

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 8 #21, March 5, 2021; Ki Tisa 5781; Parah

**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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Only forty days after the revelation at Har Sinai, the people demand that Aharon make them a "god" to replace Moshe (whom they believe must have died after nearly six weeks atop Har Sinai) and take them to Canaan (32:1). How could 3000 men involved in this activity be so stupid?

When God observes the people making an egel zahav (golden calf), He remarks to Moshe. However, God does not consider the situation grave until the second day. Why did God wait so long to express His anger? Where did the people get the idea that a calf could have godly properties? Everything seems strange here. For a clear description clarifying this incident, read Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's Devar Torah, included as an attachment to my E-mail or included in the download at PotomacTorah.org. Among other points, Rabbi Leibtag provides references indicating that when the elders of B'Nai Yisrael observe a reflection of God's image during the Revelation at Sinai, they see what appears to be feet resembling those of a cow or bull.

Rabbi Fohrman observes that the concept of Moshe as a Godly person actually comes from God Himself. When Moshe objects to Hashem at the Burning Bush that he is not capable of leading the Jews out of Egypt, God tells Moshe that He will make him an "elohim," or Godly person (4:16); (see also 23:20, 23; 32:1). The slaves in Egypt, even after God takes them out of slavery, are afraid to interact directly with God. They tell Moshe that they could not survive God's voice speaking to them from Har Sinai, and they ask Moshe to listen and relate God's words to them. During each crisis, the people complain to Moshe. They remain afraid despite every assurance that God wants to take care of them and to develop a personal relationship with each Jew. Rabbi Fohrman observes that the Torah describes the egel that Aharon makes as "egel maseichah" (32:4). Maseichah means "molten," but it also means "mask." The calf is to perform a role that Moshe has played for the people – something to protect them from the frightening intensity of dealing directly with God.

Rabbi Leibtag adds that the people try to replicate the ceremony at Har Sinai forty days earlier when they introduce the egel zahav. While introducing an idol is a sin, doing so in this context does not upset God unduly. It is only the second day, when the people become drunk and start dancing inappropriately, that God becomes furious and threatens to destroy the people (to start over with children from Moshe).

The consequences of egel zahav recur in many places in Jewish history and Tanach. For example, in Vayikra, several of the korbanot (sacrifices) include an egel (calf) or par (adult cow or bull). The most preferred animal for an olah (burnt offering) is an unblemished male bull. (One who could not afford a par could bring a sheep, goat, or a bird (Vayikra 1:10).) A chatat (offering for an unintended sin) for a Kohen Gadol or for a congregation is a young bull (egel) (4:3; 13-14). A shelamim (shared meal for a peace offering or celebration) should be a cow or bull (ch. 3).

Purification after contact with a dead body also involves an adult egel – a par (female) cow; see Bamidbar 19, where Hashem speaks to both Moshe and Aharon, because Aharon had to be involved to atone for his part in the sin of egel zahav. (The Stone Chumash provides extensive notes discussing the connection between egel zahav and Chukat. Check these notes when we prepare to read the Maftir portion this Shabbat morning.)

In a few weeks, at our Pesach Seders, we shall read a discussion of the Exodus, focusing on a discussion among Rabbis from the Talmud. After experiencing Purim last week, we should be ready for Moshe hiding his face at the Seder. (Before leaving Purim, read the very moving Devar Torah (below) on Purim that Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer sent after I had already posted a week ago.) In the entire Haggadah, Moshe's name appears only once, as an aside. The Haggadah is explicit in repeating numerous times that God Himself took us out of Egypt, by Himself, without any angel, human involvement, or elohim. Moshe's absence is to remind us that God wants a direct relationship with all of us, and that we are not to rely on any human or other force to get in between each of us and our Creator.

In previous years, I discussed Moshe's brilliant method of convincing God to forgive the sin of egel zahav and to return His presence to dwell among the people. Rabbis Leibtag and Mayer, in Devrei Torah attached to my E-mail and in the download, discuss these topics at length. For a change, I decided to discuss several ways in which the consequences of egel zahav have affected Jewish history (and Tanach) over time. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, started me on the process of looking for connections between a weekly parsha and other parts of Tanach. This quest brings all parts of the Torah alive for me – and I hope that some of this excitement comes across in my message.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, 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, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

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Hannah & Alan

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**Drasha: Ki Sisa: Higher than Sinai**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1999

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

In the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe's mortality is transformed to immortality as — anthropomorphic as it may sound — he gets G-d to change his mind.

Hashem, who had threatened to destroy Klall Yisrael after the sin of the Golden Calf, finally assures Moshe that His presence will accompany them on their sojourn. But Moshe, it seems, is still not satisfied. In what appears as a daring move, he asks Hashem for more. Not only does he want assurance of the accompaniment of the Divine presence, Moshe now asks Hashem to "show me Your face" (Exodus 33:18). It is not enough that Hashem forgives the Jews for the most

audacious sin of their young history. It is not enough that he assures them that he will guide them in the desert. Moshe wants more! He asks for a mortal existence despite an immortal act. He wants to connect to the corporeal with the Omnipotent in a way never done before. He wants to feast his soul on the most spiritual meal ingested through human vision. He wants to see G-d.

Hashem explains that it is impossible to see Him and live. The human soul cannot be confined to a spatiotemporal existence after it has experienced the endless world of infinite spirituality. And thus the answer is, "No. You may however, see my back" (cf. Exodus 33:20-23). Of course the world of G-d's face as opposed to his back fill tomes of commentators from those who analyze textual reference to the great kabbalists, and it certainly has no place in a fax of internet sheet. What does interest me is Moshe's persistence. Why was he dissatisfied with G-d's first acquiescence? What propelled him, after almost losing Klall yisrael to ask for the greatest show of G-d's bond to His creation's?

**Lou Maidenbaum, former President of Met Foods, help establish the Gedaliah Maidenbaum Preparatory School Division of Yeshiva of South Shore. Before passing away last month [1999], he was confined to a hospital in Miami Beach.**

**But in his sick bed he never lost his spunk, charm or the will to live life to its fullest.**

**A week before he passed away, he was in his hospital room and was experiencing some discomfort. He pressed the button for a nurse, but no one came. Five minutes later he rang again. Still no response. He tried two more times and then decided a new tactic.**

**He picked up the telephone and dialed 3 digits. 9-1-1. "Emergency services, came the woman's voice, "what is the problem?" "I'm having difficulty breathing" gasped Lou. "Where are you calling from?" "Mount Sinai Hospital, Room 321," came the response. "Mount Sinai Hospital?" Repeated the incredulous dispatcher, "what are you calling us for? You are in the Hospital already!" Lady," he shouted to the operator. "This is my life we are talking about. And if this is the way I'll get the best response, then I'm calling 911!**

Moshe knew that he was — on Sinai — with G-d — receiving the Torah. However, that was not enough. He was not complacent about his accomplishment. He was not content with being the transmitter of eternity. He wanted more! He wanted to attain the highest possible level of mortal achievement. He wanted to see G-d. He wanted to spiritually feast on the face of the Omnipotent. Moshe was only concerned, to attain the greatest degree of spirituality that he possibly could reach. There was nothing else on his mind or in his soul. Hashem responded that if that level is attained, the soul will flee from its mortal constraints and refuse to re-enter a corporal being. "No man shall see Me and live" (Exodus 22:20). So Moshe had to concede with the highest level the physical body could endure. But in Moshe's quest to go higher than Sinai he taught us a great lesson. No matter what level you think you are on, if you are standing on earth, you must reach for the mountain and when you are standing on the mountain you must reach for the clouds. And even if you are standing on a cloud you must reach for the stars.

Good Shabbos!

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## **Worshipping God with the Physical**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

What was the sin of the golden calf and why does it matter to us today?

The commentators are divided as to the nature of the sin. For some, the golden calf was the worship of a new god, a rejection of the God who redeemed them from Egypt. According to others, the people's belief in and fidelity to God did not change. And yet they did a grievous sin by creating something physical to represent God and by directing their worship towards it.

To me, it is clear that the latter was the case. Moses is gone, and the people do not have anyone on earth that represents God. They need something that will allow them to feel that God is among them.

In the Torah, worshipping God through the physical is a form of avodah zarah, just as much as the worship of foreign gods. On a theological level, representing God in a corporeal way corrupts the idea of God and God's total separateness

from our physical reality. And on a practical and relational level, such physical representation corrupts our worship of God as God truly is.

And yet, this purist idea creates a profound challenge, even a paradox, to us as human beings. How can we as humans relate to some One who is outside our comprehension and experience? If God cannot – as Rambam argued at length – even be described with human words since those words themselves are rooted in our experience as human beings – where can the point of connection be found?

It is exactly this profound human need of connectedness that demands the use of the physical in our worship of the Divine. It can't be an idol, but it needs to be something.

For Rambam, the drawing on the physical aspect of the human experience takes place in the intellectual realm – in the Torah's use of metaphors and anthropomorphism in describing the Divine – God's outstretched arm, or God's smelling the aroma of the sacrifices. But now, these have become dead metaphors and lack their original emotive power, and they no longer serve the goal of making God more relatable.

On the practical realm, the Torah gives us the use of the physical in a number of ways. God tells us to build the Mishkan, and that God will descend in a cloud and dwell among us. We attempt to carry this idea over to our synagogues and shuls, but they so often lack the awe-inspiring power of the Temple to create a felt sense of God's presence.

What about the act of worship? The Torah gives us sacrifices. An animal is offered to God, placed on the altar, and the smoke rises up to heaven. This is a powerful, concrete way in which one experiences bringing something to God and God receiving the offering. Today, however, we have no such sacrifices, and many people find it hard to relate to this act of worship, among other reasons because its extreme physicality makes God seem too human, too physical.

So what can be done? Finding an answer is not easy by any means. A joke is told about a man who wakes up every morning at the crack of dawn to pray at the Kotel. After 30 years, a friend says to him – "Chaim, tell me, does it help?" To which he responds, "Feh! It's like talking to a wall!"

To some degree, perhaps, this challenge can be addressed, to some degree, by the use of physical ritual items and bodily movements in our davening. The wearing of tallis and tefillin, the act of shuckling or even just sitting, standing, moving three steps back and three steps forwards, all help make prayer more concrete, and make God maybe that much more accessible at that moment. But all of that probably falls short.

When I suggested this answer to my students they pushed back and offered other approaches. Some argued, cogently, that the disconnect which is at the root of the question should prompt us to rethink our conception of God. We do not have to think of God as merely transcendent and above nature; we can adopt a more Kabbalistic and Hassidic approach which sees God as both above nature and also within it, inhering in every blade of grass. By seeing God in every aspect of the physical, the challenge in finding a point of connection vanishes.

Another way to approach this challenge is through a life of Torah and mitzvot. Too often we see our performance of these as something being demanded of us by an abstract entity called "Halakha." But in the Ahavah Rabbah prayer that is recited before Shema, we say something quite different. We declare that God has loved us and given us Torah and mitzvot as the expression of that love. And in the Shema we read the verses that state that we should return our love to God through the learning of Torah and performance of these mitzvot. Imagine how different our religious life would be if we saw our day-to-day observance of halakha as an expression of God's love for us and our love for God! This could become a profound way to worship of God through the physical.

As religious beings, we have a need to connect to the Divine, even if it is sometimes buried deep within us. Our challenge is to not ignore this need, or to note it and move on, but to work to find ways that we can reach out to God in concrete and visceral ways, so that God can be a felt part of our lives.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2021/03/worshipping-god-with-the-physical/>

[A final word on Purim. This Dvar Torah reached me after I had posted my packet last week. It is a beautiful work that everyone should have an opportunity to read. Since many shuls focus on reaching out to special needs Jews at this time of year, the timing is especially relevant – Ed.]

## Can a Person Write a Megillah in English? – Purim, Unity, and Diversity

by Rabbi Dov Linzer (Posted on February 25, 2021)

We know that a sefer Torah must be written in Hebrew. But what about a Megillah? The answer to this question is rooted in how we look at Purim. Is Purim a holiday of unity or one of diversity?

The theme at the end of the Megillah is one of unity. We are told to send mishloach manot, gifts to one another, which create a sense of warmth, friendship, and respect. We are told to give matanot la'evyonim, gifts to the poor, which instills a sense of responsibility to those in need in our community.

The theme of unity, however, seems to be contradicted by an earlier theme of the Megillah: one of disunity and diversity. When speaking with Achashverosh, Haman says “יְשִׁנּוּ עַם־אֱחָד מִפְּנֵי רַמְפָּד בְּיַד הָעַמִּים” – the Jewish people scattered throughout the land.” We are scattered and disconnected from one another.

It is often said that the end of the Megillah is a response to Haman's earlier claim. The mitzvot of mishloach manot and matanot la'evyonim are established to cultivate and express a deep sense of connectedness and unity among the people.

On deeper reflection, however, it seems that it was Haman who was actually right! We were, and we are now, scattered throughout the land! The end of the Megillah, rather than underscoring the principle of unity, serves to undermine it in unheard of ways. Purim is the only holiday on our calendar celebrated on different days – some people on the 14th and others on the 15th of Adar, depending if one lives in a walled city or not.

As Ramban notes, this is completely shocking. Why and how can any holiday be instituted this way? A major part of a holiday is that it brings all the people together. History has shown that when a religion has different groups who observe the same holiday on different days, the groups divide off and become different denominations. Why institute this dividing line that risks becoming a wall that can cleave the people asunder?

The secret to this lies in understanding that Purim is both a day of diversity and of unity. It is a holiday of the diaspora – the only chag based on the experience of Jews in galus — in exile. When we were in Israel, particularly during the First Temple period, although there were sinners who worship idols, we were one cohesive people with shared customs and practices. In exile, however, we spread throughout the lands, into different host countries. We adopted their cultures and their languages. Indeed, a recurring theme in the Megillah is Achashveirosh sending decrees to each country “כְּתֹב בְּלִשָּׁנָם” – in their own script and their own language” (Esther 8:9).

We can and have embraced this diversity as something good. It is a model of the salad bowl against a melting pot. A melting pot seeks to make everything the same. A salad bowl is beautiful and tasty because it is made up of different ingredients existing side-by-side and cohering together.

We, as a people, are a salad bowl: Jews are Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Teimani (Yemenite). There are Russian Jews and there are Jews of color. All of this diversity of customs and practices adds to the richness of us as a people. To become a salad bowl, however, these components must also adhere. Our goal in galut is to treasure this diversity and at the same time to bring it all together. Not with a uniformity that flattens differences, but with a unity that integrates all these differences into one larger whole.

There is a great deal of work that has to be done to achieve this. We too often allow our different cultures, languages and practices to become a wedge that drives us apart. We have to exert intentional effort if we do not want to become separate tribes that have little or nothing to do with one another.

This is the true message of Purim. Not a rejection of Haman's statement, but as a fundamental principle that exists alongside it. It is a chag of galut, of differences; these differences are given expression by its astonishing celebration on different days. And yet, the actual practices of the chag – sending gifts and giving to the poor – cultivate and reinforce that this diversity lives within a larger unity and connectedness. As Haman said, with all our being spread out throughout the land, we are still am echad, one people.

Which brings us back to our question of whether a Megillah can be written in English. **Focusing on the chag's emphasis of a multiplicity of cultures, our Sages rule that a Megillah can be written in the vernacular of each community and used to fulfill the mitzvah – especially for those who don't understand Hebrew. It is written "according to their script and their languages." "Their languages" – in English, "and with their script" – using English characters.**

This ruling has been powerfully relevant to my family. My son doesn't understand Hebrew, and he has gone year after year feeling completely excluded from the reading of Megillah. My wife and I – really, my wife – found a perfect solution in this halakha. We commissioned a Megillah to be written in English, and now my son is able to read it in a language and script that he can understand. He has said that it is the first time that the mitzvah has felt meaningful. It is now an act that connects him to God, and hopefully to the Jewish people.

We often struggle between these two poles. At times, unity turns into uniformity, and diversity goes out the window. Why not have a minyan for Spanish speakers and English speakers alongside those who can daven in Hebrew?, my son asks. And too often, diversity rules the day, and we create only separate communities, not a larger one that brings us all together as one people. This Purim, perhaps we should start a new custom of having a salad bowl at our seudah! But more importantly, let us all work to invest intentional effort to bring a larger unity to our diverse cultures and languages.

Chag Sameach!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/02/can-a-person-write-a-megillah-in-english-purim-unity-and-diversity/>  
Emphasis added.

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### **Parshas Ki Sisa- "I'm Waiting"** by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2014 Teach 613

The event of the golden calf was a great setback for the Jewish people. When Moshe didn't come back immediately after their count of forty days had elapsed, people started getting nervous. "We do not know what has happened to kisisaMoshe." So a group of people decided to replace Moshe with a new and powerful spiritual force called the golden calf.

The Torah records different reactions to the golden calf. There was of course the group that made the golden calf. They felt that with the disappearance of Moshe there was a need for a new system. Some Jews joined them; others remained apart.

There was, however, one person who remained unaffected by the golden calf. Moshe's loyal student, Yehoshua, remained waiting patiently at the foot of the mountain, blissfully unaware of the panic that had taken over the camp. To Yehoshua there was only one reality. Moshe would return as promised. He was not fazed by the delay or by the commotion in the camp. Yehoshua retained his vision of the future. Yehoshua was waiting.

This was not the only time that Yehoshua would display this powerful quality. When he was sent with the other spies to check out the Land of Israel, he was subjected to 40 days of hearing plans how to malign the Land. Through it all Yehoshua was silent. He waited. Only later did he voice his opinion; only later was his view borne out. Yehoshua knew how to maintain his view despite the challenge surrounding him. Yehoshua knew how to wait.

I once knew a teacher of sixth grade boys, who conducted her class with absolute dignity. The boys would come in after recess and she would stand at the front of the classroom with poise waiting for them to settle down. She had a clear vision of how the class was to be conducted and she earned the respect of her students by sharing that vision with them. Her words were a legend among the students. She would say firmly and with dignity, "Boys, I'm waiting."

The skill of waiting is not just about patience. Correct waiting is about vision, and about perseverance to see one's dreams become reality.

There was a woman in New York in the 1920s by the name of Rochel Gold. Mrs. Gold had a son that she wanted to enroll in yeshiva, so she did her research and chose the yeshiva that would be best for him. Then she set out to enroll her son in that yeshiva.

When she got to the office she encountered a very overwhelmed principal who told her that he simply could not take in another student. The classes were overcrowded, the building at its max. "Sorry," he said, "Maybe you can come back when we have more room."

Mrs. Gold politely left the office and sat down on the front stairs with her son. There they sat for the entire morning. At lunch time they ate their lunch on the stairs. Not until dismissal time did they leave to go home. The next day they again sat on the stairs. By this time people took note of them and asked her if everything was alright. Mrs. Gold answered, "Yes. Everything is fine. I'm just waiting."

By the third day her answer "I'm waiting," simply fell shallow. A teacher asked her, "What is it that you are waiting for?" Mrs. Gold answered, "They told me that right now they don't have room for my son, but someday they might have room. So I'm just waiting until they have room for him in the yeshiva."

Within minutes the principal had found a place for her son.

Waiting doesn't mean passively watching the clock tick as we do nothing. Waiting is an active experience of anticipation. When waiting correctly we maintain a vision for the future, and take little steps towards the fulfillment of that vision.

Some people find it unnerving to deal with a "Yehoshua personality". "Why don't you give up already?" they might ask. But a student of Yehoshua doesn't lose sight of the way things are supposed to be.

Over the past few years the popularity of rededication to Torah study and observance has grown enormously. In some communities new mikvaos and day schools have been built. The dream that every Jew should be knowledgeable in Torah is a goal that is gaining momentum. The accomplishments of the Jewish world are truly remarkable.

What strikes me as noteworthy, however, is that many of these motivated Jewish communities started just a few years ago with a few dreamers. Each community started with a few people who refused to stop yearning and waiting for a better tomorrow. They met to brainstorm and to study Torah, in groups of 2,3 or 5, until their numbers grew and success blossomed forth. Such achievements deserve celebration.

So whether you live in a vibrant Jewish community, or in a community that is starting out, remember the lesson of Yehoshua. Treasure your dreams and your vision for tomorrow. Waiting isn't about passivity. Waiting is about the clarity that tomorrow will be brighter than today.

\* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.  
[RMRhine@Teach613.org](mailto:RMRhine@Teach613.org). Teach613, 10604 Woodsdale Dr., Silver Spring, MD 20901. 908-770-9072. **Donations welcome to help with Torah outreach. [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org).**

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-ki-sisa-im-waiting/>

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## **A Philosophy of Mitzvoth: Thoughts on Parashat Ki Tissa**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

"The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as an eternal covenant."

This famous verse from this week's parasha seems to have a redundancy. It informs us that the children of Israel "shall keep" Shabbat "to observe" Shabbat. How do we "keep" Shabbat "to observe" it?



The great Hassidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, explained the verse as follows: we are commanded to keep the Sabbath. When we actually do keep the Sabbath, we will find that it is a wonderful, soul-satisfying experience. Indeed, it is so fulfilling that we will want to observe the Sabbath next week, and the week after, and throughout the generations.

Some people consider the many laws of Shabbat and think: we can't do that, Shabbat is too difficult, it requires too many sacrifices. But when they do actually observe Shabbat, they find that the experience is delightful. They enjoy the Shabbat meals, they rejoice in the synagogue services, they gain wisdom from Shabbat Torah study, they relish the time spent quietly with family and friends. Indeed, Shabbat is so extraordinary that those who observe it wonder how it would be possible to live without Shabbat. Those who love Shabbat pine for Shabbat from week to week; their lives center around the rhythms of the weekly Shabbat. When one has truly kept Shabbat, he/she desires to observe Shabbat again and again. This is what the Torah means: when the children of Israel keep Shabbat, they will continue to observe Shabbat in the future. The powerful experience of Shabbat inspires them to want to observe Shabbat each week.

This is an important lesson about Judaism in general. We have many mitzvot, customs and traditions. At first glance, all these things may seem to be enormous burdens, overwhelmingly difficult to observe. But once we do observe the mitzvot, they become part of the fabric of our lives--and we find that they are essential to our physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. They are tremendous sources of joy and inner strength. Fulfilling one mitzvah leads us to want to fulfill it again--and to fulfill other mitzvot as well.

The great 17th century author, Isaac Cardoso, pointed out: to those who don't love the Torah, even six commandments seem as difficult as 613; but to those who love the Torah, 613 commandments seem as easy as just six. It is a matter of attitude. A positive, enthusiastic attitude leads one to fulfill the mitzvot with great satisfaction and happiness. A negative, unenthusiastic attitude leads one to think of the mitzvot as burdensome and unpleasant.

The greatest gift that Jewish parents and grandparents can give their progeny is an attitude and experience of joy in fulfilling Shabbat and the other mitzvot. We teach not by talking at our children and grandchildren, but by sharing with them the fulfillment of the commandments in a spirit of happiness and meaningfulness. If we will keep the Shabbat and other commandments, we will want to observe them again and again; our younger generations will learn to value the mitzvot, and will continue our traditions throughout the generations.

**\*\*\*PASSOVER REMINDER: Rabbi Marc Angel's Sephardic Haggada and Gilda Angel's Sephardic Holiday Cookbook are available through the Institute's online store at [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org). Please order soon so that these books can reach you in time for Passover.**

\* [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org), Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, <https://www.jewishideas.org/print/philosophy-mitzvot-thoughts-parashat-ki-tissa> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

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## **AS ORTHODOX RABBIS WE SUPPORT THE ISRAELI SUPREME COURT DECISION**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel and Rabbi Avi Weiss \*

We are Orthodox rabbis who have served in Orthodox synagogues and taught in Orthodox schools for five decades. It is precisely because we love Orthodoxy that we speak in support of the Israeli Supreme Court's decision validating Conservative and Reform conversions done in Israel for Israeli citizenship.

This move, we believe, will help foster in Israel a less coercive Orthodoxy and worldwide will embrace all of our people as part of Am Yisrael, with a shared past and shared future.



No doubt, the Chief Rabbinate will disagree with the position we've taken as they fiercely want to hold on to power, determined to be the sole arbiters on conversions, leaving no room for Conservative and Reform.

We know as well from conversations with colleagues that there are Orthodox rabbis who agree with us, but are fearful to say so publicly, concerned that the Chief Rabbinate will refuse to accept any spiritual leader who disagrees with their position.

Because we support Reform and Conservative conversions for citizenship in Israel doesn't mean we would accept their conversions as halachically legitimate. As in America, when individuals have come before us with non-Orthodox conversions, if they don't meet Orthodox standards, we would encourage another conversion.

Truth be told, the Israeli Supreme Court decision doesn't change much. Based on the Law of Return, the Israeli Interior Ministry already accepts for citizenship those converted by Conservative and Reform rabbis outside of Israel. The inequity for those in Israel has now been resolved.

Why accept the Supreme Court decision? Our teacher Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik wrote not only about the Covenant of Sinai, but the Covenant of Egypt, also called the Covenant of Fate. We part company with our Conservative and Reform colleagues on many halachic matters going back to Sinai, but our fate as a people unites us; the enemy makes no distinction between levels of observance or denominations. We survive and thrive as a people together.

More broadly, we are all part of what can be called the Covenant of Family – that family includes our co-religionists from other denominations. Recognizing their conversions in Israel will deepen the relationship between Israel and the majority of Jews in the Diaspora who are not Orthodox.

With all our heart and soul, we believe the Supreme Court decision will strengthen Orthodoxy. Most Jews in Israel today have been alienated by the Chief Rabbinate, as they see it as coercive in nature. This kind of Orthodoxy alienates, as spiritual striving and religious coercion are antithetical. With greater choice, people may see Orthodoxy as less oppressive, more inviting.

If Israeli citizens have a choice of where to go for a conversion, it may catalyze the rabbinate to be more open in their conversion policies, taking into account the whole corpus of Jewish Law which is more flexible than the current extreme Chief Rabbinate's standards. Competition is always good as it encourages everyone to do better. This bill could create a dynamic which would prod the Chief Rabbinate to become less insular and adopt a broader view of Klal Yisrael.

Notwithstanding our critique of the Chief Rabbinate, our feelings for those who hold its office remain warm. In the past, we were honored to have contact with Chief Rabbis – clearly lovers of Israel and the Jewish people. We have little doubt, too, that the Chief Rabbis today are people of goodwill. But the Chief Rabbinate as an institution no longer works. Whenever power coalesces in the hands of the few, it spells trouble.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Israel is the lack of unity of our people. The Supreme Court decision has the potential to bring us closer, allowing Jews from all streams to feel part of the destiny of Am Yisrael, talking openly with each other, disagreeing agreeably, recognizing we are not only part of one nation, but one family – hopefully a loving family.

\* <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/orthodox-rabbis-we-support-israeli-supreme-court-decision>

NOTE: For a related article, concerning Halacha and public policy toward conversions, see Rabbi Hayyim Angel's article on the subject at <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/conversion-halakhah-and-public-policy> .

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### **Parshas Ki Tisa** by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah was too late for my deadline this week. Watch for his messages most weeks.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

## **The Golden Calf, Charles Bukowski, and The Little Things**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

Charles Bukowski did not succeed as a writer until he was in his 50's. Until then, he worked blue collar jobs throughout America while getting rejected by publishers left and right. When reflecting on his life, he said that he didn't write to be successful, but because writing chose him. It consumed his being, and it didn't matter whether people saw it or not. That was his advice to everyone. Find something that consumes your being and do it.

No wonder his poems burst at the seams with realness and unformed grit. Bukowski did not write to please the sensibilities of a higher class or the editorial board at The New Yorker. He wrote his reality. And a lot of it wasn't pretty.

Bukowski comes to mind because we have an unpretty parsha this week where we see the collapse of our nation into their worst impulses. A mere forty days after receiving the most exalted ideals and visions ever presented to mankind, the Jews descend into idol worship, orgies, and murder. Every year I read about this, and every year I ask, "Why?" How is it possible? Surely if we would have just received the Torah from God Himself on Mount Sinai we'd have a different reaction."

So it seems fitting that I ran into one of Bukowski's poems this week, where he describes his discussions with an Italian and a Jew about leading a revolution against the government. But all he ended up doing was having an affair with his Italian friend's wife. See the poem by clicking [\[see below\]](#). I'm showing you this poem to illustrate the process of going from big ideas to immorality and their surprising connection. (But I of course don't recommend reading this poem to your kids.)

To explain his actions, the narrator writes that after all the talk about revolutions, he realized that "the weakness was not Government but Man, one at a time, that men were never as strong as their ideas and that ideas were governments turned into men."

In other words, we like to talk about big ideas, but afterwards we come crashing down when we realize that we do not have the strength to manifest it. (At least not in the time frame when we believe we should.)

So we reflect on how limited we are, get depressed, and settle for the easily attainable pleasures in front of us. Although it does not always lead to immorality, many choose fulfillment through Amazon when their life goals seem too big to fulfill.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, one of the past generation's rabbinic teachers and a physicist, explains the golden calf in this way. When a human being gets exposed to an idea that's so overwhelming that it consumes him, he/she will rebel because nothing less than the full implementation of the dream will satisfy him. And when he/she realizes they lack phenomenal cosmic powers, hedonism offers a welcome option.

So of course Israel sinned.

We live in a culture where we're surrounded by big ideas shot at us by the ever present media. "Feed The Hungry," "Heal the Sick," "Repair The World," "Fight For Justice." One lifetime is not enough to do it all. Not even one hundred lifetimes would do it. No wonder people can be so anxious. But don't worry. Netflix and Amazon can assuage our spirits. (It's definitely better than a golden calf.)

So what can we do? Remember the old song from Ethics of the Fathers: "It's not on you to complete the work, but you are not free to shirk it."

Do the little things. Take that big idea of "Healing the World" and focus on just giving a smile to a random stranger or calling someone who may need a pick-me-up. Fight for "Unity" by uniting with your compatriots at a prayer service or unifying the Matzah and Maror for the Korech sandwich during the Seder. "End Ignorance" by reading a little bit of Torah and maybe even sharing it with a friend.

Dream and be inspired. But let's not let the dream stay in our heads too long. Do something. Anything. Before it collapses like the golden calf or Bukowski's revolution. Even though these actions look so tiny in comparison to the dream, I think we'd feel better than if we drowned it in the latest Netflix documentary.

Though if you are going to do that, Shtisel Season 3 will be on Netflix March 25th.  
Shabbat Shalom!

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. **Link to the Charles Bukowski poem:**  
[https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49574/i-wanted-to-overthrow-the-government-but-all-i-brought-down-was-somebodys-wife?mc\\_cid=0cc12d4413&mc\\_eid=7938e0deb2](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49574/i-wanted-to-overthrow-the-government-but-all-i-brought-down-was-somebodys-wife?mc_cid=0cc12d4413&mc_eid=7938e0deb2)

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Ki Tisa: Moses' Extraordinary Prayer**

Perhaps the lowest point in the history of the Jewish people occurred shortly after the Torah's revelation at Mount Sinai. Without Moses' leadership and guidance, the people turned to idolatry, worshipping a golden calf.

Divine justice demanded that this terrible betrayal be punished severely, but Moses "pleaded before God" on their behalf (Exod. 32:11).

The word for "pleaded" — נִחַל — is not the usual expression for prayer. The Sages offered several explanations why the Torah used this particular word to describe Moses' prayer. Rabbi Elazar noted that נִחַל (va-yechal) shares the same root as חולה (choleh), meaning "sick." Moses prayed for the sake of Israel so intensely that he became ill from the effort.

According to Rabbi Eliezer the Great, the word נִחַל even indicates the specific illness that afflicted Moses. Moses suffered from achilu, a fever in the bones.

Why should Moses' efforts for the sake of the Jewish people make him ill? What is the significance of a fever in his bones?

#### **Intensity of Prayer**

The gravity of the Sin of the Golden Calf should not be underestimated. It was not a foregone conclusion that God would forgive the Israelites. Divine justice dictated that the Jewish nation deserved to be destroyed for this calamitous breach of faith.

Moses could not offer just any prayer in their defense. Their sin was beyond the normal efforts of the great leader to rectify. In order to recover, to some extent, the spiritual state they had attained at Sinai, Moses needed to pray with an intensity that exceeded his natural powers. The exertion was so great that Moses became ill. This is one implication of the word נִחַל — a pleading so intense that it disrupted his body's normal functioning.

#### **Awakening the Fire in the Bones**

Rabbi Eliezer the Great provided an additional insight into Moses' extraordinary prayer. Although bones are not particularly sensitive, they nevertheless contain a condensed essence of life. (The word etzem in Hebrew means both 'bone' and 'essence.') When the life-force has left all other parts of the body, it still remains in the bones. A starved individual, just barely alive, will appear to be a walking skeleton.

Thus bones are a metaphor for the marrow of life, stored deep inside the body. This life-force is not normally felt, unless it is awakened by a very powerful force. Ezekiel thus described the national revival of the Jewish people with a vision of dry bones coming back to life.

Moses was unable to plead the case of the Jewish people using only his natural powers. He needed to awaken all of his powers, even those hidden deeply within. His extraordinary effort was in equal measure to the people's cataclysmic spiritual breakdown. The nation's descent into idolatry could not be corrected by the regular influence of ethical life alone.

It was necessary that powers from the soul's essence — from the people's inner goodness and holiness, hidden deeply in their bones — be awakened.

Since these aspects of life are ordinarily hidden, their awakening is an unnatural, even extreme measure. Moses' plea for the sake of Israel at that critical time was thus based on a special fire — a fire of holiness, smoldering inside their very bones.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 144, 146.)

[http://ravkooktorah.org/KI\\_TISA\\_65.htm](http://ravkooktorah.org/KI_TISA_65.htm)

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## **The Closeness of God (Ki Tissa 5776)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

The more I study the Torah, the more conscious I become of the immense mystery of Exodus 33. This is the chapter set in the middle of the Golden Calf narrative, between chapter 32 describing the sin and its consequences, and chapter 34, God's revelation to Moses of the "Thirteen attributes of Mercy", the second set of tablets and the renewal of the covenant. It is, I believe, this mystery that frames the shape of Jewish spirituality.

What makes chapter 33 perplexing is, first, that it is not clear what it is about. What was Moses doing? In the previous chapter he had already prayed twice for the people to be forgiven. In chapter 34 he prays for forgiveness again. What then was he trying to achieve in chapter 33?

Second, Moses' requests are strange. He says, "Show me now Your ways" and "Show me now Your glory" (33:13, 33:18). These seem more requests for metaphysical understanding or mystical experience than for forgiveness. They have to do with Moses as an individual, not with the people on whose behalf he was praying. This was a moment of national crisis. God was angry. The people were traumatised. The whole nation was in disarray. This was not the time for Moses to ask for a seminar in theology.

Third, more than once the narrative seems to be going backward in time. In verse 4, for example, it says "No man put on his ornaments", then in the next verse God says, "Now, then, remove your ornaments." In verse 14, God says, "My presence will go with you." In verse 15, Moses says, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not make us leave this place." In both cases, time seems to be reversed: the second sentence is responded to by the one before. The Torah is clearly drawing our attention to something, but what?

Add to this the mystery of the calf itself – was it or was it not an idol? The text states that the people said, "This, Israel, is your God who brought you out of Egypt" (32:4). But it also says that they sought the calf because they did not know what had happened to Moses. Were they seeking a replacement for him or God? What was their sin?

Surrounding it all is the larger mystery of the precise sequence of events involved in the long passages about the Mishkan, before and after the Golden Calf. What was the relationship between the Sanctuary and the Calf?

At the heart of the mystery is the odd and troubling detail of verses 7-11. This tells us that Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp. What has this to do with the subject at hand, namely the relationship between God and the people after the Golden Calf? In any case, it was surely the worst possible thing for Moses to do at that time under those circumstances. God had just announced that "I will not go in your midst" (33:3). At this, the people were deeply distressed. They "went into mourning" (33:4). For Moses, then, to leave the camp must have been doubly demoralising. At times of collective distress, a leader has to be close to the people, not distant.

There are many ways of reading this cryptic text, but it seems to me the most powerful and simple interpretation is this. Moses was making his most audacious prayer, so audacious that the Torah does not state it directly and explicitly. We have to reconstruct it from anomalies and clues within the text itself.

The previous chapter implied that the people panicked because of the absence of Moses, their leader. God himself implied as much when he said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have

become corrupt” (32:7). The suggestion is that Moses’ absence or distance was the cause of the sin. He should have stayed closer to the people. Moses took the point. He did go down. He did punish the guilty. He did pray for God to forgive the people. That was the theme of chapter 32. But in chapter 33, having restored order to the people, Moses now began on an entirely new line of approach. He was, in effect, saying to God: what the people need is not for me to be close to them. I am just a human, here today, gone tomorrow. But You are eternal. You are their God. They need You to be close to them.

It was as if Moses was saying, “Until now, they have experienced You as a terrifying, elemental force, delivering plague after plague to the Egyptians, bringing the world’s greatest empire to its knees, dividing the sea, overturning the very order of nature itself. At Mount Sinai, merely hearing Your voice, they were so overwhelmed that they said, if we continue to hear the voice, ‘we will die’ (Ex. 20:16).” The people needed, said Moses, to experience not the greatness of God but the closeness of God, not God heard in thunder and lightning at the top of the mountain but as a perpetual Presence in the valley below.

That is why Moses removed his tent and pitched it outside the camp, as if to say to God: it is not my presence the people need in their midst, but Yours. That is why Moses sought to understand the very nature of God Himself. Is it possible for God to be close to where people are? Can transcendence become immanence? Can the God who is vaster than the universe live within the universe in a predictable, comprehensible way, not just in the form of miraculous intervention?

To this, God replied in a highly structured way. First, He said, you cannot understand My ways. “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy” (33:19). There is an element of divine justice that must always elude human comprehension. We cannot fully enter into the mind of another human being, how much less so the mind of the Creator Himself.

Second, “You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live” (33:20). Humans can at best “See My back.” Even when God intervenes in history, we can see this only in retrospect, looking back. Steven Hawking was wrong.[1] Even if we decode every scientific mystery, we still will not know the mind of God.

However, third, you can see My “glory”. That is what Moses asked for once he realised that he could never know God’s “ways” or see His “face”. That is what God caused to pass by as Moses stood “in a cleft of the rock” (v. 22). We do not know at this stage, exactly what is meant by God’s glory, but we discover this at the very end of the book of Exodus. Chapters 35-40 describe how the Israelites built the Mishkan. When it is finished and assembled we read this:

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. (Ex. 40:34-35)*

We now understand the entire drama set in motion by the making of the Golden Calf. Moses pleaded with God to come closer to the people, so that they would encounter Him not only at unrepeatable moments in the form of miracles but regularly, on a daily basis, and not only as a force that threatens to obliterate all it touches but as a Presence that can be sensed in the heart of the camp.

That is why God commanded Moses to instruct the people to build the Mishkan. It is what He meant when He said: “Let them make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell (ve-shakhanti) among them” (Ex. 25:8). It is from this verb that we get the word Mishkan, “Tabernacle” and the post-biblical word Shekhinah, meaning the Divine presence. A shakhen is a neighbour, one who lives next door. Applied to God it means “the Presence that is close.” If this is so – it is, for example, the way Judah Halevi understood the text[2] – then the entire institution of the Mishkan was a Divine response to the sin of the Golden Calf, and an acceptance by God of Moses’ plea that He come close to the people. We cannot see God’s face; we cannot understand God’s ways; but we can encounter God’s glory whenever we build a home, on earth, for His presence.

That is the ongoing miracle of Jewish spirituality. No one before the birth of Judaism ever envisaged God in such abstract and awe-inspiring ways: God is more distant than the furthest star and more eternal than time itself. Yet no religion has ever felt God to be closer. In Tanakh the prophets argue with God. In the book of Psalms King David speaks to Him in terms of utmost intimacy. In the Talmud God listens to the debates between the sages and accepts their rulings even when they go against a heavenly voice. God’s relationship with Israel, said the prophets, is like that between a parent and a child, or between a husband and a wife. In The Song of Songs it is like that between two infatuated lovers. The Zohar,

key text of Jewish mysticism, uses the most daring language of passion, as does Yedid nefesh, the poem attributed to the sixteenth century Tzefat kabbalist R. Elazar Azikri.

That is one of the striking differences between the synagogues and the cathedrals of the Middle Ages. In a cathedral you sense the vastness of God and the smallness of humankind. But in the Altneushul in Prague or the synagogues of the Ari and R. Joseph Karo in Tzefat, you sense the closeness of God and the potential greatness of humankind. Many nations worship God, but Jews are the only people to count themselves His close relatives ("My child, my firstborn, Israel" Ex. 4:22).

Between the lines of Exodus 33, if we listen attentively enough, we sense the emergence of one of the most distinctive and paradoxical features of Jewish spirituality. No religion has ever held God higher, but none has ever felt Him closer. That is what Moses sought and achieved in Exodus 33 in his most daring conversation with God.

Shabbat Shalom.

#### FOOTNOTES:

[1] He famously said, at the end of A Brief History of Time, that if we were to reach a full scientific understanding of the cosmos, we would "know the mind of God."

[2] Judah Halevi, The Kuzari, 1:97.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/the-closeness-of-god-ki-tissa-5776/>

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### **The Mysterious Life and Death of Hur** By Levi Avtzon \* © Chabad 2021

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 . . .”<sup>5</sup>*

*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 at the Linksfield Senderwood Hebrew Congregation, Johannesburg, South Africa.. © Chabad 2021.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/default\\_cdo/jewish/Torah-Portion.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/default_cdo/jewish/Torah-Portion.htm)

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## **Parshat Parah: Background**

By OU Staff, © 2014

*"This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come." (BaMidbar 19:2)*

This is an example of Law of the Torah which is considered completely above human comprehension. The paradox is that those who are involved in the preparation of the ashes of the cow become ritually impure, while the sprinkling of water with those ashes is used to remove contamination! It is an example of a Law which must be accepted on faith alone.

On the Shabbat after Purim, two Torah Scrolls are removed from the Ark. The Sidrah of the week is read from the first, and from the second, the chapter of Parah Adumah, the Red Cow (or Red Heifer), is read. It gives the procedure through which people can purify themselves from the contamination caused by a human corpse.

The reading of this chapter was instituted for this time of the year because Jews were required to purify themselves before coming to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festival of Passover.

The Haftarah read on the Sabbath of Parashat Parah contains the verse, "And I shall sprinkle pure water upon you, that you be cleansed. From all your contamination and from all your filth I will cleanse you" (Ezekiel 36:25). There are other parallels in the Haftarah between the concepts of sin represented by contamination, and atonement represented by purity.

This idea is discussed in the commentary to the ArtScroll Ezekiel (pp.534-5), as follows: Freedom of will in moral matters is the first and irreplaceable condition for living one's life on the higher plane demanded by the Torah. Belief in man's freedom of action, however, is endangered by the fact that man cannot avoid death and that he is subject to the superficial limitations imposed by the forces of nature.

This belief is particularly shaken by the sight of a dead human being. If the whole human being has succumbed to death, been overpowered by physical forces – If man, like all other organic beings, cannot escape the spell of an overpowering force – then there is no room for the moral "you shall" next to the physical "you must." Moral freedom of will would then be an illusion, and the Divine law of morality with its demand for total free-willed devotion to the illuminating, purifying fire of its sanctuary would be incomprehensible. (R'Hirsch, Numbers 19:22)

Thus, sin is related not only to death, but also to contamination, which is closely associated with death. Because the sinner is shackled by his desires, he loses spiritual control of actions. He is swept along by the physical lusts that have overpowered his spiritual self. Thus, the most meaningful part of life, the spiritual, has been killed. For this reason, when G-d forgives man's sin and grants him a new heart and a new spirit, He is imbuing him with purity, the state of mind in which man is the sole master of his actions.

A living (and therefore a pure) person uses his body as he wills; it is his tool to use as he sees fit. The regenerate sinner, upon returning to the state of purity, joins once more the state of the living – and the free. (Chazon HaMikra)

As with the other of the Four Parshiyot, a boy who is not yet of Bar-Mitzvah age should not be called to the Torah for Maftir on Shabbat Parshat Parah, nor should he read the Parshah for others. For since he is free of the obligation of Mitzvot, he cannot enable others to fulfill their obligation through him.

<https://www.ou.org/holidays/parshat-parah/>

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## **Ki Tisa: Engraved Upon the Tablets:**

An Insight from the Rebbe \*

**The tablets were G-d's handiwork and the script was G-d's script, engraved by G-d Himself on the tablets. (Exodus 32:16)**

The Written Torah is written on parchment, with ink. It thus comprises two separate components: the message (the words written in ink) and the medium (the parchment upon which it is written). In the case of the Oral Torah, too, there are two separate components: the words (the message) and the person who is studying them (the medium for their articulation). Although we may become emotionally and intellectually involved in our studies, they nevertheless remain a peripheral addition to our essence.

The Ten Commandments, however, were engraved on the tablets themselves. Rather than two separate entities, there was just the stone itself, and the commandments were engraved onto it.

When something is written, it can be erased or scraped off; when it is studied orally, it can be forgotten. In the case of engraving, however, there is no way of separating the writing from the stone. It can be covered up, filled in, or additional parts of the stone can be chipped away so that the writing becomes illegible, but it cannot be erased or removed. The medium has become one with the message.

This is how we must approach the Torah. When we study the Torah, we should be so lost in it that all that exists for us is the Torah itself; the medium, the message, and the recipient of the message all merge to become one.

With this approach to the Torah, we can never completely lose touch with it. The sands of time may cover the engraving, or the temptations of the world may make it hard to decipher; yet, throughout it all, that connection is there, and cannot possibly be revoked. This is the message that G-d imparted by carving the commandments in stone: "The Torah, you, and I are all one, and this unity can never be severed."

— From the Kehot Chumash

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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# Likutei Divrei Torah

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Moses Annuls a Vow

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

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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.  
[1] Pesikta Rabbati (Ish Shalom), 9.

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

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"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."

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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.

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

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#### **From a High Roof**

It is hard to sustain a spiritual high. Those of us who are committed to religious observance know that long periods of successful adherence to our standards are sometimes rudely interrupted by sudden, seemingly inexplicable lapses. Long-enduring spiritual experiences yield to momentary temptations and vanish in a flash.

Experts in the psychology of religion, some of them within our own Jewish tradition, understood this. They have warned us that the experience of closeness to God waxes and wanes, comes and goes. It is a process of advance and retreat, of approach and withdrawal.

The Sages of Talmud refer to this phenomenon with a telling metaphor: "From a high roof to a deep pit, *me'igra rama le'bira amikta*."

Parents often witness this strange process in their children and are perplexed by it. A child commits himself to good behavior, cleans his room and does his other chores for months on end without complaint. Then, out of the blue, he fails to come home by curfew one evening, and a panic-stricken call to the police ensues.

As a former psychotherapist, I can attest to the experience of all my fellow practitioners, especially those who deal with adolescents, of long periods during which the patient or client maintains a long streak of weeks of healthy adjustment, which are followed by moments of profound crisis.

I remember well a teenager I saw early in my training, when I was thankfully still under the supervision of a senior professional. The young man, from an affluent family, was arrested after many incidents of shoplifting. I worked with him and his family, and he seemed to have developed insight into his actions and great self-control. Months passed by, and then, one rainy night, I was summoned to the police station because he had shoplifted again. "From a high roof to a deep pit."

In this week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa, we have a dramatic example of this puzzling phenomenon. For the past many weeks, we have read of a people making political and spiritual progress. They are freed from slavery. They witness wonders and miracles. They experience the revelation of the Almighty and the giving of the Law. They donate generously to the construction of the Tabernacle. They enjoy the manna, the "bread of heaven."

And then, one fine day, their leader Moses returns a little late from his rendezvous with the Lord Himself, and the bubble bursts. Gone is the exhilaration of freedom, and gone are their cries of commitment to a new way of life. Yesterday: "We will do and we will heed." (Exodus 24:7) Today: "Let us make for ourselves a Golden Calf." (Exodus 32:1)

In all of my years of Torah study, of carefully reading the weekly parsha, it is this sudden backsliding that confounds me more than any other narrative. And of course, I am by no means the first to be amazed by this rapid deterioration of commitment, by this utter transformation of a people from a faithful, grateful, self-disciplined folk into a wild crowd, dancing and singing in orgiastic enthusiasm around an idol.

Every year, I attempt anew to resolve this puzzle to find an answer for myself and for those who looked to me to help them understand the Bible. This year, I find myself contemplating a new answer based upon a very unusual source.

Some years ago, the Wall Street Journal carried an essay by one Amy Chua. The essay was entitled Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior.

The author describes her own experience as a Chinese mother and the strict expectations she has of her adolescent daughters.

This column evoked strong reactions all over the world. Many believed that her approach was the correct one and represented a much-needed corrective antidote for the permissiveness of American parents. Others found her approach to be nothing short of cruel and even sadistic.

While I personally found some of her prescriptions worthy of consideration, I believe that most of them are excessive. But in her article, she makes an astute remark that I find to be memorable and useful, despite, or perhaps because of, its simplicity.

"Chinese parents understand that nothing is fun until you are good at it. And you can only be good at it if you work at it."

We all would like our activities to be fun and our lives to be enjoyable. But the roads to fun and the paths to joy are effortful ones. Hard work and persistence are necessary in all fields of endeavor, and religion and spirituality are no different. They too require diligence and toil.

No wonder, then, that we are capable of many months of perfect religious behavior, of adherence to the highest moral standards, and of spiritual edification. But it's hard work, as promises of "easy fun" often surround us and seduce us.

There is an insight here that can help parents, teachers, and psychotherapist deal with the unpredictable shifts in the behaviors of those they work with.

There is also a profound lesson here for those who look for an explanation of the Golden Calf episode in this week's Torah portion. The way of life that the Jewish people were just beginning to learn is a wonderful and rewarding one. But the wonder and the rewards, the fun, come only when we are "good at it", when we work hard to perfect our lives.

We all are well advised to be on guard against the promise of "easy fun". The Golden Calf took no work at all. The verse in Exodus 32:34 suggests that the Jews had to only cast their gold into the fire and the Golden Calf effortlessly emerged. The Golden Calf imposed neither moral restrictions nor ethical standards. Just dancing and singing. Fun?

Amy Chua teaches us that that's not fun. Having real fun in life requires that "you be good at it", good at life. And that takes work.

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#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **Closer After the "Fight" Than Before**

The parsha begins with the pasuk "Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: When you will take a

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census of the Children of Israel according to their counts, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, and there will be no plague among them when counting them. This is what they shall give—everyone, who passes among the counted—half of the shekel, by the holy shekel, the shekel is twenty geirah, half of the shekel as a portion to Hashem." [Shemos 30:11-13]. The Torah here specifies the mitzvah of the "Half Shekel" and instructs what is to be done with the collected funds: "You shall take the silver of the atonements from the Children of Israel and give it for the work of the Tent of Meeting; and it shall be a remembrance before Hashem for the Children of Israel, to atone for your souls." [Shemos 30:16]

Rashi [pasuk 15] explains that there were actually three instances of "Half Shekel" collections. We are not going into the details of that explanation here. For our purposes, we are going to focus on what Rashi says in his commentary to pasuk 16: "You have learned from this that Moshe was commanded to count them at the time of the beginning of the contribution toward the Mishkan after the incident of the Egel Hazahav (Golden Calf) because a plague entered among them.... This can be compared to a flock of sheep that was precious to its owner, which had been stricken by pestilence. Once the pestilence had ended, the owner said to the shepherd, 'Please count my sheep and ascertain how many of them are left,' to make it known that the flock is precious to him."

As many Rishonim say, the Torah here is written out of sequence. Parshios Teruma and Tetzaveh, which detail the building of the Mishkan, are followed by Parshas Ki Tisa, which contains the sin of the Egel Hazahav. Chronologically, according to many early commentaries, it did not happen that way. In actuality, the sin of the Golden Calf (in the middle of the month of Tamuz following the Exodus) happened first. Following the sin of the Golden Calf and their being forgiven for it, the Almighty gave them the command to build the Mishkan (the following Tishrei).

Rashi, following this opinion, writes that they were commanded to be counted at the beginning of their contribution toward building the Mishkan. As it were, the Almighty "wished to know" following the plague caused by the sin of the Golden Calf, how many Jews remained, because of His love for the Jewish people.

This analogy is somewhat skewed. In the case of the person who owned the flock, the sheep were afflicted by an external plague. The owner of the flock did not cause it. He had no control over the pestilence. It is a misfortune that sometimes befalls herdsmen, people who own cattle. Now, nebach, he has lost so many sheep, and he wants to see how many of his beloved sheep remain.

In our case, however, the Master of the Universe Himself brought the pestilence. He brought the plague, and now He wants to see how many Jews are left? Can this be a demonstration of how dear they are to Him? If they were so dear, why did He bring the plague in the first place? Maybe you will argue that they needed the plague, but the analogy is not parallel.

In order to answer this question, let me present a beautiful Torah thought that I heard from the Tolner Rebbe, shlit"a. After the whole incident of the Egel, when the Almighty told Moshe, "Depart from Me that I might destroy them" [Devorim 9:14] we know that Moshe Rabbeinu pleads the with Almighty, "I implore! This people has sinned a great sin and they made for themselves a god of gold. And now, if You would but bear their sin! – but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written." [Shemos 32:31-32] Moshe Rabbeinu put his own life on the line, as it were.

Moshe was successful in his mission, and the Almighty forgave Klal Yisrael, despite the fact that "He sent a plague against the people for having made a calf that was made by Aharon." [Shemos 32:35] Then, further on in the parsha, Moshe comes to the Almighty and says "And now, if I have indeed found favor in Your eyes, make Your ways known to me, so that I may know You, so that 'I shall find favor in Your eyes.' And see that this nation is Your people." [Shemos 33:13] Moshe asked—as it were—to get a glimpse of the Master of the Universe. The Almighty responds: "I shall cause all My goodness to pass before you, and I shall call out with the Name of Hashem before you; and I shall show favor when I shall show favor, and I shall have mercy when I shall have mercy... (however) You shall not be able to see My face, for no human can see My face and live." [Shemos 33:19-20]

Although Moshe's primary request could not be granted, the Almighty offered him a modified proposal: "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]

The Sefas Emes asks a question: Up until this point, Moshe Rabbeinu has had an ongoing relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. Moshe never asked Hashem, "Show me, please, Your Glory?" Moshe never requested this intimate encounter with the Ribono shel Olam. Here, after the sin of the Golden Calf, and after the fact that Hashem very angry with Klal Yisrael and was tempted to destroy them, after Moshe pulls out all stops to beg Hashem not to destroy His people—now of all times Moshe advances his request "Please show me Your Glory"? It seems peculiar. Is this the time to ask for such intimacy? Why now?

The Sefas Emes cites an interesting incident with the Chidushei haRim and the Kotzker Rebbe, which relates to this matter. As we have said before, the Kotzker Rebbe was one of the great personalities of the Chassidic movement. He was a man of few but very sharp words. He had very few disciples and at the end of his life he had almost no disciples. One of his outstanding disciples was the Chidushei haRim (the first of the Gerer Rebbes and the grandfather of the Sefas Emes). The Chidushei haRim went to his rebbe, the Kotzker, and asked him, "How do I explain the following phenomenon? I feel more spiritually elevated and holy on the second day of Yom Tov than I do on the first day!"

Personally, I would never ever ask that question. I do not feel more spiritually elevated on the second day of Yom Tov than on the first day of Yom Tov. Of course, as it goes without saying, I am not the Chidushei haRim!

The Kotzker Rebbe explained to his student the following: When a husband and wife have a fight and their Shalom Bayis (marital harmony) has not been so good, many times when they make up they feel closer to each other than they did beforehand. There was that tension, there was that rift, there was that break. But if they are successful in working things out and seeing their differences and putting aside their differences, then the husband and wife become closer than before the fight.

This is not to say that the way to enhance your marriage is to get into fights with your wife and then make up. But the reality is—the Kotzker Rebbe says—that husband-wife relationships often greatly improve after a dispute which comes out into the open has been resolved, over what they were before the dispute broke out. The Kotzker Rebbe explained that that is why on Yom Tov Sheini someone might feel spiritually closer to the Almighty. What is Yom Tov Sheini about? It is about "Because of our sins we were exiled from our Land." The Ribono shel Olam was angry with us and He threw us out of Eretz Yisrael. He took away the Beis HaMikdash. As it were, He had a "fight" with us! However, we got back together. Yom Tov Sheini is that getting back together. "Despite the fact that I kicked you out and you are in Galus, there is a second day of Yom Tov." This second day of Yom Tov celebration represents "the couple after the spat." The couple, when making up after the spat, feels a fresher intimacy, a more intense intimacy, then was present before the argument.

The Tolner Rebbe correlates this thought to an amazing Rambam in his Mishna Commentary [Parah Chapter 3, Mishneh 3]. The Rambam suggests something there which, on the surface, is counter intuitive.

Consider the following question: Who is more "Tahor" (ritually pure) – a person who

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never became "Tameh" (ritually impure) or a person who became "Tameh" but then went through a purification process? I would assume most people would say that a person who never in his life was "Tameh" is certainly more "Tahor" than a person who had experienced "Tumah" and then became "Tahor" once again.

The Rambam explicitly writes that, on the contrary, the person who had been impure and then went through a purification process is more "Tahor" than someone who never experienced "Tumah". The proof is that the Torah testifies about such a person saying (after he goes through the purification process) "And he will be Tahor" (something never explicitly stated about a person who had never become "Tameh").

The Tolner Rebbe equates these two concepts. With this he says (and one needs somewhat of a Chassidishe bent to appreciate this) an interesting idea: The Rambam's Mishna Torah consists of fourteen volumes, one of which is called, Sefer Taharah (the Book of Purity). One of the subdivisions of the Book of Purity is Hilchos Tum'as Meis (the Laws of Death Impurity); another is Hilchos She'ar Avos HaTumos (the Laws of the Balance of Major Categories of impurity); another is Hilchos Tum'as Tzaraas (the Laws of "Leprosy" Impurity). Virtually every subdivision of this volume is called "The Laws of X Category of Impurity."

The question must be asked – why call it "Sefer Tahara" (the Book of Purity)? Call it "Sefer Tum'ah" (the Book of Impurity). Now, we know that such a volume would not be a best seller; therefore, the Rambam's publisher did not let him write "Sefer Tum'ah." But, the Tolner Rebbe says, with the above explicated idea we can understand the name of this volume. It is "Sefer Tahara" because a person who was impure and then became pure is (according to the Rambam's own words in his commentary to Mishna Parah) at a higher level of spiritual purity than one who has never been impure.

The Sefas Emes, based on the Torah of his grandfather (the Chidushei haRim), and the Torah of his grandfather's Rebbe (the Kotzker Rebbe), explains why Moshe Rabbeinu specifically found it to be an opportune time to request "Please show me Your Glory" after the sin of the Golden Calf, when the Almighty is so angry with Klal Yisrael. The Almighty had been ready to wipe them out, but then He forgave them. Moshe sensed that now, after the "machlokes" (argument), the "Shalom Bayis" moment had arrived. I want this moment of intense intimacy with You, and I want it specifically now because now that the tension is behind us, we can move on to even greater closeness than ever before.

This is the deeper interpretation, as well, of Rashi's parable. The Almighty brings a plague

on Klal Yisrael. Then he wants to count them now to show how dear they are to him. We asked the question – He brought the plague upon them! So now, He wants to count “the flock that is so dear to him?” The answer is “Yes. I brought the plague. You needed the ‘patch’ and it was administered. But now you can build a Mishkan and we can become even closer. Yes, I have punished you, but you are still very dear to Me—perhaps even more so after the punishment than before.”

## Dvar Torah

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

### 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.

## OTS Dvar Torah

### Tablets and Fragments

**Rabbi Shlomo Brown**

Did Moses break the tablets because he was shocked by the Golden Calf, or was it premeditated? “As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.” (Exodus 32:19) This is how the Torah recapitulates Moses’ greatness: Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom Hashem singled out, face to face. for the various signs and miracles that Hashem sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, and for all the mighty hand and awesome power that Moses displayed before the eyes of all of Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

Rashi offers the following commentary on these verses: Before the eyes of all of Israel — This refers to the fact that his heart inspired him to shatter the Tablets before their eyes, as it is said, “And I broke them before your eyes”, and the opinion of the Holy One, blessed be He, regarding this action agreed with his opinion, as it is stated that God said of the Tablets, “Which you have broken” – You have done well by having broken them. In other words, the “mighty hand” is the same hand that shattered the tablets. Moses broke the tablets of his own initiative, and the Holy One, Blessed Be He concurred with Moses’ choice and the breaking of the tablets in hindsight.

The breaking of the tablets, a dramatic event by all accounts, is described in this week’s Parasha and in Parashat Ekev. In this Parasha, it is unclear whether this was an act that followed forethought and planning, but the description in the Book of Deuteronomy (chapter 9, verses 16-17) leaves no room for doubt: I saw how you had sinned against Hashem your God: you had made yourselves a molten calf; you had been quick to stray from the path that Hashem had enjoined upon you. Thereupon I gripped the two tablets and flung them away with both my hands, smashing them before your eyes.

Moses saw the calf, whereupon he grabbed the tablets and hurled them, shattering them in full view of the entire nation of Israel. Thus, it turns out that Moses thought before he acted. He understood that by shattering the tablets as the people looked on, he had brought about the

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right tikkun, or rectification, of the Sin of the Golden Calf. How come?

In the first article of his book, Sefer Hakuzari, Rabbi Judah Halevi explains what had caused the Sin of the Golden Calf: In those days, all of the nations had worshipped graven images... Similarly, the masses wouldn’t accept any Torah if it wasn’t somehow associated, in their minds, with a tangible image that they could focus on. The people of Israel were promised that something would descend to them from their Heavenly Father, something they would see, something they could focus their gaze on. Indeed, Moses ascended the mountain, expecting to receive etched tablets that he would take back down to the people. They had only asked that they would always have something tangible, which could be worshipped, something they could hint to when referring to the wonders of their G-d from their book.

According to Rabbi Judah Halevi, one of the main factors behind this sin was the tablets themselves. The Children of Israel had anxiously awaited their arrival, because they needed a tangible object they could look to when worshipping Hashem. When they realized that Moses wasn’t coming back when he had said he would, they turned to Aaron and asked him to create something to substitute for the tablets. In other words, the Sin of the Golden Calf was not idol-worship per se, rather a transgression against the prohibition of creating idols. According to this explanation, one of the main causes of this sin was the importance that the Children of Israel attached to the tablets, and with that in mind, it’s obvious why Moses had broken them. This wasn’t an act driven by rage. It was well-calculated. Rather than being a punishment, it was an educational act of the highest degree, which aimed to convey a message – the content of the tablets is what’s important, not the tablets themselves.

It’s rather easy for us to find modern-day parallels involving great evil driven by good intentions, but “alas, for those that are gone and are no more to be found”, those with hands as mighty as Moses’, which can break the tablets, and by doing so, produce about a major rectification.

## Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

**Rabbi Michael Rosensweig**

### Cheit ha-Eigel: a Betrayal of Emunah and Bitachon

Parshat Ki Tisa records the cataclysmic transgression, the cheit ha-eigel, that altered Klal Yisrael’s trajectory, changed the character of the luchot, and, according to Chazal, continues to reverberate to this day. And yet, the precise status of this violation remains obscure and enigmatic. The immediately proximate experiences of Klal Yisrael - yeziat Mitzrayim, keriat Yam Suf, mattan Torah, and other miraculous manifestations that unequivocally established Divine omnipotence



and reinforced Hashem's sovereignty - seem to preclude a crude violation of idolatry. The begrudging involvement of Aharon ha-Kohen in eigel activity certainly further distance this calamitous offense from actual avodah zarah. Yet, the pesukim and Chazal unequivocally identify the eigel with this cardinal infraction. Aharon's own justification - explanation underscores this motif (Shemot 32:22-23), "vayomru li aseh lanu elohim asher yeilchu lefaneinu"! At the same time, the comments that precede this assertion - "vayomer Aharon al yichar af adoni. Atah yadata et ha-am ki be-ra hu", and that follow it - "ki zeh Moshe ha-ish asher helanu mei'erezt Mitzrayim lo yadanu meh hayah lo" - suggest a more complex posture.

The issue is crystalized in some of the commentaries of the passuk (Shemot 32:21) that formulates Moshe's query/critique of Aharon's participation, "vayomer Moshe el Aharon: meh asah lecha ha-am ha-zeh ki heivita alav chata'ah gedolah." Rashi interprets that Moshe projected that Aharon must have been tortured before he succumbed - "kamah yisurim savalta she-yisruha ad shelo tavi aleichem cheit zeh." Ramban, however, questions whether even extreme pressure would sufficient justify Aharon's compliance, as avodah zara is one of the cardinal transgressions that require martyrdom (Sanhedrin 74b). Maharal (Gur Aryeh op cit) explains Rashi's view by invoking Ramban's own famous perspective (32:5) that the eigel was not actually avodah zara, but an egregious effort to replace the missing -delayed Moshe Rabbeinu with a concrete symbol.

While this view accounts for the evidence and considerations cited previously that militate against the conclusion that the eigel was, in fact, avodah zara, also explaining why, according to Rashi, Aharon had no requirement of martyrdom, it leaves us puzzled with respect to the enormity of the crime as well as with regard to the equally compelling indications associating the eigel with avodah zara. Moreover, Ramban, who advocates for the position that the eigel fell considerably short of actual avodah zara, invokes the requirement of martyrdom in this very context, despite his view!

Evidently, while technically not an act of avodah zara (according to Ramban, at least), the projection of a material symbol to substitute for Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership constituted a massive betrayal of Hashem's Divinity, sovereignty, and his special mission for Klal Yisrael. While theologically short of avodah zara (see, also Ohr Hachayim, Yitro - aseret ha-dibrot), it did nevertheless entail an act of rebellion that is a crucial component of avodah zara itself. There is a great deal of evidence that suggests that the rebellious-betrayal motif in avodah zara, alongside the extreme severity of the infraction (maaseh aveirah) itself, constitutes an essential aspect of its singular status as an aveirah. [See, for

example, the language of the gemara Chullin 5a pertaining to the notion of mumar le-kol ha-Torah kulah, and Mechilta on Bamidbar 15:22 regarding the special korban offered for avodah zara violation. See Ramban's incisive analysis of the Torah's presentation of that korban and of the fact that the Torah does not explicate avodah zara in that context!! I hope to elaborate this issue elsewhere.] According to Ramban, perhaps this betrayal component alone mandates martyrdom, even in the absence of theological avodah zara!

While Klal Yisrael's impulse was inherently offensive and indefensible, it was particularly egregious precisely in the context of what had recently transpired. Having experienced Divine Providence (hashgachah) so frequently and so profoundly, their panic engendered by a perception of the delay of Moshe's return was shocking, indeed. The fact that "va'ya'aminu ba-Hashem u-be-Moshe avdo" could so quickly and easily be converted into "aseh lanu elohim asher yeilchu lefaneinu ki zeh Moshe ha-ish asher helanu mei'eretz Mitzrayim lo yadanu meh hayah lo", even as it acknowledged that Moshe was only "ha-ish", was particularly disturbing.

The contrast to events in Megillat Esther that we just read is particularly striking. Even in dire times, standing against the might of an empire, faced with a decree of genocide, and certainly with very little basis for confidence and optimism, Mordechai and Esther exhibited unshakeable faith and trust in Divine providence. Mordecai's refusal to compromise even the perception of avodah zara (see Tosafot Sanhedrin 61b etc.) and his steadfast, principled posture of "lo yichreh ve-lo yishtachaveh" were unequivocal. They form the background of his absolute conviction regarding hashgachat Hashem and the continuity of Klal Yisrael, notwithstanding the prevailing reality: "revach ve-Chazalah yaamod la-yehudim mi-makom acher...u-mi yodea im la-eit kazot higaat le-malchut". After some initial prodding, Esther responds with equal resolve and faith: "leich kenos ha-Yehudim". Each and both of them assiduously insure that the optimism and faith of the Purim experience - "shekol kovecha lo yeivoshu ve-lo yikalmu la-nezach kol ha-chosim bach" (see, also Rambam's brief petichah after the minyan ha-katzar) - will remain a permanent legacy of Klal Yisrael. [See, particularly the use of the term "lekayeim" that is repeatedly emphasized in the end of the Megillah- 9:21,27,29,31-33]. In this sense, too, Purim was a second kabalat ha-Torah, a time of kiymu ve-kiblu that highlighted and reinforced (kiymu mah she-kiblu kevar) the special bond with Avinu she-bashamayim that drives and defines our destiny.

As the world struggles with an unprecedented health crisis, it is important that we, as a community and as individuals, respond with vigilance and responsibility. It is critical that we promote and implement the protocols that

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health experts mandate to safeguard lives and protect vulnerable populations. It is axiomatic that ve-nishmartem et nafshoteichem demands full compliance and cooperation. But as a Torah community, it is equally vital to stress the need to maximize our avodat Hashem during this eit tzarah within healthy guidelines, and to maintain a spirit of optimism and faith in hashgachat Hashem. The promotion and intensification of bitachon and emunah (together with hishtadlut) that was egregiously abandoned and betrayed in the episode of the eigel, but that magnificently characterized the commitments and policies of Mordecai and Esther, remains Klal Yisrael's greatest legacy.

### Rabbi Yakov Haber

#### "Thank G-d for the Little Things"

Dedicated in honor of my esteemed, very caring mother, Mrs. Bella Haber shetichye. May Hashem grant her many more happy years of life in good health with much nachas from her children and grandchildren.

The title of this article is an oft-repeated phrase I have heard from my mother. This expression for her is not merely a trite slogan but represents a way of life. I wish both to elucidate and to elaborate upon this life mantra of hers in her honor and to connect its theme to the upcoming festival of Purim.

Hakaras hatov - recognizing and being thankful for good received - in general and specifically to HaKadosh Baruch Hu forms a central pillar of avodas Hashem. R. Bachya ibn Paquda devotes much time in his Chovos HaLevavos to explaining its centrality. Mankind is inundated with Hashem's constant kindness and inherently feels a sense of gratitude. As a result, we are driven to somehow repay this debt. In general, when one feels a sense of gratitude, one can choose to react to it in one of two ways: either by repaying the debt by benefiting his benefactor or by denying the gifts which he had received. [1] The same is true with respect to HaKadosh Baruch Hu's acts of kindness. We can either serve Hashem as a result or somehow try to deny they are from Him or lessen their significance. (See Chovos HaLevavos, Sha'ar HaBechina.)

R. Bachya gives a mashal which I present here in a modernized form. Two parents were driving with their two children and unfortunately got into a horrific accident. The two parents were instantly killed, and their surviving children, one 16-year old and one two-year old, were put in foster care, eventually both being adopted by a caring family. Both of them, who were lovingly treated as the new family's own children - receiving affection, food, clothing, a warm home environment and schooling - grew up and started families of their own. One would expect the younger child, adopted at such an early age who received much more from his new family than his brother did, to be more grateful. But the opposite was true. The 16

year-old naturally felt and expressed a greater sense of gratitude. The reason, in R. Bachya's words,[2] is:

> ...because he went from a situation of destitution and suffering to one of goodness and tranquility while his mental faculties were mature. Therefore, he fully recognized the goodness and the kindness of his benefactor. But the infant did not realize the great extent of the goodness even after his perception and understanding had matured because he was used to them since his childhood.

Our relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu with respect to the acts of lovingkindness He performs for us is akin to that of the younger child with his adoptive parents. We have been receiving Hashem's kindness from the moment of our creation as a soul at the beginning of time through our formation in utero, followed by birth and throughout our lives in this world and the next. But our sense of gratitude to our loving Creator needs to be developed and is not at all intuitive because of the same reason mentioned above.

R. Yitzchak Maltzan (author of Shevisas HaShabbos) in his insightful commentary to the siddur, Siach Yitzchak, explains the purpose of the morning blessings based on this teaching of R. Bachya. Naturally, we take life, sight, the ability to move our muscles, walk and so many other regular life activities for granted. The morning blessings, highlighting that it is Hashem yisbarach who provides us with these functions constantly, are meant to cause us to pause and reflect that it is only because we have been receiving these gifts before our intellect developed sufficiently that we are not sufficiently grateful for them. Starting the day with such a transformative attitude has the potential to inject the day's avodas Hashem with a natural desire to in some small way to recognize our Benefactor; learning Torah and the performance of mitzvos then become an instinctive expression of our will to somehow acknowledge these gifts such that they do not comprise mere obligations imposed upon us.[3]

The recent festival of Purim is of course, first and foremost, a celebration of miracles and Divine providence. Many have noted the hidden nature of the miracles, the joyous festival and the megilla reading beckoning us to be מגילה (reveal) that which is contained in the מגילה beneath the surface. It is not a mere history of a "lucky break" for the entire Jewish people but a guide to seeing Hashem's hidden hand in everything: in all of the specific acts of Divine providence in our lives and in the day-to-day "natural miracles" or "regular" bodily functions and human interactions. Festivals of thanksgiving are also times to recall Hashem's other acts of kindness to us both nationally and individually. (Maoz Tzur sung on Chanuka serves as an example of this principle.) I recently read that Rav Aryeh Levine zt"l would

place a picture of his wife who had predeceased him on the table at the Purim seudah. When his guests inquired as to the reason for this unusual act, he responded that he wishes to express hakaras hatov to Hashem on this day of thanksgiving for the kindness he received from Him of having had such a special wife for so many years.

It has been a year since the world has been plagued by COVID-19. Deaths keep mounting worldwide, and the Jewish community has suffered greatly. Life with which we had become accustomed for so many years has undergone massive transformations. Nonetheless, many Rabbinic figures have noted, and I humbly wish to repeat this thought, that there is still much to be thankful for without in any way diminishing the tragedy of even one life negatively, or even tragically, affected. Compared to plagues in the past, most who have become infected recovered mostly or fully.[4] This is not something to be taken lightly. I wish to relay a personal anecdote in fulfillment of "בקהל עם ארומנו". Most of our family recently took ill with the virus and were recovering and in quarantine for two weeks. With all home from school for a prolonged lockdown which had started in Israel even before we got sick, and with our autistic son home as well, life was not so smooth. Baruch Hashem we all recovered, but immediately after my wife ended her quarantine our son had a seizure necessitating his being rushed to the hospital, escorted by my wife, having to stay all night there for tests. Since they both had already had the disease, she felt significantly calmer without the fear of getting infected at the hospital. [Indeed, there was a patient in close proximity to them who turned out to have the disease!] Baruch Hashem, he returned home in good health. We all very much felt that the timing of our contracting the virus was kindly machinated by the One above to facilitate that sense of greater calm in an otherwise worrying situation. All of us should exert efforts to discern Hashem's kind, providential Hand even in this time of upheaval --החלונות מן ההרכים משיגה מן החלונות--.

Many have also noted that the very disruption of regular life routines gives us opportunity to appreciate them much more. Who would have thought that the ability to walk around the block or join with one's non-immediate family members at a meal would not always be possible? Elsewhere,[5] we quoted Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldwicht's zt"l insight into the fact that even something as unique as the mann which constantly connected the Jewish people to Hashem did not fall on Shabbos in order that b'nei Yisrael not become accustomed to it and cease viewing it as from the Nosein lechem l'chol basar. When normal human endeavors are temporarily suspended, after they resume we have a greater opportunity to appreciate their Source. Similarly, in our era, the gift of Eretz Yisrael, being able to travel there or even live there, was taken as a given. Shutdowns of airports and cancellation of

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flights (Ben-Gurion airport is still largely closed as of this writing) again give us pause not to take this gift for granted either. The difficulty breathing and sometimes life-threatening need for oxygen that this virus often causes should prod us to inculcate the teaching of the well-known midrash (Bereishis Rabba 14:9) interpreting the verseהנשמה שאתם נושמים -- על כל נשימה ונשימה שאדם נושם צריך תהלה ק-ה - a person must praise Hashem for every life-giving breath that he takes.

One final thought. In the נשמת prayer, we recite אילו פינו מלא שירה כים ... אין אנחנו מספיקים להודות לך ד' אלוהינו... על אחת מאלף אלפי אלפים ורבי רבבות פעמים הטובות שעשית עם אבותינו ועמנו. If we do a quick calculation, we are saying to Hashem that even if we had infinite ability, we would not be able to thank Him sufficiently for even one of the 100,000,000,000,000,000,000 (100 quintillion) acts of kindness he has done for us and our ancestors. At first glance, this number seems highly inflated, but if one studies even a modicum of modern science one will instantly realize that so much functionality transpires in the human body every single second on the macro- and micro-level, from unraveling DNA, production of proteins, transmission of neural impulses through nerves, digestive enzymes chomping away at substrates, cleansing of the cells and blood by the kidneys, fusion of oxygen to red blood cells, complex mental processes and so much more. And all this when the body is healthy! When the body is fighting disease - and all doctors know that medical science is there to assist the body to heal itself - so much more occurs. All of these acts generated constantly by our Creator - המחדש בטובו בכל יום תמיד מעשה - easily add up to the astronomical number listed above in a matter of days or perhaps even hours or minutes. When we add to the smooth functioning of the body, G-d's Hand in our lives and Jewish history, we are humbled greatly before these magnificent, enormous acts of kindness for which we must have and express a profound sense of gratitude.

May we merit utilizing the time of the "great light" of Purim, a time of transformation מאכל ליום טוב, מגוון לשמחה ומאפלה לאור גדול, to return to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, to pray to Him for a removal of all tragedy, illness and distress and merit seeing the ultimate redemption when, as the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 9:7) beautifully states: R. Pinchas and R. Levi and R. Yochanan in the name of R. Menachem... in the future, all of the offerings will be abolished, but the korban todah will not; all prayers will be nullified, but [prayers of] thanksgiving will not. הודו לך כי טוב כי לעולם תחסדו!

[1] This seems to be at the psychological root of the oftentimes used counter-argument when confronted with a statement from a benefactor (parent, spouse, etc.) like "How can you act that way after all I've done for you?!" - "But what about X, Y or Z which you didn't do for me!" This is a misguided attempt to deny or lessen the indebtedness so one doesn't have to live with the guilt of being ungrateful.

[2] Chovos HaLevavos (Sha'ar HaBechina, introduction), translation by Rabbi Moses Hyamson, available at <https://dafyomireview.com/article.php?docid=414>.

[3] The important principle of "kabbalas ol" and performing Hashem's will even if we do not desire to do so is not our topic here but must be equally stressed.

[4] I repeat again that which I have written before that those who would dismiss this event as "a mere flu" are not examining hard facts in hospital wards. Furthermore, recovery from even an "ordinary flu" with the "armed forces" HaKadosh Baruch Hu has provided for us in the form of antibodies and leukocytes is also something for which to have eternal, profound gratitude to the Almighty.

[5] See Mann and Parnassa.

## THE DEPTHS OF WINTER Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

With Pesach already close at hand, nearly visible on the horizon, we are all hoping that the depths of winter are behind us. We could all use a little bright sunshine, warmer weather and the feeling of hope that springtime always brings.

We really cannot complain about this past winter, for it was a winter of abundant rain, the thrill of a short snowstorm and only a limited number of days of extreme cold. Nevertheless, winter is winter, and the short days and long nights can be depressing, especially since this winter brought with it two severe lockdowns occasioned by the continuing ravages of the Coronavirus pandemic.

It was also the winter of inoculations and vaccinations against the spread of that pandemic. The apparent success of this inoculation program and the positive effect that it has had in lowering the incidence of the disease have proven most heartening.

It is hard for me to imagine why anyone should oppose or even delay being vaccinated, when the evidence is so overwhelming that this vaccine is a boon to the health of the individual being vaccinated and to the society in which we all continue to function.

What this pandemic has created is a society of fear, and this extends even to the failure of being protected from the pandemic itself. Once people find themselves in a state of fear, they fear everything - even those methods that can relieve that fear.

The winter has also brought upon us the political collapse of the coalition government that was supposed to rule here in Israel for the next few years. Instead, we are about to embark on the fourth election in little more than two years. In honor of this new election there are several new political parties that arrived with great fanfare but with little if any new content or ideas.

The main common denominator of all these new parties is that they are opposed to the current prime minister at almost all costs. They are very thin on ideas and programs as to how they would govern in the future. The election seems to be whittled down to those who support the Prime Minister at any cost and those who oppose him, also at any cost. Whether this is sufficient cause for an election to be held and for all the pain and divisiveness that elections inevitably bring, is underlying to the election process itself.

Some of the new parties have already perished in the desert of public and media opinion. In this, they resemble the great gourd plant that covered the head of the prophet Jonah. It was created overnight but soon withered and disappeared almost as quickly. New parties rarely do well in Israeli politics, and their rate of mortality is remarkably high.

Most of the time the reason for this is that they are little more than ego trips for ambitious politicians, but the Israeli public is sophisticated and wise enough now to see through the supposed novelty of a new party or personality claiming to be the ultimate savior of our society and government.

In any event, winter has a deadening effect on electioneering and political campaigns. This is especially true regarding the Corona lockdowns which have occurred. Even the heartiest of partisans are not that anxious to stand out in the cold and rain for hours on end listening to speeches by politicians.

In general, Israeli society is weary – weary of lockdowns, isolation, economic contraction, false promises, ineffective government policies and the other assorted failings of our society. People wish to get on with their lives and somehow to be able to put the pieces back together after more than a year of living in a shattered society.

The feeling on the street regarding the elections is not one of excitement or anticipation, but rather one of apathy and almost boredom. The politicians are excited, but the voters are not. Since we no longer have a benchmark of normalcy, it is hard to determine when, if ever, things will really get back to 'normal.' It is certain that the new 'normal' will include more and more people working from their homes instead of in offices, zoom classes and lectures, and, perhaps, the wearing of masks for a long period of time into the future. But...we are definitely coming out of the depths of winter and that itself is a good thing.

Shabbat shalom  
Berel Wein

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## Weekly Parsha KI TISA 5781 Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

I approach this week's Torah reading while still under the influence of the great holiday of Purim. As such, I have long noticed that according to the Talmud, the name of the hero of the Purim story, Mordechai, is alluded to in the portion of this week's Torah reading, which describes the spices that constitute the incense offering in the tabernacle and temple. The names of Haman and Esther, that the rabbis also connected to verses that appear in the Torah, are more easily found in the explicit texts that the Talmud makes reference to.

However, the name of Mordechai, that is hidden within the ingredients for the incense service, is more difficult to discern, and seems to be somewhat of an esoteric stretch. It seems there must be a deeper connection and message involved, as well as the link between Mordechai and the incense service of the tabernacle and temple.

All of the interpretations that appear in the Talmud contain far deeper meaning than the literal words. That is why the Talmudic commentaries are so abundant and seemingly endless, both in number and in the analysis and interpretations. So, when the rabbis of the Talmud associated Mordechai with this particular incense service, they wished to convey a deeper and more subtle message than merely a clever play on words.

The ideas and words of the Talmudic sages speak to every generation of Jews, in every circumstance and for all societies. The task of the scholars of Israel is to be able to ferret out the specific ideas that are intended for them and for their times.

The incense service was viewed by the Torah as having enormous positive, curative and ennobling powers. It could prevent plagues and pandemics, could purify the atmosphere, cleanse the temple of odors and flying insects and also serve as the protective cloud that preserved the priests who offered it on behalf of the people of Israel. However, at the same time, it also had the power of being lethal, destructive, with the ability to cause immense personal and national tragedy.

The sons of Aaron died because of this incense, while their brother Elazar was able to use it to allay the ravages of a plague. I feel that this depicts the specific connection between Mordechai and the incense service. In the hands of the righteous and altruistic holy servants of God, the incense serves as a blessing and has enormous curative powers. In the hands of those who wish only to profit for themselves and have base

motives, even if only at the moment that they are performing the sacred service, the incense can be a lethal and destructive force.

The greatness of Mordechai was his humility and self effacement. It is his total devotion to the salvation of the Jewish people and his willingness to risk all in order to save the people, that elevates him to the highest rank of Jewish leadership and heroism. He becomes a living incense, with all of the blessings that this service entails and brought to the Jewish people. All of us should strive to be disciples of Mordechai and to sanctify ourselves with our spiritual incense service.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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## **How Leaders Fail (Ki Tissa 5781) Covenant & Conversation**

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

As we have seen in both Vayetse and Vaera, leadership is marked by failure. It is the recovery that is the true measure of a leader. Leaders can fail for two kinds of reason. The first is external. The time may not be right. The conditions may be unfavourable. There may be no one on the other side to talk to. Machiavelli called this Fortuna: the power of bad luck that can defeat even the greatest individual. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we fail. Such is life.

The second kind of failure is internal. A leader can simply lack the courage to lead. Sometimes leaders have to oppose the crowd. They have to say no when everyone else is crying yes. That can be terrifying. Crowds have a will and momentum of their own. To say no could place your career, or even your life, at risk. That is when courage is needed, and not showing it can constitute a moral failure of the worst kind.

The classic example is King Saul, who failed to carry out Samuel's instructions in his battle against the Amalekites. Saul was told to spare no one and nothing. This is what happened:

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."

But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

"Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night."

"Tell me," Saul replied.

Samuel said, "Although you may be small in your own eyes, are you not head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you King over Israel. And He sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?"

"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their King. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder,

the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal." (I Sam. 15:13-21)

Saul makes excuses. The failure was not his; it was the fault of his soldiers. Besides which, he and they had the best intentions. The sheep and cattle were spared to offer as sacrifices. Saul did not kill King Agag but brought him back as a prisoner. Samuel is unmoved. He says, "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as King." (I Sam. 15:23). Only then does Saul admit, "I have sinned." (I Sam 15:24) But by this point it is too late. He has proven himself unworthy to begin the lineage of kings of Israel.

There is an apocryphal quote attributed to several politicians: "Of course I follow the party. After all, I am their leader." [1] There are leaders who follow instead of leading. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter compared them to a dog taking a walk with its owner. The dog runs on ahead, but keeps turning around to see whether it is going in the right direction. The dog may think it is leading but actually it is following.

That, on a plain reading of the text, was the fate of Aaron in this week's parsha. Moses had been up the mountain for forty days. The people were afraid. Had he died? Where was he? Without Moses they felt bereft. He was their point of contact with God. He performed the miracles, divided the Sea, gave them water to drink and food to eat. This is how the Torah describes what happened next:

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, "Come, make us a god who will go before us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they gave him and he fashioned it with a tool and made it into a molten Calf. Then they said, "This is your god, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." (Ex. 32:1-4)

God becomes angry. Moses pleads with Him to spare the people. He then descends the mountain, sees what has happened, smashes the Tablets of the Law he has brought down with him, burnes the idol, grinds it to powder, mixes it with water and makes the Israelites drink it. Then he turns to Aaron his brother and asks, "What have you done?"

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how these people are prone to evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god who will go before us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!" (Ex. 32:22-24)

Aaron blames the people. It was they who made the illegitimate request. He denies responsibility for making the Calf. It just happened. "I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!" This is the same kind of denial of responsibility we recall from the story of Adam and Eve. The man says, "It was the woman." The woman says, "It was the serpent." It happened. It wasn't me. I was the victim not the perpetrator. In anyone such evasion is a moral failure; in a leader such as Saul the King of Israel and Aaron the High Priest, all the more so.

The odd fact is that Aaron was not immediately punished. According to the Torah he was condemned for another sin altogether when, years later, he and Moses spoke angrily against the people complaining about lack of water: "Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against My command at the waters of Meribah" (Num. 20:24).

It was only later still, in the last month of Moses' life, that Moses told the people a fact that he had kept from them until that point: "I feared the anger and wrath of the Lord, for He was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the Lord listened to me. And the Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too." (Deut. 9:19-20) God, according to Moses, was so angry with Aaron for the sin of the Golden Calf that He was about to kill him, and would have done so had it not been for Moses' prayer.

It is easy to be critical of people who fail the leadership test when it involves opposing the crowd, defying the consensus, blocking the path the majority are intent on taking. The truth is that it is hard to oppose the mob. They can ignore you, remove you, even assassinate you. When a crowd gets out of control there is no elegant solution. Even Moses was helpless in the face of the people's demands during the later episode of the spies (Num. 14:5).

Nor was it easy for Moses to restore order. He did so with the most dramatic of acts: smashing the Tablets and grinding the Calf to dust. He then asked for support and was given it by his fellow Levites. They took reprisals against the crowd, killing three thousand people that day. History judges Moses a hero but he might well have been seen by his contemporaries as a brutal autocrat. We, thanks to the Torah, know what passed between God and Moses at the time. The Israelites at the foot of the mountain knew nothing of how close they had come to being utterly destroyed.

Tradition dealt kindly with Aaron. He is portrayed as a man of peace. Perhaps that is why he was made High Priest. There is more than one kind of leadership, and priesthood involves following rules, not taking stands and swaying crowds. The fact that Aaron was not a leader in the same mould as Moses does not mean that he was a failure. It means that he was made for a different kind of role. There are times when you need someone with the courage to stand against the crowd, others when you need a peacemaker. Moses and Aaron were different types. Aaron failed when he was called on to be a Moses, but he became a great leader in his own right in a different capacity. And as two different leaders working together, Aaron and Moses complemented one another. No one person can do everything.

The truth is that when a crowd runs out of control, there is no easy answer. That is why the whole of Judaism is an extended seminar in individual and collective responsibility. Jews do not, or should not, form crowds. When they do, it may take a Moses to restore order. But it may take an Aaron, at other times, to maintain the peace.

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### **Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11 – 34:35)** **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – "Lord, Lord a God of Compassion..." (Exodus 34:6)

It is difficult to imagine the profound disappointment and even anger Moses must have felt upon witnessing the Israelites dancing and reveling around the Golden Calf. After all of his teachings and exhortations about how God demands fealty and morality –and after all of the miracles God had wrought for them in Egypt, at the Reed Sea, in the desert and at Sinai, how could the Israelites have so quickly cast away God and His prophet in favor of the momentary, frenzied pleasures of the Golden Calf?

"And it happened that when he drew near to the encampment and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses burned with anger and he cast the tablets from his hands, smashing them under the mountain" (Ex 32:19).

Whether he broke the tablets in a fit of anger, disgusted with his nation and deeming them unworthy to be the bearers of the sacred teachings of

the Decalogue (Rashi), or whether the sight of the debauchery caused Moses to feel faint, to be overcome with a debilitating weakness which caused the tablets to feel heavy in his hands and fall of themselves, leading him to cast them away from his legs so that he not become crippled by their weight as they smattered on the ground (Rashbam, ad loc), Moses himself appears to be as broken in spirit as were the tablets in stone. After all, ultimately a leader must feel and take responsibility for his nation's transgression! All of these emotions must have been swirling around Moses' mind and heart while the tablets were crashing on the ground.

But what follows in the Biblical text, after capital punishment for the 3,000 ring leaders of the idolatry, is a lengthy philosophical – theological dialogue between Moses and God. This culminates in the revelation of the thirteen Divine attributes and the "normative" definition of God at least in terms of our partial human understanding. What does this mean in terms of Moses' relationship with his nation Israel after their great transgression, and what does this mean for us today, in our own lives?

This was not the first time that Moses was disappointed by the Israelites. Early on in his career, when he was a Prince in Egypt, Moses saw an Egyptian task-master beating a Hebrew slave. "He looked here and there, and he saw there was not a man" – no Egyptian was willing to cry out against the "anti-Semitic" injustice and no Hebrew was ready to launch a rebellion – "and he slew the Egyptian task-master and buried him in the sand" (Exodus 2:11). Moses was no fool; he would not have sacrificed his exalted position in Egypt for a rash act against a single Egyptian scoundrel. He hoped that with this assassination he would spark a Hebrew revolution against their despotic captors.

Moses goes out the next day, expecting to see the beginnings of rebellious foment amongst the Hebrews. He finds two Hebrew men fighting – perhaps specifically about whether or not to follow Moses' lead. But when he chastises the assailant for raising a hand against his brother, he is unceremoniously criticized:

"Who made you a master and judge over us? Are you about to kill me just as you killed the Egyptian?" (Ex 2:14).

Moses realized that he had risked his life for nought, that the Hebrews were too embroiled in their own petty arguments to launch a rebellion. Upset with his Hebrew relatives, Moses decides to give up on social action and devote himself to God and to religious meditation rather than political rebellion (see Lichtenstein, Moshe, Tzir V'tzon). To this end, he apparently chose to escape to Midian; a desert community whose Sheikh, Yitro, was a seeker after the Divine. (see Ex 2:21, Rashi ad loc and Ex 18:11)

Moses spends sixty years in this Midianite, ashram-like environment of solitary contemplation with the Divine, culminating in his vision of the burning bush when Moses sees an "angel of the Lord in flame of fire in the midst of a prickly thorn-bush, – "and behold, the thorn-bush is burning with fire, but the thorn-bush is not consumed" (Exodus 3: 1-3). The prickly and lowly thorn-bush seems to be symbolizing the Hebrew people, containing within itself the fire of the Divine but not being consumed by it. And God sends Moses back to this developing, albeit prickly Hebrew nation, urging him to lead the Israelite slaves out of their Egyptian servitude.

God is teaching His greatest prophet that his religious goal must not only be Divine meditation, but also human communication; and specifically taking the Israelites out of Egypt and bringing them to the Promised Land, no matter how hard it may be to work with them.

Now let us fast forward to the sin of the Golden Calf and its aftermath. Moses pleads with God to forgive the nation. God responds that He dare

not dwell in the midst of Israel, lest He destroy them at their next transgression. Moses then asks to be shown God's glory, to understand God's ways in this world. God explains that a living human cannot see His face, since that would require a complete understanding of the Divine. But His back – a partial glimpse – could and would be revealed. Moses then stands on the cleft of a rock on Mount Sinai, the very place of God's previous revelation of the Ten Commandments, and he receives a second revelation, a second "service to God on this mountain:"

"... Moses arose early in the morning and ascended to Mt. Sinai...taking the two stone tablets in his hand. The Lord descended in a cloud and stood with him there, and he called out with the Name Adonai (YHWH). And Adonai (YHWH) passed before him and he proclaimed: Adonai, Adonai, El (God), Compassionate and forgiving, Slow to Anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth..." (Ex 34: 4-7).

In this second revelation, God is telling Moses two things: first of all, that He is a God of unconditional love, a God who loves the individual before he/she sins and a God who loves the individual even after he/she sins (Rashi ad loc), a God who freely forgives. Hence God will never reject His covenantal nation, will always forgive with alacrity and work with Israel on the road to redemption. Secondly, if God is fundamentally a God of love and forgiveness, we must be people of love and forgiveness. From Moses the greatest of prophets to the lowliest hewers of wood and drawers of water, just as He (God) loves freely and is always ready to forgive, so in all of our human relationships we must strive to love generously and always be ready to forgive. This second Revelation is the mirror image of the first, yes, we must firmly ascribe to the morality of the Ten Commandments, but we must at the same time be constantly aware that the God of the cosmos loves each and every one of His children, and is always ready to forgive us, no matter what. Shabbat Shalom!

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## Ki Tisa 5781

**Rabbi Nachman Kahana | Mar 2, 2021**

### Frustrating the Diabolical Plans of Enemies

There is much to be learned not only from the texts of the parshiot, but even from their order of appearance.

The last five parshiot of Shemot are: Teruma, Tetzaveh, Ki Tisa, Vayak'hel and Pekudai.

Teruma and Tetzaveh deal with the Mishkan and its implements, parashat Ki Tisa interrupts the sequence and tells of the sinful, disastrous episode of the Egel HaZahav (the Golden Calf). The two final parshiot, Vayak'hel and Pekudai, return to the subject of the Mishkan and its implements.

Mishkan, Mishkan, episode of idolatry, and again Mikdash, Mikdash (mishkan and mikdash are inter-changeable terms) – what does it mean?

I submit:

The Torah, through the sequence of these five parshiot, is informing the Jewish people of the future that awaits us.

The instructions in parashat Teruma allude to the 479 years of the Mishkan before the Bet Hamikdash was established in Yerushalayim: 39 years in the desert, 14 years at Gilgal, 369 years at Shiloh, and 57 years in Nov and Givon.

Tetzaveh alludes to the 410 years of the Bet Hamikdash of King Shlomo on the Temple Mount in Yerushalayim.

The disastrous, sinful act of idolatry in parashat Ki Tisa alludes to the destruction of King Shlomo's Bet Hamikdash for reasons of idolatry and the following 70 years of exile.

Parashat Vayak'hel alludes to the Bet Hamikdash built by Ezra and the Jews who returned with him from Babylon and Persia.

Parashat Pekudai alludes to the magnificent Bet HaMikdash built by Hordus (Herod).

The Temples of Ezra and Hordus stood for 420 years before being destroyed by the Romans. The closing of the Book of Shemot alludes to the destruction of the Temple of Hordus and the subsequent 2000-year exile of the Jewish people from our holy land.

The Book following Shemot is Vayikra, which deals in its entirety with the Bet Hamikdash and its service, alluding to the future renaissance of the Jewish people who will return home and build the third Bet Hamikdash.

The time we are living in is one of profound celebration for the beginning of our redemption and salvation. After 2000 years of unspeakable calamities which befell our nation, HaShem has recognized and honors the unflinching loyalty of His people and has returned us to our ancient holy land.

To remain true to the Torah even after the Shoah is worthy of the highest rewards by our Father in Heaven.

He has restored our sovereignty over a large part of Eretz Yisrael and over Yerushalayim.

He has protected us in times of war and has made us prosperous in times of peace. We are creating a Torah empire here the likes of which has not existed in the past 2000 years.

What is transpiring today in the lands of our enemies is a remarkable, miraculous sign of HaShem's protective wing over His children in Eretz Yisrael.

In the Song at the Sea (Shirat Hayam, Shemot 15:7) the survivors sang: "With Your infinite genius You destroyed those who rose up against You. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like straw"

At first glance, one would think that instead of:

"With Your infinite genius You destroyed those who rose up against You"

the wording should be:

With Your infinite strength You destroyed those who rose up against You

But indeed, "With Your infinite genius" is absolutely more accurate. Because it comes to describe how HaShem, in His infinite genius, time and again frustrates the diabolical plans of our enemies in ways which are totally unpredictable, and yet keeps the hidden presence of the Creator intact.

In keeping with this, just consider what is currently happening in our region so suddenly and unexpectedly.

The Arabs will be busy fighting each other for years to come. Sunnis vs. Shiites, and both against the Alawis. Arabs against Iranians. Libyans against each other. Christian Copts vs. Moslems in Egypt. Everyone against everyone in Lebanon and Syria. The Sunnis of Iraq against the Shiites of Iraq and all of them against the Kurds. The Turks against the Kurds, and the former Southern Moslem states of the USSR against Russia and against themselves. The flood of Arab refugees from North Africa into Europe. Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Somalia and more.

And in the midst of all this, in the eye of the hurricane, stands the tiny State of Israel – prosperous and happy in the knowledge that HaShem has spread over us His holy cloud of protection, as in the time of our forefathers' sojourn in the desert.

Indeed, the greatest of life's experiences is to be a Jew living today in Eretz Yisrael.

### The Christian Crusades (of the 21st Century?)

Why is the present American administration, in concert with major Christian countries of Western Europe, continuing the ways of the bad old Obama days? They are running amok to appease the deranged and despicable ayatollahs of Iran; the ones who shout "death to America" whenever a camera appears.

Yet these countries are like the proverbial dog in Mishlei 26,11:

As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.

They are returning to aid and abet Iran in its quest to produce nuclear bombs.

This brings to memory an incident that occurred here about ten years ago. I was walking to the Old City. At the Jaffa Gate there was a large



group of people, obviously very American, lining up to enter. I approached one man and inquired as to who they are and what they represented? He explained that they were American Christians who came to ask forgiveness for what the Christians did to the Jews at the time of the Crusaders. I thanked him and made my way to the front of the line. I inquired as to who was the leader of the group, and man came forward and identified himself as pastor something or other. I then asked him: "Why are you asking our forgiveness for what your co-religionists did to us over 800 years ago, when they did much worse just 70 years ago? His reply was to turn his back to me and walk away.

I suddenly realized that forgiveness was the last thing on their minds. They were part of a campaign to arouse the collective memory of Christians to the ideals of the crusades to bring the Holy Land under Christian control.

This ambition has never left the Christian agenda just because Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn (Saladin) defeated them in the Battle of Hattin in the lower Galilee in 1187. That the Jews have returned home is a major blow to Christian replacement theology, whereby Christianity replaces Judaism as the chosen people. For 2000 years, history was on their side while we roamed the globe begging for a handout from the various nations. They believed we would never return to Eretz Yisrael, much less be sovereign over the land. And to add insult to injury, to be sovereign over Yerushalayim, including their "holy" places. Every day that we are here is one more punch to the solar plexus of Christianity.

I cannot know if the American Christian leaders ever sat in a closed room to plan out the strategy for replacing Medinat Yisrael with the 51st state of the U.S. or the 2nd state of the Vatican, but subconscious thoughts project onto decisions of man and direct his actions.

President Biden is the second Roman Catholic to ascend the office (the first was Jack Kennedy); Mr. Biden is a serious church-going Roman Catholic.

It might become revealed one day that these Christian countries conspired to bring Iran very close to developing a nuclear weapon in order that the State of Israel would implore them to come and save the Jewish State. The US, France, Germany, England and NATO will send tens of thousands of Christian soldiers here and de facto achieve what the Crusaders could not do, that is for Christian control of the Holy Land.

Me Yoday'ah – Who Knows?!

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Shabbat Shalom,  
Nachman Kahana

### ***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights***

***For the week ending 6 March 2021 / 22 Adar 5781***

***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)***

#### ***Parshat Ki Tisa***

#### ***No Spare Tie***

*"...and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, 'Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe who brought us up from Egypt — we do not know what became of him.'"* (32:1)

Let me give you, in my opinion, an essential "life-hack" — something that is going to save you a lot of time. It goes like this:

There are two kinds of lost objects: the kind that will eventually turn up, and the kind that is irretrievably lost. Whenever you lose something, don't try to find it. That's just a waste of time. Do the following. Think to yourself, "Do I absolutely need this thing right now? Is there a work-around? Do I absolutely need to wear my pink tie with the little green elephants on it? I know I was really looking forward to wearing it today, but maybe I could just get by, if I really need to, with the yellow one with pink poodles."

Much, if not most, of the time we can substitute what we want with what we need. Looking for non-essentials is a complete waste of life. Because they will either turn up, one-way-or-another, or they are gone forever. Life is about distinguishing the essence from the nonsense.

When Moshe failed to appear from Mount Sinai, the Children of Israel made a fatal mistake. They thought they could find a work-around. They thought they could replace their "lost object" — Moshe — with a golden calf.

Nothing could replace Moshe. "There never has risen again in Israel a prophet like Moshe..." (Devarim 34:10)

When it came to Moshe Rabbeinu — there was no "spare tie."

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***Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Kee Tisah 5781-2021***

***"Reverence for Learning in Jewish Tradition"***

***(updated and revised from Kee Tisah 5763-2003)***

***Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald***

In this week's parasha, parashat Kee Tisah, we read of the fateful sin of the Jewish people with the Golden Calf. The sin of the Golden Calf is considered so grievous, that it eventually contributes to the Al-mighty's decision to ban all male citizens of Israel who were alive at that time and were 20 years of age or above, from entering into the land of Israel.

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, after receiving the two tablets from G-d, and heard and saw the enthusiastic celebration of the people for the Golden Calf, he smashed the tablets. Dramatically stopping the idolatrous festivities, Moses calls on his brethren, the tribe of Levi, to exact vengeance upon the leaders of the rebellion, and 3,000 Israelites perish in the confrontation.

Notwithstanding his deep disappointment with the people, Moses begs G-d to forgive them. G-d accedes to his request, but reminds Moses that when the people will sin again in the future, He will take the sin of the Golden Calf into account, which He does after the sin of the scouts who come back with an evil report concerning Israel.

To distance himself from the sinful people, Moses moves his tent outside the camp and proceeds to hold court from that location. Scripture tells us in Exodus 33:8 that, despite the rebelliousness of the people, whenever Moses would go out to his tent, וְקָרְמוּ כָּל הָעָם וַיִּצְבּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ , the entire nation would stand at the entrance of their tents, and gaze upon Moses until he reached his tent. Standing for Moses was an obvious gesture of the people's respect for the leader and the mortal redeemer of Israel.

It is interesting to note that some of the traditional educational customs practiced by the "yeshiva world" today originate from this Torah portion. One of the virtually universal practices is that when a rabbi, leader or teacher enters a room, students are expected to stand and to remain standing until the exalted person has reached his designated place. Similarly, in some yeshiva elementary schools when a principal or a guest enters a classroom, students stand—as a gesture of respect. In many yeshivot, students speak to their teachers only in the third person, never referring to a teacher as "You." So for instance, it is not unlikely to hear a student say, "Yesterday the Rebbe taught us such and such in the Talmud," rather than say, "You taught us," which is considered disrespectful. Certainly, no one would dream of walking through a door before the rabbi, or of not holding the door for their teacher or, during communal prayer, of not waiting for their teacher to finish his/her prayers before beginning the repetition of the Amidah (central prayer).

The Mishna, in tractate Baba Metzi'ah 33a, teaches that if a person simultaneously happens upon the lost object of their parent and the lost object of their teacher, he is required to retrieve the lost object of his teacher even at the expense of the lost object of his parent. The sages explain that while a parent gives his child life in this world, the teacher gives his student life in this world, and (through the study of Torah) ensures his student's eternal life in the World to Come. Therefore, the teacher's lost object takes precedence over the parent's lost object. However, if the parent is the child's primary teacher of Torah, the child must show ultimate respect to the parent over a non-primary rabbi or teacher.

The determining factor that governs this relationship of ultimate reverence for a teacher is the primacy of Torah—which is regarded as the elixir of life! As our Maariv (evening) liturgy states (based on Deuteronomy 32:47)—“They [the words of the Torah] are our life and the length of our days, and upon them we must meditate day and night.”

It is, of course, this reverence for education which has permeated Jewish life throughout the ages. Historically, there was hardly a generation throughout the millennia, no matter how poor, how insecure or endangered, that was illiterate! In fact, the Talmud (Nedarim 81a) states boldly, “Take heed of the children of the poor, for from them Torah will emerge.”

Historically, the Jewish people, in the time of the first century sage Simeon ben Shatach, were the first to introduce formal compulsory education, and strict rules were set governing class size and the qualifications of teachers.

In the Code of Jewish Law there are abundant and exacting regulations concerning unfair business competition. Yet, when it comes to education, there are no competitive restrictions. The Code of Jewish Law (Yoreh Deah 245:22) posits that one may establish a competing school in the same neighborhood, in the same courtyard, even in the same building as an existing school, because according to Jewish tradition, (Baba Batra 21a) קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה, jealousy and competition between scholars are viewed as means to increase wisdom and scholarship.

One of the quaint Jewish customs that underscores the unmitigated reverence for learning is the practice of kissing a holy volume that falls accidentally to the floor, as if to atone for the negligence of allowing a holy tome to fall. Could anyone imagine, even in their wildest dreams, that a lifelong scholar and obsessive devotee of John Milton would kiss the cover of Paradise Lost that has fallen?! And, yet, the zeal and reverence that the Jewish people have for education does not allow for the slightest disrespect, implied or real, even to an inanimate object or volume.

It is this reverence for education that is at the core of Jewish educational success, and accounts for much of Jewish economic success. The scholar was always the most respected person in the Jewish community, far more than the wealthy business person. And, that is why the wealthy businessmen were always eager to marry their children to the rabbi's or the scholar's children.

In these challenging times, that are marked by the vast illiteracy of our people, the Jewish community and their leaders need to redouble their efforts to make Jewish education the sine qua non of Jewish life, and to make certain to devote their foremost efforts to assure the highest degree of Jewish literacy for all Jews.

Please note: 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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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

***Dvar Torah Ki Tisa and Zoom: There's nothing quite like the real thing***

Thank God for Zoom, but it's nothing quite like the real thing.

An appreciation of the power of experiencing the real thing is presented to us in Parshat Ki Tisa. The Torah tells us how Moshe had received the Ten Commandments from Hashem on Mount Sinai. After being on the summit of the mountain for forty days and forty nights, Hashem dramatically said to Moshe,

“Lech red.” – “Go down. The ppl of Israel are rebelling.”

“Asu lahem eigel maseicha,” – “They have made for themselves a molten calf. They are praying to it. They are sacrificing to it.”

Moshe came down from the mountain and saw the nation worshipping the golden calf. He was so upset and enraged that he smashed the

tablets. The Midrash asks a great question: Why didn't Moshe smash the tablets when he was on top of the mountain? After all, Hashem had already told him everything that was transpiring, and without sparing any of the details!

Seeing for yourself

The Midrash answers by saying,

“Eino domeh shmiah leriya.” – “Hearing about something is not the same as seeing it for yourself.”

And I find that the power of this teaching is all the greater because Moshe didn't hear about this by reading it in a book or hearing from a friend or family member – he heard from none other than Hashem Himself, and even that was not the same as being personally immersed within the experience.

During coronavirus we're hearing a lot. And thanks to our online communications we're certainly in touch with the world around us. We can see into spaces and rooms and we can see images of faces of friends and family in front of us – but it's not the real thing.

Appreciation

When one misses something, one comes to appreciate it all the more.

Take for example the halachah on Tisha b'Av that for 25 hours we don't greet people. I find that the absence of being able to say, “hello,” or, “good morning,” makes me appreciate that opportunity to greet people all the more.

How much more so therefore have we all, over the last year, started to appreciate the privilege – yes, privilege – of being able to socialise with others, to physically be in their presence during the last. Thank God, it won't be too long now until the real thing will be possible.

For the rest of our lives let us therefore never take for granted that opportunity to experience the real thing – to be in the presence of others, to enjoy their company and to have an opportunity to make a deep impact.

‘Eino domeh shmiah leriya’. Hearing about something is not the same as seeing it for oneself. And indeed, thank God for Zoom, but it's nothing quite like the real thing.

*Shabbat shalom.*

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

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***Drasha Parshas Ki Tisa - Higher than Sinai***

***Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky***

*Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya*

In the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe's mortality is transformed to immortality as — anthropomorphic as it may sound — he gets G-d to change his mind.

Hashem, who had threatened to destroy Klall Yisrael after the sin of the Golden Calf, finally assures Moshe that His presence will accompany them on their sojourn. But Moshe, it seems, is still not satisfied. In what appears as a daring move, he asks Hashem for more. Not only does he want assurance of the accompaniment of the Divine presence, Moshe now asks Hashem to “show me Your face” (Exodus 33:18). It is not enough that Hashem forgives the Jews for the most audacious sin of their young history. It is not enough that he assures them that he will guide them in the desert. Moshe wants more! He asks for a mortal existence despite an immortal act. He wants to connect to the corporeal with the Omnipotent in a way never done before. He wants to feast his soul on the most spiritual meal ingested through human vision. He wants to see G-d.

Hashem explains that it is impossible to see Him and live. The human soul cannot be confined to a spatiotemporal existence after it has experienced the endless world of infinite spirituality. And thus the answer is, “No. You may however, see my back” (cf. Exodus 33:20-23). Of course the world of G-d's face as opposed to his back fill tomes of commentators from those who analyze textual reference to the great kabbalists, and it certainly has no place in a fax of internet sheet. What

does interest me is Moshe's persistence. Why was he dissatisfied with G-d's first acquiescence? What propelled him, after almost losing Klall yisrael to ask for the greatest show of G-d's bond to His creation's?

Lou Maidenbaum, former President of Met Foods, help establish the Gedaliah Maidenbaum Preparatory School Division of Yeshiva of South Shore. Before passing away last month, he was confined to a hospital in Miami Beach.

But in his sick bed he never lost his spunk, charm or the will to live life to its fullest.

A week before he passed away, he was in his hospital room and was experiencing some discomfort. He pressed the button for a nurse, but no one came. Five minutes later he rang again. Still no response. He tried two more times and then decided a new tactic.

He picked up the telephone and dialed 3 digits. 9-1-1. "Emergency services, came the woman's voice, "what is the problem?" "I'm having difficulty breathing" gasped Lou. "Where are you calling from?" "Mount Sinai Hospital, Room 321," came the response. "Mount Sinai Hospital?" Repeated the incredulous dispatcher, "what are you calling us for? You are in the Hospital already!" Lady," he shouted to the operator. "This is my life we are talking about. And If this is the way I'll get the best response, then I'm calling 911!"

Moshe knew that he was — on Sinai — with G-d — receiving the Torah. However, that was not enough. He was not complacent about his accomplishment. He was not content with being the transmitter of eternity. He wanted more! He wanted to attain the highest possible level of mortal achievement. He wanted to see G-d. He wanted to spiritually feast on the face of the Omnipotent. Moshe was only concerned, to attain the greatest degree of spirituality that he possibly could reach. There was nothing else on his mind or in his soul. Hashem responded that if that level is attained, the soul will flee from its mortal constraints and refuse to re-enter a corporal being. "No man shall see Me and live" (Exodus 22:20). So Moshe had to concede with the highest level the physical body could endure. But in Moshe's quest to go higher than Sinai he taught us a great lesson. No matter what level you think you are on, if you are standing on earth, you must reach for the mountain and when you are standing on the mountain you must reach for the clouds. And even if you are standing on a cloud you must reach for the stars.

Good Shabbos

In honor of the marriage of Mordechai Merenstein to Leah Dukler. May they be zocheh to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael!

Warmest regards to the readers of Drasha who I met at the Gertzulin – Pachtman wedding. BZW please e-mail your address.

Thank you to the scores of reader who sent Mazel Tov on the Bar Mitzvah of our son, Pinchus Eliyahu.

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Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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***Ki Tisa: What was Aaron thinking!?***

***Ben-Tzion Spitz***

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day. - Abraham Lincoln

Aaron, Moses' brother, is presented with a nigh-impossible dilemma. Moses has ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Tablets of the Law from God, but he is apparently delayed in returning. The people are highly agitated by Moses' delay and start clamoring for a new god. According to the Midrash, Hur, Aaron's brother-in-law and co-leader during Moses' absence refuses to give in to the demands of the crowd. He is subsequently killed by the enraged mob. Aaron fears he may be the next victim of the unruly crowd.

Aaron then commands that the crowd gather all the gold in their families' possession and bring it to him. The crowd obliges. Aaron throws the gold into the fire and out comes the infamous Golden Calf,

which members of the crowd rapidly announce to be Israel's new god, just a number of weeks after they had heard the voice of God commanding them not to worship anybody or anything else.

Aaron, not missing a beat, builds an altar and declares that the next day will be a festival. God is furious with the development, threatens to destroy the entire nation and rebuild a new one from Moses and his descendants. Moses defends the nation of Israel, God relents and disaster is averted.

One of the fundamental questions is what was Aaron thinking? How could he facilitate the creation and worship of an idol? He must have known this was wrong.

The Bechor Shor on Exodus 30:2 explains that the people of Israel weren't asking for a new "god" but rather for a new leader to replace Moses. (The word Elohim in Hebrew can carry both meanings). Aaron wanted to stall the process in the hope that Moses' return would make the request mute. Aaron was hesitant to name some other distinguished personage as the new leader, for when Moses would return, the new leader may not want to relinquish his new appointment, which in turn would lead to fighting and bloodshed. Likewise, if Aaron did nothing, the people themselves would appoint a leader, leading to the same situation. If Aaron were to appoint himself, Moses might think he was illegitimately usurping power.

Whatever path he might have chosen would have ended in disaster. Therefore, Aaron came up with the idea of asking for the peoples' gold as a delaying tactic. He was hoping they wouldn't be so eager to part with their riches. When they did, he used it to construct an empty symbol, and even then he continued to delay things announcing that the celebration will be held the next day. His hope was that if he stalled, occupying the mob with empty and worthless pursuits instead of creating a leadership battle when Moses would return, the situation would then be defused more easily. He may have been right and that might have been the best path he could have taken from a variety of unsavory choices.

May we only be challenged with a variety of good choices.

*Dedication - To Pesach cleaning. Now it begins.*

*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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***Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz***

***Parashat Ki Tisa - 17 Adar 5781 March 1, 2021***

***Sin, Compassion, and Leadership***

The main story in this week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa, is one of the most embarrassing ones at the beginning of the Jewish nation's history: the sin of the golden calf. It happened when Moses went up to Mount Sinai and stayed for forty days in order to receive the Divine directives written in the Torah. The nation waited for him at the foot of the mountain, but days went by and Moses did not return. There were people – according to tradition, they were the "erev rav," non-Jews who attached themselves to the Jewish nation in the Exodus from Egypt, who had not let go of the idolatrous Egyptian culture and wanted to create a substitute: a god in the form of a calf.

These people turned to one of the respected people in the nation, Chur – the son of Miriam the prophetess, who refused to cooperate with them and paid for this with his life. Immediately afterwards, these same people turned to Aaron, Moses' brother, and demanded of him, "Come on! Make us gods!". Aaron, apprehensive of more bloodshed, preferred to cooperate with them. He tried to postpone the creation of the calf under different pretexts, but the pressure from the nation was ultimately decisive. With surprising generosity, they donated the gold jewelry they had brought from Egypt, and melted it to create the golden calf.

The calf was made, and Moses descended from Mount Sinai and was faced with the shocking sight of the nation dancing around the golden calf, ecstatically calling out, "These are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

It is not difficult to imagine the depths of Moses' disappointment, frustration, and torment. During that past year, Moses had courageously faced Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, and demanded that he free the Hebrew nation of slaves and allow them to leave Egypt. With the help of manifest miracles and the ten plagues that G-d brought down on Egypt, Moses succeeded in his mission and liberated the nation. He led them through the sea, arriving at Mount Sinai, where they experienced a public Divine revelation, the only one in history, in which they heard the Ten Commandments. And now, it seemed, the nation had gone back to its ways, to Egyptian idol worship, to dancing around a golden calf.

Moses began a series of actions. First, he broke the Tablets of the Covenant that he had brought down from Mount Sinai, understanding that a nation that worships a golden calf could conceivably also make the tablets into a sort of idol. After that, he burned the calf and punished those who had initiated the sin. Then Moses turned to G-d to plea that He not punish the nation for their sin. During the prayer, a fascinating dialogue took place between Moses and G-d; one whose significance has been analyzed by commentators and philosophers for generations. We will take a peek at the writings of the giant of Jewish thought, Maimonides, who dedicated a long chapter to this in his monumental book "A Guide to the Perplexed."

Moses asked two requests of G-d. The first: "...let me know Your ways, so that I may know You – so that I may find favor in Your eyes" (Exodus 33, 13); and the second: "Show me, now, Your glory!" (Ibid Ibid, 18). Maimonides explains that Moses wanted to know the ways in which G-d leads the world, and in addition, he wanted to grasp godliness itself. G-d refused the second request: A human being, even the greatest human like Moses, is incapable of grasping the essence of G-d. It is beyond human capability. But G-d answered the first request in the affirmative:

"I will let all My goodness pass before you..." (Ibid Ibid, 19)

What did G-d teach Moses about His ways of leading the world? He taught him about the virtues of compassion that represent Divine leadership. Here, Maimonides adds significant insight: Why did Moses ask to know the ways of G-d? Because Moses understood that a human leader must adopt these ways when dealing with the nation. The incredible disappointment brought upon Moses by the nation's creation of the calf led him to search for the Divine paths a leader should take.

These paths are the thirteen attributes of compassion. Just as G-d is capable of forgiving the sins of humans, so humans are called upon to forgive the sins of others. A worthy leader is one who is guided by compassion. Moses learned this after the sin of the golden calf. It is a lesson we should also learn and internalize.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

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#### **Rav Kook Torah**

#### **Ki Tissa: A Chair with Three Legs**

**Chanan Morrison**

After the Israelites worshipped a golden calf, God suggested to Moses that the people be replaced by Moses' own descendants:

"Do not stop Me as I unleash My wrath against them and destroy them. I will then make you into a great nation." (Ex. 32:10)

Moses, however, rejected this offer. The Talmud records the argument that Moses used in defense of the Jewish people:

"Master of the Universe! If a chair with three legs cannot endure Your anger, certainly a chair with only one leg will fare no better!" (Berakhot 32a)

What was this "chair with three legs"?

Moses was referring to the founding of the Jewish people through three spiritual giants: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What was the special heritage that the Avot (the forefathers) passed on to their descendants?

#### **Three Inherited Traits**

The Avot succeeded in bequeathing their unique traits to their descendants. Even if later generations should abandon the path of their righteous fathers, the imprint of that spiritual greatness remains, and their failings may be rectified.

The extent of the influence the Avot had on their descendants was a function of the intensity with which those holy traits permeated their own souls. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had internalized these characteristics so profoundly that they became an eternal heritage for all generations.

It is possible that the three special characteristics of Israel - kindness, modesty, and compassion<sup>1</sup> - are inherited from the Avot, trait one from the tzaddik who had made that particular quality the focus of his personality. Abraham was legendary for his acts of kindness. Isaac was distinguished by his modest and inward nature. And Jacob acquired a high level of compassion, as demonstrated by his great love for his children.

How did worshipping the golden calf change this?

The sin of the golden calf was diametrically opposed to these very traits. This sin involved not only idolatry, but also bloodshed (the murder of Chur) and licentious behavior ("they rose up to make merry").

Murder is clearly the opposite of compassion; licentiousness is the opposite of modesty. And idolatry is the opposite of compassion. The fact that we care about others is rooted in a sincere belief in God's Oneness, which leads us to recognize that all of creation should be united in helping one other for the common good. Idolatry, on the other hand, boosts the traits of division and self-gratification.

After the sin of the golden calf and the resultant loss of those holy traits inherited from the Avot, Divine justice decreed that the Jewish people deserved to be replaced.

#### **The Advantage of Three Legs**

But Moses, the faithful shepherd, defended his charges. How could he be sure that his own descendants would retain their spiritual heritage any better?

Despite the unique level of perfection of Moses' soul, the inheritance of the Avot had a clear advantage. Each forefather focused on and perfected a particular trait, which he then transmitted to his descendants. Moses enjoyed a harmonious balance of these characteristics. But by the very fact that they were blended into one personality, these qualities lacked the potency of a trait that is at the very core of a great personality. The spiritual traits of the forefathers were marvelously united in Moses, like a chair with one leg. The original heritage of the Avot, however, was far more robust, supporting future generations like three distinct legs.

*(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 143-144)*

*1 See Yevamot 79a.*

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#### **Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

#### **Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Sisa**

**פרשת כי תשא תשפ"א**

**זה יתנו כל העבר על הפקדים מחצית השקל השקל הקדש**

**Everyone passing by to be counted must give this half-shekel based on the shekel of the Holy. (30:13)**

Why were the people commanded to give only a half-shekel? It clearly was not due to financial difficulty. It is not as if another half-shekel would have placed anyone on the poverty list. It is almost as if the Torah wants to send a message with the "half" shekel amount. Indeed, the commentators, each in his own inimitable approach, underscore the value of a "half" and how it applies to each Jew – knowing that on his own he is fractioned, he is not whole. He needs his fellow in order for him to become whole. *Horav Yoshiahu Pinto, Shlita*, offers a powerful insight which should engender some non-ambiguous deliberation on our part. A Jew should believe, and this conviction should remain the principle upon which he is able to confront issues –

both adverse and propitious – that all we see, all with which we are confronted, is only “half,” part of reality. There is always another perspective, the rest of the story, a second look, two sides to every coin. In other words, what we see and what we experience constitute partial reality. It may appear dismal and bleak now, but be patient, it will change for the better. Likewise, one should not think that his good fortune is here to stay. He could be experiencing the “other side, second half” of the coin – or the beginning.

One who suffers a traumatic experience should not assume that this is “it.” Now, life is challenging, but be patient, it is only half. More will soon emerge, and it will make sense out of the present. It is very much like the parable rendered by the *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, about the prince who grew up amid extraordinary opulence, to the point that he believed that everything grew on trees. The bread that he ate, the cake that he enjoyed, grew on trees. His belief was shattered when, one day, he left the palace on an extended journey where he saw farmers “destroying” (plowing) the earth. If this was not sufficiently strange to him, he was stupefied when, a few days later, he saw the same farmer burying (planting) good, edible seeds in the ground. A few weeks later, when he saw tall, strong stalks of wheat growing in the field, he was quite impressed, until he saw the farmer cut (harvest) them down. He followed the process and became angered when he saw the farmer pound (grind) the kernels into white powder. When he saw the flour mixed with water produce delicious bread, however, he understood that he had always been looking at part of the story.

*Machatzis ha'shekel*, half a *shekel*. It is always a half. We are not privy (in one sitting) to the whole story. We all have issues; we all have complaints. Some articulate their problems more than others, while others have the sagacity to remain quiet, patiently awaiting a turn of events. We all play a minor role in the play of life. Hashem places us in specific places and gives us a part to play, a role to perform. We can only do what we are supposed to do, since we do not see beyond the time allotted to us in this life.

The following frightening story is true and demonstrates how little we know and how shortsighted we can be, because we see only one frame of life, not the whole/bigger picture. In a small Austrian town on the German/Austrian border, there lived a couple with a sick baby. It was the end of the nineteenth century and urgent care centers with their expertise were unknown. The baby was spiking a high fever. The father went out in search of a competent doctor who could save his baby's life. Finally, he convinced a doctor from a neighboring town to make a house call. It took hours of patience, expertise and drugs to bring down the child's fever before they were convinced that the child's crisis had passed. The doctor was considered a hero, accolades and gratitude being lavished on him. He left a proud, happy man, having saved a child's life. To any of us hearing the story, we would feel good all over and agree that the doctor was truly a hero. That is, until we learned the identity of the child: Adolph Hitler, *yemach shemo v'zichro*. As I said, we only see part of the picture, half the story.

ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחלת ויחר אף משה וישלך מידו את הלחת וישבר אתם.

**And as he (Moshe) approached the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing; Moshe's anger blazed, and he threw down the Tablets that were in his hands and smashed them. (32:19)**

The last three words of the Torah are: *l'einei Bnei Yisrael*, “before the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*.” This refers to Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s greatest act of leadership, indeed, his epitaph: He broke the *Luchos* before the eyes of the Jewish people. Hashem agreed with Moshe's decision. This is how the Torah ends. It begins with the Creation of the world and ends with (so to speak) the breaking of the *Luchos*. Clearly this begs elucidation. Does the Torah not present any other closing lesson, any other leadership decision that Moshe made that might deserve greater mention? Furthermore, how was Moshe able to break the *Luchos*? It is not as if the *Luchos* were made by man and, thus, susceptible to human intervention. What is made by man can be broken by man. The *Luchos* were created by Hashem. The Almighty did not just

go down to a quarry, pick up some stones and engrave them with the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. He fashioned them from the raw material (which some say was sapphire) to the unique, miraculous engraving (from both sides). A human being cannot destroy what Hashem makes unless...the letters flew off (as they did), leaving plain stone. How could this be broken?

*Horav Yehudah Leib Chasman*, *zl*, explains that sin has the power to weaken a *maaseh Elokim*, creation of G-d. This was Moshe's message to the people: I broke the *Luchos* before your eyes to teach you what sin can do. No human endeavor can impose itself on a Heavenly creation, but sin can weaken even the *Luchos* and cause the letters to fly off. The *Luchos* (had they been given to us) would have changed everything. We would never forget the Torah that we have learned. Death would no longer be a threat, since it would have been eradicated. Free from pain; free from death; we could learn and never forget. Spiritual utopia! We lost it all as the result of sin. This is what Moshe was teaching *Klal Yisrael* when he broke the *Luchos*.

*Horav Reuven Karlinstein*, *zl*, supplements this with a commentary from the *Daas Zekeinim M'Baalei Tosfos*. (I have searched for the source and have not succeeded in locating it.) What prompted Moshe to break the *Luchos*? *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 87b) explain that Moshe made the following *kal v'chomer* (the most basic hermeneutic principle; an argument *afortiori*; literally lenient and strict, deriving one law from another, using the logic that, if a case which is generally strict has a particular leniency, then a case which is generally lenient will certainly have that leniency). *Korban Pesach*, which is only one of the 613 *mitzvos*, may not be eaten by a *ben neichar*, one whose actions have estranged him from Judaism (or a gentile), so certainly, if one becomes a total apostate by embracing an idol, then he surely has no part of our religion. In other words, people who reject Hashem by trading Him for a Golden Calf have no business connecting to the *Luchos*. The question is obvious: Reject the people, but why shatter the *Luchos*? Punish the sinners, but place the *Luchos* in a safe place for another time, for another group of Jews. Why do something that completely puts an end to all hope for reconciliation? Hashem agreed and even thanked Moshe for his taking the law into his own hands, so it obviously was a good decision. Agreed, but why?

The *Baalei Tosfos* offer an answer so compelling, innovative and novel that *Rav Karlinstein* suggests that one should go to the *mikvah* and purify himself before he listens to it! Moshe heard Hashem tell him, “Go, descend (immediately), for your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt has become corrupt” (*Ibid*. 32:7). Moshe wasted no time. When Hashem says, “Go,” one runs. When Moshe arrived at the scene of infamy, he knew that he must immediately put a halt to the iniquitous revelry. He was carrying the heavy *Luchos* in his hands, and they were slowing him down. If he ran with the *Luchos*, it would take him longer to get into the midst of the nation to stop them. During those precious few moments one more Jew might fall prey to the sin. What should he do? He had no option. He flung down the *Luchos*, because to carry them might endanger the spiritual future of one more Jew! Moshe broke the *Luchos* to save a Jew! He had no time to lay them down “nicely” on the ground. During those two minutes, a single Jew might suffer spiritual demise.

As a result of this exposition, the *Baalei Tosfos pasken*, render, the following *halachic* decision: If one sees a fellow Jew about to commit an *aveirah*, transgress (for example about to be *mechallel Shabbos*, desecrate *Shabbos*, eat non-kosher), and it is within his ability to (hopefully) prevent him from committing this violation, but he is hampered because he is holding a *Sefer Torah* in his arms (thus obviating him from engaging the would-be sinner in a timely fashion), he may place the *Sefer Torah* on the ground (if there is no alternative place available) in order to save a Jew from spiritual censure. If Moshe could act in such a manner with the *Luchos*, he may follow suit with a Torah scroll, anything to spare a Jew from sin. The shattering of the *Luchos* teaches us a lesson concerning the pernicious effect of an *aveirah*, and to what extent we should go to save a Jew from sin.

ילך נא ד' בקרבנו כי עם קשה ערף הוא

**Let my Master go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people. (34:9)**

Hashem revealed to Moshe *Rabbeinu* His *Yud Gimmel middos*, Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which signify that Hashem will forgive us out of a sense of Divine compassion. Understandably, we are not always worthy of His absolution. Thus, these Attributes come into play to guarantee that Hashem will never turn His “back” on us. Following the last of the *middos*, Moshe asks of Hashem, *Yeilech na Hashem b'kirbeinu*, “Let my Master go among us.” Why does this request follow immediately after the Attributes of Mercy? In his inimitable manner, the *Maggid*, *zl, m'Dubno* explains with a parable.

A peddler who would travel from town to town selling his wares stopped in a large city with the hope that he would do well in the wealthy suburb of the city. His wares consisted of wooden spoons which were used by many in the smaller communities that he serviced. Alas, those communities were home to economically deprived families. Therefore, his prices and consequent profit margin were low. Here, he hoped to make a killing. From the exterior of the homes and fancy gardens, these were people of means. He would surely make a sizable profit. The problem was: In order to make money, one must have customers. After two days of screaming, “Wooden spoons!” and generating no response, he was becoming quite angry. These people had some “nerve” to ignore him.

A wise man noticed the peddler's anxiety and guessed the reason. He came over and said, “Let me give you a bit of advice. You are in the wrong neighborhood. These are wealthy people who would never eat with wooden spoons. For them, it is either silver or, even, gold. Wood? Unheard of in this neighborhood. If you want to sell wooden spoons, return to the poor neighborhoods. There you will find customers.”

Likewise, Moshe stood before Hashem and argued, “*Ribono shel olam*; what place do Your Thirteen Attributes of Mercy have in the Heavenly sphere? The angels certainly have no use for them, since they have no *yetzer hara*, evil inclination. They are pure and do not sin. Such “wares” have no place in Heaven. If I find favor in Your eyes, if You want to see Your Attributes of Mercy put to good use, where it is vital and will transform lives, come among us, for *Klal Yisrael* is a stiff-necked people who have sinned and will continue to make mistakes. They require the Thirteen Attributes in order to survive. It is only among us that You will find ‘customers’ for Your wares.”

As Moshe implored Hashem to “descend” and “go among us,” Hashem told Moshe that his place was not in Heaven. He had a job to do on earth. When the nation sinned with the Golden Calf, the Almighty said to Moshe, *Lech, reid ki shicheis amcha*; “Go down, for Your people have become corrupt” (Ibid.32:7). *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl* (quoted in *Lev Eliyahu*), explains that Hashem was intimating to Moshe, “Your people need you down there.” The *Talmud* (*Kiddushin* 40b) states that the world is judged in accordance with the majority of its merits. If the merits outweigh the demerits, it survives. If, Heaven forbid, the people have a greater number of deficiencies than merits, we are in serious trouble. Thus, the *zechuyos*, merits of the *tzaddikim*, righteous men, of each generation keep us alive. When a *tzaddik* is taken from his generation, it puts the generation into a different balance, because his merits are not present to serve as protection.

In the event that Hashem seeks to punish the generation, and, as a result of the *tzaddik's* merits they are in protective mode, Hashem is compelled to remove the *tzaddik*. The generation requires discipline and, as long as the *tzaddik* is among them, Hashem must refrain from punishment. Thus, Hashem removes the barrier, the protective agent, from among them. When the *tzaddik* is not in this world, his merits cannot protect, leaving the generation open to the “elements.”

Hashem looked at the Jewish people who were sinning with the Golden Calf. This was an egregious sin generated by the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, but, like a conflagration burning through a forest of dry trees, it was quickly swallowing up the people whose defenses against sin were still weak. Hashem told Moshe, “You had better get down there. They need you. Without your merits to protect the nation,

there might no longer be a nation. Your presence is demanded elsewhere.”

There is a time and place for everything. During the sin, Hashem told Moshe, “Your place is on earth.” After the sin, Moshe pleaded with Hashem, “We need Your Presence among us.”

ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך ... ילך נא ד' בקרבנו ... וסלחת לעוונינו ולחטאתנו ונחלתנו.

**And he (Moshe) said, “If I have found favor in Your eyes...let my Master go among us...and pardon our iniquity and our sins, and take us as Your own possession.” (34:9)**

On the first day of *Selichos* we plead with Hashem: *Pnei na el ha'telaos v'lo l'chataos*; “Turn to our sufferings and not to our sins.” We understand that we have failed to keep our commitment to Hashem. He has given us so much and asked only that we maintain our fidelity to Him, that we observe His commandments. We failed because of all that is going on in our lives: troubles, problems, adversity, economic issues, health issues, spousal issues, children issues. Our mind is overburdened with *telaos*, *tzaros*, troubles.

The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* was an outspoken proponent of *aliyah*, emigration, to *Eretz Yisrael*. He wanted to personally relocate to the Holy Land. It was not, however, part of Hashem's plan for him. The *Gaon's talmidim*, students, did make a strong, dedicated effort to immigrate there. It was a difficult and dangerous undertaking, given that the high seas were not easily traversable with the wooden sail/ships that was the mode of travel over two centuries ago. If one survived the ordeal and safely embarked in the Holy Land, he had experienced a miracle. Since survival in the Holy Land was also far from a bed of roses, these individuals were highly-dedicated, spiritually devoted to living a life of greater connectivity to Hashem in a place that bespoke spirituality, where every stone and mound of earth was sacred.

The leader of the group (*Perushim*, as they were called) was *Horav Yisrael Shklov, zl*, a primary student of the *Gaon*. He endured much adversity in his journey to and sojourn in *Eretz Yisrael*, but he was the leader who trail-blazed the *Talmidei HaGra's* settlement in *Eretz Yisrael*. (There were also others, such as *Horav Menachem Shklov, zl*, who settled and established communities.) *Rav Yisrael* led a group of 150 men, Torah devotees who sought an elevated level of spiritual ascendancy. Their boat was old and flimsy, having seen better days, its captain experienced, but wary of such an undertaking. The boat had no berths. Each man found his place on the floor, and this was his seat. A few days into the journey, the seafarers encountered a major storm, one which the captain nervously claimed the likes of which he had not seen in thirty years of traveling the high seas. He was very upfront with *Rav Yisrael*, “Prepare for the worst. If this storm does not subside, we will all drown at sea.” *Rav Yisrael* asked to address his group.

“*Morah v'rabbosai*, my dear friends, the captain has informed me that we are all in dire straits. We are all believing Jews who have dedicated our lives to serving Hashem. As such, I feel that it is prudent to use this time to repent and ask Hashem for His forgiveness. Thus, if it is decreed that we should not survive this journey, that we will leave this world as devout penitents. The *Talmud* teaches that *viduy*, confession, should be recited quietly, so that no one hears his fellow's sins. To vocalize one's sins publicly is shameful. Since we are standing at the brink of death, however, I feel that in order to generate hope that our confession will serve as the catalyst for our atonement, we should render our confession publicly, so that the shame will atone for our sins.” They decided that the youngest student among them should begin the proceedings.

The young man stood up, shaking uncontrollably and weeping profusely, overcome with guilt concerning his one sin, “I am ashamed and humiliated to stand before you, for the purpose of confessing to a sin that I committed for two years: During this period, I lied to my mother!” They all looked at him in disbelief. He was an upright, scholarly young man. Who would have believed him capable of prevaricating to his mother?

"I am the oldest of nine brothers. When I was young, our family moved to Vilna where we lived in an apartment adjacent to that of the holy *Gaon*. My father had a little grocery whose proceeds supported our family. The walls being thin, my father would sit at night glued to the wall, listening to the *Gaon* learning. One night, my father heard the *Gaon* reiterating over and over the words of *Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* and his son, Rabbi Eliezer, concerning those who, rather than study Torah, spend their days in pursuit of livelihood. *Manichim chayei olam v'oskim b'chayei shah*, 'leave eternal life aside and engage in temporal life.'

Hearing the *Gaon* repeat this phrase over and over penetrated into my father, to the point that the next day, he announced, 'I no longer will spend my day engaged in pursuit of temporary livelihood while my spiritual life is laid to waste. I am now undertaking to spend my entire day immersed in the sea of Torah.' My mother immediately stepped up to the plate and offered to run the store. At one point, business was bad, and we were faced with severe economic hardship. My mother closed the store and began baking *challah* to sell in town. When this enterprise proved insufficient to sustain our family, my mother cleaned homes, all so that our father could spend his day learning Torah. Indeed, my father was totally unaware of my mother's extraordinary efforts to allow him to continue learning.

"Days passed, and the economic adversity in our home became more intense. It was then that I started my 'lie.' I told my mother that the *cheder* I attended would be serving lunch. For two years, my mother would ask me, 'Yankele, did you have lunch?' and I replied, 'Yes.' This is my lie for which I am terribly ashamed." He sat down and once again broke down in incessant weeping.

Hearing this story and *Rav Yankele's* "lie," *Rav Yisrael* stood up and raised his eyes and his hands Heavenward and declared, "Hashem *Yisborach*, during *Selichos* we plead that You turn to our suffering and ignore our sins. I ask You instead to look at our sins, at what we consider a sin. Yankele's lie allowed him to fast all day to save money. When You will gaze down and analyze their sins, You will see what type of activity this young man considered to be a sin."

At that moment, the storm subsided, the water calmed down and the ship was once again sufficiently sea-worthy to reach their destination in *Eretz Yisrael*. This story has been transmitted throughout the generations. Indeed, the saintly *Satmar Rav*, *Horav Yoel Teitelbaum*, *zl*, would relate it to his followers at the beginning of *Chodesh Elul*, in order to arouse them to *teshuvah* before the *Yomim Noraim*.

### Va'ani Tefillah

ובנה וברכה חן וחסד ורחמים – *Tovah u'vrachah, chein v'chesed v'rachamim*. Good and blessing, favor and kindness and mercy.

Five gifts to be included in *shalom*, peace, because, without them, the *shalom* will be incomplete and hence not endure. *Horav Avigdor Miller*, *zl*, explains that "good" means sweet and beneficial circumstances, which are useful for the perfection of our mind and character, because this is the definition of true good. We also request that this good be bestowed unaccompanied by circumstances of pain. *Simchah m'toch simchah*, happiness amid happiness. Blessing in the sense of success, which is unlimited and not temporary; indeed it should increase and continue to bear fruit. Kindness, that we receive benevolence with generosity in abundance. We also request that all men be inspired and motivated to act kindly and do good. Mercy, even when we are undeserving. Nonetheless, we pray that Hashem's mercy grant us all that we requested, similar to a mother who gives her child everything, even when he/she is undeserving. It may be a "tall" order, but, for Hashem, nothing is too "tall." He is our Heavenly Father. It is now up to us to act like His children.

Dedicated לזכר נשמת our father, grandfather  
הרב דניאל בן הרב אברהם ארי' לייב שור ז"ל *Horav Doniel Schur Z"l*

נלב"ע כ"א אדר תשס"ו ת.ג.צ.ב.ה.  
הונצח על ידי בניו, בנוחיו וכל משפחתו

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

## Anointing Oil Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Who?

Who may be anointed with the shemen hamish'cha?

Question #2: What?

What are the ingredients of the shemen hamish'cha?

Question #3: Where?

Where is the shemen hamish'cha poured?

Introduction:

Parshas Teruman contains the first reference to the anointing oil used to dedicate the Mishkan and to consecrate the kohein gadol and the Jewish kings. Next week's parsha, Ki Sissa, contains the beautiful mitzvah of processing this oil, called the shemen hamish'cha, a mitzvah with which most people are not that familiar. I should actually say "three mitzvos," since the Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch note that there are three mitzvos, one positive mitzvah (mitzvas aseih) and two negative mitzvos (lo saaseh):

(1) A mitzvas aseih (Sefer Hamitzvos of Rambam, Mitzvas Aseih #35; Chinuch, Mitzvah #107) to manufacture, use correctly, and treat this unique anointing oil in a special way. We see from the Torah that blending the shemen hamish'cha and "anointing" with it the various keilim used in the Mishkan fulfilled the mitzvah. We also see that the mitzvah includes "treating the shemen hamish'cha as holy," although it is unclear, at this point, what that entails.

(2) A lo saaseh not to pour the shemen hamish'cha onto a person when unauthorized= (Sefer Hamitzvos of Rambam, Lo Saaseh #84; Chinuch, Mitzvah #108). We will see that there are four categories of people who may be anointed with shemen hamish'cha. Anointing anyone else with the shemen hamish'cha violates this lo saaseh; furthermore, it is also prohibited to smear or pour the shemen hamish'cha onto the skin of any person, even someone whom it is permitted to anoint with it. Thus, the Gemara states that a kohein gadol who smears shemen hamish'cha on his leg as a balm violates the prohibition of the Torah (Kerisus 7a).

(3) A lo saaseh not to blend a recipe equivalent to the shemen hamish'cha that Moshe mixed (Sefer Hamitzvos of Rambam, Lo Saaseh #83; Chinuch, Mitzvah #109).

Let us begin by quoting the first posuk that describes this mitzvah (Shemos 30:22-23): "And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 'And you – take for yourself the best of the fragrances.'" Because of the difficulty in ascertaining the precise meaning of many of the terms for fragrances used by the Torah, I will often transliterate the word and then explain what it means.

The Torah tells us that five ingredients were used in the anointing oil: (A) Five hundred holy shekel-weights of mor deror; (B) Fragrant kinneman, half of which is 250 holy shekel-weights; (C) Fragrant cane or reed – 250 holy shekel-weights; (D) Five hundred holy shekel-weights of kiddah; (E)

A hin of olive oil.

As we will soon see, the identity of these ingredients is disputed. Furthermore, the tanna'im disagree whether the various fragrances were extracted by boiling them in the olive oil, or whether they were extracted in water and then blended into the olive oil (Kerisus 5a-b).

The posuk begins with Hashem saying to Moshe: "And you – take for yourself." This implies that Moshe had a specific relationship with the shemen hamish'cha. The Gemara explains that the shemen hamish'cha was made only one time – by Moshe Rabbeinu (Kerisus 5a). Forever after, the laws governing when the shemen hamish'cha may be used apply only to the oil manufactured by Moshe Rabbeinu in the Desert.

How much kinneman?

How many units of kinneman are used? In other words, what do the words, "kinneman, half of which is 250 shekel," mean? And, if it means



simply that we are to take 500 shekel-weight of kinneman, why not say so, clearly?

The Gemara explains that, to make sure that enough fragrance was used, it was required to add a small amount of spice more than the weight used to balance against it. Thus, the shemen hamish'cha contained a bit more than 500 shekel-weights of mor deror and of kiddah, and a bit more than 250 shekel-weight of fragrant reeds. However, the fragrant kinneman was brought in two measures of 250 holy shekel-weights, and each of these was weighed separately (Kerisus 5a). So, there actually was a little more kinneman than mor deror or fragrant cane.

What are its ingredients?

What are the ingredients of the shemen hamish'cha? The Torah describes that Moshe is to take four fragrant items: mor, kinneman, knei bosem and kiddah. The rishonim dispute regarding the correct identity of every one of these fragrances.

#### Mor

According to Rav Saadya Gaon and the Rambam, mor is what we call, in English, musk, a glandular extract from various animals. Although most of them, such as the muskrat, civet and otter are non-kosher, there is a variety of deer and a variety of wild ox, both of them kosher species, that might be the source.

The ibn Ezra and the Raavad disagree with the Rambam. The ibn Ezra contends that the Rambam's interpretation does not fit the description of the word mor in other pesukim in Tanach (Shir Hashirim 5:1, 5); whereas the Raavad argues that the Torah would not want an extract of a non-kosher species in the Mishkan. Both of these questions are resolved by later rishonim (see Rabbeinu Bachya).

Those who disagree with Rav Saadya Gaon and the Rambam usually suggest that mor is myrrh, a tree exudate (also called a gum) of the species Commiphora myrrha and related varieties.

#### Kinneman

In Modern Hebrew, the word kinneman means what we call, in English, "cinnamon," whose scientific name is either *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* or *Cinnamomum loureirii*. Obviously, all of these names are cognate to the Hebrew and derived from it. However, this does not necessarily prove that cinnamon is the correct species. Among the rishonim, there are many opinions as to the correct identity of kinneman; the Ramban, for example, quotes four different opinions. Rashi does, indeed, identify kinneman as what is probably cinnamon, but it is quite clear that the Rif, the Rambam and others do not. The Ramban, in disputing Rashi's opinion, notes that several midrashim describe kinneman as a field grass that goats forage – certainly not a description of cinnamon or any other tree bark. The Rif describes kinneman as being similar in appearance to straw. Among the candidates suggested for kinneman, according to this approach, is muskroot, also called sumbul or sumbal, which bears the scientific name of *Adoxa moschatellina*. Another possibility is palmarosa, also called Indian geranium or ginger grass, whose scientific name is *Cymbopogon martinii*. Thus, although the English word cinnamon is derived from the Hebrew, this could be a case of false identification, as is true in many such uses of Hebrew cognates.

#### Fragrant smelling reed

The Ramban (Commentary to Shemos 30:34) identifies knei bosem, fragrant-smelling cane or reed, with a species called, in Arabic, darasini, which I am told is the Arabic word for cinnamon. Thus, the Ramban agrees with Rashi that cinnamon is one of the spices used in the shemen hamish'cha, but disagrees as to which Hebrew word refers to it. There will be a difference between them as to how much cinnamon is included, since there are 500 shekel-weights of kinneman and only 250 of "fragrant smelling reeds."

#### Kiddah

According to Rashi and Targum Onkelos, the Aramaic word for kiddah is ketziyah, which is cognate to, and usually translated as, cassia, a tree whose scientific name is *Cinnamomum cassia*, which is similar to cinnamon and also has a fragrant bark. Again, this identification is not

certain. The Rambam calls it "kost" (often pronounced and printed with the Hebrew letter shin as kosht), which is usually assumed to be costus, the root of an annual herb called *Sausurea lappa*.

From the explanation that the Ramban provides to the ketores (Commentary to Shemos 30:34), it can be demonstrated that he disagrees with both Rashi and the Rambam, and identifies kiddah as a different herb. Among the species I have seen suggested are *Castus speciosus*, but this is merely conjecture.

#### How is it used?

Let us now continue the posuk: "You shall make with it oil for sacred anointment, blended together, processed as an apothecary does – and it will be oil for sacred anointment. With it you shall anoint the Tent of Assembly (the Mishkan), the Ark of Testimony (the Aron), the Table and all its implements, the Menorah and all its implements, the incense altar, the olah altar and all its implements, the laver and its stand... And you shall anoint Aharon and his sons... Furthermore, you shall tell the children of Israel – 'This holy anointing oil shall be for Me, for all your generations. It shall not be poured on a person's flesh, and any likeness of its formulation shall not be made; it is sacred, and you must always treat it as such. Any person who will blend anything similar to it, or put it on a zar (a person who may not be anointed with it) will be cut off from his people'" (Shemos 30: 25-33).

Before we continue, let us explain: What is the posuk emphasizing when it says: "This holy anointing oil shall be for Me, for all your generations?"

The Gemara explains that, notwithstanding that the shemen hamish'cha was used to anoint the kohanim, the vessels, and the kings, when the original hin of anointing oil is found, it will be found in its entirety. In other words, although the shemen hamish'cha is used, miraculously, the original amount never dissipates (Kerisus 5b; Horiyos 11b).

#### Qualitative or quantitative?

What do the words, "any likeness of its formulation shall not be made" mean? The answer is that the prohibition of blending the shemen hamish'cha is violated only when someone uses the exact quantities of the different fragrances. However, if someone blends the correct proportions of the shemen hamish'cha, but not the same amounts that were mixed by Moshe, there is no violation. In other words, someone who produces a mock shemen hamish'cha by mixing the five ingredients in the correct proportions, but in larger or smaller quantities than those described, is not guilty of violating the prohibition. This is in contrast to the prohibition of manufacturing the ketores, the incense burned in the Beis Hamikdash, which is violated by making the correct proportions of its different fragrances, even when the quantities are different (Kerisus 5a).

Why is there this halachic difference between the two mitzvos? The answer is that the ketores was used in smaller proportions, and therefore, blending it proportionally in smaller quantities is similar to the way it was used. The shemen hamish'cha, on the other hand, was never used or made in smaller proportions, and therefore, it is not prohibited to mix it in smaller amounts.

#### Kareis

Both of these prohibitions, blending the shemen hamish'cha and using the shemen hamish'cha, carry with them the severe punishment of kareis ("will be excised"). This is unusual, because kareis is usually reserved for severe and basic violations of the Torah, such as idolatry, blasphemy, desecrating Shabbos or Yom Kippur, eating or drinking on Yom Kippur, consuming chometz on Pesach, failure to have a bris milah, and arayos (Mishnah Kerisus 2a). Almost all the mitzvos of kashrus are not punishable by kareis, meaning that they are considered a lesser level of violation than using the shemen hamish'cha inappropriately or blending your own shemen hamish'cha. This certainly provides much food for thought.

#### Part II

#### Question Group #1: Who?

If the *shemen hamish'cha* (anointing oil) is used inappropriately, is the anointer liable, the anointed, or both of them?

#### Question Group #2: What?

If someone produces *shemen hamish'cha* inappropriately, is he liable, regardless how much he produced?

#### Question Group #3: Where?

Where is the *shemen hamish'cha* poured?

Where will we find the *shemen hamish'cha* today?

#### Introduction:

*Parshas Ki Sissa* contains the beautiful mitzvah of processing and using the anointing oil, the *shemen hamish'cha*, a mitzvah with which most people are not that familiar. I should, actually, say “three mitzvos,” since the *Rambam* and the *Sefer Hachinuch* note that there are three mitzvos, one positive mitzvah (*mitzvas aseih*) and two negative (*lo saaseh*) mitzvos:

(1) A *mitzvas aseih* (*Sefer Hamitzvos* of *Rambam*, *Mitzvas Aseih* #35; *Chinuch*, *Mitzvah* #107) to manufacture, use correctly, and treat this unique anointing oil in a special way.

(2) A *lo saaseh* not to pour the *shemen hamish'cha* onto a person who is not to use it (*Sefer Hamitzvos* of *Rambam*, *Lo Saaseh* #84; *Chinuch*, *Mitzvah* #108). We will see, shortly, that there are four categories of people who may be anointed with *shemen hamish'cha*. Anointing anyone else with the *shemen hamish'cha* violates this *lo saaseh*; furthermore, it also prohibited to smear or pour the *shemen hamish'cha* onto the skin of any person, even someone whom it is permitted to anoint with it. Thus, the *Gemara* states that a *kohein gadol* who smears *shemen hamish'cha* on his leg as a balm violates the prohibition of the Torah (*Kerisus* 7a).

(3) A *lo saaseh* not to blend a recipe equivalent to the *shemen hamish'cha* other than that which Moshe mixed (*Sefer Hamitzvos* of *Rambam*, *Lo Saaseh* #83; *Chinuch*, *Mitzvah* #109).

Last week's article devoted itself to analyzing what are the correct components and quantities of the *shemen hamish'cha*.

#### Who?

At this point, I will explain the details of the mitzvah by addressing and answering our opening questions, the first of which was: Who may be anointed with the *shemen hamish'cha*?

There are four categories of people who are anointed with the *shemen hamish'cha*:

(1) All those designated as *kohanim*, at the time the Mishkan was dedicated.

(2) The *kohein gadol*.

(3) The *kohein meshuach milchamah*, the *kohein* anointed prior to the Jewish people going to war, for the purpose of encouraging them regarding their responsibilities.

(4) A king of the Jewish people who was a descendant of David Hamelech.

We will now examine the *halachos* of these four categories:

#### Seven days of dedication

As part of the pomp and ceremony of the seven days of dedication of the Mishkan, the five *kohanim* at the time, Aharon and his four sons, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Isamar, were each anointed with the *shemen hamish'cha* every day (*Vayikra*, 3:13 and several times in Chapter 8; *Kerisus* 5b). During these seven days, all the vessels of the Mishkan were also anointed, daily, with the *shemen hamish'cha*.

This anointing was limited to the dedication week. Once the *Mishkan's* dedication was complete, there was no longer any mitzvah to anoint any vessels or a *kohein hedyot*. The only use of the *shemen hamish'cha*, after this point, was to anoint people, and, as such, it was used to anoint only three people:

The *kohein gadol*

All future *kohanim gedolim* were also anointed with the *shemen hamish'cha*, when they assumed their position. However, approximately

25 years before the first *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, *Yoshiyahu Hamelech*, realizing that it was only a matter of time until the *Beis Hamikdash* would be destroyed and overrun, hid the *aron* and everything that it contained, which included the *shemen hamish'cha*, so that it would not be seized during the *churban*. The answer is that we do not know where *Yoshiyahu* buried it, and, until it is found, its location is an unsolved mystery. The *Gemara* assumes that, at some time in the future, it will be found and used (*Kerisus* 5b).

The Mishnah (*Megillah* 9b; *Horiyos* 11b) teaches that, in the absence of the *shemen hamish'cha*, there is still a *kohein gadol*. How is he installed into his position? Donning garments that only a *kohein gadol* may wear and performing the *avodah* in the *Beis Hamikdash* while wearing them elevates him to the position of *kohein gadol*.

Are there any differences in *halacha* between the *kohein gadol* who was anointed with *shemen hamish'cha* and the *kohein gadol* who was not? There are some *halachic* differences between the two, but the vast majority of mitzvos and responsibilities of the *kohein gadol* apply, whether or not he was anointed with *shemen hamish'cha*. The Mishnah (ad loc.) reports that the only difference between the two is whether he offers a special *korban chatos*, should he violate, negligently, a serious prohibition of the Torah. We should also note that not all *tanna'im* accept even this distinction between the *kohein gadol* who was anointed with *shemen hamish'cha* and one who was not (Rabbi Meir, as reported in the *Gemara* ad locum).

The *kohein meshuach milchamah*

The Torah teaches that, prior to the Jewish people going to war, a *kohein hedyot* was appointed, specifically, for a special role of exhorting the people prior to their going to battle and bolstering their spirit (*Devarim* 20:2-4). This *kohein*, called the *meshuach milchamah*, was anointed for his position with *shemen hamish'cha*. *Halachically*, he now had an in-between status – he had some of the laws of a *kohein gadol* and some of those of a *kohein hedyot*, a regular *kohein* (see *Yoma* 72b-73a; *Horiyos* 12b).

According to several *acharonim*, when there is no *shemen hamish'cha*, there can be no *kohein meshuach milchamah*. However, some *acharonim* note that Josephus refers to a *kohein meshuach milchamah* during the war against the Romans, which was several hundred years after *Yoshiyahu* had hidden the *shemen hamish'cha* (*Minchas Chinuch*). Judaic kings

The kings of the Jewish nation, Shaul and Dovid, and those who continued Dovid's lineage, could be anointed with the *shemen hamish'cha*. However, in this instance, there is a *halachic* difference between this anointing and that of the *kohanim* mentioned above, in two ways. First, the king was anointed with *shemen hamish'cha* only when there had been some dispute or controversy concerning who would become the new king. For example, since Shelomoh's older brother Adoniyah had initially contended he would become king after *Dovid Hamelech's* passing (see *Melachim* I, Chapter 1), Shelomoh was anointed, to verify his appointment (*Kerisus* 5b).

When all accepted the appointment of the new king, he was not anointed, but assumed his position, without this procedure.

The second difference between the anointing of the *kohein gadol* and that of the king is how the oil is applied to the head of the anointed. When a king was anointed, it was applied in a way reminiscent of a crown, whereas when a *kohein gadol* or *kohein meshuach milchamah* was anointed, the oil was applied following a different pattern. There are different *girsas'os*, texts, to the *Gemara* that explain what this pattern was, and consequently, a dispute among the *rishonim* as to exactly how the *kohein gadol* was anointed, some contending it was in the shape of a crisscross atop his head, others, that it was poured similar to three sides of a rectangle, and still others with various other understandings of the text.

We should note that, at times, a Jewish king not of the family of *Dovid Hamelech* was anointed, not with *shemen hamish'cha*, but with a different, special anointing oil that had no sanctity (*Kerisus* 5b).

Where?

At this point, we can answer another of our opening questions: “Where will we find the *shemen hamish’cha* today?”

The answer is that we do not know where Yoshiyahu buried it, and until it is found, its location is an unsolved mystery. The *Gemara* assumes that at some time in the future, it will be located (*Kerisus* 5b).

*Moshiach’s* arrival

Will the *Moshiach* require that he be anointed with *shemen hamish’cha*? After all, doesn’t the word “*Moshiach*” mean “the anointed one?”

The answer is that whether the *shemen hamish’cha* is found before the arrival of the *Moshiach* or not, he can fulfill his role.

If the oil is used inappropriately, is the anointer liable, the anointed, or both of them?

How much?

What is the amount of each of these ingredients, in modern measurements, that this mitzvah requires?

The Torah prohibition is violated only if someone uses the exact quantities of the different oils. However, if someone wants to have a sense of blending the *shemen hamish’cha*, it is permitted to mix the qualitative equivalent as long as the quantities are not the same. This is different from a similar mitzvah, also mentioned in this week’s *parsha*, about blending the *ketores*, the incense burned in the *Beis Hamikdash*, in which case it is forbidden to mix the same proportions of the *ketores*, even when the quantities are different.

Why is there this *halachic* difference between the two *mitzvos*? The answer is that the *ketores* was used in smaller proportions, and therefore blending it proportionally is similar to the way it was mixed in the *Beis Hamikdash*s. The *shemen hamish’cha*, on the other hand, was never used or made in smaller proportions, and therefore, there is nothing wrong with mixing it in smaller proportions.

Blending

Making a blend of *shemen hamish’cha* for a person’s own personal use.

In truth, the *shemen hamish’cha* was made only once in *Klal Yisroel’s* history, and that was when Moshe manufactured it in the Desert.

Using

As we saw above, the Torah prohibited using the *shemen hamish’cha* for a non-authorized purpose. However, it should be noted that the prohibition is only to use the *shemen hamish’cha*, itself, that was intended for holy purposes, and not for using a privately-made equivalent. In other words, making a blend of *shemen hamish’cha* is prohibited *min haTorah*, but there is no prohibition in using that

privately-made blend. The prohibition is only to use the *shemen hamish’cha* made by Moshe Rabbeinu.

At this point, let us analyze another of our opening questions: If the oil is used inappropriately, is the anointer liable, the anointed, or both of them?

From the *Gemara*, we see that the anointer is certainly liable. The question is whether the anointed is, also, liable. The *Tosefta* (*Makos* 3:1) states that the anointed is also in violation. However, the *Rambam* does not mention this law, which prompts many *acharonim* to discuss why he does not.

Conclusion

Toward the end of *parshas Ki Sissa*, the Torah notes: “Three times a year, shall all your males appear before Hashem, the Master, the G-d of Israel.” This mitzvah focuses our attention on the central importance of the *Beis Hamikdash* for the Jewish people. Similarly, the *shemen hamish’cha* is closely connected to the *Beis Hamikdash*, and its use for the future of *Klal Yisroel* is primarily to anoint the *kohein gadol*. Thus, although we cannot observe the mitzvah today, studying its laws reminds us of the significant role that the *Beis Hamikdash* plays in the life of the Jewish people, and the realization of how much we are missing.

One of Rav Moshe Feinstein’s *talmidim* related to me the following story that he, himself, observed. A completely red, female calf had been born. Since this is, indeed, a rare occurrence, much conversation developed concerning whether this was positive indication that the *Moshiach* would be arriving soon, and this would provide the *parah adumah* necessary to make the *Beis Hamikdash*, the people and the vessels *tahor*.

Someone approached Rav Moshe to see his reaction to hearing this welcome news, and was surprised that Rav Moshe did not react at all. When asked further whether Rav Moshe felt that this was any indication of the *Moshiach’s* imminent arrival, Rav Moshe responded: “I *daven* every day for the *Moshiach* to come *now*. The *parah adumah* is not kosher until it is past its second birthday. Do you mean to tell me that I must wait two more years for the *Moshiach*?”

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לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

\*\*\*\*\*

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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 ksheh 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 their 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

=====



### 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' [ev'il / 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.

# **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 credit 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, 'You 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



# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TISA • 22 ADAR 5781 MARCH 6, 2021 • VOL 28 NO.18

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### No Spare Tie

*“...and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, ‘Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe who brought us up from Egypt – we do not know what became of him.’” (32:1)*

**L**et me give you, in my opinion, an essential “life-hack” – something that is going to save you a lot of time. It goes like this:

There are two kinds of lost objects: the kind that will eventually turn up, and the kind that is irretrievably lost. Whenever you lose something, don't try to find it. That's just a waste of time. Do the following. Think to yourself, "Do I absolutely need this thing right now? Is there a work-around? Do I absolutely need to wear my pink tie with the little green elephants on it? I know I was really looking forward to wearing it today, but maybe I could just get by, if I really need to, with the yellow one with pink poodles."

Much, if not most, of the time we can substitute what we want with what we need. Looking for non-essentials is a complete waste of life. Because they will

either turn up, one-way-or-another, or they are gone forever.

Life is about distinguishing the essence from the nonsense.

When Moshe failed to appear from Mount Sinai, the Children of Israel made a fatal mistake. They thought they could find a work-around. They thought they could replace their “lost object” – Moshe – with a golden calf.

Nothing could replace Moshe. *"There never has risen again in Israel a prophet like Moshe..." (Devarim 24:10)*

When it came to Moshe Rabbeinu — there was no “spare tie.”

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Be Lionhearted

Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima says, “Be as brazen as a leopard, as light as an eagle, as swift as a gazelle, and as strong as a lion – to do the will of your Father in Heaven.”

The teaching by the great Torah Sage on our *daf* is actually a *mishna* taught in Pirkei Avot (5:20). Here we are taught to internalize four “animal” traits to enable each person to maximize his individual potential to do the will of Hashem.

One explanation for the mention of these four traits, associated with four aspects of a person’s ability to serve Hashem, is offered by one of the major classical commentaries on *The Mishna*, Rav Ovadiah from Bartenura. “Be bold like a leopard (which he describes not as a leopard, but as an “unnatural” crossbreed of a wild boar and a lioness) implores a person to *not be embarrassed* to ask his rabbi for further explanation if the student does not understand the Torah teaching sufficiently – “One who is embarrassed will not learn,” teach our Sages. “Be light like an eagle,” he explains, is to review what you have learned, and, if you really try, you will find that *you will not be weary* from the toil of your repeated study. “Run like a gazelle” means to *persevere* in your efforts to fulfill as many mitzvahs as you can, in the best manner possible. “Be brave like a lion” is to *conquer* any innate, inner inclinations you may have that tempt you to transgress the way of the Torah.

Another approach is offered by Rabbeinu Yaakov the son of the Rosh – also known as the *Tur*. (Orach Chaim 1) He relates each of the character traits that are lauded in the *mishna* to four main parts of a person’s body. “Be bold as a leopard” teaches that a person should *embolden his mind* and determination to not refrain from doing Hashem’s will, although he may encounter fools and dolts who delight in making fun of his fervent mitzvah fulfillment and Torah study. “Be light like an eagle,” the *Tur* explains, means to “fly in the heavens,” above it all, as it were, without seeing negative and improper sights. One should guard his eyes to be careful to not view anything that might lead to transgress the way of the Torah. It is well known that the sight of something inappropriate is the beginning of the transgression. “Run like a gazelle,” he writes, instructs a person that his *feet* should be used only for running to do good deeds and mitzvahs. “Be brave like a lion” is an instruction to strengthen one’s *heart* – the seat of emotion – to want to strive more and more to improve his following the way of Hashem. Be *lionhearted*. The *Tur* lines up the four essentials in the *mishna* with four parts of a person: mind, eyes, feet and heart – all to be used properly and to the fullest in the service of Hashem.

Rabbi Yechiel Michal Epstein – also known by his work called *Aruch Hashulchan*, an invaluable codification of all branches of halacha – suggests an alternative reason for there being four distinct teachings in the *mishna*. He notes that there is a concept that man is comprised of the four basic “elements”: fire, air, water and earth. The four traits in the *mishna* correspond to these fundamental building blocks: boldness corresponds with fire, which is very brazen and mighty; lightness with air, which is very lightweight and ethereal; running with water, which flows back and forth; and bravery/courage with the earth, which is strong and hard. Rabbi Epstein writes that he humbly asserts that the *mishna* means to teach the need for a person to constructively

use all of these four elements of his physical being *only* for the sake of doing the will of Hashem, and not, G-d forbid, for any negative reason.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger cites a source who makes a fascinating observation in the *mishna*, providing a deeper understanding of the call to be *az* – brazen or bold. Let us look at the entire *mishna*. “Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima would say: ‘Be brazen like a leopard, light like an eagle, fleeting like a deer and mighty like a lion – to do the will of your Father in Heaven. He would also say, ‘The brazen – to *gehinom*, the bashful – to *Gan Eden*. May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, that the Beit Hamikdash will be built speedily in our days – and grant us our portion in Your Torah.’” Note the apparent contradiction regarding the quality of the character trait called *az*, brazenness. This is why the *mishna* concludes, “May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, that the Beit Hamikdash will be built speedily in our days – and grant us our portion in Your Torah.”

Rabbi Akiva Eiger continues his explanation: Towards the end of the *mishna* we see that brazenness is an extremely negative trait: “The brazen – to *gehinom*”, whereas at the beginning of the *mishna* we are taught that it is positive to be brazen – be brazen like a leopard. It must be that this trait is generally bad, but can be positive if used in the correct way at the correct time. For example, in our times, before Mashiach, it is good to not be timid about speaking up to ask questions in order to learn Torah. A person who is embarrassed, lest he be seen as ignorant for asking questions in order to understand the Torah, will not learn Torah, explain our Sages. A person should be bold in seeking greater Torah knowledge and wisdom. In the future, however, in the time of Mashiach, the world will be filled with knowledge of Hashem and his Torah. Then, there will be no need to be brazen in order to understand and acquire the Torah, and any sign of brazenness will be considered negative and lead to *gehinom*, away from Hashem, as it were.

A parenthetical note: It is important to recall the words that we wrote as “Talmud Tips” on Eruvin 100b, where the *gemara* states, “Even if the Torah had not been given we would be able to learn modesty from the cat and we would have learned to not steal from the ant.” The Ben Yehoyada points out that once the Torah was given, we are to learn these and other positive character traits only from the Torah, and not from animals. Animals also possess negative qualities, which one might be influenced by, whereas the Torah is pure righteousness and goodness. Here, too, the four traits mentioned in the *mishna*, although associated with animals, are learned only from our pure and holy Torah.

• *Pesachim 112a*

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# Q & A

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## KI TISA

### 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

### Ki Tisa: Remember Forever

Six commandments mandate that a Jew remember certain things. These six things are the Sabbath (Ex. 20:7), the Exodus from Egypt (Deut. 16:3), that Amalek attacked after the Exodus (Deut. 25:17), the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai (Deut. 4:9), how the Jews angered G-d in the desert (Deut. 9:7), and what G-d did to Miriam when she spoke slander (Deut. 24:9). In all but one of those commandments, the Torah uses the Hebrew word *zachor* to mean “remember.” This essay seeks to more clearly define the term *zachor* and explain how it differs from another Hebrew word that means “remember” — *pakad*. The Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b) essentially recognizes *pakad* as a synonym of *zachor*, such that it asserts that *pikdonot* equals *zichronot*, meaning Biblical verses which mention G-d “remembering” with a cognate of *pakad* can also be included in the *zichroniyot* prayer on Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah.

The most basic definition of *zachor* is offered by Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138), who writes that it means to remember something that one once knew but forgot (while *shamor* means to “keep in mind” something that one currently knows). But what is the definition of *pakad*?

The Hebrew word *pakad* is used in so many different ways that it is quite difficult to pin down its core meaning. In addition to meaning “to remember,” the verb *pakad* and its cognates also mean “to count” (Num. 1:21, 2:32, I Shmuel 15:4), “to be absent” (Num. 31:49, Isa. 38:10), “to command” (Ps. 19:9, 119:56, Ezra 1:2), “to appoint” (Num. 1:50, 31:14, Esther 2:3, Ps. 109:6), “to punish” (Ex. 20:5, Hos. 2:15), “to bring about death” (Num. 16:29, Jer. 46:21), “to visit” (see Rashi to *Nedarim* 39b and Kli Yakar to Num. 16:29), and “to deposit” (Lev. 5:23).

The Malbim points to two differences between the sort of “remembering” that *zachor* denotes and that which *pakad* denotes. First, Malbim explains that *zachor* simply refers to “remembering” in one’s mind, i.e., mentally recalling a certain fact or idea, but not doing anything else other than just remembering it. *Pakad*, on the other hand, denotes “remembering” something in order to take some sort of action — for better or for worse. Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) capsulizes this stance by writing “*zechirah* is in thought, while *pekidah* is in action.”

This understanding of *pakad* accounts for the broad semantic spectrum denoted by that term. In other words, *pakad* primarily means “remembering” something or someone in order to “attend to it,” “deal with it,” or otherwise “pay attention to it.” The most basic way of paying attention to something is to determine whether it is actually present or not; hence the term *pakad* means “to count” and “to be absent.” Another way of dealing with somebody or something is to give him or it instructions about what to do (“command” or “appoint”). A third way of dealing with somebody is to give him what he deserves (whether that means to “punish” him, or even, in some cases, to “bring about his death,” or simply to “visit” him). Finally, a way to deal with an item is by “depositing” it in somebody else’s hands to take care of. Thus, the Malbim teaches us that *pakad* means more than just the mental exercise denoted by *zachor*. It means “remembering” something in a practical sense that leads to action. (Rabbi Dr. Asher Weiser writes that *kapdanut* - which means “meticulousness/strictness” — relates to *padak* by way of metathesis, in the sense that one who is *makpid* pays attention to something to the utmost degree and is “particular” about all the details.)

Alternatively, Malbim explains that *zachor* denotes constantly “remembering” something over a long span of time, while *pakad* simply denotes one fleeting act of “remembering,” whereby one remembers something just enough that he can take certain actions related to that memory. After that, he can forget about it.

The Italian scholar Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino points out in *Ohel Moed* that the word *zecher* sometimes refers to the “scent” of something (Lev. 6:8, Hos. 14:8, Ps. 20:4), in the same sense that a “memory” of something is a whiff of that idea, but is not it itself.

Rabbi Saadia ben David Al-Dhamari (a 15th century Yemenite scholar) explains that *pakad* refers to remembering something after a long time, while *zachor* refers to remembering something after a shorter amount of time. For example, when G-d says He “remembered” the Jews and will redeem them from Egypt (Ex. 3:16), this “remembering” came after they had already been in exile for centuries! Or, when the Bible reports that G-d “remembered” Sarah and allowed her to become pregnant (Gen. 21:1), this happened after she had already been barren for several decades. In both of those cases, the word *pakad* is used to denote G-d “remembering.” In both cases He “remembered” after a long time.

By contrast, when the Bible reports G-d “remembering” Noah hiding from the deluge in his ark, Noah had been there only for about a year (Gen. 8:1). Similarly, when G-d “remembered” Rachel before granting her pregnancy, she had only been barren for a few years (Gen. 30:22). In those two cases the word used to denote His “remembering” is a cognate of *zachor*, because only a short amount of time elapsed.

Now we can address the elephant in the room: the word *zachor* seems to be related to *zachar* (“male”), but what is the thematic connection between the two? The interplay between these two words is

found in a Talmudic anecdote (*Bava Batra* 21b) in which King David’s general Yoav explains that he did not kill female Amalekites, because his teacher vowelized the word *zecher* in the commandment “erase the remembrance (*zecher*) of Amalek” (Deut. 25:19) as *zachar*. But, what is the deeper connection between these two words that are spelled exactly the same?

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (1361-1444), also known as Rashbatz or Tashbatz, writes in his commentary to *Avot* (5:12) that men have better memory (or potential for memory) than women. He buttresses this claim with the insight that the Hebrew words *zachar* (“male”) and *zachor* (“remember”) seem related. On the flip side, the Hebrew word for “women” (*nashim*) is related to the word for “forgetfulness” (see *nashani* in Gen. 41:51 and *teshi* in Deut. 32:18).

Indeed, Rabbi Moshe de Leon (1240-1305) – the Kabbalist who first published the *Zohar* – writes in *Sefer HaRimmon* that the term *zachor* is indeed related to the word *zachar*. In the relationship between a man and woman, man serves as the initiator who provides the nourishing kernel that woman receives and develops into something greater.

With this in mind, Rabbi de Leon accounts for a curious phraseology in the *Yaaleh V’Yavo* prayer. In that prayer, we ask G-d to remember us using both forms of “remembering” – *v’yizacher/zichronenu* and *v’yipaked/fikdonenu* – and then we specifically beseech Him to bestow upon us from His benevolent efflux in two ways – *zachrenu, fukdenu*. Yet, there are two terms for His benevolent efflux, *tohav* (literally “good”) and *berachah* (literally “blessing”). The word *tohav* implies His direct bestowal of good in a way that parallels the male’s role in bestowing the female with the germinate kernel, so it is no wonder that when we ask G-d to remember us with His *tohav*, we use the word *zachrenu*. On the other hand, the word *berachah* implies Him blessing what we already have by allowing it to grow and multiple, in a way that



mirrors the female's role in incubating and gestating the seeds which the male has provided her. Accordingly, it makes sense that when we ask G-d to remember us with a *berachah*, we use the term *fukdenu*, which is the Hebrew synonym for "remembering" associated with the female.

As mentioned previously, when G-d "remembered" Noah in his ark (Gen. 8:1), the Torah uses the verb *zachor*. Rashi enigmatically explains that this means that G-d switched His trait of strict judgment for His trait of mercy, but there is no textual basis for this explanation, especially because that very verse uses His name *Elokim* (which implies strict judgment) instead of the Tetragrammaton (which implies mercy). To resolve this difficulty, Rabbi Naftali Hertz Treves of Frankfurt (1493-1540) postulates in his work *Sefer HaGur* that the term *zachor* itself implies "remembering" as an act of mercy, while *pakad* does not (as it sometimes refers to "remembering" in order to punish).

This explanation dovetails nicely with the Kabbalistic terminology used above: G-d's trait of mercy reflects unfettered Divine influence with a focus on the Giver, thus associating *zachor*/mercy with the male (giver) paradigm. On the other hand, G-d's trait of judgment reflects a limited Divine influence that focuses on the recipient and whether or not said recipient deserves to receive from Him. As a result, *pakad*/judgment more closely follows the female (receiver) model.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchiv (1740-1810) in *Kedushas Levi* (to Gen. 21:1) explains that *pakad* alludes to the female element because it implies that the person who is "remembered" already

received his or her due. When G-d promises to give something, that "gift" is already considered to have come into existence the moment the promise was made because vis-à-vis G-d, there is no difference between past, present and future – it is all one continuum. Any difference in time is only according to our perception. Therefore, if in the present it looks like G-d had not yet granted His promise, this only means that the fulfillment of said promise, which already came into existence the moment He made the promise, is simply "hidden" from us until such time that He decides to reveal it. With this in mind, we can understand why the Torah uses the word *pakad* regarding Isaac's birth. From Hashem's timeless, omnitemporal position, Isaac already existed before he was born, but from the viewpoint of the receiver (in this case, Sarah), it had been hidden away, until G-d "remembered" to reveal to her the gift's existence.

Finally, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) explains that *zachar* is related to *zachor* in the sense that one's male descendants are typically his legacy by which he is "remembered" in This World. This is because daughters generally marry into other families and become part of their husband's extended household, while sons carry on the name of their father's family.

*Postscript:* In case you've forgotten, we previously ran an article about different Hebrew words for "forgetting" entitled "Forget About It" (Sept. 2019), and another article about different Hebrew words for "counting" entitled "When Just Counting Doesn't Count" (May 2017).

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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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 1)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

“These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one’s parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all.” (*Tractate Shabbat 127a*)

The opening sentence of this section gives us an insight into one of the most fundamental tenets of Judaism: the relationship that exists between our physical actions and their spiritual reward. By teaching us, “These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come,” our Sages are conveying to us an important message. Not only do our good actions accrue spiritual rewards, but they mostly do not directly benefit us in the physical realms. Not because they cannot, but simply because we do not want to squander their eternal worth in the World to Come on something as transient as a reward this world.

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001), an exceptionally eloquent and brilliantly prolific Torah scholar who lectured all over the world, described this concept as the equivalent of buying a bottle of water using a ten thousand dollar check with no hope of receiving any change. A person desperately thirsty in the desert would likely be willing to part with such a huge sum of money. But that same person knows that in a different reality there would be no way they would spend even a fraction of that amount for a simple bottle of water. Under normal circumstances, the value of the check totally eclipses the worth of the water.

Likewise, the commandments we keep and the good deeds we perform in the physical world are priceless

in the “currency” of the World to Come. They create our eternity. However, in order to be able to continue to exist and function in the physical world, there is a need, at times, to transfer some of the spiritual merits accrued in the spiritual spheres into our physical domain. This idea is similar to one having a savings account and a checking account. As a rule, money held as savings is not to be used for day-to-day needs. Over time it accumulates and can turn into a luxurious nest-egg, but there may be occasions when it is necessary to transfer from one’s savings account to the checking account to cover any shortfalls. Correspondingly, our Heavenly “bank account” is being topped up every time that we perform a mitzvah, but we are also drawing from our “savings account” into our “checking account” to fill any gaps that may have built-up as we live our lives in this world. Normally, such transfers come directly from the accumulated merits that we have amassed in the spiritual realms. However, the Talmud is teaching us here that there are certain mitzvahs that can garner us benefit in this world – yet not detract from our reward in the World to Come. Truly a win-win!

It is intriguing that these mitzvahs are not the ones that would necessarily spring to mind as being the ultimate source of reward both in both this world and in the World to Come. In general, the mitzvahs are loosely divided into two groups: those that reflect our relationship with G-d and those that determine the way that we interact with everyone around us. It would seem logical that the mitzvahs which would be



those which are the source of such bountiful reward *both* in this world and in the World to Come would be ones that are clearly G-d-related. These mitzvahs appear to more clearly reflect the Divinity within us, by emphasizing our spiritual actions. Yet, it is quite the opposite. The mitzvahs listed here are not the ones that obviously define our connection with G-d, but are almost entirely related to our interpersonal relationships. This essential tenet is addressed by Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel (1250-1327), one of the

most erudite scholars in his generation and whose commentary on the Talmud is considered until today to be fundamental to understanding its depths. He writes (Tractate Peah 1:1) that G-d prefers mitzvahs that benefit other people *even more* than the mitzvahs that are between us and G-d.

As we shall learn together, even those mitzvahs which seem, at first glance, to only concern our relationship with G-d, are actually also focused on those around us and how we can help them and ourselves.

*To be continued...*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**M**oshe 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 and 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 Shabbat, 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 to be delayed, and so they force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. Hashem 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 destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men.

Moshe ascends the mountain again 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 he 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*

## “Keeping” the Sabbath

The Torah repeatedly uses the verb “keep” (*shemor*) when instructing about the Sabbath. While this verb is also used for the entirety of Torah and mitzvahs, its use in the context of a particular commandment – here, repeated three times in the context of the Sabbath – is unique. This language has taken root in our colloquial speech, as we refer to one who observes the Sabbath as a “*shomer Shabbat*.”

The use of this term teaches us to regard the Sabbath as a precious possession given to us and entrusted to our care. Just as a watchman must guard the object of its care, take care not to be negligent, and never tamper with it, the Jewish People is instructed to be scrupulous and vigilant in keeping away and fending off anything that might damage this treasure.

G-d instructs us, “Only keep my Sabbaths!” The plural indicates that what is entrusted to our safekeeping is not the Sabbath in general, but that each and every Sabbath day is so entrusted as a unique asset. The word “only,” explain our Sages, teaches that the Sabbath is given priority over the work of the Tabernacle. The “safeguarding,” then, is not against violation by personal, profane activity or ordinary occupational pursuits, but rather against the sublime work of constructing a dwelling for G-d! Thus, the priority of Sabbath observance over all other endeavors less sacred is impressed with greater impact.

“This” – the safekeeping itself – is a “sign” between G-d and Israel so that we may know G-d sanctifies us. (Shemot 31:13). By our safekeeping – by refraining from constructive work on Sabbath – we lay ourselves, our whole world, and all the powers we have been granted, to shape the world in homage before G-d.

Ever since the world’s existence, the Sabbath was known as a memorial to G-d’s creation of the world. But it existed only as an abstract idea. Because it lacked a visible expression – a symbol – it disappeared from man’s consciousness.

When Israel was chosen as an instrument for G-d’s rule – to acknowledge and spread the knowledge of Him as Master and Ruler of mankind – He gave Sabbath the concrete symbol of prohibiting creative activity. This was a sign “between G-d and Israel” of the mutual relationship, so that we may know He has chosen Israel to be that instrument.

● Sources: Commentary, Shemot 31:13

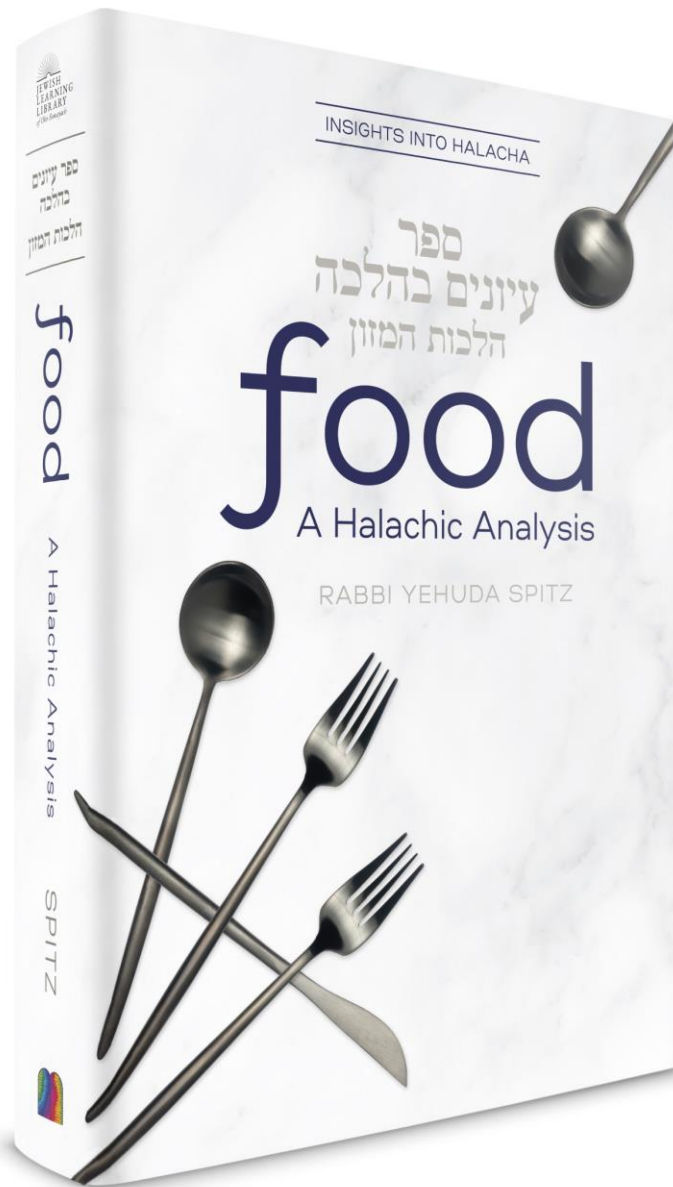
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