

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
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**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

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How could B'Nai Yisrael have worshiped a golden statue of a calf only 40 days after experiencing God's presence at Har Sinai? The concept is so ridiculous that it is difficult to imagine anyone, let alone the entire people, being so stupid.

The sin of worshiping a graven image, a direct violation of the two commandments that all the people heard directly from God, was blatant. How could Moshe have possibly saved the people from death? Why, then, did God wait until the second day before objecting to this sin (32:6)? The Torah says explicitly that the people gave Aaron their gold earrings, that he put the gold into a cloth, and fashioned it into a molten calf. Aaron then built an alter and called for a festival to Hashem for the next day. Only after the people arose early the next day, brought offerings, ate, and drank did God complain about their behavior (32:2-7). For a detailed analysis, see Menachem Leibtag's Devar Torah, included as an attachment to the E-mail version or available as part of the downloadable pdf.

When God threatened to kill all the people, Moshe responded with silence. The Torah continues with a second statement from God (32:9-10), that the people were stiff necked and that Moshe should step aside so He could kill them. God said that he would start over and make a new nation from Moshe, as He had done generations earlier, starting over with a new nation from Noach. At this point, Moshe could not go down and stop the people from sinning. As soon as he left, God would kill them.

Moshe's response was brilliant, in my opinion his greatest moment as a leader of the Jewish people. As Rashi understood, when God told Moshe to stand aside so He could kill the people, God was implying that perhaps He would not destroy them if Moshe stayed. Moshe stayed and told God that He had no choice but to forgive the people. If He destroyed the people, the Egyptians and other non-Jews would say that God was not powerful enough to save the Jews. Moshe also would not help God's public relations, because he said that if God destroyed the Jewish people, then God would need to write Moshe out of his book. In short, Moshe would not permit God to start over with Moshe's children and descendants. Further, God would violate His promises to the Patriarchs if He killed the Jewish people. God had boxed himself into a corner. He had no choice but to find a way to forgive the people for the sin of Egel Zahav.

Only after Moshe forced God to forgive the people did he go down and confront the people. He captured their attention by throwing down the tablets and smashing them at the foot of Har Sinai (32:19). Moshe had to break the tablets, because they represented a covenant based on Divine Justice. The penalty for breaking a commandment under Divine Justice was death. Moshe negotiated a new covenant with God, one based on Divine Mercy, based on God's Thirteen Attributes (ch. 34, especially 34:6-7). We read these words every fast day and repeat them many times during the Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur davening.

Last week I raised the question of the chronological order of the Mishkan section of the Torah. Did the direction to build a Mishkan come before or after Egel Zahav? The concept of our ancestors building a statue and praying to it only 40 days after Har Sinai makes me appreciate that the people certainly were not ready yet to merit entering the land. As a modern Jew, I find the concept of Egel Zahav difficult to comprehend. Rabbi David Fohrman explains the Egel Zahav as a mask, or a symbol to create some distance between a scary God and the frightened former slaves, people who were afraid to develop a direct relationship with a powerful God. In this sense, the people were looking for a symbol or mask to replace Moshe, when they thought that he had died on Har Sinai. This interpretation, which Rabbi Fohrman develops in a lengthy series of podcasts, makes the incident much easier to appreciate.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, also made the Torah come alive in his Shabbat morning Torah discussions. The strange events at the foot of Har Sinai, during the weeks when Moshe was on the top of the mountain with God, require much more explanation than a modern person can understand by reading the Chumash (in Hebrew or translation). After years of study, I still learn more each year – and shall never exhaust the depths that remain.

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Elisheva Chaya bas Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Beyla bat Sara, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, Ruth bat Sarah, and Tova bat Narges, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

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Hannah & Alan

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### **Special Message Regarding the Coronavirus Emergency**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2020

We are all grappling now with the coronavirus. Even for the vast majority of us who are not sick or infected, our life has been significantly altered, and between quarantines, shul closings, school closings, and social distancing, many people are feeling alone and isolated. It is a time when our natural instinct is to protect ourselves and our family – and that is, indeed, our primary moral and halakhic responsibility. At the same time, it is imperative on us to remember that we are a community. Whether davening in a shul with a minyan, or davening by oneself at home, we say every brakha in the plural – we are always connected to the larger community and thinking of their needs as well as ours.

This is the time to pick up the phone – or better yet, to get on Zoom - and reach out to people who are in isolation or staying at home out of caution, to offer to go shopping or run errands for someone, to lend an extra laptop, computer, or tablet to people who don't have enough for the whole family. This is the time to keep the wellbeing of individuals, of the community and of the world in your thoughts and prayers and let those translate into action. Perhaps my colleague, Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky, says it best: "Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise."

In the book of Shemot, B'nei Yisrael time and again come together and demonstrate achdut as a people. Whether standing at Mt. Sinai – "like one person with one heart" – or building the Mishkan, or even when they are sinning and making of the Golden Calf, they join together as one. Purim tells a different story. The people are spread out - "scattered throughout the nations" – with different languages and different customs. This is reflected in the practices of Purim – it is the only holiday which is celebrated on multiple days – the 14th and the 15th – and the Rabbis added to this the 11th, 12th, and 13th. And the megillah itself can be written and read in different languages. And yet, despite this, Purim is a day of great unity. It was, for the Rabbis, the acceptance of the Torah all over again, coming from the free will people, with all the people acting as one. And it is a day where we foster unity and we extend ourselves to others – sending food to our friends, giving gifts to the poor. Purim teaches us that even when separated and isolated, we can still come together as one. It is on us to reflect on how we can best stay connected and be of assistance even during these trying times.

My best wishes and tefillot for all of our wellbeing,

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### **Drasha: Parshas Ki Sisa: Masked Emotions**

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

In what is probably the most anti-climactic event in Jewish history, the nation that was about to receive the Torah from Moshe turns away from the will of Hashem. After 40 days they begin to worry that Moshe will never return and they panic. They create a new leader for themselves — The Golden Calf..

The Torah describes the scene in Exodus 32:6: "The people offered (the calf) peace offerings and they sat down to eat and drink and they got up to revel."

Hashem immediately commands Moshe to descend Mount Sinai in order to admonish his corrupt nation. As Moshe comes down the mountain he hears tumultuous shouts emanating from the people who were celebrating their new found deity. His student, Yehoshua, also hears the sounds and declares (Exodus 32:17) "the sound of battle is in the camp." Moshe listens and amends the theory. He tells Yehoshua, "It is not the sound of victory, nor the sound of defeat: I hear the sound of distress." When Moshe sees the Golden Calf he breaks the Tablets and restores order, sanity, and the belief in Hashem.

What is strange about the episode is the contrast of the sounds made and the sounds heard. If the Jewish People reveled and celebrated then why did Yehoshua hear sounds of war and how did Moshe hear sounds of distress? They should both have heard the sound of celebration and festivity.

**Rav Chaim of Sanz had a custom: he would test the local children on a monthly basis. The children would recite orally from the Mishnah or Talmud and Rav Chaim would reward them generously with sweets and money. Once a group of secular Jews decided to dupe Rav Chaim. They taught a Talmudic selection to a gentile child and reviewed it with him until he knew it perfectly. They dressed him like a Chasidic child and had him stand in line with all the other children to be tested.**

**The rabbi listened to the young boy intently. The other children were puzzled: they did not remember this boy from their cheder, yet they were amazed at the remarkable fluency he displayed in reciting his piece. Rav Chaim was not impressed at all. He turned to the young man and said, "please tell your father that there are better ways to earn a few coins!" With that he dismissed the child.**

**The secularists were shocked. "How did the Rabbi know?" Their curiosity forced them to approach Rav Chaim. Rav Chaim smiled as he answered them. "There are two ways to say the Gemorah. One is filled with spirituality. The child's body is swaying and filled with the emotion of Torah. The other is just repetitive rote. This young man lacked the fire and the true joy that the Jewish children have when learning Torah. I knew he was not one of ours."**

The Jews got up to revel around the golden calf. Moshe and Yehoshua however knew the difference between true joy — simcha — and confusion. The Jews revel were in essence distressed but it was masked with drinks and noise makers. True joy is coupled with a certainty and a sense of direction; something lacking for those Jews celebrating the idol. The Jews may have gotten up to celebrate, but it was no celebration. It may have looked like a party to the untrained eye, but Moshe knew the true sound of joy. It did not exist with the Golden Calf. True joy is the harmony of spirituality and contentment. Superficial sounds of euphoria and celebration are heard by those with true insight as sounds of battle and distress.

Good Shabbos!

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## **Ki Tisa: Torah as a Way to Know God**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012, 2020

How exactly can a finite human being, rooted in her physicality, connect to an infinite, non-physical God? This question is one that the Torah grapples with throughout the second half of the book of Shemot. God commands for the building of a physical Mishkan to house the Glory of God enveloped in the cloud. Neither of these are representations of God Godself. The Mishkan delimits a place, a space, for the Divine presence to inhabit, and the Glory of God is a created thing which represents God's presence, but not God Godself. In such a physical space, and with such a felt physical Presence, a through the profoundly physical act of the offering of sacrifices, finite people were able to connect to an infinite God.

This is the means that the Torah provided, but it is easy to blur the line between it and between creating an actual physical representation of God, between identifying God with the physical, between the making of idols. It is exactly this line which is crossed as soon as Moshe leaves the people on their own, and tarries in his return from Har Sinai. The people make a Golden Calf, and call out: "This is your gods, Israel, who have brought you up from the Land of Egypt." (Shemot 32:4).

Now, when it comes to idolatry, the Torah recognizes two types. There is the idolatry of worshipping other gods. This is the idolatry that is prohibited in the second of the Ten Commandments. "You shall not have any other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an engraved image... You shall not bow down to them and you shall not serve them because I am the Lord your God, a jealous God..." (Shemot 20:3-5). The focus here is the worship of other gods, and the imagery of God as a jealous God evokes the husband who is

jealous because of his wife's actual or suspected adultery (see Bamidbar 5:14). It is a violation of the fidelity of the God-Israel relationship, it is a "whoring after other gods." (Devarim 31:16).

There is, however, another type of idolatry. Not the worship of other gods, but the corrupting of the idea of God, the worship of an image as a representation of the true God. It is this idolatry that the Torah warns against immediately after the Ten Commandments and the Revelation at Sinai: "And the Lord said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the people of Israel, You have seen that I have talked with you from Heaven. You shall not make with me gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. (Shemot 20:19-20). God is saying, in effect, "Because you saw that I talked to you from heaven, you may think that you actually saw something, that you saw Me. You may attempt to represent me with images of gold and silver. Know that this is forbidden. I remained in Heaven; I never came down; I am not of this world and cannot be represented in a physical fashion." This meaning is made explicit in Devarim, when the Torah retells the event of the Revelation: "Take therefore good heed to yourselves; for you saw no manner of form on the day when the Lord spoke to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire;. Lest you corrupt, and make you an engraved image, the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female." (Devarim 4:15-16). The key word here is *tashchitun*, to corrupt, not to worship the wrong god, but to worship the right God corruptly, to corrupt the very idea of God Godself.

When it comes to the Golden Calf, the commentators debate which form of idolatry took place. Did the people believe the Calf to be a different god, as is perhaps indicated by the use of the plural ("your gods, who have brought you up..."), evoking the constellation of pagan gods, or did they create the Calf as a physical representation of God, as a more immediate way to connect to and worship God? Psychologically, it seems hard to believe that after everything they had just experienced, that the People would so quickly backslide into their earlier pagan beliefs, but perhaps this is just evidence of how hard it is and how much work is necessary to change a person's deeply ingrained practices and beliefs. So while the psychological argument is debatable, the textual evidence is, I believe, quite clear: "The Lord said to Moshe: Go down; for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted; They have strayed quickly from the path which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf..." (Shemot 31:7-8). The key word, here again, is *shecheit*, corrupted. They have not abandoned Me; they have not whored after other gods; they have corrupted – corrupted the worship of God and the idea of God. They have strayed from the path that they were commanded, they have violated the rules, and left narrow path that allows only certain forms of worship, but that have not violated the faith, they have not believed in or worshiped other gods.

The Golden Calf, then, was the People's need to go one step further than the Mishkan. It was the need for an actual physical representation of God. They lapsed into this because of Moshe's absence. What is the causal relationship between these two events? First, it is possible that as long as Moshe was present, the people did not need a physical representation of God because Moshe served that purpose. A religious leader, especially if he is a charismatic one (or, in Moshe's unique case, has the opportunity to speak to God directly), can often come to represent God in the mind of those he leads. Although there is no actual confusion of the leader with God (one hopes), having a person who represents religious authority, who (ideally) embodies the teachings of the religion, can satisfy in the mind of the worshipper the need for a more concrete representation of God Godself. Secondly, it is possible that because people are naturally drawn to the need to connect to something physical, that if no one is around to keep a vigilant watch, and if they are not able to do so themselves, then they will naturally slide into the use of the physical to represent the Divine.

I believe that both of these two reasons are true, and we must be aware that these dangers persist even in our day. People who are religiously yearning, who are looking for a means of connection, may tend to focus on their religious leader, their rabbi, as a substitute, and to raise their rabbi to a God-like status. While rabbis deserve respect and at times even reverence – and this is a value often needs strengthening – they do not warrant slavish worship. Such worship of a human being is a form of idolatry, a disaster for the rabbi who can forget his own fallibility and need for humility, a disaster for the congregant, who can shut down his or her critical faculties, and not think for themselves in religious and life matters, and it is a disaster for the religion and for our relationship to God.

Even when people do not idolize their religious leaders – and , indeed, it is often more, not less, respect that is needed – there is still a strong draw to find something in our world to serve as a means of connection. The ideal response to this need would be to find ways to connect other than through our physical nature. It is for this reason that I believe that Moshe, after the sin of the Golden Calf, made the bizarre, and – seemingly – highly inappropriate request of God, "I beg you, if I have found favor in Your eyes, show me Your way" (Shemot 33:13). And even after being rebuffed, he is relentless, "And he said, I beg You, show me Your Glory" (Shemot 33:18). Given God's burning anger against the People, how could Moshe think that such a request would be granted? And yet, miraculously, God grants his request: "And the Lord said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (Shemot 33:19). Why was this request made now, and why was it granted?

The answer, I believe, is obvious. The People needed something more than a Mishkan, but less than a Calf. They needed something that, unlike the Mishkan, was directly God, but yet was not an idol. They needed to understand God, to know God's way, to see – to understand – God's Glory, and not just to see the cloud that surrounded it. To replace the physical seeing with the intellectual understanding. And this God understands, and God agrees to: I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. "And God said, You cannot see my face; for no man shall see me and live." (Shemot 33:20). According to Rambam, this means – You cannot understand Me directly, even the use of human language, like the use of physicality, is too limited, to human, to describe or understand Me. But you can "see My back," you can understand how I act in the world, what are My attributes, what are My ways. God

then provides us an alternative to connecting through the physical, and that is connecting through the intellect, through striving to understand God and God's ways.

How do we achieve such understanding of God? How do we connect through our minds, and not through our bodies? The answer depends on the person. For Rambam, the answer was the use of the rational mind and the study of philosophy and theology. For the kabbalists, the answer was the use of the mystical mind, the study of kabbalah, and the achievement of mystical states. For many today, the answer is through the study of Torah – God's "mind," as it were – and Halakha – God's way for us to act in the world.

The study of Torah and Halakha is, I believe is the most traditional and most realizable path, but even it has its potential pitfalls. For many people study Torah and halakha as an intellectual pursuit alone, not as the use of the intellectual in the pursuit of knowing God. This can be seen from the lack of interest in studying the aggadata, the sections of the Talmud that are less intellectually challenging but that are the essence of Hazal's understanding of God, Humanity, and Creation. It can also be seen among those who have no interest in anything outside of the Talmud – whether it is Tanakh, Jewish thought, or other pursuits that can heighten a person's awareness of God and God's will. When Rambam, in his Book of Mitzvot, describes the mitzvah to love God (Positive Mitzvah 5), he states that one achieves love of God through the study of Torah. But when he describes this mitzvah in Mishneh Torah, he states that love of God is achieved through understanding the natural world, not God's revelation, but God's creation (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 2:2). How many of us try to connect to God in this way?

Indeed, when God reveals Godself to Moshe, God does this through naming the Divine attributes. How many of us, of those who study Torah, devote any of our time to pondering these attributes, to thinking about God directly? It is perhaps for this reason that Moshe, after the sin of the Calf, broke the Tablets when he descended from the mountain. He saw that the people could be led astray by anything that was too much of this world. Even stone tablets that contained the word of God could become an object of worship, a type of an idol. Even the study of Torah and Halakha, if it is only meaningful in itself, and not as a way of understanding God and connecting to God, can be a type of an idol. Let us strive to find ways that we can truly connect to God, and that we can study and embody Torah and Halakha as part of our pursuit to know God and to serve God. Let us strive to seek out God in many ways, to bring a wide range of pursuits – rational, mystical, aesthetic, artistic, scientific – in the study of God's revelation and God's creation – to the service of knowing of God and of connecting to God.

Shabbat Shalom.

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## **Purim Reflections -- About-Face**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2020 Teach 613

Esther is undoubtedly the hero of the Purim story, but not for the reason that most people think. It was quite challenging for her to go to King Achashveirosh to plead the case of the Jews. Certainly, Esther acted with fortitude, and will forever be remembered for her courage and advocacy. But the Mishna in Avos guides us to focus on a different virtue. The Mishna says that Esther brought about the salvation when she related- in the name of Mordechai- the lifesaving information about Bigsan and Seresh's plot to kill the king.

To put this in perspective, the story of Purim is a remarkable one. Achashveirosh trusted Haman implicitly, and was willing to have the Jews killed. He elevated Haman to the position of prime minister, had people bow to Haman, and gave Haman the royal ring to sign letters in the name of the king. Throughout this part of the story, Achashveirosh was in a quagmire that would have taken him to a place of genocide and evil. What made Achashveirosh do an about-face, and totally turn the tables on Haman, in favor of the Jews?

Esther's plea certainly was a factor. But even after Esther made her plea, Achashveirosh still had a decision to make. On the one hand he had Haman, a person with whom he found commonality in his propaganda against the Jews. On the other hand, he had the Jews, and Mordechai in particular, who were respectable and were a substantial presence in the kingdom. How would Achashveirosh choose between these two loyalties? The Megilla tells us that the turning point was when Achashveirosh realized that Mordechai had saved his life. It was this information, originally provided by Esther in Mordechai's name, which caused Achashveirosh to switch his attitude. Thus was created the miracle of Purim, known as "V'nahapoch Hu," a total upturning of the situation.

The critical aspect causing the salvation, was not Esther's plea for Achashveirosh to reconsider. As important that plea was, that alone could not change the situation. What brought about the salvation, was that Esther had attributed goodness to Mordechai. As a result, when Achashveirosh had the choice of bad or good, he chose to see the Jews as good, because of Esther's prior influence.

Often, we find ourselves at a crossroads which requires a decision. A strong case can usually be made for both possibilities. In a certain sense, we choose one possibility over the other, and then show the supportive proofs to the decision that we made. The moment of decision, like the moment when Achashveirosh realized that Mordechai was a friend, not an enemy, is the moment that really causes the about-face from indecision or worse, to getting back on course. It is the comment to see things in a brighter light that enable us to move forward successfully. It is for creating that brighter light, which Esther is credited.

When Simon Wiesenthal was liberated after the Holocaust, he was quite bitter. Rabbi Eliezer Silver approached him and asked what was on his mind. Simon explained that during the time in the camps there was one Jew with a siddur, and he charged rations for people to rent it from him. "If a Jew can be so callous," he reasoned, "then he had every reason to be depressed."

Rabbi Silver asked him, "Were there Jews who cooperated with his terms? In the midst of death, were there Jews who did pay for the opportunity to pray with a Siddur?"

Wiesenthal responded that, indeed, many did.

"So then why do you focus on the one who was callous?" Rabbi Silver countered. "Why not focus your memory on the Jews who passionately and devoutly wanted to connect to G-d even in the shadow of evil and death, and paid from their life-giving rations to do so?"

Often, the greatest gift we can give, is simply to help someone refocus.

A Rebbe of mine related that on the day of his high school graduation, the principal called him in and asked, "So, Leibel, how do you think we did?"

The young man replied, "Frankly, I think this place did a lousy job."

"So," the principal replied, "I challenge you to go into Jewish education, and do better."

Because often it is not the facts that dictate our decisions. The facts pro and con are plentiful. It is the perspective of goodness that can create an about-face.

A married woman once shared at a marriage class that over the years she had quite a few arguments with her husband. But invariably, after an argument, as she moped, her eyes caught one of the newlywed pictures in their bedroom, and she was reminded of the love and commitment with which they started their marriage. That pushed her to reconsider her mood, and despite all the complaints, she chose to put her best effort forward to repair and restore the relationship. It is that goodness-perspective which Esther is credited in creating.

The Chofetz Chaim, in the laws of constructive Lashon Horah, describes the requirement to judge favorably and see the good. It is certainly a worthwhile endeavor. In fact, the Talmud (Brachos 20b) relates that although G-d is fair and just, when dealing with a person who favors people beyond the requirement, He acts with favoritism, and shines His countenance upon them. Sometimes, it is up to us, to create that goodness-moment for ourselves, as we reframe situations in a way that is positive and nurturing.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a Happy Purim!

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Ki Tissa: When Bad Things Happen to Good People**

After Moses succeeded in petitioning God to forgive the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf, he made an additional request from God: "If You are indeed pleased with me, allow me to know Your ways" (Ex. 33:12).

What exactly did Moses desire to know? The Talmud (Berachot 7a) explains that Moses wanted to understand the age-old problem of reward and punishment in this world:

*"Master of the Universe, why is it that some righteous people prosper, while others suffer? Why do some wicked people prosper, and others suffer?"*

#### **Two Factors**

According to Rabbi Yossi, God fulfilled Moses' request. The Talmud initially explains that anomalies in divine justice in this world are the result of ancestral merit. A righteous person whose parents were wicked may undergo suffering in this world, while a wicked person whose parents were righteous may be rewarded.

However, the Sages were not satisfied with this explanation. Why should a righteous person who rejected his parents' evil ways be punished? He should be rewarded doubly! The Sages conclude that if there are righteous who suffer, it must be because they are not fully righteous. (This is usually understood that they are punished in this world to atone for their sins so that their reward in the next world will be complete.) Similarly, the wicked who prosper must not be totally evil. They receive reward in this world for the few merits they do possess.

(The Talmud also mentions an additional factor, called “Afflictions of Love.” Even a perfectly righteous individual may suffer in this world in order to gain additional reward in the afterlife.)

Upon inspection, we discover that these two mitigating factors — ancestral merit and incompleteness of righteousness or wickedness — are interrelated. All actions may be broken up into two categories. Some actions are performed purposely, by choice; while others — the majority — are done without thought, but by habit or training. For a righteous person from a righteous family, good deeds come naturally. He does not need suffering in order to refine his soul. The righteous individual born in a wicked family, on the other hand, must work harder. His good deeds are a conscious effort, going against his education and natural bent. He therefore needs the refinement that comes from suffering in order to perfect his character traits.

The wicked person who hails from a righteous family is naturally helpful to others, and may have inherited many other positive character traits. Therefore, his portion in life is good, as he contributes to the world. But the wicked who comes from a wicked family is usually an utterly evil person. His lot in life is made difficult and unstable, in order to limit the damage that he may cause in the world.

### **Beyond Our Grasp**

The Talmud records a second opinion, Rabbi Meir, who disagreed with Rabbi Yossi. According to Rabbi Meir, God did not fulfill Moses’ request to explain the mechanics of suffering and reward in this world. The complex calculations of how much of our actions is a function of free will, and how much is due to society, education, and family background — belong to the Creator alone. The knowledge needed in order to understand divine justice in this world is beyond the grasp of all humans — even the master of all prophets, Moses.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. A 162-163. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p.32.)

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## **The Mysterious Life and Death of Hur** By Levi Avtzon\* © Chabad 2020

The story of Hur is one of heroism, tragedy and, ultimately, redemption.

Let us start from the beginning.

According to tradition, Moses’ older sister, Miriam, married Caleb, son of Yefuneh.<sup>1</sup> Miriam and Caleb had a son, whose name was Hur.

The first time we meet Hur is during the war with Amalek. It was very soon after the Exodus, and the nation of Amalek aimed to poke a hole in the invincibility of this newborn nation:

Moses said to Joshua, “Pick men for us, and go out and fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G d in my hand.” Joshua did as Moses had told him, to fight against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended to the top of the hill.

It came to pass that when Moses would raise his hand, Israel would prevail, and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail. Now, Moses’ hands were heavy; so they took a stone and placed it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one from this [side], and one from that [side]; so he was with his hands in faith until sunset . . .<sup>2</sup>

Hur, one of the three people who went up the hill to pray for salvation, was obviously a man of stature who was close to his venerated uncle Moses.

The next time we meet him is when Moses is climbing Mount Sinai for a 40-day learning session with the Divine, and tells the elders, “Wait for us here until we return to you, and here Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a case, let him go to them.”

At the most important junctures of Jewish life in the desert, Hur was there, together with his uncle Aaron.

The subsequent—and final—time we meet Hur is just a few weeks later. Moses had told the Jews that he would ascend the mountain and remain up there for 40 days. The Jews miscalculated, and when Moses did not descend the mountain by the deadline, they decided to create a Golden Calf.

Just 40 days after hearing the words “Thou shall have no other god,” they danced and celebrated before a Calf of Gold. And just twoscore after saying yes to “Don’t commit adultery,” they broke that cardinal rule as well.<sup>3</sup>

Idolatry, adultery—and murder. They also committed murder at the scene of the Golden Calf.

**Says the Midrash: 4**

*The sixth hour of the day arrived, and Moses had not descended from the heaven . . . They immediately gathered around Aaron. At that time Satan took advantage of the opportunity and made an image of Moses visible suspended lifeless between heaven and earth. The Jews pointed to the image with their fingers and said, "For this is the man Moses . . ."5*

*At that moment, Hur arose against them and said, "You severed necks! Do you not remember the miracle that our G d did for you?" Immediately, they arose against him and killed him.*

You read that right. It was six weeks after "Thou shall not murder," and there they were, murdering Moses' own nephew!

At the foot of Sinai, the Jews committed the three cardinal prohibitions. Moses would break the Tablets and beseech G d for mercy, and history would be changed forever in many ways as a consequence of this one morning.

You might think that Hur, who had just helped save the Jews from a terrible enemy a few weeks prior, and was now murdered for standing up for the honor of G d and His servant Moses, would end his story here at this all-time low.

But there is a postscript to Hur's story. The Torah tells us that when it came time to build the Tabernacle, G d told Moses to appoint an architect for this endeavor. The name of this young architect? Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur.<sup>6</sup> The honor to build the home for G d was given to the grandson of he who stood up to sanctify G d's name.

### **Meaning of the Name**

The Ohr Hachaim<sup>7</sup> offers an insight into the name Hur. Hur (Chur) shares the same root word as chorin, "freedom." He explains that it was only through building the Tabernacle that the Jews were finally freed from the blemish of their sins at the Golden Calf. Building a home for G d was their rectification of the sinful behavior that pushed G d away from them.

In other words, Betzalel, grandson of Hur, provided the Jews with the freedom from their sins that included killing his grandfather.

Hur, the lover of Jews<sup>8</sup> and defender of the faith, must have been deeply proud that the honor of G d and the unity of His people has been restored, thanks to his own grandson.

Thus, Hur's story ends not with tragedy, but with forgiveness and redemption.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Rashi Exodus 17:10, based on I Chronicles 2:19.
  2. Exodus 17:10.
  3. Rashi on Exodus 32:6.
  4. Cited in Rashi on Exodus 32:6.
  - 5 Exodus Rabbah 41.
  6. Exodus 31:2.
  7. On Exodus 31:2.
  8. Malbim (Exodus 17:12) refers to him as the unifier of Jews and the unifier between Jews and their G d.
- \* Senior Rabbi, Linksfield Senderwood Hebrew Congregation, Johannesburg, South Africa.

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## **Ki Tisa: In Their Best Light** by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

**When G-d finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two Tablets of the Testimony.** Shemot 31:18



G-d gave Moses the tablets on the 40th day of his stay on the mountain. But the people had already made the golden calf on the 39th day! In other words, even after the people had committed this most heinous sin, G-d continued to teach the Torah to Moses, and even gave him the tablets in order to transmit the Torah to all the Jewish people.

Similarly, we should always see people in their best light, encouraging them to study the Torah and fulfill G-d's commandments even if their actions seem to contradict G-d's wishes.

From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #2

Gut Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

### A Stiff-Necked People

It is a moment of the very highest drama. The Israelites, a mere forty days after the greatest revelation in history, have made an idol: a Golden Calf. God threatens to destroy them. Moses, exemplifying to the fullest degree the character of Israel as one who "wrestles with God and man," confronts both in turn. To God, he prays for mercy for the people. Coming down the mountain and facing Israel, he smashes the tablets, symbol of the covenant. He grinds the calf to dust, mixes it with water, and makes the Israelites drink it. He commands the Levites to punish the wrongdoers. Then he re-ascends the mountain in a prolonged attempt to repair the shattered relationship between God and the people.

God accepts his request and tells Moses to carve two new tablets of stone. At this point, however, Moses makes a strange appeal: And Moses hurried and knelt to the ground and bowed, and he said, "If I have found favour in Your eyes, my Lord, may my Lord go among us, because [ki] it is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance." (Ex. 34:8-9)

The difficulty in the verse is self-evident. Moses cites as a reason for God remaining with the Israelites the very attribute that God had previously given for wishing to abandon them: "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone so that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." (Ex. 32:9)

How can Moses invoke the people's obstinacy as the very reason for God to maintain His presence among them? What is the meaning of Moses' "because" – "may my Lord go among us, because it is a stiff-necked people"?

The commentators offer a variety of interpretations. Rashi reads the word *ki* as "if" – "If they are stiff-necked, then forgive them." [1] Ibn Ezra [2] and Chizkuni [3] read it as "although" or "despite the fact that" (*af al pi*). Alternatively, suggests Ibn Ezra, the verse might be read, "[I admit that] it is a stiff-necked people – therefore forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance." [4] These are straightforward readings, though they assign to the word *ki* a meaning it does not normally have.

There is, however, another and far more striking line of interpretation that can be traced across the centuries. In the twentieth century it

was given expression by Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum. The argument he attributed to Moses was this: Almighty God, look upon this people with favour, because what is now their greatest vice will one day be their most heroic virtue. They are indeed an obstinate people... But just as now they are stiff-necked in their disobedience, so one day they will be equally stiff-necked in their loyalty. Nations will call on them to assimilate, but they will refuse. Mightier religions will urge them to convert, but they will resist. They will suffer humiliation, persecution, even torture and death because of the name they bear and the faith they profess, but they will stay true to the covenant their ancestors made with You. They will go to their deaths saying *Ani ma'amin*, "I believe." This is a people awesome in its obstinacy – and though now it is their failing, there will be times far into the future when it will be their noblest strength. [5]

The fact that Rabbi Nissenbaum lived and died in the Warsaw ghetto gives added poignancy to his words. [6]

Many centuries earlier, a Midrash made essentially the same point: There are three things which are undaunted: the dog among beasts, the rooster among birds, and Israel among the nations. R. Isaac ben Redifa said in the name of R. Ami: You might think that this is a negative attribute, but in fact it is praiseworthy, for it means: "Either be a Jew or prepare to be hanged." [7]

Jews were stiff-necked, says Rabbi Ami, in the sense that they were ready to die for their faith. As Gersonides (Rabbi) explained in the fourteenth century, a stubborn people may be slow to acquire a faith, but once they have done so they never relinquish it. [8]

We catch a glimpse of this extraordinary obstinacy in an episode narrated by Josephus, one of the first recorded incidents of mass non-violent civil disobedience. It took place during the reign of the Roman emperor Caligula (37–41 CE). He had proposed placing a statue of himself in the precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem, and had sent the military leader Petronius to carry out the task, if necessary by force. This is how Josephus describes the encounter between Petronius and the Jewish population at Ptolemais (Acre):

There came ten thousand Jews to Petronius at Ptolemais to offer their petitions to him that he would not compel them to violate the law of their forefathers. "But if," they said, "you are wholly resolved to bring the statue and install it, then you must first kill us, and then do what you have resolved on. For while we are alive

we cannot permit such things as are forbidden by our law..."

Then Petronius came to them (at Tiberius): "Will you then make war with Caesar, regardless of his great preparations for war and your own weakness?" They replied, "We will not by any means make war with Caesar, but we will die before we see our laws transgressed." Then they threw themselves down on their faces and stretched out their throats and said that they were ready to be slain... Thus they continued firm in their resolution and proposed themselves to die willingly rather than see the statue dedicated." [9]

Faced with such heroic defiance on so large a scale, Petronius gave way and wrote to Caligula urging him, in Josephus' words, "not to drive so many ten thousand of these men to distraction; that if he were to slay these men, he would be publicly cursed for all future ages."

Nor was this a unique episode. The rabbinic literature, together with the chronicles of the Middle Ages, are full of stories of martyrdom, of Jews willing to die rather than convert. Indeed the very concept of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of God's name, came to be associated in the halachic literature with the willingness "to die rather than transgress." The rabbinic conclave at Lod (Lydda) in the second century CE, which laid down the laws of martyrdom (including the three sins about which it was said that "one must die rather than transgress") [10] may have been an attempt to limit, rather than encourage, the phenomenon. Of these many episodes, one stands out for its theological audacity. It was recorded by the Jewish historian Shlomo ibn Verga (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries) and concerns the Spanish expulsion:

One of the boats was infested with the plague, and the captain of the boat put the passengers ashore at some uninhabited place... There was one Jew among them who struggled on afoot together with his wife and two children. The wife grew faint and died... The husband carried his children along until both he and they fainted from hunger. When he regained consciousness, he found that his two children had died.

In great grief he rose to his feet and said: "O Lord of all the universe, You are doing a great

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deal that I might even desert my faith. But know You of a certainty that – even against the will of heaven – a Jew I am and a Jew I shall remain. And neither that which You have brought upon me nor that which You may yet bring upon me will be of any avail.”[11]

One is awestruck by such faith – such obstinate faith. Almost certainly it was this idea that lies behind a famous Talmudic passage about the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai: And they stood under the mountain: R. Avdimi b. Chama b. Chasa said: This teaches that the Holy One blessed be He, overturned the mountain above them like a barrel and said, “If you accept the Torah, it will be well. If not, this will be your burial place.” Said Rava, Even so, they re-accepted the Torah in the days of Ahasuerus, for it is written, “the Jews confirmed and took upon them”, meaning, “they confirmed what they had accepted before.”[12]

The meaning of this strange text seems to be this: at Sinai the Jewish people had no choice but to accept the covenant. They had just been rescued from Egypt. God had divided the sea for them; He had sent them manna from heaven and water from the rock. Acceptance of a covenant under such conditions cannot be called free. The real test of faith came when God was hidden. Rava’s quotation from the Book of Esther is pointed and precise. Megillat Esther does not contain the name of God. The rabbis suggested that the name Esther is an allusion to the phrase *haster astir et panai*, “I will surely hide My face.” The book relates the first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people. That Jews remained Jews under such conditions was proof positive that they did indeed reaffirm the covenant. Obstinate in their disbelief during much of the biblical era, they became obstinate in their belief ever afterwards. Faced with God’s presence, they disobeyed Him. Confronted with His absence, they stayed faithful to Him. That is the paradox of the stiff-necked people.

Not by accident does the main narrative of the Book of Esther begin with the words “And Mordechai would not bow down” (Esther 3:1). His refusal to make obeisance to Haman sets the story in motion. Mordechai too is obstinate – for there is one thing that is hard to do if you have a stiff neck, namely, bow down. At times, Jews found it hard to bow down to God – but they were certainly never willing to bow down to anything less. That is why, alone of all the many peoples who have entered the arena of history, Jews – even in exile, dispersed, and everywhere a minority – neither assimilated to the dominant culture nor converted to the majority faith.

“Forgive them because they are a stiff-necked people,” said Moses, because the time will come when that stubbornness will be not a tragic failing but a noble and defiant loyalty. And so it came to be.

[1] Rashi, commentary to Exodus 34:9.

[2] In his “short” commentary to Exodus 34:9. In his long commentary he quotes this view in the name of R. Yonah ibn Yanah (R. Marinus, 990–1050).

[3] Hezekiah ben Manoah, a French rabbi and exegete who lived during the thirteenth century.

[4] Ibn Ezra, “long” commentary ad loc.

[5] This is my paraphrase of the commentary cited in the name of R. Yitzhak Nissenbaum in Aaron Yaakov Greenberg, ed., *Iturei Torah*, Shemot (Tel Aviv, 1976), 269–70.

[6] For R. Nissenbaum’s remarkable speech in the Warsaw Ghetto, see Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken, 1982), 223.

[7] Beitza 25b; Shemot Rabbah 42:9.

[8] Ralbag, commentary to Exodus 34:9.

[9] Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews*, bk. 18, chap. 8. Cited in Milton Konvitz, “Conscience and Civil Disobedience in the Jewish Tradition,” in *Contemporary Jewish Ethics*, ed. Menachem Kellner (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978), 242–43.

[10] Sanhedrin 74a. The three sins were murder, idolatry and incest. Martyrdom was a complex problem at various points in Jewish history. Jews found themselves torn between two conflicting ideals. On the one hand, self-sacrifice was the highest form of Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of God’s name. On the other, Judaism has a marked preference for life and its preservation.

[11] In Nahum Glatzer, *A Jewish Reader* (New York: Schocken, 1975), 204–5. It was this passage that inspired Zvi Kolitz’s famous Holocaust fiction about one man’s defiance of God in the name of God, Yossel Rakover *Talks to God* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

[12] Shabbat 88a. See essay “Mount Sinai and the Birth of Freedom,” p. 149.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

“And God spoke unto Moses: Take unto you sweet spices, stacte [nataf ], onycha [shelet] and galbanum [helbena], these sweet spices with pure frankincense [levona], all of an equal weight.” (Exodus 30:34) One of the most unique aspects of the Sanctuary, continued in the Holy Temples, was the sweet-smelling spices of the incense burned on a special altar and whose inspiring fragrance permeated the House of God. In the portion of Ki Tisa the Torah lists the different spices, and their names – in Hebrew or English – are strange to our modern ears. But stranger still is the Rabbinic commentary that one of those spices – specifically helbena – is hardly sweet smelling. On the contrary, as Rashi writes, helbena “...is a malodorous spice which is known [to us as] gelbanah [galbanum]. Scripture enumerates it among the spices of the incense to teach us that we shouldn’t look upon the inclusion of Jewish transgressors in our fasts and prayers as something insignificant in our eyes; indeed, they [the transgressors of Israel] must also be included amongst us” (Rashi, ad loc.).

Rashi is conveying a most significant Rabbinic insight. The community of Israel – in Hebrew a *tzibur* – must consist of all types of Jews: righteous (the letter *tzadi* for *tzaddikim*), intermediate (the letter *bet* for *benonim*), and wicked (the letter *reish* for *resha’im*), just as the incense of the Sanctuary included spices of unappetizing fragrance. Perhaps because we must learn to take responsibility for every member of the “family” no matter what their

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behavior, perhaps because what appears to us as wicked may in reality be more genuine spirituality, perhaps because no evil is without its redeeming feature or perhaps merely in order to remind us not to be judgmental towards other human beings, the message of the incense could not be clearer: no Jew, even the most egregious sinner, dare be dismissed with mockery and derision from the sacred congregation of Israel. Every Jew must be allowed to contribute, and only when every Jew is included does the sweet fragrance properly emerge.

We have already seen how the Torah portion of Ki Tisa contains another striking example of the significance of every single Jew in Israel in the aftermath of the great sin in the desert. We read that soon after the revelation at Sinai, Moses’ prolonged communion with the divine frightened the people into worshipping a golden calf. Our Sages teach: “And God said to Moses, ‘Go down’ (Ex. 32:7). R. Elazar interprets: God was commanding Moses to descend from his elevated position. The only reason I gave you greatness is because of Israel, and now that Israel has sinned, what do I need you for?” (Berakhot 32a)

God is reminding Moses that God’s covenant with Abraham was with every single Jew. No Jew dare be discounted; every Jew must be loved, taught, and at least given the opportunity to come closer to God and our traditions. Even the Jew who is serving idols must be spoken to, ministered to!

A month or so after this portion is read, the Seder itself becomes a living demonstration of the necessity to include rather than to exclude any Jew. Take note of the proverbial four children: the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child and the child who knows not what to ask. It is instructive that the wicked child is not defined by the compiler of the Haggadah as one who eats non-kosher food or desecrates the Sabbath; the wicked child is rather the one who says “Of what value is this work for you?” Wickedness is defined as excluding oneself from the general Jewish community. And even if a person excludes herself – and is therefore called wicked – we dare not exclude her. Our Seder table must always be welcoming enough to include everyone, no matter who.

Indeed, towards the end of the Seder we are instructed to open the door for Elijah the prophet, forerunner of the Messiah. In the past I’ve commented that opening the door for Elijah seems superfluous given Elijah’s uncanny ability to visit every single Seder in the world; anyone capable of accomplishing such a remarkable feat certainly would not be stopped by a closed door. One answer that I’ve proposed is that the opening of the door is not really for Elijah; it is rather a symbolic gesture of opening the door to the fifth child, the child who has moved so far from the Jewish people that he isn’t even at the Seder! We must go out

to find him – even if he is at a neighborhood disco or a Far East ashram – and invite him to come back in. And why is Elijah associated with this gesture toward the fifth child? The closing verse of the last prophet included in the canon, Malakhi, declares: “Behold I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of God, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...” (Malakhi 3:23). No one, not the “wicked” child, and not even the “invisible” child, is to be excluded from the Seder, the commemoration of our first redemption. Parents and children must all join together in a loving and accepting reunion.

There is a fascinating halakhic ramification of our desire to include rather than to exclude. The Talmud (Eruvin 69b) suggests that a public desecrator of the Sabbath is comparable to an idolater, whose wine cannot be drunk and who cannot be counted for a statutory quorum (minyan) for prayer. Does this mean that a Jew who does not observe the Sabbath laws and rituals forfeits his rights to belong to a proper Jewish congregation? One of the towering Torah giants of nineteenth-century Germany, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, raises this very question in his collection of responsa, *Mellamed Leho’il* (Responsum 29), where he resoundingly rules that the Talmudic comparison no longer applies. He explains that during Talmudic times, when the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people was observant, and when a Jew was defined in terms of their Torah observance, any Jew who publicly desecrated the Sabbath was effectively testifying to their exclusion from the Jewish people. Therefore, in Talmudic times, a public Sabbath desecrator became the equivalent of an idolater; in effect, the perpetrator of such a public crime was excluding himself from the congregation of Israel and such a person was thereby relinquishing any rights to Jewish privileges.

However, explains Rabbi Hoffman, when – sadly enough – the overwhelming majority of Jews are not observant (and today this is even truer than it was in nineteenth-century Germany), a Jew who publicly desecrates the Sabbath is not at all making a statement of exclusion from the peoplehood of Israel. On the contrary, the very fact that such a desecrator attends a synagogue (if only a few times a year) and is willing to partake in the service indicates a definite feeling of belonging and a will to belong to the historic community of Israel. Therefore, Rabbi Hoffman concludes, a Sabbath desecrator must not only be included in a minyan, but should be encouraged to become more involved.

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#### **The Person in the Parsha** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

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#### **The Inevitable Comedown**

It was over forty years ago, but I remember the feelings very well. They were overwhelming,

and were not dispelled easily. It was just after I had completed all of my course requirements and dissertation defense in the process of obtaining my doctorate in psychology. Like any graduate school experience, this was the culmination of several years of study and hard work. The ordeal was now over, and a celebration was in order.

And celebrate I did, together with my wife, my young children, several other students, and assorted friends. But then, the celebration was suddenly over. I found myself inexplicably moody and depressed. A sense of emptiness enveloped me. At first, I thought it was just a result of a transition from a state of being busy to a state of boredom.

However, the feelings lingered for quite some time. I tried to rid myself of my moodiness in various ways, and it must have been difficult for those close to me to be around me. Luckily, the feelings were soon gone, as suddenly and as mysteriously as they had come.

Quite a while later, I learned that this curious phenomenon was very common. When people achieve great accomplishments, having put great effort and toil into them, they experience a sense of exhilaration and excitement. A “high.” Soon afterwards, and often very soon afterwards, there is a “comedown” from that “high.”

It is as if, now that the goal with which one had been long preoccupied was reached, life had become meaningless. There is nothing further to do, no ongoing purpose. A pervasive sense of emptiness ensues.

The struggle to fill that emptiness is fraught with danger. In my own case, the emptiness thankfully passed in relatively short order, with no harm done, and no unusual “acting out” on my part. But others in similar predicaments frequently attempt to fill that emptiness in ways which result in great, and sometimes tragic, difficulties.

The psychological mechanism I have just described helps to explain a most puzzling event in this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35). I refer, of course, to the episode of the Golden Calf.

Just a few short weeks ago, in the Torah portion of Yitro, we read of how the Children of Israel experienced the most momentous occasion in human history. The Almighty revealed Himself to them at Mount Sinai in an awe inspiring atmosphere of thunder and lightning. They heard the voice of God, and they were spiritually elevated by His revelation. They were, almost literally, on a “high.”

Moses then ascends Mount Sinai, and remains there for forty days and forty nights. During that time, the people come down from their “high.” His disappearance mystifies them, they

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become impatient and irritable. We can empathize with their sense of emptiness, although we are shocked by the manner in which they choose to deal with that emptiness.

“When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people came together unto Aaron, and said unto him: ‘Up, make us a god...’ And all the people broke off all the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron... he... made it a molten calf and they said: ‘This is thy god, O Israel...’ He built an altar before it... And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry.” (Exodus 32:1-6)

What a comedown! How can one explain a process of spiritual deterioration as drastic as this? Just weeks ago the Jewish people were on the highest possible level of religiosity and commitment to the one God. Now they are dancing and prancing before a golden idol. Is this not inexplicable?

Yes, it is inexplicable, but it is a common human phenomenon. People are capable of attaining greatness, but they are not as capable of sustaining greatness. They can achieve “highs” of all kinds, but they cannot maintain those “highs.” There is an inevitable “comedown.”

This concept is so very well expressed in the following verse:

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?  
Who may stand in His holy place?” (Psalms 24:3)

Homiletically, this has been interpreted to mean that even after the first question is answered, and we learn “who may ascend the mountain,” the question still remains: “Who can continue to stand there?” It is relatively easy to ascend to a high level; much more difficult is remaining at that high-level and preserving it.

My revered colleague, one of the most insightful spiritual thinkers of our age, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, believes that the best example of deterioration following an exciting climax is the experience of childbirth itself. He points to the phenomenon known as “postpartum depression.” A woman, a mother, has just experienced what is probably the highest of all “highs,” the emergence of a child from her womb. But quite commonly, that experience is followed by a sense of depression, which is sometimes incapacitating, and sometimes even disastrous.

The physiological process of giving birth calls upon the utilization of every part of the mother’s body, from her muscles and nervous system to her hormonal fluids. Her body has exerted itself to the maximum. In the process she has achieved the greatest of all achievements, the production of another human being.

But soon afterwards, when the body, as it were, has nothing left to do, she feels depleted and empty. She can easily sink into a depression, sometimes deep enough to merit a clinical diagnosis of “postpartum depression.”

This is an important lesson in our personal spiritual lives. Often we experience moments of intense spirituality, of transcendence. But those moments are brief, and transitory. When they are over we feel “shortchanged,” and we despair of ever returning to those precious experiences.

We must take hope in the knowledge that almost all intense human experiences are transitory, and are followed by feelings of hollowness. We can ascend the mountain, but we cannot long stand there.

We must humbly accept our descent, our frustrating failures and limitations, and persist in climbing the mountain. Ups and downs, peaks and valleys, are to be expected in all aspects of our life.

We will experience “highs,” but we must expect the inevitable “comedown.” And we must hang in there and try and try again to recapture those “highs.”

This is the lesson of this week’s parsha. Our people ascended a spiritual mountain. They then descended into an orgy of idolatry. But then they persisted and with the assistance of God’s bountiful mercy and, as we read later in the Torah portion, received this divine assurance:

“And he said, behold, I make a covenant: Before all Thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth...And all the people...shall see the work of the Lord...” (Exodus 34:10)

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**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**  
**Shabbos Comes Automatically; Yom Tov Requires Preparation**

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In Parshas Ki Sisa, in connection with the mitzvah of Shabbos, the Torah says, “...for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am Hashem, Who Sanctifies you.” [Shemos 31:13]. The Chasam Sofer points out that there is a fundamental difference between Shabbos and the other Yomim Tovim. On Shabbos, the Ribono shel Olam and kedusha [holiness] arrives, whether we are ready or not, and whether we are prepared or not. The mere fact that it is Shabbos invests us and imbues us with a certain kedusha.

We understand that the more a person prepares for Shabbos, and the more a person makes him or herself a receptacle for Shabbos – the higher will be the level of kedusha that the person achieves. However, the bottom line is that this pasuk teaches that the Shechina [Divine Presence] joins us on Shabbos and makes

everybody holier, whether we prepared for it or not.

Holidays are not like that. There is a concept in Kabbalah [Jewish mysticism] called “Arousal from Above” and “Arousal from below.” Sometimes there is an inspiration that comes from Above and sometimes the inspiration needs to come from us. By Yom Tov, we need to prepare ourselves to achieve the effect that the holiday is supposed to have upon us. It is a case where the “Arousal from below” must come into play. Shabbos is a case of “Arousal from Above.”

This is part of what Chazal mean by the expression “The Almighty said ‘I have a wonderful present in my treasure house – and it is named Shabbos’”. When someone gives a gift, the recipient does not necessarily need to deserve it. He does not necessarily need to prepare for it.

That is Shabbos. It is a gift. Every single week the Shechina comes down. We sit there at Kabbalas Shabbos whether we just ran into Shabbos or not. The Divine Presence arrives and rests on every single Jew no matter what his level of Shabbos preparation may have been.

The Sefer Bei Chiyah makes an interesting observation based on this Chasam Sofer. When we put back the Sefer Torah in the Aron Kodesh on Shabbos, we say Tehillim [Psalms] Chapter 29 “Mizmor L’Dovid” [A Psalm to David]. On Yom Tov, when we return the Sefer Torah to the Aron Kodesh, we recite Tehillim Chapter 24 “L’Dovid Mizmor” [To David a Psalm]. Why the difference? He shares a beautiful idea.

Throughout Tehillim, there are varying introductions to the various chapters. Dovid HaMelech was inspired to compose the chapters of Tehillim. Sometimes, without any preparation, he was simply inspired by Ruach HaKodesh to compose a chapter of Tehillim. When that occurred, the introductory phrase is “Mizmor l’Dovid.” There are other chapters of Tehillim where Dovid HaMelech was inspired to write the Mizmor [psalm chapter], but he first had to prepare himself to be in an inspired state of mind so he could compose such a Mizmor. That is when the introductory phrase is “L’Dovid Mizmor”, meaning Dovid HaMelech had to first prepare himself, and then prepare the Mizmor.

Sefer Bei Chiyah explains beautifully. On Shabbos which is, as we are explaining, the great present that the Almighty gives us whether we made the preparation or not – the appropriate chapter of Tehillim to read is Mizmor L’Dovid Havu l’Hashem Bnei Eilim. On Yom Tov, where the level of holiness is a result of our preparation, it needs to be L’Dovid Mizmor.

Using this concept, he also wants to explain a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi. The halacha is that some people have trustworthiness (ne’manus) with regards to

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Terumos and Masros. This means they can be trusted that they removed the required gifts for the Kohanim and the Leviim, and therefore their crops (which grew in Eretz Yisrael) are now edible rather than being forbidden tevel.

The Yerushalmi says that one who purchases fruit in Eretz Yisrael from one who is generally not trusted regarding the proper taking of Terumos and Masros is nevertheless allowed – on Shabbos – to inquire of the seller if he in fact removed these Priestly and Levitical gifts from the fruit, and he can believe him. This permission is unique to Shabbos; during the week one is normally not allowed to merely question the seller and believe his testimony that he in fact removed the Terumos and Masros.

The Yerushalmi explains the reason for this novel ruling: “Because the fear of Shabbos is upon him!” On Yom Tov, there is not such a halacha. We do not have a license to trust an Am HaAretz to tell us that he removed the Priestly gifts from the food he sold us. What is the difference between Shabbos and Yom Tov? Even if this person may be an ignoramus and may have entered into the synagogue from the field just three minutes before Shabbos started, when he sat there for Kabbalas Shabbos and he heard the words “Come my Bride; come my Bride” – this Am Ha’Aretz was invested with the holiness of Shabbos and that does something to his spiritual essence. The fear of Shabbos is now upon him. He is no longer suspect of lying and saying that something had tithes taken off from it when that was not the case. Even the most ordinary Jew is special on Shabbos – he has the Fear of Shabbos upon him.

On Yom Tov, this is not true. Yom Tov is special; Yom Tov is beautiful; Yom Tov has its own holiness, but it requires preparation. Therefore, a person who is an Am Ha’Aretz, if he does not have that preparation, there is no such concept as “The Fear of Yom Tov is upon him.”

So, Shabbos has this special quality. However, Yom Tov, by virtue of the fact that you have to “work” to prepare yourself for its holiness has its own advantage as well. The Gemara [Beitzah 16a] comments on another pasuk in this week’s parsha – “...On the seventh day He rested and va’yinafash:” [Shemos 31:17] Rav Shimon ben Lakish states that Hashem gives man an extra soul (neshama Yeseira) on Shabbos Eve and takes it from him at the conclusion of Shabbos. This “neshama Yeseira” is part of this extra holiness that we all receive on Shabbos. This is why we smell Besamim [sweet fragrances] on Motzai Shabbos. It is like when a person faints, they put smelling salts in front of his nose to restore him, so too, we need to be restored on Motzai Shabbos after having suffered the loss of our neshama Yeseira. We had this special gift for the duration of Shabbos. When Shabbos left, it left. That’s it! Easy come, easy go!

Tosfos says in Pesachim and Beitzah that this is why we do not use Besamim in Havdala at the conclusion of Yom Tov. It is because Yom Tov does not bring with it a neshama Yeseira. That is a special concept that is part of the “Divine Gift” we are given from G-d’s Treasure House on Shabbos. It does not apply to Yom Tov. Therefore, Motzai Yom Tov, we do not need to be “restored” because we did not lose anything.

Tosfos in Tractate Pesachim raises a question for which he does not give an answer: What about a Yom Tov that comes out on Sunday (i.e. – it begins Motzai Shabbos)? The Kiddush we say at the beginning of such a Yom Tov incorporates Havdolah for the now departing Shabbos and is referred to by the acronym YaKNeHaZ (Yayin—wine; Kiddush; Ner (Candle); Havdalah, Zman (She’hechyanu blessing). However, we do not make a Beracha on Besamim as part of this Kiddush-Havdalah combination!

Tosfos asks: Why not? Shabbos is over so we lost our Neshama Yeseira. We are not getting a new Neshama Yeseira for Yom Tov so we should need to be restored from our post-Shabbos loss!

The Avnei Nezer and the Sefas Emes in Tractate Pesachim argue with Tosfos, and say that we do have a neshama Yeseira on Yom Tov. That is why when Yom Tov begins on Motzai Shabbos, you do not need Besomim, becomes the Neshama Yeseira remains throughout Yom Tov. If that is the case, why don’t we use Besomim with Havdalah at the conclusion of Yom Tov? The Avnei Nezer answers – it is because the “Neshama Yeseira” of Yom Tov does not leave us. As we mentioned, we need to work for the inspiration of Yom Tov. A Yom Tov for which a person had to work to inspire himself to earn the Neshama Yeseira does not depart immediately after the holiday with an “easy come easy go” disappearance. It is “hard come and hard go”. It does not leave us.

Unlike Tosofos, who explains that the reason we do not have Besamim on Motzai Yom Tov is because we do not have a Neshama Yeseira on Yom Tov, the Avnei Nezer explains we do have a Neshama Yeseira on Yom Tov but we do not lose it and therefore do not need to be “refreshed” by pleasant fragrance.

### **The Circle the Almighty Will Make for the Righteous in the Future**

The other idea I would like to share on Parshas Ki Sisa is based on a thought of the Chasam Sofer which was expanded by the sefer Bei Chiyah.

Moshe Rabbeinu asks the Ribono shel Olam, “Show me please your Glory.” Moshe Rabbeinu said he would like to see the Kavod of the Master of the Universe. The Almighty responds to Moshe Rabbeinu: “...Behold! There is a place with Me; and you will stand on the rock. When My glory passes by, I shall place you in a cleft of the rock, and I shall cover you with My palm until I have passed.

Then I shall remove My palm and you will see My back, but My Face may not be seen.” [Shemos 33:21-23] This is the literal translation of the words of these pesukim.

The Talmud [Berachos 7a] explains that this question and answer between Moshe Rabbeinu and the Almighty was more than just a question of “I want to see what You look like.” Moshe was asking the most fundamental question that has bothered mankind since the beginning of time. This question (to which in our lifetime we will never really know the answer) is the question of Tzadik v’Rah lo, Rasha v’Tov lo [Why do bad things happen to righteous people and good things happen to wicked people?] The entire book of Iyov is devoted to trying to understand this concept.

The Chasam Sofer explains the Ribono shel Olam’s answer to this question. The answer is, “And you shall see My back, but not My front.” If you want to understand why bad things happen to good people in this world while they are happening — that you will never understand! “My Face” – indicates “up front” – while it is happening. That you will never comprehend. However, “seeing My Back” indicates that sometimes, in retrospect, we can look back at an event that while the event was happening, we could not figure out why on earth it should be happening, but in retrospect, occasionally, we can have a better understanding of why it happened.

A classic example of this is the story of Esther. When Esther was chosen to be the Queen of King Achashverosh, I am sure that for a person of her spiritual stature, it was the worst thing that could happen to her. Here is a righteous woman and she has to consort with this disgusting person. Why is this happening? “What terrible mazal that I got chosen as the Queen!”

The Megillah may take us only 45 minutes to read, but the events portrayed therein took over ten years to transpire. From the time that Esther was chosen, years passed when Esther had no idea why she was chosen. As it turned out years later, the fact that she was chosen as queen proved to be the salvation of the entire Jewish people. This is an example of “You will see My Back but My Face you will not see.” This is what the Chasam Sofer writes.

The Gemara says in Maseches Taanis [31a] “In the future G-d will make a circle for the righteous (machol l’Tzadikim).” This means, as it were, that Hashem will sit in the middle of a circle like a groom at his wedding and the Tzadikim will all dance around Him. When we dance in a circle around the Chosson, not only do we see the face of the groom, we see also his back. In this world, we will not see His Face. We will not understand the way He conducts His world, up front. However, in the future, Hashem will be in the middle of the circle, we will dance around Him and even be able to see (and understand) His Face – i.e. why things happen when they happen.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

This is what the Tzlach in Maseches Pesachim [50a] writes. The Gemara says, “the future world is not like the present world” (lo k’olam hazeh olam habah). In this world, we recite the blessing “Blessed is He who is Good and does Good” (haTov u’Meitiv) on good news, and we recite the blessing “Blessed is the True Judge” (Dayan haEmes) on evil tidings. In the future world, we will make the blessing “Blessed is He who is Good and does Good” on all news. The Tzlach explains that this does not mean that in the future there is not going to be bad news. There still could be bad news, but even on the bad news we will make the HaTov u’Meitiv bracha, because we will understand why it is happening. This is the circle that the Almighty will make – not only will we see His Back, but we will see His Front as well.

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### **Dvar Torah**

#### **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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#### **How can we find comfort when tragedy strikes?**

In Parashat Ki Tisa we are told that Hashem intended to destroy the Jewish people in the aftermath of the worshipping of the golden calf and the smashing of the tablets.

Moshe prayed to Hashem and he said, “Shuv Mecharon Apecha – Please God, relent from Your wrath.” “V’Hinacheim Al Hara’a Le’amecha – And reconsider the bad that you are going to be bringing to Your people.”

It is fascinating that the term used here is ‘V’hinacheim’, from ‘Nechama’ – which means ‘comfort’. So why is that term used for ‘reconsidering’?

Indeed we find that after Moshe’s prayer was successful the Torah tells us, “Vayinacheim Hashem Al Hara’ah – God indeed reconsidered.”

What we see from here is that ‘comfort’ is directly linked to the idea of ‘reconsideration’. It is linked to a change of attitude, a change of mind set and a change of action.

In the wake of tragedy when we experience grief, God forbid, one can simply wait for the world to come and bring them pity. One can engage in self-pity. But ultimately, in order to grow, to develop and to move forward, it is important that there is change. Because when one can effect a change of attitude, a change of mind-set and most definitely a change of circumstances, one is better placed to be able to cope.

Let’s consider what happened to the Jewish people after the Shoah, the most horrific national tragedy to have befallen us and perhaps to any people on earth. I think the world would have understood if the Jewish people were condemned to an eternal state of paralysis and depression. But that is not what happened. In the midst of our grief, with the emotional wounds still raw to this day, we have taken action.

In the immediate aftermath of the Shoah, there

was a dramatic increase in commitment to Torah and to Mitzvot, to fighting hate and racism, to improving the values of society, trying to guarantee that the scourge of antisemitism would not raise its head again and, most significantly of all, creating the State of Israel.

We changed our national circumstances so that we could move forward constructively.

From Parashat Ki Tisa we learn that in those trying and difficult moments of our lives – and they affect all of us a one time or another – of course there is no easy answer to any situation but most definitely we need to recognise that ‘Nechama’ – comfort is not necessarily going to come from what other people will do for us. Rather it is within our hearts, within our minds and within our power to do something in order to bring about the comfort that we need.

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

#### **Rabbi Mordechai Willig**

#### **Undistracted Prayer**

I. Moshe said, "Please show me Your glory." Hashem said, "I will call out with the Name Hashem before you" (Shemos 33:19). Rashi explains this teaches us the order of requesting mercy. As you see Me enwrapped and reciting the Thirteen Attributes, you should teach Yisroel to do so.

Hashem passed before him and called out the Thirteen Attributes (34:6,7). Hashem, as it were, enwrapped Himself like a shaliach tzibbur and told Moshe, When Yisroel sin before Me, they should perform this order before Me in this order and I will forgive them (Rosh Hashana 17b).

The Maharal (Be'er Hagola 4, Machon Yerushalayim edition, p. 488-499 with Rav Hartman's notes) explains that it is impossible to see Hashem's glory. One can only see His attributes and thereby cleave unto Him, which was Moshe's request. We are taught to cleave unto His attributes, particularly Chesed (Sotah 14a). By performing Chesed on our own beyond absolute requirements, we fulfill "After Hashem your G-d you shall walk" (Devarim 13:5).

If one concentrates in Tefilla and does not turn away from Hashem, Hashem responds by being with him completely. A shaliach tzibbur wraps himself in a talis, so as not to look right or left, to daven with total kavana, from the depths of his heart (see Mishna Berura 91:6). Hashem is close to those who call to Him truthfully (Tehillim 145:18).

The Maharal notes that one who is in crisis is more likely to daven with the focus linked to ituf. Thus, a "poor man prays when he is enwrapped" (Tehillim 102:1) both physically, in a talis (Metzudah) and mentally, focused on his crisis, without any distraction (see perushei Maharal in Artsroll Tehilim Mikra'os Gedolos 2017 edition), pouring out his heartfelt prayer to Hashem (ibid). Similarly, (ibid 107:4-6)

when hungry, thirsty and lost in the desert, the enwrapped souls cry out to Hashem in their crisis, and He saves them from their dangerous plight. When one concentrates completely, without turning right or left, Hashem responds in kind, enwrapping Himself as a shaliach tzibbur. Hashem is then close to the person, who then cleaves to the goodness of Hashem, achieving the greatest possible closeness, as Moshe requested.

II. Tefilla without any extraneous thoughts, as the Maharal defines proper prayer, is exceedingly difficult to achieve. Even the Amora'im did not always succeed (see Yerushalmi Brachos, end of 2:4).

Perhaps for this reason, the Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvos 5) limits the Torah obligation of prayer to times of crisis. In an Eis tzara focused prayer is more attainable. As there is "no atheist in a foxhole," tefilla when life is on the line is more intense and focused. In shul, uninspired tefilla is often followed by devotional Tehilim in case of war or life threatening illness. Intense prayer, and even tears, are much more common on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur when the books of life and death are open before Hashem.

The Rav zt"l (Reflections of the Rav, p. 80-81) suggested that the Rambam agrees fundamentally with the Ramban. He counts daily prayer as a Torah command because, in a sense, every day is an eis tzara. Our lives are always in danger, and our continued existence and welfare depend on Hashem's kindness. Internalizing this idea is the key to focused prayer.

The Rashba (Berachos 13b) states that if one's mind wanders in the middle of the first Beracha of Shemone Esrei it may invalidate the beracha (see Be'ur Halacha 101:1). We don't repeat Shemone Esrei if we fail to focus on the meaning of the first bracha only because we will likely fail in our second attempt as well (Rama Orach Chaim 101:1). The other case when distraction is possibly an invalidation is the first passuk of Shema. For this reason, it is customary to cover our eyes so that we should not look at anything which will prevent kavana (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 61:5).

The first beracha of Shemone Esrei and the first passuk of Shema are not supplications. They affirm belief in Hashem and His rule as a King who helps, saves and protects us. We must recite these prayers with no distractions. This will allow us to focus for the remainder of Shema and Shemone Esrei. One's head covered by a talis in Shemone Esrei resembles covering one's eyes at the beginning of Kriyas Shema.

III. When we daven, every effort should be made to avoid distractions. During the entire Shemone Esrei, one must either close his eyes or read from a siddur (Mishna Berura 95:5).

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Even during Chazaras Hashatz, one should follow along by looking in the siddur (Mishna Berura 96:9).

The Chasam Sofer (Choshen Mishpat 190) rules that we separate women from men in shul so that when men daven, they should not be distracted by the sight or the voice of women. For prayer to be effective, one's thought must be pure and focused.

Nowadays, cellphones, especially smartphones, pose a constant distraction. Except for emergency responders, these devices should, ideally, not even enter the shul. Certainly, except for emergencies, email and text messages should not be read or sent. Obviously, all sounds must be turned off, lest others be distracted as well. A shul must be accorded at least as much respect as a courtroom and a theater.

In this vein, non-essential conversations must be avoided in shul. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 51:4) prohibits all conversations between Baruch She'amar and the end of Shemone Esrei. The Mishna Berura (9) citing Eliyah Raba (3) extends the prohibition until after Tachanun, thereby including Chazaras Hashatz as well, a point explicitly and frighteningly made in the Shulchan Aruch (124:7). The Eliyah Raba (ibid) forbids conversation during tefilla b'tzibbur until after Aleinu as well as idle chatter in shul at all times.

The Maharal adds that Hashem taught Moshe not only what to say - in context, the Thirteen Attributes, and by extension, the words of our tefilla - but also how to pray: enwrapped in a talis, denoting total and undistracted concentration. May we all strive towards that ideal, so that our tefillos be answered and our mutual closeness to Hashem be achieved.

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#### **OTS Dvar Torah: Rabbanit Sally Mayer Rosh Midrasha of Midreshet Lindenbaum's Overseas Program**

How does the detailed description of the construction of the Mishkan relate to our lives today?

We are all part of a large and important group to which each one of us contributes, in order to build a strong and cohesive society. But at the same time, each individual is an entire world. We are all supposed to bring our own personalities and initiatives to bear when we serve Hashem, both individually and communally.

At the beginning of Parshat Ki Tisa, Hashem commands that the Jews are to be counted in a rather unique way – by levying a half-shekel from each person “to atone for your souls.” The Torah repeats the words “a contribution” three times when mentioning this commandment. Rashi explains, based on a Gemara in Tractate Megillah (page 29) that these are three different contributions. The first

is a contribution of a half-shekel from each individual, which is used to prepare the foundation sockets of the Mishkan. The second is a half-shekel donation from each person, money which is used to purchase the communal offerings that will be made over the entire year, and the third is a contribution “from each man, according to what his heart desires.” In other words, everyone brings whatever he or she wishes, with no restrictions or definitions. What is the significance of these contributions? What does each one symbolize?

The modern-day equivalent of the service in the Mishkan is prayer. The Talmud in Tractate Brachot (page 26) mentions a famous dispute on the source from which we deduce that we must pray three times a day. Rabbi Yossi, the son of Rabbi Hanina, says that our forefathers instituted the prayers, while Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi maintains that prayers were instituted to parallel the daily burnt-offerings. What is the main difference between these two approaches, and what is the message of each one?

Rabbi Yossi quotes several verses to substantiate his claim that it was the forefathers that instituted prayer. Abraham instituted shacharit, the morning prayer, when he tried convincing Hashem not to eradicate Sodom. We find that Abraham had the courage to argue with the Creator of the World and bring about change through his prayers. His son, Isaac, instituted mincha, or the afternoon prayer, when waiting for the wife that Abraham’s servant had found for him. He went out to converse in the field, and prayed for an unknown future. Our third forefather, Jacob, prayed when he fled from his brother, Esau, who sought to kill him. He found a place in which to spend the night and prayed out of a feeling of intense fear, establishing the evening prayer of Arvit. Hashem calmed him by speaking to him through the famous dream of the ladder.

According to this approach, we learn that prayer at certain times of day is analogous with certain situations in a person’s life – confidence in the morning, when the sun is out; uncertainty at dusk; and fear at night, when darkness and confusion reign. Our forefathers’ institution of prayer reveals the personal side of prayer. They each pray in their own words, at a time of their choosing, at their own initiative, and out of a profound need that comes from within.

Conversely, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s method suggests that prayers were instituted parallel to the daily burnt-offerings, which were sacrificed in the morning and at dusk in the Mishkan and in the Beit Hamikdash. These offerings have their own permanent rules and a precise protocol used every day of the year, including the Sabbath and Yom Kippur. This method stresses the permanent facet of prayer – accuracy, observing a commandment, and

following a uniform text and schedule every day.

The Gemara draws the conclusion that both of these sages were correct. The prayers were indeed instituted by the forefathers, but our sages linked these prayers to the sacrifices. Thus, we must pray every day, at set hours, and recite a set text – but we can also infuse these prayers with our own personal fears, hopes, sentiments, and aspirations.

Now let’s go back to the contributions to the Mishkan. What do these three contributions really mean?

They made the prayer sockets out of the first contribution. These were silver items that kept the posts of the Mishkan upright and stabilized it. In other words, the sockets constituted the base that propped up the Mishkan, and this was the contribution meant to establish the worship of Hashem through a single communal effort.

The second contribution was earmarked for public offerings made over the course of the year, and it was collected annually. This is why we read Parshat Shekalim every year – to remind us of the half-shekel that was levied between Purim and the first day of Nisan. This contribution is about how the Jews had all contributed equally to the offerings regularly made in the Mishkan day after day, and year after year. The third contribution received was one in accordance to the desires of each donor. This contribution signifies the personal and individual aspect of this act.

Thus, the contributions to the Mishkan remind us of our worship of Hashem in today’s day and age. Though we no longer have a Temple, we have our prayers, which are our way of worshipping Hashem regularly nowadays, and they are our way of turning to Hashem to make requests and give thanks. We are all part of a large and important group to which each one of us contributes, in order to build a strong and cohesive society. But at the same time, each individual is an entire world. We are all supposed to bring our own personalities and initiatives to bear when we serve Hashem, both individually and communally.

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### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah**

**by Rabbi Label Lam**

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#### **To Put the Picture Back Together Again**

When He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moshe the two tablets of the testimony, stone tablets, written with the finger of G-d. (Shemos 31:18)

Now it came to pass when he drew closer to the camp and saw the calf and the dances- that Moshe’s anger was kindled, and he flung the tablets from his hands, shattering them at the foot of the mountain. (Shemos 32:19)

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

And HASHEM said to Moshe: “Carve for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. (Shemos 34:1)

What was in that special gold laden box in the Holy of Holies? The Talmud (Brochos 8A) tells us that both sets of Tablets were in the Holy Ark, the 2nd set of Luchos that were carved by Moshe and the 1st set that was the handiwork of G-d that Moshe shattered in response to the Golden Calf. These are what reside in the heart of hearts of the relationship between HASHEM and the Jewish People. Why? What do they represent?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin) spells out a broad outline of human history. There will be 6,000 years divided up into three sets of 2000 years. The first 2000 years are called “Tohu v Vohu-void and nothingness”. The word was built with perfection and man was originally in a state of perfection. In this epoch, man is left up to his own devices and he defiles, crashes, and burns a world that was once pristine and pure.

The next 2000 years begin from 52 years after the birth of Avraham. He rediscovered HASHEM ECHOD and began to teach the world. This period is characterized by the development of the Jewish People and the raining down of prophetic guidance from above to the world below.

The latter era of 2000 years is called the Epoch of Moshiach and it is a world where prophecy is no more but the Torah is already here in this world and yet man is left up to his own devices again without overt miraculous intervention. It’s a slug fest, a fight to the end between forces of order and chaos. Why is all this necessary?

Imagine a young child is given by his loving father a beautiful picture in a frame. He is told not to pull the screw out of the corner of the frame. He is tempted to do so and he does it. Now that magnificent picture is really a giant jig saw puzzle and it slowly begins to disassemble. That is the portrait of the first 2000. The child is now crying with all the broken pieces around him, a shattered picture with no apparent order, but with a sense that everything should fit neatly.

Now the father begins to assist the child like a tutor to put the pieces together until the picture is once again complete. The child is pleased beyond words. That little child was like Avraham and his progeny the Jewish People. From a splintered world of idolatry to the building of the Beis HaMikdash and the spreading of the notion of HASHEM ECHOD all over the world, that is the essence of those 2nd 2000 years.

Then the loving father does something surprising and shocking. He pulls the screw out of the corner of the newly framed and



perfected picture. The picture begins to fall apart again the child is crying but the loving father reminds him, “It was given to you whole. It was broken. I helped you fix it. Now you have to put it together again by yourself. It will remain forever as your accomplishment.”

The 1st Tablets were made by HASHEM. They were shattered. The 2nd Tablets were carved out by Moshe. Everyone did Teshuvah and built a Mishkan to put the picture back together again.

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#### Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

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#### The Golden Calf and Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Statue

By Naamah Golan<sup>1</sup>

The sin of the golden calf mentioned in *Parashat Ki Tissa* is one of the gravest sins in the history of the people of Israel. It was so grave that it caused the Lord to wish to put an end to the Israelites and make Moses the progenitor of a great people. The contrast Scripture portrays between Moses and the people further heightens the seriousness of this sin.

In Exodus 24:12, the Lord commands Moses: “Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the **stone** tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them.” Moses indeed ascends the mountain and remains there for forty days and forty nights, in the course of which he is commanded to build the Tabernacle. After this period, it says, “When He finished speaking with him on **Mount** Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact, **stone** tablets inscribed with the finger of Gd” (Ex. 31:18).

The festive mood, however, rapidly turns to deep crisis. The transition from the concluding verse of chapter 31 to the opening verse of chapter 32 expresses the contrast between where Moses was and where the people were, both physically and spiritually. While Moses was on the mountain, receiving the Torah, the people were ganging up around Aaron, asking him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him” (Ex. 32:1).

Aside from the geographical contrast between Moses, on high, and the people, at the foot of

the mountain, there is another contrast: between **stone** tablets and the **golden** calf. Moses received **stone** tablets inscribed by the finger of Gd, whereas the people took off the **gold** earrings on their women. This contrast becomes even more stark when Moses comes down from the mountain carrying the stone tablets and sees the golden calf and the people dancing around it. The contrast was so stark that Moses could contain it, and he cast the tablets from his hands, breaking them at the foot of the mountain. In addition, Moses burned the golden calf and “ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it” (Ex. 32:20).

The motif of burning the golden calf, grinding it to powder and strewing it on the water reverberates in a later story, that of the “dream of the statue” in the book of Daniel, chapter 2. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a huge statue, its head of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet part iron and part clay. In the second part of the dream, a stone appeared and crushed the statue, turning it into a great mountain that filled the whole earth. After Daniel related to Nebuchadnezzar what the latter had dreamt, he also explained what the dream signified. According to his interpretation, each of the metals making up the statue stood for one of the four human empires that would rule the world, one after the other (Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece). As for the stone that smashed the statue and turned it into a great mountain filling the whole earth—that symbolized the kingdom of Gd.<sup>2</sup>

The motif of dividing history into four periods, symbolized by four metals—gold, silver, bronze and iron—dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., where it appears in a chapter of the Greek poet Hesiod’s *Works and Days*.<sup>3</sup> His scheme delineates five eras in the history of mankind, from earliest times up to the poet’s day. Four of the five eras mentioned are symbolized by the same metals as appear in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue. The similarity between works does not stop here. Both also contain the motif of a decline from one generation to the next.

The author of Daniel, chapter 2, apparently made use of a ready-made schema, that of the “four empires,” which included Assyria,

## Likutei Divrei Torah

Media, Persia and Macedonia. However, given the context of Jewish history and the fact that the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar was the one who destroyed the Temple, the author replaced Assyria with Babylonia. According to the chronological approach in both sections of the book of Daniel (which is not historically precise), the kingdom of Media followed on the heels of the Babylonian and empire, and Persia, after Media.

Comparing the dream of the statue to similar Four Empire schemes,<sup>4</sup> we observe that the author of Daniel, chapter 2, did not use the scheme of Four Empires as it was, but rather imbued it with new content. The changes made in the book of Daniel are well put by Deborah Diamant: “The author could have chosen a statue of animals that were widespread in the ancient world. Deliberately choosing a statue resembling a human being indicates the main issue for the author: the human nature of this creature. The fact that the statue was made of precious metals, used to glorify and strengthen it, also points to a human hand... The statue itself symbolizes the principle of human rule as a general concept. Thus the scheme expresses not only an historical process of empires that arise one after the other, but also different sides of a single phenomenon—the reign of human kings.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, comparing the dream of the statue as it appears in the book of Daniel with the four-empire scheme on which the author drew reveals that the unique elements added to the story pertain to the contrast between human vs. divine rule. This element finds expression both in the humanoid form of the statue and in the motif of the stone that first destroys the statue and then turns into a mountain that fills the whole earth. Using the stone and the mountain as symbols of the divine, and the metals (especially gold) as symbols of the man-made and human, reinforces the contrast between man and Gd.<sup>6</sup>

These symbols also find expression in the narrative of the sin of the golden calf. While the stone tablets given to Moses on the mountain symbolize the reign of Gd, the golden calf stands for the work of man. The connection between these two stories also finds expression in the account of the statue being smashed, which resembles the account

<sup>1</sup> שפאן 'ש (Hebrew translation from the Greek, with the addition of an introduction and notes), *Shirat Hesiodos: Ma'asim ve-Yamim, Theogonia, Maggen Hercules*, Jerusalem 1956, pp. 41-45, lines 106-201.

<sup>2</sup> The scheme of a sequence of four empires also appears in Persian, Greek and Roman sources. Greek historians living in the heyday of the Persian Empire were acquainted with a three-empire scheme: Assyria, Media and Persia. This scheme emphasized the importance of the last link, Persia, and hence appears to have taken shape as political propaganda in the time of the Persian Empire. Under Alexander the Great a four-empire scheme emerged, including Assyria, Media, Persia and Macedonia. An extended version emerged in the writings of Roman authors, adding Rome as the fifth empire. See D. Flusser, “The Four Empires in the Fourth Sybil and the Book of Daniel,” *IOS* 2 (1972), pp. 148-175.

<sup>3</sup> D. Diamant, “*Arb'a ha-Malkhuyot be-Sefer Daniel*,” *Kelim Sheluvim: Megillot Midbar Yehudah ve-Sifrut Yemei ha-Bayit ha-Sheni*, Jerusalem 2010, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> The contrast between stone and metal, symbolizing the contrast between Gd and man, finds expression also in the story of David and Goliath (I Sam. 17). Cf. N. Golan, “*Sippurei Daniel: Nituah Sifrut shel Daniel 1-6*,” Doctoral Thesis, Ramat Gan 2017, pp. 60-62.

<sup>5</sup> Y. Zakowitz, *I Will Utter Riddles from Ancient Times: Riddles and Dream-riddles in Biblical Narrative* (Heb.), Tel Aviv 2005, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> In the next chapter, Daniel chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar sets up a statue made entirely of gold. On the significance of these two stories being juxtaposed, see D. N. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1-6*, Sheffield 1988, p. 67.

of the golden calf being burned. Smashing the statue is described using the verb *ve-hadeket himon* (= and [the stone] smashed them [the legs of the statue]; Dan. 2:34). This verb, which recurs in the next verse as well—*badayin daku khahadah* (= they were crushed as one; Dan. 2:35), creates a linguistic connection with the narrative of the golden calf, where it says that after Moses burned the golden calf he ground it *ad asher dak*, “until finely ground” (Ex. 32:20).

The connection between the stories does not end here. The calf was made of gold, as was the head of the statue, symbolizing the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. In both instances, after the crushing of the golden calf or the statue, there is a motif of strewing or scattering. With the golden calf, we are told that Moses “strewed it [the ashes] upon the water” (Ex. 32:20, and with the statue we are told that after it fell down and crumbled, it became “like chaff of the threshing floors of summer” (Dan. 2:35), carried off by the wind.

The statue dream in Daniel, chapter 2, is clearly tied to the narrative of the golden calf (Ex. 32). The connection between the two stories and use of the same symbols underscores the contrast between the divine and the human. In addition, both stories do not end with crushing (of the statue or golden calf), rather the narrative goes on to rehabilitation, to restitution. The stone that crushes the huge statue becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth, and similarly, Moses ascends the mountain again and there the Lord again writes the Decalogue on the stone tablets in his hands. Thus both stories instruct us about the power of making amends, that even a sin as grave as that of the golden calf can be atoned. *[Translated by Rachel Rowen]*



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I added a few items re **Coronavirus & social distancing**. Thanks. Chaim

<https://www.aish.com/ci/s/Coronavirus-and-Blaming-the-Victims.html>

### **Coronavirus and Blaming the Victims**

Mar 10, 2020 | by **Rabbi Benjamin Blech**

As the coronavirus outbreak grows in scale and scope, victims sadly find themselves having to cope with the added stigma of blame for "the crime" of threatening the health of others.

At first it was inside China where people from Wuhan were treated like lepers. It wasn't long before we began to see numerous reports of verbal and physical abuse aimed at ethnic Chinese, and an aversion to Chinese restaurants and other places associated with the country.

Once the virus spread, discrimination was no longer restricted by geographical source. "Victim blaming" focused on anyone unfortunate enough to show signs of being affected – and as Madeline Hsu, a professor of history and Asian American studies at the University of Texas at Austin, perceptively put it, "Germs and viruses don't operate on the basis of race." Last week a major Metropolitan New York newspaper featured a photo that identified "a Jewish lawyer" in Westchester with arrows of people "he infected" by way of contact in his synagogue at Sabbath services as well as at a funeral he attended.

The World Health Organization, sensitive to the possibility for blaming the victim, is urgently pushing the campaign against saying that people are "transmitting Covid-19", "infecting others," or "spreading the virus," because that wording suggests a measure of blame or guilt. Instead WHO asks that we refer to people "acquiring" the virus.

Blaming the victim has a very long precedent. Robert Fullilove, a professor of sociomedical sciences at New York's Columbia University Medical Center, observed that history teaches us this unfortunate – and universal – lesson: "The more panic, the more temptation to blame the outsider – the other."

The plagues of the past all verify this truth. And Jews have had a very personal and tragic familiarity with it.

When the bubonic plague, better known as the "Black Death", turned a quarter of the population of Europe into a mass graveyard within a few short years in the mid-14th century, Christians found a ready explanation. Anti-Semitism was a simple theological rationale to assign blame on Jews who obviously masterminded the outbreak, poisoned the wells, or as a medieval conspiracy theorist claimed, "wished to extinguish all of Christendom, through their poisons of frogs and spiders mixed into oil and cheese." As for the Jews who also perished, it was nothing less than well-deserved divine punishment for their sins and nonacceptance of Jesus.

Hundreds of Jewish communities met their deaths as targets of extermination campaigns for the crime of supposedly having created a disease which took no note of religious differences – other than treating Jews who faithfully observed the ritual of frequent handwashing as a mitzvah somewhat less harshly.

In the 15th century it was the spread of syphilis that again turned disease into an acceptable rationale for xenophobia and hatred. As historians put it, every national group in Europe defined syphilis as a disease of other nations. The Germans blamed the French, calling it "the French disease." The French blamed the Italians, the Poles blamed the Russians, the Persians blamed the Turks, the Muslims blamed the Hindus, and the Japanese blamed the Portuguese. Somehow this was one of the rare occasions that Jews in the main were not considered the chief culprits.

But Jews weren't so lucky in the US when at the beginning of the 20th-century Jewish immigrants were accused of carrying "consumption", better known as tuberculosis, to America. Nicknamed "the Jewish disease" and "the tailor's disease" – one of the most common Jewish occupations – tuberculosis and its Jewish connection helped to create the image of Jews as sickly and weak. Unfortunately, this would later be used as a "racial stereotype" to justify restrictions on Jewish immigration in the 20s as well as later in the 30s and 40s, even as the Holocaust decreed only death as alternative.

"Victim blaming" is not only irrational, it is cruel. It is directed to innocents already needlessly suffering. Sherry Hamby, a professor of psychology at the University of the South and founding editor of the APA's Psychology of Violence journal, sees its source in a very human attempt to ease our own fears for personal safety. "Holding victims responsible for their misfortune is partially a way to avoid admitting that something just as unthinkable could happen to you – even if you do everything 'right'."

With the spread of the coronavirus extending rapidly worldwide, every one of us might, God forbid, become the next target. For our own sakes, let us not be guilty of the crime which severely compounds the tragedy – the crime of blaming the victim.

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<https://www.jta.org/2020/03/11/opinion/im-not-a-doctor-but-i-am-a-rabbi-heres-my-spiritual-prescription-for-the-coronavirus>

### **OPINION - I'm not a doctor, but I am a rabbi. Here's my spiritual prescription for the coronavirus.**

**RABBI SHMULY YANKLOWITZ**

MARCH 11, 2020 1:56 PM

PHOENIX (JTA) — I am not a medical professional, an epidemiologist or an expert on pandemics. I leave the serious information in those important fields for the professionals who have the appropriate training to help us get through the coronavirus epidemic.

Even though I do not possess medical knowledge, as a rabbi and social activist, I believe I can try to humbly prescribe ethical vaccines that can remedy jilted nerves and worried minds. My words are not meant to heal physically but to inspire spiritually.

At this challenging time, it seems appropriate that those in the positions to (re)build confidence should do so. In that spirit, I am sharing thoughts on

how we might be able to spiritually cope with the uncertain reality that has rapidly spread throughout the world. The coronavirus is not only a disease of the body, but also presents an existential crisis that has put governments, businesses and, most important, communities and individuals on edge.

I pray that we can get through it all. People are scared — and rightly so. We are truly living in an era of plague; we are largely unprepared. Communities throughout the world have been caught off-guard by the virus' potent potential for wanton havoc and daily disruption.

But hope can't be lost. At this moment, we want to protect ourselves and our families; this is human nature. From a Jewish perspective, from a social justice perspective, from a human perspective, we cannot descend into pointed tribalism at a time when we must come together as a collective of mind and soul. The coronavirus is a huge burden placed on humanity, but one that can be handled through shared action, compassion and a desire to see this disease contained before more lives are needlessly lost.

As I reflected inward about how the coronavirus is affecting the world, I thought about soul remedies that could help guide us — in the Jewish community and beyond — through this arduous ordeal and into a brighter tomorrow. Here's my six-part prescription for getting through this crisis with our souls intact.

1. There is no value in placing blame.

We are already seeing our worst impulses play out in this crisis. Because the present strain of coronavirus originated in China, some are blaming "the Chinese" or even all Asians for the outbreak, which is absurd and hateful. And then there are community leaders such as an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who bizarrely blamed the LGBTQ community for spreading the disease. These are the wrong reactions: Whatever we do, we cannot fall into the trap of blame. Blame harms more than it helps; it is myopic and never leads to practical solutions. Of course, we must hold reckless public officials accountable if they neglect public welfare, but this is different from directing baseless blame at large populations. Rather than join the blaming team, we should join the helping team.

There are times where we cannot help as much as we'd like, but we can still do as much as we can from a distance. We must simply adjust our mindset to think about how we can all effectively work together with the help of experts to deal with the task at hand.

2. Be afraid.

Yes, this must sound like unusual advice in a time of pandemic. But we must be skeptical of those in office who say "Everything is fine. Stop panicking and live your life!" It is a natural human emotion to be afraid of the unknown and the uncertain. We live in times where every day's events constitute a reminder that we cannot control the world as much as we might want.

Politically, culturally and spiritually, the world is experiencing levels of disequilibrium that are difficult to endure. It would seem then that, rationally, we should live in fear of what tomorrow may bring. Rather than denying that human impulse to have fear in the face of serious risks, we can channel that fear productively.

Hold the fear. Hold your love ones close. But don't be held motionless — physically, emotionally or spiritually — by this disease. Feel it but own it, refine it, control it. Use it. We need to react boldly to situations such as the one that challenges us right now and with the clarity of mind that tells us that fear should inspire us to be courageous; troubling times calls for passionate and resolute leadership. Our fear can inspire us to hold one another even closer and with deeper resolve.

3. Wipe out evil.

In the Jewish tradition, the nation of Amalek is synonymous with the worst evil imaginable. The Amalekites saw the most vulnerable among the Israelites and instead of helping them, pursued and killed them, targeting in particular the weakest among the weak. The Torah records the deeds of the Amalekites and their actions, juxtaposing the meekness of the Jewish people with the pure cruelty of the nation of Amalek. We are commanded to vanquish Amalek and eliminate its memory from this world. The coronavirus

— the disease itself! — is Amalek-like since it appears to have the most serious consequences for some of the most vulnerable among us, the elderly and the immunocompromised. By protecting and supporting the most vulnerable people around the world, we have the ability to live up to the commandment to wipe out Amalek once more.

As tensions among communities may run high, we must learn again the lessons of interdependence: The coronavirus demonstrates the profound ignorance of the belief that we keep ourselves "safe" by building walls to separate us from our neighbors and by locking up immigrants at the border. In a world as interconnected as ours, we keep ourselves safe by respecting the truths revealed by science, by cooperating and working together within and among nations, by caring for the most vulnerable among us, and by creating a society that keeps as many of us as possible healthy and financially secure. In a world so focused on "us vs. them," the coronavirus reminds us that in a profound sense, there is only us.

The only sane path forward is more compassion, more justice, and more humility about the degree to which we need each other.

4. Embrace a sabbatical.

One of Judaism's great gifts to the world is the idea of the Sabbath, the sacred break from the labors of the week. But the Sabbath is more than lounging around with nothing to do. It's about renewal and the need to nourish the soul through extra time to study. One of the side effects of the coronavirus might be the ability for those who need to stay home to use that time away from the workplace or the outside world productively. Some folks need to show up at work, travel and go about business as usual. But to the extent that one can, it will be vital to care of yourself and those that you love. Through the gift of physical and spiritual rest, we may experience breakthroughs that will allow our society to manage this disease more effectively.

5. Be gentle.

Always be gentle with others. Everyone is doing the best they can. Human beings are fundamentally frail. To compensate for uncertainty and imperfection in this moment, some people will act out with pure hubris. But this hubris hides vulnerability and pain. We do not know what others go through on a daily basis.

The coronavirus may give us the ability to realize that humility in the face of great challenge can be a factor leading us toward communal healing. To be under quarantine, as whole countries are essentially imposing at this point, cannot be a pleasant feeling. It's isolating and humiliating. To be gentle also means to be empathetic to those who find themselves cut off from society.

This disease has upended routines all over the world. We can be understanding of how it has ruined the daily lives of people who only want to support themselves and their families. This universal reality brings us together rather than tearing us apart. Let us have the strength to be understanding and kind in this time of great tumult.

6. Love is contagious, too.

The coronavirus is highly contagious, but so are the actions we can take inspired by love and joy. We are reminded yet again of the total interconnectedness of all life on this planet. The amazing phenomenon of life and its parallel humbling frailty can inspire wonder and deeper empathy.

While, of course, we must heed medical experts to undertake precautionary measures to avoid the spread of the virus, we can also do our best to spread happiness and positivity, international cooperation and a positive attitude to help quell this virus.

To give up on the better angels of our nature is akin to defeat. At the least, to acknowledge people's good intentions and engage others out of love rather than fear are ways to help defeat the trials put before us by the coronavirus. Spread love, spread warmth, spread optimism. The times may seem bleak, but we can all do our part to ensure that a brighter tomorrow is around the corner.

Friends, this is a difficult time for all. No one has been spared from the effects of the coronavirus. Not all of us will be infected by the virus, but we

are already affected. There is no denying that the global attention to this ailment has radically shifted the world's power landscape indefinitely. But, for a moment, looking past these macro-effects can offer an opportunity to consider how each of us, at an individual level, can be spiritually renewed in our collective efforts to halt this disease and get through this moment.

**RABBI SHMULY YANKLOWITZ**

is the President & Dean of the Valley Beit Midrash (Jewish pluralistic adult learning & leadership), the Founder & President of Uri L'Tzedek (Orthodox Social Justice), the Founder and CEO of Shamayim (Jewish animal advocacy), the Founder and President of YATOM, (Jewish foster and adoption network), and the author of seventeen books on Jewish ethics. The opinions expressed here represent the author's and do not represent any organizations he is affiliated with.

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[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/4668191/jewish/Six-Things-You-Can-Do-About-Coronavirus.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4668191/jewish/Six-Things-You-Can-Do-About-Coronavirus.htm)

### **Six Things You Can Do About Coronavirus**

By **Mendy Kaminker** March 4, 2020 2:32 PM

No matter where we live in this ever-shrinking world, it seems like everyone is thinking about the coronavirus, or COVID-19. At the Costco near my home, I was greeted by empty shelves, with most everyone cautiously stocking up on essentials. I am told that the local Shoprite and Target are experiencing similar shortages.

As the days go by, the number of people around the world impacted by this virus is increasing at an alarming rate with some entire cities under quarantine.

Is there something we can do about it?

The Jewish answer is: Yes, there is always something for us to do!

Let me share a few thoughts and practical suggestions as we weather this storm together.

#### **1. Follow Health Guidelines**

As much as it's common sense, guarding your health is a mitzvah we should take very seriously.

So follow the instructions of the CDC and your local health officials. Wash your hands with soap. If you suspect that you or a loved one has been affected, contact your doctor.

And if you do find yourself under quarantine, get yourself a good laptop and charger (and get ready to watch hours of Torah classes on Chabad.org video).

Read: Obey the Doctor

#### **2. Know Someone in Quarantine? Reach Out!**

With all of the talk about the problems with technology, perhaps this is its time to shine.

If you know of anyone who is under quarantine, reach out! Isolation for a long period of time is tough for anyone. Call, email, or send a loving text message.

So if it's a friend, a relative or a co-worker that needs to stay home, reach out to them. Tell them that you are thinking of them and praying for them.

#### **3. Check Your Mezuzahs**

The Torah guarantees that when a Jewish home bears a mezuzah on its door, the Guardian of Israel ensures that the home and all who live in it are protected. Whether at home or at the other end of the world, in the merit of that mezuzah, you've got the best safety net around you.

Rolled up inside a mezuzah case rests a parchment with the Shema Yisrael inscribed by an expert scribe. With time and weather, that parchment can fade or crack. That's why it's a Jewish custom to check the mezuzahs of your home every few years, and especially at a time when protection is needed.

If you don't have a mezuzah, your local Chabad rabbi can help you get one written by a qualified scribe now. If you have a mezuzah, but haven't had it checked recently, contact your local Chabad rabbi and have it checked right away.

How many mezuzahs does a home require? Basically, one for every entranceway. Your local Chabad rabbi can also help you determine which doorposts require a mezuzah and where that mezuzah should be placed.

Read: A Guide to Checking Your Mezuzahs

#### **4. Have Faith, Not Fear**

Yes, the concern is real. But the truth is, there is only One who decides what will happen to us, and that is the one Director of heaven and earth. Trust that He is good and think only good thoughts, and things will be good.

Spend some time pondering and verbalizing your faith in G-d. Pray. Ask Him to protect you and your loved ones. Ask Him to send healing to the entire world. Then have complete confidence that He listens to every prayer that comes from the heart, and yours will be answered as well.

A little trust in G-d can have some great side benefits too! Check this out, from the Mayo Clinic:

"Most studies have shown that religious involvement and spirituality are associated with better health outcomes, including greater longevity, coping skills, and health-related quality of life."

As in most situations, fear doesn't do anyone much good. Even a teaspoon of faith, on the other hand, has amazing healing power.

Read: What Is Bitachon?

#### **5. Give Charity**

Isaiah, the great prophet of peace, compared giving charity to donning a suit of armor. Each contribution you make, no matter how small, provides another shield of protection against any affliction. So too, the Book of Proverbs tells us that "charity saves from death."

The main thing is not how much you give, but how often. So get two charity boxes—one for your home and one for your place of work. In a pinch, you can simply designate any box as a charity box.

Put a coin in the box every weekday as well as before the Shabbat candle lighting on Friday afternoons. At your place of work, encourage others to contribute their spare change as well.

Don't carry cash? Today, most charities collect online. There are even apps for giving, including apps that direct funds to Jewish charities. You can make a habit of giving through an app on a daily basis.

Read: 16 Charity Facts Everyone Should Know

#### **6. Be Infectious!**

Finally, let's take a page from the playbook of this nasty virus. It's infectious, it's spreading, it's separating people and even causing us to be suspicious of each other.

So be an antivirus! Just by adding a little goodness and kindness to the world, you can be infectious in a positive way.

Use your social network to spread kind words, helpful actions and a little more love and caring to the planet. And may our collective good stop the spread of anything negative!

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[https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/4676982/jewish/10-Tips-for-Preparing-for-Shabbat-While-Social-Distancing.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4676982/jewish/10-Tips-for-Preparing-for-Shabbat-While-Social-Distancing.htm)

### **10 Tips for Preparing for Shabbat While Social Distancing**

By **Menachem Posner** March 12, 2020 5:11 PM

Does the coronavirus have you stuck at home for Shabbat, isolated from your synagogue and social group? Not sure how to celebrate alone? Here are 10 tips to make this Shabbat as pleasant and rejuvenating as possible:

#### **1. Prepare Shabbat Feasts**

"Anyone who puts in the effort to prepare on the eve of Shabbat will eat on Shabbat," say the sages of the Mishnah. Stuck at home on Friday? Assuming you have access to groceries, use the time to make your own challah, boil up a steaming pot of delicious chicken soup ("Jewish penicillin"), prepare fish, salad, chicken, kugel, and of course some hardy cholent to be enjoyed at Shabbat lunch.

We have all the best recipes waiting for you at those links.

If you are unable to prepare Shabbat food, please reach out for help. Your local Chabad emissaries can help, so please alert them to your need as soon as possible.

#### 2. Have Liquid Soap and Cut Paper Towels on Hand

With a premium placed on regular and thorough hand washing, be sure to have a supply of liquid soap at home since bar soap can be problematic on Shabbat.

Since we don't tear paper towels to size on Shabbat, and using regular hand towels is out for the time being, prepare a stack of pre-cut paper towels near the bathroom and kitchen sinks for easy and sanitary washing.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is perfectly okay for Shabbat use.

#### 3. Get Some Good Kiddush Wine

So you're stuck at home, but Shabbat is still a time of delight.

How about one of the fine kosher wines (or grape juice) that are available today, both for Kiddush and throughout the meal (with moderation, of course). This may be the week to spend an extra dollar or two on something special to honor Shabbat.

After making kiddush, there's no need to pass the wine cup around for everyone to take a sip, or to pour into other's cups. Instead, let everyone have their own glass of wine or grape juice in front of them while one person makes kiddush for all. In some ways, that's even better, because then people can drink as soon as kiddush is said, without delay.

As joyous as things may get, careful not to clink those glasses when making a l'chaim.

#### 4. Print Up Some Good Reading Material

Looking for something uplifting and engaging to read while snuggled up at home? Before Shabbat, go to [www.chabad.org/magazine](http://www.chabad.org/magazine) and print the articles and stories we've published this week, especially some articles from our acclaimed Parshah section. There's something there for everyone, and probably more than a few somethings to help you through the long afternoon.

#### 5. Make a Schedule in Advance

With so many hours in isolation, it's easy to feel like you are on a never-ending hamster wheel. It can be helpful to designate landmarks to demarcate the passing of time and give you something to look forward to.

So plan in advance. Decide what time you'll pray, when you'll have your meals, when you'll study Torah, take your Shabbat nap, etc. so that the day does not seem to stretch on forever.

#### 6. Make Pre-Shabbat Phone Calls

Feeling like you need a good boost of social interaction before heading into 25 hours of isolation? Call friends and family before Shabbat to wish them a peaceful and healing Shabbat.

Tell them you'll be thinking of them, and ask them to think of you as well.

Fill your social tank to the fullest, and use that fuel to propel you through to Havdalah.

#### 7. Pray a Little Extra When Lighting Your Candles

Shabbat candles must be lit in every Jewish household before Shabbat. This is the case even if there is no woman present. Are you isolated in a male-only home? Make sure you (or another one of the guys) lights candles.

Before lighting, make sure to give some charity. Today, that's a cinch to do online. Charity, according to our tradition, provides a shield of immunity around you at times such as these. And the time immediately before lighting candles is an especially propitious time for creating that shield.

After you've lit the candles and said the blessing, ask the One Above for all your needs. Use this time to pray for healing and happiness for the world.

#### 8. Make Your Home a Mini-Synagogue

Even though you cannot attend synagogue, there is no reason not to pray alone.

With the exception of Kaddish, the Barechu call to prayer, the repetition of the Amidah, and the Torah reading, you can pray anywhere in the world, including your home.

So make sure you have a Siddur handy and a place set aside to serve as your ad hoc shul. If you are with others, pray together. Even though you don't make a minyan, you can say the words and sing the songs together.

Wondering when to hold services? Actually, the best time to do so is when your local congregation is doing so. That way, you're actually praying in tandem with them, even though you cannot see each other.

#### 9. Exercise Your Positivity Muscles

Medical experts and Chassidic masters all agree that staying positive and full of faith can help you maintain your good health, keep up your immune system, and even recover more quickly from illness.

Upping our happiness is an art, one that we can learn and perfect with practice and patience.

Not sure where to start? Here are two simple steps:

Tell yourself: Everything is in G-d's hands; He loves me, and I am going to be OK.

Now smile.

Repeat as many times as necessary.

#### 10. Belt Out Shabbat Songs

Going stir crazy from the silence? Fill it with Shabbat songs.

There's a longstanding tradition to sing zemirot (hymns) at the Shabbat table, and there's no reason to stop singing just because the crowd is a bit smaller than usual. On the contrary, fill the space with louder singing, joyful singing, and more happiness than ever. Best thing you can do for your immune system!

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<http://www.5tjt.com/five-lessons-from-the-coronavirus/>

#### Five Lessons From the Coronavirus

March 11, 2020

By **Rabbi Pinchas Allouche**

To date, more than 100,000 people have been affected by the coronavirus globally, including 3,000 deaths. As we pray that this pandemic ends speedily, here are five pressing lessons that we may learn from this tragic disease:

##### LESSON ONE: One Sneeze Can Change the World

According to health experts, the coronavirus spreads viral particles through sneezing, which can infect many people.

The lesson is powerful: we each possess two forces within — a body and a soul. And if small particles from our body can produce such havoc, just imagine how much good our souls can create with its Divine particles. If one sneeze can affect our world so dramatically, one positive deed can certainly produce great change.

It is true: each of us holds the power to alter the state of our society. If we can allow our souls to produce some Divine particles through deeds of goodness, we too can engender a positive revolution that can, and will, better our world.

As Maimonides once put it: "Each person must view himself and the entire world as being half meritorious and half guilty. If he does one single good deed, he can tip the scale and bring deliverance to the entire world" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 3:5).

##### LESSON TWO: A Little Bit of Fear Is Good

Franklin D. Roosevelt famously exclaimed that there is "nothing to fear but fear itself." Yet dare I ask, is it true that we should not be afraid of fear? Judaism would disagree. Sure, fear can be dangerous. It can paralyze the mind, stifle our growth, and lead to habits of destruction. But fear can also be constructive.

It is no secret that the coronavirus has spread fear among individuals and nations. People are increasingly afraid to congregate, travel, and attend public events.

But the more we fear for what will be in the future, the more we can also learn to appreciate all that we have, today, at the present.



Turbulent times like these can teach us that life is so vulnerable, that seeming certainties are so uncertain, and that material achievements are so fleeting. The fear that then naturally emerges from these realizations can rattle us profoundly. But it can, and it must, also awaken us to a renewed appreciation and commitment toward all that is firm and certain in our lives — from deepening our relationships with our loved ones to rededicating ourselves to living a life of purpose.

Perhaps this is why the wisest of men, King Solomon, taught that “happy is the man who is always fearful” (Proverbs 28:14). A little bit of fear is valuable, for it prevents us from falling into a state of stalemate, and opens our eyes to all the good that lies in and around us.

#### LESSON THREE: The Unbreakable Power of Unity

As I write these words, world governments and international experts are collaborating in unprecedented ways to find a vaccine for the coronavirus. It is in historic moments of unity such as these that we are privy to the power of collective responsibility. When we come together as one, even the most destructive of diseases becomes curable, and even the cruelest of challenges are, eventually, surmountable.

It is no secret that we live in tumultuous and divisive times. Yet, the coronavirus teaches us that the path to a healthy future relies on our ability to work together with respect for who we are: people of all kinds, who were created in the image of G-d.

And when we join hands together, an avenue of redemption is then paved. Like the colors of a rainbow or a symphony of instruments, true beauty and harmony will only emanate from our ability to unite together.

#### LESSON FOUR: “Keeping Good Hygiene”

With the rapid spread of the coronavirus, health officials are constantly warning us to “keep good hygiene.”

But I wonder: are we as careful about physical infections as we are about spiritual ones, such as negative words and actions?

It is no secret that we live in an age of impulses. On social media, we often do not hesitate to voice our immediate reaction to every story under the sun. But not every post is worthy of our likes, pokes, and comments.

For in the race to speak back, we often forget to think. In the urge to reply, our swirl of emotions often eclipses our clarity of thought. And in the heat of disagreements, spiritual viruses can spread uncontrollably.

In the wise words of the Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859): “All that is thought should not be said, all that is said should not be written, all that is written should not be published, and all that is published should not be read.”

#### LESSON FIVE: Man Plans, G-d Laughs

So says an old Yiddish adage. As we all know, our personal plans are not always fulfilled. Sometimes we get “stuck in traffic.” Other times, we receive a phone call that rocks our day.

The coronavirus has destabilized many of us. Personally, I was notified yesterday that a six-day mission of young Jewish leaders to Riga and Paris, in which I was to assume a role, was postponed.

Yet this disruption of plans teaches us a vital secret to happiness. Every day includes two plans: the plan that we design for ourselves, and the plan that God designs for us. Unfortunately, they are not always synchronized.

Sometimes we plan for A, but B happens. But the question then begs itself: how will we respond? Will we bury ourselves in frustration, or will we learn to accept the hidden blessings in God’s unannounced plans?

Viktor Frankl, the famed psychotherapist and Holocaust survivor, taught his students to “not ask what they want from life.” Instead, they should ask “what life wants from them, and then happiness will follow.”

Frankl was right. True happiness can only be achieved when we learn to accept what life wants from us, even when it interferes with our own plans. Some of history’s greatest heroes — from Queen Esther in the story of the upcoming festival of Purim to Sir Nicholas Winton who saved over 600 children during the Holocaust — rose to glory when they heeded the call of the unplanned.

And so must we. At times, we may not see the blessings in the unexpected events of life, but we must believe that they exist, and that, one day, we will find within them the laughter of G-d.

Rabbi Pinchas Allouche is the head rabbi at Congregation Beth Tefillah in Scottsdale, Arizona. Rabbi Allouche is richly-cultural, having lived in France, where he was born, South Africa and Israel. He is fluent in English, Hebrew, French and Italian. He received his rabbinic ordination in Milan, Italy in 1999. In March of 2013, Rabbi Allouche was listed in the Jewish Daily Forward as one of America’s 36 Most Inspiring Rabbis, who are “shaping 21st Century Judaism.” Rabbi Allouche can be reached at: [Rabbi@BethTefillahAZ.org](mailto:Rabbi@BethTefillahAZ.org).

<https://www.jewishpress.com/news/us-news/breaking-news-bergen-county-rabbis-cancel-all-shul-forbid-minyanim-shabbat-gatherings-eating-out-and-more/2020/03/12/>

#### Rabbinical Council of Bergen County, New Jersey (RCBC)

March 12, 2020

ט"ז אדר תש"פ

Dear Friends,

We are writing with an important update regarding COVID-19 and the ongoing health situation in our community.

Last night, the rabbis of the Rabbinical Council of Bergen County (RCBC), the presidents of our shuls, and the heads of our local schools gathered to meet with representatives of local government, including the Teaneck Department of Health and expert physicians from our three local hospitals: Englewood Health, Hackensack University Medical Center, and Holy Name Medical Center.

The message from the healthcare providers was clear. They need our help to slow the spread of the disease before their resources are overwhelmed. The doctors expressed significant concern regarding the capacity of our local hospitals to meet the growing needs of their patients in the event of a (expected) large surge in cases of COVID-19. They reported that while the amount of cases is now low, it seems to be increasing rapidly. Even if patients of COVID-19 will be treatable, we may deplete our resources and other patients who suffer from ordinary, serious illnesses will not be able to get the necessary care, putting their lives in danger.

Slowing the spread of the disease will allow our hospitals to best manage this situation. The only way to do this is for us to socially distance ourselves from one another. Moreover, the doctors emphasized that the most significant community closure possible will make the greatest impact in potentially saving lives in our area.

We have therefore made the very difficult decision to adopt the following policies of social distancing in our community. We intend to re-evaluate our policies next week on the basis of the expert guidance provided by the medical leadership of the three local hospitals. This panel will guide us as we continually monitor the ongoing situation as it evolves. We collectively agree to abide by the decisions reached by our lay, educational and rabbinic leadership on the basis of expert medical advice, to uniformly adhere to these standards, and to communicate collectively.

We must all try our best to STAY HOME with only our immediate family for now and to avoid unnecessary contact with others, and particularly with substantial groups. We should only leave when it is truly necessary. Thus:

1. All community members are strongly encouraged to work from home, if possible, and to stay home whenever possible. It is critical for adults to set the right example.
2. As the schools are currently closed, there should not be playdates between children of different families. This would undermine the entire purpose of the school closing.
3. Shuls will be closed for all minyanim and shiurim effective Friday morning, March 13. There should be no house minyanim. All of the rabbis will be davening alone in their own homes.
4. There should be no public celebrations for smachot.

5. People should not have gatherings for Shabbat meals.
6. Shiva visits should be replaced by phone/video calls.
7. Levayat should be restricted to a small group of family members and a minyan.
8. Refrain from contact sports.
9. Restaurants should not seat customers. People should order for pick-up and delivery only.
10. The Mikvaot will remain open, at the guidance of CDC and local health authorities. Women under mandatory quarantine or who are experiencing symptoms of illness may not use the mikvah. Please consult your rav for further clarification or for specific questions.

As you can see, these represent significant changes to our lives and many detailed questions will certainly emerge. This brief outline cannot guide every particular situation. We will all have to address each circumstance as it comes up based on professional expertise and religious guidance.

It is with a very heavy heart that we are suspending so many of the most crucial routines of our daily lives and lifecycle moments. We do this only because of the compelling nature of our circumstance and the decisive medical testimonies that are consistent with CDC recommendations. These measures are adopted as a reflection of our overarching commitment to the sanctity of all human life, and we pray that these will be very temporary measures. Please take these days as a critical opportunity to intensify our tefilot to the Rofeh Ne'eman that all those ill will be healed and that our community will be shielded from any further harm.

Sincerely,

The **Rabbinical Council of Bergen County**

<https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/im-a-rabbi-with-the-coronavirus-whose-congregation-is-quarantined-its-bringing-out-the-best,18933>

## **HEALTH AND HALACHA**

I'm the rabbi with the coronavirus whose New Rochelle congregation is quarantined. It's bringing out the best in us.

Posted March 6, 2020

**By Rabbi Reuven Fink**

As so many of us are now contemplating going into a Shabbos of seclusion, I want to share a few thoughts with you.

We all woke up Tuesday morning prepared for our usual schedules of work or school or whatever we usually do. By late afternoon we learned that the state and the county health departments ordered a voluntary quarantine of those who were in a number of venues where the Coronavirus might have been. I said to myself, "but at all of those places we were performing mitzvot. To be davening in shul, attending a funeral, attending bar and bat mitzvah celebrations — all are good deeds, mitzvot!"

And yet, we were about to commence an unpleasant course of action:

Isolation and quarantine are words that evoke fear. I must confess I was frightened that we might have an epidemic, a pandemic in our community. Our lay leadership and I met with the health officials and tried to explain that quarantine of almost an entire congregation was an overarching edict. They quickly disavowed us of any such thinking and announced the shutdown of the Shul before we could even announce it to our own members.

We were locked in our homes. What would we do? This Shabbos is Parshat Zachor!

We all know it is incumbent upon Jews to hear Zachor being read from the Torah. Additionally, a young man's bar mitzvah was scheduled for Shabbos. He had studied his parsha so long and hard. What would be? And then, a young woman's bat mitzvah was on Sunday. She would be so disappointed! Our friend and member lost her dear father and is sitting shiva. We who are in quarantine are not able to visit her in her time of need.

People's lives are so disrupted. And certainly our minds never diverted from thinking about and praying for our good friend who lay in the hospital in

such serious condition. We thought of his wife and the kids and what they were going through in comparison to what our situation was.

I told myself we would work things out. The people of New Rochelle are resourceful people.

And we prayed. Everyone was emailing for our friend's Hebrew name and wanted to know which Tehillim should be recited. People who were not in quarantine were calling to arrange to help people in need, particularly those who were elderly or sick. Neighboring communities volunteered to help. Our neighbors in Scarsdale and White Plains shopped and made deliveries to many. Seasons and Chickies tried to make ordering easy. UJA-Federation offered to send our members food from a canceled dinner. So many good people did so much good. And it continues.

Over the past day or two, other members of our congregation were tested and found to be positive for the Coronavirus. I as well found out an hour ago that I am infected with the virus. I can now reassure you that it is possible, Thank G-d, to get through this virus without a special vaccine. I have the virus and am doing reasonably well. But I must caution all of you who have had personal contact with me to seek counsel from your health practitioner as to how to proceed.

As a Shul we must worry about religion. We tried to address in writing what people could do for the observance of yahrzeit and recitation of kaddish. We worked out a plan to read Zachor on Purim. Daf Yomi was taught online via Zoom. We had two shiurim today given by me and by Rabbi Axelrod about Purim topics.

A crisis can bring out the best in people. It is bringing out the best in us.

Admittedly, it is hard to comply with the burden the state has placed on us.

But as we see, despite all these measures, the amount of people testing positive is increasing. We all have to be careful to comply.

There are some positive elements that can be found in looking at our predicament. It slows down the pace of our frenetic lives. That can be positive. It can give us more time with our families. Maybe that book that we never got around to reading can be read now. Maybe we always wanted to find time to learn Torah. We now have that opportunity. I can't remember the last time I davened without a minyan for Shacharis. But my davening this morning was much slower than usual.

This circumstance certainly gives us the opportunity to think. Our attention turns to mortality and our vulnerability. We sometimes find ourselves victims of life's fragility and tentativeness. This is one of those times. It can help us to reorient our ultimate goals in life. Contemplation is good for the soul.

I can't help but wonder if perhaps I discovered a fantastic insight into current events in this morning's Daf Yomi.

The Talmud is in the midst of discussing various seminal events in the life of King David. It tells of an error he made. He decided to conduct a census of his kingdom. He wanted to have an accurate count of Israel's population. According to the Torah, a census can only take place by counting tokens that represent a person but not by counting the people themselves. The Torah says: Count half-shekel so there "will not be a pestilence when you count them." King David ignored this rule and counted people. The Navi tells us that a plague commenced as a result. The strange occurrence that guided that plague was that exactly 100 people died per day. The prophets and sages of that era ascertained from heaven that if they would institute a new mitzvah, the plague would end. They legislated a rabbinic mitzvah to recite 100 brachot each day. This is among the seven rabbinic mitzvot, along with lighting candles before Shabbat and the recitation of Hallel. But somehow this particular mitzvah has been lost to us during our bitter history.

Could it be only a coincidence that we learn this portion in the Talmud specifically today during this crisis of a possible pandemic? Perhaps. But perhaps we can take a lesson from it. Maybe we can accept upon ourselves to be more mindful and meticulous in reciting brachot. A bracha, a blessing, is our way of acknowledging the profound awareness that we have of G-d in



our lives. A blessing can elevate the most mundane activity into something lofty and holy. It takes seconds but launches us into eternity.

We still have a way to go in handling our communal situation. Together we can persevere and triumph over these challenges. With our ever-abiding faith in G-d who is the healer, we pray that we, as well as our fellow Americans and the peoples of the world will conquer this disease.

Wishing all a Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Reuven Fink

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Home Weekly Parsha KI TISA**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

One of the more mystical rituals in the mishkan was the ktoret – the offering of incense on the altar. The incense, when burned by fire, provided a fragrant cloud of smoke that permeated the tent of the mishkan. The Torah is very exact and detailed in describing the ingredients and formula that formed the ktoret in the mishkan and later in the Temple, which produced this powerful fragrance. The Talmud states that when the incense was being prepared in the Temple in Jerusalem the goats pasturing downwind in Jericho sneezed! There is no doubt that the incense did provide a very strong and pungent fragrance, though nowhere is it mentioned what this fragrance was comparable to. The Talmud adds that if the incense mixture would be combined with honey, then its smell would be so pleasant that it would prove to be irresistible. Why, then, was no honey added to the formula of the incense? The Torah itself forbade this addition to the incense mixture, by stating explicitly that honey was not to be introduced on the altar. There is a profound lesson to be learned here.

The Torah's instructions are not to be improved upon by human tastes, fads and currently popular ideas. The mystique of the incense offering is not to be enhanced by human preferences. Jewish history has shown us that all such "improvements" were eventually discarded. The Torah deals with eternity, and not with current moods that always change. The Torah itself is the sole arbiter of what the fragrance of the incense offering should be.

The incense offering was also deemed to be dangerous, if not lethal, to those priests performing the service. This was especially true on Yom Kippur when the High Priest himself performed the service upon entering the Holy of Holies with the incense pan and coals in his hands and arms. The Talmud records that during Second Temple times there were many priests who were unworthy of being the High Priest and obtained their position only by means of corruption and graft. Their corpses literally had to be dragged out of the Temple's precincts, since they died from the incense offering ritual. We do not find such lethal danger attached to any other duties of the High Priest in the Temple service.

But as in the physical world, so, too, is it in the mystical spiritual world – that which has the power to destroy also possesses the power to heal and bless. The incense offering was the source to ensure financial prosperity and abundance for the Jewish people. Even today, biblical verses regarding the incense offering are recited daily by many as a prayer for monetary success and physical welfare. It is the mystery of all this that so intrigues us. It remains one of the hidden treasures of the Torah that are not yet revealed to us. The ktoret retains its eternal fragrance of mystery. And we are not to add or detract from its Torah formulation.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

date: Mar 11, 2020, 3:17 PM

## **Moses Annuls a Vow (Ki Tissa 5780)**

### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

Kol Nidre, the prayer said at the beginning of Yom Kippur, is an enigma wrapped in a mystery, perhaps the strangest text ever to capture the religious imagination. First, it is not a prayer at all. It is not even a confession. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. It is written in Aramaic. It does not mention God. It is not part of the service. It does not require a synagogue. And it was disapproved of, or at least questioned, by generations of halachic authorities.

The first time we hear of Kol Nidre, in the eighth century, it is already being opposed by Rav Natronai Gaon, the first of many Sages throughout the centuries who found it problematic. In his view, one cannot annul the vows of an entire congregation this way. Even if one could, one should not, since it may lead people to treat vows lightly. Besides which, there has already been an annulment of vows ten days earlier, on the morning before Rosh Hashanah. This is mentioned explicitly in the Talmud (Nedarim 23b). There is no mention of an annulment on Yom Kippur.

Rabbeinu Tam, Rashi's grandson, was particularly insistent in arguing that the kind of annulment Kol Nidre represents cannot be retroactive. It cannot apply to vows already taken. It can only be a pre-emptive qualification of vows in the future. Accordingly he insisted on changing its wording, so that Kol Nidre refers not to vows from last year to this, but from this year to next. However, perhaps because of this, Kol Nidre created hostility on the part of non-Jews, who said it showed that Jews did not feel bound to honour their promises since they vitiated them on the holiest night of the year. In vain it was repeatedly emphasised that Kol Nidre applies only to vows between us and God, not those between us and our fellow humans. Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some places until the eighteenth century, in lawsuits with non-Jews, Jews were forced to take a special oath, More Judaica, because of this concern.

So there were communal and halachic reasons not to say Kol Nidre, yet it survived all the doubts and misgivings. It remains the quintessential expression of the awe and solemnity of the day. Its undiminished power defies all obvious explanations. Somehow it seems to point to something larger than itself, whether in Jewish history or the inner heartbeat of the Jewish soul.

Several historians have argued that it acquired its pathos from the phenomenon of forced conversions, whether to Christianity or Islam, that occurred in several places in the Middle Ages, most notably Spain and Portugal in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Jews would be offered the choice: convert or suffer persecution. Sometimes it was: convert or be expelled. At times it was even: convert or die. Some Jews did convert. They were known in Hebrew as anusim (people who acted under coercion). In Spanish they were known as conversos, or contemptuously as marranos (swine).

Many of them remained Jews in secret, and once a year on the night of Yom Kippur they would make their way in secret to the synagogue to seek release from the vows they had taken to adopt to another faith, on the compelling grounds that they had no other choice. For them, coming to the synagogue was like coming home, the root meaning of teshuvah.

There are obvious problems with this hypothesis. Firstly, Kol Nidre was in existence several centuries before the era of forced conversions. So historian Joseph S. Bloch suggested that Kol Nidre may have originated in the much earlier Christian persecution of Jews in Visigoth Spain, when in 613 Sisebur issued a decree that all Jews should either convert or be expelled, anticipating the Spanish expulsion of 1492. Even so, it is unlikely that conversos would have taken the risk of being discovered practising Judaism. Had they done so during the centuries in which the Inquisition was in force they would have risked torture, trial and death. Moreover, the text of Kol Nidre makes no reference, however oblique, to conversion, return, identity, or atonement. It is simply an annulment of vows.

So the theories as they stand do not satisfy.

However it may be that Kol Nidre has a different significance altogether, one that has its origin in a remarkable rabbinic interpretation of this week's parsha. The connection between it and Yom Kippur is this: less than six weeks after the great revelation at Mount Sinai, the Israelites committed what seemed to be the unforgivable sin of making a Golden Calf. Moses prayed repeatedly for forgiveness on their behalf and eventually secured it, descending from Mount Sinai on the Tenth of Tishrei with a new set of tablets to replace those he had smashed in anger at their sin. The tenth of Tishrei subsequently became Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, in memory of that moment when the Israelites saw Moses with the new tablets and knew they had been forgiven.

Moses' prayers, as recorded in the Torah, are daring. But the Midrash makes them more audacious still. The text introducing Moses' prayer begins with the Hebrew words, Vayechal Moshe (Ex. 32:11). Normally these are translated as "Moses besought, implored, entreated, pleaded, or attempted to pacify" God. However the same verb is used in the context of annulling or breaking a vow (Num. 30:3). On this basis the Sages advanced a truly remarkable interpretation:

[Vayechal Moshe means] "Moses absolved God of His vow." When the Israelites made the Golden Calf, Moses sought to persuade God to forgive them, but God said, "I have already taken an oath that Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be punished (Ex. 22:19). I cannot retract what I have said." Moses replied, "Lord of the universe, You have given me the power to annul oaths, for You taught me that one who takes an oath cannot break their word but a scholar can absolve them. I hereby absolve You of Your vow" (abridged from Exodus Rabbah 43:4).

According to the Sages the original act of Divine forgiveness on which Yom Kippur is based came about through the annulment of a vow, when Moses annulled the vow of God. The Sages understood the verse, "Then the Lord relented from the evil He had spoken of doing to His people" (Ex. 32:14) to mean that God expressed regret for the vow He had taken – a precondition for a vow to be annulled.

Why would God regret His determination to punish the people for their sin? On this, another Midrash offers an equally radical answer. The opening word of Psalm 61 is la-menatzeach. When this word appears in Psalms it usually means, "To the conductor, or choirmaster." However the Sages interpreted it to mean, "To the Victor," meaning God, and added this stunning commentary:

To the Victor who sought to be defeated, as it is said (Isaiah 57:16), "I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of Me—the very people I have created." Do not read it thus, but, "I will accuse in order to be defeated." How so? Thus said the Holy One, blessed be He, "When I win, I lose, and when I lose I gain. I defeated the generation of the Flood, but did I not lose thereby, for I destroyed My own creation, as it says (Gen. 7:23), "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out." The same happened with the generation of the Tower of Babel and the people of Sodom. But in the days of Moshe who defeated Me (by persuading Me to forgive the Israelites whom I had sworn to destroy), I gained for I did not destroy Israel.[1]

God wants His forgiveness to override His justice, because strict justice hurts humanity, and humanity is God's creation and carries His image. That is why He regretted His vow and allowed Moses to annul it. That is why Kol Nidre has the power it has. For it recalls the Israelites' worst sin, the Golden Calf, and their forgiveness, completed when Moses descended the mountain with the new tablets on the 10th of Tishrei, the anniversary of which is Yom Kippur. The forgiveness was the result of Moses' daring prayer, understood by the Sages as an act of annulment of vows. Hence Kol Nidre, a formula for the annulment of vows.

The power of Kol Nidre has less to do with forced conversions than with a recollection of the moment, described in our parsha, when Moses stood in prayer before God and achieved forgiveness for the people: the first time the whole people was forgiven despite the gravity of their sin. During Musaf on

Yom Kippur we describe in detail the second Yom Kippur: the service of the High Priest, Aharon, as described in Vayikra 16. But on Kol Nidre we recall the first Yom Kippur when Moses annulled the Almighty's vow, letting His compassion override His justice, the basis of all Divine forgiveness.

I believe we must always strive to fulfil our promises. If we fail to keep our word, eventually we lose our freedom. But given the choice between justice and forgiveness, choose forgiveness. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are liberated from a past we regret, to build a better future.

Shabbat Shalom

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il

subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

**Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11 – 34:35)**

**Rabbi Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Two Tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" (Exodus 34:29)

What is the significance of the dazzling radiance of Moses's face and why did it not attain this shining glow until he received the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur? And, perhaps the most difficult question of all, why did Moses break the first tablets? Yes, he was bitterly disappointed, perhaps even angry, at the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf only 40 days after God's first Revelation on Shavuot; however, these tablets were "the work of God and they were the writing of God." How could the holiest human being take the holiest object on earth and smash it to smithereens? Was he not adding to Israel's sin, pouring salt on the wounds of the Almighty (as it were)? My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, taught that Moses emerges from our portion of Ki Tisa not only as the greatest prophet of the generations but also as the exalted rebbe of Klal Yisrael (All of Israel), as Moshe Rabeinu; Moses the teacher and master of all the generations. This unique transformation of his personality took place on Yom Kippur; it is the sobriquet of Rebbe which occasions the rays of splendor which shone forth from his countenance.

The midrash on the first verse of the Book of Leviticus, "And [God] called out to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting...", provides a remarkable insight.

The biblical word for "called out" in this text is vayiker, a word which suggests a mere chance encounter rather than an actual summoning or calling out of the Divine; indeed, our Masoretic text places a small letter 'alef' at the end of the word. The midrash explains that it was Moses's modesty which insisted upon an almost accidental meeting (veyikra) rather than a direct summons.

However, when God completed the writing down of the Five Books, there was a small amount of ink left over from that small 'alef'; the Almighty lovingly placed the surplus of sacred ink on Moses's forehead, which accounts for the glorious splendor which emanated from his face.

Allow me to add to this midrash on the basis of the teaching of Rabbi Soloveitchik. The essence of the Second Tablets included the Oral Law, the human input of the great Torah Sages throughout the generations which had been absent from the first tablets.

Hence Chapter 34 of our portion opens with God's command to Moses, "Hew for yourself two stone tablets" – you, Moses, and not Me, God; the first tablets were hewn by God and the commandments were engraved by God, whereas the second tablets were hewn by the human being Moses and the commands were engraved by him. The chapter concludes: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Write for yourself these words for on the basis of these words [the Oral Law, the hermeneutic principles and the interpretations of

the rabbis of each generation] have I established an [eternal] covenant with Israel.”

Rabbi Soloveitchik maintains that during the 40 days from the beginning of the month of Elul to Yom Kippur, Moses relearned the 613 commandments with the many possibilities of the Oral Law; Moses’s active intellect became the “receiver” for the active intellect of the Divine, having received all of the manifold potential possibilities of the future developments of Torah throughout the generations. This is the meaning of the Talmudic adage that “Every authentic scholar (‘talmid vatik’) who presents a novel teaching is merely recycling Torah from Sinai.”

In this manner, Moses’s personality became totally identified and intertwined with Torah, a sacred combination of the Divine words and the interpretations of Moses. Moses became a living ‘Sefer Torah’, a “ministering vessel” (kli sharet) which can never lose its sanctity.

The Beit Halevi (Rav Yosef Dov Baer Halevi Soloveitchik, the great-grandfather of my teacher) maintains that the special radiance which emanated from Moses’s countenance originated from the concentrated sanctity of Moses’s identity with the many aspects of the Oral Torah which his own generation was not yet ready to hear, but which Moses kept within himself, for later generations. Whenever the inner world of the individual is more than it appears to be on the surface, that inner radiance becomes increasingly pronounced and externally manifest. Moses’s radiant glow was Oral Torah dependent, not at all germane to the first tablets, which contained only the Written Law; the glow expressed the radiance and love which would suffuse the manifold interpretations which were beneath the surface, but would emerge throughout the future generations of oral interpretations to come!

Why did Moses break the first tablets? Moses understood that there was a desperate need for a second set of tablets, born of God’s consummate love and unconditional forgiveness, with an Oral Law which would empower the nation to be God’s partners in the developing Torah. But God had threatened to destroy the nation. Moses breaks the first tablets as a message to God: Just as the tablets are considered to be “ministering vessels” which never lose their sanctity even if broken, so are the Jewish People, Knesset Yisrael, teachers and students of Torah, “ministering vessels,” who will never lose their sanctity, even if God attempts to break them! The Jewish nation, repositories of the oral teachings, are the heirs to the eternal sanctity of Moses their Rebbe.  
Shabbat Shalom!

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tisa**

**For the week ending 14 March 2020 / 18 Adar 5780**

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com**

**Parsha Insights**

**A Work of Craft**

"See, I have proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft ... to perform every craft of design." (31:2-3)

In Hebrew, there is no word for Art.

There is a Hebrew word, "melacha," that means "craft," but no word meaning Art.

What’s the difference between Art and craft?

An artist can think he is G-d.

He starts off with a blank piece of paper and creates a universe. Being an artist is the closest a person can get to creation ex nihilo — creation from nothing. The universe of the artist is entirely at the whim of its creator. He

can draw and he can erase. He can form and he can fold. He can "create worlds" and he can "destroy them." The sky can be blue or gray. The next note could go up or down. And who says that all this has to be the way it is? Me, the artist.

For the past two and a half thousand years there has raged a global-historical conflict over the place of art in the world. The ancient Greeks, who invented Art with a capital "A", claimed that Art is a doorway to ultimate truth. This Weltanschauung says that through art and artifice you can reach the elemental truths of existence. Celebrating the surface, the way things look, claimed the ancient Greek, leads to the essence of things themselves. The Jew says that the artifice and illusion leads only to greater illusion, unless that skill subordinates itself to the service of truth.

Art that is not for Art’s sake is called craft. Craft knows it is the servant of another master.

The Talmud teaches that if you never saw the Second Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), which Herod built, you never saw a beautiful building in your life. Its walls were constructed from blue/green marble and white Marmara marble. One layer was indented and the next protruded so that the plaster would adhere. Herod thought of covering the whole edifice with gold plate. The Rabbis told him to leave it as it was — without plaster or gilding — since it looked better in its natural state with the different levels of green/blue and white resembling the waves of the sea.

"See, I have proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft ... to perform every craft of design."

Every talent has a place in Judaism. Every talent is a gift of G-dly spirit: A beautiful voice, a brilliant mind, the skill of an artist. Every talent is a gift and a responsibility.

"By His breath the Heavens are spread (shifra)" (Iyov 26:13).

G-d spreads aside the curtain of cloud to reveal that which is beyond. He disperses the clouds that conceal so we can see past the obstruction, past the surface. The word "spread," "shifra," has the same root as "shapir" which means "to beautify."

In Jewish thought, beauty means seeing past the surface to the essence. That which is beautiful is that which takes us beneath the surface, beyond the clouds, to reveal the endless blue heavens, to reveal the truth.

Similarly, the word for "ugly" and "opaque" in Hebrew are the same "achur." Something that conceals essence is ugly, however "beautiful" it might seem.

"Art for Art's sake" can never be a Jewish concept. For, if the definition of beauty is that which reveals, something that reveals nothing but itself can never be beautiful.

The true beauty of the Tabernacle and the Temples was in being the place of the greatest revelation in this world. It revealed that existence is not bounded by the physical constraints of space and time. It demonstrated that this world is connected to that which is beyond this world.

It was a Work of Craft.

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**Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Kee Tisah 5780-2020**

**“The Levites and the Golden Calf: Transcending One’s Own Nature”**  
(Updated and revised from Kee Tisah 5761-2001)

**Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

In this week’s parasha, parashat Kee Tisah, we read of the tragic and calamitous rebellion of the Golden Calf.

According to tradition, the People of Israel miscalculated the time that Moses would be with G-d on Mt. Sinai. When Moses did not return at the

expected time after 40 days, the people demanded from Aaron that he make a new leader for them.

Aaron tried to delay the people until Moses returned by asking the people to bring their jewelry, expecting that they would not be very eager to give up their valuables. Uncharacteristically, the people quickly brought their valuables. Aaron received their donations and fashioned the gold with a tool into a molten calf. Aaron tried to delay again announcing that there would be a celebration tomorrow. But, the people were so eager, that they arose early in the morning and began to joyously worship the Calf. When Moses descended from the mountain, he found the people not only worshipping the Golden Calf, he saw them enthusiastically celebrating with song and dance. Moses reacted angrily to this sight and smashed the tablets that he had brought down from Sinai.

The Torah, in Exodus 32:25-29, states that when Moses saw that the people (worshipping the Golden Calf) had gone mad... he stood at the gate of the camp and cried out: *mi laHashem Eilai* "Whoever is to G-d, come to me!" All the Levites gathered around him. He told them, "Thus says the Lord, G-d of Israel, each of you prepare your sword on your thigh, pass back and forth through the camp and kill your own brother or your own friend or your relative."

The Levites did as Moses commanded, and on that day, there fell from the people about 3,000 men. Moses said to the Levites: "Dedicate yourselves to G-d today, for indeed each of you is dedicated through his son or his daughter and have brought on yourselves a blessing this day."

Rabbi M. Miller in his *Shabbath Shiurim*, cites a series of questions raised by the Netziv, with regard to the Golden Calf. Clearly, asks the Netziv, since only 3,000 people were killed, these 3,000 (an approximate ratio of one of 200) must have been the guilty ones among the 600,000 people, who were actually involved in the sin. Why then did only the Levites respond to Moses' call?

Furthermore, asks the Netziv, why was the call of Moses expressed in such a harsh manner? Moses did not say: Kill every person, even if he is your brother or your friend. Instead, he commands, "Kill your own brother, or your own friend." What was the reason for his extreme harshness?

Rabbi Miller explores and develops the comments of the Netziv, saying that the Levites' response to Moses was much more than an ethical, moral or religious response. Rather, claims the Netziv, the Levites' response emanated from an extraordinarily pure and unmitigated desire to perform G-d's command. Through their selfless actions, the Levites, in utter self-negation, became an instrument of G-d's justice, devoid of any human emotion. When Moses calls to the people, (Exodus 32:26), "Whoever is to G-d, come to me!"—he is really asking, who is holy and unreservedly for G-d? Who is capable of utter abnegation of the self in their zeal for G-d? He phrased the question in such a brazen manner specifically because he wanted only those to come who were up to that exalted level.

Only the Levites, among the People of Israel who did not worship the Golden Calf, reached that level of self-abnegation. Consequently, only the Levites were able to respond to Moses' call to kill even their brothers, if necessary.

Perhaps, now we understand why the Levites were singled out to be the servants of G-d for all time and to serve as the ministers in the Tabernacle and ultimately in the Temple. The Levites, who were prepared to kill even their own brothers, and subjecting themselves to the possibility of being killed by their own brothers, actually went against human nature.

While few of us could ever hope to achieve that exalted state of transcendent spirituality reached by the Levites, all Jews must certainly strive to raise their own spiritual sights as high as possible, so that we too may serve as the ministers of G-d in our own modest way.

This Shabbat is also known as "Shabbat Parashat Parah." It is the third of four special Shabbatot that surround the holiday of Purim. On this Shabbat, a thematic Torah portion concerning the Red Heifer is read from Numbers 19:1-22.

*May you be blessed.*

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***Ki Tissa: The Knot of God's Tefillin***

***Moses' Vision***

One of the more enigmatic passages in the Torah describes a mysterious encounter that took place following the Sin of the Golden Calf. After successfully pleading on behalf of the Jewish people, Moses took advantage of this special time of Divine favor. "Please let me have a vision of Your Glory!"

God replied that it is impossible for mortal man "to have a vision of Me and live." However, God agreed to protect Moses in a mountain crevice as He "passed by."

"You will then have a vision of My back. My face, however, will not be seen." (Ex. 33:17-23)

This account raises many questions. The most obvious problem concerns the story's anthropomorphic elements. God has no body; what do the allegorical terms 'back' and 'face' mean?

The Talmudic commentary for this puzzling incident only adds to our confusion. The Sages explained that God revealed His 'back' to Moses by showing him the knot of God's tefillah shel rosh. (The tefillah shel rosh, the phylactery worn on the head, is held in place by means of a leather strap tied to the back of the head with a special knot.)

What is the significance of God's tefillin knot? Why did God choose to reveal that particular part of His tefillin to Moses?

Knowing God

There are two levels of knowledge. The first is an accurate knowledge of an object's true nature. The second is a limited knowledge, restricted by our intellectual or physical limitations. Regarding tangible objects, there may not be a significant difference between the two levels of knowledge. But when dealing with abstract concepts, especially with regard to the nature of God, the difference will be great — perhaps infinitely so.

The Torah is based on the second type of knowledge. It presents us with a perception of God according to our limited grasp, since only this type of knowledge can provide ethical guidance. Knowledge of God's true nature, on the other hand, is not a form of comprehension at all. As God informed Moses: "Man cannot have a vision of Me and live."

Bound to the Human Intellect

Now we may begin to understand the metaphor of God's tefillin. Contained inside tefillin are scrolls with verses declaring God's unity and Divine nature. These verses signify a comprehension of God's true reality. This truth, however, is beyond human understanding. How can we relate to this infinite truth? What brings it down to the level of our intellectual capabilities, enabling this knowledge to enlighten us and provide moral direction?

The function of the knot is to bind the tefillah shel rosh to the head — and intellect. The knot symbolizes a level of comprehension that takes into account the abilities of those contemplating, so that they may grasp and utilize this knowledge.

The imagery of God's 'face' and 'back' corresponds to these two levels of knowledge. 'Face' in Hebrew is *panim*, similar to the word *p'nim*, meaning inner essence. True knowledge of God's infinite reality is God's 'face.'

Knowledge of God's reality according to our limited understanding, on the other hand, is referred to as God's 'back.' Moses was granted this partial, indirect knowledge — a grasp of the Divine that we are able to appreciate and apply in our finite world.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. I, p.33)

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah: Ki Tisa**

**What does Hashem's back look like?**

This must sound like an extraordinary question but in Parshat Ki Tisa we find Moshe having an encounter with the Almighty. Moshe asks to be given permission to see the presence of Hashem and Hashem replies 'V'raita et achorai, u'fanai lo yera'u' – you will see my back but my face will not be seen'. What did Hashem mean? Many of our commentators say that actually the message here is that if you want to see the presence of Hashem in this world you need to look backwards to our history because with hindsight, one can certainly understand Hashem's involvement and his place, directing everything that takes place in this world.

Rashi however, prefers a different approach. He references the words of Chazal, who explain that at that moment, Hashem showed Moshe his 'Keshet shel teffilin – the knot of the teffilin'. You see we put on our teffilin 'shel rosh' – the teffilin of the head and the teffilin 'shel yad' – the teffilin of the arm, every day. If you were to have a look at somebody who is wearing teffilin from behind, you will see the knot of the teffilin in the nape of his neck. That is what Hashem showed Moshe. You see in the Gemara (masechet Brachot) Chazal tell us that a Hashem puts on teffilin every day.

Then they ask which verse is written in the teffilin of Hashem? The answer is the verse from Chronicles 'u'mi ke'amcha Yisrael goi echad ba'aretz' – 'who is like the people of Israel, a unique nation in this world'. I find this to be incredible. In our teffilin we have written 'Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad' – Listen o Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one'. Our teffilin are all about our praise for Hashem, but Hashem's teffilin are all about his praise for the people of Israel.

Now the Shut Tirosh v'Yitzhar explains beautifully, this particular encounter between Hashem and Moshe took place immediately after the sin of the golden calf. By showing Moshe his teffilin, Hashem was giving us reassurance. Despite the fact that so soon after receiving the Ten Commandments we rebelled against God and rejected his presence in this world, nonetheless, Hashem was continuing to sing the praises of our people. Despite our actions, Hashem was guaranteeing that the Jewish people would survive. So Moshe ended up not seeing Hashem's face, not even seeing his back – he saw his teffilin. Through the teffilin of Hashem, he was informed that regardless of circumstances in this world, Hashem will always remain true to His covenant with the founders of our faith and He will guarantee the survival of the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom

*Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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**Ki Tisa: Understanding a Son's Sin**

**Ben-Tzion Spitz**

Every man is an omnibus in which his ancestors ride. -Oliver Wendell Holmes

This week's Torah reading contains the famous episode of the Golden Calf. Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God. After forty days and nights, the people of Israel became anxious, and feeling leaderless, demanded of Aaron, Moses' brother, that he make an idol for them. Aaron grudgingly does so.

The next morning the people of Israel worship the Golden Calf. They do this at the foot of Mount Sinai, forty days after having heard the voice of God, three months after having been miraculously liberated from Egypt. God is understandably furious (whatever that means theologically). God is ready to destroy the nation of Israel. He informs Moses of his plan to wipe out all of Israel and start over again with Moses as the Patriarch of a new nation that would ostensibly remain loyal and steadfast in their devotion to God.

This is where Moses steps in. He prays to God. His prayer is so strong, so sharp, so convincing, that he somehow gets God to stay His wrath. (Parts of his prayer are used in our liturgies to this day).

The Meshech Chochma on Exodus 32:8 digs a little deeper and wonders as to what gave Moses the insight, the clarity and the wisdom to articulate such an effective prayer and thereby save the entire nation of Israel.

He answers based on the Talmud (Tractate Berachot 32a) which says that Moses prayed until he felt "fire in his bones." The Meshech Chochma details that the reference to "fire in his bones" is that Moses prayed to God for forgiveness for Israel about the Golden Calf until he felt in his bones that he also had the same fault. Only when Moses reached that point of understanding and identification with the sin of Israel, was he able to achieve forgiveness for Israel.

What aspect of the sin was in Moses' "bones?" The Talmud (Tractate Niddah 31a) states that a characteristic that a father bequeaths to his son is his bones. The Midrash based on the Book of Judges tells us that Moses' grandson Yehonatan was guilty of worshipping idols. That gave Moses the opening to say to God: "God, you want to make a new nation from me? In my family, I will also have this fault of idol worship."

So Moses' understanding and identification with his future grandson's idolatry somehow saved the nation of Israel from being punished for that same crime.

May we identify with our progeny, and they with us.

Dedication - To all those in quarantine.

Shabbat Shalom

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by

**Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Tisa**

**פרשת כי תשא תשפ**

**זה יתנו כל העובר על הפקודים**

**This shall they give – everyone who passes through the census. (30:13)**

The *mitzvah* of giving *machatzis ha'shekel*, a half-*shekel*, each year applies equally to all Jews (men, twenty years old and up), regardless of their financial circumstances. All Jews are the same with regard to the donation that supports the daily *korbanos*, communal offerings, and other communal rituals in the *Bais HaMikdash*. As the *Sefer HaChinuch* explains the *shoreshe*, root, of this *mitzvah*, Hashem wanted – for the good and merit of *Klal Yisrael* – that all Jews be equal with regard to the sacrifices (equal representation) that they brought regularly before Him. *Shavim b'mitzvah*, equal in the *mitzvah*, because all Jews are equal before Hashem. Every Jew has his unique, individual *tafkid*, purpose, in life, totally exclusive of his fellow. It is a purpose which only he can perform – no one else. After all, only one "you" exists.

This idea becomes more compelling after (or during) a crisis in one's life, when everything seems to come apart. One might think that the crisis counteracts his purpose in life. It is not true. He always has a purpose. He should be patient and watch how the situation plays out, and he will soon see how, even/especially in his present crisis, he is able to achieve what no one else can.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates the story of Reb Asaf-Yosef Zeiger - who grew up in a secular *kibbutz* in Southern Eretz Yisrael right next to Sderot. He became a *baal teshuvah*, penitent, and studied for eight years in Bnei Brak. He then returned to his *kibbutz* and married a like-minded young woman. Now came the pressing decision: Where should they live? No religious atmosphere to speak of existed in their present location. His mentors and other distinguished Torah leaders encouraged him to return to the *kibbutz*. No one was more suited to reach out to the members of his community than one of their own. He figured that this must be his personal *tafkid* in life. It did not take long before he had established a *shul* that served as a Torah center to which Jews of all stripes came to hear the word of G-d. Even after he became gravely ill, he continued his holy work, because only he could do it. Who knows, perhaps this is why he was blessed with a *refuah sheleimah*?

One of the premier *talmidim*, disciples, of the *Baal Shem Tov* visited his saintly *Rebbe*. He was shocked to hear the *Baal Shem Tov* declare, "You have no *emunah*, faith!" Obviously shocked by this accusation, the student replied, "I spend a good part of my *avodas ha'kodesh*, religious service, working on areas of *emunah*, elevating and deepening my faith." The *Baal Shem Tov* countered, "Yes, you have *emunah* in Hashem, but you have no faith in yourself!" This means that a person who does not "hold of himself," who lacks sufficient self-confidence, whose belief in himself and his abilities leaves something to be desired, is guilty of the concept of *katnus mochin*, restricted consciousness, which is the opposite of *gadlus mochin*, expanded consciousness. Negativity, resentment, aggravation, and obstinateness appear to be much more powerful than they really are to the individual who is going through a period of *katnus*, literally, smallness. He becomes overwhelmed, filled with a lack of self-confidence; he is no longer able to dream, to believe, to hope. He acts much like the *meraglim*, Jewish spies, whom Moshe *Rabbeinu* sent to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. They heard the residents of the land referring to them as *chagavim*, grasshoppers, which resulted in their own diminished opinion of themselves: *Va'nehi b'eineinu k'chagavim*, "We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers" (*Bamidbar* 13:33). Such a statement projects an utter state of uselessness and depression, which impedes a person's personal growth, thus interfering with his *emunah* in Hashem. The key to believing in oneself is to be true to oneself. Everyone has a unique good quality upon which he should focus. As a result, he should live his life consistent with his highest values and aspirations. Doing this will enable and empower him to believe in himself.

As a corollary to the *mitzvah of machtzis ha'shekel*, we learn the significance of attending to our personal *tafkid* in life. It is not about anyone else but us. Everyone has to worry about his personal turf, his unique *tafkid*. Do not worry about the other fellow. Worry about yourself!

The head of one of the premier *chesed* programs in Eretz Yisrael, a program which reaches out and helps many individuals who are in serious need of medical assistance, (and all of the antecedent issues that result from their condition) came to Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, seeking a *brachah*, blessing. Although an accomplished *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, he asked the *Rav* to bless him that he should have more time for learning and that his learning should be on a more profound level (as it used to be prior to his involvement with the *Klal*, community). The response was inspiring. "Had you approached me prior to undertaking this endeavor which assists thousands of our people and creates an enormous *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name, in the world, I would have granted you a blessing to your heart's content (to grow in learning). Now that you are so involved in your project, and *Klal Yisrael* is in dire need of your services, however, it is a clear sign from Heaven that this is your *tafkid* in life. If this is the case, I have no reason to fill your request for a blessing (to grow in Torah learning)."

If we are succeeding at something, *Klal Yisrael* is benefitting and this results in an enormous *Kiddush Hashem* - it must be our *tafkid*. So, we should go for it!

ויאמר משה אל אהרן מה עשה לך העם הזה כי הבאת עליי חטאה גדולה  
Moshe said to Aharon, "What did these people do to you that you brought a grievous sin upon it?" (32:21)

*Rashi* interprets Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s question as, "How much trouble did they put you through before you felt compelled to make the Golden Calf for them?" *Ramban* disagrees, because such a sin is considered *avodah zarah*, idol worship, which is one of the three cardinal sins for which the law of *yehoreg v'al yaavor*, one should be killed rather than transgress, applies. In other words, regardless of the *yissurim*, painful troubles, to which Aharon might have been subjected, he still did not have license to make the Golden Calf. While it is beyond the scope of this *dvar Torah* to distinguish between *yissurim* and *missah*, death, with regard to the sin of *avodah zarah*, we can derive one powerful lesson from Moshe's question: When one judges the sinful behavior of his fellow (judging, as in preparation to rebuke), he must take into account everything and anything that could have catalyzed the sin.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, observes that when we see our fellow acting inappropriately, regardless of the sin, we must first ask ourselves what his reason could be, what mitigating circumstances could have forced him to act in this manner. We must assume that he was not acting with malice; it was not the evil within him that was expressing itself. He must have an underlying reason for his actions. [This neither justifies nor vindicates his actions. A sin is a sin regardless of the underlying excuse, but it is good to know that the individual did not act maliciously.]

*Chazal* assert (*Pirkei Avos* 1:6), *Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*; "Judge all men favorably." Most people justify acting the way they do. One does not simply sin because he wants to sin. He has a story. Every person has a pathology. If we were to go back to his past—family, community, education, upbringing, marriage, economics, etc., we will most often discover a compelling (and mitigating) reason for his actions.

Aharon replied to Moshe, "They had already murdered Chur. I was next. I could not allow them to kill us, for this would have created an unpardonable situation."

The *Sefas Emes* presents a fascinating exposition concerning this *Mishnah*. First and foremost, we are not instructed to ignore a person's actions. It is vital that we criticize constructively, with love and understanding, while being sensitive to the sinner's emotions and (perceived) reasons for acting in such a manner. We must try to understand what would make him act in such a negative manner. The *Sefas Emes* draws this conclusion from the unique vernacular of the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* exhorts us to judge "all men" *kol ha'adam*, which actually means, "all of the man." The whole of the person/all of the man, in this context means that you must give each person the benefit of the doubt. We do not judge one action in isolation, without taking into account the sinner's entire personality, his background and what he has gone through in life. This way we realize that had we been in his place, we might not have acted differently.

Horav Nachman Breslover, zl, offers a powerful thought concerning the obligation to judge others favorably. He teaches that the way we view others actually empowers us. We must search for a positive quality within the person whom we are judging. Within that positive quality, only good exists. If we can find that good and judge him in accordance with it, it is possible to elevate him to the point that the scales of judgment will swing in his favor. Thus, the individual whom we were about to disregard can be saved and brought back, if we take the time to expend the effort to look for that good and judge him based upon that good.

Furthermore, the way we view others can, in turn, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. *Rav Nachman*'s teaching applies not only with regard to the way we view others, but, likewise (perhaps especially) the way we look at ourselves. Two types of people render two types of judgment. The first type is quick to vilify others, while simultaneously finding enormous merit in their own actions. Conversely, others are quick to heap praise on the actions of others, while deriding themselves mercilessly. For this reason, *Rav*

Nachman underscores the importance of also judging oneself favorably.

One who has difficulty in finding the positive qualities which he possesses will fall prey to depression and melancholy. “Do not listen to the negative voice from within which tries to depress you,” declares the *Rebbe*. Surely one has acted properly or performed good things with his life. That is sufficient reason to claim merit and establish a baseline upon which to focus. Once we have discovered the good, the rest is all about focusing on that good. This will ultimately bring us back to Hashem, Who is waiting for our return.

An elegant wedding was celebrated at one of the more exclusive halls in Yerushalayim. The assembled guests knew the *chassan's* family quite well, as fine, upstanding – but economically challenged – people. They were frequently borrowing or requesting assistance, simply to put food on the table. Therefore, the guests were quite surprised to witness the luxury and opulence of this wedding. It was not as if the *kallah's* side had any money either. As is common when people congregate and have nothing better to do, some of the guests began to gossip, wondering how a family of “*shnorrers*,” who usually requested charity, could have the temerity to incur such exorbitant expenses to marry off their son. When the *Rav* of the community heard the slander based upon rumors, he felt that he had an obligation to reveal the truth about the wedding.

Shortly before the wedding, the father had searched for a hall large enough for the wedding. He was about to make his first wedding and felt it prudent to invite the community. After all, without the constant support of the community, he would not be here now. He was in for a shock when he discovered that weddings are not given away for free. A caterer must earn a living. He went to the first hotel in which his son could get married and was prepared to sign a contract. As he was inquiring about prices, the woman who owned the hall burst into tears. She wept profusely after discovering the identity of the *chassan's* father.

A few moments elapsed and, after she gathered herself together, she explained to the puzzled father why she had reacted in the manner that she did: “Your father (the *chassan's* grandfather) helped my family escape Germany during the second world war. If not for him, we would not be here today. I insist that your son's wedding be celebrated in this hotel and that I assume all the expenses for the wedding.” This is how people who were otherwise destitute were able to have a lavish wedding. A story always has two sides.

After reading this story, one might say that it is best not to talk, because we never know how, why, where they had the money to make such a wedding. The flipside is, why would they be so thoughtless as to make such a wedding and feed the slander mongers their daily rumor? They should have known better. People – even good people – when they see a poor man living in luxury will question his sanity and integrity. Why give them the opportunity to speak negatively?

To judge favorably is an expression of deep love. We care about the person and want to see him happy and empowered. This is how it should be. We pray for the day when this is how it will be.

**הראני נא את כבודך**

**Show me please Your glory. (Shemos 33:18)**

The *cheit ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf, was committed forty days after Hashem gave Moshe *Rabbeinu* the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, on *Har Sinai*. It was a sin for which Hashem wanted to destroy the Nation. While only a small group of people actually sinned, the rest of the nation stood by in apathy, either indifferent or unable to do anything to prevent the sin from occurring. As a result, Hashem held all of them in contempt, and He punished them. Hashem revoked His decree to destroy the nation due to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* supplication on their behalf.

Following Hashem's acquiescence to Moshe's prayer, Moshe asked Hashem, *Hareini na es kvodecha*; “Show me, please, Your Glory,” which means, “Teach me the way You conduct the world.” Hashem replied

that it is impossible to see Hashem's Glory directly and survive. To grant Moshe a glimpse, Hashem placed Moshe in a cave until His Glory passed by. As the vision of Hashem's Glory passed, Moshe could look out and gaze at Hashem's back. *Chazal* explain that Moshe was able to see His *Kesher Shel Tefillin*, the knot that secures the *Tefillin Shel Rosh*, *Tefillin* on the head, which is positioned on the back of the neck. Obviously, this is beyond us. What does the *Tefillin* knot, *kesher*, have to do with the Glory of Hashem?

The commentators interpret Moshe's request as an attempt to understand the spiritual quandary of, *Tzaddik v'ra lo, rasha v'tov lo*; “The righteous suffer while the wicked prosper.” This dilemma is magnified when we see a *tzaddik* who has lived a perfect life of commitment to Hashem suffer greatly, while the consummate *rasha*, whose life of abandon and rebellion against Hashem is utterly disgusting, seems to be walking on a cloud, enjoying the pleasures of this world to his greatest satisfaction. Our quintessential leader, whose faith in Hashem was without peer, could not fathom why there must exist such a spiritual impasse – one which has plagued and even turned off otherwise (externally) upright and devoted Jews. Furthermore, the eleventh *Ani Maamin*, Principle of Faith, declares that He is a righteous G-d Who rewards good and punishes evil. This is a principle of faith which, in the face of what seems to occur, requires that we make an enormous leap of faith to accept it.

*Horav Shimon Schwab, zl* (quoted in *My Rebbe, Rav Schwab*), explains that the *kesher* of the *Tefillin Shel Rosh* is tied in a special way. The manner in which we tie it provides us with an insight into Hashem's response to Moshe. A leather strap (*retzuah*) is inserted through a slot in the back of the *Tefillin* box and comes out on the right and left sides of the box. Those two ends are connected by a special knot, causing the *retzuos*, straps, to form a ring the size of the person's head. The knot sits at the back of the head, with the rest of the straps hanging down and worn by the person on the front of the body. Upon examination, we note that each strap enters the knot on one side and exits on the other. The right strap enters on the right and exits on the left and vice versa. Thus, the *kesher* serves as the medium for reversing the *retzuah*, with right becoming left and left becoming right.

This, explains *Rav Schwab*, alludes to the underlying connection between Moshe's question and the *kesher* of the *Tefillin*. What we perceive as pain and suffering is, in reality, in one's best interest. The righteous person who undergoes suffering simultaneously atones his sins in this world, so that his entrance into his rightful place in the World-to-Come is pure and without sin. The one who lives a life in violation of Hashem's *mitzvos* seems to value this temporal world above the external value of reward in *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come. Thus, Hashem rewards him for whatever good he does in this world. The *kesher* teaches us that what goes in one end does not necessarily exit that way. Likewise, what we seem to think is “right” is actually “left” and vice versa.

**ומשה לא ידע כי קרן עור פניו בדברו אתו**

הרב דניאל בן הרב אברהם ארי' ליב שור ז"ל *our father, grandfather*

נלב" ע"כ אדר תשס"ו ת.צ.צ.ב.ת. *Horav Doniel Schur Z"L*

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**When May I Ask a Non-Jew to Assist Me on Shabbos?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

While enslaved in Egypt, the Jews worked every day of the week, and one of the special days celebrated to commemorate our Exodus is Shabbos. Observing Shabbos includes not only keeping the *mitzvos* ourselves, but also knowing when I may ask a non-Jew to perform prohibited activity, and when I may benefit from work performed by a non-Jew on Shabbos.

Each of the following questions describes a situation that people have asked me:

Question #1: A non-Jew turned on the lights for me on Shabbos. May I use this light to read?

Question #2: It is chilly in our house. May I ask a non-Jewish neighbor to turn up the heat?

Question #3: There is a problem with our electricity -- the lights have gone out, and my son is terrified. May I ask a non-Jewish electrician to repair the power on Shabbos?

Question #4: We left the air conditioning off, and it became very hot on Shabbos. May I ask a non-Jew to turn the air conditioning on?

Question #5: I did not realize that I parked my car in a place where it will be towed away. May I ask a non-Jewish neighbor to move it?

In general, a Jew may not ask a non-Jew to perform activity that a Jew himself may not do. Chazal prohibited this because asking a non-Jew to work on Shabbos diminishes our sensitivity to doing melacha ourselves. Furthermore, the non-Jew functions as my agent, and it is therefore considered as if I did melacha work on Shabbos.

One may not benefit from melacha performed for a Jew by a non-Jew on Shabbos, even if the Jew did not ask him to do the work (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 276:1). Thus, if a non-Jew turned on a light for the Jew's benefit without being asked, a Jew may not use the light.

This article will discuss when I may benefit from what a non-Jew does a melacha and when may I ask him to do melacha.

#### BENEFITING FROM NON-JEWISH LABOR

In general, if a non-Jew does melacha work for me on Shabbos, I may not benefit from what he did until enough time has elapsed after Shabbos for the work to have been performed after Shabbos (Beitzah 24b; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 325:6). Thus if a non-Jew baked an apple for me on Shabbos, I may not eat it after Shabbos until the time it takes to bake an apple. This way I receive no benefit from the work he performed on Shabbos and I am not tempted to ask him to do melacha for me at a different time (Rashi and Tosafos, Beitzah 24b).

However, if a non-Jew did work specifically for himself or for another non-Jew, I may benefit from his work even on that Shabbos itself (Mishnah Shabbos 122a). Therefore, if he turned on a light to see where he is going or to be able to read, I may use the light to read. There is an exception to this lenience that I will explain shortly.

The Gemara tells us the following story: The great Amora Shmuel was visiting a man named Avin in the town of Torin, when a non-Jew entered the room and kindled a light. Shmuel assumed that the non-Jew had ignited the light for Shmuel's benefit, which would make it forbidden to use the light. In order to point out the fact that he was not using the light, Shmuel turned his chair around, with his back to the light, so that it was obvious that he was not using it. Shortly thereafter, the non-Jew returned with a document that he proceeded to read. Shmuel now realized that the non-Jew had kindled the light for himself and that he (Shmuel) was permitted to read by the light (Shabbos 122b).

Sometimes I may not benefit from work performed by a non-Jew even though he performed the work to benefit a non-Jew. This is in a case where there is concern that my benefiting from the activity might encourage the non-Jew to do more work than he needs for himself in order to benefit me. For example, if a non-Jew who knows me heated up a kettle of water because he wants a cup of coffee, I may not use the hot water. The reason is that, at some time in the future, he might decide to add extra water to the kettle that he is heating so that I can benefit (Shabbos 122a).

#### REMOVING IMPEDIMENTS

If a non-Jew did work that results in removing an impediment that was disturbing a Jew, I need not be concerned about benefiting from the non-Jew's melacha activity. For example, if he turned off the light so that a Jewish person can sleep, one may go to sleep in that room. This is not considered as receiving benefit from a non-Jew's Shabbos activity, since extinguishing the light only removed an obstacle and created nothing positive.

#### PARTIAL BENEFIT

Another instance that is not considered as receiving benefit from melacha activity is when I could already benefit before the non-Jew performed the melacha, and his melacha only makes it easier to do what I wanted. For example, if there is enough light to read, and a non-Jew turns on additional light, I may continue to read even though it is now easier to read. This is not considered as benefiting from the non-Jew's melacha since I could have read even if he did not do the melacha (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 276:4). Similarly, one may eat a meal by the light that he provides, if one could eat even without the additional light. (Note that one may not ask the non-Jew to turn on the light in any of these instances.)

The poskim dispute whether in the above scenario I may continue reading after the original light burns out. Some contend that once the light has gone out, I may no longer read in the room since I am now benefiting from what the non-Jew kindled on Shabbos (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 276:4; Bach; Magen Avraham). Others contend that since I was permitted to read when the light was kindled, I may continue to read even after the original light extinguished (Taz, Orach Chayim 276:3). Mishnah Berurah concludes that one should follow the first opinion.

I once spent Shabbos in a kosher hotel for a family simcha. I arrived early for davening Shabbos morning, intending to learn beforehand, only to discover that the lights were still out in the shul. I assumed that the lights were set to go on by a Shabbos clock and sat down near a window to learn in the interim. Fifteen minutes before davening started, a non-Jewish employee of the hotel arrived and turned on all the shul lights. This involved two prohibitions: 1. Since the non-Jew was an employee of the Jewish-owned hotel, the hotel should not have arranged for him to do melacha on Shabbos. 2. One may not benefit from the work he did. Thus, it is forbidden to read in the shul if you need the light to read.

However, as long as enough light came in through the windows to read, I could continue to read using the artificial light, since I could in any case read near the window.

However, I could not read anywhere else in the shul. Furthermore, once it would get dark outdoors, and I could no longer read by the natural light, most authorities would prohibit reading by the kindled light.

#### MUST I LEAVE HOME?

According to what we have just explained, it would seem that if a non-Jew turns on the light in a house because he wants to benefit a Jew, one may not benefit from the light -- and would have to leave the house. However, Chazal ruled that one is not required to leave one's house if one did not want the non-Jew to turn on the light. Although one may not benefit from a non-Jew's melacha on Shabbos, one is not required to leave one's house in order to avoid benefiting from melacha done against one's will (Rama 276:1, quoting Yerushalmi). In all instances like this, one should tell the non-Jew that you do not want him to do the melacha.

#### WHEN MAY I ASK A NON-JEW TO WORK ON SHABBOS?

Under certain extenuating circumstances, Chazal permitted asking a non-Jew to do melacha that a Jew may not do himself. I will group these situations under the following categories:

I. Situations when I may ask a non-Jew to perform work that would be prohibited min haTorah for a Jew.

II. Situations when I may ask a non-Jew to perform work that is prohibited midrabbanan.

I. There are a few situations where I may ask a non-Jew to perform something that would be a Torah prohibition if I did it myself. I may ask a non-Jew to perform a melacha for someone who is "choleh kol gufo," literally, his entire body is sick. This means that although the person is in no danger, his illness is more than just a minor annoyance but it affects his entire body (Shabbos 129a; Shulchan Aruch 328:17). For example, I may ask a non-Jew to drive this person to a doctor, to pick up a prescription, or to turn a light on or off. This leniency applies to someone whose illness affects his entire body, or who is sick enough to be bedridden. Later in the article, I will discuss the halachos that apply to someone who is not well but who is feeling better than the person just described.

#### CHILDREN

Since children often get sick and are generally weaker than adults are, halacha considers a child as choleh kol gufo (Rama 276:1) when there is a great need (Mishnah Berurah ad loc.). Therefore, if it is cold indoors, one may ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat for the sake of a child, and then an adult may also benefit from the heat.

Until what age do I consider a child a choleh kol gufo? Many poskim contend that any child under the age of nine is in this category (Shu't Minchas Yitzchok 1:78), although other poskim are less lenient.

Halacha treats a child who is afraid of the dark as a choleh kol gufo (Ketzos Hashulchan 134:18). Therefore if the light went out and a child is afraid, one may ask a non-Jew to rectify the problem.

We can now answer Question #3 above: "There is a problem with our electricity -- the lights have gone out, and my son is terrified. May I ask a non-Jewish electrician to repair the power on Shabbos?" Under these circumstances, one may do so.

#### COLD ADULTS

When it is very cold, one may ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat even for adults, even if this involves doing a Torah prohibition. This is because everyone is considered sick when it comes to the cold. When it is chilly but not freezing, the poskim dispute whether I may ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat for the sake of adults when there are no children or ill people around (Shulchan Aruch 276:5 and commentaries).

Thus, we can now answer Question #2: "It is chilly in our house. May I ask a non-Jewish neighbor to turn up the heat?" The answer is that it depends on how cold it is and who is affected by the lack of heat.

#### WIDESPREAD TRANSGRESSION

Another situation where one may ask a non-Jew to do melacha that is prohibited min haTorah, is when it is necessary to prevent many people from transgressing the Torah. For example, if one discovered that the eruv is down, one may ask a non-Jew to repair it on Shabbos, even though he will have to perform activities that would be prohibited min



haTorah (Mishnah Berurah 276:25), such as driving his car, tying a knot, or carrying in a reshut harabim min haTorah.

II. Situations when I may ask a non-Jew to perform work that is prohibited miderabbanan.

#### SHVUS DE'SHVUS

Under certain other circumstances, Chazal permitted asking a non-Jew to do something that would be prohibited miderabbanan for a Jew. The poskim usually refer to this lenience as shvus de'shvus. In general, this is permitted in any of the following situations:

(A) If a person is slightly ill.

(B) There is a major need.

(C) In order to enable a Jew to fulfill a mitzvah (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 307:5). I will now explain these three situations:

(A) Earlier, I noted that if someone is ill to the extent that the illness affects his entire body, or if he is sick enough to go to bed, one may ask a non-Jew to do something that would involve a Torah prohibition for a Jew. If the person is less ill, one may ask a non-Jew to do something that involves only a rabbinic prohibition, but not a Torah prohibition.

Included under this category is if the person is suffering from considerable pain (Gra, Orach Chayim 325:10; Aruch Hashulchan 307:18). Thus, someone who caught his finger in a door may ask a non-Jew to bring ice through an area without an eruv, if he has no ice in his house. Similarly if an insect bit him, he may ask a non-Jew to buy medicine to alleviate the pain.

Based on the above heter, may one ask a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioner if it gets very hot? Does this qualify as alleviating a great deal of suffering? And is operating the air conditioning considered a Torah violation or a rabbinic violation, for which we may be lenient because of shvus de'shvus?

This question was the subject of a dispute by the last generation's poskim. Minchas Yitzchok (3:23) permits asking a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioning, quoting Levush who explains that once people are unaccustomed to the cold, halacha considers them to be ill even if it is not that cold. Therefore, one may ask a non-Jew to kindle a fire for them. However, he then quotes sources that contend that being too hot is not the same as being too cold. He concludes that someone who is accustomed to moderate weather suffers when it is very hot and humid and may therefore ask a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioning because it is shvus de'shvus bimakom tzaar (to alleviate suffering). Similarly, his mechutan, the Chelkas Yaakov (3:139) permitted having a non-Jew turn on the air conditioning because of shvus di'shvus bimakom tzaar.

On the other hand, Rav Moshe prohibited asking a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioner because it is benefiting from work performed by a non-Jew on Shabbos (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:47:2). Rav Moshe forbids benefiting even if one did not ask the non-Jew to turn on the air conditioning, but merely hinted, such as by telling him, "It is really hot here!" hoping that he catches the hint. Evidently, Rav Moshe did not consider this as a makom tzaar that permits benefiting from a non-Jew's activity on Shabbos.

Thus, in answer to Question #4 -- "We left the air conditioning off, and it became very hot on Shabbos. May I ask a non-Jew to turn the air conditioning on?" We see that the poskim dispute whether this is permitted or not.

(B) One may ask a non-Jew to perform an issur derabbanan in case of major need.

There are three opinions as to how much financial loss this must entail to be considered a major need.

(1) Some rule that one may ask the non-Jew even if there is no financial loss, as long as there is a great need (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 307:5; Gra 307:12). According to these poskim, if one's clothes became torn or dirty on Shabbos and he is embarrassed to wear them, he may ask a non-Jew to bring him clean clothes through an area not enclosed by an eruv.

(2) Other poskim rule more strictly, contending that one may be lenient only if a major financial loss will result (Magen Avraham 307:7). According to these poskim, if one discovered that the plug of one's well-stocked freezer is disconnected, one may ask a non-Jew to reconnect it on Shabbos.

(3) A third opinion contends that major financial loss is not sufficient reason to permit shvus de'shvus unless there is some physical discomfort as well (Elyah Rabbah 307:14). We usually follow the second opinion quoted and permit a shvus di'shvus in case of major financial loss. Furthermore, we allow shvus de'shvus even if it is uncertain that a major loss will result, but it is a good possibility (see She'eilas Yaavetz 2:139). As a result, one may ask a non-Jew to plug in the freezer even if one is uncertain whether the food will go bad.

Note that the opinions I quoted above permit asking a non-Jew only to perform a melacha derabbanan to avoid financial loss, but none of them permit asking him to violate a Torah law. Thus, this would answer Question #5 that I mentioned above: "I did not realize that I parked my car in a place where the city will tow it away. May I ask a

non-Jewish neighbor to move it?" The answer is that one is not allowed to ask him.

However, one may hint to the non-Jew in an indirect way by saying, "My car is parked in a place where it might get towed," as I explained in a previous article on this subject.

(C) I may ask a non-Jew to do something that is only an issur derabbanan in order to enable me to perform a mitzvah. For example, having a guest who is visiting from out of town, or a guest who otherwise would have nowhere to eat, fulfills the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim. (Inviting a neighborhood family over for a Shabbos meal may be a very big chesed for the wife of the guest family, but it does not qualify as the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim [Rama 333:1].) Therefore, if one realizes on Shabbos that one does not have enough chairs for all the guests to sit at the table, he may ask a non-Jew to bring chairs from a neighbor's house even when there is no eruv. Other poskim are more lenient, permitting asking a non-Jew to bring any food or beverage that enhances Shabbos (Aruch Hashulchan 307:18).

Some authorities permit asking a non-Jew to perform a Torah melacha in order to allow the observance of a mitzvah. This is a minority opinion and should not be followed.

However, there was an old custom among European Jewry to permit asking a non-Jew under these circumstances. This custom has halachic sources in the following Rama:

"Some permit telling a non-Jew to kindle lights for the sake of the Shabbos meal, because they contend that in order to fulfill a mitzvah (such as having a nice Shabbos meal) one may ask a non-Jew to perform even a real melacha that would be forbidden for a Jew to do min haTorah. Following this approach, many are accustomed to be lenient and command a non-Jew to kindle lights for the purpose of the Shabbos meal, particularly for wedding and bris meals, and no one rebukes them. However, one should be strict in this matter when there is no extenuating need, since most of the halachic authorities disagree" (Rama 276:2).

In conclusion, we have discovered that in certain extenuating instances, Chazal permitted melacha performed by a non-Jew, but that one should not extend these heterim to other situations. When using a non-Jew to do normally forbidden work, one should focus that one's intent is not, chas vesholom, to weaken the importance of Shabbos, but, rather, to enhance kavod Shabbos.

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### PARSHAT KI-TISA

No matter how one explains the story of 'chet ha-egel' [the sin of the Golden Calf], we encounter a problem. If we understand (as the psukim seem to imply) that Bnei Yisrael truly believed that it was this 'golden calf' (and not God) who took them out of Egypt - then it is simply hard to fathom how an entire nation would reach such a senseless conclusion!

But if we claim (as many commentators do) that Aharon had good intentions, for he only intended for the 'egel' to be a physical representation of God (who took them out of Egypt) - then why is God so angered to the point that he wants to destroy the entire nation!

In this week's shiur, we look for the 'middle road' as we attempt to find a 'logical' explanation for the events as they unfold, based on our understanding of the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

#### INTRODUCTION

According to the popular Midrash, quoted by Rashi (see 32:1 'ba-shesh'), Bnei Yisrael's miscalculation of Moshe's return by one day led to the entire calamity of 'chet ha'egel'. However, when one examines the details of this story (as other commentators do), a very different picture emerges that provides a more 'logical' explanation for the people's request.

In the following shiur, we follow that direction, as we examine the events as they unfold in Parshat Kitisa in light of (and as a continuation of) the events that transpired at the end of Parshat Mishpatim (see 24:12-18).

Therefore, we begin our shiur by quoting the Torah's description of Moshe's original ascent to Har Sinai for forty days, noting how Moshe never provided the people with an exact date of his expected return:

"And God told Moshe, come up to Me on the mountain... then Moshe ascended God's Mountain. To the elders he said: **'Wait here** for us, **until we return** to you. Behold, Aharon and Chur are with you, should there be any problems, go to them..." (see 24:12-14).

Carefully note how Moshe had informed the elders that he was leaving 'until he returns', without specifying a date! Even though several psukim later Chumash tells us (i.e. the reader) that Moshe remained on the mountain for forty days (see 24:18), according to 'pshat', the people have no idea how long Moshe would be gone for.

[And most likely, neither did Moshe or Aharon. It is important to note that Rashi's interpretation carries a very deep message re: the nature of patience and sin, but it is not necessarily the simple pshat of these psukim. ]

#### A LOGICAL CONCLUSION

Considering this was not the first time that Moshe had ascended Har Sinai to speak to God (see 19:3,20; 24:1,2); and in each previous ascent Moshe had never been gone for more than a day or two - Bnei Yisrael have ample reason to assume that this time he would not be gone much longer. After all, how long could it possibly take to receive the 'luchot, Torah, & mitzva' (see 24:12): a few days, a few weeks?

Days pass; weeks pass; yet Moshe does not return! Add to this the fact that the last time that Bnei Yisrael saw Moshe, he had entered a cloud-covered mountain consumed in fire (see 24:17-18), hence - the people's conclusion that Moshe was 'gone' was quite logical. After all, how much longer can they wait for?

Assuming that Moshe is not returning, Bnei Yisrael must do something - but what are their options?

\* To remain stranded in the desert?

Of course not! They have waited for Moshe long enough.

\* To return to Egypt?

"chas ve-shalom' / (of course not!). That would certainly be against God's wishes; and why should they return to slavery!

\* To continue their journey to Eretz Canaan?

Why not! After all, was this not the purpose of Yetziat Mitzraim - to inherit the Promised Land (see 3:8,17 6:8)?

Furthermore, that is precisely what God had promised them numerous times, and most recently in Shmot 23:20?

This background helps us understand why Bnei Yisrael approached Aharon, whom Moshe had left in charge (see 24:13-15) and why their opening complaint focused on their desire for new leadership - to replace Moshe. Let's take a careful look now at the Torah's description of this event:

"When the people saw that Moshe was **so delayed** in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered on **Aharon** and said to him: Come make us an **elohim** that will **lead us** [towards the Promised Land] **because** Moshe, who took us out of the land of Egypt [and promised to take us to Eretz Canaan], we do not know what has happened to him" (32:1).

As your review this pasuk, note the phrase "elohim asher **yelchu** lefaneinu". In other words, note how the people do not request a new god, but rather an **elohim** [some-one /or thing] that that will 'walk in front', i.e. that will **lead** them [to the Promised Land].

To understand how 'logical' this request was, we need only conduct a quick comparison between this pasuk and God's earlier promise (in Parshat Mishpatim) that He would send a "**mal'ach**" to lead them and help them conquer the Land:

"Behold, I am sending a **mal'ach** - **lefanecha** [before you] - to guard you and **bring you to the place** that I have made ready..."

(see 23:20 / Note the Hebrew word '**lefanecha**!')

And two psukim later, God continues this promise:

"ki **yelech mal'achi lefanecha** - For My angel will **go before you**, and bring you to the Land..." (23:23)

[Note again - **lefanecha**, and the word **yelech**.]

Recall as well that this was the last promise that they had heard before Moshe ascended Har Sinai. When Bnei Yisrael first heard this promise, they most probably assumed that this **mal'ach** would be none other than Moshe himself. [Note how the **mal'ach** must be someone who commands them, leads them, while God's Name is in his midst (see 23:21-22, compare 19:9).]

Now that Moshe is presumed dead, the people simply demand that Aharon provide them with a replacement for (or possibly a **symbol** of) this **mal'ach**, in order that they can **continue** their journey to the Promised Land. Note once again:

"Come make us an **elohim** - asher **yelchu lefaneinu**!" (32:1) [Again, note **yelchu** & **lefaneinu**]

In fact, from a simple reading of the text, it appears as though Aharon actually agrees to this request:

"And Aharon said to them: Take off your gold... and bring them to me... He took it from them and cast in a mold and made it into a molten calf..." (32:2-4).

If our interpretation thus far is correct, then the people's statement (upon seeing this Golden Calf): "This is your god O' Israel - who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (32:4), does not need to imply that this Golden Calf actually took them out of Egypt. [After all, they had already stated in 32:1 that Moshe had taken them out of Egypt!] Rather, the people are simply stating their own perception - that this **egel** (which Aharon had just made) represents the God who had taken them out of Egypt and will hopefully now act as His **mal'ach** who will lead them on their journey to Eretz Canaan.

In other words, in Bnei Yisrael's eyes, the **egel** is not a **replacement** for God, rather a **representation** of His Presence!

[See a similar explanation by Rav Yehuda HaLevi in Sefer HaKuzari I.77! See also Ibn Ezra & Ramban on Shmot 32:1]

This would also explain Aharon's ensuing actions: To assure that the **egel** is properly understood as a **representation** of God, Aharon calls for a celebration:

"And Aharon saw, and he built a **mizbeiach** in front of it, and Aharon called out and said: A celebration **for God** [note: be-shem **havaya**] tomorrow" (32:5).

Furthermore, this 'celebration' parallels the almost identical ceremony that took place at Har Sinai forty days earlier - when Bnei Yisrael declared 'na'aseh ve-nishma'. To verify this, we'll compare the Torah's description of these two ceremonies:

\* In Parshat Mishpatim - after Moshe sets up 12 monuments:

"...and they **woke up early** in the morning, and they **built a mizbeiach** at the foot of the mountain and twelve monuments for the twelve tribes of Israel... and they offered **olot** and sacrificed **shlamim**" (24:4-5).

\* In Parshat Ki-tisa - after Aharon forges the **egel**:

"...and they **woke up early** in the morning [after Aharon had **built a mizbeiach** in front of it /32:5], and they offered **olot** and sacrificed **shlamim**..." (32:6).

Note the obvious parallels: waking up in the morning, building a **mizbeiach** in front of a 'symbol' (representing their relationship with God), offering **olot & shlamim**, and 'eating and drinking' (compare 24:11 with 32:6).

Furthermore, recall how that ceremony included Moshe's reading of the 'divrei Hashem' - which most likely included the laws of Parshat Mishpatim - including God's promise to send a **mal'ach** to lead them (see 23:20-23). Hence, not only are these two events parallel, they both relate to Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of a **mal'ach** that will **lead** them to the land [asher **yelchu** lefaneinu]!

Finally, note how **both** ceremonies include a **mizbeiach** that is erected in **front** of a **symbol** representing God:

\* In Parshat Mishpatim, the symbol is the twelve monuments, possibly representing God's fulfillment of brit avot.

\* In Parshat Ki-tisa, the symbol is the **egel**, representing the **mal'ach** (which God had promised) that will lead them.

[Note, that this parallel actually continues in the **mishkan** itself! In front of the **mizbeiach** upon which Bnei Yisrael offer **olot & shlamim**, we find the **aron & keruvim** - that serve as symbol of God's covenant with Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Later, this very **aron** leads Bnei Yisrael through the desert towards the land (see Bamidbar 10:33) as well as in battle (see Bamidbar 10:35 & Yehoshua 6:6-10). This can also explain why the Torah refers to this calf as an 'egel **masecha**' (see 32:4) - implying a 'face covering', hiding the true face, but leaving a representation of what man can perceive.]

### WHY 'DAVKA' AN EGEL?

Even though our interpretation thus far has shown how the **egel** can be understood as a symbol of God's Presence, we have yet to explain why specifically an **egel** is chosen as that representation. Chizkuni offers an ingenious explanation, based on yet another parallel to Ma'amad Har Sinai.

Recall that at the conclusion of the ceremony at Har Sinai (24:1-11), **Aharon**, Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders are permitted to 'see' God:

"And they saw **Elokei Yisrael** and - 'tachat **raglav**' - under His feet was like a shining sapphire..." (24:10)

Obviously, God does not have 'feet'! However, this description reflects a certain spiritual level. Moshe, for example, achieved the highest level - "panim be-panim" - face to face. In contrast, the seventy elders perceived 'tachat **raglav**' -(God's feet), reflecting a lower spiritual level.

[This may relate to the people's request for a more distanced relationship, where Moshe served as their intermediary (see 20:15-18 and Devarim 5:20-26).]

Although it is very difficult for us to comprehend the description of God in such physical terms, Chizkuni (on 32:4) notes that we find a very similar description of the **Shchina** in Sefer Yechezkel:

"And their feet were straight, and the bottom of their **feet** were similar to the feet of an **egel**..." (Yechezkel 1:7).

[See also the textual parallel of 'even sapir' / compare Yechezkel 1:26 with Shmot 24:10.]

[Alternately, one could suggest that an **egel** was chosen to represent the **parim** which were offered on Har Sinai during the ceremony when God informed them about the **mal'ach** (see 24:5/ note that an **egel** is a baby 'par').]

So if the people's original request was indeed 'legitimate', and Aharon's 'solution' a sincere attempt to make a representation of God - why does God become so angered? Why does He threaten to destroy the entire nation?

To answer this question, we must once again return to our parallel with Parshat Mishpatim.

### A CONTRASTING PARALLEL

Despite the many parallels noted above, we find **one** additional phrase that is unique to the story of chet ha-egel, and creates (what we refer to as) a contrasting parallel. Note the final phrase of each narrative:

\* At Har Sinai (in Parshat Mishpatim):

"... and they beheld God and they **ate and drank**" (24:11).

\* At chet ha-egel (in Parshat Ki-tisa):

"they sat to **eat and drink** and they rose **letzachek**" (32:6).

[We call this a 'contrasting parallel'.]

It is not by chance that many commentators find in this word the key to understanding Bnei Yisrael's sin.

Even though the simple translation of 'letzachek' is laughing or frivolous behavior, Rashi raises the possibility that it may refer to licentiousness (or even murder / see Rashi 32:7 and Breishit 39:17). Certainly, Chazal understand this phrase to imply more than just 'dancing'. To Aharon's dismay, what began as a quiet ceremony turned into a 'wild party'. The celebration simply seems to have gotten 'out of hand'. [Soon we will explain why.]

To support this understanding of letzachek, let's 'jump ahead' to the Torah's account of Moshe's descent from Har Sinai (when he breaks the luchot), noting what Moshe and Yehoshua hear from the mountain.

First of all, note Yehoshua's initial reaction to the 'loud noise' that he hears:

"And Yehoshua heard the sound of the people - **be-rei'o** - screaming loudly, and said to Moshe: there are sounds of **war** in the camp. But Moshe answered - these are not the sounds of triumphant, nor are they the groans of the defeated, they are simply sounds [of wildness/ frivolity] that I hear" (32:17-18).

[Note Targum Unkelos of 'kol anot' in 32:18 - kol de-**mechaychin**, compare with Targum of letzachek in 32:6 of le-**chaycha**; clearly connecting the loud noises to the loud laughing of "va-yakumu letzachek"!

Note also the word **be-rei'o** - from shoresh 'lehariya' - to make a sound like a **tru'a**, but the spelling is **r.a.a.h.** reflecting its negative context like the word 'ra'a' = bad or evil! Compare also with 32:22!

The noise from this 'wild party' was so loud that it sounded to Yehoshua like a war was going on!

Note as well what provoked Moshe to actually break the tablets: "And he saw the **egel** and the **dancing** circles and became enraged" [va-yar et ha-egel u-**mecholot**...] (32:19).

Moshe was upset no less by the 'wild dancing' than by the **egel** itself! [See commentary of Seforno on this pasuk.]

With this in mind, let's return now to study the Torah's account of God's anger with chet ha-egel, as recorded earlier in chapter 32.

First of all, as you review 32:5-7, note how God only becomes angry (and tells Moshe to go down) on the day **after**

Aharon made the egel! Now if Bnei Yisrael's primary sin was making the egel, God should have told Moshe to go down on that very same day. The fact that God only tells him to go down on the **next** day, and only after we are told that - "va-yakumu letzacheh" - supports our interpretation that this phrase describes the primary sin of chet ha-egel.

### BACK TO OLD HABITS

What led to this calamity? What was this noise and 'wild party' all about? Even though it is based on 'circumstantial evidence', one could suggest the following explanation:

Even though the celebration around the egel initiated by Aharon began with good intentions (see 32:5 - 'chag l-Hashem'), for some reason, Bnei Yisrael's behavior at this party quickly became wild and out of control. Apparently, once the drinking, dancing, and music began, the nation impulsively reverted back to their old ways, regressing back to their Egyptian culture. [Even though this may not sound very logical, as most of us are aware, it is unfortunately human nature.]

To understand why, let's return to our discussion of Bnei Yisrael's spiritual level in Egypt, based on Yechezkel chapter 20, and as discussed in length in our shiurim on parshat Va'era and Beshalach:

Before the exodus, Bnei Yisrael were so immersed in Egyptian culture that God found it necessary to demand that they 'change their ways' in order to prepare for their redemption (see Yechezkel 20:5-9). Even though they did not heed this plea, God took them out of Egypt in the hope that the miracles of Yetziat Mitzraim, and their experiences on the way to Har Sinai would create a 'change of heart' (see TSC shiur on Parshat Beshalach). When they arrived at Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael's proclamation of na'aseh ve-nishma (see 19:3-8 & 24:7) showed God that they were finally ready to become God's special nation.

### THE LAST STRAW

Unfortunately, the events at chet ha-egel forced God to change this perception. Bnei Yisrael's inexcusable behavior at this celebration reflected the sad fact that despite His numerous miracles, deep down, nothing had really changed. God became more than angered; He became utterly disappointed. All of God's efforts to 'train' His nation (since Yetziat Mitzrayim) seemed to have been in vain.

In summary, we have suggested that there were **two** stages in Bnei Yisrael's sin at **chet ha-egel**.

- \* The first - making a physical representation of God - even though this was improper, it was understandable.

- \* The second - the frivolous behavior after the eating and drinking at the conclusion of the ceremony - was inexcusable.

We will now show how these two stages are reflected in God's 'double statement' to Moshe (32:7-10) in the aftermath of this sin:

(1) - 32:7-8 / God's first statement:

"And **God spoke to Moshe**: Hurry down, for your people have acted basely ['ki shichet amcha']... they have turned astray from the way that I commanded them [see 20:20!] - they made an egel masecha [a representation of Me]...

(2) - 32:9-10 / God's second statement:

"And **God spoke to Moshe**: I see this nation, behold it is an 'am ksheh oref' [a **stiff necked people**]. Now, allow Me, and I will kindle My anger against them and I will destroy them and I will **make you** a great nation [instead]."

[Note, that "va-yomer Hashem el Moshe" is repeated **twice**, even though Moshe does not speak in between.]

God's first statement describes the act that began with good intentions but was nonetheless forbidden [see Shmot 20:20 - "lo ta'asun iti elohei kesef..."]. Although this sin requires rebuke and forgiveness (see 32:30), it was not severe enough to warrant the destruction of the entire Nation.

God's second statement is in reaction to 'va-yakumu letzacheh', i.e. their frivolous behavior. Because of this

regression to Egyptian culture, God concludes that they are indeed a 'stiff-necked people' - **unable to change their ways**. Therefore, God concludes that He must destroy Bnei Yisrael, choosing Moshe to become His special nation instead.

Similarly, these two stages are found in the conversation between Moshe and Aharon in the aftermath of this event:

"And Moshe said to Aharon: What did this people do to you that **caused** you to bring upon them such a terrible sin?

... Aharon answered: You know this people - 'ki ve-ra hu' - their ways are evil" (32:21-22).

One could suggest that Aharon's conclusion is based on his previous experiences with Bnei Yisrael. It is clear, however, that Moshe understands that Aharon had no intention that this situation would get out of hand. After all, Aharon himself is not punished. In fact, he later becomes the Kohen Gadol [High Priest].

Once Aharon had explained to Moshe what transpired (32:22-24) in the **first** stage, Moshe already understood what happened in the **second** stage:

"And Moshe 'saw' the people - 'ki paru'a hu' - that they became wild (out of control), for Aharon had caused them to become wild [to the point of] their demise, **be-kameiheim** - when they **got up** [to dance/ possibly reflecting '**va-yakumu** letzacheh'! [see 32:25].

Finally, the **two** levels that we later find in Bnei Yisrael's actual punishment may also reflect these two stages. First, the three thousand 'instigators' who incited this licentious behavior (stage 2) are killed. For that rebellious group, there is no room for forgiveness (32:26-29). However, on the second day, Moshe approaches God to beg forgiveness for the rest of the nation (see 32:30-32). Even though they had sinned, Moshe hopes to secure them a pardon - because their actions began with good intentions (stage 1).

Ultimately, Moshe will receive this pardon - but it won't be very simple.

### DELAYED PUNISHMENT OR FORGIVENESS

Even though God had originally agreed to Moshe Rabeinu's first request not to totally destroy His nation (see "va-yechal Moshe... va-yinachem Hashem al ha-ra;a..." / 32:11-14), his next request for forgiveness in 32:31-32 clearly indicates that the execution of the 3000 'instigators' did not absolve the rest of the nation.

To our surprise, Moshe's second tefilla (in 32:30-32) does not achieve forgiveness! To prove this point, take a careful look at God's response to Moshe's second tefilla:

"And God told Moshe: He who has sinned to Me shall be punished. Now go **lead** the people to [the place] that I said [i.e. to Eretz Canaan], behold My angel will accompany you, and on the day that I will punish you, I will punish you" (32:34).

Note that God instructs Moshe to lead Bnei Yisrael to the Promised Land, thus fulfilling brit avot (as Moshe demanded in 32:13), but He still plans to later punish them for chet ha-egel, at the time that He finds fit. Note however, that even though brit avot will be fulfilled, brit Sinai remains 'broken!' To prove this, note how chapter 33 explains what God told Moshe in 32:34:

"And God said to Moshe - Set out from here, you and the people that you have brought out of Egypt to the Land that I swore to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov (brit avot)... but I **will not go in your midst** for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I destroy you on the journey" (see 33:1-3).

In contrast to God's original promise at Matan Torah that He will send a **mal'ach** with **His name** in their midst ['shmi be-kirbo' / see 23:20-23], now He emphatically states that He will no longer be with them - "ki **lo** a'aleh be-kirbecha" (33:3). Due to chet ha-egel, Bnei Yisrael are no longer worthy of the special relationship of **brit Sinai**.

This 'downgrade' is reflected in God's next commandment

that Bnei Yisrael must remove 'their jewelry' that they received on Har Sinai, undoubtedly the symbol of the high level they reached at **matan Torah** (see 33:5-6). Furthermore, Moshe must now move his own tent **away** from the camp, in order that God can remain in contact with Moshe (see 33:7).

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

A very strange predicament has arisen (that often goes unnoticed). Even though Bnei Yisrael will not be destroyed (thanks to brit avot), God instructs Moshe to continue on to Eretz Canaan **without** brit Sinai. [Imagine, a Jewish State without 'kedusha', several thousand years before Theodore Herzl!]

As unthinkable as this sounds, God's decision is very logical. Considering His conclusion that Bnei Yisrael are an 'am kshe oref' - a stiff-necked people (see 32:9, 33:5), and hence will not change their ways, there appears to be no other solution. After all, should He keep His **Shchina** in their midst, Bnei Yisrael would not be able to survive.

Fortunately for Am Yisrael, Moshe Rabeinu is not willing to accept God's decision. As we will see, his next argument will set the stage for the declaration of God's **midot ha-rachamim**:

"And Moshe beseeched God: 'Look, you have instructed me to lead this people... but recognize that this nation is **Your** people!'

God answered: I will lead [only] you. But Moshe insisted: 'Im ein panecha holchim al ta'alenu mi-zeh' - Unless **Your presence will go with us**, do not make us leave this place. For how should it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You **go with us**...' (33:12-16)

[These psukim are quite difficult to translate, I recommend that you read the entire section inside.]

Note how Moshe demands that God keep His Presence [**Shchina**] with them, threatening a 'sit down strike' should God refuse. Most powerful is Moshe's demand that God recognize that they are His people - "u-re'eh ki amcha ha-goy ha-zeh" (see 33:13). God ['kivyachol'] now faces a most difficult predicament.

\* On the one hand, He cannot allow His Shchina to return - for according to the terms of **brit Sinai** - this 'am kshe oref' could not survive His anger, and would eventually be killed.

\* On the other hand, He cannot leave them in the desert (as Moshe now threatens), for **brit avot** must be fulfilled!

\* But, He cannot take them to the land, for Moshe is not willing to lead them **unless** He returns His **Shchina**.

Something has to budge! But what will it be?

It is precisely here, in the resolution of this dilemma, where God's 13 **midot ha-rachamim** enter into the picture.

### A NEW COVENANT

Let's take a look now at God's response to Moshe's request. Note that here is first time in Chumash where God introduces the concept of divine mercy:

"And God said to Moshe, 'I will also do this thing that you request... [to return His **Shchina** / Moshe then asked that God show His Glory -] then God answered: 'I will pass all my goodness before you, and I will proclaim **My name** before you, and **I will pardon** he whom I will pardon and **I will have mercy** on he to whom I give mercy (ve-CHANOTI ET ASHER ACHON, ve-richamti et asher arachem)'... (33:17-22).

In contrast to His original threat of immediate punishment should they sin (if God is in there midst), now God agrees to allow Bnei Yisrael a 'second chance' (should they sin). This divine promise sets the stage for the forging of a **new** covenant though which **brit Sinai** can be re-established, for it allows the Shchina to return without the necessity of immediate severe punishment.

Therefore, God instructs Moshe to ascend Har Sinai one more time, in a manner quite parallel to his first ascent to Har Sinai [but with significant minor differences], to receive the **second luchot** (see 34:1-5 and its parallel in 19:20-24).

As we should expect, the laws should and do remain the same. However, their **terms** must now be amended with God's

attributes of mercy. Hence, when Moshe now ascends Har Sinai, it is not necessary for God to repeat the **dibrot** themselves, for they remain the same. Instead, God will descend to proclaim an amendment to how He will act in this relationship - i.e. His attributes of mercy.

As God had promised in 33:19 (review that pasuk before continuing), a new covenant, reflecting this enhanced relationship, is now forged:

"And God came down in a cloud...& passed before him and proclaimed: 'Hashem, Hashem Kel rachum ve-CHANUN, erech apayim ve-rav chesed ve-emet, notzer chesed la-alafim' (34:5-8).

### THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE ATTRIBUTES

With this background, we can now better appreciate the words that God chose to describe His new **midot**. To do so, we must first quickly review God's **midot** as described at Ma'amad Har Sinai in parshat Yitro.

Recall that the **dibrot** included not only laws, but also describe **how** God will reward (or punish) those who obey (or disobey) His commandments. Let's review these 'original' attributes by noting them (in **bold**) as we quote the Commandments:

"I am the Lord your God...

You shall have no other gods besides Me...

Do not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord am a **Kel kana** - a **zealous** God

**poked avon avot al banim** - remembering the sin of parents upon their children... for those who reject Me [**le-son'ai**], but

**oseh chesed** - showing kindness... for those who love me and follow my laws - [**le-ohavai** u-leshomrei mitzvotai]" (see 20:2-6).

Note how the second Commandment includes three divine attributes:

- 1) **Kel kana** - a zealous God
- 2) **poked avon avot al banim** - **le-son'ai**  
**harsh** punishment for those who reject God
- 3) **oseh chesed la-alafim** - **le-ohavai**  
Kindness & reward for those who follow God.

Similarly, in the third Commandment, we find yet another

**mida** [divine attribute]:

"Do not say in vain the **name** of God - ki **lo yenakeh Hashem** - for God will **not forgive** he who says His Name in vain" (20:7).

Let's add this fourth attribute to the above list:

- 4) **lo yenakeh Hashem** - He will not forgive

How should we consider these four attributes? At first glance, most of them seem to be quite harsh!

Even the **mida** of **oseh chesed** - Divine kindness, does not necessarily imply **mercy**. Carefully note in 20:6 that God promises this kindness **only** for those who **follow** Him, and hence not for any others. Most definitely, all four of these attributes are quite the opposite of mercy, they are **midot ha-din** - attributes of exacting retribution.

Although these **midot** have their 'down side', for they threaten immediate punishment for those who transgress (le-son'ai), they also have their 'up side', for they assure immediate reward for those who obey (le-ohavai). In other words, these **midot** describe a very intense relationship, quite similar to [and not by chance] to God's relationship with man in Gan Eden (see Breishit 2:16-17).

### MORE MIDOT HA-DIN

Yet another example of this intense relationship, and another attribute as well, is found at the conclusion of the unit of laws in Parshat Mishpatim. Recall that immediately after the Ten Commandments, Moshe was summoned to Har Sinai to receive a special set of commandment to relay to Bnei Yisrael (see Shmot 20:15-19). At the conclusion of those laws, God makes the

following promise:

"Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and help bring you into the Promised Land. Be **careful** of him and **obey** him, Do not defy him - **for he shall not pardon your sins** -" **"ki lo yisa le-fish'achem"**, since My Name is with him...

[On the other hand...]

"...should you obey Him and do all that I say - **I will help you defeat your enemies**... (see Shmot 23:20-24).

Once again, we find that God will exact punishment should Bnei Yisrael not follow His mitzvot and reward (i.e. assistance in conquering the Land) should they obey Him.

Finally, after chet ha-egel, we find that God intends to act precisely according to these attributes of **midat ha-din**:

"And God told Moshe, go down from the mountain for your people has sinned... they made a golden image... and now allow Me, and **I will kindle My anger** against them that I may destroy them -**ve-yichar api bahem**..." (see Shmot 32:7-10).

Here we find yet another divine attribute - **charon af Hashem** - God's instant anger.

Let's summarize these six attributes that we have found thus far. Later, this list will be very helpful when we compare these **midot** to God's **midot** in the second **luchot**.

- 1) **Kel kana**
- 2) **poked avon ... le-son'ai**
- 3) **oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
- 4) **lo yenakeh**
- 5) **lo yisa le-fish'achem...**
- 6) **charon af**

We will now show how these six examples of **midat ha-din** relate directly to the **new** attributes that God now declares. Note the obvious - and rather amazing - parallel that emerges:

#### FIRST LUCHOT

- 1) **Kel kana**
- 2) **poked avon...le-son'ai**
- 3) **oseh chesed la-alafim**  
**... le-ohavai**
- 4) **lo yenakeh**
- 5) **lo yisa lefish'achem**
- 6) **charon af**

#### SECOND LUCHOT

- Kel rachum ve-CHANUN**  
**poked avon avot al banim...**  
**rav chesed ve-emet**  
**notzer chesed la-alafim...**  
**ve-nakeh, lo yenakeh**  
**nosei avon ve-fesha...**  
**erech apayim**

#### FROM DIN TO RACHAMIM

Each attribute from the original covenant switches from **midat ha-din** to **midat ha-rachamim**. [To appreciate this parallel, it is important to follow these psukim in the original Hebrew.]

Let's take now a closer look:

A. **Hashem Kel rachum ve-CHANUN --> (1) Hashem Kel kana**  
rachum ve-CHANUN based on 33:19 (see above)  
a **merciful** God in contrast to a **zealous** God

B. **Erech apayim --> (6) charon af**  
**slow** to anger in contrast to **instant** anger

C. **Rav chesed ve-emet --> (3) oseh chesed... le-ohavai**  
**abounding** kindness for all, potentially even for the wicked  
[This may allow the possibility of 'rasha ve-tov lo']  
in contrast to **exacting** kindness, and hence, limited exclusively to those who obey Him.

[Note that the mida of emet is now required, for this abounding kindness for all must be complemented by the attribute of truth to assure ultimate justice.]

D. **Notzer chesed la-alafim --> (3) oseh chesed...**  
**le-ohavai**  
He **stores** His kindness, so that even if it is not rewarded immediately, it is stored to be given at a later time.

[This may allow the possibility of 'tzadik ve-ra lo']  
in contrast to **immediate** kindness and reward for those who follow Him.

E. **Nosei avon ve-fesha... --> (5) lo yisa le-fish'achem ...**  
**forgiving** sin in contrast to **not forgiving** sin.

F. **Ve-nakeh, lo yenakeh --> (4) lo yenakeh**  
**sometimes** He will forgive, sometimes He may not.  
[See Rashi, forgives those who perform teshuva.]  
in contrast to **never** forgiving.

G. **Poked avon avot al banim...--> (2) poked avon le-son'ai**  
He **withholds** punishment for up to four generations  
[in anticipation of teshuva / see Rashi]  
in contrast to **extending** punishment for up to four generations.

[Even though these two phrases are almost identical, their context forces us to interpret each pasuk differently. In the first luchot, all four generations are punished, in the second luchot, God may **hold back** punishment for four generations, allowing a chance for teshuva. See Rashi.]

These striking parallels demonstrate that each of the '13 midot' lies in direct contrast to the midot of the original covenant at Har Sinai.

This background can help us appreciate Moshe's immediate reaction to God's proclamation of these **midot**:

"And Moshe hastened to bow down and said: 'If I have indeed gained favor in Your eyes - **let Hashem go in our midst** - 'ki' = **even though** they are an **am ksheh oref** - a stiff necked people, and you shall pardon our sin...' (34:8-9)

God's proclamation that He will now act in a less strict manner enables Moshe to request that God now return His **Shchina** to the people **even though** they are an **am ksheh oref**. Note how this request stands in direct contrast to God's original threat that "he will not go up with them for they are a stiff necked people, less He smite them on their journey..." (see 33:3/ compare with 34:9)!

These Divine attributes of mercy now allow the Shchina to dwell within Yisrael even though they may not be worthy.

From a certain perspective, this entire sequence is quite understandable. For, on the one hand, to be worthy of God's presence, man must behave perfectly. However, man is still human. Although he may strive to perfection, he may often error or at times even sin. How then can man ever come close to God? Hence, to allow mortal man the potential to continue a relationship with God, a new set of rules is necessary - one that includes **midot ha-rachamim**.

The original terms of **brit Sinai**, although ideal, are not practical. In this manner, **midot ha-rachamim** allow **brit Sinai** to become achievable. These midot ha-rachamim reflect God's kindness that allows man to approach Him and develop a closer relationship without the necessity of immediate punishment for any transgression.

#### SELICHOT

This explanation adds extra meaning to our comprehension and appreciation of our recitation of the Selichot. Reciting the 13 **midot** comprises more than just a mystical formula. It is a constant reminder of the **conditions** of the covenant of the **second luchot**. God's attributes of mercy, as we have shown, **do not guarantee** automatic forgiveness, rather, they **enable the possibility** of forgiveness. As the pasuk stated, God will forgive only he whom He chooses ("et asher achon... ve-et asher arachem" / 33:19). To be worthy of that mercy, the individual must prove his sincerity to God, while accepting upon himself not to repeat his bad ways.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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### FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part One

1. It is not clear why Aharon does not insist that the people be patient and wait for Moshe. Note that, according to 24:14, the people are instructed to turn to Aharon **and** Chur, should a problem arise. Interestingly enough, Chur is never mentioned again.

Relate this to the Midrash that explains Aharon's behavior because Chur had told them to wait and was killed.

2. Note the use of the word 'shichet' in 32:7. In Devarim 4:16 we find a similar use of this shoresh in relation to making a physical representation of God with **good** intentions!

Read Devarim 4:9-24 carefully and note its connection to the events at chet ha-egel. Use this parallel to explain 4:21-23.

3. See the Rambam's first halacha in Hilchot Avoda Zara. Relate his explanation of the origin of Avoda Zara to the above shiur.

### FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part Two

A. As the new covenant allows for mercy, the perception of God becomes less clear. While the first covenant boasted a clear relationship of 'panim el panim' (face to face / 33:11), this new covenant, even to Moshe, is represented by a 'face to back' relationship:

"But, He said, you can not see my face ... Station yourself on the Rock as My Presence passes by ... you will see my back, but

My face must not be seen."["LoTuchal lir'ot **panai** - ki lo yir'ani ha-adam va-chai ... ve-ra'ita et **achorai** - u-**panai** lo yira'u.]  
(33:20-23).

This new level has a clear advantage, midat ha-rachamim - however there is still a price to pay - the unclarity of Hashem's hashgacha. No longer is punishment immediate; however, reward may also suffer from delay. Hashem's hashgacha becomes more complex and now allows apparent situations of tzadik ve-ra lo-rasha ve-tov lo.

1. See Chazal's explanation of "hodi'eni na et drachecha" (33:13) How does this relate to our explanation?

2. As communication is clearer when talking face to face with someone as opposed to talking to someone with his back turned, attempt to explain the symbolism of the above psukim.

3. Why must Moshe Rabeinu also go down a level in his nevu'a?

B. The second luchot are carved by man, and not by God. Attempt to relate this requirement based on the nature of the 13 **midot**.

Relate this to the mitzva for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan, which follows in parshat Vayakhel.

Compare this to the mitzva to begin building a **sukka** immediately after Yom Kippur, and in general, why the holiday of **Sukkot** follows Yom Kippur.

C. After God declares His 13 midot of Rachamim (34:6-9), He makes a promise (34:10), and then adds some commandments (34:11-26).

Are these commandments new, or are they a 'repeat' of mitzvot which were given earlier in Parshat Mishpatim?

[Relate especially to Shmot 23:9-33.]

If so, can you explain why they are being repeated?

[Hint: Which type of mitzvot from Parshat Mishpatim are not repeated?] Relate your answer to the events of chet ha-egel.

D. In the story of chet ha-egel, we find a classic example of a 'mila mancha', i.e. use of the verb 'lir'ot' - to see [r.a.h.].

Review chapters 32->34 in this week's parsha while paying attention to this word. 'See' for yourself if it points to a theme. As you read, pay careful attention to: 32:1, 32:5, 32:9, 32:19, 32:25, 33:10, 33:12-13!, 33:20-23, 34:10, 34:23-24!, 34:30, and 34:35. What does it mean when God 'sees'..., when man 'sees'..., and when man 'sees' (or is seen by) God? Relate also to the use of

this verb (r.a.h.) at Ma'amad Har Sinai, especially 20:15, 20:19. See also 19:21, 24:10, & Dvarim 5:21! Could you say that 'seeing is believing'?

If you had fun with that one, you can also try an easier one: the use of the word 'ra'a' [evil / reish.ayin.hey.] in 32:12-14. Relate to 32:17, 32:22, 32:25?, 33:4. Relate to Shmot 10:10; see Rashi, Ramban, Chizkuni, Rashbam.

E. Chazal explain that God's original intention was to create the world with his attribute of 'din' [judgement], but after realizing that it could not survive, He included (in His creation) the attribute of 'rachamim' [mercy] as well. [See Rashi Breishit 1:1 - 'bara Elokim...']

Relate this to the above shiur. Would you say that this Midrash reflects Sefer Shmot as well as Sefer Breishit.

F. Note 'kol tuvi' in 33:19. Relate this to "va-yar Elokim ki tov" mentioned after each stage of **creation** in Breishit chapter 1.

Can you relate this to the above question and above shiur?

See also Rambam Moreh Nevuchim I:54 / second paragraph.

[page 84 in Kapach edition Mosad Harav Kook]

G. Note 34:10 "hinei anochi koret brit..." & 34:29-30. Relate this to why we refer to midot ha-rachamim in selichot as 'brit shlosh esrei'.

H. Connect **Part I** of the above shiur to a similar concept of a mal'ach leading Bnei Yisrael, represented by a physical symbol - as in Bamidbar 10:33:"ve-aron brit Hashem noseia lifneihem derech shloshet yamim la-tur lahem menucha". See also Bmd. 10:35-36 & Yehoshua 6:6-11.

## OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TISA • 18 ADAR 5780 MARCH 14, 2020 • VOL. 27 NO. 19

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## A Work of Craft

*"See, I have proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft ... to perform every craft of design." (31:2-3)*

In Hebrew, there is no word for Art.

There is a Hebrew word, "melacha," that means "craft," but no word meaning Art.

What's the difference between Art and craft?

An artist can think he is G-d.

He starts off with a blank piece of paper and creates a universe. Being an artist is the closest a person can get to creation *ex nihilo* — creation from nothing. The universe of the artist is entirely at the whim of its creator. He can draw and he can erase. He can form and he can fold. He can "create worlds" and he can "destroy them." The sky can be blue or gray. The next note could go up or down. And who says that all this has to be the way it is? Me, the artist.

For the past two and a half thousand years there has raged a global-historical conflict over the place of art in the world. The ancient Greeks, who invented Art with a capital "A", claimed that Art is a doorway to ultimate truth. This Weltanschauung says that through art and artifice you can reach the elemental truths of existence. Celebrating the surface, the way things look, claimed the ancient Greek, leads to the essence of things themselves.

The Jew says that the artifice and illusion leads only to greater illusion, unless that skill subordinates itself to the service of truth.

Art that is not for Art's sake is called craft. Craft knows it is the servant of another master.

The Talmud teaches that if you never saw the Second Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), which Herod built, you never saw a beautiful building in your life. Its walls were constructed from blue/green marble and white Marmara marble. One layer was indented and the next protruded so that the plaster would adhere. Herod thought of covering the whole edifice with gold plate. The Rabbis told him to leave it as it was — without

plaster or gilding — since it looked better in its natural state with the different levels of green/blue and white resembling the waves of the sea.

*"See, I have proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft ... to perform every craft of design."*

Every talent has a place in Judaism. Every talent is a gift of G-dly spirit: A beautiful voice, a brilliant mind, the skill of an artist. Every talent is a gift and a responsibility.

*"By His breath the Heavens are spread (shifra)" (Iyov 26:13).*

G-d spreads aside the curtain of cloud to reveal that which is beyond. He disperses the clouds that conceal so we can see past the obstruction, past the surface. The word "spread," "shifra," has the same root as "shafir" which means "to beautify."

In Jewish thought, beauty means seeing past the surface to the essence. That which is beautiful is that which takes us beneath the surface, beyond the clouds, to reveal the endless blue heavens, to reveal the truth.

Similarly, the word for "ugly" and "opaque" in Hebrew are the same "achur." Something that conceals essence is ugly, however "beautiful" it might seem.

"Art for Art's sake" can never be a Jewish concept. For, if the definition of beauty is that which reveals, something that reveals nothing but itself can never be beautiful.

The true beauty of the Tabernacle and the Temples was in being the place of the greatest revelation in this world. It revealed that existence is not bounded by the physical constraints of space and time. It demonstrated that this world is connected to that which is beyond this world.

It was a Work of Craft.



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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Ki Tisa: Shabbat 2:8

### Self-Sacrifice

*Rav Sheshet raised an objection: "Do we say that a person may do a transgression in order to benefit someone else?!"*

This rhetorical statement on our *daf* is taught as a question on a suggestion in the *gemara*. At first, Rav Bibi bar Abayei posed a halachic question: If a person attaches dough to the wall of an oven on Shabbat, is it permitted to be removed from there on Shabbat (an act normally forbidden by Rabbinical decree) before the bread bakes and the person will be obligated to bring a sin-offering? The *gemara* rejects the possibility that this question is about a scenario in which the *same* person who put the dough there is the one who is removing it, since he would not be considered to be *shogeg* – forgetful of its being Shabbat or forgetful that baking on Shabbat is forbidden – *from beginning to end*. He would therefore *not* be obligated to bring a sin-offering even if he would leave the dough there to bake.

Therefore, Rav Shila avers that the case in question is one where a person *other* than the one who put the dough there realizes the impending prohibition and penalty that the first person would incur if the dough bakes, and wants to remove it before it bakes in order to save the first person. Rav Shila says that is the question first posed by Rav Bibi bar Abayei: Did the Rabbis permit him to remove it or not?

At this point Rav Sheshet raises his objection to Rav Shila's depiction of the scenario in question: "Do we say that a person may do a transgression in order to benefit someone else?!" Rashi explains this to mean: Do we say to a person to go out and transgress a "light" prohibition in order that your fellow person should not be obligated a serious punishment? Since this is obviously not permitted, it follows that Rav Bibi bar Abayei's question must involve a different scenario, one which the *gemara* describes as it continues.

However, Tosefot and other Rishonim raise a number of questions from cases that appear to be contrary to this principle that one person may not transgress to benefit another person. Elsewhere there is indication that one may *indeed* transgress in order to benefit another. For example, we are taught in a *mishna* (Gittin 41a) that in the case of someone who is half-slave and half-free, his owner must free him completely. This is permitted despite the prohibition against freeing a Canaanite slave: Rav Yehuda said, "Whoever frees his slave transgresses a positive

mitzvah, as it states, *Forever they will serve you.*" (Gittin 48b) The *gemara* explains the rationale for permitting this act of freeing him: "Being fruitful and multiplying is different, since it is a great mitzvah."

Another example noted by Tosefot is that when Rabbi Eliezer entered the Yeshiva and didn't find a minyan for prayer, he freed his slave to complete the minyan – despite the known prohibition against freeing one's Canaanite slave. In this case, the *gemara* states that "a mitzvah for the public is different" – and is sufficient reason to permit what would otherwise be considered as violating a positive commandment under ordinary circumstances. (The two reasons which justify permitting one person to transgress in order to benefit another are both found in Tosefot on our *daf*, in addition to our Tosefot teaching two other possible conditions that could serve as reason to be lenient. A fifth reason is taught in Tosefot in Masechet Gittin 41a and in the Chidushei HaRashba to Shabbat 4a. And a sixth reason is offered by Chidushei Anshei Shem, Shabbat 14:1. A complete and detailed treatment of this topic can be found in *Avosos Ahava – Kiruv Rechokim B'Halacha, chelek dalet, perek aleph.*)

This concept of not permitting one person to transgress in order to save another person from transgression is an important principle in halacha, one with potentially wide-ranging ramifications. For example, just as a person may transgress Shabbat in order to save another person's physical life, may he transgress Shabbat in order to save another person's spiritual life? One might argue that it is permitted based on the reasoning of *kal v'chomer*: One who causes another to transgress is worse than one who kills him (Sifri Devarim 23:8), and from here it may be learned that one who saves another from transgression is "greater" than one who saves him from death.

Consideration of these issues might lead to important practical applications in the event of trying to prevent a person from joining a cult or missionaries: What, if any, steps that are normally prohibited by halacha may be taken in order to intervene? This question, and other similar questions, are obviously extremely delicate and complex, and must always be carefully presented, with all details, to a *Posek*.

• Shabbat 4a

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. How many "geira" are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called "malachim?"
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a "sign." What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

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

## Answers

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2, 3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say "Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people."
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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Synonyms in the Hebrew Language  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Better Late Than .....

The Torah reports that after Moshe ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, he spent some time atop the mountain before returning to the Jewish People. In the meanwhile, the Jewish People grew impatient anticipating Moshe's return, "And the Nation saw that Moshe delayed (*boshesh*) in descending from the mountain..." (Ex. 32:1). The *Erev Rav*'s response to this delay was to fashion a Golden Calf to lead the Jewish People instead of Moshe. Rashi explains that the word *boshesh* is an expression of *ichur* ("delay"), but he does not explain the difference between the two terms. In this essay we seek to understand the difference between *boshesh*/*bosh* and *ichur*/*acheir*, and in doing so can come to a better appreciation of why the Torah uses the word *boshesh* in this story instead of *ichur*. We will also touch on how *boshesh* is related to *bushah* ("embarrassment"), which will bring us to a clearer understanding of that word's nuances.

The Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 18:6) interprets the word *boshesh* as a portmanteau of the phrase *bau shesh shaot* ("six hours have arrived"), explaining that the Jews decided that Moshe was late since it was already six hours into the day on which they expected him to return, and yet Moshe was nowhere to be seen. Rabbi Chanoch Zundel of Bialystok (d. 1867) in *Eitz Yosef* explains that the basis for this exegesis is the atypical appearance of the word *boshesh* in lieu of the expected *ichur*. To him, the fact that the Torah uses the word *boshesh* instead of *ichur* screams for further interpretation, and the Midrash fills in that lacuna.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826), writes in *HaRechasim LeVikah* that *ichur* refers to something acceptably late (colloquially, "fashionably late"), while *boshesh* refers to an excessive delay, hours upon hours. Similarly, Malbim explains that *ichur* means anything "past" a pre-determined point of time, while *boshesh* refers to an excessive lateness that is even later than that. Based on the supposition that *boshesh* denotes excessive lateness, Rabbi Shapira-Frankfurter suggests that perhaps the appearance of this word led the rabbis to assume that the Jews thought that Moshe was late by many hours. In other words, they thought that he wasn't just *late* — he was *very late*.

Rabbi Shapira-Frankfurter also discusses a third term for "delaying" or "lateness": *hitmahmah*. In his view, that word refers to a delay caused by moving slower than the expected speed. It is used when somebody is supposed to do

something quickly, but instead is dilly-dallying. For example, when Lot delayed his escape from Sodom (Gen. 19:16), or when King David delayed his escape from Avshalom in order to hear back from Achimaatz (II Sam. 15:28), cognates of this word are employed.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) looks at the relationship between the three words in question differently. He explains that *ichur* is a neutral type of delay or lateness that is simply related to the word *achar* ("after"), to denote that a certain point of time has already passed. *Ichur* does not imply being tardy for excusable or inexcusable reasons. It is neither good nor bad. It just is. By contrast, the other two words for lateness carry with them a value judgement: *hitmahmah* is a positive type of delay which is not only expected but is the right thing to do under certain circumstances, while *bosh*/*boshesh* is a negative type of delay for which one should be embarrassed (*bushah*).

Interestingly, Rabbi Pappenheim connects the word *hitmahmah* to the biliteral root MEM-HEY (*mah*), which means "what" and is an expression of doubt and uncertainty. He explains that a person who is *hitmahmah* is essentially "waiting around" and not doing anything specific, because he is asking himself "what" he should be doing.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) quotes an elaborate discussion about these words from the writings of R. Naftali Hertz (Wessely) Weisel (1725-1805) — a figure often maligned as a *maskil*, but whose rabbinic bona fides are also attested to. He explains that *ichur* connotes a person who is willingly and deliberately late. On the other hand, *bosh*/*boshesh* refers to somebody who is delayed by forces beyond his control. In short, he argues that by using the word *boshesh*, the Torah conveys the idea that the Jews thought that Moshe was delayed from descending the mountain by circumstances beyond his control, namely, he had either fallen ill or died. Because of this, they were open to accepting a new leader (i.e. the Golden Calf) in his stead. But, in reality, Moshe's delay is better characterized as an *ichur* because Moshe was enjoying and basking in the study of Torah atop the mountain, and he therefore purposely stayed there longer than the Jews may have expected him to.

Rabbi Avraham Saba (1440-1508) in *Tzror HaMor* writes that the Torah uses the word *boshesh* instead of *ichur* as a means of alluding to the argument that the *Erev Rav* made

to convince the masses to worship the Golden Calf. He explains that the word *boshesh* is related to the Aramaic word *bshash*, which refers to tasteless food that is without spices or seasoning. Thus, the *Erev Rav* convinced the masses to worship the Golden Calf by arguing that since Moshe's teachings have no "taste" or "seasoning" to them, they ought to be rejected. As an allusion to this argument, the Torah specifically uses the word *boshesh* instead of the usual *ichur*.

Rabbi Saba mentions two places where we see the word *bshash* in the sense of something tasteless. One context in which this word appears is when Iyov responds to one of his friends' diatribes by dismissing his friend's words and sarcastically asking, "Is bland food eaten without salt?" (Iyov 6:6). By calling his friend's rhetoric "bland Food," Iyov meant that what he said is unpalatable and unacceptable. In that context, the Targum renders "bland food" as *bshash*. The second example is when the Talmud (*Berachos* 40a) refers to a certain type of tasty bread as something which "does not require *bshash*." The commentators explain that *bshash* in this context means "delay," meaning that bread which is tasty on its own can be eaten straight away and one need not be "delayed" until the arrival of other condiments or relishes. (Interestingly, *Piskei HaRosh* and *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah* cite Ex. 32:1 to prove that *bshash* is related to "delaying," while Rashi chooses to cite Judges 5:28 to that effect. *Maadanei Yom Tov* asks why Rashi chose to cite the verse in Judges instead of the verse in Exodus.)

Earlier in this essay we cited Rabbi Pappenheim's understanding of the connection between *boshesh* and *bushah* ("embarrassment"), which essentially argued that *boshesh* is the type of delay or lateness from which one ought to be embarrassed. However, other rabbis offer other ways of explaining the connection between *boshesh* and *bushah*:

1. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) explains that the core meaning of the root of these words is "disappointment." He explains that "embarrassment" is the feeling of disappointment in oneself after realizing one's own shortcomings, while *boshesh* refers to a sort of "delay" which has caused the matter to be so late that those waiting are "disappointed" in whomever they are waiting for and just give up on him.

2. Rabbi Dovid Golumb (1861-1935) in *Targumna* explains the connection differently. When a person is "embarrassed" (*bushah*), he is so belittled and ashamed that nobody views him as important. The ramifications of this are that such a humiliated person is no longer deemed worthy of waiting for when he is delayed (*boshesh*).

3. Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) explains that the root BET-SHIN primarily refers to something being delayed or withheld. Two corollaries of this meaning include the concept of "lateness," which is obviously associated with being "delayed," and the concept of "embarrassment," whereby one's face turns white, as his blood is "withheld" from travelling in its normal way.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rcklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rcklein@ohr.edu)

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments.

The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy

everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the Tablets and he destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men.

Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's clouds of glory return. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new Tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of Tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## Written in Stone

The Torah describes the miraculous nature of the writing on the first set of Tablets in a series of phrases: *They were inscribed on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were inscribed... the writing was G-d's writing, "charut" [cut right] through the Tablets.* The content of the *luchot* has already been conveyed, but here the Torah sees fit to convey the *presentation* as well.

Our Sages give an even more vivid picture, based on these verses. First, they teach that the writing went right through both sides of the stone and not was engraved merely to a certain depth. Second, despite this, the writing was readable from both sides of the stone. The words appeared in proper sequence and were not reversed, as one would expect if they had been bored through the entire stone. The insides of the letters that form complete circles – the *samech* and the *mem* that appear at the end of a word – stood suspended in the air. They could stay in place only by a miracle – the handwriting of G-d.

Not only was the *content* the word of G-d, but the *luchot* themselves – the stone and the manner in which the words were written – were intended to be *eidut*, testimony to the Divine origins of the Torah. More, the manner of writing communicated the manner in which the Jew was to relate to Torah.

*The writing... was "charut" on the Tablets.* This root – *charut* – appears no other place in Tanach. The writing was not merely engraved, it cut through the *luchot*. The root *chor* –

means hole, or opening, in the sense of the stone being bored through. It is also the root of the word *chenut*, meaning "freedom." In this sense, it would mean "freedom over the Tablets" – i.e. the writing had free mastery over the Tablets, as evidenced by the *mem* and *samech* standing midair. The Tablets did not bear the writing, as is the case in ordinary engraving, but the writing supported the Tablets. This had symbolic import for how the Jew is to relate to Torah: his material life (the stone) is subordinate to the Torah (the words), and the Torah supports the material. The writing raises the material above nature, which governs all matter. The same applies to human beings in whom the spirit of this writing has taken hold: they make themselves the bearers of this spirit, and the spirit uplifts them, and supports them above the forces of blind compulsion. In other words, they become free.

There is yet another message in the complete chiseling of the letters through the entire stone, and their legibility from both sides. The word of G-d must not grip us only superficially and one-sidedly. It must penetrate us through and through, and set its stamp on every part of our being. Whichever way we are turned, whatever circumstances we face, with whomever we interact with, the writing of G-d is to be visible on us, clearly and legibly for all to see. The Jew is to bear this Divine stamp in the home and in the office, in private quarters and in the street, in his interactions with his superiors and with his spouse – just like the Tablets, the word of G-d is to be imprinted on him through and through.

- Sources: Shemot 32:15-16; Collected Writings I, pp. 281-28

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# ASK!

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## Jewish Superheroes

Joey from LA asked:

*Are there any teachings about “superheroes” in the Torah or in Jewish literature?*

Dear Joey,

What a super-question!

Judaism doesn't idolize movie stars and athletic achievers as “superheroes.” Rather, a person who stops to help someone needing help to cross a busy street is a superhero. A person who says a kind word to someone having a bad day is a superhero.

In this sense, I am certain that each of us knows a superhero. Hopefully, not far away. Hopefully, in one's own home.

As you probably know, a number of personalities in the Torah were endowed with “super-powers.” Moses was on Mount Sinai to receive the Torah for forty days and forty nights – without food or water! And, of course, he played a key role in the ten plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea. Samson had superhuman strength. David slew Goliath.

King Solomon had super-intelligence. These special qualities were given to these people by God to enable them to further the eternal destiny of the Jewish People.

What about the rest of us?

Our Sages teach in Ethics of the Fathers that the Jewish definition of true strength is someone who overcomes his desire to do what is wrong. This is a message of immense value. “Super” anything can be implemented by utilizing the ethical, moral and legal teachings found in the Torah. Internalizing the wisdom of the Torah enhances and augments within us strengths that we never knew we had.

For example, our Sages teach that a person who is not blessed with a high IQ is not restricted in the ability to understand Torah. A person who has a true, pure love for Torah may be granted the ability to understand its depths, sometimes even beyond others who have been blessed with a much more natural intellect.

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## LOVE OF THE LAND

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### Food for Thought

In the debate among the Talmudic Sages (*Sanhedrin* 70b) as to what exactly was the food of the Tree of Knowledge from which Adam ate, it is the position of Rabbi Yehuda that it was wheat. This is a sharp departure from the positions of his colleagues, who identify that tree as one that bore grapes or figs.

The basis for Rabbi Yehuda's stand to identify this sinful food as wheat, despite the obvious difficulty of connecting wheat with a tree, is the fact that this tree is described by the Torah as one whose fruit imparts knowledge. A baby, he points out, does not have the

understanding to say the words “father” and “mother” until it eats wheat. It is logical, therefore, to assume that only food which imparts such understanding in a child could be considered the food which gave man the knowledge to distinguish good from evil.

Wheat was the principal ingredient of the flour offerings in the Beit Hamikdash. It, and its subspecies spelt, are mentioned (*Pesachim* 35a) as ingredients which qualify for use in the matzah we eat on Pesach to fulfill our mitzvah.



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# **Parshat Ki Tisa: A Conspiracy to Forgive (Part I)**

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

## **PARASHAT KI TISA**

Over the past few weeks, we have been dealing with the "Mishkan Unit," the second half of Sefer Shemot. To very briefly recap:

- 1) Parashat Teruma & Tetzaveh: the command to Bnei Yisrael to build a Mishkan (portable temple) for Hashem to occupy.
- 2) Parashat Ki Tisa (1st half): in response to the worship of the "egel" (golden calf), Hashem cancels His command to the people to build the Mishkan. Since He has withdrawn His Presence from the people, there will be no need for them to build a temple to house His Presence.
- 3) Parashat Ki Tisa (2nd half): forgiveness -- the Mishkan command is reinstated as Hashem returns His Presence to His forgiven people.
- 4) Parashat VaYak'hel & Pekudei: The report of the actual performance of the command to build the Mishkan.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Parashat Ki Tisa raises so many questions: what are Bnei Yisrael really looking for in creating and worshipping the egel -- another God, or another Moshe? How do we understand Aharon's role in facilitating the egel fiasco? But we will leave these questions for another time. In this week's shiur, we will focus on the truly complex process of forgiveness for the crime of the egel (golden calf); next week, we will continue with the same topic (since next week's parasha, V-Yak'hel, repeats Parashat Teruma for the most part). I know that this is somewhat inconvenient, so if you'd prefer to receive Part II this week, email me at [emayer@ymail.yu.edu](mailto:emayer@ymail.yu.edu) and I will send it to you ASAP. Be warned, though, that it's a lot of material.

The process of forgiveness takes place in two different arenas: 1) Interaction between Hashem and Moshe, and 2) interaction between Moshe and the people.

## **AT THE BARGAINING TABLE WITH GOD**

The conversations in our parasha between Hashem and Moshe comprise a process of negotiation and bargaining through which Moshe successfully 'convinces' Hashem to forgive the people for worshipping the egel. These conversations are exceedingly complex and require very thorough unpacking. Often, when we encounter negotiations in the Torah, it seems unclear what is at issue and what each party is arguing. This tendency is especially pronounced in Ki Tisa, where a superficial read shows Moshe simply repeating the same "Forgive the people" request again and again, and Hashem responding indirectly and, often, obscurely. Hopefully, a more careful look will shed light on the substance of the negotiations:

- a) What do Hashem and Moshe want at each stage of the conversation?
- b) What is Moshe's strategy in 'convincing' Hashem to forgive the people? A careful reading of Moshe's requests and arguments reveals a definite strategy, to which Moshe remains faithful and which eventually succeeds in achieving his goal for the people.

## **MOSHE AND THE PEOPLE:**

Moshe's relationship with the people through this crisis is also complex and subtle: Is his role to represent the people and achieve forgiveness for them, or to represent Hashem and punish the people -- or both?

## **THE EGEL:**

We pick up as the Torah reports that the people make the egel and worship it:

## **SHEMOT 32:1-4:**

The people saw that Moshe was delayed in descending the mountain. They gathered upon Aharon and said to him, "Arise and make us a god to go before us, for this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we have no idea what has happened to him . . . They made a plated calf ("egel") and said, "This is your god, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

At first, the people credit Moshe with "bringing us up from the land of Egypt." But once they have created the egel, the people transfer this credit to the idol: "This is your god, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Who indeed brought the people up from the land of Egypt? To us it seems clear that it is Moshe and not the golden calf who deserves credit, but when we turn to the conversation between Hashem and Moshe, it is apparent that they, too, debate this question: Who brought Bnei Yisrael up from the land of Egypt? This question, a recurring theme in the struggle between Hashem and Moshe, will assume tremendous importance as



we continue.

## **PLACING THE BLAME:**

The Torah now 'switches cameras' from the scene of the egel-worship to the scene at the top of Har Sinai, as Hashem reports to Moshe what the people have been up to in his absence. As you read the section (reproduced below), think about the following questions:

- 1) Whose nation is it that has worshipped the egel?
- 2) Who is responsible for "bringing them up from Egypt"?
- 3) Whose God/god is whose?
- 4) What arguments does Moshe use to convince Hashem not to kill the people, and why?

## **SHEMOT 32:7-14**

Hashem said to Moshe, "Go down [the mountain], for YOUR NATION has become corrupt, whom YOU BROUGHT UP from the land of Egypt. They have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a plated calf and have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your god, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Hashem said to Moshe, "I have seen this nation, and it is a stiff-necked nation. Now, let Me alone, so My anger may burn against them and I will consume them, and I will make you into a great nation."

Moshe beseeched Hashem, his God, and said, "Why, God, let Your anger burn against YOUR NATION, whom YOU BROUGHT out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should Egypt say, 'Evilly did He take them out, to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the Earth'? Return from Your burning anger, and retract the evil [decree] for Your nation! Remember Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya'akov, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your name, saying, 'I shall increase your descendants as the stars of the sky, and all of this land which I have mentioned, I shall give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" God retracted the evil He had said He would do to His nation.

## **WHOSE NATION?**

**Hashem claims that this nation is "amkha," your (Moshe's) nation. He distances Himself from the people at the same time as He makes Moshe responsible for them and their actions. This is the first hint Hashem drops that Moshe is supposed to rise to the people's defense.**

**But Moshe shoots back that the nation is Hashem's nation, insisting that He 'must' acknowledge His connection to them. This is one of the major themes which will control much of what Moshe says in Ki Tisa in attempting to regain Hashem's favor for the people.**

## **WHO "BROUGHT THEM UP FROM EGYPT"?**

Hashem claims that it is Moshe who brought the people out of Egypt. This is yet another way of making Moshe responsible for the people, and therefore a hint to him that he is supposed to defend them. It also distances Him from the people, weakening the covenantal relationship as it sarcastically echoes the idolatrous people's claim: The people first gave Moshe credit for taking them out of Egypt, and then transferred this credit to the egel; Hashem does the same thing, first giving credit to Moshe and then quoting the people giving credit to the egel. The subtext: "What chutzpah! First they give you credit, then they give the idol credit, when it was I who took them out of Egypt! Not just idol-worshippers, but ungrateful idol-worshippers!"

But Moshe claims that it was Hashem who took the people out of Egypt. Moshe is once again reminding Hashem of His relationship with and responsibility for Bnei Yisrael.

## **THIS GOD IS MY GOD, THIS GOD IS YOUR GOD . . .**

Hashem, furious with the people for worshipping the idol, echoes their claim that for them, the egel is god. Moshe does not try to argue with Hashem on this score; it would be tough to make the case that the people remain devoted to Hashem while they idolatrously cavort around the work of their own hands at the foot of the mountain. Reflecting the fact that at this point, it is Moshe alone who remains faithful to Hashem, the "narrator" of the Torah refers to Hashem as Moshe's God alone: Moshe beseeches "the Lord, HIS God."

## **MOSHE'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

Moshe marshals several arguments to convince Hashem not to kill Bnei Yisrael on the spot:

1) Relationship: You have already taken them ("YOUR nation") out of Egypt with great fanfare and a display of awesome power.

2) Hillul Hashem (desecration of God's name or reputation): the Egyptians will think of You as an evil God, confirming their pagan beliefs that a deity is basically a demonic being who must be appeased, rather than what You are, a benevolent being who must be positively worshipped.

As we saw in Parashat Bo, one of the primary aims of the plagues and the other miracle of the Exodus was to teach Egypt and the rest of the world about Hashem's power and His benevolence toward His nation. Nothing could uproot this lesson more thoroughly than Hashem's destruction of that special nation.

3) Past Promises: You have sworn to their forefathers that they will inherit the land.

None of Moshe's arguments come anywhere near saying that the people actually deserve to survive on their own merits; all of Moshe's arguments depend on external factors.

One other interesting note to the above scene is that although the text gives the impression that Moshe immediately responds to Hashem's fury by begging Him to spare the people, after which he descends the mountain to deal with the people himself, mefarshim (commentators) disagree about the chronology of the scene.

Ibn Ezra believes that Moshe does not actually respond here, and that he first goes down to destroy the egel and punish its worshippers; only then does he return to Hashem and deliver the tefila (prayer) above (this requires Ibn Ezra to assert that the Torah records Moshe's tefila here out of chronological order). Ibn Ezra is motivated to read the story this way partly for textual reasons, but also (as he states) because he thinks it impossible that Hashem would forgive the people while the egel remained among them.

Ramban, however, believes that Moshe does respond immediately to Hashem's threat to destroy the people. He, too, is motivated partly by textual reasons, but also by the argument that Moshe simply did not have the 'luxury' of descending the mountain to deal with the sinners. He had to deal with the Divine emergency and convince Hashem not to simply wipe the people out; then he could begin to address their crime.

#### **DEALING WITH THE PEOPLE:**

Moshe succeeds in saving the people from immediate, utter destruction, but there is still a lot left to do:

1) To seek complete forgiveness from Hashem for the people. So far, all he has achieved is preventing Hashem from destroying Bnei Yisrael. He still must give the relationship a future.

2) To punish the people, help them understand the magnitude of what they have done, and guide them in a process of teshuva (repentance).

First, the Torah says that Moshe turns to go down to 'take care' of the people. But then, strangely, the Torah pauses for a detailed description of the Luhot and how specially they were formed; one senses that the Torah treats us to this detailed description of the divinely carved character of the Luhot because they are about to be smashed.

#### **SHEMOT 32:19-20 --**

When he approached the camp and saw the egel and the dancing, Moshe's anger burned. He cast the Luhot from his hands and shattered them at the base of the mountain. He took the egel they had made, burned it in fire, ground it up fine, spread it over the surface of the water, and made Bnei Yisrael drink.

#### **"PLANNED SPONTANEITY":**

The Torah's account of Moshe's approach to the camp makes it sound like seeing the egel and the dancing is what arouses his anger. But we know that Moshe already knows what is ahead even before he sees it -- after all, Hashem himself has told Moshe how they have been keeping busy while he is gone -- and in fact, Moshe tells Yehoshua what is ahead as they descend the mountain! Why does the Torah make it sound as if the sight of the egel and the dancing arouses Moshe's anger? Why is he angry only now, and not since all the way back when he heard about the egel? Furthermore, while the Torah makes Moshe's smashing of the Luhot sounds like a spontaneous reaction to spontaneous anger, since we know that Moshe has known about the egel the whole way down the mountain, it seems logical that he brings the Luhot with him for the express purpose of smashing them. How do we look at the smashing of the Luhot -- as a calculated demonstrative act or a spontaneous expression of fury?

Note also the irony connected with Moshe's anger: while we just heard him beg Hashem, "Al ye-khereh apekha," "Do not let Your anger burn," now we see him doing exactly that himself: "Va-yi-khar af Moshe"! Note also the irony in that despite his begging Hashem not to kill the people, he is about to turn around and do exactly that himself! Yes, Hashem had wanted to kill everyone and Moshe had "only" 3,000 people killed, but it is still highly ironic that the defender turns into the accuser! Moshe has us coming and going -- is he with us or against us?

**Moshe's job is to heal the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. This means he has to play both ends. When Moshe faces Hashem and Hashem tells him to stand aside so that He can blast the people with a lightning bolt (so to speak), Moshe knows that even in His anger, Hashem is hinting that Moshe should defend the people -- Hashem wants to be appeased.** (If He did not mean to hint to Moshe to stand his ground and defend, He would just blast the people without warning Moshe). Moshe plays the role of appeaser, reminding Hashem of all the reasons He shouldn't destroy the people. Moshe's role in the face of Hashem's anger is to hold his own anger completely in check for if he, too, becomes angry, how will he be able to save the people?

But when Moshe faces the people, he allows his anger to blossom. The people have been attacked by a virulent form of spiritual cancer, and to survive they need radical surgery. If, without knowing the context, you watched a surgeon amputate a limb, you might think the surgeon a cruel torturer. But the truth is that he or she is a healer; without the amputation, the patient would die. Moshe seems full of cruelty and anger, but the truth is that he comes as a healer. The people need an amputation to avoid the greater threat, so that Hashem will be satisfied that justice has been done. Also, in order to be rehabilitated back into relationship with Hashem, the people need to experience punishment and guilt. They need to understand what they have done, deeply regret it, and deeply desire to return to Hashem. So when Moshe faces the egel and the dancing, he gives free reign to the anger he choked back before.

The mefarshim pick up on various themes which hint that part of Moshe's strategy is to induce in the people an awareness of what they have done and a sense of guilt. Seforno addresses the question of Moshe's use of the Luhot to teach the people a lesson:

#### **SEFORNO, SHEMOT 32:15:**

"With the two tablets in his hand": He [Moshe] reasoned that when he returned, they would repent, and if not, he would smash them [the Tablets] right in front of them to shock them into repentance.

The smashing of the Luhot is not a completely spontaneous reaction to Moshe's own anger; it is something he plans while he makes his way down the mountain. His anger at seeing the egel and the dancing -- anger which he purposely lets loose at this point -- adds authentic passion to the gesture of smashing the Luhot in front of the people.

Ramban adds to the picture with his explanation of why Moshe has the people drink the dust of the egel. Other mefarshim say that eating the dust reveals who has participated in the worship: just as the waters drunk by the sota [woman accused of adultery] show whether a woman has been unfaithful, these waters will show if the people have been unfaithful to Hashem. But the Ramban adds a different suggestion, a psychological one:

#### **RAMBAN, SHEMOT 32:20:**

... He wanted to show contempt for what they had made, so he ground up their god and put it into their bellies so that they should excrete it in their excrement, as it says, "Cast them [your idols] out like an outcast, tell them, 'Get out!'" (Isaiah 30:22). According to our rabbis, he also meant to test them like a sota, so that "their belly would swell and their thigh fall away," and that is the truth.

Before they can do teshuva, Bnei Yisrael need to understand what they have done and develop a sense of revulsion for it. They need to feel a powerful sense of harata [regret], an integral part of teshuva. One way of making the people feel this revulsion is to transform the egel, the object of their worship, into something palpably disgusting; in addition, Moshe's action forces the people to demonstrate (literally) their rejection of the egel, also a basic element of teshuva.

Moshe's next task is to respond to the demands of justice by wiping out the chief participants in the worship of the egel. Last week we developed the picture of the Kohen as a person who relinquishes his personhood, his individuality, in order to function as a proper conduit between Hashem and the people. If this Kohenic character is shared to some degree by the rest of Shevet Levi, it fits that specifically Levi volunteers to mete out punishment in Hashem's place, ignoring the bonds of love and friendship in representing Hashem's justice to the people -- in carrying out in microcosm the destruction Hashem had wanted to carry out in macrocosm.

#### **A CONSPIRACY TO FORGIVE:**

This brings us to the next encounter between Hashem and Moshe.

#### **SHEMOT 32:30-35 --**

The next day, Moshe said to the people, "You have sinned greatly; now I shall ascend to Hashem -- perhaps I will be able to atone for your sin." Moshe returned to Hashem and said, "O, this people have sinned greatly and made for themselves a golden god. Now, if You will forgive them, [good,] but if not, erase me from the book You have written!" Hashem said to Moshe, "Whomever has sinned against Me, him will I erase from My book! Now go and lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you; My angel shall go before you. But on the day I choose, I will recall their sin upon them!"

Moshe saved the people's lives with his first tefilla, but now he must find a way to convince Hashem to forgive them and reestablish relationship with them. He adopts a very aggressive strategy: "Erase me from the book You have written!" Many of us know Rashi's interpretation: "Erase me from the Torah." But most other mefarshim disagree and say that "the book You have written" is not the Torah, it is the Book of Life, or the book of merits and sins which is before Hashem. In other words, "If You will not forgive them, then kill me!" (Rashbam and others).

## **"NO" MEANS "YES":**

On the surface of things, Hashem seems to brush Moshe off and refuse his request -- "I will erase the sinners, not you. Now go back to your job and lead the people." But buried in this refusal is something quite new: "Take them to Israel" (!) Not only will Hashem not destroy Bnei Yisrael, but in fact they will still be traveling to Eretz Yisrael to inherit the land promised to them. This subtle shift -- subtle because it seems buried within a context of refusal of Moshe's bold demand -- is a pattern which spans the parasha: Moshe demands complete forgiveness in different ways, and Hashem, seeming to refuse, actually grants the request in part. The cumulative result is that Hashem edges closer and closer to completely forgiving the people, until, close to the end of the parasha (as we will see next week), He forgives them completely and returns His Presence to them.

This pattern raises our awareness of a fascinating aspect of these conversations: Hashem seems angry and vengeful, threatening to destroy the people, refusing to forgive, turning Moshe down again and again. But along the way, Hashem continues to drop hints to Moshe that he is doing the right thing by defending Bnei Yisrael and challenging Hashem's decrees. If not for these hints, it would be difficult to understand why Hashem does not simply blast Moshe to dust for his chutzpah and stubbornness [who is more "keshei oref" than Moshe himself?] in refusing His commands: "Leave Me, so that I may destroy them!" Moshe refuses to budge, and instead launches into a tefila to save Bnei Yisrael -- a successful tefila. Moshe understands that by telling him to "stand aside" so that he can destroy the people, Hashem is really saying, "Don't stand aside! Play the defender!" Hashem certainly does not need Moshe to stand aside to strike at Bnei Yisrael, so when Hashem asks Moshe to make way, Moshe reads, "I [Hashem] am so angry that I am about to destroy the people. The only thing 'in the way' is you, Moshe -- the only thing that can stop Me is your interceding for the people. If you stand aside, if you do not pray for them, I will destroy them."

Moshe then takes the initiative, demanding forgiveness or death (reminding all of us Americans, of course, of Patrick Henry). While the exoteric formulation of Hashem's response is a refusal, it is actually a partial accession to Moshe's request. As we will see, this pattern is one that will continue. [You may recall that Avraham displays similar 'chutzpah' in challenging Hashem's plan to destroy Sedom and Amora. Avraham knows that he is expected to challenge; if not, God would have had no need to tell him of His plans for Sedom.]

Hashem does not want to destroy the people; He wants to forgive them. He communicates this to Moshe in subtle ways, but on the surface He remains angry and distant. In a sense, Hashem and Moshe are partners in a conspiracy of mercy, an under-the-table effort to forgive the people. Moshe immediately senses this and plays the role of audacious defender, while Hashem continues to play the role of vengeful and angry prosecutor and punisher. Hashem helps Moshe, as we will see, by supplying Him with the strategy which will allow him to achieve the goal desired by both of them: the return of Hashem's Presence to the people.

This 'conspiracy,' and the fact that Hashem is implicitly instructing Moshe to play the defender's role, is noted by Hazal in a midrash quoted by Rashi (33:11). Moshe has moved the "Ohel Mo'ed" outside the camp, a move interpreted by Hazal as Moshe's understanding that just as Hashem has withdrawn from the Bnei Yisrael, so should His faithful servant, Moshe, withdraw from them. But Hashem tells Moshe that he is wrong:

### **RASHI 33:11 --**

Hashem told Moshe to return to the camp. He said to him, "If I am angry, and you are angry, who will draw the Bnei Yisrael close?!"

Despite His anger, Hashem wants to forgive the people, and He communicates this to Moshe, although perhaps with subtler hints than the conversation imagined by the midrash to express this idea.

## **MY ANGEL SHALL GO BEFORE YOU":**

Getting back to the scene above, although Hashem promises to punish the people at some point, it seems that they are basically "back on track" to go to Eretz Yisrael and inherit the land. If so, however, then the parasha should end here; the reason it does not is also 'buried' in this section: "My angel shall go before you." Hashem Himself will not be coming with the people (=no Mishkan, as we have discussed at length). Moshe notices this, and does not respond -- but he also does not carry out Hashem's orders! So Hashem gives the orders again. Usually, when the word "va-yomer" appears to tell us that someone says something, and then "va-yomer" appears again to introduce another statement by the same person, the implication is that the other party to the conversation has not responded to the first statement; the first party has paused, waiting for a response, but when it does not come, he begins again, so the Torah gives us another "va-yomer," as it does here:

### **SHEMOT 33:1-6:**

HASHEM SAID ["va-yomer" again] to Moshe, "Go, arise from here, you and the nation you brought up from Egypt, to the land I promised to Avraham, to Yitzhak, and to Ya'akov, saying, 'To your descendants shall I give it.' I will send an angel before you, and I shall drive out the Kena'ani, Emori, Hiti, Perizi, Hivi, and Yevusi. [Go to] the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go up with you, for you are a stiff-necked nation, and I might destroy you on the way." The people heard this evil thing and mourned. No one put on his decorative ornaments. Hashem said to Moshe, "Tell the Bnei Yisrael, 'Your are a stiff-necked people; if I accompany you for even a second, I will destroy you. Now remove your decorations, and I will decide what to do to you.'"

Hashem repeats to Moshe the command to lead the people to Eretz Yisrael (since Moshe has not budged so far), repeats that He will send an angel before them, and makes even clearer than before that He Himself will not be making the trip with them. It seems that

there is no progress in the forgiveness effort. But a second look shows that Moshe's silent refusal to budge has quite effectively 'changed' Hashem's mind on several scores:

1) The land has now become "the land I promised to the Avot," not simply "the place I told you," as in Hashem's last command. This implies that Hashem has accepted Moshe's reminder (in his first tefila) that He promised the land to their forefathers, and that He therefore 'must' acknowledge a strong historic connection with and commitment to the people.

2) The angel will not just "go before them," but will help them conquer the powerful nations there.

3) The land is described as a wonderful place to be, flowing with milk and honey. The angry Hashem who commanded, "Take them to that place I told you!" now says, "Take them to the land flowing with milk and honey, the land promised to their forefathers, the land I will help them conquer through My angel." The latter statement simply cannot come out of an angry countenance.

4) Hashem's not accompanying the people is formulated not as a punishment, a punitive withdrawal of the Divine Presence, but as a form of mercy. Hashem recognizes that the people's ingrained habits and beliefs make it impossible for them to walk the straight and narrow, remaining always completely obedient. If He were to accompany them personally, any failure on their part to meet divine standards of faithfulness would demand that He destroy them, for His accompanying them would mean that any rebellion would be "in His face" and demand swift and extreme punishment. Hashem must withdraw so that when the people fail, they will, in a sense, be rebelling only against Hashem's angel, not against the Divine Presence itself.

The Torah tells us that the people hear this and mourn, understanding that their behavior has caused the departure of the Shekhina. But then, puzzlingly, Hashem commands Moshe to deliver this message again. Also puzzling is Hashem's command to the people to remove their ornaments, despite the fact that the Torah tells us that the people, in their mourning, had already removed their ornaments on their own, caught up in sadness and guilt. Why command what has already been done?

**Hashem's command to Moshe to repeat to the people that He will not accompany them fits perfectly into the pattern we have noted of Hashem's external anger but internal mercy and desire to forgive. Hashem is trying to emphasize to the people that the withdrawal of His Presence is not a punishment, but a merciful recognition that the people cannot handle the demands of faithful obedience implied by Hashem's immediate personal Presence. And the command to remove the already-removed decorations reinforces the impression that Hashem is only externally angry -- He decrees a non-decree, prescribing mourning that the people have already performed independently. He purposely adds nothing substantive to the people's mourning or sadness, only preserving the outward facade of His unforgiving, blaming posture.**

We will continue next week with the final scenes of the 'conspiracy to forgive.'

Shabbat Shalom

Note: Emphasis added