* — became rooted in a physically congealed and opaque body. The higher levels of soul — *chaya* and *yechida* — remained in the transcendental realm, only tenuously connected to the dislocated levels of soul and body below.

This is the meaning in the Torah of their becoming aware of their nakedness and G-d's clothing them with garments of skin. Once their inner light, which initially masked their bodies, dimmed, their transgression became exposed, and G-d enveloped their crystallizing bodies in human flesh and skin.

From then on, the spiritual and physical planes were greatly

separated, and the highest level to be achieved in this world was the perfection of *neshama*. One who approached perfecting the heights of the next level, *chaya*, would either have to descend back to the physical, or ascend into the transcendental. Since the congealed, crystallized body cannot contain the light and energy of *chaya* and *yechida*, it must either retreat and remain physical or ascend and become spiritualized by them, passing over to the other side.

This is what transpired with Eliyahu who was on such a high spiritual plane that once he perfected *chaya*, this connection could not be maintained in the demoted state of this world, and he metaphorically ascended Heavenward in a chariot of fire, meaning that his physical form was consumed by the spiritual fire of his higher souls and was conveyed into the spiritual realm.

But as high a spiritual elevation as this was, Moshe's level was even higher. And this is precisely because what happened to Eliyahu did not happen to him.

As did Eliyahu, Moshe also attained and perfected the level of *chaya*. However, unlike anyone other than Adam before the sin, Moshe was so elevated that his spiritualized physical form could actually contain *chaya* in this world without becoming consumed by it. His being thus became like a wick upon which rested a Heavenly flame (portended earlier by the bush in which blazed a fire but was not burnt) and a beacon of light suffusing spiritual luminescence from the transcendental realm into the material.

And this was the reason behind Moshe's beaming with light of an intensity which could not be gazed upon by others. His physical form was literally aglow with the brilliant energy of his higher soul as he regained a spiritual level akin to that of Adam in Eden before his demise. For this reason his "skin" is described as "luminescent" — he was on the threshold between a fallen being of skin and a redeemed being of light. But in the Sanctuary, the portal between the upper and lower worlds, Moshe was able to unveil his face, meaning divest himself of occlusion, and truly shine in the presence of G-d.

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Rav Bulman^{zt"l}
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

MODEH ANI

“I gratefully thank You, O living and eternal King, for You have returned my soul within me with compassion – abundant is Your faithfulness.”

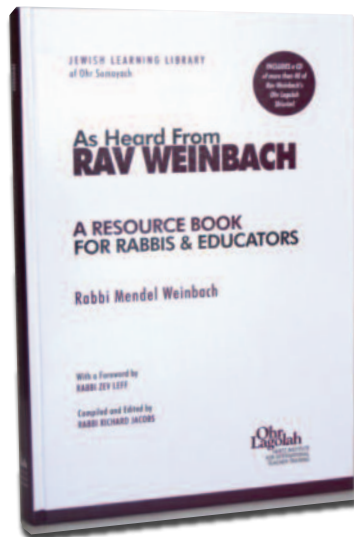
It has become the accepted custom to recite the “*Modeh ani*” prayer immediately upon awakening from sleep each day. Since there are none of G-d’s holy names mentioned in this short prayer, it may be said even before one washes his hands in the morning. The precise text that we read was written by Rabbi Moshe Machir (16th century) in his book *Seder HaYom*.

The concluding phrase “Abundant is Your faithfulness” is based on a verse from Eicha 3:23, which states: “They (Divine kindnesses) are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness.” Each night we return our soul to G-d, tired from the day, like a battery whose charge has run out, and G-d returns it to us fresh and “recharged” each morning as if it were new. This is a display of G-d’s great faithfulness, in

restoring our life back to us each morning, as well as a reminder of the revival of the dead, the ultimate expression of G-d’s faithfulness. (Anaf Yosef, based on Midrash Rabbah Eicha 3:8)

The Ya’arot Devash explains how joyous and grateful we should be for this act of kindness, based on an example from the Zohar: When a person has collateral for a past-due loan, the borrower often loses his collateral. However, even when a person is guilty of numerous transgressions and deserving of punishment, G-d nonetheless faithfully returns his soul to him each morning (Eitz Yosef).

The “*Modeh ani*” prayer is a hint to the unique connection of the Jewish People with G-d. The Torah states that G-d dwells with the Jewish People even when they are in a state of impurity and iniquity (see Vayikra 16:16). As a sign of our gratitude to G-d for this unbreakable bond and unconditional love we declare with our first breath each morning “*Modeh ani*” — “Thank you!”



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DAVID NIELSEN

Age 26 - London, England

University of Birmingham, BSc in Psychology - Mechina Program

High Wycombe, the nearest town to the small village in which he grew up, is not known as one of the major Jewish communities of the UK. In fact, David was the only Jewish student in his primary and grammar (secondary) schools. Situated in the “Home Counties” between London and Oxford, it is quite rural and very “English”.

David’s family belonged to a Reform (Conservative in US terminology) Synagogue, which was a gathering place for the scattered Jewish families in the northern Home Counties. He attended a “*cheder*” at the synagogue on Sunday morning where he received a scanty Jewish education and celebrated his bar mitzvah.

After completing his “A” levels he entered the University of Birmingham where he majored in Psychology. Although not a factor in his choosing a university, Birmingham happens to have one of the largest Jewish student populations of any of the universities in England. It was a fortuitous choice for David. He was no longer the only Jew in the school. He joined the Jewish Society and attended Friday night and Yom Tov meals at the Hillel House and interacted with the other Jewish students. In his last year of university he moved into a Jewish house where the students kept kosher.

Although he was moving in the direction of observance he didn’t think that the end of that road would be Orthodoxy. He was proud to be a kosher Reform Jew within a secular Jewish community. His mother joined him in his decision and kashered her kitchen.

During his final year of university he became involved with the student television station, and upon graduation got a job in London with the British branch of the QVC network — a 24/7 TV shopping channel — as a studio floor manager, managing talent and crews on the shows’ production floor. While very exciting, it was also tiring, and when he saw an ad in the Jewish Chronicle for a marketing assistant at World Jewish Relief, a UK Jewish charity which bills itself as the UK’s leading Jewish International Development Agency, he applied. He was hired and worked there for three years, preparing marketing campaigns for various projects the charity sponsored. It was meaningful and exciting work and he was bettering the world. He loved his job, and over the three years he received a number of promotions, eventually becoming a manager of his own team of marketers.

Interested in making more social contacts in the Jewish community, upon the suggestion of a friend he tried out JLife

— a project of the JLE London (an Ohr Somayach affiliate) — which brings young professionals together for classes, events and trips. It is very competently run by Rabbi Benjy Morgan and Rabbi DovBer Cowan.

On a JLife trip to Israel shortly after Pesach in 2013, David was first introduced to Ohr Somayach, where the participants had some learning sessions run by Rabbi Moshe Berger of our Jerusalem staff. He loved it. Thereafter, the JLE London became a big part of his life. He went on seven trips abroad with the JLE and started planning for his eventual immersion in the “Sea of Talmud” in Jerusalem. In May of 2015, on another JLife trip to Israel, David decided to stay for an additional week and go “yeshiva shopping” — sampling different yeshivas to see which one would be the best for him. He picked Ohr Somayach.

Upon returning to England he gave notice to his employer and started to prepare for his return to Israel. David entered the Mechina 1 program in October of 2015 and has made rapid progress. He is now in Mechina 2. Asked about his time at Ohr Somayach, David says: “My experience so far at Ohr Somayach has been enriching, enlightening and reassuring. One of the main reasons I chose to study here was for the opportunity to be surrounded by so many different kinds of people, from all walks of life, from all backgrounds, all holding at different levels. Ohr Somayach is enabling me to discover and develop my Judaism at my own pace, without pressure. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to learn every single day from some of the world’s wisest and most well respected *rabbeim*. Three months into my journey I already know that when the time comes for me to leave Ohr Somayach I will be well-equipped to continue learning and growing throughout my life.”

Last Shabbat was an “In Shabbat” at the Yeshiva, and David, paraphrasing Rabbi Yitzchok Breitowitz, the Rav of Kehilat Ohr Somayach, remarked to the rabbi sitting next to him at lunch: “What a fantastic Shabbaton, with all of the programs of Ohr Somayach joining together as a whole community. It reminds me that, as Jews, we shouldn’t be like a cholent — with all of the ingredients blending until they are unrecognizable. We should be like a salad bowl — with each element offering its own unique contribution: mixing different colors, tastes and textures; but put them together and they can produce something amazing!”

Thanks David, for being one of the “ingredients”.



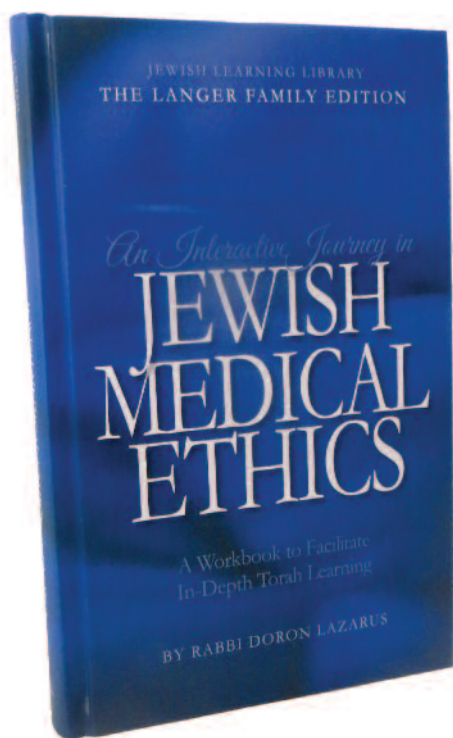
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