

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

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Now available: recording of Dr. Michael Matsas' interview on The Illusion of Safety – the Nazis' tragic slaughter of 87% of the Jews of Greece during World War II. Listen on YouTube at https://youtu.be/F_hgB0ExYRo Copy of Dr. Matsas' book also at Beth Sholom library.

Ki Tisa contains the well known story of Moshe spending forty days and nights on Har Sinai while Hashem teaches him the Torah and engraves two Tablets with the Aseret Dibrot (Ten Statements) to take down to B'Nai Yisrael. Rabbi Fohrman observes that the story of Moshe's meetings with Hashem on Har Sinai have numerous parallels in both text and structure to Noach's experiences with the flood. These parallels indicate that we are to compare Moshe's behavior to that of Noach. When Hashem told Noach that He was about to destroy the world and start over, Noach acted passively. He listened, did what God told him to do, but did not try to save other people during the 120 years during which he worked on his teva. Moshe, in contrast, fights when God tells him that B'Nai Yisrael have sinned and that they have all earned death for disobeying the Covenant of Divine Justice that they had accepted at Har Sinai. When God tells Moshe to go down so He can destroy the people, Moshe refuses to leave and uses numerous arguments to convince God that He cannot destroy His people, and that if He tries to do so, then Moshe insists that God remove him from His book (take all references to Moshe out of the Torah).

When the Torah moves from Noach to Avraham, the Torah compares Avraham to Noach. Here, the Torah compares Moshe and Noach. As we see many times, the Torah uses parallel sentence structure and language to draw comparisons between individuals and situations to teach us proper behavior.

B'Nai Yisrael expect Moshe to return after forty days on Har Sinai. Their error is counting the day that Moshe departs as the first day rather than counting his first full day after leaving as day one. The people believe that Moshe has died and insist that Aharon make a symbol (idol) to replace Moshe (as a mask or barrier between them and God's presence). Aharon stalls for time, but when the people bring jewelry to melt, a golden cow emerges. The people have a feast, get drunk, and start dancing inappropriately. At that time, God tells Moshe that the people have sinned and sends him down.

God tells Moshe to leave so He can destroy the people and start over with Moshe. However, Moshe realizes that God would not have told him to leave unless he wanted Moshe to challenge him. (If God planned to kill the people, he would have just destroyed them without waiting.) Moshe refuses to leave and bargains for their lives. He tells God that B'Nai Yisrael are His people, whom He took out of Egypt (not Moshe's people). Moshe states that killing the people would break His promise to the Avot and that the Egyptians (and non-Jews everywhere else) would interpret the killing as indicating that God did not have the power to bring the Jews to the promised land. These arguments work, so God agrees to negotiate a new covenant based on Divine Mercy rather than Divine Justice.

Moshe must destroy the first Luchot, because they are based on Divine Justice. Under the terms of the Har Sinai covenant, the penalty for violating the mitzvot is death. Moshe breaks the Luchot at the most dramatic point, in front of the people, and makes them drink water with the dust of the broken pieces. Rabbi Rhine (see below) observes that a great leader can turn a tragic event into something positive. By negotiating a new contract with God, Moshe saves B'Nai

Yisrael. If he had not destroyed the Luchot, any time the people sinned (as they did often), they would be subject to a death penalty. With the new contract, God would treat sin under Divine Mercy – forgiveness (Kol Nidre/Yom Kippur) becomes an option.

Rabbe Moshe Rube adds to this interpretation, following Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, z"l. Under the Har Sinai covenant, humans had no space for their own initiative. They could only follow Divine command. The new covenant is the basis of the Oral Torah. Now there is room for human input – a majority of the senior rabbis of the time could interpret the law and make modifications. With human input, the Oral Law lasts. Humans are now partners with the Almighty. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, adds that the first Luchot lasted only a few hours while the second Tablets endure. He interprets that Divine initiative changes the world but does not change humans. It takes human initiative (interacting with the Divine) to change humans. When Moshe comes down the first time after forty days with Hashem, he is unchanged. When Moshe comes down the second time, after making the second Luchot on which God wrote the mitzvot, his face has a glow that requires him to cover his face from other people. Interaction between humans and God, with human initiative, changes us.

I am honored to introduce Rabbi Haim Ovadia, an distinguished Sephardic Rabbi and friend, who has agreed to share his weekly Devrei Torah with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia observes that at the time of Egel Zagav, B'Nai Yisrael lack spiritual intimacy with Hashem. Moshe asks God to let him see His face so he could have more spiritual intimacy to relate to the people. However, because God is in God's space rather than in human space, this intimacy is not available to humans outside Gan Eden. This quest persists, but there are limits to how close humans can come. The closest a human can come to Hashem is by observing Shabbat (coming close in time). Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol could come close to Hashem during the service of the Kohen Gadol (coming close in space). This quest for closeness to our Creator is a recurring theme in the Torah.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved to delve deeply into the parts of the Torah that seem most difficult for a modern reader to appreciate. He started me studying Torah when I first met him more than fifty years ago, and his lessons over the years bring me more understanding and pleasure each Torah cycle. Now that my grandchildren are starting to study Chumash, I hope to share this love of Torah with them.

Shabbat Shalom,
Alan & Hannah

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. 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.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.
Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Ki Sisa: Shabbos Forever
by Rabbi Label Lam © 2007

The Children of Israel shall keep the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos **an eternal covenant for their generations**. Between Me and the Children of Israel it is a sign forever that in a six day period HASHEM made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed. (Shemos 31:16-17)

An eternal covenant for their generations: Rebbe says, “Anyone who keeps one Shabbos accordingly is considered by the verse as if he has kept every Shabbos from the day that The Holy One Blessed Be He created His world until the ‘revival of the dead’...” (Mechilta)

Wow! That a one huge and hyperbolic promise for keeping a single Shabbos. How do we tap into that and how can we understand simply how it works? Let us consider two approaches.

1 - Not unexpectedly, the Mona Lisa is delivered to your door one Friday afternoon. For approximately twenty-four hours you have been selected to host this priceless work of art. Imagine the tumult in the neighborhood in anticipation, the security (to protect “her”) concerns, the guest lists and food issues and crowd control. It would be a really big deal to house such a rare and treasured painting even for one day’s length. You would likely talk about it forever after whenever the opportunity would arrive. You would have that much more in common with others who were given the same unique opportunity to bask in the sublime beauty of her half smiling countenance. Discussions would abound about whether or not that is a grimace or a grin and what her true identity might be. It would certainly be a bigger than life conversation piece for art lovers and others to have been chosen and entrusted with the chance and for having even once lived the dream.

Sure the Mona Lisa is a priceless work of art but and she carries a high price tag but after all it is a two dimensional representation of the imagination of an individual DeVinci that lived so many hundreds of years ago. He is no longer alive and she is quiet and somewhat lifeless too. Certainly a human face of a living person- childlike or elder is millions of times more dynamic and interesting than any painting.

How much more so when we consider that Shabbos, referred to as the Queen, arrives at our home also for twenty-four plus hours and we are her designated host. Everyone is keeping the same Shabbos, though it resides in each of our unique abodes. It is the very same Shabbos that visited Avraham and Sarah’s tent and the same that will we hope will be welcomed into the homes of our children and grandchildren till the end of human history. It is the same ancient, timeless, and priceless work of art with its own peculiar requirements for keeping and protecting that has been looking for residence from the beginning of time till today.

2 - The Ben Ish Chai told a parable about a young Jewish man that became enamored with the practices of a certain foreign culture and began to express strongly his desire to convert. The rabbi of the community came to visit and spoke to him for hours about the events of Mount Sinai and how we are G-d’s witnesses through history. He spoke about the spiritual delights of Paradise and the horrors of Hell. Nothing seemed to penetrate his armor. His mind was made up. The rabbi left frustrated and with a heavy heart.

Soon afterwards an old friend entered, and sizing up the situation, he began to speak about the old days. They spoke of childhood memories including tasty Shabbos foods like cholent, kugel, and chicken soup. The Pavlovian juices began to flow. The young man was reliving those delicious memories with relish. A gigantic smile spread across his face. They broke out into singing mode and strung one tune with another for hours. His friend reminded him that he was readying himself, by converting out, to depart from and leave go of all those culinary and familial delights. A door opened up in his heart and eventually he changed his mind.

As absurd as it may sound, it’s also very true. When one sits to enjoy a delicious Shabbos meal with family on a Friday night or a Shabbos day with luscious Challah prepared for the sake of Shabbos surrounded by the aromas and sounds of Shabbos he is not just keeping that one singular Shabbos. Rather he is anchoring himself and his family to a wondrous experience of **Shabbos forever**.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5770-kisisa/>

Journey After Failure

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2022

When Moshe ascended the mountain to receive the Torah from Hashem, he appointed two great leaders to be approachable in his absence. Moshe said, "Behold, Aharon and Chur are with you, anyone with an issue shall approach them." (Shimos 24:14)

Moshe informed the people that he would be ascending the mountain and would be away for 40 days. The people made a mistaken calculation and decided that Moshe was late. The Medrash says that their state of panic increased when some people perceived a vision that Moshe had died.

The Eirev Rav, a group of foreigners who latched on to the Jewish people, led an initiative to create an intermediary between the people and Hashem to replace Moshe, whom they thought was now lost. These people joined with some Jews and tried to force Chur to accept their initiative. When Chur rejected them, they killed him. It was with this panic stricken, disoriented, and rebellious mood, that they approached Aharon for approval of their plan. Aharon saw what they did to Chur and realized that a straight-out refusal would be disastrous for the Jewish people. It was probable that this mob would kill him too. Who knew what would be next?

It was in this moment of showdown that Aharon decided to propose a plan that he thought would ensure a delay and enable a more sensible resolution. Perhaps Moshe would come before another disaster occurred. Perhaps with a bit of delay the people would calm down and return to good judgment.

But this was not to be. Aharon suggested that they obtain the gold from the women, knowing that the women would not part with their jewelry so easily for this cause. Instead, the men brought their own gold. In the heat of the moment, they moved quickly, created the golden calf, and began to worship it.

Moshe indeed returned just hours later. But it was too late. The tragedy of the golden calf had already occurred. Moshe broke the Luchos (Tablets) that Hashem had gifted the Jewish people. He directed a purge of those who had worshipped the golden calf. And he turned to Aharon for an explanation.

Moshe asked, "What did the people do to you, that caused you to be the catalyst of this great sin?"

Aharon responded, "My Master, you know that the people were in a bad state. They demanded an intermediary to replace you because they did not know what happened."

This is the basic story of the Eigel (golden calf). What I find remarkable is what happens afterwards.

Aharon was personally shattered. On some level he was the catalyst for this great tragedy. The people had approached him, and as a leader, he decided to deal cautiously with their idea. Things then unraveled quickly. His intent to delay things didn't work and the tragedy occurred.

When the Mishkan was built shortly thereafter, Hashem instructed Moshe to call upon Aharon to become the Kohein, the priest, to serve in the Mishkan. The Torah describes the great moment of inauguration: "Moshe told Aharon take a calf as an atonement... and approach the Mizbeiach (Altar)." Rashi explains that the calf was an atonement for the golden calf. Moshe needed to instruct Aharon to approach because Aharon was ashamed and fearful to approach.

Aharon had been placed in a position of leadership in a time that was devastatingly difficult. Moshe, their mentor, the man that some thought of as their redeemer, was missing. The Eirev Rav had a predisposition to idol worship and were proposing an immediate solution. They had already staged a showdown with Chur and killed him. What was Aharon to do?

Aharon was a great Tzaddik. He handled the situation the best he knew how. But that best wasn't good enough. A terrible tragedy occurred.

Aharon undoubtedly reviewed the incident in his own mind many times, and on some level blamed himself. I believe the message to Aharon was that there is still a journey to be traveled after tragedy and failure. Even after things do not turn out as we would have liked, and we blame ourselves for not being greater or better, there is still greatness to be had. In fact, it is possible, sometimes, that the situation itself is intrinsically tragic and does not necessarily have a better solution.

This is the place that many teachers, parents, and others in leadership roles, and even individuals, might find themselves at some point during life. We may have been faced with situations that do not have obvious good answers. We tried to choose wisely. We tried to influence those around us in a good way. But it doesn't always work, at least not right away. The embrace that is given to Aharon is an embrace meant for anyone who has experienced failure. It is the embrace awarded to people who can recognize their humanity. It is the embrace awarded to people who are willing to try again.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com.
For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Standing Tall and Strong for Israel and the Jewish People: Thoughts on Parashat Ki Tissa

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Some years ago, I read about a German Jew who established a "Jewish Nazi Society" during the 1930s. While Jews throughout Germany (and Europe in general) were facing horrible anti-Jewish persecutions, this Jewish man internalized the vicious anti-Semitic propaganda to such an extent that he also became a Jew-hater. Perhaps he thought that by identifying as a Nazi, he would be spared personally from the anti-Jewish persecutions. He wanted to be considered as "a good Jew" in the eyes of the Nazis, rather than be accounted among the "bad" Jews whom the Nazis were tormenting.

I don't know what ultimately happened to the members of the "Jewish Nazi Society," but I doubt that they were spared by the Nazi hate machine. The Nazis hated Jews for having Jewish blood, regardless of their beliefs or political leanings. Jewish Nazis were just as despicable to Nazis as any other Jews. The Jewish Nazis were despised by Jews for their treachery; and despised by Nazis for their Jewishness.

These thoughts came to mind as I contemplated the phenomenon of Jews in our time who struggle to undermine Israel, and who identify themselves with those who strive to destroy the Jewish State. These individuals seem to suffer from the same psychological problems as members of the "Jewish Nazi Society" in Germany. Israel is constantly barraged by its enemies – through terrorism, economic boycotts, political isolation, anti-Israel propaganda, threats of war and nuclear destruction. To the enemies of Israel, the Jewish State is the object of blind, unmitigated hatred. The enemies use every possible forum to malign Israel and deny its legitimacy. This unceasing war against Israel is resisted courageously by the Jewish State, by Jewish supporters of Israel, by millions of non-Jewish supporters of Israel.

It is bizarre and morally repugnant that the one tiny Jewish country in the world has to suffer so much abuse. It is a matter of honor to stand up for Israel and to remind the world of the right of the Jews to their own homeland. We need to counter

the attacks against Israel in every forum. We need to speak truth to combat the unceasing stream of lies heaped up against Israel.

Does this mean that we must agree with and condone everything that Israel does? Of course not. Israelis themselves are vocal in their criticisms of aspects of Israeli life and government policies. As long as criticisms are voiced with love, they should be welcome. They help shake the status quo and move things in a better direction. But criticism must be balanced with an appreciation of the amazingly impressive positive aspects of the Jewish State.

While fair and loving critics are vital to Israel's welfare, haters are destructive. Haters do not seek to improve Israel – they seek to destroy it. Their goal is not to encourage a vibrant, flourishing Jewish State – their goal is to eliminate the Jewish State. The hatred is so blind and so intense, that it is oblivious to facts and figures. For haters, Israel is guilty just by existing. It is particularly regrettable when people of Jewish ancestry align themselves with the haters. In some perverse way, they may think this separates them from the fate of Israel and the Jewish people – they think they will be viewed as "the good Jews" in contrast with the Zionists who are viewed as "the bad Jews." But such Jews are despised by Jews as traitors, and are despised (or mocked) by the haters of Israel – because after all, these hating Jews are still Jews! The enemies are happy to use such people for propaganda purposes; but if they were ever to succeed in their wicked designs, these hating Jews would not fare well. Their treachery to Israel and their fellow Jews would not make them beloved by the enemies of Jews and Israel.

We have read recently of Jewish haters/self-haters who have participated in – and even spearheaded – anti-Israel boycotts. We have read of Israeli professors/left wing intellectuals who have participated in anti-Israel programs on college campuses throughout the world. We have read columns by Jewish journalists that are so blatantly unfair to Israel that it makes us shudder.

The great 16th century kabbalist and biblical commentator, Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh, offered a homiletic interpretation of the first verse in this week's Torah portion. When the Israelites are to choose a leader (ki tissa et rosh benei yisrael), they should choose one who is totally devoted to Israel, who is willing to give his life on behalf of the Lord and on behalf of the people (ish kofer nafsho). It is destructive to have half-hearted or self-serving people in positions of authority. Total commitment is an essential component of leadership.

But this interpretation applies not only to the officially designated leadership; it applies to each Jew. Each of us is an ambassador of our people; each of us represents the history, culture and traditions of the millennial Jewish experience; each of us is part of the Jewish destiny. To play our roles as proud and courageous Jews, we need to overcome inferiority complexes and reject "politically correct" pressures; we need to stand tall and stand strong, with the wholeness of our being, on behalf of the God of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the People of Israel.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/standing-tall-and-strong-israel-and-jewish-people-thoughts-parashat-ki-tissa>

** The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at www.jewishideas.org

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Resisting Religious Coercion

A Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

I first visited Tel Aviv's Chief Rabbi Haim David Halevy, of blessed memory, in the summer of 1984. I was then a 15-year veteran of the American Orthodox rabbinate serving a large congregation in New York City.

At our meeting, we discussed the increasing authoritarianism and extremism that were spreading relentlessly within the Orthodox world. With sadness in his eyes, he asked me: "Have you heard of the mafia? We have a rabbinic mafia here in Israel!" A small clique was arrogating power to itself and marginalizing those who held opinions that differed with them. Instead of viewing halakha in its remarkable diversity, this clique was advocating a halakha that seemed to have only one answer to every question, one view on every issue.

In my mind, I have relived my 1984 meeting with Rabbi Halevy many times. As I write these lines, I am reliving that meeting once again.

Rabbi Halevy lamented the marginalization of rabbis who do not follow the "party line," who offer original halakhic opinions, who refuse to stifle their freedom in order to curry favor with the rabbinic power-brokers. This tendency has only worsened in recent years.

We read of a "rabbinic blacklist" on the part of the Rabbanut in Israel. We know, first hand, of rabbis who prefer to stay silent or remain "neutral" rather than to stand up against religious extremism and fanaticism. We see the growing conformity in dress, behavior and thought in large segments of the Orthodox world.

In a fascinating responsum, Rabbi Naftali Tsevi Yehudah Berlin – the Netsiv – reminded his readers that during the time of the Second Temple, the Jewish people was divided between the Perushim and Tsedukim. Competition between the groups was intense. The situation became so bad that Perushim branded as a Tseduki anyone who deviated even slightly from prevailing practice. To dissent from the predominant opinion led to one's being ostracized. The Netsiv applied the lesson to his own time:

"It is not difficult to imagine reaching this situation in our time, Heaven forbid, that if one of the faithful thinks that a certain person does not follow his way in the service of God, then he will judge him as a heretic. He will distance himself from him. People will pursue one another with seeming justification (be-heter dimyon), Heaven forbid, and the people of God will be destroyed, Heaven forbid." (Meshiv Davar, Warsaw, 5654, no. 44.)

The Netsiv was concerned that self-righteous individuals were attempting to suppress the opinions of others. In the name of Torah, they sought to discredit others--even branding them as heretics. Yet, Jewish tradition respects the right and responsibility of individuals to express opinions which are fully based on proper Torah authority – even when those opinions differ from those popularly held. Rabbi Yehiel Michel Epstein, author of the Arukh ha-Shulhan, noted in his introduction to the section on Hoshen Mishpat, that differences of opinion among our sages constitute the glory of the Torah. "The entire Torah is called a song (shirah), and the glory of a song is when the voices differ one from the other. This is the essence of its pleasantness."

Responsible intellectual freedom is the hallmark of a healthy religious community. Diversity of opinion and freedom of expression are vital to our wellbeing as Jews — and as human beings. Those who attempt to serve as a coercive "thought police" are doing a vast disservice to our community and to the Torah itself.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/resisting-religious-coercion-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

Ki Sisa – The Colorful Grays of Life

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

Aharon achieved one of the greatest spiritual feats in history. He earned a place serving in G-d's Palace as the trusted servant to handle all the sacrifices and services to be done there. He earned this privilege for himself, for his children and for their future progeny for all time. Beyond that he earned for himself the great privilege of being allowed entrance to the epicenter of holiness – the Holy of Holies, where the Holy Ark was kept and where no one other than Moshe was allowed to enter. He earned that these privileges stay with his family and that they be G-d's trusted family for all time. What was his merit that Hashem should choose him in such a fashion, when even Moshe did not pass on his leadership to his own children, but to his student Yehoshua who was from a different tribe? One has to wonder: how did Aharon do it?

The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 37:2) asks this very question and gives a shocking answer. The reason Aharon was chosen was because he was the one who led the people in making the Golden Calf! Aharon's unique merit that he and his family should be the one's bringing the sacrifices in G-d's Palace for all times was that Aharon was the one who led the people in perhaps the greatest national error of all time. How could this be? The sin of the Golden Calf was a flagrant violation of the first two of the Ten Commandments! How could involvement in such a calamity earn one such privilege?

The Medrash explains that Aharon's intentions were pure. He understood that once the nation thought Moshe had died, if he tried to stop the people from creating an idol they would kill him. His only chance was to go along with them. By dint of his position, if he took the lead they would follow him. He would then be able to stall, hopefully delaying until Moshe returned. The Medrash gives a parable of a servant of a king charged with raising the prince. One day he sees the prince outside the palace walls trying to dig under the walls and break into the palace. The servant realizes he won't be able to overpower or stop the prince and therefore asks the prince to let him do the digging so the prince will not exert himself. In this way, he is able to slow the prince's efforts and prevent the prince from committing any unforgiveable offense before he is caught. Hashem swore to Aharon that for this dedication and valor, he would be rewarded that no one but he and his family would serve in G-d's Temple.

While we can understand how Aharon's act may have been appropriate under these circumstances, it is hard to understand why it was so courageous. Aharon was desperate and saw that there was nothing he could but play along and delay them. So he did. Perhaps it displays Aharon's wisdom and his ability to maintain a clear mind under pressure, but how does it show dedication and devotion?

Perhaps if we could imagine ourselves in Aharon's position, this Medrash may be easier to understand. After two centuries of living in Egypt and eighty years of incomprehensible oppression, Aharon's brother comes to Egypt carrying the message that Hashem had remembered them and would be redeeming them soon. After a year of unparalleled open miracles, under Moshe's leadership they follow G-d into the barren desert, even taking the wealth of Egypt with them as compensation for their years of slavery. They experience the Splitting of the Sea, where even the simplest Jew had a clarity of G-d's Oneness and Mastery beyond the most sublime visions of later prophets. A mere several weeks later they stand at Har Sinai and see the entire fabric of existence ripped open before them – there is nothing but G-d. They experience Moshe's level of prophecy and hear the Ten Commandments from G-d all in one moment – seeing the sounds. They hear the first two commandments from G-d a second time in a manner they can comprehend – belief in G-d and the prohibition against idol worship. The nation as a whole saw and understood that G-d wants us to recognize Him and to recognize Him in truth – as the One and Only. All of this is achieved under Moshe's leadership.

Little more than a month has passed since that great climax which sealed our pact with G-d. The nation fearing Moshe's death somehow convinces themselves to turn to idols. It's incomprehensible, but it is happening right in front of Aharon's eyes. Aharon does not believe that Moshe is in danger. He is waiting lovingly for his dear, holy brother to return with the full package of G-d's instructions – our holy Torah.

Imagine the emotions that must have raged within Aharon's heart. These people had abandoned G-d right on the heels of the Exodus and the experience at Sinai, with lightning speed they had fallen to the lowest depths and were about to abandon the very core of our relationship with G-d – the first two commandments. In doing this, they were also abandoning his dear brother, whom he loved with a depth we have never seen. Our rabbis teach us that there was no jealousy between them. Whenever one achieved new spiritual heights the other felt nothing but pride and joy – even at times when they took positions the other would have had. The people were choosing an idol over their miraculous bond with G-d and abandoning his brother. Aharon's dismay and anguish must have been beyond anything we could imagine.

In the midst of this anguish, Aharon could have left them to their fate. He could have let them suffer the grave consequences for their own error. Or – Aharon could save them from the worst of it. He could lead the rebellion - violating the commandments himself and creating an idol with his own hands, in order to slow them down and minimize the gravity of their sin. These were G-d's children. G-d's pain was also great. Aharon could forfeit himself for them. Yet, if he did, he would be not only hurting himself - but his brother. What would Moshe think when he comes down and sees Aharon leading the nation in creating an idol to replace him?

Aharon saw all this and placed G-d's pain before his own. Knowing this was the only way that he can stop the people – he chose to take the lead in breaking their pact with G-d – he stepped in and created the idol himself. It was the only hope to minimize the damage. He himself took the lead and violated the first two commandments with his own hands. He threw everything away in order to minimize G-d's pain and mitigate – in whatever small way he could – the severity of the Golden Calf. It was for this decision that Hashem chose Aharon to be the High Priest and the father of all priests for all time.

As we go through life, there are many situations where right and wrong appear to be abundantly clear. There are things that must be done and there are things that we simply do not do. In those situations serving G-d and maintaining our morals is noteworthy and shows our commitment. Yet, at the same time, once we are committed to living a better life and choosing the higher road, we find strength in that commitment and take pride in who we are. Emboldened by this strength and pride we would literally walk through fire if needed.

There are other times, though, when living by our morals is not so simple. When right and wrong are not clearly defined it is very difficult to stand strong. It is so hard to violate our principles and morals – even if we think it's the right thing to do. It is in these gray areas where the greatest challenge sometimes begins. Aharon was in a position where either choice was disastrous – either he abandons G-d's children completely to their fate, or he violates the essence of his new pact with G-d and abandons his brother. Aharon reached deep within himself, put all personal concern aside and recognized that all those involved in the Golden Calf were just as holy as he was and he would cause the least pain to G-d by joining them and stalling them. This strength of character was the greatest display of devotion that Aharon – or any human being - could display.

The gray areas of life are where we truly have to look deep within and ask ourselves, "Who's wishes are most important to me?" It is in the gray of life that we can shine brightest and show our true colors. It is in those decisions where we can reach the greatest spiritual heights and the greatest devotion to G-d.

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Parshas Ki Sisa – The Value of Experience

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

After Moshe spent forty days on Har Sinai with G-d teaching him all of Torah, Moshe was told to go down quickly for his people had made an idol. When Moshe gets to the bottom of the mountain, he speaks briefly with his student Yehoshua, who had been waiting there. Yehoshua is unaware of the Golden Calf, noting only there is a sound of great commotion in the camp and assumes there is a battle. Moshe has a brief discussion, disproving the battle theory and then heads into the camp proper. When he arrives in the camp and sees the Golden Calf before him, Moshe immediately destroys the Luchos – the Tablets containing the Ten Commandments. The Gemara in Yevamos (62a) explains that Moshe understood that after the great sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people were not worthy to receive the Torah. When G-d later instructed Moshe to carve out new tablets, G-d referenced the old Tablets using language that indicates praise for Moshe's decision to have broken the first set of Tablets, teaching us that Moshe was right to have destroyed them.

The Maharsh"a (ibid.) asks a thoughtful question. If Moshe understood that the sin of the Golden Calf rendered the nation unfit to receive the Torah, why then did he wait to break the Tablets until he reached the camp? While Moshe was still on top of the mountain, G-d told him that the people had made an idol for themselves. Yet, Moshe did not choose to act then. When Moshe came down the mountain, he stopped briefly for a conversation with Yehoshua. It was only once Moshe entered the camp proper that he broke the Tablets. If the Jewish people weren't fit to receive the Torah, then why did Moshe wait?

The Maharsh"a quotes the Sefer Ha'ikrim (Ma'amar 4 Chapter 15) who explains that part of the power of experience is that it sharpens and heightens the emotions. A person is more emotionally impacted by what he sees and experiences than by what he knows. When Moshe was on Har Sinai, he knew that the people were sinning, but was not fully emotionally moved and charged by this knowledge. It was only once Moshe had seen it with his own eyes that Moshe was pained to the point where he felt the need to break the Tablets.

At first glance, it would seem that the Maharsh"a is not answering his question. The Maharsh"a's question was only once the Gemara tells us that Moshe's decision to break the Tablets was based on logical reasoning. Since, Moshe was aware of the sin before coming down from Har Sinai, then he should have followed the logic and reasoning right away. How does Moshe's greater pain in seeing for himself explain why he didn't act on G-d's word alone?

Perhaps, the Maharsh"a is teaching us that the value of experience is more than just greater understanding and empathy. Experience helps to deepen our appreciation and awareness, even of situations we know. Sometimes even clear ramification may only be noticeable to one who has experience. It was only once he saw with his own eyes that Moshe was able to fully appreciate the gravity of what they had done, and it was only once Moshe had that added level of clarity that he realized that we were no longer worthy of the Torah. The deeper emotional awareness gave Moshe a greater clarity on the logic and reasoning, as well.

While there are many important things in each person's life, and they can't all be fully experienced, Hashem has given us a great gift in our imagination. When we take a few moments to stop and imagine being there, we can gain some level of experience, and with it a greater level of awareness and understanding. By taking a few moments to imagine living someone else's life – with all of their troubles and challenges, we can perhaps gain a new level of empathy. By taking a few moments to consider the world and the setting of the stories of the Torah, we can begin to find new lessons in the same stories we read before. Experience deepens our awareness, awareness deepens our understanding, and we may then see things we had missed before.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Note: Because Rabbi Singer's new Dvar Torah did not make my deadline for early posting, with his permission, I am sharing his Dvar Torah from last year.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Spiritual Intimacy – Know God, Know Yourself

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Moshe Wants to Know God

Shortly after the momentous occasion of the Giving of the Law on Har Sinai, the Israelites commit a preposterous transgression. They make and worship a molten idol, the Golden Calf. Moshe pleads with God to show mercy to the rebellious nation, and then makes a request which seems to be out of place:

Show me Your ways so I may know You. (Ex. 33:13)

Moshe continues to explain why he believes that he deserves that knowledge:

You said that You have known me by name and that I have found grace in Your eyes.

To know by name and to find favor in one's eyes is to have a personal relationship. Moshe argues that since he has this special relationship with God, he should get to know God better. God's response to that request was a mystical, breathtaking event, in which Moshe was hiding in the crevice of the rock while God passed His glory before him, proclaiming:

YHWH, YHWH, a God compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yet I do

not remit all punishment, but visit the iniquity of parents upon children, and children's children, upon the third and fourth generation.

Is God Merciful or Vengeful?

This proclamation seems contradictory, as it describes God as both merciful and vengeful. The Midrash explains that Moshe's request was to understand the duality of God's ways in dealing with His world and His creatures. Moshe wanted to understand Divine justice, he wanted to know why the righteous suffer while the wicked flourish.

This is a valid question, and probably the most pressing one for a believer, but it does not belong here, in the aftermath of the Golden Calf. God was about to punish the sinners and reward Moshe, according to a logical system of reward and punishment. There was nothing out of the ordinary to justify such a request.

To Love is to Know

I believe that the answer hides in plain sight. Moshe wanted to get to know God better to have a better relationship. We can paraphrase his words to say: if you truly love me, tell me more about yourself. These are words spoken between spouses and friends. They want a proof for the love and for the stability of the relationship. They understand that intimate knowledge will strengthen and deepen the relationship.

The other biblical source which most resembles Moshe's request is between Delilah and Shimshon, a wife and husband, although there it is an act of treachery and deceit (Judges 16:15):

She said to him: How can you say you love me, when your heart is not with me? You have misled me three times and [still] did not tell me what makes you so strong.

Moshe's demand for an intimate relationship is not just for himself. Moshe and Israel are one, and despite their iniquities, he feels bound to them by his responsibility and love. He wants to deliver on the promise he conveyed to the people in Egypt, that the Israelites will serve God on Har Sinai. He wants that service to be more than abstract faith and technical rituals. He wants it to be an intimate relationship.

Keeping the Flame Alive

Moshe wants to know how we can constantly infuse our life with religious and spiritual excitement. He deliberately uses the verb יָדַע, to know, which in Biblical Hebrew connotes deep intimacy. A marriage can go stale when spouses are no more lovers but merely two people who happen to share assets, memories, and offspring. Spiritual life can be similarly eroded when excitement and inspiration are taken over by routine.

A child growing up in an observant household, people who return to their Jewish roots, or Jews by choice are excited with every new aspect of religious life. Shabbat is amazing, prayers are inspiring, and shaking the lulav is elevating. The moment when that child, returning Jew, or a Jew-by-choice is accepted as a full-fledged member of the adult congregation is a beautiful and memorable moment. However, a time might come when they know exactly what to do, when to do it, how to fulfil their responsibilities towards God, and what to expect in return. Because of that, many people find themselves in a midlife religious crisis. They are going through the motions to the letter of the law, but they have no spark, excitement, or sense of anticipation.

Moshe's request to know God better is an argument in his people's favor. He claims that they have sinned because they only know the rigid law and God's service. If they would know God with the love and passion of spouses or dear friends, the Golden Calf would not have happened.

This interpretation is supported by numerous biblical references which describe our relationship with God in terms of marital life¹. That analogy inspired the mystics of Safed to create a special matrimonial ceremony on Friday nights, which has been accepted by all Jews. They would face the serene mountains of the Galilee at sunset and welcome the Shabbat, in the way a groom welcomes the bride:

Come my beloved towards the bride, let us welcome the Shabbat.

Spiritual Intimacy

God's response to Moshe's request is a key to having a better spiritual and marital life. The contradiction mentioned above teaches us that part of the relationship is responsibility and caretaking. Visiting the iniquities upon third and fourth generations means that although one can be forgiving, there must be a limit when destructive behavior is evident. When one parent fails to take care of the children and puts them in danger, the other parent cannot stand idly by. When spouses do not treat each other with love and respect, their direct descendants will bear terrible consequences.

Love and kindness infuse the relationship with a sense of commitment and gratitude. In the spiritual realm, the laws between us and others are less prone to become routine actions, and they always give us new insights and excitement.

The elation from giving another person is more than charity and it is not only monetary. It is giving and sharing time, attention, advice, and compassion. It is extended, as the verse says, to thousands. Every person we meet and interact with can teach us something new about the world and about ourselves. When that interaction is one of loving kindness it enables us to see and connect with the humanity in the other, and it is then an uplifting and inspirational experience.

There is Always a Mystery

Before God reveals some secrets to Moshe, He tells him:

You will not be able to see My face, for man cannot see Me while alive... you will see My back but My face will not be seen. (Ex. 33:20-23)

In the quest for God, and in the quest for love, there should always be an unknown. When spouses or friends seek and find new facets of their beloved, they are filled with a sense of mystery and longing, which breed love and passion.

Our quest for God is in essence a search for a meaning and a definition of oneself. We should strive to constantly uncover new secrets and explore new mysteries, and to grow intellectually and emotionally. These secrets are in the wisdom of the Torah, science, and the natural world, but most importantly, they are in each and every one of us.

Moshe, hiding in the crevice, waiting to see God's face, is an allegory to any human who seeks God. We are both the prophet and the image of God. We sometimes hide, we feel lost, and we cower in the dark. We often pursue a dream or a vision which is tantalizingly close but always a step ahead, and we can glimpse its rear.

We believe in the vision and do not give up. We want to see its face, so we come out of the cave. We thus live a wholesome, compassionate life. We emulate God's attributes, showing responsibility and honesty, and treating others with love and compassion. When we finally reach the elusive image, and when it turns to look at us, we know: I have found God, I have found myself!

Footnote:

1. See for example Song of Songs, Isaiah 49:14-21; 50:1; 54:1-8, Jeremiah 2:1-2; 3:1-5.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school).

Breaking Our Tablets

By Rabbi Gabriel Greenberg *

In this week's parsha Ki Tisa, Moshe received the two tablets which contain the Ten Commandments. When he came down and saw the people dancing in front of the golden calf, he smashed those two tablets. This prompts God at the beginning of Exodus Chapter 34 to tell Moshe to "carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, 'asher shibarta,' which you shattered (Ex. 34:1). Commentators have noted that when God says this, that last phrase 'asher shibarta' seems extraneous.

Why? It's obvious that those first tablets were the ones that Moshe broke. Is it possible that God is referring to another set of tablets? No, there's only one set of tablets, the set that Moshe broke. So why does God have to specify the ones that you broke?

The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat notes that it's as if God is making a play on the words 'asher shibarta,' which you broke. Reish Lakish says that 'asher' is like yashar, and God is telling Moshe 'Yashar koach' (Shabbat 87a). Good for Moshe, Moshe made the right decision to break the tablets.

This is a fascinating midrash that this phrase is meant to invoke God cheering Moshe's breaking of the tablets. It is quite a radical idea. The tablets are a once in a universe creation with words inscribed by God's own finger. Yet Moshe breaks them. Here the Gemara is suggesting that God says Yashar Koach, good on you Moshe, well done.

What can this possibly mean? There are many different commentaries which have ascribed a variety of meanings to this action. For me, the one that sits most resonantly is that we live between a constant tension of maintaining tradition and being too rigid and stuck in our ways.

One of the joys and beauties of Judaism is that we take what we inherit from our parents, grandparents, and tradition and we try to guard that very closely. We live it in our own lives and pass it on to our children. That's so fundamental to what we do as observant Jews. At the same time, sometimes our practice can become too rigid, too reified, too solidified. There are times, says the Gemara, that even God says that we have to break those things and break those habits, even for something which has been seen as holy by previous generations.

Sometimes we have to smash and reinvent or reimagine our practice. That must be done according to Torah and Halakha, but we have to make sure that we do not become too rigid in our ways. To that, God will say, 'Yashar Koach,' 'Asher shibarta.' Good job that you broke those strictures, those ways of being that you had become reified within.

Always a pleasure learning with you.

* Executive Director at Penn Hillel, Rabbi Greenberg received semicha from YCT in 2012.

** From Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah: Friends, it has been my true privilege these many years to share with you my thoughts on the parsha, both in written form and more recently as videos. Now the time has come to pass the baton over to our amazing rabbis in the field. I know that we will be enriched by their insights and unique and distinct perspectives, as they bring the Torah, refracted through the lens of their rabbinates and the people they are serving, to all of us. We start with Rabbi Gabe Greenberg, executive director of Penn Hillel.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2022/02/kitisa22/>

The Playing of the Bull and The Squirting of Seltzer

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Last week we spoke of play and its importance in our life. But it seems our portion this week is determined to discount it. What started as fear due to Moshe's absence devolved into the building of a golden calf, outright idol worship, and public immorality.

The Torah describes the final descent of the Jews into this state as "Vayakumu Litzachek," or "They arose to Tzachek." Tzachek is a Hebrew word that generally, means to play, sport, laugh, or jest -- in other words, having the nonserious attitude we usually associate when we hear the word play.

Perhaps you agree with the Torah's negative classification of play here. Indeed, many of us can sometimes empathize with the opinion of Krusty the Clown's father, Rabbi Hyman Krustovsky (voiced by Jackie Mason), when he told his son not to become a clown because "Life is not fun. Life is serious. Seltzer is for drinking not for squirting." Or we may like

the sentiment expressed about 1930's Jewish culture in the Bronx in Chaim Potok's 1975 novel, "In The Beginning." There it says that "childhood was something you grew out of," implying that the play attitude was not seen as a positive in that world.

Of course life isn't all play. However, we cannot prove from this example that the Torah takes a no-holds-barred attitude against it. Examples abound of the word "Tzachek" in the Torah used in a positive context.

God loved Avraham's Tzachek (laugh) so much that He commanded Avraham to name his son that word. Sarah describes her blessing of a son as a "Tzachek" that God gave her, and the Torah describes Yitzchak as being Mitzacheik Rivkah, his wife. which implies the positive role that play played in their intimacy.

Tzachek can be used in both negative and positive contexts. So maybe we should ask a better question.

Instead of asking for the definitive Torah attitude to play, let's ask what causes play to go so wrong. How do we play like Avraham's laughter and not let our play devolve into the "playing of the bull" that Israel committed? What do you think? In what cases can play evolve us and when can it do the opposite?

Let's zoom out a bit first. How the Jews could have gone so wrong right after the giving of the Torah has always been a sticking point for me. What does that say about the meaning of any religious experience if we can sink so low afterwards anyway? The only answer that ever satisfied me was one I read from Rav Aryeh Kaplan, a late Jewish rabbi and teacher who also happened to have a PhD in physics. He pointed out that all was not quite right with the Sinai experience. While we imagine seeing God himself to be the most sublime thing we could aspire to, it actually wouldn't be. Because when we have such a direct experience, we lose any sense of agency we have over ourselves. To fully experience a being like God means to be completely absorbed in Him to such a degree that we lose our independence.

When we as humans lose our perceived independence, our freedom to think and act as we see fit, we rebel. A part of us wants it back, and we will do anything we can to show that we are separate independent thinking beings. If you back someone into a corner they will lash out. That's the imperfection of Sinai. It was such a powerful experience that we lost our sense of agency. We had no way to take part in Jewish tradition. We had no way to express any of our own thoughts. Would you want to be in a relationship like this? Where you have no way to contribute at all? No matter how wonderful, engaging, and spectacular the person you are with is, you will hate it if you never get a chance to talk.

At Sinai, the people were confronted with absolute definitive Truth. So they lost their freedom to be curious, their freedom to explore, their freedom to play. That's when play turns its ugly side. When you or someone outside you tries to remove it by sheer brute force.

Put another way, if you try to force someone to do something, if you take away their choice they will rebel even if you're one hundred percent right. We as humans need the freedom to explore and find the answer for ourselves. All work and no play turns us into robots or rebels.

Here's some stories from Midrash that show us that our predecessors understood this perspective:

1) God forces the Jews to accept the Torah by holding Sinai over their heads and threatening to bury them should they refuse to accept. The Jews then rebelled and made the calf.

2) King Hezekiah tried in his time to force the Jews to study Torah by threatening them with the sword. His son King Menashe soon after spread idols everywhere in the land of Judah.

Force never works. That's why in the second try, God told Moshe to write the second Luchot and teach it to Israel. The Torah would now have an Oral dimension. The Oral Torah, all the discussions of the Talmud, Midrash and all the

dialogues of Jewish history are our way that we as a nation play and discover. It's how we maintain ourselves not as obedient robots but as partners with God. It's how we can question and challenge even God Himself (as the prophets were wont to do).

It's how we keep our sense of play.

Although sometimes quirting seltzer can also be effective. I think I've just discovered my Purim costume.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Moshe Rube

Reading Suggestions: See the book Homo Ludens by Johan Huizinga for an in-depth discussion of these and more questions about the play element in culture.

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Rav Kook Torah

Ki Tissa: When Bad Things Happen to Good People

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

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

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

Two Factors

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

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

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

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

The wicked person who hails from a righteous family is naturally helpful to others, and may have inherited many other positive character traits. Therefore, his portion in life is good, as he contributes to the world. But the wicked who comes

from a wicked family is usually an utterly evil person. His lot in life is made difficult and unstable, in order to limit the damage that he may cause in the world.

Beyond Our Grasp

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

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

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/KI_TISA59.htm

Two Types of Religious Encounter (Ki Tissa 5773) By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Framing the epic events of this week's sedra are two objects — the two sets of Tablets, the first given before, the second after, the sin of the Golden Calf. Of the first, we read:

"The Tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the Tablets."

These were perhaps the holiest object in history: from beginning to end, the work of God. Yet within hours they lay shattered, broken by Moses when he saw the calf and the Israelites dancing around it.

The second Tablets, brought down by Moses on the tenth of Tishri, were the result of his prolonged plea to God to forgive the people. This is the historic event that lies behind Yom Kippur (tenth of Tishri), the day marked in perpetuity as a time of favour, forgiveness and reconciliation between God and the Jewish people. The second Tablets were different in one respect. They were not wholly the work of God:

Carve out two stone Tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first Tablets, which you broke.

Hence the paradox: the first Tablets, made by God, did not remain intact. The second Tablets, the joint work of God and Moses, did. Surely the opposite should have been true: the greater the holiness, the more eternal. Why was the more holy object broken while the less holy stayed whole? This is not, as it might seem, a question specific to the Tablets. It is, in fact, a powerful example of a fundamental principle in Jewish spirituality.

The Jewish mystics distinguished between two types of Divine-human encounter. They called them *itaruta de-l'eylah* and *itaruta deletata*, respectively "an awakening from above" and "an awakening from below." The first is initiated by God, the second by mankind. An "awakening from above" is spectacular, supernatural, an event that bursts through the chains of causality that at other times bind the natural world. An "awakening from below" has no such grandeur. It is a gesture that is human, all too human.

Yet there is another difference between them, in the opposite direction. An "awakening from above" may change nature, but it does not, in and of itself, change human nature. In it, no human effort has been expended. Those to whom it happens are passive. While it lasts, it is overwhelming; but only while it lasts. Thereafter, people revert to what they were. An "awakening from below," by contrast, leaves a permanent mark.

Because human beings have taken the initiative, something in them changes. Their horizons of possibility have been expanded. They now know they are capable of great things, and because they did so once, they are aware that they can do so again. An awakening from above temporarily transforms the external world; an awakening from below permanently transforms our internal world. The first changes the universe; the second changes us.

Two Examples. The first: Before and after the division of the Red Sea, the Israelites were confronted by enemies: before, by the Egyptians, after by the Amalekites. The difference is total.

Before the Red Sea, the Israelites were commanded to do nothing:

"Stand still and you will see the deliverance God will bring you today . . . God will fight for you; you need only be still." Shemot 14:13-14

Facing the Amalekites, however, the Israelites themselves had to fight:

"Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose men and go out and fight the Amalekites.'" Shemot 17:9

The first was an "awakening from above," the second an "awakening from below." The difference was palpable. Within three days after the division of the Sea, the greatest of all miracles, the Israelites began complaining again (no water, no food). But after the war against the Amalekites, the Israelites never again complained when facing conflict (the sole exception – when the spies returned and the people lost heart – was when they relied on hearsay testimony, not on the immediate prospect of battle itself). The battles fought for us do not change us; the battles we fight, do.

The second example: Mount Sinai and the Tabernacle. The Torah speaks about these two revelations of "God's glory" in almost identical terms:

The glory of God settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the Cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day God called to Moses from within the Cloud. Then the Cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of God filled the Tabernacle.

The difference between them was that the sanctity of Mount Sinai was momentary, while that of the Tabernacle was permanent (at least, until the Temple was built, centuries later). The revelation at Sinai was an "awakening from above." It was initiated by God. So overwhelming was it that the people said to Moses, "Let God not speak to us any more, for if He does, we will die" (Shemot 20:16). By contrast, the Tabernacle involved human labour. The Israelites made it; they prepared the structured space the Divine Presence would eventually fill. Forty days after the revelation at Sinai, the Israelites made a Golden Calf. But after constructing the sanctuary they made no more idols – at least until they entered the land. That is the difference between the things that are done for us and the things we have a share in doing ourselves. The former change us for a moment, the latter for a lifetime.

There was one other difference between the first Tablets and the second. According to tradition, when Moses was given the first Tablets, he was given only Torah shebichtav, the "written Torah." At the time of the second Tablets, he was given Torah she-be'al peh, the Oral Torah as well: "R. Jochanan said: God made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of the Oral Law, as it says :

"For by the mouth of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel" Shemot 34:27

The difference between the Written and Oral Torah is profound. The first is the word of God, with no human contribution. The second is a partnership – the word of God as interpreted by the mind of man. The following are two of several remarkable passages to this effect:

R. Judah said in the name of Shmuel: Three thousand traditional laws were forgotten during the period of mourning for Moses. They said to Joshua: "Ask" (through ruach hakodesh, the holy spirit). Joshua replied, "It is not in heaven." They said to Samuel, "Ask." He replied, "These are the commandments – implying that no prophet has the right to introduce anything new." (B.T. Temurah 16a) "If a thousand prophets of the stature of Elijah and Elisha were to give one interpretation of a verse, and one thousand and one Sages were to offer a different interpretation, we follow the majority: the law is in accordance with the thousand-and-one Sages and not in accordance with the thousand prophets."

Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishneh, Introduction

Any attempt to reduce the Oral Torah to the Written – by relying on prophecy or Divine communication – mistakes its essential nature as the collaborative partnership between God and man, where revelation meets interpretation. Thus, the difference between the two precisely mirrors that between the first and second Tablets. The first were Divine, the second the result of Divine-human collaboration. This helps us understand a glorious ambiguity. The Torah says that at Sinai the Israelites heard a “great voice *velo yasaf*” (Deut. 5:18). Two contradictory interpretations are given of this phrase. One reads it as “a great voice that was never heard again”; the other as “a great voice that did not cease” – i.e. a voice that was always heard again. Both are true. The first refers to the Written Torah, given once and never to be repeated. The second applies to the Oral Torah, whose study has never ceased.

It also helps us understand why it was only after the second Tablets, not the first, that “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two Tablets of Testimony in his hands, he was unaware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with God” (Shemot 34:29). Receiving the first Tablets, Moses was passive. Therefore, nothing in him changed. For the second, he was active. He had a share in the making. He carved the stone on which the words were to be engraved. That is why he became a different person. His face shone.

In Judaism, the natural is greater than the supernatural in the sense that an “awakening from below” is more powerful in transforming us, and longer-lasting in its effects, than is an “awakening from above.” That was why the second Tablets survived intact while the first did not. Divine intervention changes nature, but it is human initiative – our approach to God – that changes us.

[Note: For early Devrei Torah, including this one, footnotes are no longer available.]

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tissa/two-types-of-religious-encounter/>

Were the First Tablets a Mistake?

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2022

When I was in yeshivah, there was an oft-repeated anecdote that went something like this:

Imagine a bonfire, a raging, roaring flame licking the sky and sending billows of smoke all around. Then, you stop feeding it and it starts to die down. At first, it reduces only slightly, but eventually, as time goes on and you continue to deny it any fuel, it becomes a small crackle and ultimately peters out.

So it is with life: When you're young, you can often be very spiritual, very pious, and . . . very naïve. And that's a good thing. Why? Because as you get older, you're bound to cool off. Life happens, you get distracted, and before long, the “heat” of your youth is all but forgotten.

It is here that the metaphor kicks in: If you start out with a raging bonfire, chances are you'll be left with at least some sort of smolder by middle age down to the finish line. Even when you stop feeding your fire, there will still be something left. But if you never fed it in the first place, well, then, you'll peter out very quickly.

What Was ‘Plan A’?

Parshat Ki Tisa tells the dramatic and tragic story of the Sin of the Golden Calf. Just days after the Jews witness the most spectacular G-dly revelation on record, they sin to catastrophic proportions. As a result, the tablets are destroyed, and only after intense negotiation with G-d does Moses secure forgiveness and a second set of tablets.

This time around, the ceremony was much different. Whereas the first set came along with thunder, lighting, and much pomp, these were given quietly, without fanfare. This was a deliberate change — as Rashi points out:

Since the first [tablets] were accompanied by loud noises, sounds, and with a multitude, the evil eye affected them. [Our conclusion is that] there is nothing better than modesty.¹

Rashi's reasoning immediately raises the obvious question: Why, then, were the first set given with such fanfare? Did G d only figure out the advantage of modesty after "plan A" went so horribly awry? That seems unlikely. So why go with pomp if modesty is so much better?

'Plan B' Is Only After 'Plan A'

The answer is that "plan A" really was a good plan, and it remains that way. Moreover, "plan B" is only good as a second option, but not as the first.

To explain:

Take a look at Abraham, the first Jew. He was brash and bold about his beliefs, spreading them far and wide, going down in history as the father of monotheism. Famously, he would provide wayfarers in the desert with food and drink, and then teach them to thank the G d Who really provided for them. "Abraham converted the men, and Sarah converted the women," we are told. This power couple had a whole factory going on in the Mesopotamian desert.

Apparently, they didn't get Rashi's memo.

And that's because a modest and timid approach is great, but only after the thunder and lighting. Abraham and Sarah were at the beginning of the process, so they needed to operate loud and hot. This way, when they would eventually start cooling off, it wouldn't die out.

When it came to giving the Torah, the same pattern occurred. It started off loud and proud—with thunder and lightning and G d's presence over the entire world. "Not a bird chirped, nor a cow mooed"² when the Torah was given, so powerful was the impact.

The Jewish people were on board as well. They were on a spiritual high, full of the fire and passion of their newly minted relationship with G d. It was brash, bold, and beautiful.

But as highs tend to, it wore off very quickly, and sadly, the people sinned with the Golden Calf. At this point, the passionate fire was barely a smoldering ember. It was time to resort to "plan B" — something quieter and more sustainable. And so, the second tablets were delivered without fanfare, for, "There's nothing better than modesty."

But, this "modesty" is only healthy, sustainable, and nurturing coming on the heels of bold passion. It's not as if you can start off with a quiet sustainable flame; with that approach, you'll never get anywhere. It's only when you start off with a roaring fire that you can thereafter let it quiet to a steady crackle.

Start Out Hot

So it is in life.

The honeymoon phase is always the most passionate. Whether it's a spiritual or physical experience, more often than not, we start off hot out of the gate.

"Beginning," can be the start of a longer trajectory of life. In a romantic relationship, for example, "beginning" is very often the starting point, when the knot is tied. On a spiritual journey of discovery, say you've discovered Judaism later in life, the "beginning" is often those first days and months of wonder.

But it's not limited to that. "Beginning" can be the start of the day, when you're fresh and inspired, such that your morning prayers are impassioned and lively. By the time your day is halfway through, your afternoon prayers are barely pulling their weight on whatever leftover sputtering flames you can muster.

Or, you sign up for a new parenting course, and in the beginning, you're so fired up and committed to change that your kids look at you with skepticism and wonder if you've gone mad. But then it starts to wear off and you're yelling and threatening them again (hopefully not as much).

This is all normal. Such is life: it starts out hot, and then it cools off.

So remember the truth of the bonfire, and the message of the two-tablet sequence: start off really hot. At those beginning stages, don't worry too much about being tempered and sophisticated. Don't get too concerned that you're being fanatic, or not sufficiently objective. Just go all-in and stoke those flames into a raging inferno.

Why?

Because it's going to cool off; that is almost guaranteed. So if you manage to bring things to a fever pitch, you'll be left with some semblance of healthy inspiration later on. If not, you'll be left with nothing.

And who wants to get stuck with nothing?³

FOOTNOTES:

1. Rashi, Exodus 34:3.
2. Midrash, Shemot Rabah 29:9.
3. This essay is based on Sfat Emet al Hatorah, Ki Tisa, 5639.

* Writer, editor, and Rabbi, Brooklyn, NY. Editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5397909/jewish/Were-the-First-Tablets-a-Mistake.htm#footnoteRef1a5397909

Giving Credit When Credit Is Due

By Yossi Ives * © Chabad 2022

Plagiarism is a major no-no in the academic world, one that can ruin a person's career and forever taint other accomplishments.

The Torah, too, is quite clear in telling us that we are to credit received wisdom to those who shared it with us, and that failure to do so is tantamount to stealing. But does this apply in all cases?

To probe the depths of this question, the Rebbe begins with a story from the Zohar:

Rabbi Yose and Rabbi Chiyya were traveling together, when Rabbi Chiyya shared an exposition on a verse from Isaiah. Impressed, Rabbi Yose declared, "This journey truly merited to benefit from this thought." Rabbi Yose then inquired of Rabbi Chiyya, "From whom did you hear this thought?" Rabbi Chiyya responded that once he was walking along the way and he heard Rav Hamnuna the Elder¹ teach this verse to Rabbi Acha.²

If Rabbi Chiyya was aware that he had derived this teaching from another sage, why did he not make the correct attribution from the outset? After all, surely he was aware of the tradition recorded in Ethics of the Fathers, "Anyone who delivers a teaching in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world, as it is written: 'Esther informed the King in the name of Mordechai.'"³ In the Purim story, it came to Mordechai's attention that some advisors were plotting to have the king killed, and Esther passed along the information in Mordechai's name. This led to the king acting in gratitude towards Mordechai, which became an important part in the salvation of the entire nation.

Knowing this, surely Rabbi Chiyya should have acknowledged from the outset where his inspiring thought originated.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, father of the Rebbe, explains that in the case of Esther the information was directly passed to her by Mordechai.⁴ This made it imperative that Esther give the appropriate attribution when informing the king, retracing the steps of how the information was shared. Not so in the case of Rabbi Chiyya, who merely overheard the Torah thought. As the idea had never been intentionally shared with him, he could not say that this was information given to him. It seems that Rabbi Yose sensed this, which is why he asked Rabbi Chiyya, "From where did you hear this?" and not "Who told you this?"

A significant difficulty remains with this story, as the rabbis also regarded giving correct attribution to one's sources a halachic imperative. According to the Midrash, "Anyone who fails to state a teaching in the name of the one who said it, the verse says about him, 'Do not rob the poor on account of his being poor.'⁵ Thus when a person hears something, he must always repeat it in the name of the one who said it."⁶ Halachah thus rules that "One who does not repeat a teaching in the name of the one who said it transgresses a prohibition."⁷

This seems to apply equally to overheard teachings as well as those intentionally transmitted.

Since Rabbi Hamnuna was not necessarily aware that his teaching was overheard by Rabbi Chiyya, it could be argued that the lack of attribution could have been a sin. How could Rabbi Chiyya fail to provide credit where credit was due?

The Rebbe supplies a new perspective by drawing attention to something quite glaring: there are veritably hundreds of teachings in the ancient texts that are never attributed to their original sources. How can this be?

This is particularly striking in relation to Rabbi Eliezer the Great, who said about himself that he "never taught a teaching that he had not heard from his own teacher."⁸ Yet many of Rabbi Eliezer's teachings are not attributed.

This provides the turning point for a new understanding. The obligation to credit one's learning to one's teachers only applies if the person is "holding onto" the learning of another. In many cases, however, the knowledge becomes fully integrated into the mind of the one who studies it. It is no longer another person's idea that he has acquired, but an authentic part of his own mind. By sharing the teaching, he is no longer passing along someone else's idea, but instead giving of his own self. At that point, the idea is as much his own as it is his teacher's.

We see this from the way the Talmud permits a teacher to forgo his honor:

By what right can the teacher forgo his honor as a Torah scholar, when the honor is not due to him but to the Torah that does not belong to him? It very much is his Torah, as it is written regarding the righteous 'His only desire is in G d's Torah and in his Torah he delves day and night.'⁹ As if to say that the Torah starts out G d's Torah, but by virtue of the toiling of the righteous it can now be called 'his Torah.'¹⁰

The teaching shared by Rabbi Chiyya was one he had devoted himself to with such deep intensity it had become firmly part of his own repertoire, evidenced by how inspired his colleague, Rabbi Yose, was from hearing it.

The point of Torah study is not to accumulate knowledge and become better educated. The goal is to absorb what we learn so deeply that it enriches our very soul and can be truly called our own. We may not necessarily attribute to others, not for lack of politeness but because the learning has become a part of ourselves. We are not passing on information we gathered elsewhere, but giving from our inner core. When we give the proper attribution, we do so in order to pay homage to the tradition, not because we don't feel attached to the idea which is now etched into our mind.

Adapted from Likkutei Sichot vol. 36, Ki Tisa II (pg. 180-186)

FOOTNOTES:

1. According to another version, it was Rabbi Shimon.
2. Likkutei Sichot, vol. 2, Ki Tisa, p. 188:1.
3. Avot 6:6.
4. Likkutei Levi Yitzchak, vol. 2 p. 140.
5. Proverbs 22:22.
6. Tanchuma, Numbers 22.

7. Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 156:2.

8. Sukkah 27b.

9. Psalms 1:2.

10. Kiddushin 32a-b.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5052496/jewish/Giving-Credit-When-Credit-Is-Due.htm

A Shining Face

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky * © Chabad 2022

After his third 40-day stay on Mount Sinai, Moses descended on the 10th of Tishrei, 2449, carrying the second set of Tablets, which replaced the first set that Moses broke when he saw the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf. Moses' extended stay in G d's presence had left a lasting impression on his body: his face radiated light.

A Shining Face

Moses was not aware that the skin of his face had become radiant. Exodus 34:29

G d Himself chiseled the first set of tablets out of the rocks on Mount Sinai, whereas the second tablets were chiseled by Moses. Nevertheless, it was specifically after receiving the second set of tablets, rather than the first set, that Moses' face shone.

This is because when something is given to us from G d without our having worked to earn it, it does not penetrate our very being. It is thus no accident that the first tablets were broken, whereas the second set never were. When we work for something, it can remain with us permanently; something that is received unearned can be more easily lost.

Because Moses chiseled the second tablets himself, their holiness could penetrate his physical body, and therefore his face shone. Similarly, the effort we expend in studying the Torah and fulfilling G d's commandments refines even our physical bodies. If we exert ourselves to the point that the Torah penetrates us, our faces glow.¹

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

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¹ Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, p. 179

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

A Nation of Leaders

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, burns 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

By Allen and Barbara (Baras) Kessel
in commemoration of the yahrzeit
on the 18th of Adar of Hy Baras, a"h
(Chaim Shlomo ben Usher Zelig)

By Sari & Russell Mayer, Avi, Atara, and Arella
on the occasion of the yahrzeit (11 Adar Aleph)
of Sari's father, Dr. A. Abba Walker, z"l
(Avraham Abba ben Shlomo)

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.

[1] This statement has been attributed to Benjamin Disraeli, Stanley Baldwin and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"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 nations' 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:

Likutei Divrei Torah

"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 (YHVH). And Adonai (YHVH) 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.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
The Inevitable Comedown

It was over fifty years ago, but I remember the feelings very well. They were overwhelming and were not dispelled easily.

It was just after I had completed all of my course requirements and dissertation defense in the process of obtaining my doctorate in psychology. Like any graduate school experience, this was the culmination of several years of study and hard work. The ordeal was now over, and a celebration was in order.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moses then ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights. During that time, the people come down from their “high.” His disappearance mystifies them, they become impatient and irritable. We can empathize with their sense of emptiness, although we are shocked by the manner in which they choose to deal with that emptiness.

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

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

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

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

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

Likutei Divrei Torah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

More Than Just a Play on Words

The Gemara [Chulin 139] asks “Where is there an allusion to Esther in the Torah? Where is there an allusion to Haman in the Torah? Where is there an allusion to Mordechai in the Torah?” Regarding this last question, the Gemara cites the pasuk in this week’s parsha “Mor Deror” [Shemos 30:23], translated by the Aramaic Targum as Mora Dachye – which, when put together, sounds very much like the name Mordechai. This, the Gemara says, is the Torah’s allusion to Mordechai.

Each one of the Talmudic derivations – the one for Esther and the one for Haman – need explanation. But what specifically is the meaning of the statement that Mor Deror, translated as Mora Dachye, is an allusion to Mordechai in the Torah?

The Chasam Sofer gives a very interesting interpretation. There is a Talmudic discussion in the sixth perek of Maseches Brachos as to the correct Brocho to recite over a substance known as ‘musk’. The Chasam Sofer says that Mor Deror (myrrh) is a form of ‘musk’. The Rosh there in Keitzad Mevorchim cites a dispute among the early commentaries whether musk may be used as a spice for consumption. Some authorities believe that musk comes from an animal that has some kind of pocket on the back of its neck where blood coagulates. Eventually, the blood dries up and becomes a powder like substance, which is the source of musk. A person is certainly permitted to smell the musk, but the Baal HaMaor holds that since it originally comes from blood, it is forbidden for consumption. The Rosh also cites the opinion of Rabbeinu Yonah, who justifies consumption of musk because in its present form, it is totally divorced from its earlier status of blood, and is now merely a powdery substance. In halachik terminology, “panim chadoshos ba’oo l’kan” (a new identity appears before us now, and we do not consider its origins).

The Chasam Sofer links this opinion of Rabbeinu Yonah with the Gemarah in Chulin, which asks, “Where do we have an allusion to Mordechai in the Torah? As it is written ‘Mor Deror,’ which is translated as Mora Dachye.” The Chasam Sofer asks: Who was Mordechai? The Megillah identifies him as “Mordechai son of Yair son of Shimi son of Kish, a man from the Tribe of Benjamin” [Esther 2:5]. We do not necessarily know the identification of all the individuals named in this family tree, but we do know the identity of Shimi. Shimi ben Geirah is mentioned in the book of Melachim. He was a very bad person. When Dovid haMelech needed to escape from Yerushalayim

because his son Avshalom rebelled against him, Shimi ben Geirah, who was an enemy of the king, cursed out Dovid haMelech in a very horrible fashion. According to the Gemara, he called Dovid an adulterer, a murderer, and a mamzer. On his deathbed, Dovid instructed his son and successor, Shlomo, “You will know how to properly take care of Shimi ben Geirah.”

This Mordechai haTzadik, who is now on the Sanhedrin and part of the Anshei Keneses haGedolah, one of the heroes of the Megillah, was the grandson of this wicked Shimi. The lesson is that a completely righteous tzadik can emerge from a totally wicked rasha. Even though he has bad Yichus (genealogy), nonetheless, panim chadoshos ba’oo l’kan (he is a new person and we do not consider from where he came).

Where is this concept alluded to in the Torah? It is from Mor Deror – the substance Mora Dachye – musk, which originates from forbidden blood but now it is changed to a pleasant-smelling powdery spice. Rabbeinu Yona rules that it is totally permitted.

This is not just a play on words. We can learn from Mordechai not to worry about our origins. It is who you are now that is important. A person or substance can come from bad beginnings, and yet be a tzadik or permissible substance now.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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.”

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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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Beams of Light

Rabbi Gideon Sylvester

How close to God can we get? And what effect do our spiritual journeys have on our personalities and our relationships with the people around us? Jewish tradition is filled with figures who strove for closeness to God. Their paths are described and explored in the Torah, Talmud, Midrashim and Hassidic stories. While all were elevated by the quest, for some it was particularly challenging. This week’s parsha of Ki Tissa provides a window into those spiritual journeys and their effects.

“When Moshe 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” (Shemos 34: 29)

Unlike other prophets whose prophecy was episodic, Moshe had constant contact with God [1]. Yet, he remained unaware of the unique, distinguishing light which indicated a

man touched by God. When the Jewish people see him, they recoil in terror.

For most people, creating connection to God is difficult. Many Jews identify with the struggles of the great Hassidic leader Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. He was a spiritual genius who was tormented by his inability to forge a consistent relationship with God. Sometimes, his prayers flowed, creating a sense of spiritual ecstasy and connection, but such experiences were fleeting, and ephemeral. By the next day, he could neither describe his encounter nor recapture it[2]. He felt excluded from God's presence as if the Almighty was deliberately driving him away[3].

While Rabbi Nachman's sometimes felt rejected by God, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's spirituality drove away the people around him. His years of hiding from the Romans in a cave enabled him to reach great heights of spirituality, but this piety came at a high price. On his first excursion out of the cave, he spotted a farmer ploughing his fields. Unable to accept any concession to physical needs, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai burned up the people around him. Ironically, it was God who rejected this destructive spiritual elitism. "Have you come to destroy my world?" he asked Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai; commanding one of the greatest mystics of all time to return to his cave and connect to a Torah that would allow him to coexist with other mortals[4].

If Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's encounter with God led him to destroy others, Yitzhak's came at great personal cost. The Midrash suggests that as Yitzhak lay on the altar preparing to be sacrificed by his father, he gazed up towards the Shechina and he was blinded by what he saw[5]. Yitzhak modelled extraordinary spiritual heroism and self-sacrifice which was repeated by generations of Jewish martyrs. But the price was high for him and for his family.

Our Midrash contrasts the blinding effects of Yitzhak's engagement with the heavens with Moshe's experience. While Yitzhak modelled supreme calm and passivity in his divine service, the rabbis portray Moshe's time in heaven as spent clasping on to the divine throne and battling with the angels for possession of the Torah[6]. Moshe was not just a deeply spiritual person, he was also a leader, defender and teacher of the Jewish people. Perhaps this is what enabled him to withstand the overwhelming power of the heavens and to return with the spiritual glow on his face.

But why would God bestow an external mark of Moshe's inner spiritual achievements? A Midrash suggests that the light on Moshe's face reflected his modesty. Moshe's reticence to look at the Burning Bush or to derive benefit from the Shechinah were rewarded with radiance shining from his face.

A second reason is offered by the Hizkuni. He answers that whereas the first set of tablets

were given with thunder, lightning and shofar blasts, the second set which followed the sin of the Golden Calf were given without any of that drama. Consequently, people could question whether God had fully forgiven the Jewish people for the Golden Calf and whether Moshe should remain their leader. God foresaw the potential for another rebellion, so he blessed Moshe with this irrefutable sign demonstrating his special status[7]. Sadly, the sin of the Golden Calf diminished the people's ability to withstand spiritual encounters, so they were overwhelmed by Moshe's new appearance and retreated from his presence. Moshe in his great modesty brought them back.

Despite their initial reticence to look at their teacher, the Jewish people benefitted forever from the glorious glow emanating from Moshe's face. The Sforno notes that Moshe's miraculous radiance set a pattern for the future. Ever since that moment, the faces of great Torah teachers have radiated the depth and beauty of their Torah study and their exceptional loving kindness[8].

Hanging above my desk is a gallery of pictures of rabbis who have guided and inspired me. Amongst them are Rabbi Brovender and Rabbi Riskin who headed Ohr Torah Stone's Yeshivat Hamivtar. When I look up at them, I am reminded how privileged I am to have teachers whose Torah is warm, generous, scholarly and inspiring. I am deeply grateful that they never rushed to judgement, but always encouraged us on our spiritual journeys. Looking at their faces, I feel privileged to detect a glimpse of the glow that distinguishes the greatest Torah scholars.

[1] For the difference between Moshe and other prophets see Rambam, Introduction to the Guide for the Perplexed.

[2] Rabbi Natan of Nemirov, Sichot Haran, 1

[3] Rabbi Natan of Nemirov, Shivchei Haran 1: 11

[4] Talmud, Shabbat 33b

[5] Midrash, Devarim Rabbah 11: 3

[6] Talmud, Shabbat 88b.

[7] Commentary of the Hizkuni to Bereishit 34: 29.

[8] See for example Talmud, Eruvin 13b which tells how Rav always sat behind his teacher Rabbi Meir in the classroom. Rav excelled in his Torah studies, but he said that had he been privileged to sit in front of Rabbi Meir and to set eyes on the rabbi while he taught, the experience would have made him even wiser.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

The Best is Yet to Come

One of the central themes of Parshas Ki Sisa is the sin of the golden calf. To appreciate the severity of the sin, one has to look at the environment in which this transgression was committed and the resulting consequences. Firstly, Rashi (Shemos 31:18) is of the opinion that it was only as a result of the worshipping of the golden calf, whereby the Jewish people demonstrated they needed something tangible to focus on with their worship, that they received the directive to build the Mishkan. Without this mishap it would have been the

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case, as we find at the end of Parshas Yisro, that wherever man would call to Hashem, He would respond. Secondly, the Talmud (Shabbos 146A) teaches that when the nachash persuaded Chava to eat of the forbidden fruit in Gan Eden, he seduced her and cast impurity into her, which was then passed on to future generations. At Har Sinai the Jewish nation was cleansed of this impurity and returned to their original uncontaminated state. However, this taste of Gan Eden was lost with their act of idolatry with the eigel. Moreover, Medrash Tanchumah (Parshas Ki Sisa 16) teaches in the name of Reb Nechemyah that the description of the tablets that were divinely designed was, "charus al haluchos" which is understood to be related to "chairus - freedom", specifically freedom from death. Had the Jewish people not sinned with the golden calf they would have returned to the golden days of Gan Eden and be granted immortality.

In light of the above, the Jewish nation would have been satisfied if Hashem would have only restored the relationship that He had with the people prior to their sin. Indeed, throughout the parsha Moshe is pleading with Hashem that he not send an angel to lead the Jewish people but rather Hashem himself should be in their midst. Hashem responds to Moshe's prayers and provides him with the formula of approaching Hashem in the future should circumstances occur that require Divine rapprochement, the thirteen attributes of mercy. What immediately follows is a startling pronouncement that Hashem will not only reside in their midst but (Shemos 34:10) "Behold! I seal a covenant. Before your entire people I shall make great wonders - niflaos - such as have never been created in the entire world and among all the nations." What do these niflaos refer to? The Vilna Gaon (in Aderes Eliyahu) teaches that it refers to the restoration of the ananei haKavod. He continues to say that although we find that the anan accompanied the Jewish people when they left Egypt, that arrangement was only temporary until they reached the yam suf. Moreover, the anan did not protect the entire nation, only the prophets among them. Now, however, the clouds representing Hashem's presence will be over the entire nation. Thus we find (Bamidbar 14:14), "They have heard that You, Hashem, are in the midst of these people that You, Hashem, appear eye to eye and Your cloud stands over them." In addition (Shir HaShirim 3:6), "Who is this ascending from the wilderness, it's way secured and smoothed by palm-like pillars of smoke." When the Jews travelled for forty years in the desert it was a most remarkable privilege for them and was the envy of all the nations.

What is most interesting to note is the upgrade in the relationship between Hashem and His nation. Sometimes after undergoing a challenging crisis, a relationship between a couple can become even deeper, and after the eigel we experienced a greater manifestation of Hashem's love. This personifies that which the

Gemorrah (Berachos 34 B) teaches, "in the place where penitents stand, the completely righteous do not stand." Several reasons are suggested for this. Either the ba'al teshuvah is superior because it is harder for him to control his evil inclinations than it is for the perfectly righteous who never became accustomed to sin. In addition, the process of teshuvah requires contrition and admission of some guilt and wrongdoing which humbles the individual, thereby allowing for a greater closeness with his Maker. The overcoming of the negative behavior that the ba'al teshuvah experienced is much more challenging than the righteous individual who is not tempted by sin. Finally, one can suggest the high station of the ba'al teshuvah is due to the fact that he has experienced *siyata d'Shmaya* in his journey of teshuvah. Thus, the broader picture of the sin of the golden calf ends with the message of "Lehoros teshuva Larabim" (Avodah Zara 4b), communal repentance. This teshuvah is most welcome and produces extraordinary results, as seen by the *niflaos* that followed the *cheit haeigel*.

I believe that a similar powerful message emerges from the second Torah reading of this Shabbos, Parshas Parah. The Rabbis ordained that we read Parah before Pesach as a fulfillment of "u'nishalma parim sefasainu", i.e. we should recite and study the laws of the *korbanos* and that will be considered by Hashem as if we brought the *korban*. Unfortunately, we do not yet have the third Beit HaMikdash or the *parah adumah* to enable us to purify ourselves. However, the reading of Parah has to inspire us with the surety that shortly we will be privileged to have that which we are pining for. The Prophet Michah (7:15) says, "As in the days when you left the land of Egypt, I will show wonder". The Navi speaks about the *niflaos* that will come in the future in the days of Moshiach. Note that he concludes his prophecy with the familiar three verses beginning with, "Mi kail kimocha" which are understood as a being paraphrase of the thirteen attributes of mercy, which is Hashem's welcoming response to our forthcoming teshuvah. The lesson for us is that the great wonders that (we pray) we will experience in the very near future will be commensurate with the quality of our teshuva.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

In Deep Deep Trouble

When the people saw that Moshe was late in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron, and they said to him: "Come on! Make us gods that will go before us, because this man Moshe, who brought us up from the land of Egypt we don't know what has become of him." (Shemos 32:1)

This is the introduction to one of the great mistakes of all time, the Sin of the Golden Calf. We are still mopping up the fallout from that terrible event. It was beyond tragic. HASHEM even offers Moshe the option of

wiping out the entirety of the Nation of Israel and starting again from him. Had Moshe not fought ferociously against it, it just might have been. That shows us how horrific this deed was and how it shattered the heavens in cosmic way we cannot comprehend.

We look on in horror as we review this incident over and over again through the ages. Maybe it's a sign of the weakening of generations but I am left asking myself a fundamental question. I intend no irreverence in asking. I don't mean to be cynical. It just needs to be asked and spelled out clearly so this dull heart can understand. What's so bad about idolatry? Let me count the ways. Why is it so terrible? Let us try a few approaches.

Firstly, the primary and ultimately the most important relationship we can hope to have in life is with HASHEM. King David says, "As for me, closeness to HASHEM is goodness!" That is our mission. That is the goal. Without that we are, in the grand scheme of things, lost!

The Maharal studies the Ten Commandments not only in a linear fashion laying out a case for the logical flow of ideas but he also explains them in horizontal pairs. How does number 1 match up with number 6 and 2 with 7. Number 2 is the admonition against idolatry and it's no mistake that number 7 is the warning against adultery. Choosing to be loyal to other gods is an act of supreme disloyalty and a break trust in our relationship with HASHEM.

Now, what is the importance and necessity of the second Commandment? After The Almighty introduces that He is G-d, why then do we need to be told to have no other gods. That's strange! Why is there an admonition against idolatry immediately following the bold and open revelation of The Creator Himself? Our classic commentators tell us that the first of the big ten is the head pin, the impetus for all the positive, active Mitzvos. The second is the driving force behind all the negative or prohibitive Mitzvos. How does that help us?

Little Chaim comes running into the house after school. He waves quickly and casually "Hi!" to his father who's planted there in his seat on the couch. Father stops Chaim and asks him where he's off to in such a hurry. Chaim informs his father that he's going to get his ball and his glove, his bat and his cleats and join the other guys out on the field. Father shakes his head solemnly and reminds Chaim of their prior agreement. "Last night was your aunt's wedding and you were up late. The deal was that tonight it would be homework, dinner and early bed!" Dad says firmly. Chaim slinks off deeply disappointed, banging his feet and slamming doors in protest.

Five minutes later, though, that same disgruntled Chaim goes running gleefully past

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his father in the other direction with all his baseball paraphernalia. "Where are you going?" booms Father, amazed at the temerity of his little son. With a confident smile Chaim replies, "It's OK Dad, I asked Mom!" as he scoots out.

When our father, our boss, our superior commands us to do something it's hard to avoid getting the job done. If The G-d who spoke to the entire Jewish Nation on Mount Sinai also tells me to bind my head and arm with little black boxes and straps, I'll feel compelled to take my blood pressure every day simply because I was told to do so by the Creator.

However, if I am told not to do something, something that I have a desire to do, then the devilish genius within begins to search feverishly for a second opinion. Let me find or create a god, a rabbi, a religion that legalizes what I want to do so my conscience can be quieted. Then like a drug it's hard to escape!

This is the genesis of idolatry. When one is capable of consciously abandoning the most important and ultimate relationship to justify a low urge then he is in deep deep trouble.

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Taking the Blame Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35)

by Rabbi Abba Wagensberg

Taking the Blame

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week's Torah portion describes the infamous Golden Calf. When Moses prays to God to forgive the Jewish people for this incident, he pleads, "Blot me out of Your Book" (Exodus 32:32). The implication of this statement is that Moses's erasure from the Torah would somehow atone for the Jewish people's sin. We know that Moses was the humblest man who ever lived, which makes this statement seem quite surprising. The Golden Calf was a major offense. How could Moses be so presumptuous to think that removing his name from the Torah could atone for the entire fiasco?

According to the Baal Shem Tov (9), whenever Moses saw the Jewish people behaving inappropriately, he blamed himself. He assumed that his own failings were the most probable cause of the people's misbehavior. This attitude can be understood on two levels. On a Kabbalistic level, if the leader of a generation makes even a slight mistake, it can cause a ripple effect. A leader's small error in thought, speech or action may result in the people's committing major crimes.

The Mekor Mayim Chaim (6) writes that this effect can be compared to a person holding a long piece of string, with the top end between his fingers and the bottom lying on the ground. If the person moves the top of the string even slightly, the bottom will move as well. The top of the string - the "head" - symbolizes the head of the generation. Just as the head of the string causes

the bottom to move, so too does the head of the generation impact those lower down.

On a practical level, we can understand Moses's behavior as covering for the Jewish people. He took responsibility for their mistake because of his intense commitment to leading them. It is as if Moses said, "Had I been a better leader, they would have been better people." He saw their mistake as a reflection on his failure to guide them properly.

In fact, this was not the case, as we see in God's subsequent statement, "The one who really sinned to me I will blot out of My Book" (Exodus 32:33). Moses was completely guiltless in this situation. Yet we see that Moses was nevertheless prepared to cover for the people by taking the blame himself.

Now we can understand Moses's plea to be taken out of the Torah. Moses was not being presumptuous by claiming that his erasure from the Torah would atone for the people's sin; rather, he was begging, "Punish me instead of them!" A willingness to cover for other people - deflecting the accusations against them and accepting the blame ourselves - is one of the greatest ways to demonstrate love.

May we learn to love each other to the degree where we can point the accusatory finger at ourselves instead of at others. In this way, may we be able to rectify our old mistake of baseless hatred, and replace it with baseless love, that we may merit our full and final redemption.

from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: targumim@torah.org date: Feb 17, 2022, 4:34 PM subject: **Reb Yeruchem -**

Kicking the Tires

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Ki Tisa Kicking the Tires print

They have strayed quickly from the way that I commanded.[2]

How quickly? Serving the eigel ha-zahav a mere forty days after the revelation at Sinai would seem tragically quick enough. But Chazal did not see it that way. Rather, their time-frame for the failure of the Bnei Yisrael is so astonishing that it boggles the mind.

A midrash[3] lists a few opinions. "They remained with Hashem in spirit only 11 days. For 29, their thoughts turned to building an eigel ... They were with Hashem only one day. The other days were given to thoughts of an eigel Rabbi Meir says, 'Not even for a single day were they with Hashem. Instead, they stood at Sinai saying naasheh ve-nishmah with their lips, while their hearts were oriented towards avodah zarah.'"

Why would Chazal be so hyper-critical? Why would they undo the crowning achievement of the Bnei Yisrael, in reacting so beautifully when Hashem offered them the Torah. Hashem Himself praised them for their alacrity and trust. "Who revealed this secret to them - to use the very formula of naaseh ve-nishma utilized by the angels?" He placed two crowns on their heads, one for each word. Why take that away from them?

Spiritual merchandise must be weighed and evaluated in the same way that we evaluate ordinary materials. Before a major purchase, we consult experts who can find flaws that are not easy to detect. Kicking the tires of a used car doesn't tell us all that much. If we know what we are doing, we take the car to a knowledgeable mechanic for a consultation. He can look under the hood and tell us about issues we would not see on our own.

We try to find out about materials and workmanship. Most of all, we try to assess the durability of a product. How long will it function? When will wear and tear make it unreliable or inoperative?

The same is true of spiritual materials. Dovid said, "The ignoramus does not know; the fool does not understand. When the wicked spring up like grass... it is only to destroy them forever." [4] The unlearned are taken aback when evildoers thrive and flourish like grass. They do not comprehend that their success has no durability, no staying-power. As quickly as grass sprouts it also withers and dies. Its success is short-lived.

Klal Yisrael, on the other hand, is praised precisely for its durability, which is rock-solid. Literally. Bilam said, "From its origins, I see it rock-like. I see

it from the hills.”[5] Rashi renders it, “I look at their origin and at the beginning of their roots. I see them entrenched and strong as these rocks and hills, by way of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.” The strength of the Jewish people is that their greatness lasts. It passes the test of time. The nations of the world had their greatness as well, but it was a fleeting accomplishment. The greatness quickly vanished.

The midrash we cited is based on that principle. A spiritual high is pure *nitzchius*/eternity only if it in fact lasts forever. If it doesn’t, there had to have been some defect in it from the beginning. It is like a product that fails because of a flaw in its materials. Chazal understood that the terrible failure through the *eigel* did not spring up from nowhere. The people did not do an abrupt about-face from the majesty of Sinai. On some level, a flaw must have been present earlier. Like the tiniest crack in glass, it would spread until it became visible and ugly.

We understand, of course, that when Chazal spoke of thoughts that quickly turned to *avodah zarah*, they certainly did not mean it in the usual sense of outright idolatry. They meant it a super-sensitive scale, befitting the high plane of spirituality that the people stood on at the time. Their point was that the *Bnei Yisrael* would not have been capable of the enormous transgression of the *eigel* so soon after *matan Torah*, without some miniscule, imperceptible flaw – some leaning away from *Hashem* – present even while expressing their extraordinary love for Him at Sinai.

1 Based on *Daas Torah* by Rav Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l, *Shemos* pgs. 283-285 ↑ 2 *Shemos* 32:8 ↑ 3 *Shemos Rabbah* 42:7-8 ↑ 4 *Tehillim* 92:7-8 ↑ 5 *Bamidbar* 23:9 ↑

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

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Can There Be Compassion Without Justice?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

At the height of the drama of the Golden Calf, a vivid and enigmatic scene takes place. Moses has secured forgiveness for the people. But now, on Mount Sinai yet again, he does more. He asks God to be with the people. He asks Him to “teach me Your ways,” and “show me Your glory” (Ex. 33:13, Ex. 33:18). God replies:

“I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My Name, the Lord, in your presence ... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live.”
”Ex. 33:20

God then places Moses in a cleft in the rock face, telling him he will be able to “see My back” but not His face, and Moses hears God say these words: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

Ex. 34:6-7

This passage became known as the “Thirteen Attributes of God’s Mercy.”

The Sages understood this episode as the moment in which God taught Moses, and through him all future generations, how to pray when atoning for sin (Rosh Hashanah 17b). Moses himself used these words with slight variations during the next crisis, that of the spies. Eventually they became the basis of the special prayers known as *Selichot*, prayers of penitence. It was as if God were binding himself to forgive the penitent in each generation by this self-definition.[1] God is compassionate and lives in love and forgiveness. This is an essential element of Jewish faith.

But there is a caveat. God adds: “Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.” There is a further clause about visiting the sins of the parents upon the children which demands separate attention and is not our subject

here. The caveat tells us that there is forgiveness but also punishment. There is compassion but also justice.

Why so? Why must there be justice as well as compassion, punishment as well as forgiveness? The Sages said:

“When God created the universe He did so under the attribute of justice, but then saw it could not survive. What did He do? He added compassion to justice and created the world.”

See Rashi to Genesis 1:1.

This statement prompts the same question. Why did God not abandon justice altogether? Why is forgiveness alone not enough?

Some fascinating recent research in diverse fields from moral philosophy to evolutionary psychology, and from games theory to environmental ethics, provides us with an extraordinary and unexpected answer.

The best point of entry is Garrett Hardin’s famous paper written in 1968 about “the tragedy of the commons.”[2] He asks us to imagine an asset with no specific owner: pasture land that belongs to everyone (the commons), for example, or the sea and the fish it contains. The asset provides a livelihood to many people, the local farmers or fishermen. But eventually it attracts too many people. There is over-pasturing or overfishing, and the resource is depleted. The pasture is at risk of becoming wasteland. The fish are in danger of extinction.[3]

What then happens? The common good demands that everyone from here on must practice restraint. They must limit the number of animals they graze or the number of fish they catch. But some individuals are tempted not to do so. They continue to over-pasture or overfish. They justify to themselves that the gain to them is great and the loss to others is small, since it is divided by many. Self-interest takes precedence over the common good, and if enough people act on these instincts, the result is disaster.

This is the tragedy of the commons, and it explains how environmental catastrophes and other disasters occur. The problem is the free rider, the person who pursues their self-interest without bearing their share of the cost of the common good. Because of the importance of this type of situation to many contemporary problems, they have been intensively studied by mathematical biologists like Anatol Rapoport and Martin Nowak and behavioural economists like Daniel Kahneman and the late Amos Tversky.[4]

One of the things they have done is to create experimental situations that simulate this sort of problem. Here is one example. Four players are each given \$8. They are told they can choose to invest as much or as little as they want in a common fund. The experimenter collects the contributions, adds them up, adds 50% (the gain the farmer or fisherman would have made by using the commons), and distributes the sum equally to all four players. So if each contributes the full \$8 to the fund, they each receive \$12 at the end. But if one player contributes nothing, the fund will total \$24, which with 50% added becomes \$36. Distributed equally it means that each will receive \$9. Three will thus have gained \$1, while the fourth, the free rider, will have gained \$9.

This, though, is not a stable situation. As the game is played repeatedly, the participants begin to realise there is a free rider among them even if the experiment is structured so that they don’t know who it is. One of two things then tends to happen. Either everyone stops contributing to the fund (i.e. the common good) or they agree, if given the choice, to punish the free rider. Often people are keen to punish, even if it means that they will lose thereby, a phenomenon sometimes called “altruistic punishment.”

Some have linked participants to MRI machines to see which parts of the brain are activated by such games. Interestingly, altruistic punishment is linked to pleasure centres in the brain. As Kahneman puts it:

“It appears that maintaining the social order and the rules of fairness in this fashion is its own reward. Altruistic punishment could well be the glue that holds societies together.”[5]

This, though, is hardly a happy situation. Punishment is bad news for everyone. The offender suffers, but so do the punishers, who have to spend time or money they might otherwise use in improving the collective

outcome. And in cross-cultural studies, it turns out to be people from countries where there is widespread free-riding who punish most severely. People are most punitive in societies where there is the most corruption and the least public-spiritedness. Punishment, in other words, is the solution of last resort.

This brings us to religion. A whole series of experiments has shed light on the role of religious practice in such circumstances. Tests have been carried out in which participants have the opportunity to cheat and gain by so doing. If, without any connection being made to the experiment at hand, participants have been primed to think religious thoughts – by being shown words relating to God, for example, or being reminded of the Ten Commandments – they cheat significantly less.[6] What is particularly fascinating about such tests is that outcomes show no relationship to the underlying beliefs of the participants. What makes the difference is not believing in God, but rather being reminded of God before the test. This may well be why daily prayer and other regular rituals are so important. What affects us at moments of temptation is not so much background belief but the act of bringing that belief into awareness.

Of much greater significance have been the experiments designed to test the impact of different ways of thinking about God. Do we think primarily in terms of Divine forgiveness, or of Divine justice and punishment? Some strands within the great faiths emphasise one, others the other. There are hellfire preachers and those who speak in the still, small voice of love. Which is the more effective?

Needless to say, when the experimental subjects are atheists or agnostics, there is no difference. They are not affected either way. Among believers, though, the difference is significant. Those who believe in a punitive God cheat and steal less than those who believe in a forgiving God. Experiments were then performed to see how believers relate to free-riders in common-good situations like those described above. Were they willing to forgive, or did they punish the free-riders even at a cost to themselves. Here the results were revelatory. People who believe in a punitive God, punish people less than those who believe in a forgiving God.[7] Those who believe that, as the Torah says, God “does not leave the guilty unpunished,” are more willing to leave punishment to God. Those who focus on Divine forgiveness are more likely to practice human retribution or revenge.

The same applies to societies as a whole. Here the experimenters used terms not entirely germane to Judaism: they compared countries in terms of percentages of the population who believed in heaven and hell. “Nations with the highest levels of belief in hell and the lowest levels of belief in heaven had the lowest crime rates. In contrast, nations that privileged heaven over hell were champions of crime. These patterns persisted across nearly all major religious faiths, including various Christian, Hindu and syncretic religions that are a blend of several belief systems.”[8]

This was so surprising a finding that people asked: in that case, why are there religions that de-emphasise Divine punishment? Azim Shariff offered the following explanation:

“Because though Hell might be better at getting people to be good, Heaven is much better at making them feel good.” So, if a religion is intent on making converts, “it’s much easier to sell a religion that promises a Divine Paradise than one that threatens believers with fire and brimstone.”[9]

It is now clear why, at the very moment He is declaring his compassion, grace and forgiveness, God insists that He does not leave the guilty unpunished. A world without Divine justice would be one where there is more resentment, punishment, and crime, and less public-spiritedness and forgiveness, even among religious believers. The more we believe that God punishes the guilty, the more forgiving we become. The less we believe that God punishes the guilty, the more resentful and punitive we become. This is a totally counterintuitive truth, yet one that finally allows us to see the profound wisdom of the Torah in helping us create a humane and compassionate society.

[1] The Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 17b says that God made a covenant on the basis of these words, binding Himself to forgive those who, in penitence, appealed to these

attributes. Hence their centrality in the prayers leading up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and on Yom Kippur itself.

[2] Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” Vol. Science 162, 13 December 1968: no. 3859 pp. 1243-1248.

[3] Long before Garrett Hardin, there was an old Hassidic story about a village where the people were asked each to donate an amount of wine to fill a large vat to present to the King on his forthcoming visit to the village. Each villager secretly contributed only water instead of wine, arguing to themselves that such a small dilution would not be noticed in the large gift. The King arrived, the villagers presented him with the vat, he drank from it and said, “It’s just plain water.” I guess many folk traditions have similar stories. This is, in essence, the tragedy of the commons.

[4] See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic, 1984. Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue*, Penguin, 1996. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Allen Lane, 2011. Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, *Super Cooperators: Evolution, Altruism and Human Behaviour or Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011.

[5] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 308.

[6] Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*, Princeton University Press, 2013, 34-35.

[7] *Ibid.*, 44-47.

[8] *Ibid.*, 46.

[9] *Ibid.*

From: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> via date: Feb 17, 2022, 10:02 AM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 02/17/2022
Meshech Chochma Al HaTorah

by R. Gidon Rothstein

People Are More Important Than Shabbat

Meshech Hochmah points out two inconsistencies in Shemot 31:14. The verse obligates Jews to observe Shabbat, “ki kodesh hi lachem, it is sanctified for you,” which sounds like Shabbat is for the Jewish people. The next words assign the death penalty to anyone who treats Shabbat mundanely, justifying it because “for anyone who performs creative labor during it (Shabbat), that soul will be cut off from its nation.” Halachah generally views death as more severe than karet, so our verse seems to base the death penalty on this sin’s incurring a lower level punishment, an odd logic.

To explain, Meshech Hochmah notes that in ordinary circumstances, Shabbat is kodesh for Jews in the sense that Jews may violate Shabbat to save any Jew’s life, no matter how insignificant that Jew might seem, and may do so in cases of doubt, too, doubt the danger is life-threatening, and/or doubt the violation will save the Jew. Balanced against Jewish lives, Shabbat is very much kodesh lachem, sanctified for you, under your control.

Because without Jews, R. Meir Simhah says, there would be no Shabbat, no weekly testimony to Gd’s having created the world and “rested” on the seventh “day.”

Unless We’re Not

On the other hand—explaining the shift in the verse—a Jew who deliberately violates Shabbat is worse than an animal (he says).

Where a court cannot or does not mete out the death penalty, the Jew incurs karet, which Meshech Hochmah asserts is worse than death (contrary to our usual view). Death atones, restores the sinner to membership in the people, where karet cuts the person off from the nation and Gd’s Torah. In that sense, death is a favor. (He is arguing that even though death is worse than karet in the halachic hierarchy of punishment, its results for the sinner are better.)

For him, the verse reads, loosely: Shabbat is for you to serve your function in the world. As long as you do, you are more important, so any life-saving medical needs outweigh Shabbat. Should a Jew violate Shabbat on purpose, the sinner loses his/her full belonging to the covenant and citizenship, with the way to restore it—to avoid eternal exclusion (and other than teshuvah, where courts cannot intervene)—being the death penalty.

As support, he reminds us of the opinion of R. Elazar b. Shim’on in the Gemara (not accepted in practice), who held Jews could kill another Jew to prevent him/her from deliberate Shabbat violation, as we do hold is true of those about to commit murder. We usually think of rodef, the right to kill a

murderer before s/he kills, as a matter of defending the intended victim; for R. Elazar b. Shim'on, it applied to Shabbat violation, to avert spiritual damage of equal or worse level (Meshech Hochmah is assuming halachah accepts R. Elazar's values statement, just not his conclusion).

Identify with Others When You Pray with Them

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Torah uses the verse va-yehal, implored, for Moshe's prayer on their behalf, 32;11. Berachot 32a quotes R. Eliezer Ha-Gadol, Moshe prayed until he was overcome by ahilu, defined as a fire in the bones. Meshech Hochmah says Moshe kept praying until he experienced himself as having this same flaw, felt it in his bones. (He is relying on Baba Batra 109b, which says the officiating priest for the idol of Michah (see Shofetim 18) was a descendant of Moshe; if so, Moshe, too, has idolatry in him.)

The fully felt own future involvement in this kind of worship (Meshech Hochmah is assuming what I believe is a general Jewish idea, descendants credit and/or implicate their ancestors), he could point out the insufficiency of Gd's idea of wiping out the Jews and turning Moshe into a great nation. It would be no better, since he, Moshe, also had such potential in his future. R. Meir Simhah Ha-Kohen may have meant only the one technical piece, Moshe had to see and feel his own future to be able to prove Gd's idea wouldn't work. To me, he implies praying for others takes more work than just saying, oh, please, Gd, wouldn't it be great if so-and-so got such-and-such. To pray for others takes identification, after which we can find the path to an "argument" Gd might more likely accept. Moshe had to work to see how he was more like them than he assumed, showing the avenue forward. The Stubborn Human Need for Physicality

In our third comment for the week, Moshe comes down the mountain, sees the Calf, and breaks the luhot, the Tablets, 32;19. Meshech Hochmah starts his reaction with what he asserts is a basic principle, Torah is not encumbered by physicality or location. While we treat certain places with more sanctity, such as Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple, he still believes the details of Torah are the same everywhere.

(My Bar-Ilan has a parenthesis, "other than mitzvot tied to the Land of Israel." I believe someone else added that, struggling with how he could have said everything is the same, when Israel is clearly different. I think Meshech Hochmah was focused on the ideas and worldview Torah promotes, which are all the same regardless of place. It is applied as appropriate to each place and person, but the Torah is the same everywhere.)

Similarly, the lowliest Jew has the same Torah as Moshe Rabbenu (although there, too, they will have different roles, each as proper for him/her/them). In all this, Moshe was an agent/broker, entrusted to bring the Torah to the people, the Torah that broadcasts the message of Gd alone being at the center of existence, the only true necessity. When Moshe failed to show, the people decided they needed a substitute to bring the spirit Moshe had managed to manifest, so they made the Calf (this follows one strand in Midrash, the Calf was to replace Moshe, not be a god).

They had the urge to offer sacrifices, sing, dance, invest themselves physically in worship, and without Moshe they were desperate for an alternative. He likens it to Yerov'am, the one who split off the Northern Kingdom, making calves as an alternative to the Beit Ha-Mikdash, for fear the people would go to Jerusalem and also return to allegiance to the Davidic kings. To accomplish his goal, he only needed to guard the roads, I think Meshech Hochmah is saying; his establishing an alternative worship was to assuage the people's deep need for connection to something.

(The idea of worship as an instinct/need is very important. It explains why people tend to have some ruling principle, to which they become dedicated, a practical demonstration of how avodah zarah develops. I just recently saw a story about a man worried about his carbon footprint, so he called in an expert to check and tell him where he was going right and wrong; it reminded me of calling a kohen to your house to check for tzara'at. Because when people do not have Gd, they will designate something else to fill the role.)

We Need to Free Ourselves of the Attachment to Physical Manifestations

To disabuse the Jews of the idea they had to have replaced him, he made a point of his lack of significance. Nor will the Mishkan or Mikdash be independently important places, Moshe wanted them to know (a remarkable addition by Meshech Hochmah, since the people had no idea there was going to be a Mishkan at this point; he reads Moshe to be making a point for the future, too, in this moment of national failure).

Gittin 56b tells us Titus entered the Temple with a prostitute and made use of her services there, with no repercussions, because by then the structure had lost its sanctity, had been profaned by the Jews' failures and Gd's leaving it for the Romans to destroy.

The same was true of the luhot. Written by Gd, their sanctity, too, depended wholly on the Jewish people putting them in the framework of service to the One, nonphysical, Gd, their realizing that all sanctity extends only from proper service of Gd, whatever structures we build or practices we perform.

The Depth of Their Error

Meshech Hochmah goes to some length to show how much their mistake pervaded their worldview. When Moshe approached, they were dancing (the verse says), betraying their lack of any doubt about the correctness of their actions. Remember, Moshe is one day late, they're already fully invested in and excited about a new intermediary.

Had he brought the Tablets, they would have conceded they were wrong with the Calf, only to switch to adoring the luhot excessively, ignoring the core problem.

It's why tradition thinks Gd congratulated Moshe for having broken them, is the reason Gd refers to the broken luhot when telling Moshe to make new ones. Gd will write on the second luhot lessons Moshe taught in practice by breaking the first ones, that Jews must serve Gd alone. The idea also explains why the Aron contained both sets of luhot (as Baba Batra 14b says), to stress that objects attain sanctity and durability only by being used for Gd's service, not because of who or Who made them.

The Jews show the same erroneous thinking in speaking of Moshe as who took them out of Egypt, when he was solely a messenger to speak to Par'oh. Gd picks up on it, calls them Moshe's people (ki shihet amecha, your people has gone astray) because they identified themselves that way, elevating Moshe to a status he did not deserve (or want).

Meshech Hochmah has more on the issue (an indication of how vital he found the point, one I find still vital in our times), but we will stop here, with the basic lesson: people tend to focus on the physical, ascribe the workings of the world to those. Being Jewish is about standing up for the difficult to absorb idea that it's about a Gd we cannot see, hear, or touch, and yet Who created the world and continues to support it and direct it.

People matter, a great deal, Ki Tissa taught R. Meir Simhah Ha-Kohen, as long as they focus in the right direction, when there are many temptations not to, even within the realms of Gd's service. And when people do go wrong, the first step to effective prayer on their behalf is identifying with them, seeing where (as my father a"h used to like to quote) there but for the grace of Gd go I.

from: OU Kosher GerstenE@ou.org subject:

Halacha Yomis - Shabbos Snowfall, Salt

Rabbi Yaakov Luban and Rabbi Eli Gersten

Q. There is a wet snow falling on Shabbos, and I am concerned that my front steps and walkway will freeze over and become very slippery, am I permitted to put down salt on Shabbos?

A. In general, it is forbidden to actively melt ice on Shabbos (See Shulchan Aruch OC 320:9). Also, one may not handle ice melting pellets, since they are muktzah. However, when there is a public safety concern, it is permitted. Shulchan Aruch (OC 308:18) writes that one may remove a public safety hazard from the road, even in a place where there is no eiruv, so long as one's act of carrying does not violate a Torah prohibition. Based on this, Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchaso [25:9:(49)] writes that to protect the public from dangerous icy conditions, one is permitted to put down salt on Shabbos. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l ruled that in this area of halacha, "the

public” is defined as any group of three or more individuals, even if they are members of your family. If three or more people might walk down your front steps, and it would be dangerous if it turns to ice, this is considered a public hazard, and it is permitted to put down salt.

The Gerald & Karin Feldhamer OU Kosher Halacha Yomis

This column is dedicated in memory of: Rav Chaim Yisroel ben Reb Dov HaLevi Belsky, zt'l Senior OU Kosher Halachic Consultant from 1987-2016

From: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

Date: Thu, Feb 17, 2022, 6:59 AM Subject: Dimensions in Ki Sisa

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Ki Sisa

Dancing around the Golden Calf

The tragic episode of making and worshipping the Golden Calf came to a traumatic head with the breaking of the luchos by Moshe Rabbeinu. Having received the luchos from Hashem, Moshe descended the mountain in order to give them to the Jewish People. However, when he reached the camp, he saw that the people had made the Golden Calf, and judged that they were not worthy to receive the luchos, whereupon he threw them down and smashed them into fragments.

There is a very basic problem here. While he was still on the mountain, Moshe was told by Hashem Himself that the Jewish People had made the calf, yet he nevertheless took the luchos and began his descent. He was, apparently, of the opinion that the making of the calf was not a critical impediment to the Jewish People receiving them. In that case, why, upon seeing the Golden Calf, did Moshe break the luchos? If he felt that the people were not deserving of them, he should have left the luchos on the mountain!

The Seforno explains that when Moshe was initially informed by Hashem that the people had made the Golden Calf, the verse reads:

סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתם עשו להם עגל מפסכה

They have strayed quickly from the path that I have commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf.”[1]

Moshe was thus aware that the people have sinned. However, he reasoned that, as grievous as their sin may be, they could recover from it by him bringing down the luchos. Perhaps their sin was born of a moment of confusion or lack of direction over Moshe not being among them. As soon as they would see the luchos, they would snap out of it and be reminded of the correct path for them to be taking. This is why he took the luchos with him. However, when Moshe approached the camp he saw the calf – which he had been told about – but he also saw something else that he had not been aware of. The verse reads:

ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומהלל

It happened as he drew near the camp, he saw the calf and the dances.[2]

Moshe had been told that the people had made a calf. He did not know, however, that having made the calf, they then proceeded to dance around it.[3] This represents a completely different level of identification with their sin. They did not relate to it as a mistake at all. They were happy with it! At this point, Moshe realized that merely seeing the luchos would not have any effect on the people. They were too far invested in their path of sin; with all the dancing they may not even have noticed Moshe or the luchos! The only course of action that could bring them back was to smash the luchos in front of them. The people would then be confronted with a drastic expression of how far they had strayed and what they potentially stood to lose.

There is a profound message in these words for those people who make mistakes, otherwise known as human beings. Having committed those acts, a stubborn and egocentric part of us is reluctant to recognize them as wrong, choosing instead to justify them and even idealize and dance around them. The Seforno is teaching us that whatever mistakes we may have made, we should be sure to maintain a sense of honesty about them, so that the sight of the luchos alone should be enough to bring us back, without anything having to be smashed in order to shake us out of our delusions.

The Thirteenth Attribute

נקה לא נקה

And cleanses, though not completely.[4]

The sages of the Talmud,[5] cited by Rashi, expound these words as reflecting two conflicting ideas: “נקה” – He will cleanse,” and “לא נקה” – He will not cleanse.” The resolution of this conflict is that it depends on whether the person does teshuvah: “He cleanses those who do teshuvah and does not cleanse those who don’t.”[6] Indeed, this interpretation is reflected in our communal practice when reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy out loud, where we conclude the recitation with the word “נקה”, and do not include the words that follow, as they reflect the negative outcome for one who does not do teshuvah.

Understandably, this matter requires some investigation, since the simple meaning of the words sees them as one integral phrase, “נקה לא נקה,” why, then does the midrash state that they should be separated and treated as two opposing ideas?

In truth, however, the pshat approach which sees this as one phrase is quite difficult. Grammatically, as one phrase, this represents an absolute statement, which would mean “He does not completely cleanse [the person].” How does this statement, which comes only to limit the extent of Hashem’s mercy, reflect the concluding attribute of mercy? Moreover, is this even so? Can a person never be entirely cleansed of his sins, even if he does teshuvah?[7] For this reason, the sages adopt the drash approach and explain that the cleansing is not limited, but it is conditional, for it depends on the person doing teshuvah. If he does, however, he can be entirely cleansed, and it is to this that we refer by mentioning only the word “נקה” in our recitation of the Divine Attributes.

There is a fascinating idea related to this found in the early sources. There are two sets of “Thirteen Middos”: The Thirteen Middos (Attributes) of Divine Mercy and R’ Yishmael’s Thirteen Middos (midrashic principles) through which the Torah is expounded.[8] These sources state that there exists a parallel between these two sets of thirteen, so that involving oneself in one of the principles of drash helps activate the corresponding attribute of mercy – a most unusual application of the idea of “middah kenegged middah”! The thirteenth and final exegetical principle states:

וכן שני כתובים המכחישים זה את זה עד שיבא הכתוב השלישי ויכריע ביניהם

Similarly, two verses that contradict each other, until a third verse comes and reconciles them.

And indeed, this is the very situation described by the final attribute of Mercy, which appears to contain “two conflicting verses” – the idea of Hashem cleansing and Him not cleansing – until the third “verse” comes to reconcile the contradiction, explaining that the matter is dependent on the person doing teshuvah![9]

[1] Shemos 32:8. [2] Ibid. verse 19. [3] Rav Yehuda Copperman, in his commentary to the Seforno, points out that this contrast is reflected by the fact that the word “העגל” is preceded with the letter heh, denoting a known entity, while the word “מהלל” has no heh, as that element was not known to Moshe. [4] Shemos 34:7. [5] See Yoma 86a. [6] This is also the approach of Onkelos, who translates: “ולדלא תיבין לא מוכי” – He forgives those who return to His Torah, but does not cleanse those who do not return.” [7] Rashi himself first offers a pshat approach, whereby Hashem does not entirely cleanse the person, but rather, exacts retribution from him little by little. However, even according to this explanation, Hashem does ultimately cleanse the person completely, He just does not do so immediately. This is already a departure from the absolute connotation of the negation contained within the pshat. For this reason, Rashi proceeds to cite the midrashic approach. [8] These are enumerated in the morning prayers just before pesukei de’zimra. [9] Bnei Yissaschar, Elul Maamar 2. Copyright © 2022 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved. You’re receiving this email either because you signed up on the website or you requested to be added. <http://www.journeysintorah.com> Our mailing address is: Journeys in Torah 2/4 Rechov Yitzhok ben Nachum Bayit Vegan 90045 Israel

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Feb 17, 2022, 4:59 PM subject: Rav Frand - **The Secret of the Keshet Shel Tefillin**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1196. Taking a Choleh to the Hospital on Shabbos: You or a Non-Jew? Good Shabbos! In Parshas Ki Sisa, Moshe asks to see the Glory of G-d (Shemos 33:18). Hashem's response was: "...I shall cause all My goodness to pass before you, and I shall call out with the Name Hashem before you; and I shall show favor when I shall show favor, and I shall have mercy when I shall have mercy... You shall not be able to see My Face, for no human can see My Face and live." (Shemos 33:19-20).

This seems like a strange dialog between Moshe Rabbeinu and the Ribono shel Olam. Rashi quotes a Gemara (Brochos 7a) that when Hashem passed over Moshe, Hashem showed Moshe the Tefillin knot on the back of His head Tefillin. We reference this incident in a line towards the end of Anym Zemiros: Keshet Tefillin her'ah l'anav (He showed the Tefillin knot to the humble one).

In fact, Rashi there in Maseches Brochos spells out this Talmudic allusion: This refers to the head Tefillin knot at the nape of the neck.)The Talmud in fact states elsewhere that Moshe did not understand what the knot at the back of the head Tefillin looked like, and the Ribono shel Olam showed him exactly how it looked.(

I saw a beautiful homiletic idea in a sefer. What does it mean that Moshe did not understand the knot of the Tefillin shel Rosh? Does it mean that he understood everything else about Tefillin perfectly, without needing to be shown what it looked like? Did he perfectly visualize a Tefillin bayis (compartment holding the parchment) or the knot of the head Tefillin? What does it mean that he didn't understand what the knot of the Tefillin shel Rosh looked like?

Rav Firer says an interesting thing. Several times throughout Parshas Ki Sisa, Hashem complains about Klal Yisrael that they are a stiff-necked people (am k'shei oref). Let us pause and ask ourselves – is it a bad thing or a good thing to be a "stiff-necked nation"? On the one hand, from the fact that the Ribono shel Olam keeps on complaining in this parsha that we are an am k'shei oref, it would seem to be a very bad thing. On the other hand, the stiff-neck property of the Jewish nation is one of the secrets of our continued existence. If we would not be stubborn, we would not have survived.

This is a classic example of one of the great truths of life, namely that there is no character trait (midah) that is either all good or all bad. Everything depends on how and where and when that midah is used. When the Ribono shel Olam complains that Klal Yisrael is an am k'shei oref, it is an appropriate complaint. It reflects the fact that they were a rebellious and contentious people. They were a hard and argumentative nation, and they gave Moshe Rabbeinu and (as it were) the Almighty much grief. But on the other hand, thousands and thousands of Jews have persevered over the centuries in spite of untold persecutions. They were willing to die to sanctify G-d's Name. That is also a result of the fact that we are an am k'shei oref. Rav Firer suggests—and there is an irony in this—that we place the Tefillin shel Rosh on the very spot that symbolizes our being an am k'shei oref (i.e., the back of the neck!) Moshe wanted to know over here—and the Ribono shel Olam was showing him—how we use the Keshet shel Tefillin:

To what is our characteristic of stubbornness bound? If we tie it to rebelliousness and heresy then it is a terrible thing. But if the midah of am k'shei oref is tied to the right thing—to mesiras nefesh and to perseverance and resilience—then it indeed becomes a beautiful characteristic. The secret of the Keshet shel Tefillin is that the nature of this characteristic of stubbornness is entirely dependent on the aspect of our personalities to which it is bound. If it is bound to the right ideologies, it indeed becomes a tremendous thing.

This resolves a perplexing question. There are three pesukim in this parsha, in which the Almighty complains to Moshe Rabbeinu that Bnei Yisrael are a

stiff-necked nation. But then, towards the end of the parsha—which we read on every public fast day—Moshe says: "If I have now found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, may my L-rd please go in our midst – for it is a stiff-necked people, and may You forgive our iniquity and our error, and make us a portion." (Shemos 34:9)

Does this make sense? The Ribono shel Olam is complaining over and over to Moshe Rabbeinu that the Jews are an am k'shei oref, which is tempting Him to destroy them all, yet Moshe Rabbeinu argues back that Hashem should stay with them BECAUSE they are an am k'shei oref! This seems illogical!

This is the secret that Moshe Rabbeinu just now learned. It all depends on what we do with that attribute. Moshe argues that the Almighty should stay with the Jewish people because the very fact that they are so stubborn is the reason they will be willing to be moser nefesh for Him when the time comes. This is the way it is with every Midah. There is no human character trait—be it jealousy or anger or hatred—that is only negative and destructive. There is a proper time and place to utilize all of these human emotions and character traits. "Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything under the heaven... A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace" (Koheles 3:1-9)

So too, there is a time for stubbornness and a time for being soft. It just depends to what the attribute is bound, and that is the secret of the Keshet shel Tefillin.

Not the Cry of Battle, but Rather the Cry of "Anos"

Elsewhere in the parsha, there is another difficult pasuk to understand: "Yehoshua heard the sound of the people in their shouting, and he said to Moshe, 'The sound of battle is in the camp.' He said, 'It is not the sound of shouting of might nor the sound of shouting of weakness, an ANOS sound do I hear.'" (Shemos 32:17-18).

Moshe and Yehoshua both heard loud screams coming from the location of the Israelite camp. Yehoshua suggested to Moshe that they were hearing battle sounds. Moshe disagreed: He told Yehoshua that they were hearing neither the sounds of military victory nor military defeat. They were the screams of 'anos'. What is the simple interpretation of the expression Kol Anos? What does that mean?

In Maseches Taanis, the Talmud Yerushalmi says that Moshe responded somewhat critically to Yehoshua: The person who will one day be the leader of 600,000 Jews cannot discern the difference between one type of scream and another? What exactly was Moshe's complaint to Yehoshua?

Rav Schwab shares a beautiful pshat in his sefer: Yehoshua heard these screams and he proclaimed: These are the screams of rebellion in the camp. These are the screams of people who have abandoned the Ribono shel Olam and have built an idolatrous Golden Calf. This is a revolt on the part of the people! That is the "Kol Milchama b'Machaneh."

Moshe chastised him. "Yehoshua, as a future leader you need to understand the nature of this noise. These are not the screams of people who are victorious. These are not the screams of people who are weak. This is a 'Kol Anos'". (Rav Schwab says the word 'Anos' (ayin-nun-vov-taf) is etymologically related to the word 'eenui' (ayin-nun-vov-yud).) "It is the cry of people who are in pain. They are suffering and in pain because they don't know what happened to me. They fear they have lost their leader. They are like a baby crying because it lost its mommy." They are not rebelling against the Ribono shel Olam. They are screaming because they are scared and they don't know where to turn.

This is a Kol Anos—a cry of pain, inui, and confusion. Moshe chastises Yehoshua for misreading the screams because a true Jewish leader needs to be able to discern the difference between a cry of rebellion and a cry of pain. A leader must be able to figure out the cause of the people crying. This lesson applies to all of us as well. We as parents, or we as teachers must properly read what's behind our children or our students acting out and misbehaving. It might look like an act of chutzpah or an act of rebellion but it may be something else. Sometimes that is not really the cause. The only way such "rebellion" can be redirected is by understanding the real cause.

Children sometimes say and do hurtful things. Our initial reaction might be “How dare they say that? This is out and out chutzpah and rebellion!” No! Sometimes something deeper is going on, and we need to know how to react. This is the mussar that Moshe Rabbeinu was giving to Yehoshua: “The one who is destined to be a leader over 600,000 Jews does not know how to distinguish between one type of cry and another?!” Understanding what is really behind the cry is the only way a leader will ever be able to set the people straight.

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dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Available December 10, 2013 Rav Frand © 2020 by Torah.org. support Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/when-protest-must-be-raised/2022/02/17/>

When Protest Must Be Raised

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser -

16 Adar I 5782 – February 17, 2022

Yehoshua heard the sound of the people shouting, and he said to Moshe: There is a sound of battle in the camp!” But Moshe said: It is neither a voice shouting strength [victory], nor a voice shouting weakness [defeat]; I hear a voice of distress.” (Shemos 32:17-18) Rashi translates the “voice of distress” as one of blasphemy, which distresses the soul of one who hears it.

Was Yehoshua trying to prevent Moshe Rabbeinu from learning that the Jewish nation had sinned with the Golden Calf? Did he think he would be able to hide it forever? Obviously, when Moshe would enter the camp he would see the Golden Calf with his own eyes and understand how unfortunate the situation truly was.

What was the meaning of Moshe Rabbeinu’s answer? Why didn’t he just tell Yehoshua that he had already heard about the Jewish nation’s transgression from Hashem Himself, and there was no reason to hide the truth from him? The Chasam Sofer explains that Moshe Rabbeinu descended disheartened from the mountain, cognizant of the fact that the Jewish people had committed a sin that would be difficult to forgive. It was in this state of mind that he encountered his disciple, Yehoshua, who certainly had no intention of hiding the sin from his teacher, Moshe. Their dialogue, in fact, focused on another aspect of the situation entirely.

Yehoshua tried to offer a measure of comfort to Moshe and said, “Undoubtedly, the sin is egregious and the situation is very bleak. However, ‘there is a sound of battle in the camp!’” – meaning: There are those who are protesting and zealously defending the honor of Hashem. But Moshe’s pain was not assuaged. He said, “This is not the dissenting outcry of zealots; this is the horrifying voice of blasphemy raised by those who are involved in the sin.” There was, in fact, no dissension – which increased the enormity of the sin – and therefore Moshe Rabbeinu had to break the luchos.

We learn that it was the lack of any opposition or disapproval that aggravated the magnitude of the sin of the Golden Calf. Individuals who could have used their influence and clout to try to dissuade the masses from sinning failed to do so. We have an obligation to speak out when actions and situations require such a response.

Rabbi Shabse Yudelevitz notes that although the sin of the Golden Calf was specific to that generation, every generation has its own potential chet ha’eigel, which manifests itself in various forms, often galvanized by disinformation. The only way to avert disaster is by confronting the situation and vigorously presenting a reality check.

The Talmud (Sotah 11a) relates that three people were consulted by Pharaoh about what to do with the Jewish people – Bilaam, Iyov and Yisro – and each presented their opinion. Bilaam, who advised Pharaoh to kill all the sons that were born to the Jewish people, was punished by being killed in the war with Midyan. Iyov, who was silent, and neither advised nor protested, was punished by suffering. Yisro, who ran away as a sign of protest, merited that some of his children’s children sat in the Sanhedrin.

The Gry”z (R’ Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik) explains that Iyov remained silent because he believed that any protest he made would be of no consequence. Iyov, in fact, was a very influential advisor to the king and his words would have made an impact, even if they had not been accepted. A person who is suffering cries out in pain even though he knows that it will not help. If one is quiet, it indicates that the matter at hand does not concern him.

In the late 1800s, the Maskilim (members of the Haskalah movement in Europe who intended to modernize Jews and Judaism by encouraging the adoption of secular European culture) channeled their influence with the Hungarian government to have a law passed that all Jewish boys must go to school and learn Hungarian and other secular subjects. Then they attempted to influence the government to found separate Jewish schools in which the Jewish children could learn from Jewish teachers.

The Kedushas Yom Tov (R’ Chananya Yom Tov Lipa Teitelbaum, Grand Rebbe of Sighet) opposed this plan, saying it was better to go to secular school than to learn from “enlightened” Jewish teachers who would eventually lead the children astray. The schools were built throughout Hungary, but in Marmarosh, the Kedushas Yom Tov’s clout prevailed and no secular Jewish schools were built there during his lifetime.

Once the mayor of Sighet came to the Kedushas Yom Tov’s house to discuss the matter with him.

“Isn’t it a sin,” asked the mayor, “for a Jewish child to sit with an uncovered head?”

“Yes,” said the Kedushas Yom Tov.

“In the secular schools the Jewish children are forced to sit with uncovered heads,” said the mayor, “but we are giving you permission to build a separate Jewish school in Sighet. The children can cover their heads, and keep every detail of the Torah. Why won’t you agree to save them from sin?”

“Whatever sins the child does in the secular school,” answered the Kedushas Yom Tov, “he is forced to do, and Hashem will not hold it against him. We need not fear that what he sees there will make an impression on him and cause him to act that way for the rest of his life, because he knows that the teacher is not a Jew. Although he learns secular subjects from him, it will not occur to him to learn from the teacher anything relating to religion. As far as religion, his home will be the sole influence on him.

“But if the teacher is Jewish, the child will have a certain respect for him and see him as wiser than his own father, since his father does not know these secular subjects. He will absorb the teacher’s views on religion as well, which will stay with him for his whole life. These teachers tend to be heretical, or at least critical of our ancient beliefs and traditions. Their influence on our children would be far worse than a child sitting in class with his head uncovered.”

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, a prominent rav and Torah personality, is a daily radio commentator who has authored over a dozen books, and a renowned speaker recognized for his exceptional ability to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

YUTorah <office@yutorah.org> Thu, Feb 17, 2022 at 8:01 PM

Thoughts for Ki Tisa: **Returning to the Grand Stage**

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The circumstances were dire. Weeks after pledging allegiance to Hashem we debased ourselves, frolicking around a calf fashioned from gold. The crashing sounds at Sinai announced a bold new message: G-d had no face and wasn’t physical or visual. Sadly, we corrupted this powerful idea by bowing to a human-sculpted creature. Rightfully, Hashem planned to replace us with a new nation—more intrepid and better suited to represent Him in this world.

Moshe intercedes, heroically and desperately pleading for our survival. First, he reminds Hashem of the great founders of our people and of their historical covenant. They alone took the great leap of faith, rising from the darkness of an ancient world cursed by savagery and muddled by religious confusion. The grandchildren of these visionaries deserve a second chance—and a third, and a fourth. Covenants are forever. They outlast betrayal and infidelity.

While praying, Moshe asserts a second appeal on our behalf. More than four centuries had been invested in a grand project of forming the nation of G-d. This nascent movement began to spread—from lone ideologues to an entire clan—and ultimately to an entire nation, three and a half million strong. Finally, after 2500 years of doubt, G-d was manifest in this world through a community of humans which acknowledged Him.

All this religious progress was now jeopardized. To eliminate that nation, after so much investment, would have reversed hundreds of years of religious innovation. The Egyptians would, G-d forbid, mock and sneer, snickering that Hashem was powerless to steward the Jews through the desert or to deliver them to their homeland. Why else would he annihilate his beloved people? Religious skeptics would shrink Hashem to "one amongst many" ancient deities. If the Jews perished in the desert, the presence of Hashem would take a "hit," and would retreat from this world. This tragedy is called a *chilul Hashem*, and could not be tolerated. Perhaps we didn't deserve to be spared, but we are the people of G-d and our condition in this world directly reflects directly upon His presence. This terrible worry about a potential *chilul Hashem* carried the day, and ultimately, Hashem offered us repentance and reconciliation.

As the chosen people, we bear enormous weight, and we wield mighty influence upon religious history. G-d spans all reality, but we hold the key to His presence on this planet. Through our behavior we can augment or diminish that presence. Throughout history, we valiantly defended His presence even to the point of martyrdom. Swords and fire could not defeat our great faith, nor could aggression and hatred conquer the bold religious ideas we introduced to humanity.

Of course, Judaism has no death wish and we prefer to sanctify His presence through life, rather than through blood. Through our religious lifestyles we model His will. We showcase the merit of a "godly" life of commandment, morality, conscience, family and community. During a long and dark period of history we abdicated the privilege of this "modeling". For the past two thousand years we lived in a dreary tunnel of history. We were pushed aside to the margins of society, no longer inhabiting the front stage of history. Very few took notice of our "godly lifestyles". We were depicted as historical castaways. When people did take notice of us, it was, typically, with rabid anger and venomous contempt. We had forfeited the opportunity to represent G-d through life, and were often called upon to represent Him through death. History has shifted. We have returned to prominence and to historical relevance. Society has welcomed us back, offering us influence and opportunity. They haven't been disappointed. We have spearheaded modernity, revolutionizing our world while spreading prosperity. We have driven the advance of science, reason, technology, culture, economics and philosophy. We have offered the world our best light and, in doing so, have represented Hashem well.

But not always. This newfound prominence has come at a steep price. Sadly, many Jews in public roles, haven't always risen to the occasion, and haven't always acted as children of G-d. As a people it has yet to fully sink in: After centuries of living on the fringes of society we haven't yet learned the consequences of living on the big stage. The world is once again paying attention to us, and we don't always acquit ourselves well. We haven't yet fully understood the connotations of the historical moment.

Our moral failures tarnish the presence of Hashem. We may not bow to gold idols, but modern society provides plenty of idolatrous temptations which have entrapped us. We must do a better job educating consciousness of this new reality. We live in a different era, and we can't enter positions of

leadership or public influence without realizing that our personal conduct impacts the presence of Hashem.

In previous generations Jews were nervous about creating a "shander" (literally "shame" in Yiddish) or disgracing our people. Living in a fragile post-Holocaust world, we stood on shaky ground. We reasoned: better not rock the boat or cause shame and undue attention.

Thankfully, our community is well beyond the "shander" syndrome. Today buoyant Jewish communities rightfully feel confident and relatively secure. We shouldn't strive for moral behavior based on fear of "shander". Firstly, acting with conscience and conviction is crucial even if no one is paying attention. However the world is paying attention we must represent Hashem more capably and more nobly than we often do.

Something else has changed. Not only have Jews been restored to the societal "stage", but our national identity has been reconstituted in Israel. Blessed with a state and with a homeland, we have crafted a democracy, a military superpower, and an bustling economy, winning us well-deserved international admiration. These accomplishments augment Hashem's presence, as his ascendent people have bucked the odds and built a masterpiece.

Having shifted into a world in which we glorify his name at a state level, we carry even greater responsibility to reinforce this message at an individual level. We can't dream of national representation of G-d if we don't reflect that message in our personal lives.

One day all of humanity will gather in Jerusalem and herald G-d and His people. Let us not wait for that day. Through our conduct we are building that Jerusalem. We better not wreck that city with dishonesty or moral weakness

from: Halachically Speaking <Halachically_Speaking@mail.vresp.com>
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Mentioning a Pasuk at the End Of Shemonei Esrei Rabbi Moishe David Lebovitz

KOF-K Kosher Supervision

Many *siddurim* have a list of *pesukim* that correspond to one's name, which are meant to be recited at the end of Shemoneh Esrei. What is the nature of this practice? When is the proper time to say the *pasuk*? Should women say it as well? What should a person do if his name does not appear on this list (which is common for people with more modern names)?

These questions will be addressed in this article.

The Source The custom of saying a *pasuk* corresponding to one's name at the end of Shemoneh Esrei is not mentioned in the Gemara or Shulchan Aruch.¹ However, it is mentioned by some *poskim*. The Elya Rabbah³ says that this custom is found in the Beis Yosef, although it is not there.⁴ It is possible that the Elya Rabbah meant a different source.⁵ The *pasuk* can be from Torah, Neviim or Kesuvim.⁶

The Purpose

We have established a source for the practice to say the *pasuk*, but what is the purpose of it?

Rashi says that saying this *pasuk* saves one from Gehinom.⁷ The Chofetz Chaim⁸ elaborates on this in his sefer *Shemiras Halashon*: Saying the *pasuk* is a method to remember one's name on the Day of Judgment, when one is nervous and scared.¹⁰ The nature of man is that he goes around and talks badly about others, or embarrasses them. Because of this he is filled with sin. Each sin has a name on it — specifically the sinner's name. If one talks badly about hundreds of people, since people have many names they will all be mixed up and he will have to be punished for all of them.

Even if one says that his name is not the one under which the sin is labeled, he will be punished anyway because on the Day of Judgment he will forget his name. However, if one says the *pasuk* daily during his lifetime, this will help him to remember his name on the Day of Judgment and he will not receive a punishment he does not deserve. Saying the *pasuk* that

corresponds to one's name reminds him not to speak badly about others. His name will then be only his, and not a mixture of many other names.¹¹ What and When to Say It

The practice is to say a pasuk that starts with the first letter of one's name and ends with the last letter of the name.¹²

Some poskim say that one may mention a pasuk that has one's entire name in it. For example, someone whose name is Avraham may say a pasuk that contains this name.¹³ This may be even more preferable, since one may be able to better remember his name if the name itself appears in the pasuk.¹⁴ The pasuk is recited before saying the last of the two Yehi Ratzons in Elokai Netzor. ¹⁵ Some poskim say that this pasuk should not be said during Shemoneh Esrei, since doing so is a hefsek. ¹⁶ However, others counter that this is baseless, since it is permitted to be mafsik at the point when the pasuk is said.¹⁷

Changing a Pasuk If one wishes to say a different pasuk that corresponds to his name, he may do so, but he should not keep switching the pasuk since he won't remember it on the Day of Judgment.¹⁸ This is common if one has a name that does not appear in the list of names (see below). He may find any pasuk that best corresponds to his name.

Multiple Names

One who has multiple names should say a pasuk that corresponds to each of his names.¹⁹ If a name was added to a sick person's name, R"l, and he recovered and is no longer called by that name, there is no need for him to say a pasuk that corresponds to this name.²⁰

One who is called by a nickname says a pasuk that corresponds to his real name. For example, if one is called Izak but his name is Yitzchak, he says the pasuk corresponding to Yitzchak.

Pasuk for Women

Based on the reasoning of the Chafetz Chaim, as mentioned above, women should also say a pasuk corresponding to their name at the end of Shemoneh Esrei. ²¹

Reciting Pasuk by Heart

Many people recite the pasuk by heart. Is this permitted? The halachah is that one is not allowed to say a pasuk that is written without reading it from the text.²² However, it is permitted if one is fluent in the pasuk. ²³ Since one who recites the pasuk many times is fluent in it, there is no concern of saying it by heart.²⁴ Other poskim maintain that the concern is when one is exempting others for a mitzvah, but this is not this case here.²⁵

Some poskim maintain that although there are leniencies if one knows Tehillim by heart, when it comes to a segulah this is different.²⁶

FOOTNOTES at https://tehalacha.com/wp-content/uploads/Vol18Issue2.pdf?utm_content=Kutm_source=VerticalResponse&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=Click%20here%20to%20download%20%22Mentioning%20a%20Pasuk%20at%20the%20End%20Of%20Shemoneh%20Esrei%22&utm_campaign=Mentioning%20a%20Pasuk%20at%20the%20End%20Of%20Shemoneh%20Esrei

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Rabbi Daniel Stein

Making Space for Hashem

In the wake of the sin of the Golden Calf, while lobbying on behalf of the Jewish people, Moshe interjected his own personal request, "let me know Your ways, so that I may know You" (Shemos 33:13). According to the Gemara (Brochos 7a), Moshe was asking Hashem to justify and explain the suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the wicked. Moshe followed this entreaty with a second supplication, "Show me now Your glory" (Shemos 33:18), which expressed his desire to grasp the true essence of Hashem and nature of His existence (Rambam Yesodei Hatorah 1:10). These are of course critical theological questions that are undoubtedly worthy of much contemplation and curiosity, but why are they relevant to a negotiation about forgiveness? How would understanding the answers to these questions on a personal level transform Moshe into a more effective spokesperson and ambassador for a people who surely erred?

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (Daas Torah) suggests that by making these personal requests Moshe was attempting to coax Hashem into absolving the Jewish people. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy begin "Hashem, Hashem", and the Gemara (Rosh Hashana 17b) interprets, "I am Hashem before the sin, and I am Hashem after the sin." Moshe interacted with Hashem "face to face" and was certainly well acquainted with the dimension of Hashem's mercy that exists prior to sin, but now he was asking to

experience Hashem's more potent and powerful form of kindness by witnessing Hashem's forgiveness after the sin. In order to grant Moshe's personal appeal for greater spiritual understanding Hashem was obliged to reveal the depths of His mercy by forgiving the Jewish people. Moshe's strategy teaches us that sincere requests for personal spiritual growth are always granted, and ironically, the more a person struggles to understand and the more distant he feels, the more likely Hashem is to respond.

The Medrash (Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:2) states, "Hashem says to Bnei Yisrael, my son, open for me a hole the size of a needle and I will open for you an opening that wagons and chariots can pass through." This seems to underscore the importance of making the initial move in the process of teshuvah, for even small steps can unlock a disproportionate amount of Divine assistance. However, according to Rav Yerucham, the Medrash also intends to convey that just like when one pokes a hole in a vessel, it now has a void that needs to be filled, so too if we create a deficiency in our heart, if we demonstrate that we are missing something in our relationship with Hashem, that vacuum itself opens and unleashes the potential for greater closeness and dveikus. After numerous attempts, Moshe realized that the most effective way to persuade Hashem to forgive Bnei Yisrael was by focusing on his own lack of knowledge and desire for greater spiritual discovery, because Hashem is committed to fulfilling those requests.

Therefore, an essential step in curating a fertile religious mindset is digging holes and opening spaces wherein the seeds of spirituality can sprout and flourish. The stones that rested in the breastplate of the Kohen Gadol are described as "filling stones" (Shemos 25:7) because they "filled" the indented settings that were carved into the gold. However, each of these priceless gemstones had its own unique beauty and color, how then can they rightly be reduced to simple space fillers? Perhaps the Torah overlooks the value of the stones and emphasizes instead the cavities which they occupied in order to indicate that Hashem's presence can only fit into our lives if we first hollow out space for Him. If we are satisfied and content with our religious status and spiritual intensity there is no room or reason for further development. Only if we feel some sense of emptiness, only if there is a gap between our current state and our desired destination, can Hashem enter our hearts and fill our souls.

The Gemara (Yevamos 79a) establishes that "there are three marks of the Jewish people. They are merciful, they are shamefaced, and they perform acts of kindness." The Baal Shem Tov traces these defining characteristics back to the three avos. Avraham epitomized kindness (Michah 7:20), Yitzchak represents fear and shame (Breishis 31:42), and Yaakov corresponds to mercy, which sits at the intersection between kindness and fear. However, we are told that at the time of Maamad Har Sinai, Moshe said to Bnei Yisrael, "Be not afraid, for Hashem has come only ... in order that the fear of Hashem may be ever with you so that you do not go astray" (Shemos 20:17). The Gemara (Nedarim 20a) infers from this pasuk that "one who does not have the capacity to be shamefaced it is known that his forefathers did not stand at Har Sinai." This implies that the Jewish attribute of shame was not inherited from the avos but rather developed later as a product of the experience of Maamad Har Sinai. The contradiction about the origins of Jewish shame leads Rav Yaakov of Izhbitzh (Beis Yaakov, Yisro) to distinguish between two types of shame. There is one kind of shame that exists after a sin or mistake. The avos ingrained within the Jewish psyche to instinctively be embarrassed when they commit an aveirah, even in private, while other nations tend to resist feelings of guilt until it is forced upon them. However, there is a second form of shame that isn't prompted by a specific sin or failure but rather is a function of the ongoing disappointment with the status quo. At the time of Maamad Har Sinai, when we encountered the unbridled revelation of Hashem's presence, we also accessed our own potential for holiness and transcendence. Subsequently, upon returning to regular life, we now confront an inherent sense of shame about the disparity between the normal and ideal states. However, it is precisely this frustration with our reality that opens the door for progress and change. Similarly, Rav Yaakov of Izhbitzh (Beis Yaakov, Noach) suggests that a drunk is prohibited from davening (Brochos 31a) because intoxication relaxes inhibitions and induces serenity, as the Gemara (Yoma 75a) states, "whoever casts his eye on his cup, the whole world seems to him like level ground." Prayer demands a certain uneasiness, a healthy sense of apprehension about the status quo, because in that tension lies the impetus for all improvement and growth. When one feels completely satisfied and content, ironically, prayer has no traction. A similar notion is expressed by the Gemara (Chagigah 13a) which establishes that the secrets of Torah may only be shared with one "whose heart inside him is concerned" about his sins and desires to repent. Rav Tzadok Hakohen (Pri Tzaddik, Beshalach) explains that intimate knowledge of Hashem can only be attained by someone who first appreciates and is worried about the distance between his current state of affairs and the expectations the Ribbono Shel Olam has for him.

In his Kuntres Hahispaalus, the Mittlerer Rebbe, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, records that he heard from his saintly father in the name of the holy Maggid of Mezeritch, that

it is impossible for a person to absorb the secrets of the Torah and grasp the true depth of the light of Hashem unless he possesses an innate tendency towards "mara shchora" - "melancholia". This statement should not be taken as a glorification or sanctification of sadness and depression, for these traits can be unhealthy and harmful and indeed, they are an impediment to becoming an effective and successful oved Hashem.[1] Rather, the Maggid is describing a spiritual longing and aspiration for what we could have been and what we need to become. The cushy couch of confident complacency doesn't leave much room for extrospection and introspection. Only when there is some frustration with the status quo, some tension with our current reality, can the light of Hashem begin to break through.

[1]See Shaarei Kedusha 2, 4 and Likkutei Moharan 282 and Tinyana 10.

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Parashas Ki Sisa תשפ"ב פרשת כי תשא

תשפ"ב פרשת כי תשא Every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul. (30:12) The Baal HaTurim observes that the word, v'nasnu: vov, nun, saf, nun, vov, is a palindrome (in this instance, a word which reads the same backward as forward). This prompts him to posit that one who gives to tzedakah, charity, does not lose his contribution; rather, he receives it back. Hashem sees to it that one's good deeds are not forgotten. What he gives to others will eventually be returned to him. Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl, notes another palindrome in the Torah: V'hikeihu, "And he will strike him" (Bereishis 32:9), which refers to Eisav's striking one of Yaakov Avinu's camps. Vov, hay, kuf, hay, vov. He explains that one who strikes us will receive just punishment from Hashem, measure for measure. This concept has been a source of hope and solace to our people amid the travail that has accompanied us throughout our exile. If I may add that the mitzvah of giving shekalim, requiring every Jew to give a half-shekel, makes him realize that, even when he gives a "whole" donation, he is but a "half." Only when unity reigns among Jews does one become whole; consequently, one who "gives" will be protected from Eisav striking out against him. The word v'nasnu, they shall give, applies to a unique form of gift. The word matanah, gift, applies to a bestowal on our fellow under such circumstances that the benefactor receives nothing in return and needs nothing from the beneficiary. It is pure giving for the sake of giving assistance, a tribute, an act of philanthropy. The benefactor sees someone who is in need, and, out of the goodness of his heart, he is happy to oblige and offer his gift. Such a v'nasnu, through which the only one who benefits is the beneficiary, has the power to protect and withstand Eisav's v'hikahu. When one is blessed by Hashem, he must realize that it is a gift for a purpose. Hashem does not provide His panacea to v'hikahu unless it is preceded by a whole-hearted v'nasnu. Horav Yosef Shaul Nattenson, zl, author of the Shoel U'Maeshiv, was Rav of Lvov. He once went with his brother-in-law, Horav Mordechai Zev, to solicit funds for pidyon shevuyim, to pay ransom, secure the release of a fellow Jew taken captive by slave traders or robbers or imprisoned unjustly. Sadly, this was not an uncommon occurrence. The wicked gentiles who preyed on Jews were acutely aware that Jews are benevolent and would pay for their brother's release, and they took advantage of it. They stopped at the home of Rav Hershel Bernstein, a prodigious philanthropist, who happily supported many causes. The well-known benefactor was ecstatic to see them, and he insisted that they have lunch with him. As a caveat, he would donate all of the necessary ransom. He loved guests, especially such distinguished personages, and he felt it was neither appropriate nor dignified that two such illustrious rabbanim spend their day knocking on doors seeking contributions. A meal with two such Torah giants revolves around Torah. In this case, they focused on the significance of the mitzvah of pidyon shevuyim. When Rav Hershel heard the topic, he said, "I cannot add divrei Torah to such profound thoughts with which their honors are enhancing this meal, but I can share an exceptional, inspiring story – indeed the story which was the harbinger of my wealth. When I was a young man, I studied Torah and was supported by my father-in-law. When the time came for me to go out on my own, I traveled to Leshkowitz, to the great market, to invest, buy and sell, in order to support my growing family. I had four hundred gold coins in my possession. My goal was to purchase precious stones and resell them at a profit. "I arrived at the market to see thousands of sellers, brokers and buyers, all engrossed in the business of making money. As I stood by the gateway to the market, I chanced upon a woman who was weeping bitterly. "How can I help you?" I asked. "What is wrong?" She replied that her daughter had been promised in marriage to a young man. She had promised a dowry of four hundred gold coins which she did not have. She feared that the marriage would be called off, and her daughter would be shamed. She was a young widow with no visible means of support. My heart went out to her, so I gave her the money that I had brought along to invest. This was the sum total of my material assets. "For the

sake of curiosity, I walked around the market. Who knows what I would venture to find? As I was walking, a man approached, and, in his hand, he had the most beautiful coral beads. I knew jewelry, and I was partial to precious stones, but I had never come across such beauty. 'Would you like to purchase these beads?' he asked. 'I have no money to invest,' I replied. 'You look like a trustworthy person. I will give it to you on credit. When you sell it, you will remember me.' Interestingly, the price he asked was four hundred gold pieces. I sold it immediately at three times its price and made a handsome profit. I returned to the man and paid him off. He was so impressed that he showed me more jewelry which cost me one thousand gold pieces. What did I have to lose? I had the money. I bought and sold, making a large profit. The next day, when I paid him his thousand gold pieces, he sold me jewelry for six thousand gold pieces. Once again, I made an incredible profit. When I returned the next morning to reimburse the man for his jewelry, he was nowhere to be found. No one had any idea who he was or where he had gone. I have never been able to locate him. I am certain, however, that Hashem had rewarded me for the mitzvah of hachnasas kallah, helping a young bride to get married. I saved this girl the shame of a broken match. Hashem repaid me multiple times over."

ואתה קח לך בשמים ראש Now you, take for yourself choice spices. (30:23) The Ohr HaChaim observes that the command to Moshe Rabbeinu regarding the Shemen HaMishchah, anointing oil, is different from the other commands concerning the construction of the Mishkan. Regarding the other aspects of the Mishkan, Hashem spoke to Moshe in second person. His intention, however, was that Moshe convey His instructions to a surrogate to perform the actual work. Not so concerning the anointing oil which, in this case, Hashem wanted Moshe to produce from ingredients which Moshe himself would donate. While the original call to donate the various items needed for the construction of the Mishkan included Moshe as well, this time it was directed to him exclusively. What was it about the Shemen HaMishchah that required Moshe's personal involvement from purchase to production? Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that the key lies in the purpose of the anointing oil. This oil was to anoint and to sanctify all the utensils of the Mishkan. As such, for the most part, the oil did not have its own purpose. It was, however, an enabler that empowered the other utensils to function in the Mishkan. The creation of a product to sanctify physical entities with a degree of holiness that allows them to serve and function in the Mishkan is no small contrivance. It requires that its initiator be one of impeccable moral, ethical and spiritual accomplishment – in other words, someone no less the caliber of Moshe Rabbeinu, who had achieved a level of holiness that was the envy of even the Heavenly angels. In fact, the original oil which Moshe made remained with the nation forever; it was never replaced. A similar lesson may be extrapolated concerning teaching Torah and the quality of character that should be inherent in everyone who acts as a vehicle for Torah transmission. Growth in Torah is intimately connected with holiness. Thus, it makes sense that the one who is the conduit (the rebbe) for teaching Torah should reflect personal sanctity and impeccable character. He is the anointing oil that will empower his students to grow into enablers. A rebbe must not only be erudite, his deeds and attributes must parallel his Torah knowledge. This is certainly the standard by which our rebbeim have lived and taught Torah. They were not only scholars; they were the embodiment of everything the Torah expected of a person of their calling. They are not the only ones who impart the Torah weltanschauung to us. These are also parents who teach by example and who, for the most part, are a child's first mentors. Horav Mattisyahu Solomon, Shlita, writes that following a talk that he gave to a group of young men, one of them remarked that he had never seen his father not wearing a shirt. This comment was considered quite praiseworthy by the other men in the group. The venerable Mashgiach was appalled at their reaction, almost as if it were a common occurrence for children to see their fathers prancing around in their tee-shirts or other stages of undress. How low have we descended if dignity is measured on the barometer of how coarse one presents himself in the privacy of his own home? Chazal teach (Sotah 36b) that Yosef refrained from sinning with Potiphar's wife as a result of seeing d'mus d'yukno shel aviv, the image of his father's face, appearing before his eyes. This image had been seared into his mind for twenty-two years! What images do we present to our children for posterity? Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, makes an intriguing (almost frightening) observation. D'mus d'yukno shel aviv is a mechayeiv, compels the father to present himself in such a manner that his d'mus d'yukno will leave a lasting impression on his children. To put it in ordinary vernacular: How do we want to be remembered? Sitting with a sefer and learning, or acting in a manner best suited for a bar? Yosef was filled with shame – a shame that prevented him from committing a terrible sin, only because he saw his father's image before him. Can we say the same? The Torah thus requires of us that our children see us with full dignity. This concept applies under all circumstances – even intimate family settings. Children remember what they see, and it might come back to haunt us! The Gerrer Rebbe, Horav Pinchas Menachem Alter, zl, was the youngest child, the ben zekunim, of his father, the saintly Imrei Emes, zl. The Pnei

Menachem once said, “From the time I was three years old, I did not forget even one thing that my father told me or one action that I saw him do.” Everything that he saw became seared into the future Rebbe’s phenomenal memory, never to be forgotten. The Pnei Menachem learned one of the most important lessons that his father taught him when he was child. He had noticed the Baal HaTurim’s commentary to the phrase describing Yosef’s relationship with Yaakov Avinu: “He was a ben zekunim.” The Baal HaTurim writes that the word zekunim is an acronym for the various orders of the mishnayos. The Torah alludes to the idea that Yaakov taught Yosef various orders of Mishnayos: zayin = Zeraim; kuf = Kodshim; nun = Nashim; yud = Yeshuos (which is another name for Nezikin); and mem = Moed. The young boy made an obvious observation to his father: One seder is glaringly missing – Seder Taharos – which deals with laws of purity. His father’s reply remained with him for the rest of his life, “When it involves purity, you must attain it on your own! One cannot achieve that pinnacle of avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, simply from learning with his father! That is a level that requires much personal endeavor and sacrifice.” The Pnei Menachem understood that yichus, illustrious pedigree, does not imbue one with purity. If he wanted to achieve and make his mark, he would have to work very hard and yearn for it.

ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחלת ויחר אף משה וישלך מידו את הלוחות וישבר אותם
It happened that as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, Moshe’s anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them. (32:19)

Hashem had informed Moshe Rabbeinu that the nation had sinned egregiously, so that he should descend the mountain and return to his people. What novel lesson did Moshe learn when he returned that provoked him to shatter the Luchos? Why did he wait so long? Simply, we might suggest that while he certainly believed Hashem, the matter was not yet engraved on his heart that the nation would be guilty of such treason. It is one thing to believe in Hashem unequivocally; it is another thing to be prepared to shatter the Luchos as a result of this belief. Seeing the sin in its complete depravity demonstrated to Moshe that the nation was seriously morally impaired. Rashi, however, informs us that Moshe was motivated to shatter the Luchos by a kal v’chomer (lenient and strict, whereby we derive one law from the other, applying the logic that, if a case which is generally strict has a particular leniency, a case which is generally lenient will certainly have that leniency). Moshe reasoned, “If Pesach, which is only one mitzvah, does not permit a ben neichar, one who is strange to Jewish law, to partake of it, certainly one who rejects the Torah, the entire corpus of Jewish law and observance, does not deserve the Luchos.” Thus, we see that Moshe had applied his analytical reasoning to deduce that shattering the Luchos was not only correct – it was mandatory. Horav Shmuel Berenbaum, zl, explains that Moshe understood the human psyche’s deference to the wiles and ploys of the yetzer hora, evil inclination, through which it attempts to drive a wedge between us and Hashem. Thus, when Moshe heard that the nation had sinned, he attempted to ameliorate their iniquitous actions by conjecturing that the people were looking for something. Satan provided that something – a medium, a powerful entity which appeared godlike in their eyes, with mystical powers that were the product of the kochos ha’tumah, powers of impurity, which are very real. True, they had sinned, but it was not their fault. They fell for Satan’s gambit. When Moshe descended the mountain, however, and came face to face with a molten calf, around which the people were unabashed, dancing and acting in the most reprehensible manner, he broke the Luchos. Perhaps Satan put the bug in their minds, but the deterioration was purely their own fault. There was nothing beguiling about the Golden Calf. It was the depravity of the people that should be condemned. How could they debase themselves to such a nadir after having just experienced the greatest Revelation of all time? The Rosh Yeshivah explains this with a practical analogy. A ben Torah who had heretofore spent years studying full time in kollel decided to leave the bastion of Torah and enter the world of commerce. His reason: his financial straits were choking him. He could not do this any longer. A few years passed, during which he had successfully navigated the world of commerce and now enjoyed the fruits of his labors: beautiful home, expensive car, children attending the finest schools and camps, clothing no longer an issue. Life was great. It is understandable that he might have felt that his decision to leave the bais hamedrash was practical. However, his counterpart had also left the yeshivah, but sadly did not make it; still lived with his large family in a basement apartment, scrounging for food, wearing second-hand clothing, with little hope for his financial future. To leave the yeshivah and have nothing to show for his troubles, not to be able to give a fortune to tzedakah, charity, but instead, be the one who is on the receiving end, is deplorable. Regarding him we could ask: Why did you leave, and what did you benefit from leaving? When Moshe descended and saw the deplorable calf, he was shocked how the people could have acted so foolishly, as to exchange Hashem Yisborach for such an absurdity. If they would have at least in some way gained – nu – but now they had exchanged everything for absolutely nothing. As a result, Moshe shattered the Luchos. The people did not deserve them. We should ask ourselves this question: For what

are we exchanging Torah learning? Are we giving it up for frivolity and sham pleasure? If we are, we are truly piteous.

Dedicated in memory of משה בן שמואל ז"ל Krilov Hebrew Academy of Cleveland,
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Parshat Ki Tisa: A Conspiracy to Forgive (Part I)

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT KI TISA

Over the past few weeks, we have been dealing with the "Mishkan Unit," the second half of Sefer Shemot. To very briefly recap:

- 1) Parashat Teruma & Tetzaveh: the command to Bnei Yisrael to build a Mishkan (portable temple) for Hashem to occupy.
- 2) Parashat Ki Tisa (1st half): in response to the worship of the "egel" (golden calf), Hashem cancels His command to the people to build the Mishkan. Since He has withdrawn His Presence from the people, there will be no need for them to build a temple to house His Presence.
- 3) Parashat Ki Tisa (2nd half): forgiveness -- the Mishkan command is reinstated as Hashem returns His Presence to His forgiven people.
- 4) Parashat VaYak'hel & Pekudei: The report of the actual performance of the command to build the Mishkan.

INTRODUCTION:

Parashat Ki Tisa raises so many questions: what are Bnei Yisrael really looking for in creating and worshipping the egel -- another God, or another Moshe? How do we understand Aharon's role in facilitating the egel fiasco? But we will leave these questions for another time. In this week's shiur, we will focus on the truly complex process of forgiveness for the crime of the egel (golden calf); next week, we will continue with the same topic (since next week's parasha, V-Yak'hel, repeats Parashat Teruma for the most part). I know that this is somewhat inconvenient, so if you'd prefer to receive Part II this week, email me at emayer@ymail.yu.edu 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

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE ATTRIBUTES

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

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

"I am the Lord your God...

You shall have no other gods besides Me...

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

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

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

Note how the second Commandment includes three divine attributes:

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

Similarly, in the third Commandment, we find yet another **mida** [divine attribute]:

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

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

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

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

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

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

MORE MIDOT HA-DIN

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

following promise:

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

[On the other hand...]

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) **Kel kana**
- 2) **poked avon ... le-son'ai**
- 3) **oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
- 4) **lo yenakeh**
- 5) **lo yisa le-fish'achem...**
- 6) **charon af**

We will now show how these six examples of **midat ha-din** relate directly to the **new** attributes that God now declares. Note the obvious - and rather amazing - parallel that emerges:

FIRST LUCHOT

- 1) **Kel kana**
- 2) **poked avon...le-son'ai**
- 3) **oseh chesed la-alafim**
... le-ohavai
- 4) **lo yenakeh**
- 5) **lo yisa lefish'achem**
- 6) **charon af**

SECOND LUCHOT

- Kel rachum ve-CHANUN**
poked avon avot al banim...
rav chesed ve-emet
notzer chesed la-alafim...
ve-nakeh, lo yenakeh
nosei avon ve-fesha...
erech apayim

FROM DIN TO RACHAMIM

Each attribute from the original covenant switches from **midat ha-din** to **midat ha-rachamim**. [To appreciate this parallel, it is important to follow these psukim in the original Hebrew.]

Let's take now a closer look:

A. **Hashem Kel rachum ve-CHANUN --> (1) Hashem Kel kana**
rachum ve-CHANUN based on 33:19 (see above)
a **merciful** God in contrast to a **zealous** God

B. **Erech apayim --> (6) charon af**
slow to anger in contrast to **instant** anger

C. **Rav chesed ve-emet --> (3) oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
abounding kindness for all, potentially even for the wicked
[This may allow the possibility of 'rasha ve-tov lo']
in contrast to **exacting** kindness, and hence, limited exclusively to those who obey Him.

[Note that the mida of emet is now required, for this abounding kindness for all must be complemented by the attribute of truth to assure ultimate justice.]

D. **Notzer chesed la-alafim --> (3) oseh chesed...**
le-ohavai
He **stores** His kindness, so that even if it is not rewarded immediately, it is stored to be given at a later time.

[This may allow the possibility of 'tzadik ve-ra lo']
in contrast to **immediate** kindness and reward for those who follow Him.

E. **Nosei avon ve-fesha... --> (5) lo yisa le-fish'achem ...**
forgiving sin in contrast to **not forgiving** sin.

F. **Ve-nakeh, lo yenakeh --> (4) lo yenakeh**
sometimes He will forgive, sometimes He may not.
[See Rashi, forgives those who perform teshuva.]
in contrast to **never** forgiving.

G. **Poked avon avot al banim...--> (2) poked avon le-son'ai**
He **withholds** punishment for up to four generations
[in anticipation of teshuva / see Rashi]
in contrast to **extending** punishment for up to four generations.

[Even though these two phrases are almost identical, their context forces us to interpret each pasuk differently. In the first luchot, all four generations are punished, in the second luchot, God may **hold back** punishment for four generations, allowing a chance for teshuva. See Rashi.]

These striking parallels demonstrate that each of the '13 midot' lies in direct contrast to the midot of the original covenant at Har Sinai.

This background can help us appreciate Moshe's immediate reaction to God's proclamation of these **midot**:

"And Moshe hastened to bow down and said: 'If I have indeed gained favor in Your eyes - **let Hashem go in our midst** - 'ki' = **even though** they are an **am ksheh oref** - a stiff necked people, and you shall pardon our sin...' (34:8-9)

God's proclamation that He will now act in a less strict manner enables Moshe to request that God now return His **Shchina** to the people **even though** they are an **am ksheh oref**. Note how this request stands in direct contrast to God's original threat that "he will not go up with them for they are a stiff necked people, less He smite them on their journey..." (see 33:3/ compare with 34:9)!

These Divine attributes of mercy now allow the Shchina to dwell within Yisrael even though they may not be worthy.

From a certain perspective, this entire sequence is quite understandable. For, on the one hand, to be worthy of God's presence, man must behave perfectly. However, man is still human. Although he may strive to perfection, he may often error or at times even sin. How then can man ever come close to God? Hence, to allow mortal man the potential to continue a relationship with God, a new set of rules is necessary - one that includes **midot ha-rachamim**.

The original terms of **brit Sinai**, although ideal, are not practical. In this manner, **midot ha-rachamim** allow **brit Sinai** to become achievable. These midot ha-rachamim reflect God's kindness that allows man to approach Him and develop a closer relationship without the necessity of immediate punishment for any transgression.

SELICHOT

This explanation adds extra meaning to our comprehension and appreciation of our recitation of the Selichot. Reciting the 13 **midot** comprises more than just a mystical formula. It is a constant reminder of the **conditions** of the covenant of the **second luchot**. God's attributes of mercy, as we have shown, **do not guarantee** automatic forgiveness, rather, they **enable the possibility** of forgiveness. As the pasuk stated, God will forgive only he whom He chooses ("et asher achon... ve-et asher arachem" / 33:19). To be worthy of that mercy, the individual must prove his sincerity to God, while accepting upon himself not to repeat his bad ways.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part One

1. It is not clear why Aharon does not insist that the people be patient and wait for Moshe. Note that, according to 24:14, the people are instructed to turn to Aharon **and** Chur, should a problem arise. Interestingly enough, Chur is never mentioned again.

Relate this to the Midrash that explains Aharon's behavior because Chur had told them to wait and was killed.

2. Note the use of the word 'shichet' in 32:7. In Devarim 4:16 we find a similar use of this shoresh in relation to making a physical representation of God with **good** intentions!

Read Devarim 4:9-24 carefully and note its connection to the events at chet ha-egel. Use this parallel to explain 4:21-23.

3. See the Rambam's first halacha in Hilchot Avoda Zara. Relate his explanation of the origin of Avoda Zara to the above shiur.

FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part Two

A. As the new covenant allows for mercy, the perception of God becomes less clear. While the first covenant boasted a clear relationship of 'panim el panim' (face to face / 33:11), this new covenant, even to Moshe, is represented by a 'face to back' relationship:

"But, He said, you can not see my face ... Station yourself on the Rock as My Presence passes by ... you will see my back, but

My face must not be seen."["LoTuchal lir'ot **panai** - ki lo yir'ani ha-adam va-chai ... ve-ra'ita et **achorai** - u-**panai** lo yira'u."] (33:20-23).

This new level has a clear advantage, midat ha-rachamim - however there is still a price to pay - the unclarity of Hashem's hashgacha. No longer is punishment immediate; however, reward may also suffer from delay. Hashem's hashgacha becomes more complex and now allows apparent situations of tzadik ve-ra lo-rasha ve-tov lo.

1. See Chazal's explanation of "hodi'eni na et drachecha" (33:13) How does this relate to our explanation?

2. As communication is clearer when talking face to face with someone as opposed to talking to someone with his back turned, attempt to explain the symbolism of the above psukim.

3. Why must Moshe Rabeinu also go down a level in his nevu'a?

B. The second luchot are carved by man, and not by God. Attempt to relate this requirement based on the nature of the 13 **midot**.

Relate this to the mitzva for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan, which follows in parshat Vayakhel.

Compare this to the mitzva to begin building a **sukka** immediately after Yom Kippur, and in general, why the holiday of **Sukkot** follows Yom Kippur.

C. After God declares His 13 midot of Rachamim (34:6-9), He makes a promise (34:10), and then adds some commandments (34:11-26).

Are these commandments new, or are they a 'repeat' of mitzvot which were given earlier in Parshat Mishpatim?

[Relate especially to Shmot 23:9-33.]

If so, can you explain why they are being repeated?

[Hint: Which type of mitzvot from Parshat Mishpatim are not repeated?] Relate your answer to the events of chet ha-egel.

D. In the story of chet ha-egel, we find a classic example of a 'mila mancha', i.e. use of the verb 'lir'ot' - to see [r.a.h.].

Review chapters 32->34 in this week's parsha while paying attention to this word. 'See' for yourself if it points to a theme. As you read, pay careful attention to: 32:1, 32:5, 32:9, 32:19, 32:25, 33:10, 33:12-13!, 33:20-23, 34:10, 34:23-24!, 34:30, and 34:35. What does it mean when God 'sees'..., when man 'sees'..., and when man 'sees' (or is seen by) God? Relate also to the use of

this verb (r.a.h.) at Ma'amad Har Sinai, especially 20:15, 20:19.

See also 19:21, 24:10, & Dvarim 5:21! Could you say that 'seeing is believing'?

If you had fun with that one, you can also try an easier one:

the use of the word 'ra'a' [evil / reish.ayin.hey.] in 32:12-14.

Relate to 32:17, 32:22, 32:25?, 33:4. Relate to Shmot 10:10; see Rashi, Ramban, Chizkuni, Rashbam.

E. Chazal explain that God's original intention was to create the world with his attribute of 'din' [judgement], but after realizing that it could not survive, He included (in His creation) the attribute of 'rachamim' [mercy] as well. [See Rashi Breishit 1:1 - 'bara Elokim...']

Relate this to the above shiur. Would you say that this Midrash reflects Sefer Shmot as well as Sefer Breishit.

F. Note 'kol tuvi' in 33:19. Relate this to "va-yar Elokim ki tov" mentioned after each stage of **creation** in Breishit chapter 1.

Can you relate this to the above question and above shiur?

See also Rambam Moreh Nevuchim I:54 / second paragraph.

[page 84 in Kapach edition Mosad Harav Kook]

G. Note 34:10 "hinei anochi koret brit..." & 34:29-30. Relate this to why we refer to midot ha-rachamim in selichot as 'brit shlosh esrei'.

H. Connect **Part I** of the above shiur to a similar concept of a mal'ach leading Bnei Yisrael, represented by a physical symbol - as in Bamidbar 10:33:"ve-aron brit Hashem noseia lifneihem derech shloshet yamim la-tur lahem menucha". See also Bmd. 10:35-36 & Yehoshua 6:6-11.