

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 11 #21, March 1-2, 2024; 21-22 Adar 1 5784; Ki Tisa

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.

Harriet Edleson sponsors the Devrei Torah for Ki Tisa honoring the yahrzeit of her mother, Sonya Edleson, a"h, on 24 Adar, which starts Motzi Shabbat.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Only a few weeks after the Revelation, when Moshe returns to the top of Har Sinai for additional Torah instruction from Hashem, B'Nai Yisrael miscalculate the timing of Moshe's return and panic. Fearing Moshe's death, some of the men approach Aharon and insist that he create a physical representation to which they can direct their energies, something to replace Moshe as their intermediary with God. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer observes that only a few thousand men participate in this sin, yet the result is that God punishes virtually the entire generation of the Exodus. The Ohr Hachaim explains that many additional Jews stand around and do not object to the idolatry, and even more Jews consider finding a new representation attractive. According to the Ohr Hachaim, the Jews who do not even try to stop the sin, or who approve in their hearts, are guilty of the sin of Egel Zahav and therefore earn punishment. Rabbi Singer extends this analysis to its reverse. Those who perform mitzvot or want to perform mitzvot earn a reward for the mitzvot and thereby come closer to Hashem. The lesson is that when a sin distances us from God, the reverse of that sin, a mitzvah, helps establish and build our relationship with our Creator.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, explains that Moshe's meeting with God after Egel Zahav is equivalent to Kol Nidre. The Torah starts, "Vayechal Moshe" (32:11), which chazal interpret as "Moshe absolved God of His vow" – that is, the vow of Divine Justice, under which a sin requires the death penalty. God wants Divine Mercy to override Divine Justice to permit humans to sin, perform teshuvah, and survive. The sin of Egel Zahav ends positively for Jews, thanks to Moshe's intervention.

After Egel Zahav, when Moshe is still with God on top of Har Sinai, God tells Moshe that the people have built and are worshiping a golden calf. God then tells Moshe to leave so He can destroy the people. What can Moshe say to defend the people who build and credit a golden calf with freeing them from Egypt? Rabbi David Fohrman points to 32:7-9. God tells Moshe that The Torah reports in 32:7 and again in 32:9 that Hashem speaks to Moshe. Why twice? The key is that

Moshe does not respond to God's reporting the sin. After all, there is no excuse for that sin. Moshe's only hope to save the people is to wait for God to give him an opening. In 32:9, God tells Moshe to leave so He can destroy the people. Moshe understands that he has an opening – stay so God is not alone and will not immediately destroy the people. Moshe uses God's own words to box in Hashem. These are Hashem's people, whom He promised to free and take to a special land. God made many promises to the Avot that He would give them the land and countless descendants. The non-Jews would interpret the failure of God to bring the people to the promised land as evidence of God's lack of power to keep His promises. Moshe convinces God that He cannot destroy the people; He must find a way to forgive them.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander reminds us that Moshe negotiates a new covenant after Egel Zahav – essentially a new Torah and the beginning of the Oral Torah. Rabbi Brander turns to the Hamas attack and world response of vastly increased and more dangerous anti-Semitism since October 7. During the war, Israelis and many Jews have come closer and put aside many of the differences that had been separating Jews. Rabbi Brander interprets this period as a dangerous and key time after which we Jews must find common ground with our fellow Jews – both in Israel and in the rest of the world. He hopes that more tolerance for fellow Jews and fellow Israelis will promote shared growth and a better world for all Jews and the rest of the world. Journalist Bari Weiss reviews some of the recent vicious attacks against Jews and asks us whether we want to live in a country (or world) where even speaking about Jewish topics requires substantial police protection. Rabbi Brander's approach of Jews coming together is hopefully an important step in addressing the current violence against Jews.

We read Ki Tisa every year either during the week of Purim or (during a leap year) very close to Purim Katan. Rabbi Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l, observes that the Megillah is the only book in Tanach (Bible) that does not contain God's name. Tetzaveh, which we read shortly before Purim or Purim Katan, does not contain Moshe's name. The Torah has hidden references to Esther, Mordechai, and Haman's names. Purim provides lessons for Jews living in the non-Jewish world, so the connection between Ki Tisa and relations with non-Jews, the primary focus of most of the Devrei Torah below, is especially appropriate this time of the year.

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,

Hannah and Alan

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. B"H Eliezer Tzvi ben David Hillel (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza)

completed his called-up duty in Gaza and returned home safely. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Ki Sisa: In Deep Deep Trouble

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5781

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 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.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5781-ki-sisa/>

Parshat Ki Tisa: Writing a New Torah

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone © 5784/2024

Mere days after experiencing the height of divine revelation, the Jewish people transgress. Falling into an idolatrous stupor, they join together to fashion a golden calf, which they worship at the foot of Mount Sinai. Upon his descent from the mountain, Moshe discovers what has transpired, has the participants in the worship executed, and beseeches God not to destroy the people entirely.

In the face of this tragedy and chaos, God responds, according to Rashi ([Shemot 31:18](#)) and others, by commanding the Jewish people to construct the Mishkan, the portable tabernacle within which the Divine presence would rest during their journey through the wilderness and into the land of Israel. While there is a countering view, adopted by Ramban, that the Mishkan was always a part of the divine plan, Rashi and his rabbinic colleagues see within the directive to build the Mishkan a corrective response to the making of the golden calf. What is this meant to reflect?

R. Yehuda Halevi (*Kuzari* 1:97) notes that the Jewish people hadn't meant to abandon God when worshiping the golden calf. Rather, in the aftermath of the revelation at Mount Sinai, the people yearned for a physical manifestation of the divine, just as they had experienced at Matan Torah. The episode of the golden calf came to highlight that the Jewish people had a spiritual need that had been left unmet, a need for a physical medium with which to engage with God. The Mishkan, then, is not merely a means of atonement for the collective sin of the Jewish people, but God's own acknowledgment that, in the wake of this moment of crisis, a new path within Torah observance was needed, one that reflected the spiritual position of the Jewish people themselves.

The instruction to build the Mishkan is inseparable from the very notion of Torah Shebe'al Peh, the Oral Torah, suggests R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, more commonly known as the Beit Halevi (*Sheilot u'Teshuvot Beit haLevi*, Drasha #18). Borrowing from the Midrash Tanchuma (*Ki Tisa* #34), that the giving of the second set of luchot was the moment when the Oral Torah was first developed, the Beit Halevi contrasts the relationship the Jewish people has with the Torah given with the first luchot, conceived to be totally written without any Oral law, and the reconstituted Torah with the second luchot, in which Torah was divided into two, with a written and an oral paradigm. When we received the first luchot, all of the Torah was intended to be written, assuring that no parts would be forgotten. Our role was merely to serve as the guardians of the sacred text, charged to protect and observe it.

But with the giving of the second luchot, the notion of an Oral Torah was developed, and the Jewish people became, so to speak, the very parchment upon which sections of the Torah were written. We became a part of the ever-expanding Torah, the authors of Torah that, by divine decree, is meant to respond to changes in our own circumstances, a Torah that has eternal divine principles but recognizes contemporary needs as essential to the very formation of Torah. The cataclysm of the golden calf was a “fortunate fall” that generated a new reality, in which Torah itself took on a new divine rooted evolving form.

We, too, have confronted a cataclysm, a shock to our core with ripple effects yet unknown. The reality we face in the aftermath of October 7 and the ensuing war and hostage crisis poses new challenges. We are charged to find the courage to seize this opportunity, foisted upon us but critical nonetheless, to build back our society with unity, to find common ground between the various sectors of our people to ensure our resilience and solidarity in the future. Like after the golden calf, we must use this moment to be committed to grow and deepen the Torah of Achdut, and create new paradigms of engagement. As Rabbi Elchanan Nir of Yeshivat Siach Yitzchak has poignantly written in a moving, post-October 7 poem, “Now We Need a New Torah.”

Paraphrasing Rabbi Nir: in this moment of crisis, we need a new Torah, a new Mishna, a new Gemara, a new Hasidism, a new Zionism and a new Rav Kook. A new love out of the terrible weeping. As with the second set of luchot, this renewal of Torah will remain rooted in the ancient words of the past, even as it takes new form in the present.

If people of opposing views and backgrounds can share an armored personnel carrier on the front lines, we can all certainly live together as well. Like with the golden calf incident, evolutionary growth in our relationship with God and with others must arise from this catastrophe. Shared growth, and a better world, must emerge from our great sacrifice.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Ki Tisa --The Rosh Yeshiva Responds: Ordering Fresh Food On Shabbat for Someone with an Eating Disorder

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

“However, you shall keep My Shabbats”)Shemot 31:13(.

“From where do we learn that saving a life overrides Shabbat?... Rabbi Yossi bar Rabbi Yehudah says, from this verse: ‘You shall keep my Shabbats, – perhaps for all matters? The verse teaches, ‘However’)there are times when you do not observe Shabbat – when a life is at stake(.”
)Yoma 85b(

QUESTION - Austin, TX

Someone in our community is engaged in a long-term treatment program for eating disorders. She lives with a group of other women who are patients at the hospital in an apartment down the street from the center where she will spend most of her days. She will be discharged back to her own apartment on Shabbat afternoon, but with no capacity to prepare food. She could eat sandwiches etc., but she raised the possibility of ordering something hot and fresh on GrubHub or a similar app.

Given that eating disorders have a 5 year survival rate, could ordering the food that she is interested in eating every day be considered providing for the needs of a cholah, sick person, who is in sakanah, a state that presents some risk to her

life? With GrubHub she'd get something hot and fresh.

ANSWER

Your analysis is correct. If eating hot food is important for her health, then she can definitely order it through GrubHub. It is minimally a case of a sick person who is not in danger of their life and the halakha is that a non-Jew may be asked to do a melakha to provide for this person's needs (see *Shulchan Arukh* OC 328:17). If she can arrange before Shabbat for delivery on Shabbat, that would be even the better. I assume that she will be eating kosher.

If she needs to order on Shabbat itself, and use her phone to do so, then – assuming that using electronic devices would fall in the d'rabanen (rabbinically prohibited) category, which is the general consensus – she would be permitted to do this as well. (see *Mishnah Berurah* 328:57, who rules that in such a case a d'rabanen can only be performed by a Jew if it is done with a shinuy, in an unusual manner, which would be difficult with a smartphone. But see *Nishmat Avraham* OC 328:3a, who rules that if it is not possible to do a d'rabanen with a shinuy, it may be done in the normal manner. See also *Shmirat Shabbat KiHilkhata*, ch. 33, fn. 23, who rules similarly).

In truth, however, when dealing with an eating order, we are likely dealing with a case of a sick person with a life-threatening illness, as you write. In such cases, one may perform even acts that are forbidden on Shabbat mi'di'oraitta, a Biblical level. Whether this characterization of her status is accurate needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis. It is important to stress in this regard that a case of even possible risk of life is halakhically identical to a case of definite risk of life, and that we always must be cognizant the serious health risks involved with an eating disorder.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/02/ryrkitisa/>

What It Means to Choose Freedom

By Bari Weiss * © thefp./com February 29, 2024

This past Sunday, I gave a speech at the 92nd Street Y called “The State of World Jewry.” The address is a historic one. Over four decades, it has been delivered by the likes of Elie Wiesel, Abba Eban, Amos Oz, and more.

But for a sense of the state of Jewish life in America these days, you need only to have walked by the building that night. You would've found that police had cordoned off the entire block — and for good reason. Anti-Israel protesters, many wearing masks, gathered to intimidate those who came to the lecture. On the way in, you would've been screamed at — told you were a “baby killer” and “genocide supporter” among other choice phrases. You might have even glimpsed Jerry Seinfeld being heckled and called “Nazi scum” on his way out of the talk.)Classy.(

This is of a piece with what's happening across the country at Jewish events.

On Monday at the University of Berkeley, to choose one of so many examples, a violent mob gathered outside an event featuring an IDF reservist. The students who gathered to hear him — and never got a chance to — were forced to evacuate. One student reported being physically assaulted. Another says he was spat on. Various students say the mob yelled slurs including “Jew, Jew, Jew.”

I am beyond grateful to the NYPD, and the entire staff of the 92nd Street Y, for making sure that everyone who attended the talk was able to do so safely. But everyone must ask themselves: Do we want to live in a country in which simply giving a speech about a Jewish subject requires serious police protection? What does that reality say about the state of our country and our freedoms?

* Journalist and Founding Editor, *The Free Press*. For the complete transcript, go to the Internet address below.

<https://www.thefp.com/p/bari-weiss-what-it-means-to-choose>

Corporate Corruption: Why Can't God Have a Body?

By Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff *

You may not believe it, but I was a STAR! Two years ago, I had a TikTok channel)@haggairesnikoff(dedicated to delivering YCT Torah in one minute bites. In one video, I addressed the Jewish rejection of the Christian doctrine that God was made)of[flesh. Christian viewers from across the country challenged me: Aren't you limiting the omnipotence of God if you say that God cannot take human form? My reply: it's not that God couldn't take human form, it's that we believe that God wouldn't. This, however, begs the question. What's the problem with believing in a corporeal God?

There may be technical answers to this question. Saying that God has a body implies that God is not eternal. Saying that God takes human form implies that God may have human appetites and weaknesses. I tend towards a more pragmatic reason that God would never take a human body. Believing that God may appear human creates a confusion between God and humanity that can lead to abuse.

Rabbi Meir ben Shimon of Narbonne Me'ili)early 13th c., Provence(addresses this matter in his Sefer *Milchemet Mitzva*, where he writes)ed. Moshe Yehudah HaKohen Blau, pt. 2, pp. 319-320(,

These people who we mentioned were more enlightened and successful in their understanding and intelligence than all of the wise people of their generation. And therefore, they said that the enlightening spirit in them was not like the souls of humans alone, rather the Divine took flesh in them...And they permit themselves all wickedness and violence and licentiousness and theft and murder and all evil things...

The claim that a human is divine creates an opening for abuse. The Me'ili goes through a philosophical argument)elided above(to explain why. I suggest a more direct connection. The people discussed above genuinely believe themselves to be God made flesh. As such they are the arbiters of right and wrong. However, they are still subject to the appetites and weaknesses of human beings. This combination creates the opportunity to justify any satisfaction of their appetites as the will of God. This is even more true for a person who claims to be God for exploitive purposes.

We've understood why God would never have a human body. What about a non-human body? The Rashbam)Shmuel ben Meir, c.1085-c.1158, France(, in his commentary on the Golden Calf, reveals a key truth about idolatry. He writes,

All idolators know that our God in Heaven created the world. However, they err in this: For the idols have in them an unclean spirit like the prophets who have in them the spirit of God.

The Rashbam claims that the essence of idolatry is that an object is imbued with an impure spirit)i.e. a pagan god(. What is wrong with this? Don't we say that the prophets carry, or communicate, in some way, the spirit of God?

The answer is that the notion that God may inhabit even a non-human body still creates opportunities for exploitation and abuse. The word of God as communicated by a prophet is still mediated through a human mind. It is still an interpretation of a sort. If God inhabits a body, however, even a non-human one, there is the illusion of a direct connection. Whatever messages one claims to receive are given the status of direct communication. In other words, access to an idol implies access to absolute truth. Someone who claims to know the absolute will of God has the opportunity to justify any behavior by claiming it is divinely sanctioned. Believing in a corporeal God is not inevitably abusive, but the danger looms large.

The gift of the Torah is that no closer communication with God is possible. Absolute truth remains out of reach, and no person can justify abuses and exploitation by claiming access to it. Every interpretation is open to disagreement and reinterpretation. Belief in a corporeal God, however, even temporarily, implies the possibility of direct connection and direct communication. Refuting this communication becomes much more difficult, and the possibilities for exploitation and

abuse multiply.

* Dean and Rebbe, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/02/tetzaveh5784/>

Leadership Styles: Thoughts on Parashat Ki Tissa

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

As Moses descended from the mountain with the Tablets of the Covenant, he heard a great commotion from the Israelite camp. Joshua, Moses' faithful attendant, stated: "*There is a noise of war in the camp.*" Moses corrected Joshua. The noise wasn't warlike, but rather was the sound of singing.

Indeed, what Moses and Joshua heard was the tumult created by the Israelites celebrating around the golden calf! Joshua had erred in his evaluation of the situation.

Rabbi Hayyim Angel, in his essay on Joshua's leadership (in his new book *Vision from the Prophet and Counsel from the Elders*, published by the Orthodox Union Press, 2013, and available through Ktav Publishing House) notes that in this first statement of Joshua recorded in the Torah, Joshua was wrong and needed to be corrected! Rabbi Angel points out that Joshua went on to make other errors in judgment in future episodes recorded in the Torah.

Yet, Joshua emerged as the successor of Moses. His tenure as leader of Israel was actually remarkably successful. The people were united; there were no rebellions among them. Except for one incident involving the sin of one man (Achan), the Israelites remained faithful.

The Talmud (Baba Batra 75a) compares Moses to the sun and Joshua to the moon. Moses was the brilliant prophet/leader who was closest to God. Moses' greatness was overwhelming, creating distance between himself and the people. By contrast, Joshua was only a pale reflection of the glory of Moses. Joshua made mistakes, Joshua was not as forceful or as confident as Moses.

Rabbi Angel quotes the *Sefat Emet* of Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger who contrasted the leadership styles of Moses and Joshua. Whereas Moses, like the sun, was totally dominant, Joshua was like the moon — the moon allows stars to shine! It was precisely Joshua's "imperfections" that made him a phenomenally successful leader. He did not view himself — nor was he viewed by the people — as a one-of-a-kind leader to whom everyone had to defer. Rather, he was one of the people; he consulted them; he appointed others to take leadership roles. He was content to be a "moon" who let other "stars" shine.

The lesson: there are different types of leaders and different styles of leadership. Some leaders are brilliant, awesome, overwhelming. People have a natural tendency to defer to them, to see themselves as sheep who must follow their gifted, powerful shepherds. Yet, this kind of leadership — for all its virtues — has deep flaws. It tends toward authoritarianism. It vests too much power in the hands of one person. It diminishes the role and responsibility of the public at large. And it is a leadership that is impossible (or almost impossible) to replicate in future generations.

Some leaders, following the model of Joshua, do not concentrate all power in themselves, and do not consider themselves to be the all-dominant authority. They are hard working, focused, and dedicated public servants who strive to maintain the cohesiveness of their communities. They make room for others to shine. They encourage others to take roles of responsibility and leadership. They understand that leadership is a sacred burden to be utilized for the good of the public.

In a sense, the public prefers an all-powerful leader like Moses. This kind of leader takes responsibility off their shoulders. They can blame the leader when their needs are not satisfied. They can hide behind the greatness of their leader when confronting the challenges of life.

Yet, the leadership style of Joshua has much to commend itself for a community that wishes to foster the dignity and responsibility of each person; that wishes to encourage initiative on the part of capable individuals; that doesn't attribute all greatness or all blame to its leader.

In summarizing the virtues of Joshua's leadership, Rabbi Hayyim Angel writes that Joshua's essential humanity — his weaknesses as well as his strengths — enabled him to gain the trust of the people. They could identify with him and could know that he identified with them. *"As a result, Joshua was able to transmit Moses' teachings to the people, guiding a stiff-necked and rebellious people to unrivaled faithfulness as they entered the Promised Land."*

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its winter fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/leadership-styles-thoughts-parashat-ki-tissa-march-2-2013>

Remember the Sabbath – Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

A Jewish organization recently sent an invitation to an important event intended to combat hatred. The program was sponsored in cooperation with local Asian and Black community groups. The idea was: we all need to stand together to maintain a just and civil society.

Those who conceived of and organized this program deserve praise for their good intentions and hard work. But as I read the invitation to the event, my heart sank.

The event was scheduled for a Saturday morning!

For the event organizers, Saturday was just...Saturday. It wasn't Shabbat. It wasn't the Jewish Sabbath. It wasn't a holy day when Jews should find themselves at prayer in synagogues.

There was no embarrassment calling on Jews to attend the event even though this would entail disregarding Sabbath observance.

If Jews don't respect their Sabbath, how can we expect others to respect it? Wouldn't it be nice if even the most secular Jews at least showed formal respect for the Jewish Sabbath? The issue goes beyond religious sensitivity; it's really a matter of Jewish self-respect. We wouldn't want other groups to trample on and disregard our holy days; why would we do so ourselves?

Surely, the Jewish community should work cooperatively with all groups who stand against hatred and bigotry. Surely, we should welcome communal efforts to bring people together to foster mutual respect and understanding.

But we can do these things without undermining the sanctity of our Sabbath.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy..."

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3199>

Ki Sisa: Idol Worship and Idle Worship

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The prohibition against Avoda Zora (idol worship) is well known. It is the second in the Aseres Hadibros ("Ten Commandments"). The Rambam (*Avodas Kochavim* 1) tells us that idol worship came about when people decided to pay tribute to the various forces that Hashem created. Some paid tribute to the sun, to the moon, to rain, and so on. The basic understanding of idol worship is that eventually people started worshipping these energies instead of worshipping Hashem. People decided that they could try to bypass Hashem to obtain whatever blessing they needed. They made figurines to represent these energies and paid tribute to them. The Torah prohibits all of this. Our task in life is to strive to have a relationship with Hashem. In fact — as we describe so eloquently in the blessing of Borey Nifashos — the reason that we have needs is because Hashem wants to have a relationship with us through our prayers and His blessings.

In this week's Parsha, the story of the Eigel (golden calf) provides us additional insight regarding the motivation that people had to serve Avoda Zora.

The story of the Eigel is well known. After the revelation at Sinai, Moshe ascended the mountain to learn the details of the law. He told the people that he would return after 40 days. They counted inclusively, counting the day of Moshe's ascent. When Moshe didn't return according to their count, fear and panic gripped the people. They created a golden calf to replace their leader, Moshe. The fact is that they miscounted; they should have begun their count with the first full day, the day after Moshe's ascent.

The question is: What were the Jewish people thinking? How could they have fallen so far as to make an idol just days after the great revelation?

The commentaries explain that there were two responses in the Jewish People to the problem of their missing mentor, Moshe. One response was of spiritual desperation. How would they now connect with G-d? They therefore wished to create an intermediary between them and G-d, instead of Moshe. From the knowledge they gleaned at the revelation at Sinai the people knew that one of the symbolic conduits of G-d's spiritual energy was a calf (see Radak commentary to Yechezkel 1:27). Focused as they were on spirituality, when they needed to create a new intermediary, they chose a calf.

A second response to the crisis of Moshe's absence was quite the opposite. Instead of looking for a new way to connect with G-d, some Jews gave up on spirituality. Moshe, their mentor, was gone. In their minds, so was the spiritual dream. All that was left was to simply savor the freedom from Egypt. That freedom, and the opportunity for personal wealth, was symbolized by gold.

The golden calf was a mutual mode of worship, a meeting place of sorts, for both groups, both of whom had entered an "emotional denial" regarding the great revelation and the vision of the Jewish people. One group chose to substitute the spirituality of Judaism with their own version of spirituality, while the other group chose to ignore spirituality entirely.

The spiritual response of the "calf" (intermediary to G-d), and the physical response of the "gold" (denial of a spiritual

mission), are responses that exist today in the Jewish world. When people are spiritually unsatisfied, they may choose a far-out spiritual approach, or they may choose to ignore spirituality and focus on physicality. Young adults who are desperately yearning for spirituality may end up in the far eastern religions in their quest for a spiritual alternative. Others respond to their unsatisfied feelings by trashing religion altogether and choosing the approach symbolized by the worship of gold. The golden calf was able to appeal to both approaches, so it was the choice for the people seeking a solution/escape from the problem of Moshe's absence.

There is however a third approach which can be found in Jewish communities today. That is the approach of loyalty. Despite questions, this third approach maintains that with patience and persistence, we can develop a deep, meaningful relationship with Hashem.

Once, at the conclusion of a monthly Tehillim class that I was giving, one of the participants came over to me to say, *"Wow. These explanations are great. I didn't realize that the words of Tehillim have meaning."*

The comment was striking. Yes, many of us have the loyalty to observe even if we don't see meaning in it. But with the proper effort and education, with patience and persistence, we can reach a place in observance that is so much better.

When Ahron saw the golden calf, he declared, *"Tomorrow shall be a holiday for G-d."* Perhaps his intent was to respond to the void that the people were feeling.

"No," he was saying, *"We do not need to make our own alternative deities to connect spiritually."*

"No. We do not need to give up, and begin to worship money and physicality instead of G-d."

And *"No,"* we do not need to give up hope for a meaningful relationship with G-d. *"Tomorrow shall be a festival for G-d,"* means that by taking proper action today we can make spirituality meaningful tomorrow.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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. 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.**

Ki Sisa - What Are You Dreaming About?

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 5783)2023(

Before completing the details of the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the desert, the Torah interjects one of the most painful episodes in our nation's history – the sin of the Golden Calf. At the foot of Mount Sinai, just over a month after the glorious, elevated experience of receiving the Ten Commandments from G-d and becoming His chosen nation, we erred grievously. Before Moshe had even finished receiving the full details of the Torah, we slipped and worshipped the Golden Calf. Our rabbis teach us that this sin had a devastating impact which echoes throughout the ages. Before the Golden Calf we had regained the spiritual level of Adam and were no longer subject to the curse of death. It was only because of this sin that we die today.)See Sforno Shemos 19:6(Furthermore, any punishment visited on our nation throughout our painful history was partially an atonement for the Golden Calf.)See Rash"i Shemos 32:34(

If we carefully study the words of the Torah, however, it would seem that this sin did not involve the vast majority of our

nation. The Torah records for us the initial call to recognize the calf, *“and they said, ‘This is your god, Israel, who took you out of Egypt!’”* (Shemos 32:4) The Torah is telling us that the body of the Jewish nation was standing off to the side and not involved in worshipping the calf. Those serving the calf cried out to the body of the Jewish nation, *“This is your god, Israel.”* Clearly, those serving the idol were separate from the main body of Israel. Furthermore, when Moshe instructs those committed to G-d to come forth and kill all those who were involved in worshipping the Golden Calf, only three thousand people were killed. The nation as a whole was a nearly two and a half million people. This is just one eighth of a percent of the entirety of the Jewish nation. The sin of the Golden Calf was the actions of a tiny, fringe group who viewed themselves as separate from the rest of Israel. Why was this sin so devastating that it caused such damage for our entire nation throughout history?

The Ohr Hachaim (Shemos 32:4) explains that in truth most Jews did not engage in the Golden Calf. Nonetheless, there were two ways in which the majority were culpable for the sin of those few who did worship the idol. One way is that there were many who were capable of protesting and preventing the sin from occurring, but chose not to get involved. Those who allowed idol worship to enter into their midst, and worse allowed their friends and neighbors to fall prey to idol worship, were held accountable for the sin, as well. Allowing them to sin showed that they were somewhat in favor of the sin. Their silence made them accomplices.

There were others, though, who were incapable of preventing the sin. Those involved in the sin would not have been willing to listen to them, and their hands were tied. Yet, even among those people, there were still some who were included in the sin. As they watched the event unfold, their hearts were inclined to the sin. They were not actively interested in worshipping the idol, they were simply inclined towards it. That feeling, that dreaming to perhaps one day be involved, was enough to include them in the sin.

The Ohr Hachaim is teaching us that being open to a sin is already considered a sin. The opposite is true as well. The Mesillas Yesharim in his opening chapter teaches us that Torah and mitzvos are much more than a list of laws or guidelines. Torah is an outline of the concepts and philosophies that are important to G-d for His creations and for His world. When we engage with these concepts we connect ourselves with G-d. This connection is the ultimate purpose of every mitzvah we do.

Each and every mitzvah is a golden opportunity to deepen our relationship with G-d and to enhance our own G-dliness. The Ohr Hachaim is teaching us that we don't need to wait for the actual opportunity in order to reap those benefits. Whenever we see a mitzvah being done, simply being inclined towards that mitzvah can connect us with that mitzvah, bring us eternal reward and enhance our relationship with G-d.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Ki Tisa

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Ki Tisa. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Ki Tissa - Midrash and Commentary

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2023

He gave Moshe [the Tablets] when He concluded speaking with him.

These words describe the transmission of knowledge from master to disciple, and it is only natural that they sparked a lively discussion in the Midrash. Here is one paragraph of the Midrash Rabbah (Shemot 41:5) with a brief commentary:

He gave Moshe – the rabbis say, if the Israelites would have performed that act before the Tablets were given to Moshe, they [the Tablets] would not come down with him.

R. Levi says, after they performed that act God gave the Tablets to Moshe, as it is written

The dispute between the rabbis and R. Levi is whether the laws of the Torah are observed for the sake of the Torah or the sake of the people. The rabbis argue that the goal is total observance of the Torah, and if that goal can be achieved only by one person, Moshe, he alone should receive the Torah and the Israelites should be rejected. R. Levi, on the other hand, argues that the Torah has value only as a tool to transform human society. It was given to the sinners, to those who were imperfect, so they could use its teachings and wisdom to change and improve themselves.

A similar debate takes place today among Jewish religious leaders. There are those who believe that all the decrees, customs, and regulations added over millennia by scholars have become an integral part of the Torah, and that the ideal is to observe the Torah in its totality, even if it will be observed only by a small portion of the Jewish people. Others believe that the Torah must be given to everyone, and that the rabbis must find ways to make it accessible and meaningful even to those dancing around the Golden Calf.

We continue reading:

R. Shimon ben Lakish said, "speaking with him" is analogous to a disciple learning from a master. Initially, the master speaks and the disciple repeats his words, but once the disciple understands, the master tells him to speak with him. Similarly, when Moshe went to heaven, he started by repeating after God, but once he understood, God told him "let us say together, me and you."

In this beautiful and touching piece, R. Shimon ben Lakish channels his own history and the way he felt empowered by studying Torah. R. Shimon found the world of Torah in a relatively late age and became the disciple and later colleague of R. Yohanan. He describes his own journey from a recipient who is in an inferior position, repeating the words of his master, to one who masters the knowledge and is now an equal partner of his original master.

According to the Talmud, the relationship between R. Shimon and R. Yohanan was very intense, and their learning together was passionate. Additionally, R. Shimon was allegedly enticed to study with R. Yohanan when the latter offered to introduce R. Shimon to his sister, whom he eventually married. These intimate relationships of scholarship, friendship, and marriage are highlighted in R. Shimon's next comment:

R. Shimon ben Lakish said, if one teaches Torah, and his listeners do not feel the pleasure a newly wed couple feels, he should rather keep quiet. How do we know this? When God gave the Torah to the Israelites, they felt that it was their bride, as it says ככלותו – He concluded.

R. Shimon uses a clever wordplay on the word ככלותו which resembles the word כלה – bride, to convey his belief that the study and observance of Torah cannot be a purely intellectual activity or performance of religious ritual. Rather, it should

be part of our life's fabric and cause us excitement and pleasure)see "*Spiritual Intimacy*," Rabbi Ovadia's Dvar Torah in the Potomac Torah archives for Ki Tisa 5782(.

R. Shimon continues to develop the bride analogy:

R. Levi said in the name of R. Shimon ben Lakish, just as a bride is adorned with twenty-four adornments, a scholar must be expeditious with the twenty-four books.

Twenty-four is the number of books in the Bible, and R. Shimon says a scholar should know them well so he could immediately retrieve knowledge – זריז. That kind of acquaintance with the Bible is no longer a requirement in the Yeshiva world, unfortunately, and it is probably one of the causes for the lackluster with which some people observe Torah. How can one be excited about Torah without being familiar, intimately, with the full scope of the Bible?

R. Shimon concludes with a harsh and very relevant criticism:

R. Shimon ben Lakish says, a bride, as long as she is in her father's house, hides herself and is not known to people.

Before she enters the Huppah she uncovers her face, as if saying "if anyone wants to testify about me [being promiscuous] let him step forward."

Similarly, a scholar should be humble like the bride and well-known for good deeds.

R. Shimon is speaking about honesty and transparency and about not hiding behind a religious mantle. It is very appropriate while the Vatican is discussing the sexual-harassment atrocities performed by its clergy and ignored by its establishment for decades. Jews following the coverage cannot be complacent, thinking "*this would have never happened to us*," because it happened. Not at the scale and magnitude of the church, but even one case of sexual-harassment is too much.

R. Shimon says that one's fame does not stem from his knowledge or even seemingly pious behavior, but from the way he treats other people. "*Mahasim Tovim*" in rabbinic language always refer to the relationships with other people, while "*mitzvot*" describes our commitment towards God. Hence, the term "*Torah, mitzvot, and mahasim tovim*" covers the full spectrum of Jewish observance – learning Torah, observing laws between us and God, and observing the laws which govern our behavior towards others. R. Shimon further says that the scholar should be able to invite criticism, like the bride on the brink of marriage.

And this is also a warning to any community, whether a school, a Hassidic court, a synagogue, or a non-profit religious organization – don't be afraid to ask questions and to demand explanations, and never, never cover up a leader's troublesome behavior.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

How Prayer Helps Us in Daily Challenges

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

In the DOC handbook for tramping, the first piece of advice for someone who is lost is to “relax, have a cup of tea, remain calm, and think it through.” The worst thing one can do in that situation is to panic or stubbornly continue on the trail. If only the Jews at Sinai could have learned this lesson.

Instead, when Moses did not come down from the mountain at exactly the time they expected, they all immediately jumped to the worst conclusion and assumed Moses was dead. So they decided to make an idol of a golden calf to lead them back to Egypt.

When Moses came down and saw what was happening, he broke up the revelry by breaking the tablets and had to spend another 40 days on the mountain trying to achieve forgiveness for Israel. In a period of uncertainty, it is hard to keep calm and levelheaded. But it is something we must do -- because solutions present themselves to those who keep their wits about them. One cannot know all the available options and opportunities without taking time to look around and see. Usually there are far more available options than what appears at first glance -- but a panicked person cannot see all possible solutions.

One key advantage of prayer is that it helps one relax, focus, and consider options. All through my career, congregants have reported to me that this is why they like coming to synagogue. Prayer gives them a chance to calm down from the bustle of daily life, and while they are in that state of calm, they see new things and perspectives that can improve their situations and lives. So as I head off to tramp this week in Stewart Island, my prayer is that I'll keep calm)although I don't plan on getting lost(and also that everyone at AHC has a wonderful and calming prayer experience over this and every other Shabbat.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Ki Tissa: Wisdom for the Wise

When appointing Betzalel and other craftsmen to construct the Tabernacle, God declared, *“In the heart of all wise-hearted, I have placed wisdom”*)Ex. 31:6(. Why should God give wisdom to the wise — it is the fools who need it!

A person who wishes to increase his physical strength will not achieve his goal by developing his intellectual powers. He needs to concentrate on building up his body, with physical exercise, healthy food, and proper sleep.

But the opposite can also be true. When we strengthen the body, we enable the mind to reach its full potential. This is nature's rule of *“A healthy mind in a healthy body.”*

Beyond the objective of strengthening the intellect and broadening one's knowledge lies an even higher goal: the pursuit of ruach hakodesh)divine inspiration(and prophecy. The relationship between the body and the mind parallels the relationship between 'natural wisdom')the arts and sciences(and 'divinely-emanated wisdom.' We may aspire to prophetic enlightenment, but we must first gain proficiency in the natural sciences.

Maimonides mentions this requisite intellectual preparation for prophecy in the *Mishneh Torah*, Yesodei HaTorah 7:1:
"Prophecy is only bestowed to a sage who is great in wisdom, of strong character... And he must possess an extremely expansive and accurate worldview."

We need to expand all of the mind's intellectual capabilities in order to fulfill the rule of *"a healthy mind in a healthy body"* on a spiritual level. Then an enriched prophetic inspiration will emerge within the broadened framework of a penetrating, enlightened mind.

)*Gold from the Land of Israel*, pp. 158-159. Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh* vol. I, pp. 66-67.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYAKHEL58.htm>

Ki Tissa: Moses Annuls a Vow (5780)

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

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

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

Rabbeinu Tam, Rashi's grandson, was particularly insistent in arguing that the kind of annulment Kol Nidre represents cannot be retroactive. It cannot apply to vows already taken. It can only be a pre-emptive qualification of vows in the future. Accordingly he insisted on changing its wording, so that Kol Nidre refers not to vows from last year to this, but from this year to next.

However, perhaps because of this, Kol Nidre created hostility on the part of non-Jews, who said it showed that Jews did not feel bound to honour their promises since they vitiated them on the holiest night of the year. In vain it was repeatedly emphasised that Kol Nidre applies only to vows between us and God, not those between us and our fellow humans. Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some places until the eighteenth century, in lawsuits with non-Jews, Jews were forced to take a special oath, More Judaica, because of this concern.

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

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

Many of them remained Jews in secret, and once a year on the night of Yom Kippur they would make their way in secret

to the synagogue to seek release from the vows they had taken to adopt to another faith, on the compelling grounds that they had no other choice. For them, coming to the synagogue was like coming home, the root meaning of teshuvah.

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

So the theories as they stand do not satisfy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

defeated Me)by persuading Me to forgive the Israelites whom I had sworn to destroy(, I gained for I did not destroy Israel.]1[

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

The power of Kol Nidre has less to do with forced conversions than with a recollection of the moment, described in our parsha, when Moses stood in prayer before God and achieved forgiveness for the people: the first time the whole people was forgiven despite the gravity of their sin. During Musaf on Yom Kippur we describe in detail the second Yom Kippur: the service of the High Priest, Aharon, as described in Vayikra 16. But on Kol Nidre we recall the first Yom Kippur when Moses annulled the Almighty's vow, letting His compassion override His justice, the basis of all Divine forgiveness.

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

FOOTNOTE:

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

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[Why is Kol Nidre mysterious?

]2[What is the connection between Yom Kippur and this week's parsha?

]3[How does "strict justice hurt humanity"? What is the alternative?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tissa/moses-annuls-a-vow/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

From the Golden Calf to the Silicon Chip

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

The Torah portion of Ki Tisa is well known because it contains the narrative of one of the most tragic moments in our history — the sin of the Golden Calf.

To briefly recap:

Fifty days after leaving Egypt, with the people camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses ascended the mountain for 40 days. When he didn't return on what the people mistakenly calculated as the 40th day, they assumed that he had died. To reinforce their error, Satan conjured a vision of a funeral in the sky, making it appear to the people as though Moses was being carried away in a coffin.

Wishing for a replacement for Moses, the people said, *“Come on!)Let us(make gods that will go before us”* — to lead us, to intervene for us, to be there for us — *“because this man Moses, who brought us up from the Land of Egypt, we don’t know what has become of him.”*¹

The people approached Aaron, Moses’ brother who would later be designated as the High Priest, and demanded, *“Make for us a god!”* Aaron, meaning well and intending to buy time, told them to go home and collect gold from their family members. He hoped that the women and children, who valued their jewelry and precious objects, would not consent — at least not immediately — and this would delay matters until Moses returned. But instead of asking their wives and children for their jewelry, the men immediately removed their own jewelry and gave it to Aaron.)Thus, the women played no part in the affair.(

Aaron took the gold, threw it into the fire, and voila, the Golden Calf was born, a terrible transgression that remained a stain on our people forever. G d wanted to destroy the people and build a new nation through Moses, yet Moses pleaded with G d to forgive their sin. G d ultimately acquiesced and moved on from His plan to destroy His nation.

Golden Paradox

When the people came to Aaron and demanded, *“Make for us a god!”* what material did they use? They used perhaps the most precious material of all — gold. Why did they use gold? And did the fact that they made the calf out of gold place a negative stigma on gold? Is gold now considered something unholy?

An intriguing teaching sheds light on this. The Midrash notes, *“The world was not worthy to have the use of gold, and it was created solely for the sake of the Beit Hamikdash.”*² It follows that gold is inherently holy, created with the primary intent of enabling the Jewish people to construct physical structures that would house G dliness — namely the Tabernacle and then the Holy Temple.

But then, it was specifically used in the most terrible transgression in Jewish history!

So, is gold holy or unholy?

Embrace Technology or Shun It?

To answer this question, let’s segue into one of the most important debates of our times: Does technology improve our lives? Should it be embraced or rejected? Is it holy or unholy?

On the one hand, modern technology allows Torah classes to be broadcast on the Internet, reaching people all over the world. Two thousand years ago — and even just a few decades ago — this would have been deemed miraculous.

The Rebbe himself appeared to embrace technology, encouraging the teachings of Tanya to be broadcast over radio waves when many considered radio “impure.” The Rebbe allowed his farbrengens)Chassidic gatherings(to be broadcast over cable television, which was as incredible as it was groundbreaking and historic — a rabbi speaking on cable television, reaching the entire world!

Initially, the Rebbe’s talks were heard worldwide through telephone hook-ups. As technology advanced, video broadcasts became available, allowing the community here in Los Angeles — and so many others throughout the world — to watch the Rebbe’s talks live. Later, during Chanukah events and Lag BaOmer parades, satellite feeds connected New York, Paris, Jerusalem, Hong Kong, and many other places worldwide, uniting the world through technology.

On the other hand, technology comes with risks. Giving young children unrestricted access to smartphones, tablets, and the Internet can be very dangerous; the content they view could be highly inappropriate. There are predators lurking out there. The Internet is a perilous place.

Is technology holy or unholy? The response to this question is, “Yes!”

Back to the question of gold. If you make a Holy Temple out of it, if you use it to construct a Tabernacle, there’s nothing holier. *“Gold was only created for the Holy Temple.”* If, G d forbid, you use it to create a Golden Calf, an idol, then there’s nothing more unholy. Technology is just like gold: when used in the service of G d, there’s nothing holier.

My Daily Torah Study classes and weekly sermons are accessed via Chabad.org, the world’s largest Jewish educational website. How did it attain this status? Because it had a very early start. With the Rebbe’s encouragement, Chabad.org’s founder, the pioneering Rabbi Yosef Kazen, of blessed memory, began disseminating Torah in cyberspace when most people were still trying to figure out what the Internet was.

As we’ve seen, there’s no tool more effective than the Internet for spreading Torah worldwide. Through it, Torah can reach millions across the world, something that was impossible without a miracle up to now. Technology is wonderful; there’s nothing holier. But, like gold, there’s also nothing more unholy. If used inappropriately, the worst the world has to offer is now at our fingertips.

Is technology holy or unholy? The answer is a resounding “Yes!”

Purim Connection

Most years, the portion of Ki Tisa is read during the week of Purim. Even during a Jewish, or lunar, leap-year — such as this year — this parshah is read in proximity to Purim Katan, the “Minor Purim.” Ki Tisa and Purim thus have a special connection, unveiling an important life lesson for us all.

Purim stands out as one of the most extraordinary miracles in Jewish history. To review: The Purim story unfolded during the period of exile between the destruction of the First Holy Temple and the subsequent return and building of the Second Temple. The Jewish people in that era enjoyed unprecedented acceptance amongst the nations of the world. King Ahasuerus, leader of the civilized world at the time, treated the Jewish people with equality throughout his domain.

When Ahasuerus made his famous royal banquet, glatt kosher food was served. The finest kosher wines were available.³

But their participation in that royal feast was a desecration of G d’s name because, at the meal, Ahasuerus paraded the utensils of the Holy Temple, and instead of protesting, they joined the party. And that ultimately brought about a complete reversal of fortune for the Jews.⁴

In an era of total acceptance of the Jewish people, suddenly a decree was brought about by the wicked Haman to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child from the face of the earth. Yet a great miracle occurred. Mordechai and Esther awakened a spirit of repentance among the Jewish people. For nearly an entire year, they stood in that spirit and repented completely. G d wrought a miracle, leading to a tremendous turnaround. Haman and his ten sons were hanged, and all his henchmen lost their lives. The Jewish people were recognized as a fine people, dedicated to the Persian-Median government and staunch in their Jewish practice, and everybody lived happily ever after.

That’s the Purim story as it is recorded in the megillah, the Book of Esther.

Where is G d?

One of the most intriguing aspects of the megillah is the complete absence of G d’s name. In fact, it is the only book in Tanach that does not contain G d’s name. There are many suggested explanations for this, but at the most basic level, G d’s name does not appear in the megillah because it was a time of great concealment — G d’s involvement in the miracle of Purim was deliberately hidden.

This concealment is alluded to in the Torah: The Talmud asks, “*Where in the Five Books of Moses do we find an allusion to the name Esther and the Purim story?*” Everything can be found in the Torah, albeit sometimes only as a hint or an allusion. The Talmud answers, “*The verse says, ‘V’anochi haster astir panai...’ – ‘And I will surely hide My face...’*”⁵ ‘Haster’ (‘to hide’) and ‘Esther’ are phonetically and grammatically similar. This ‘hiding’ or concealment alludes to the Purim story.”⁶

There will come a time, G d says, when I will conceal Myself and not be readily available to the Jewish people. I will also conceal Myself within the events of nature: this wonderful, righteous woman, Esther, will be queen, and no one will realize that G d planted her there. This is where we find a hint to Esther in the Torah.

Where can we find a hint to Haman, the villain of the Purim story, in the Torah? This question is also addressed in the Talmud. After Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, G d spoke to Adam and asked, “*Hamin ha’eitz...?*” – “*Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*”⁷

Our sages taught that Haman’s initial success in attempting to harm the Jewish people, G d forbid, was linked to the people’s transgression. Which transgression? Partaking of King Ahasuerus’ banquet, where they desecrated G d’s name by participating in a meal that flaunted the sacred utensils of the Holy Temple. The first word of G d’s question to Adam, “Have you eaten from the tree?” is *hamin* which is made up of the same letters as the name “Haman.” So Haman’s name is found at the very first instance of transgressing G d’s will by partaking in forbidden food.⁸

And finally, the Talmud asked, “*Where is Mordechai’s name alluded to in the Torah?*” And the answer is in the parshah of Ki Tisa, where the Torah describes the components and ingredients required to create the anointing oil. One ingredient G d instructed Moses to use was “*pure myrrh*,” which translates in Aramaic to “*mara dachia*,” the consonants of which spell “*Mordechai*.”⁹

The anointing oil symbolizes the concept of elevating something mundane — like spices — to holiness. As the leader of the Jewish people at the time, Mordechai did just that, transforming the mundane, secular aspects of life into holiness. He took his position of political leadership and sanctified it, bringing out its holiness.

Mordechai taught us how to sanctify the everyday aspects of life — including mundane items such as gold or technology. Is gold holy or unholy? Is technology holy or unholy? Mordechai answered the question with a resounding, “Yes!”

This is one of the most beautiful life lessons from our Torah portion, and indeed, it hints at the very purpose of creation, and our role in G d’s Divine plan. May we witness the full realization of that plan with the arrival of our righteous Moshiach, who will usher in the era of the Ultimate Redemption — a time when the Divine potential in all things will no longer be concealed, but will be evident for all to see — may it happen speedily in our days. Amen!

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 32:23.
2. *Bereishit Rabbah* 16:2.
3. See Talmud, Megilah 12a, and commentaries ad loc.
4. *Talmud Megilah* 11b.
5. Deuteronomy 31:17.
6. *Talmud Chulin* 139b.

7. Genesis 3:11.

8. See *Talmud Meggilah* 12a; *Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabah* 7:13; commentary of Monot Halevi in his introduction to the book of Esther.

9. *Talmud Chulin* 139b.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6324150/jewish/From-the-Golden-Calf-to-the-Silicon-Chip.htm

Ki Tisa: Make Shabbat Great by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Enhancing the Sabbath

The Israelites shall guard the Sabbath, establishing the Sabbath throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant.)Ex. 31:16(

The phraseology of this verse implies that there are two dimensions of the Sabbath: one that we are intended to “guard” or “protect”(and another that we are intended to “establish”)or “make”(.

The Sabbath is intrinsically holy, inasmuch as G-d sanctified it when He created the world. Our task with respect to this intrinsic holiness is simply to “protect” it, that is, be careful not to counteract or sabotage it. This we do by not performing forbidden types of work, and, more subtly, by aligning our demeanor with the holy character of the day.

Beyond this, however, we can also infuse additional holiness into the Sabbath, over and above its own, intrinsic holiness. We do this by studying the Torah, praying, or performing acts of kindness to a greater extent or more intensely than usual. In this way, we also “make” the Sabbath holier than it is in and of itself.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

May G-d grant a decisive victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* Insights from the Rebbe.

Chapters of psalms to recite for Israel to prevail over Hamas and for the release of remaining hostages. Recite these psalms daily – to download:

<https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AKMWqg80kU-LZSgctgRwuPHhxuo>

Booklet form download:

<https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AKMWqg80kU-LZSgctgRwuPHxuo>

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

Sponsored by Judy & David Marwick
in honor of the marriage of their granddaughter
Moriah Even-Chen (daughter of Chana and Josh, Maale Adumim)
to Akiva Lasson (Modiin)

Volume 30, Issue 21

Shabbat Parashat KiTisa

5784 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Closeness of God

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

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

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

Third, more than once the narrative seems to be going backward in time. In verse 4, for example, it says, "No man put on his ornaments," then in the next verse God says, "Now, then, remove your ornaments." (Ex. 33:5) In verse 14, God says, "My presence will go with you." In verse 15, Moses says, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not make us leave this place." In both cases, time seems to be reversed: the second sentence is responded to by the one before. The Torah is clearly drawing our attention to something, but what?

Add to this the mystery of the Calf itself – was it or was it not an idol? The text states that the people said, "This, Israel, is your God who brought you out of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). But it also says that they sought the Calf because they did not know what had happened to

Moses. Were they seeking a replacement for him or for God? What was their sin?

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

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

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

The previous chapter implied that the people panicked because of the absence of Moses, their leader. God Himself implied as much when He said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt" (Ex. 32:7). The suggestion is that Moses' absence or distance was the cause of the sin. He should have stayed closer to the people. Moses took the point. He did go down. He did punish the guilty. He did pray for God to forgive the people. That was the theme of chapter 32. But in chapter 33, having restored order to the people, Moses now began on an entirely new line of approach. He was, in effect, saying to God: What the people need is not for me to be close to them. I am just a human, here today, gone tomorrow. But You are eternal. You are their God. They need You to be close to them.

It was as if Moses was saying: Until now, they have experienced You as a terrifying, elemental force, delivering plague after plague to the Egyptians, bringing the world's greatest empire to its knees, dividing the sea, overturning the very order of nature itself. At Mount Sinai, merely hearing Your voice, they were so overwhelmed that they said, if we

continue to hear the voice, "we will die" (Ex. 20:16). The people needed, said Moses, to experience not the greatness of God but the closeness of God, not God heard in thunder and lightning at the top of the mountain, but as a perpetual presence in the valley below.

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

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

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

However, third, you can see My "glory." That is what Moses asked for once he realised that he could never know God's "ways" or see His "face." That is what God caused to pass by as Moses stood "in a cleft of the rock" (Ex. 33:22). We do not know at this stage, exactly what is meant by God's glory, but we discover this at the very end of the book of Exodus. Chapters 35–40 describe how the Israelites built the Mishkan. When it is finished and assembled we read this: Then the Cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the Cloud

What Does Judaism Say About ... Podcast

with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is **Death and Mourning** - Next week:

Importance of Family
Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:

Apple: tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays

Spotify: tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350
or email: sgreenberg@jhu.edu
<http://torah.saadia.info>

had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Ex. 40:34–35

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

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

That is the ongoing miracle of Jewish spirituality. No one before the birth of Judaism ever envisaged God in such abstract and awe-inspiring ways: God is more distant than the furthest star and more eternal than time itself. Yet no religion has ever felt God to be closer. In Tanach the prophets argue with God. In the book of Psalms King David speaks to Him in terms of utmost intimacy. In the Talmud God listens to the debates between the Sages and accepts their rulings even when they go against a heavenly voice. God’s relationship with Israel, said the prophets, is like that between a parent and a child, or between a husband and a wife. In the Song of Songs it is like that between two infatuated lovers. The Zohar, key text of Jewish mysticism, uses the most daring language of passion, as does Yedid Nefesh, the poem attributed to the sixteenth-century Safed kabbalist, Rabbi Elazar Azikri.

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

Between the lines of Exodus 33, if we listen attentively enough, we sense the emergence of one of the most distinctive and paradoxical features of Jewish spirituality. No religion has

ever held God higher, but none has ever felt Him closer. That is what Moses sought and achieved in chapter 33, in his most daring conversation with God.

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

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

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Ki Tisa is the most theological portion of the Pentateuch. It deals with one of the most profound issues facing our religion; what is the nature of God’s involvement with the world in general – and with Israel in particular? This is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible, so how should we understand chapters 33 and 34 of the Book Exodus – the central chapters of this week’s Biblical portion?

The Israelites certainly felt God’s involvement and protection during the period of the plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea. They continued to sense God’s close connection when they stood at Mount Sinai and heard His commanding voice. But then, Moses absented himself and seemed to have absconded into splendid, supernal isolation with the Divine, leaving the nation bereft of both leadership and the divine presence. They panicked, and regressed into the hedonistic and destructive idolatry of the Egyptian Golden Calf. They lost their moorings!

Now, after they have accepted their punishment and are about to continue their journey, they have one major, but crucial request: They wish God to enter into their midst, so that they will always be sure of His protective presence. They want to live in a world in which God’s supportive compassion will always be manifest, not in an agonizing uncertainty, in which God’s face is often hidden.

God has already informed them, however, that they must first “make a Sanctuary for Him” – prepare the world so that it will be ready for His presence – “and then He will dwell in their midst”. In the words of the Kotzker Rebbe, “Where is God? Wherever you let Him in”. First make a sanctuary where God can dwell, and then He will descend into its midst.

Hence, God explains to Moses, the spokesman for his nation, “I will send an angel (messenger) before you, I will drive out the Canaanites... bring you to a land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go in your midst” (Exodus 33:3). You will have messenger-angels who will lead you, you and they will have to make the decisions and follow through on the actions; but you will not see My face, and I will not be visibly in your midst. This is for your own good: “I will not go in your midst because you are (still) a stiff-necked (stubborn and rebellious) nation, lest I destroy you on the way” (Exodus 33:2,3,5).

Likutei Divrei Torah

It is premature for you to have Me in your midst, God explains, until the nation has properly repented and is ready for redemption. God is loving and compassionate, but He has high standards. If His presence is truly in our midst, if He has no opportunity to “look away” (as it were), then He will have to punish in the same way that He rewards. We are better off with God always ready to step in and prevent disaster, but from behind a cloud – so that He will be able to back off, look away, as it were, from punishing us severely, even though we might very well deserve such punishment.

Moses continues to press, entreating, “How shall it be known that Your nation has gained Your favorable grace unless You go (on the journey) together with us (imanu), so that we may be distinguished, your nation and I, from every other nation on the face of the earth?” (ibid 16). But God doesn’t acquiesce. Yes, He will reveal the “paths” on which He wishes Israel to walk and by means of His divine Torah, he will show them how He wants them to live. He will send leaders, prophets, teachers and generals to lead them in the right direction. But, they will have to follow their leaders without ever seeing God’s face or having God’s presence in their midst, until they take responsibility for their actions, repent and become worthy.

During the early Biblical period, certainly when the Israelites were in Egypt and for most of the First Commonwealth Period. God was still very active “behind the scenes” – because, after all, the Jewish people was very much in its infancy. It was during the Second Commonwealth, and especially in our period, that God expected and expects us to initiate, to play center stage in our journey towards redemption. He promises, however, that when we truly wish to become pure, He will aid us and that He guarantees our eventual repentance and world redemption.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yisrocher Frand

Do the Right Thing – Even If You Won’t Succeed

- In Parshas Ki Tisa, we are introduced for the first time to Betzalel—the general contractor of the Mishkan building project: “See, I have called by name: Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft; to weave designs, to work with gold, silver, and copper; stone-cutting for setting, and wood-carving – to perform every craft.” (Shemos 31:2-5) At this point in time Betzalel was thirteen years old. Just imagine—Moshe Rabbeinu gathers the people together to announce the CEO of the Mishkan, and it turns out to be a little Bar Mitzvah Bochur, who last Shabbos leined the Maftir in shul!

Among other things, the way that the Torah introduces Betzalel is striking. Normally, when introducing people by name, the Torah mentions the person’s name and his father’s name. So it is with Kalev ben Yefuneh and so

it is with Yehoshua bin Nun, to cite just two of many examples. In general, we do not introduce a person by his whole genealogy—who his father was and who his grandfather was. This is an exception to the rule. Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of the Tribe of Yehudah.

Not only is this the way Betzalel is mentioned when we first meet him in Parshas Ki Sisa, but his whole lineage is repeated again when he is mentioned in Parshas Vayakhel (Shemos 35:30), and then again when he is mentioned in Parshas Pekudei (Shemos 38:22). That is one anomaly.

A second anomaly is the fact that Rashi (Shemos 35:30) explains “Chur was the son of Miriam.” Why does Rashi tell us this? Why is it important to know? In fact, the Medrash in Parshas Vayakhel addresses the first issue: Why is Betzalel’s grandfather mentioned? The Medrash says that it is in the merit of Chur that Betzalel was given the opportunity and privilege to be in charge of building the Mishkan. Betzalel received more than just this opportunity. The Ribono shel Olam gifted him with the knowledge and know-how to build the Mishkan. This was all in the zechus of his grandfather Chur.

Who was Chur? Besides being the son of Miriam, Chur played a central role when Klal Yisrael was in the midst of making the Egel Hazhav (Golden Calf). As we read in this week’s parsha, it was a mob scene! The mob desired to build an Egel to replace Moshe, their missing leader. Chur stood up against the mob. He objected and insisted that the undisciplined masses were taking inappropriate action. Tragically, Chur paid for this protest against the mob with his life. They killed Chur. This is perhaps why Aharon tried to stall, and did not stand up to the mob. He saw what happened to his nephew. (See the Medrash Vayikra Rabba cited by Rashi to Shemos 32:5)

If we are to look back and ask, was Chur right or was he wrong – should Chur have stood up to them or should he not have stood up to them? We might conclude that it was a mistake, that it was an exercise in futility. Look what happened—they killed him! However, it was not a mistake! The Ribono shel Olam appreciated what Chur did. He appreciated it to the extent that he made Chur’s grandson the Chief Architect of the Mishkan. Chur took an unpopular stand. Sometimes it is necessary to take an unpopular stand despite the fact that the efforts will not succeed.

Chur did not necessarily think that he would be successful and that he would be able to persuade the people to abandon their plans of building an Egel Hazhav. But Chur felt this was not the right thing to do, and he stood up to the people. Many times in life, a person must take a stand and do what is right rather than what is popular, regardless of the chances of success. That is what Chur did.

Where did Chur get this character trait? Where did he learn the lesson that a person must at times do his best, give it his best shot, even when success is extremely unlikely? The answer to this question is the detail that Rashi is supplying when he tells us that Chur was the son of Miriam. This was Miriam’s approach to life as well.

Chazal say that when Pharaoh made the decree to throw all male children into the Nile, Amram divorced his wife. Why? He concluded: “We are toiling for naught! Why should we bring babies into the world to be thrown into the Nile?” He divorced his wife. The Gemara says that Amram was the leader of the generation (Gadol haDor) and therefore everybody followed suit and divorced their wives. Along came little Miriam and said to her father, who was the Gadol haDor: “Daddy, guess what? I don’t think you are right! Pharaoh only decreed regarding the boys. You are decreeing against the girls as well! Pharaoh only decreed that the children should be killed in this world, you are decreeing (by preventing children from ever being conceived) that the children should not even have a World-to-Come!

Did Miriam think she was going to convince her father? This is the equivalent of Rav Moshe Feinstein’s little daughter coming over to her father after Rav Moshe Feinstein came out with a definitive policy, and saying, “Tatty, I don’t think this is right!” Why did she try? Why did she make the statement?

The answer is because Miriam felt that it was the right thing to do. Whether she was able to convince her father or not, this was her opinion. Obviously, she said it politely, but this was her philosophy: You do what you think is right. You go ahead and make a statement that you believe in. Whether the recipient of the statement accepts it or not is not my business.

There is a second example: Moshe’s basket was placed into the Nile. “And his sister stood off at a distance to find out what would happen to him.” (Shemos 2:4). This too would seem to be an exercise in futility. What could Miriam hope to accomplish? Then when Bas Pharaoh finds the baby floating in the basket, Miriam approaches Pharaoh’s daughter and offers her an “idea.” Is she silly? A slave girl goes over to the Princess of Egypt and starts giving her advice about what she should do with this baby? It was apparently an exercise in futility.

There is a third example: Tosfos haRosh says that after Krias Yam Suf (the Splitting of the Sea), the men sang Az Yashir but the women complained. They said, “We also want to sing.” They went to Miriam with their complaint. Tosfos HaRosh says that Miriam recognized that there was a potential problem with women singing (Kol Isha), so she took a tambourine and started making noise with it. With the tambourine banging in the background, she told the women “Now you can sing! (The men won’t hear you anyway).”

Likutei Divrei Torah

Why did she do that? If Kol Isha is forbidden, then it is forbidden. There is no way around a black and white prohibition. The answer is that her philosophy in life was “Try to do whatever you can do. Maybe it will work.” That was her approach to life and all of its challenges.

There is a fourth example: The Rishonim write that the women wove the wool for the curtains of the Mishkan while the wool was still attached to the goats and to the sheep. The Talmud calls this “Chochma Yeseira” (requiring special talent). Now, why did they do that? The Rishonim explain that a certain percentage of the women were Niddos. If a Niddah touches the detached wool, the wool becomes tameh (impure). They complained to Miriam that they wanted to weave but they were not allowed to weave because they were tameh. They asked Miriam for advice. Miriam does not tell them flat out, “Sorry, this is forbidden. There is nothing you can do.” She suggests an ingenious idea. A live animal is not susceptible to become tameh. “Weave on the backs of live animals!”

We see a pattern here: The pattern is that you never give up. The pattern is that you try your best. The pattern is that you do whatever you can do. The pattern is what Rav Yisrael Salanter once said: “Mir darf nisht noch ton; mir darf nisht up ton; un mir darf nisht uf-ton.” Translating his Yiddish into English, this means: “Do not try to imitate people; do not try to make a minimal and superficial effort; and finally, one does not always need to accomplish.”

One merely needs to make the effort. That was Miriam’s approach to life. That philosophy of life came down to her son Chur. Chur, when faced with a hopeless situation, stood up because he thought it was the right thing to do. Rashi explains: Where did Chur get this character trait from? “He was Miriam’s son.” This was the mesorah of Miriam’s house, which translated itself to the mesorah of the House of Chur. In reward for this dedication, Betzalel built the House of Hashem.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

With how many hands was Moshe holding the tablets? In Parshat Ki Tisa, we are told how Moshe came down from the summit of Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments in his hands. And then when he saw the Israelites worshipping the golden calf the Torah says (Shemot 32:19), “Vayashlech miyadav et haluchot.” – “He threw the tablets down from his hands.”

But the word ‘miyadav’ – ‘from his hands’ – is missing a yud, and therefore it can be read literally as ‘miyado’ – ‘from his hand’. What sense can we make of this?

Reb Yisroel Salanter gives a marvellous peirush. This is how he puts it. Moshe had two tablets. One, which was held in his right hand,

was the tablet bearing the laws between ourselves and Hashem. The other, which he held in his left hand, bore the laws between ourselves and our fellow human beings. That's how Moshe came down the mountain.

When he saw the Israelites worshipping the calf, he recognised that they were breaking the first two of the commandments: 1. We have to believe in Hashem, and 2. We cannot worship any idols. These commandments were on the tablet held by his right hand and therefore the thought crossed his mind, "Vayashlech miyado," – that he would cast that tablet down from his 'hand' because what they were doing related only to the mitzvot between ourselves and Hashem, not to the mitzvot between ourselves and others.

But then Moshe realised that actually we should never separate the two tablets – because ultimately our responsibility towards our fellow human beings must always be seen as an integral part of our relationship with Hashem and that's why "Vayashlech miyadav," – he cast down the tablets from both of his hands.

Here we have yet another reminder of the centrality of our responsibility towards others within the mitzvot of the Torah because ultimately what Hashem wants of us is to have a full deep and meaningful relationship with Him and at the same time to always see our responsibility to others as being part of our belief in Hashem.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Leader and the People – One Complete Whole

Rabbanit Batya and Rabbi Uriel Zaretsky

During the time we served as shlichim in Warsaw, many people approached us with numerous questions and requests. In one unique instance, an Israeli living in Poland turned to us for help, asking us to assist him in giving a get (Jewish divorce document) to his wife who was living in Israel. We didn't understand why he was reaching out to us rather than turning to the Rabbinical Courts in Israel. After making a few inquiries, we realized that our assistance was, in fact, needed and following some trials and tribulations the get was finally sent to the wife with a messenger, thank God.

What is the role of the emissary working in the Jewish Diaspora? To help Jews in whatever it is that they may need. If one wishes to learn from an exemplary shaliach, it would be best to delve deeper into the character of Moshe, as the latter is depicted in parshat Ki Tisa.

Moshe Rabeinu, the loyal shepherd, after a relatively short time in his new role, has to face one of his most challenging moments as a leader: the Sin of the Golden Calf. Like a bride who engages in adultery under her own wedding canopy, the Children of Israel turn astray and worship the calf at the foot of Mt

Sinai. Following the transgression, Moshe turns to God and begs that He forgive the People of Israel. The Psikta Zutrata (also known as Midrash Lekach Tov) describes Moshe's great devotion to the People and how he was given an eternal reward for his behavior:

"We learn from this that he [Moshe] gave his life for the People of Israel, and, in turn, the People were named after him, [as is written in Yeshayahu 63:11] – 'Then His people remembered the days of old, the days of Moshe, asking where is He that brought them out of the sea.'"

One of the verses in the portion that best illustrates Moshe's devotion is the following: "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written" (Shemot 32:32). Moshe pleads to Hashem to forgive the People and goes on to say that should God not harken to his request – let Him blot Moshe from His book.

To which book is Moshe referring?

One possibility is mentioned by the Gemara in the tractate of Rosh Hashana (16:2). Rav Nachman bar Yitzhak explains as follows: "'Out of Thy Book' – this is the book of the righteous; 'which Thou hast written' – this is the book of those who are neither righteous nor wicked [beinoniyim]." It appears that Moshe is willing to be blotted out of the Book of Life if God decides not to forgive the People of Israel. In fact, he is willing to sacrifice his own life for the sake of his flock, as is written quite explicitly in the portion of Be'ha'alotcha (Bamidbar 11:15): "And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me outright, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Thy sight; and let me not look upon my wretchedness."

In the exegesis named Hadar Zekenim[1] another explanation is given for the words of Moshe, which are seemingly very difficult to comprehend. According to the punctuation suggested by the Hebrew cantillation [ta'amei haMikra], one must separate the words "blot me out, I pray Thee" from the words "from Thy book". Above the words na ["I pray Thee"] there is a zakef katon [a punctuation mark denoting a pause]; and above the word misifrecha ["Thy book"] there is a tipcha, which connects it, in this case, to the words that follow it – asher katavta ["which Thou hast written"].

Hence, Moshe's words – "blot me out, I pray thee" – mean to say: "Punish me alone, and not all of the People of Israel." As to the words "From Thy book which Thou hast written" – these express, "From Thy own book I shall prove to you that they do not deserve to be punished. After all, in the Ten Commandments the Divine instruction was 'Do not make for yourself an idol' [in the singular form] and not 'Do not make for yourselves' in the plural form."

Likutei Divrei Torah

Another possible explanation appears in Rashi (on Shemot 32:32): "From Thy book – from the entire Torah, so that they will not say against me that I was not worthy and thus unable to plead for them." In other words, Moshe asks God to forgive the People of Israel, and goes on to say that should God refuse, he [Moshe] does not wish to be mentioned in the Torah at all. Moshe begs for mercy for his flock, beseeching God to forgive them. God responds as follows: "Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book." Still and all, Moshe's name is not mentioned in the entire portion of Tetzaveh, the reason being that "the curse of the wise, even if uttered on condition, comes to pass" (tractate Makot 11:1).

The Sefat Emet (1877) gives a different perspective on Moshe's devotion to the People of Israel, as expressed in his plea to God following the People's Sin of the Calf. He explains the events according to the Midrash Rabbah (Shemot Rabbah 46:1):

"And I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the Lord your God" – he [Moshe] saw that the People of Israel had nothing to say in their defense, and so he threw his own lot with theirs and broke the Tablets and said to God: Behold they have sinned and I, too, have sinned for breaking the Tablets. If You forgive them, forgive me as well. As is written "if Thou wilt forgive their sin" – then forgive mine as well. But if You do not forgive them, then don't forgive me either and "blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written."

The Midrash offers an entirely new perspective on Moshe's breaking the Tablets: He did not do so because he was angry at the People for having sinned nor did he do so because he was disappointed by their actions; rather – he broke the Tablets so that he would be able to defend the People of Israel! In other words, in an act of great courage and daring, Moshe decides of his own accord to break the Tablets made by God Himself.

Let us try to imagine the Chief Rabbi throwing a Sefer Torah on the floor in front of a large public... unfathomable! What Moshe did was far more difficult and severe.

Hence, Moshe, too, needed atonement for his action, and therefore pleads for both the People and for himself in the same breath. Both he and them are in the same boat, as it were. God, in turn, offers Moshe to eradicate all but him and make him into a great nation – in other words, God wishes to separate between Moshe and the People. However, Moshe's reply is: I and the People are one whole. We cannot be severed.

The Sefat Emet writes that the Midrash Tanhuma on the portion of Ekev seems to give yet another reason for Moshe's breaking the Tablets: He broke them because he saw the letters flying upwards and leaving the Tablets.

He took this as a sign that the Tablets had lost their sanctity.

If this be so, how can we say that Moshe broke the Tablets in order to sin along with the People of Israel as explained by the Midrash?! The Sefat Emet goes on to explain that Moshe Rabeinu was a Tzaddik Gamur, a righteous person without any fault, and did not sin at all. As such, had he wanted to, he could have continued to hold onto the Torah, adopt it as a way of life, as was God's will, and God, in turn, would have made him into a great nation.

And yet, Moshe did not wish to cut himself off from the People of Israel, and threw his own lot with theirs by breaking the Tablets and sinning as well. He did this because the People of Israel were dearer to him than the Tablets. Moreover, he knew that the People of Israel were more dear to God than anything else. The Sefat Emet writes that the biggest rectification [tikkun] for the People of Israel was the fact that Moshe tied himself to them. Indeed, the People of Israel had sinned when Moshe was up on the mountain; however, the minute Moshe linked himself to the People, the latter turned into a new entity: a new and complete whole. Hence, the People of Israel in its complete form – the nation plus Moshe – did not sin. Consequently, they were able to achieve rectification and merit God's forgiveness. May we too merit to be loyal shlichim who devote ourselves completely to the Jewish People.

[1] A collection of commentary on the Torah by the Ba'alei Hatosafot; compiler unknown. Livorno (1840).

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

The Wisdom of Packaging

It would seem to be the lowest moment in the life of Moshe Rabeinu and yet the Torah prizes it as his crowning achievement. Indeed that is how Rashi understands the climatic closing of the Chumash, the lingering last line of the divine "hesped" accorded to Moshe, (Devarim 34:10-12), "There has never been a prophet who equaled Moshe...who spoke with Hashem with unparalleled clarity who delivered miracles in Mitzrayim...and who received the luchos...and (according to Rashi) who broke the luchos for everyone to see." Why did Rashi see the breaking of the luchos as worthy of being in this appreciation of Moshe altogether, let alone the culminating entry of all of Moshe's accomplishments?

There is much discussion regarding why Moshe broke the luchos. The ohr hachayim tracks two traditions debating whether Moshe acted with divine guidance or acted independently and only afterward received divine appreciation. The Kli Yakar explains that Moshe destroyed all evidence of a spiritual drop and wished to rid the world of anything that could weigh in against us.

The Meshech Chochma finds that now these luchos were no longer infused with dedication

to Hashem. Thus keeping them would send the message that there is value in service that is empty of genuine faith and total deference to Hashem's will. This risk justified doing whatever was needed to prevent sending that message.

I was taken by another conjecture. (Unfortunately time constraints did not allow me to search where I saw this insight, but that should not stop us from sharing an idea together.) Perhaps Moshe Rabeinu is indicating to us that while the Torah is immutable, the style and presentation of Torah teachings often must change from one generation to another in order to be effectively communicated. The style and format that connected with the Jews prior to the chet ha'eigel would no longer be effective after the chet, since our people after the chet would be forever different.

The luchos embodied all that Har Sinai was: Hashem's insistence on joining Klal Yisroel in this world and gifting us a permanent proof of His presence. For Moshe, the luchos represented his personal journey to becoming similar to an angel, his successfully leading the national journey from slavery to revelation, and the like. It takes a Moshe Rabeinu to set aside his personal investment and embrace that which will speak to the younger and the newer. To recognize that the next generation needs a different "hook" and a different presentation in order to teach the same Torah can be supremely disappointing, but the picture of Moshe Rabeinu can inspire us onward.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

The Most Magnificent Mosaic

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: "And you, speak to the Children of Israel and say: 'Only keep My Shabbos! For it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I, HASHEM, make you holy. Therefore, keep the Shabbos, for it is a sacred thing for you. Those who desecrate it shall be put to death, for whoever performs work on it, that soul will be cut off from the midst of its people. Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day is a Shabbos of complete rest, holy to HASHEM; whoever performs work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.' And the Children of Israel observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos for their generations as an everlasting covenant. Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is forever a sign that [in] six days HASHEM created the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested." (Shemos 31:12-17)

Shabbos is a serious business. The warning here is quite severe. How do we understand the weightiness of Shabbos Kodesh? Firstly, we see a curious description. HASHEM refers to Shabbos, not just a day in the week but as "My Shabbos". It's not my Shabbos or your Shabbos. It's HASHEM's Shabbos! What does that mean? Then we see something very

Likutei Divrei Torah

curious. Shabbos is called "The Shabbos". Are there not many days of Shabbos in a person's lifetime and over the course of history? Which is "The Shabbos"? Next we are informed that the Jewish People keeping Shabbos over generations is an everlasting covenant and that HASHEM made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. What is the connection?

I have a wild theory. The world is only six days old. Allow me to explain please. HASHEM made a world in six days and then He rested and that seventh day was Shabbos. Before the first day of creation, before time, what day was it? It was Shabbos, albeit in a heavenly domain. Every week, after six days, our orbit of time brings us back to that Shabbos of pure Divine intent that now we are experiencing in this realm of physicality. Shabbos is "M'ayn Olam Haba" – "something akin to the Next World". Here we are intersecting that same original Shabbos in an earthly setting again and again.

Maybe in that way Shabbos is "The Shabbos". It's not many different Shabbos(es). It's all the same glorious Shabbos experienced by different Jews in various ages and settings. The Jewish People keep that Shabbos as generations past did and as generations futures will. We are not only keeping Shabbos for ourselves. The verse states, "And the Children of Israel observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos for their generations..." We are to keep Shabbos in such a way that future generations will keep it too. We are not keeping only for ourselves but as a part of a national project, which is an everlasting sign between HASHEM and the Jewish People.

It would seem that we are all working, as in the building of the Mishkan, over time building and creating Shabbos to Shabbos, year to year, generation to generation a beautiful multi-dimensional mosaic, an everlasting collage of Shabbos, filled with song, food, Torah learning, family time, and millions of other delights the greatest of which is Kirvas Elochim, delighting in HASHEM. That's the sign! We can never imagine the grandeur and magnitude of that spiritual monument that was created throughout the gauntlet of human history by the Jewish People. Missing and shattered pieces of Shabbos would be obvious by their absence or carelessness and the mosaic would be lacking. It is a glorious tribute and an everlasting testimony to our holy mission in this world.

My wife and I asked a truly great educator, Rabbi Hershel Mashinsky ztl. how to keep our kids at the Shabbos table and interested in participating. He offered us priceless advice that we put into practice. He suggested that we make a family album and to write down before Shabbos who prepared what food Divre' Torah and song. Then to inscribe after Shabbos, who were the guests, some quotable statements, and much more. The favorite pastime of the children on Shabbos became studying the books from years past. This was the record of

our unique family culture keeping HASHEM's Shabbos and contributing to "The Shabbos" our best impressions of Shabbos, to be included in what is promising to be the most magnificent mosaic.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez - Our Greatest Weakness is Our Greatest Strength

So often in life our greatest weakness is also our greatest strength. Nowhere is this clearer than the remarkable transformation that Moshe performs in the Parasha from the term – "am k'shei oref", a stiff-necked people. Four times the Jewish people are referred to as stiff-necked and the first three are terribly damning of the Jewish people.

Hashem says to Moshe after the Sin of the Golden Calf that He wanted to destroy the people because they are a stiff-necked people. He then says he won't go into the Land of Israel with them, rather an angel, again because they are stiff-necked.

Stiff-necked – they are rebellious, stick to their sin even though they had heard the Voice of G-d at Sinai and seen all the miracles. Such obstinate people, G-d forbid, may be deserving of destruction.

Incredibly, a few chapters later, following the thirteen principles of mercy that G-d teaches him, Moshe says that G-d Himself should come with the people in to the Land – why? Because we are a stiff-necked people.

How is the same thing that was used to accuse the Jewish people, now used to defend them?

The Midrash says that you may think "stiff-necked" is a negative term but it is actually a positive. It is the obstinate, tenacious backbone of the Jewish people which has enabled them to survive throughout all of Jewish history. Only a tenacious, stiff-necked people could have survived when they were told to die or convert, like in the Crusades, but retained their Jewish identity. Throughout the ages, Jews have remained Jewish with a tenacity and stuck to our guns being the only people from antiquity which has survived.

We see that the same trait of being stiff-necked, seemingly our greatest weakness, can also be the same tenacity which has enabled us to survive, our greatest strength.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Ecology & The Bible - Ever since Rachel Carson wrote her Silent Spring some seven years ago, and especially during the last year or two, the problem of man's mishandling of nature has come to the forefront of public consciousness. Once, a small, elite group used to advocate conservation, trying to protect certain specific preserves of nature from plundering by a careless humanity. Today, however, all segments of the public have

become interested in ecology—not only in specific areas of nature, but in the totality of natural forces, based upon the premise that injury to any one significant segment of the natural scene will upset its fine balance of forces and so eventually destroy human life on the face of this planet.

We should not be deterred by the attraction ecology seems to have for many radicals and cultists, who apparently have tired of civil rights and even Mao and the Black Panthers. It is an extremely urgent project and deserves the most serious attention by all of us. The President and Congress have moved forward commendably in trying to legislate on the subject. Yet, that is still inadequate. It is not enough to eliminate known sources of pollution of the air and water. A distinguished scientist, Rene Dubos (in Psychology Today, March 1970), has reminded us that we still know very little indeed about pollution. Some 70% of the precipitate contaminants in urban air are still unidentified, and 20-30 years from now, those who today are infants, the ages of 1, 2, and 3, will undoubtedly show varying signs of permanent and chronic malfunction. Modern technological man, apparently, is clever enough to subdue nature—and stupid enough to wreck it.

There is no doubt that Judaism fully supports the endeavors to restore the balance of nature with man's respect for it. The Bible teaches us that man was given dominion over Nature: after creating man and woman, "God blessed them and God said unto them: 'be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth'" (Gen. 1:28). But to have dominion does not mean to destroy. We are to subdue nature, but we are also responsible for it.

The Halakhah has enshrined this principle in law. The Torah explicitly forbids the wasteful destruction of a fruit tree in a time of siege. The Halakhah extends this prohibition to cover all times, whether of war or of peace. But how about the wanton waste of other natural objects, not fruit trees? Most authorities (Tosafot and Sefer Yereim) hold that the "fruit tree" is but a single instance of any kind of wasteful destruction, all of which is equally forbidden by biblical law and punishable by flogging. Maimonides (who earlier had held to the same opinion, but then changed his mind) decided that only destruction of the fruit tree is punishable according to biblical law. What of other objects? Some commentators believe that Maimonides includes them as rabbinical prohibitions. But one important commentator (Mנחם חייך) holds that Maimonides proscribes flogging from the fruit tree, but all other objects, while not punishable, are equally prohibited by biblical law.

What we derive from all this, is that the Halakhah clearly enjoins any brutal, wanton, senseless offense against nature—and even against human produce. It demands of us a sense of responsibility before all creativity, and

Likutei Divrei Torah

a special sense of reverence before God's work.

However, our theme this morning concerns not primarily the balance of nature, but a related problem of equal or greater urgency. I refer to what might be called "moral ecology," the offense against the spiritual tone of our environment. We must be concerned not only by the pollution spewed out from the chimneys of industry that contaminate our air and water, but by the moral rot that is projected on our movie screens, that infiltrates our homes through the television, that degenerates the stage and the newsstand. We must begin to pay more attention not only to the air which we breathe, but also to the atmosphere in which we grow and raise our children.

It is interesting that the Torah borrowed terms from the physical world to symbolize moral achievements. The Torah speaks of moral excellence as *taharah*, which literally means "cleanliness," and moral corruption as *tum'ah*, which literally means "uncleanliness." In English too, we speak of "filthy" and "clean" as moral categories. In the Jewish tradition sin is known as *zuhamah*, dirt, and the great Prophet Isaiah calls his people to moral excellence and rehabilitation with the words *rachatzu, hizakku*, which literally means, "wash yourselves, come clean." (Isa. 1:16)

That we are now morally in a state of ecological disaster is self-evident. Pornography has become a big business. Millions of customers are attracted to it every week in this country. We now hear of chains of "supermarkets of erotica." Technology has been placed at the service of degeneracy.

This inundation of society by destructive elements has, paradoxically, been helped along by our own good intentions! As liberal-minded people, we are naturally against censorship. Our bitter historic experience with tyranny and dictatorship has sensitized us against it. Yet we may have overdone it. We have absolutized freedom—and that is dangerous. We have failed to foresee the consequences of our unthinking opposition to any form of control.

Now, I am not in favor of a rigid, hard, Victorian censorship. But I am not for the theory that "everything goes." It is true that it is almost impossible to determine a consistent, objective, criterion for what constitutes salacious, immoral, and obscene material. But I prefer a crazy-quilt

pattern of inconsistent regulations, irrational as they may appear, to the politics of exasperation which abandons all efforts at control because uniformity cannot be achieved and which therefore permits all society to turn scatological. In a totally permissive society, everyone and everyone's children are threatened by the forces of moral filth. And in a democracy, we do not grant freedom to some at the expense of others.

What we need therefore is a redressing of the ecological balance of society between freedom and responsibility, between civil rights and the

right to maintain one's moral integrity. The alternative to determined action to restore enlightened common-sense control is more environmental insult, a situation where we who do not wish to be overwhelmed by the universality of obscenity, will be forced, against our will and our better judgment, to accept these very values. We are in a situation of true mafehah, a plague of obscenity which affects everyone with or without his consent, and it will take decades to undo the effects of this dense, spiritual smog.

What must we do?

First, as we have said, we must remove the forces of pollution. Government must control filth and literature, stage and cinema, no less than the protection of the air and the water from contamination by industry. We must do so without too heavy a hand— but we must do so. The courts must guard against excessive censorship, but they must accept responsibility for some form of elemental control.

Second, we must make use of our own “purifying” agents in an attempt to redress the balance. Against the plague from without, we must utilize positive forces from within.

The Sidra of this morning tells us of a service in the Temple which symbolized a moral anti-pollutant. We read of the service of the ketoret, the incense, offered in the Sanctuary.

Elsewhere in the Torah, we read that the offering of the incense was effective in neutralizing mafehah, the plague. I suggest that both terms must be taken morally as well: in a situation of moral plague, we must marshal our inner resources to sweeten the air again.

The Zohar (II, 230 a, to Pekudei) offers an answer to a question that has always bothered me. We read (in last week's Sidra) that the incense was offered on a special altar or mizbeiach. But why should the platform on which the incense was offered be called mizbeiach, altar? After all, the word mizbeiach comes from the word zevach, which means a sacrifice, an animal or fowl which was slaughtered—and on the altar of incense there was no slaughtering. The Zohar answers: אל בגין דבטיל וכפית לכמה סטריין בישין because the ketoret binds (as one does an animal for slaughter) and nullifies and destroys various manifestations of evil.

The incense represents the force against corruption. It symbolizes the need for a clean moral environment, for a sweet and pure spiritual atmosphere. It is the Bible's form of drug culture: not pot or acid or speed, but incense to elevate man's conduct, to cleanse the moral milieu, to restore a healthy balance to a spiritually threatened society.

What do I mean by this? What relevance does ketoret have to our days? After all, we do not subscribe to those forms of “creative liturgy” that some ignorant young Jews, in imitation of their Christian counterparts, are trying to foist upon us as “the service of the future,” and which is more influenced by Timothy Leary than by Moses or Maimonides.

However, the Talmud has taught us (Men 110): תלמידי חכמים העוסקים בתורה בכל מקום מעלה אני עליכם כאילו מקטרין ומגישין לשמי. The Almighty accepts the study of Torah by scholars as if they had offered up ketoret or incense to him.

Torah, then, is the modern equivalent of the incense service. At a time when obscenity flourishes in an atmosphere of permissiveness, Torah demands decency by the means of self-discipline. At a time when pornography has become institutionalized as a new culture, Torah must be accepted not only as law, certainly not merely as literature, not even as religion—but as a powerful counter-culture. (Who would have thought ten or twenty years ago, that Torah, which in antiquity came as a protest against obscene pagan rites and religious orgies, would today have the same function! Once we considered such themes as irrelevant to modern times—and today it is unfortunately so very relevant!)

Torah as a culture means that we must create an environment of Torah, one in which its study is a matter of constancy, not a haphazard attempt to catch a word here and a stray thought there. This indeed is the attempt of Yeshiva University— from its high schools through the Yeshiva proper, from Stern College through Erna Michael College and the James Striar School. It is an effort to create not only a form of instruction, but a full environment which will generate countervailing pressures against the pollution and contamination of the larger contemporary environment, and in this sense we are opposed to what is happening around us.

And not only children must turn to Torah as the form of incense to stay the plague of immorality, and not only at the university level. Mature adults must do likewise. To send children to study is futile gesture. If they do not see us, their elders, behaving in the way we train them, then everything we do for them is probably wasted. I therefore cannot fail to express mild disappointment with my congregation. People who are educated, enlightened, and sophisticated, as is the membership of The Jewish Center, are not doing enough for their own Torah education. Our attendance and interest and participation in the minimal adult education we do offer is far from sufficient, far from adequate.

And yet, I admit, that mere study of Torah is insufficient. It must be study in a certain manner.

We must face the facts. The new generation, about which so much has been said and written, wants to be “turned on.” It seeks not only new ideas, but new experiences. And therefore so many of its numbers take to experimentation with drugs and with sex—and the two are related. Indeed, I am appalled at the extent to which this rot and corruption that infests society has seeped into our own ranks. I am shocked at the extent to which it has infected our own group—although we are much less affected than others. I am distressed at the “experimentation,” the experience-searching,

Likutei Divrei Torah

the thrill-seeking by respectable, well-to-do, stable, Jewishly-afflicted young people, even over the age of thirty.

What we must do, then, is reveal the experiential dimensions of Judaism. Torah is eternal, but the teaching of Torah varies with each generation. Judaism is unchanging, but the form of its transmission must always change. It is like a delicate musical instrument, which must be revered if it is to survive intact, but which can be plucked to offer new tones and suggest new insights. The cultural and emotional and social forms that appeal to the new generation today are not those that appealed to generations past, not even to American Jewry at The Jewish Center 20 years ago. Then the problem was to show that Orthodoxy is clean and decorous and aesthetic and dignified. We still have not reached the high point of this vision. We certainly must never abandon these ideals and forms. But they are not sufficient. What youth today seeks is feeling and involvement, warmth and experience, ecstasy and heart. If we are fixated at one level, if we fail to appreciate what it is that a generation wants and what we can and must offer— we may very well be bypassed.

Therefore, it is up to us to prove that the demands of life and dignity are not irreconcilable and that, in fact, they are supplementary to each other. We must put more passion into our prayers, more conviction into our study. We must not allow aesthetics to anesthetize

people. Our “davening” must not be so drily formal that one who comes to the synagogue feels he must put a muffler around his spirit lest it catch a death of a cold.

The same Sages who told us that ketoret symbolizes the study of Torah, taught that ketoret symbolizes joy and happiness: אין הקטורת באה לא על החטא ולא על העון אלא על השמחה (M. Tanchuma). The incense was not meant to cover up sin or make up for the guilt of transgression, but to express joy and ecstasy. We must bring these potential dimensions of Judaism to the fore in our times: kavanah, life, warmth, and heart.

Our moral ecology has been disrupted. The balance of moral forces in society is as threatened as the balance of natural forces in the air and the water about us. An insidious degeneracy endangers us and our families.

Before it is too late, we must betake ourselves to the ketoret of Torah— and let us do so with passion, with feeling, with simchah.

Then indeed our success will be an occasion for even more simchah, and the society we create will be as pure and as sweet-smelling as if it had been aerated with the ketoret of old itself. [1970]

Weekly Parsha KI TISA

Rabbi Berel Wein's Weekly Blog

Even after millennia of analysis, commentary and sagacious insights, the story of the Jewish people creating and worshiping the Golden Calf, as recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, remains an enigma and a mystery. After all of the miracles of Egypt and the splitting of Yam Suf, manna from heaven and the revelation at Sinai, how is such a thing possible?

The fact that our great sainted priest Aharon, the most beloved of all Jews and the symbol of Jewish brotherhood and service to God and man, is not only involved but is described as being the catalyst for the actual creation of the Golden Calf, simply boggles our minds. One is almost forced to say that there is no logical or even psychological explanation as to how and why this event occurred.

The Torah tells us the story in relatively dry narrative prose. Apparently it comes to teach us that there is no limit to the freedom of thought and behavior of human beings, to act righteously or in an evil fashion as they wish. No logic, no series of miracles, no Divine revelations can limit the freedom of choice that the Lord granted to humans.

The assumption of Western man and his civilization and society was and is that there is a logic and rationale for everything that occurs. This assumption is flawed and false. History is basically the story of the follies, mistakes and irrational behavior of individuals and nations. This week's Torah reading is merely a prime illustration of this human trait. Our freedom of choice is so absolute that we are able to destroy ourselves without compunction, thought or regret.

Nevertheless, I cannot resist making a point about what led up to Israel's tragic error in creating and worshiping the Golden Calf. The Torah emphasizes that perhaps the prime cause for the building of the Golden Calf by Jewish society then was the absence of Moshe.

While Moshe is up in heaven, freed of all human and bodily needs and restraints, the Jewish people are in effect leaderless. It is true that Aharon and Chur and the seventy elders are there in the midst of the encampment but they do not have the qualities of leadership that can guide and govern an otherwise unruly, stiff-necked people.

Successful nation building is always dependent upon wise, patient, strong and demanding leadership. The leader has to be able not only to blaze the trail ahead for his people but he also must be able to stand up to his people in a manner that may be temporarily unpopular. The failures of both Aharon, as recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, and of King Saul as described for us in the Book of Samuel, are attributed to their inability to withstand the popular pressure of the moment.

Moshe, the paragon for all Jewish leadership throughout the ages, is cognizant of the wishes and wants of the people but he does not succumb to that pressure. The Torah describes Moshe as one whose "eye never dimmed." He always sees past the present with a penetrating view and vision of the future. The absence of such a person, and leader, can easily lead to the creation and worshiping of a Golden Calf.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Between Truth and Peace

KI TISSA

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Ki Tissa tells of one of the most shocking moments of the forty years in the wilderness. Less than six weeks after the greatest revelation in the history of religion – Israel's encounter with God at Mount Sinai – they made a Golden Calf. Either this was idolatry or perilously close to it, and it caused God to say to Moses, who was with Him on the mountain, "Now do not try to stop Me when I unleash My wrath against them to destroy them" (Ex. 32:10).

What I want to look at here is the role played by Aaron, for it was he who was the de facto leader of the people in the absence of Moses, and it was he whom the Israelites approached with their proposal:

The people began to realise that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Make us a god [or an oracle] to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt."

Ex. 32:1

It was Aaron who should have seen the danger, Aaron who should have stopped them, Aaron who should have told them to wait, have patience and trust. Instead this is what happened:

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 handed him and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten Calf. Then they said, "'This, Israel, is your god, who brought you out of Egypt.'" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the Calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented peace offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Ex. 32:2-6

The Torah itself seems to blame Aaron, if not for what he did then at least for what he allowed to happen:

Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughing-stock to their enemies.

Ex. 32:25

Now Aaron was not an insignificant figure. He had shared the burden of leadership with Moses. He had either already become or was about to be appointed High Priest. What then was in his mind while this drama was being enacted?

Essentially there are three lines of defence in the Midrash, the Zohar, and the medieval commentators. The first defence, as suggested by the Zohar, is that Aaron was playing for time. His actions were a series of delaying tactics. He told the people to take the gold earrings their wives, sons and daughters were wearing, reasoning to himself: "While they are quarrelling with their children and wives about the gold, there will be a delay and Moses will come." His instructions to build an altar and proclaim a festival to God the next day were likewise intended to buy time, for Aaron was convinced that Moses was on his way.

The second defence is to be found in the Talmud and is based on the fact that when Moses departed to ascend the mountain he left not just Aaron but also Hur in charge of the people (Ex. 24:14). Yet Hur does not figure in the narrative of the Golden Calf. According to the Talmud, Hur had opposed the people, telling them that what they were about to do was wrong, and was then killed by them. Aaron saw this and decided that proceeding with the making of the Calf was the lesser of two evils:

Aaron saw Hur lying slain before him and said to himself: If I do not obey them, they will do to me what they did to Hur, and so will be fulfilled [the fear of] the Prophet, "Shall the Priest [Aaron] and the Prophet [Hur] be slain in the Sanctuary of God?" (Lamentations 2:20). If that happens, they will never be forgiven. Better let them worship the Golden Calf, for which they may yet find forgiveness through repentance.

Sanhedrin 7a

The third, argued by Ibn Ezra, is that the Calf was not an idol at all, and what the Israelites did was, in Aaron's view, permissible. After all, their initial complaint was, "We have no idea what happened to Moses." They did not want a god-substitute but a Moses-substitute, an oracle, something through which they could discern God's instructions – not unlike the function of the Urim and Tummim that were later given to the High Priest. Those who saw the Calf as an idol, saying, "This is your god who brought you out of Egypt," were only a small minority – three thousand out of six hundred thousand – and for them Aaron could not be blamed.

So there is a systematic attempt in the history of interpretation to mitigate or minimise Aaron's culpability – understandably so, since we do not find explicitly that Aaron was punished for the Golden Calf

(though Abarbanel holds that he was punished later). Yet, with all the generosity we can muster, it is hard to see Aaron as anything but weak, especially in the reply he gives to Moses when his brother finally appears and demands an explanation:

“Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, ‘Make us a god who will go before us...’ 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

There is more than a hint here of the excuses Saul gave Samuel, explaining why he did not carry out the Prophet’s instructions. He blames the people. He suggests he had no choice. He was passive. Things happened. He minimises the significance of what has transpired. This is weakness, not leadership.

What is really extraordinary, therefore, is the way later tradition made Aaron a hero, most famously in the words of Hillel:

Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them close to the Torah.

Avot 1:12

There are famous aggadic traditions about Aaron and how he was able to turn enemies into friends and sinners into observers of the law. The Sifra says that Aaron never said to anyone, “You have sinned” – all the more remarkable since one of the tasks of the High Priest was, once a year on Yom Kippur, to atone for the sins of the nation. Yet there is none of this explicitly in the Torah itself. The only proof-text cited by the Sages is the passage in Malachi, the last of the Prophets, who says about the Kohen: My covenant was with him of life and peace . . . He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

Malachi 2:5-6

But Malachi is talking about priesthood in general rather than the historical figure of Aaron. Perhaps the most instructive passage is the Talmudic discussion (Sanhedrin 6b) as to whether arbitration, as opposed to litigation, is a good thing or a bad thing. The Talmud presents this as a conflict between two role models, Moses and Aaron: Moses’s motto was: Let the law pierce the mountain. Aaron, however, loved peace and pursued peace and made peace between man and man. Moses was a man of law, Aaron of mediation (not the same thing as arbitration but considered similar). Moses was a man of truth, Aaron of peace. Moses sought justice, Aaron sought conflict resolution. There is a real difference between these two approaches. Truth, justice, law: these are zero-sum equations. If X is true, Y is false. If X is in the right, Y is in the wrong. Mediation, conflict resolution, compromise, the Aaron-type virtues, are all attempts at a non-zero outcome in which both sides feel that they have been heard and their claim has, at least in part, been honoured.

The Talmud puts it brilliantly by way of a comment on the phrase, “Judge truth and the justice of peace in your gates” (Zech. 8:16). On this the Talmud asks what the phrase “the justice of peace” can possibly mean. “If there is justice, there is no peace. If there is peace, there is no justice. What is the ‘justice of peace’? This means arbitration.”

Now let’s go back to Moses, Aaron and the Golden Calf. Although it is clear that God and Moses regarded the Calf as a major sin, Aaron’s willingness to pacify the people – trying to delay them, sensing that if he simply said “No” they would kill him and make it anyway – was not wholly wrong. To be sure, at that moment the people needed a Moses, not an Aaron. But under other circumstances and in the long run they needed both: Moses as the voice of truth and justice, Aaron with the people-skills to conciliate and make peace.

That is how Aaron eventually emerged, in the long hindsight of tradition, as the peace-maker. Peace is not the only virtue, and peace-making not the only task of leadership. We must never forget that when Aaron was left to lead, the people made a Golden Calf. But never think, either, that a passion for truth and justice is sufficient. Moses needed an Aaron to hold the people together. In short, leadership is the capacity to hold together different temperaments, conflicting voices, and clashing values.

Every leadership team needs both a Moses and an Aaron, a voice of truth and a force for peace.

The Story of the Halachic Ruling that Obligated Yeshiva Students to Serve in the Army

Revivim -

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The revolutionary first halachic ruling that imposed the obligation of military service on yeshiva students was written by Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, following an appeal by students, former underground fighters, led by Rabbi Shaar Yashuv Cohen ztz”l * Before the initiative matured, and after great effort, they managed to print a pamphlet with the ruling in besieged Jerusalem, but then, Rabbi Shaar Yashuv fell captive to the Arab Legion, and was unable to see the fruits of his labor * Eight months later, recovering from his wounds and captivity period in a convalescent home, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda came to visit him, and gave him the pamphlet with a heartfelt dedication

The Commandment to Draft Yeshiva Students

In light of the upcoming memorial day for my teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook ztz”l, which begins on the 14th of Adar, it is fitting these days to recall that our rabbi was the first to write a thorough halachic clarification regarding the commandment that obligates even yeshiva students to serve in the Israel Defense Forces.

The clarification was written at the initiative of Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv Cohen, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, son of Rabbi David HaCohen “the Nazir” (Nazirite) ztz”l, one of the heads of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav. It can be said that Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv was the first child to grow up in the bosom of the Torah of the Land of Israel, and thanks to his faith, studies and talents, paved the way for those after him, such as clarifying the commandment of military service for yeshiva students, and paving the way for combining army service with yeshiva studies, which continues with the immense sanctification of God’s name by all Hesder yeshiva students, until today.

This what Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv ztz”l wrote me: “...I am personally connected with the first attempt to establish a yeshiva for Torah students within ‘The State and Army in Formation’ – an attempt that led to the first halachic ruling, which obligated yeshiva students to enlist. This was done in the winter of 1948 through me, together with my comrades in the Hagana, Etzel and Lechi, from Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, and other yeshivas in Jerusalem. This was immediately after November 29th (ed., the Partition Resolution of the U.N.), and with the beginning of the wave of violence preceding the War of Independence, as part of the mobilization for the ‘Army in Formation’ in Jerusalem, during the months of Shevat, Adar and Nisan 1948...”

At that point in time, the halacha had not yet been decided that yeshivas students must also go to war for the milchemet mitzvah of ‘conquering the Land of Israel’ and ‘saving of Israel from those who rise up against her’. As is well known, the very idea of combining Torah and fighting is ancient, from the days of Yehoshua Bin-Nun, peace be upon him... (See Sanhedrin 44b; and compare to Megilah 3a, and Tosafot ‘va’yalen’, Yerushalmi Hagiga Chap.2, Tosafot Bavli Hagiga 16b, ‘Av’, Eruvin 63 Tosafot ‘miyad’). It is implied that already in the days of Yehoshua and the first conquest of the Land of Israel, the warriors combined Talmud Torah with Milchemet Mitzvah. Apparently then, they fought during the day, and studied Torah at night – and this is the source of inspiration for King David’s words: ‘Let high praises to God be heard in their throats, while they wield two-edged swords in their hands’ (Psalms 149:6).”

Establishing the First Integration from Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva

He added: “In order to prepare the IDF, the Zionist leadership established the ‘Mobilization Center for National Service’ at that time. In Jerusalem, the head of this center was none other than the senior rabbi of Merkaz HaRav, Rabbi Mordechai HaLevi Fromm ztz”l, husband of the Rebbetzin Tzipora, may she live, granddaughter of the ‘Israel’s Holy Light’, Rabbi Kook, ztz”l, and daughter of our teacher and rabbi, the Gaon Rabbi Shalom Natan Raanan Kook ztz”l, the yeshiva’s administrator.

“In order to enable all of us, the yeshiva students, graduates of the various undergrounds of the Hagana, Etzel and Lechi, to fight together, we initiated the establishment of a ‘Fighting Yeshiva’ as part of the defense of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. This was the only place where the three undergrounds had already united into one fighting force, under the command of our comrade from ‘Brit HaChashmonaim’, Moshe Rosenak z”l, from the Hagana’s ‘Moriah Battalion’, together with his deputy Isser Natanson z”l, from Etzel. Through our efforts, it was agreed to establish a ‘Fighting Yeshiva’ to defend the Old City, and a synagogue and dormitory were made available to us, and it was also agreed with the Jewish Quarter’s command, on a daily schedule: eight hours manning a position, eight hours prayer and Torah study, and eight hours for eating, rest and sleep, and all personal needs.”

The Blessing of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda and the Nazirite

"I received the blessing and consent for this initiative from the head of the yeshiva, my teacher and rabbi Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook ztz"l, and of course the blessing of my father, my teacher and rabbi, the holy Nazir ztz"l. There were indeed yeshiva heads who were hesitant about the initiative, perhaps due to the concern that it would lead to the cancellation of the 'draft deferment arrangement' practiced until today. The head of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, the Gaon, Rabbi Yaacov Moshe Charlap ztz"l, remained silent, but there were members of his family, and those close to him, who acted against the idea..."

"In those days, the Jewish Quarter of the Old City was under siege. We tried to enter it in a convoy of the British army, which passed through the lines once or twice a week, carrying medical staff and vital supplies. I managed to enter the Quarter, to participate in the battle for its defense... my comrades, unfortunately, did not succeed, but fought within the IDF, and some of them fell as kedoshim (holy martyrs) in the heavy fighting.

"I believe that within the IDF, we were the first (soldiers to combine yeshiva and army)... Sincerely, with great thanks and appreciation, Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv Cohen".

Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv's Request from Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda to Write a Torah Opinion

In another article, Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv related how Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda was motivated to write the halachic clarification (printed at the end of vol. 2 of Netivot Yisrael, Bet El Publishing):

"In 1948, there was a debate over the participation of Jerusalem yeshiva students in the campaign to defend the besieged city. We, students of Yeshivat 'Merkaz HaRav', followed the path of our rabbis, Maran Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook ztz"l, and my father and teacher, the Nazir... we reported to the 'National Service Mobilization', the body that laid the foundations for the IDF which was then in its formative stages, but many yeshiva heads did not accept this. There was also a debate within Yeshivat 'Merkaz HaRav' itself (although yeshivas not affiliated with the framework of the 'Yeshivot of the Land of Israel' established by 'Israel's Holy Light', Rabbi Kook ztz"l, later also enlisted in a special battalion that built fortifications in Jerusalem, which our comrade Rabbi Tuvia Bir z"l led, and called it the 'Tuvia Battalion', but this was already at a later stage, during the height of the siege)..."

"As stated, I volunteered to serve in the special units... One day, I noticed, next to the yeshiva on Rabbi Kook Street, a huge poster titled as 'Daat Torah' ('Torah Opinion') of Maran Rabbi Kook ztz"l against the draft of yeshiva students into the army, with sharp words quoted from one of his letters about the severity of someone who involves Torah scholars in battle, and stating his opinion that it was improper to draft Torah students into the army, and that they must be discharged, things that greatly shocked us.

"I stood before this poster and thought 'what do we do now?' – was each student from the yeshiva acting, heaven forbid, against the ruling of Rabbi Kook? After reading the poster, I walked along, preoccupied with thoughts and confusion, heading downtown along Rabbi Kook Street. Suddenly, my teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, emerged towards me, limping slightly as was his custom, walking slowly. Being very close with him, he could assess (from my facial expression), what mood I was in. And he said to me: 'Shaar Yeshuv, what happened, why are you so upset and pale?' I told him what had happened, and when I pointed to the poster, he practically roared out loudly (even someone who remembers Rabbi Kook's roars when he got excited, never heard such a roar): 'It's a forgery! It's an outright forgery!' That's how he shouted, in a loud voice, again and again.

"After he calmed down, he explained to me: 'The words are taken from Rabbi Kook's letter to Rabbi Dr. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi in London, regarding the draft into the British army. Yeshiva students who arrived as refugees from Russia or Poland to London after World War I, and studied Torah, were omitted from the list of 'priests in training' that the British Chief Rabbi submitted to the authorities (exempt from military service similar to their clergy, le'havdil). Rabbi Kook scolded him for this, and it has nothing to do with Jerusalem's battle.'

"When I asked him to clarify his opinion in writing, he replied that the besieged city had no printing press capable of operating without fuel, except for one used by the 'Situation Committee'. When I took upon myself the matter of printing, he agreed to write his famous booklet 'On the Commandment of the Land – Regarding the Obligation to Enlist in the Guard of the People of Israel'. Dr. Yitzchak Raphael, of blessed memory, worked to get the pamphlet printed, but I did not see it, because I was summoned to the battle of defense in the Old City, and fell captive to the Arab Legion..."

Concern for his Fate

While the pamphlet was being printed, the Old City fell into enemy hands, and the Nazir and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda were informed that Officer Shaar Yeshuv was severely wounded, and his fate was unknown. Imagine their feelings. They had ruled there was an obligation to serve in the army, knew the price could be extremely painful, and now, while arguing with other rabbis about the mitzvah of army service, the Nazir may have to sit shiva for his only son (he had a daughter, the wife of Rabbi Goren), and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda would have to mourn his

beloved student, who went out to battle at their encouragement, and did not return.

After several agonizing months they were informed that he was severely wounded, and held captive by the Jordanians. Let us return to the story, as written by Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv:

Receiving the Pamphlet

"When I returned wounded and injured from enemy captivity, after eight months around Hanukkah 1949, we were transferred for rehabilitation to the Aharonson family villa convalescent home in Zikhron Yaakov, which was dedicated to the wounded soldiers. The next morning, I believe it was Thursday, at the end of prayer, I see through the window Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda climbing up the hill to visit me. I was very moved (traveling then from Jerusalem to Zikhron Yaakov was long and exhausting). Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda entered my room, hugged and kissed me, and burst into tears. Suddenly, he took out from his pocket the small aforementioned booklet (containing his clarification on the obligation to serve in the army), with a dedication: 'To my coveted and beloved friend, Rabbi Eliyahu Yosef Shaar Yeshuv, son of Rabbi David HaCohen, the counselor, the advisor and demanding initiator; a booklet prepared and kept from its initial appearance, to return the redeemed of God to Jerusalem, with all the joy of salvation which is from of old and forever, her redemption in the year of incense (1949), Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook.'

Wedding in Military Uniform

Afterwards, Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv was appointed rabbi of the Air Force. Before his wedding, in joint consultation with his brother-in-law Rabbi Goren ztz"l, they decided that in order to express the great commandment of military service, he would marry in military uniform, in a military ceremony. Many of Jerusalem's greatest rabbis and sages attended the wedding, both on the side of the Nazir, the groom's father, and on the side of the bride's grandfather, the famous philanthropist Harry Fischel.

One person approached Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda and argued: "In Jerusalem, it is customary for the groom to come to the wedding canopy with a streimel hat, and traditional holiday clothes." Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda replied: "There is much room to doubt the sanctity of streimels, but there is no room whatsoever to doubt the sanctity of IDF uniforms, and on the contrary, 'the groom resembles a king', and the uniforms are royal garments."

This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated

יעקב ויברגר

Parshat Ki Tisa: To Count or Not to Count

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone 5784 (reprinted from 5760)

"When you take the sum of the children of Israel after their number, each one shall be counted by giving an atonement offering for his life. In this manner, they will not be stricken by the plague when they are counted. Everyone included in the census must include a half-shekel." (Exodus 30:12–13)

To count or not to count is not the question, but rather how to count! And whom you cannot count! At first glance, one of the more curious laws in the Torah is the prohibition to count Jews. The Talmud records: "R. Elazar said, "Whoever counts an Israelite, transgresses a [single] prohibition, as it is written, 'And the number of the children are as the sand of the sea which cannot be measured'" (Hosea 2:1). R. Nahman bar Isaac says, "He transgresses two prohibitions, as the verse concludes, 'and cannot be counted.'" (Yoma 22b)

Given this, how are we to understand the opening of the portion of Ki Tisa, where God commands Moses to count the Israelites? Count, but not by counting heads, but rather by counting the half-shekel coins which every Israelite was commanded to bring. But isn't this actually a subterfuge, a kind of legal fiction?

Moreover, what is the significance of a half-shekel? If you're using coins, would a whole shekel not better represent the "whole" person?

Furthermore, how are we to understand the word "tisa?" The Hebrew root implies "lifting up." Rashi, citing Targum Onkelos, informs us that it means to obtain, or to receive, which is how most translations treat the word: "When you take sum of the children of Israel..." The Midrash (Pesikta Rabati 11) picks up on the idea of "lifting" but goes one step further; more than to lift, Ki Tisa is about uplifting, not just to raise but to exalt. And in this count of counts, we are exalting not only Israel, but also the God of Israel. "In whatever manner you can uplift this nation, uplift. For it says, ki tisa et rosh bnai Yisrael [When you lift up the head

of the children of Israel]. And there is no head of the Jewish people except for God.”

How are we exalting God by counting half-shekels? Perhaps a fascinating Talmudic discussion between the two religio-political parties of the Second Commonwealth, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, will help us understand the importance of a census in the first place. Everyone agrees that we are forbidden to mourn during the first week of the month of Nisan because this marks the original establishment of the tamid, the daily sacrifice, in the Temple, but they disagree as to how the daily sacrifice should be funded. The Sadducees, who represented the aristocracy, believed that specific donors could, of their own free will, defray the cost of the daily offering, while the Pharisees insisted that the universal half-shekel payments be used for these offerings (Menahot 65a).

Apparently, the Pharisees, forerunners of Rabbinic Judaism, which gave us the Talmud, wanted the daily offering to remain a national enterprise, a gift to God from every single Jew. And the only way to guarantee its “democratic” spirit would be to insist on equal contributions, where the Rothschilds and Tevyes had equal input:

“The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than one half-shekel when giving an offering before the Lord, to atone for your souls.” (Exodus 30:15)

This idea is implicitly discussed and further illuminated in the Jerusalem Talmud, where we find the sages debating the reason for the Torah’s choice of the half-shekel in this portion. R. Yehuda explains that “since they sinned at half-day [the celebration of the golden calf began at mid-day] they had to give a half-shekel.” R. Pinhas, in the name of R. Levi, attributes it to the selling of Joseph. “Since the brothers sold the first son of Rachel, Joseph, for twenty silver pieces – and with Benjamin being too young and Joseph not being a recipient, each of the ten brothers received one-half shekel” (Shekalim, 2:3).

I would like to suggest that both of these opinions are two sides of the same coin: both idolatry and sibling rivalry reflect a world in which the value of national unity and togetherness is of paltry significance.

Idolatry results from feeling impotent in a world controlled by external and irrational forces which we humans can at best “bribe,” but can never work with in partnership. And the sale of Joseph, the expulsion of one brother from a family, expressed the view that one segment of a nation has the right to destroy, banish, or delegitimize other segments of the nation with whom they ideologically disagree and over whom they can exercise political or physical control.

The half-shekel census for the daily Temple sacrifice is a specific remedy for national feelings of internal fractiousness and ultimate impotence. The very taking of a census affirms national pride and self-confidence; it asserts the importance of every individual member as contributing to the whole.

And why a half-shekel? Simply stated, we are being taught that every Jew is incomplete without every other Jew. Every Jew must be brought closer, not pushed away. The whole is comprised of the sum of its parts, and every part is unassailably precious.

A story is told about two Hassidic masters who had spent their youth studying together in a yeshiva and sharing every imaginable adventure and crisis. Upon going their separate ways, they exchanged photos by which to remember each other. But one of the young men took the photo of himself and tore it in half, and then he tore the photo of his friend in half as well. It’s not enough, he explained, to remember the other; it is far more important to always remember that without the other, each of us is only half a person, an incomplete specimen.

But, if the half-shekel contribution is such a laudatory act, a symbol of Jewish national strength and unity, why should the Torah consider it a sin to count Jews? Indeed, the very pride of the nation seems to be in the counting!

To answer this question, and to deepen our entire attitude towards the census, we must interpret the midrashic image in the name of R. Meir:

“God removed a coin of fire from under his throne of glory and He showed it to Moses, saying, ‘This is what they shall give.’” (Tanhuma, Ki Tisa, 9)

How are we to understand this coin of fire? Did not Moses know what a half-shekel coin looked like? Fire symbolizes the spirit of God which resides within the nation of Israel, the Shekhinah who dwells in the midst of each individual of the nation. Israel was forged and formed by the divine voice at Sinai and is best described as a burning bush [The biblical word used for the burning bush is sneh which has similar letters to the word Sinai], which is never consumed by the inspiring sparks and flames of fervor that emerge from its depth; much the opposite, it is that very fire of the divine which provides the fuel for Israel’s eternity.

From this perspective, the whole is not merely comprised of each of its parts; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The whole is not only the Jewish nation; it is also the God who resides in our nation, the very God who is uplifted together with His people when each of them is counted – and when it is thereby understood that every Jew counts! And the whole is not merely the Jewish nation today. It is also the Jewish nation of yesterday and tomorrow. It is not only klal Yisrael, the entire nation; it is also kneset Yisrael, historic and eternal Israel. Yes, the nation as a united whole is significant – but that is only part of the story. The children of the patriarchs and matriarchs and the parents of the Messiah must always include their forbears as well as their progeny in a total assessment of where we stand and what we stand for.

And this “eternal” aspect of our existence is really the reason why we do not count Jews. We don’t count because we can’t count. Since the Jewish people are an eternal people, all those Jews who have lived before us, and all those Jews who haven’t even been born yet, are part of our nation, part of kneset Yisrael. In the words of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the daily sacrifice is not an offering of partnership (korban shutfut), but rather an offering of historic community (korban tzibbur). And if Israel includes within it the metaphysical idea of a historic nation, how can we ever count eternity?

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Broken

Why Breaking the Tablets Was Moses' Greatest Accomplishment

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

"The world breaks everyone, and afterwards some are stronger in the broken places." -- Ernest Hemingway

Broken

The simple reading of the story (recorded twice in Torah, in Exodus, in this week's portion, and then again in Deuteronomy) goes like this: After the Jews created a Golden Calf, Moses smashed the stone tablets created by G-d, engraved with the Ten Commandments. Moses and G-d then "debated" the appropriate response to this transgression and it was decided that if the people would truly repent, G-d would give them a second chance. Moses hewed a second set of stone tablets; G-d engraved them also with the Ten Commandments, and Moses gave them to the Jewish people.

Yet a few major questions come to mind.

1. Moses, outraged by the sight of a golden calf erected by the Hebrews as a deity, smashed the stone tablets. He apparently felt that the Jews were undeserving of them, and that it would be inappropriate to give them this Divine gift. But why did Moses have to break and shatter the heavenly tablets? Moses could have hidden them or returned them to their heavenly maker?

2. The rabbis teach us that "The whole tablets and the broken tablets nestled inside the Ark of the Covenant[1]." The Jews proceeded to gather the broken fragments of the first set of tablets and had them stored in the Ark, in the Tabernacle, together with the second whole tablets. Both sets of tablets were later taken into the Land of Israel and kept side by side in the Ark, situated in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem.

This seems strange. Why would they place the broken tablets in the Holy of Holies, when these fragments were a constant reminder of the great moral failure of the Jewish people[2]. Why not just disregard them, or deposit them in a safe isolated place?

3. In its eulogy for Moses, the Torah chooses this episode of smashing the tablets as the highlight and climax of Moses' achievements. In the closing verses of Deuteronomy we read: "Moses, the servant of G-d, died there in the land of Moab... And there arose not since a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face; all the signs and wonders which G-d sent to do in the land of Egypt... that mighty hand, those great fearsome deeds, which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel."

What did Moses do "before the eyes of all Israel?" Rashi[3], in his commentary on Torah, explains "That his heart emboldened him to break the tablets before their eyes, as it is written, 'and I broke them before your eyes.' G-d's opinion then concurred with his opinion, as it is written, 'which you broke—I affirm your strength for having broken them.'"

This is shocking. Following all of the grand achievements of Moses, the Torah chooses to conclude its tribute to Moses by alluding to this episode of breaking the tablets! Granted that Moses was justified in breaking the tablets, but can this be said to embody his greatest achievement? How about his taking the Jews out of Egypt? Molding them into a people? Splitting the Red Sea? Receiving the Torah from G-d and transmitting it to humanity? Shepherding them for forty years in a wilderness?

Why does the Torah choose this tragic and devastating episode to capture the zenith of Moses' life and as the theme with which to conclude the entire Torah, all five books of Moses?!

In the Fragments

We need to examine this entire episode from a deeper vantage point.

Moses did not break the tablets because he was angry and lost his control. Rather, the breaking of the tablets was the beginning of the healing process. Before the golden calf was created, the Jews could find G-d within the wholesomeness of the tablets, within the spiritual wholesomeness of life. Now, after the people have created the golden calf, hope was not lost. Now they would find G-d in the shattered pieces of a once beautiful dream.

Moses was teaching the Jewish people the greatest message of Judaism: Truth could be crafted not only from the spiritually perfected life, but also from the broken pieces of the human corrupt and demoralized psyche. The broken tablets, too, possess the light of G-d.

Which is why the sages tell us that not only the whole tablets, but also the broken ones, were situated in the holy of holies. This conveyed the message articulated at the very genesis of Judaism: From the broken pieces of life you can create a holy of holies.

G-d, the sages tell us, affirmed Moses' decision to break the tablets. G-d told him, "Thank you for breaking them[4]." Because the broken tablets, representing the shattered pieces of human existence, have their own story to tell; they contain a light all their own. Truth is found not only in wholesomeness, but also—sometimes primarily—in the broken fragments of the human spirit[5]. There are moments when G-d desires that we connect to Him as wholesome people, with clarity and a sense of fullness; there are yet deeper moments when He desires that we find Him in the shattered experiences of our lives.

We hope and pray to always enjoy the "whole tablets," but when we encounter the broken ones, we ought not to run from them or become dejected by them; with tenderness we ought to embrace them and bring them into our "holy of holies," recalling the observation of one of the Rebbe's, "there is nothing more whole than a broken heart."

We often believe that G-d can be found in our moments of spiritual wholesomeness. But how about in the conflicts which torment our psyches? How about when we are struggling with depression, addiction or confusion? How about when we feel despair and pain? How about in every conflict between a godless existence and a G-d-centered existence? We associate "religion" with "religious" moments. But how about our "non-religious" moments?

What Moses accomplished with breaking the tablets was the demonstration of the truth that the stuff we call holiness can be carved out from the very alienation of a person from G-d. From the very turmoil

of his or her psychological and spiritual brokenness, a new holiness can be discovered.

It is on this note that the Torah chooses to culminate its tribute to Moses' life. The greatest achievement of Moses was his ability to show humanity how we can take our brokenness and turn it into a holy of holies. There is light and joy to be found in the fragments of sacredness.[6]

(Please make even a small and secure contribution to help us continue our work. [Click here.](#))

[1] Talmud Bava Basra 14a.

[2] On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the high priest would not perform the service with his usual golden garments, since gold was remotely reminiscent of the golden calf. Yet in this instance, throughout the entire year, the very symptom of the golden calf – the broken tablets – were stored in the holy of holies! Cf. Ramban and Ritva to Bava Basra ibid; Likkutei Sichos vol 26 Parshas Ki Sisa.

[3] Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), whose work is the most basic of biblical commentaries.

[4] See Talmud Shabbas 87a and Rashi ibid; Rashi to Deut. 34:12, the final verse of the Torah.

[5] "G-d said to Moses: 'Do not be distressed over the First Tablets, which contained only the Ten Commandments. In the Second Tablets I am giving you, you will also have Halachah, Midrash and Aggadah'" (Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 46:1.) This means, that it was precisely the breaking of the tablets that became the catalyst for a far deeper divine revelation.

[6] This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, on the 20th of Av 5725, August 18th 1965, on the occasion of his father's yartziet. In this talk, in which the Rebbe broke down twice, he described the agony of many deeply spiritual Jews put in situations where they are unable to study Torah and observe its Mitzvos. "There are times when G-d wants your mitzvos," the Rebbe said, "and other times when He wants your 'broken tablets.'"

The Inspiring Story Of Rabbi Dr. Professor Avraham Steinberg Rabbi Chaim Goldberg

One struggles to come up with a word that encapsulates Rabbi Dr. Professor Avraham Steinberg. A growing number of people today are interdisciplinary, such that a rabbi/doctor or rabbi/professor no longer raises eyebrows as it once did. Thus, it can be easily missed just how unique Rabbi Dr. Professor Steinberg is.

For simplicity's sake, I will generally refer to him as Rabbi Steinberg, but each title of his is wholly deserved and independent of the others. Most medical doctors who are professors teach in their field of medical expertise (e.g., a cardiologist is a professor of cardiology). Dr. Professor Steinberg does not. Medically, he practices pediatric neurology, serving as the senior pediatric neurologist at Shaarei Zedek Hospital, while his professorial duties are in the field of medical ethics. He doesn't just teach medical ethics, but has written the decisive Jewish work in the field. (More on that later.)

Rabbinically, he's a rabbi's rabbi. Not only is he a leading authority on medical halacha, but as director of the Encyclopedia Talmudit, he oversees a team whose every contributor needs to be a massive Torah scholar intimately familiar with the entire Talmud and its commentaries.

A legend such as Rabbi Steinberg is worth reading about any day of the year, but there is special significance to the work of the Encyclopedia Talmudit during this war. Though popularity does not naturally jive with a project of deep scholarship, Rabbi Steinberg has endeavored to make the encyclopedia relevant whenever possible. Soon after October 7, his team of editors began curating a unique volume dedicated to the laws of wartime. Released just a couple weeks ago, relevant entries were culled from throughout the encyclopedia, with the result being the only book of Jewish law providing an in-depth, yet concise presentation of all the sources on war in Jewish law from the Talmud until today. Such a volume is a boon for teachers and congregational rabbis worldwide, but it is of utmost importance to those doing the fighting themselves.

The good news is that when the IDF Rabbinate heard about this project, they requested 2,500 copies to be distributed not only to IDF rabbis, but to army bases. With so many learned hesder yeshiva students and alumni in combat – including the rabbi of my shul – the demand is great among all army ranks. Unfortunately, the IDF chose to not buy them, leaving the Encyclopedia Talmudit staff to raise the funds necessary for the extra printing. The volume is now being dedicated in memory of Col. Yehonatan Steinberg (no relation), a religious officer who was the highest-ranking officer killed on October 7.

Identifying the Mutilated

My first question to Rabbi Steinberg was whether our post-October 7 reality has brought him new questions. His response was to sharpen the distinction for me between medical ethics – even Jewish medical ethics – and Jewish medical law, or medical halacha. Rabbi Steinberg illustrated the distinction through specific cases.

The cases Rabbi Steinberg shared are tragic. He had never seen difficulties in identifying the dead – both quantitatively and qualitatively – as he did after October 7. Different thresholds for identification carry serious implications, such

as when a family will start sitting shiva or whether one's spouse is considered a widow(er). Many victims were treated so brutally that the only hope of identifying them was DNA testing. Even so, some victims' homes were burned so completely that there was nothing from their home to match the DNA material with.

In such cases, Rabbi Steinberg said, first-degree relatives can be asked to provide DNA material (which can be as simple as a strand of hair). Even worse, though, are situations where there is no body because the person was kidnapped to Gaza. Can someone be identified via video? Via certain bones without which one can't live? These are qualitatively different, painfully new questions in the wake of October 7.

Following Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Ovadia Yosef, and others that brain death determines cessation of life, Rabbi Steinberg allows for organ donation after brain death. There is a debate in the Orthodox world, where encouraging organ donation remains an uphill battle. A recent article reported that 30 lives have been saved due to organs donated by 7 IDF soldiers killed in Gaza. This was at a time that over 190 soldiers had already been killed, indicating that less than 5% of soldiers had agreed to have their organs donated. It seems that everyone is reluctant, religious or secular.

Rabbi Steinberg explained that if a person hasn't signed an agreement, the decision goes to their loved ones. He pointed to a recent study's finding that, indeed, over 50% of trauma victims' families do not agree to have their loved one's organs be donated. For some people, it appears there are emotional obstacles, while for others, if even only one family member is opposed, it is not worth risking a family rift. If the deceased made it clear before death that he is a willing donor, however, Rabbi Steinberg emphasized that the family almost always respects the request, even if they personally would have been opposed.

Festschrift at Age 60

In our post-Covid world, sometimes people still wonder, "Why bother traveling to meet in-person? This interview could just as well be done over Zoom!" Sitting face-to-face for two hours with someone who measures his time in minutes was rewarding enough, but my travels on a rainy day were rewarded further still. At one point, a book on Rabbi Steinberg's shelf suddenly caught my eye. It turned out to be a festschrift presented to Rabbi Steinberg in honor of a milestone birthday. Commonly, such commemorative volumes are put together for someone's 70th, 75th, or 80th birthday, after a lifetime of accomplishment. This one was for Rabbi Steinberg's 60th, by which point he had already accomplished more than most people would in 120 years.

The volume is graced by in-depth essays from leading lights across Israeli society, including Supreme Court justices, former chief rabbis, dayanim of the Bet Din HaGadol (Israel's highest level beit din), and first-rank poskim.

Spearheaded by his son Rav Yitzchak Steinberg, dean of the Eretz Hemda Kollel in Ra'anana and a scholar and humble spirit in his own right, there is a beautiful, personal aspect to the festschrift as well. An entire section is devoted to Rabbi Steinberg's ancestors, providing a brief biographical sketch of each of their lives and bringing their own Torah novella to modern print for the first time.

Not unlike former Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Avraham Steinberg was born into a family of illustrious rabbinic lineage. His father, Rabbi Moshe, was a communal rabbi in Galicia before the Holocaust, and after he and his wife were relocated to a Displaced Persons camp after the war, he became the de facto rabbi there as well. It was in the DP camp that little Avraham, an only child of Holocaust survivors, was born. Rabbi Steinberg's grandfather, Rabbi Yitzchak (whom the festschrift's organizer, Rabbi Avraham's son, is named after), was the longtime rabbi of Yaroslav, a prominent city in Galicia. Rabbi Steinberg's namesake, his great-grandfather Rabbi Avraham, was one of Galicia's leading rabbis after WWI.

Medical Halacha & Medical Ethics

While Rabbi Steinberg charted his own path, pursuing a career in medicine, the deeply rooted tradition of Torah study remained a mainstay of his life. More than anything else, though, it was the unprecedented synthesis of the two fields which warranted a festschrift at age 60. When Rabbi Steinberg began his medical career, a yeshiva student turned doctor was a rarity. Even basic questions, such as how to practice medicine in a modern hospital as a religious Jew, especially on Shabbat, were barely addressed. The dawn of groundbreaking medical technologies such as organ transplants, respirators, IVF, and artificial insemination, though, meant the interface of medicine and Jewish law needed serious attention. A young Rabbi Dr. Steinberg dived right in.

As a fifth-year medical student, he founded Assia, a quarterly journal devoted to medical-halachic issues that is still going strong. In fact, I remember being introduced to it when learning hilchot niddah as part of my rabbinical studies with Rabbi Mordechai Willig. That same year, Rabbi Steinberg was chosen to head the Schlesinger Institute, a first-ever research program in medicine and Jewish law. He developed close relationships with the leading poskim of the generation, discussing case after case with them. And as the years went on, he began writing. And writing. And writing.

Rabbi Steinberg wrote the definitive work on medical halacha, Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Law, a seven-volume treatise in Hebrew spanning 3,400 pages of original scholarship. It received such high acclaim that in 1999, he was awarded Israel's most prestigious prize, the Israel Prize, in the category of original rabbinical literature. This work became known to Anglos as the Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics, a condensed version translated by Dr. Fred Rosner. Given Rabbi Steinberg's insistence in the beginning of our conversation that medical ethics and medical halacha are distinct fields, how was the title altered in such an egregious fashion, from "medical law" to "medical ethics," I wondered?

Rabbi Steinberg's answer was twofold. One, Jewish medical ethics and medical halacha are essentially the same field, as Jewish ethics will be significantly informed by Torah and halacha. Secular medical ethics, by contrast, is a separate field. Two, in a play on the well-known maxim, don't judge this book by its title! Both titles are correct, but even taken together, are only partially representative of the book's contents. The book's essence is medicine and Jewish law, but most entries have not only an ethical section, but also a historical background to the topic and, when relevant, a legal background to its place in Israeli law.

But Rabbi Steinberg's work in these fields goes well beyond writing. He has provided over 5,000 expert witness briefs in court cases involving pediatric neurology or medical ethics. And perhaps the most impactful work of his career has been chairing government appointed committees on bioethics, directly influencing Israeli law on end-of-life issues, organ donation, and circumcision. As such, Rabbi Steinberg is an exceedingly rare breed of intellectual whose work has positively impacted all sectors of Israeli society.

It is one thing to unify around a need-based organization such as United Hatzalah or Shalva. But to be a unifying force in the world of ideas, where ideological divisions are rooted? Nearly impossible. Yet Rabbi Steinberg transcends it all, with his respect, humility, and compassion playing as important a role as his extensive knowledge.

I asked Rabbi Steinberg who he sees as the up-and-coming Jewish medical ethics experts in the younger generation. He didn't name one. Instead, he passionately advocated that more professionals fuse their Torah study with their profession of choice. "Today many doctors are religious and learned, yet very few of them go into medical halacha or medical ethics, which I fail to understand.

"They learn other topics and that's nice, but what's most relevant to them are the laws pertaining to the medical practice. It's the same mitzvah of Torah learning – you're not losing anything! If you are a businessman, learn business halacha." In fact, he emphasizes, it's in the interface between Torah and your profession where your learning is most valuable, because you are an expert in your field. Thus, if you are familiar with the Torah principles relevant to your profession, your input is valuable to a rabbi making a halacic decision on that subject.

Fourth Life

At the time of the festschrift's publication, Rabbi Steinberg's life was already full as a physician, ethicist, and author. But in 2007, Rabbi Steinberg's fourth life began, taking on a new mission directing the Encyclopedia Talmudit. In under 20 years, he has again accomplished more than even great scholars do in a lifetime. Literally. The first half of this historic Torah project took 60 years, but the second half – under Rabbi Steinberg's visionary watch – is slated to be completed in under 20 years, by the end of 2024.

I point out that the latest volume of the encyclopedia is still on the letter mem, leaving about 40% of the alphabet left to go. How does 40% of a 75-year-old project get done in one year? Rabbi Steinberg proceeds to take me on a (verbal) historical tour of the Encyclopedia Talmudit.

Conceived of during the Holocaust and started shortly thereafter, its founding director was Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, a towering scholar of that era. Under his stewardship, the entries were top-notch quality but concise, with over 40% of the entries completed within 30 years. Upon his passing, though, the new editors took to adding much analytical discussion to each entry, and the work slowed. Over the next 30 years, only about 15% was completed.

By the time Rabbi Steinberg came on board in 2007, new volumes barely received attention and the project was in danger of being shelved altogether. Rabbi Steinberg endeavored to bring the project back to Rabbi Zevin's style, with more concise, focused entries, and would constantly tell the writers to cut this part out, cut that part out. It wasn't always an easy transition. Then, in 2014, came the breakthrough.

Encyclopedia Talmudit

From left to right, Rabbi Dr. Avraham Steinberg, President Isaac Herzog, and Rav Hershel Schachter at 75th anniversary celebration of the Encyclopedia Talmudit in January 2023.

The Toronto Foundation led by Dov Friedberg, which has also been a leading force for increasing access to licensed mental health professionals in Israel's charedi community, agreed to provide a multi-million-dollar grant toward completion of the encyclopedia's remaining volumes.

On two conditions.

One, that the entire project be finished within ten years (2024). Second, that the encyclopedia's administration match his contribution by raising another few million dollars.

Rabbi Steinberg hired new writers, the pace of writing quickened from 15 entries per year to 100, and multiple new volumes were published each year.

What about that 40% of the alphabet which remains to be done? It's done, says Rabbi Steinberg....online! In a stroke of ingenuity spurred by the need to meet the 2024 deadline, Rabbi Steinberg restructured the entire process of entry writing. Previously, a few entries were worked on at a time, and only once they had gone through an intensive editing process and received full approval were new entries begun. Now, Rabbi Steinberg has many more scholars writing entries which are good quality and are available online. Since the senior editors can only handle so much at once, their final approval and publication in book form will happen at a later stage.

To me, this signifies an entirely new, unheralded field of excellence in Rabbi Steinberg's repertoire, one heretofore missing from all that is written about him: business management. In business terms, Rabbi Steinberg is the CEO of a major non-profit, demonstrating top-notch executive leadership and managerial competence. He manages a multi-million-dollar budget, recruited a team of advanced-level professionals in their field, and provided the right structure and motivation for them to turn in peak performance, for years on end, under the pressure of a "challenge grant."

He oversaw a radical transformation of the workplace culture (when he joined in 2006, many team members were still using typewriters!) and needed to think creatively to come up with a methodology that would enable them to meet the challenge grant's terms to increase quantitative output, but without sacrificing the quality that gives the Encyclopedia Talmudit its sterling reputation. To borrow a term from the start-up world, Rabbi Steinberg has produced a unicorn: The completion of the Encyclopedia Talmudit is infinitely valuable to the world of Torah study, well beyond the \$1 billion valuation unicorn companies achieve. As King David famously said to G-d, "Your Torah teachings are more precious to me than thousands of (pieces of) gold and silver" (Psalms 119:72).

An added benefit of the project for Rabbi Steinberg is his relationship with Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, grandson of Chief Rabbi Isaac HaLevi Herzog, who has been very supportive of the project. "I send him a WhatsApp and receive an answer immediately, as if he has nothing else to do!"

Achdut & Respectful Disagreement

Another benefit of meeting Rabbi Steinberg in person was that I could see a copy of the specially-commissioned volume on the laws of wartime. As I leafed through it, the table of contents struck me as odd. Of three sections, the first two contain chapters about warfare. The third section has chapters such as *ahavat Yisrael* and *machloket*. As someone who has written in these pages about the need for, and value of, unity and respectful disagreement, I was heartened to hear Rabbi Steinberg's explanation of this section's inclusion.

"The year before the war," he shared, "there was such *machloket she'lo l'sheim shamayim* which brought hatred and almost divided our people. Now, it's legitimate to think one way or the other. Do we need judicial reform or not? You can protest; you can argue about it. But to say that the other side has no basis? It turned into a situation of hatred, and we know from our history that pure hatred brings disasters. And quite possibly, this hatred is what brought this war. The lesson we have to learn from it is to disagree, sure, but in a friendly way. So we believed that improving in these areas is essential to the war's success and included them in the volume."

And what an inspiring role model for unity he is. For the Encyclopedia Talmudit, he accepts writers of all stripes – chassidic, charedi, *dati-leumi*, Sephardi, and Ashkenazi. The only criteria are to have complete mastery of the Talmud and its commentaries and to be a good writer. Earlier, I asked if there is a particular part of the Orthodox world he identifies with. On the one hand, he learned in Merkaz HaRav, was a medical officer in the Air Force, and does not advocate for a Torah-only approach. On the other hand, his dress and lingo bespeak an affiliation with the charedi community.

"Today everyone is assigned. He belongs to this world or that world. I have my own world. I think there are very good things in the charedi world. There are very good things in the chardal (Merkaz HaRav-type) world. There are very good things in the Mizrachi (Gush-type) world. I'm trying to adapt what fits me best, as long as it doesn't violate any halacha."

"In fact, my being indifferent as far as defining myself belonging to this [world] or that [world], it helped me very much with my work, because I got access to all the *gedolim*, whether they are charedi, Mizrachi, chardal or Sephardi. I went to everyone and everyone accepted me equally."

What a wonderfully harmonious approach to carry with us in a discordant world.

The Basics of Techum Shabbos

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Camp sisters

"My sister's family and ours are each spending Shavuot at nearby campsites. We were told that we could get together at a third spot between our two places for a Yom Tov barbecue. If we return on Yom Tov with the leftovers to our separate campsites, must we keep track of who brought which food?"

Question #2: Bungalow bar mitzvah

"A friend is making a bar mitzvah in a nearby bungalow colony. How far away can the colony still be within my *techum Shabbos*?"

Question #3: Eruv Techumin

"A lecturer will be speaking in the mountains not far from where I will be spending Shabbos. I was told that he will be just a bit beyond my *techum Shabbos*. Is there a way that I can go to hear him?"

Introduction:

In parshas Beshalach, the Torah recounts the story of the manna, also including the unbecoming episode where some people attempted to gather it on Shabbos. In the words of the Torah:

And Moshe said, "Eat it (the manna that remained from Friday) today, for today is Shabbos to Hashem. Today you will not find it (the manna) in the field. Six days you shall gather it, and the seventh day is Shabbos –there will be none."

And it was on the seventh day. Some of the people went out to gather, and they did not find any.

And Hashem said to Moshe: "For how long will you refuse to observe My commandments and My teachings? See, Hashem gave you the Shabbos. For this reason, He provides you with a two-day supply of bread on the sixth day. Each person should remain where he is -- no man should leave his place on the seventh day" (Shemos 16:25-29).

Staying in place

Although someone might interpret the words, Each person should remain where he is -- no man should leave his place on the seventh day, to mean that it is forbidden even to leave one's home, this is not what the Torah intends. According to Rabbi Akiva (Shabbos 153b; Sotah 27b; Sanhedrin 66a), the Torah, here, is indeed prohibiting walking beyond your "place" on Shabbos, although this proscription only prohibits walking more than 2000 amos (approximately half to two-thirds of a mile*) beyond the "locale" where you are spending Shabbos. This border beyond which it is forbidden to walk is called *techum Shabbos*, quite literally, the Shabbos boundary. How do we determine where this boundary is, beyond which I may not walk on Shabbos?

Some basic factors determine the extent and boundaries of one's *techum Shabbos*. One is whether you are spending Shabbos within a residential area or not. I am going to present several options which will help explain how to determine someone's *techum Shabbos*.

Our first case is someone spending Shabbos in a typical city, town or village where the houses are reasonably close together, meaning that the distance between the houses is 70 2/3 amos (about 105-120 feet*) or less. In this instance, one's *techum Shabbos* is established by measuring the 2000 amos from the end of the city, town or village. The "end" of the city is determined, not by its municipal borders, but by where the houses are no longer within 70 2/3 amos of one another.

When two towns or cities are near one another, *halachah* will usually treat the two towns as one, provided that the houses of the two towns are within 141 1/3 amos of one another (Mishnah, Eruvin 57a). This is twice the distance of the 70 2/3 amos mentioned above. The details of the rules when and whether one combines two cities for determining *techum Shabbos* will be left for another time.

Techum Shabbos in a bungalow colony

Until now, we have discussed the *techum Shabbos* of someone spending Shabbos in a city. How far is the *techum Shabbos* of someone spending Shabbos in a resort hotel, side-of-the-road motel, or bungalow colony?

Someone spending Shabbos in a bungalow colony will have a *techum* that is at least 2000 amos beyond the last house of the colony. If there are other houses or bungalows within 70 2/3 amos of the residences of your colony, those houses or bungalows are included within your "place." Under certain circumstances (beyond the scope of this article), they can be included within your "place" even if the houses or bungalows are within 141 1/3 amos of one another.

If the house, hotel or motel in which one is spending Shabbos is outside a city and more than 70 2/3 amos from any other residential building, one measures the techum Shabbos from the external walls of the house.

Shabbos while hiking

Someone spending Shabbos in an open field is entitled to four amos (between 6 - 7.5 feet*) as his “place,” and the 2000 amos are measured from beyond these four amos. His “place” is determined by where he is located at sundown on Friday evening.

Proper placement

We have now established that the definition of one’s “place” for techum Shabbos purposes depends substantively on whether one’s residence for Shabbos is indoors and on whether there are other residences nearby. We will now learn that although techum Shabbos is a boundary of 2000 amos, one usually has a greater distance in which one may walk. This is because techum Shabbos is always measured as a rectangular or square area. We take the four points that are the easternmost, the southernmost, the westernmost and the northernmost points of your “place,” and then draw an imaginary straight line that begins at 2000 amos beyond each of these points. In other words, we will measure 2000 amos east of the easternmost point and draw an imaginary north-south line at that point. We will similarly measure 2000 amos north of the northernmost point and draw there an imaginary east-west line. We repeat this for the other two directions of the compass. The result is a rectangle (or perhaps a square) whose four closest points are each 2000 amos distant from your “place.” Obviously, this means that the techum Shabbos area is significantly larger than 2000 amos beyond one’s “place.” This establishes the techum within which one is permitted to travel on Shabbos. By the way, all the rules of the laws of techum apply on Yom Tov as well.

Property placement

One of the interesting and lesser-known details of the laws of techum Shabbos is that possessions are also bound by the laws of techum Shabbos. This means that my possessions cannot be transported on Shabbos beyond the area in which I myself can walk. This halachah is not usually germane to the laws of Shabbos, since, in any instance, it is forbidden to carry on Shabbos outside of an enclosed area. The halachah is therefore more germane on Yom Tov, when one is permitted to carry. For this reason, the discussion of these laws is in mesechta Beitzah, which deals with the laws of Yom Tov. This subject is one of the main topics of the fifth chapter of the mesechta.

Camp sisters

At this point, we can discuss our opening question: “My sister’s family and ours are each spending Shavuot at nearby campsites. We were told that we could get together at a third spot between our two places for a Yom Tov barbecue. If we return on Yom Tov with the leftovers to our separate campsites, must we keep track of who brought which food?” These two families are spending Yom Tov in locations that have different techumin, yet they are close enough that there is some overlapping area located within both of their techumin. Each family may walk on Yom Tov to this overlapping area, carrying the items necessary for the barbecue. Everyone must be careful not to walk beyond the area of his own techum. In addition, since the items used for the barbecue were owned by one or the other of the families when Yom Tov started, each item may not be removed beyond its owner’s techum until Yom Tov is over. Thus, if one sister brought the hotdogs or the paper plates, the other sister may not take those items back with her, if she will be removing them to a place beyond her sister’s techum.

Min hatorah or miderabbanan?

The rules of techumin that I have so far presented are held universally. However, there is a major dispute whether these rules are min hatorah or miderabbanan. There are three basic opinions. The tanna Rabbi Akiva, mentioned above, rules that the Torah forbade walking on Shabbos more than 2000 amos from one’s place, as we previously defined it. The Sages who disagreed with Rabbi Akiva contend that the prohibition of traveling 2000 amos is only miderabbanan. (Whether Rabbi Akiva held that the rules of techumin on Yom Tov [as opposed to Shabbos] are prohibited min hatorah or only miderabbanan is a dispute among

rishonim; see Rashi, Tosafos, and Turei Even, Chagigah 17b.) However, there is a further dispute whether the Sages contend that there is no prohibition of techumin min hatorah at all, and the prohibition is always only miderabbanan, or whether the basis for the prohibition is min hatorah. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Eruvin 3:4), traveling more than 12 mil, which is the equivalent of 24,000 amos (approximately 6 - 8.5 miles*), is prohibited min hatorah. This last position is quoted by the Rif (end of the first chapter of Eruvin). Several rishonim rule according to this Yerushalmi (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 27:1 and Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Saaseh #321; Semag (Lo Saaseh 36); Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #24). On the other hand, many rishonim (e.g., Baal Hamaor, Milchemes Hashem, and Rosh, all at the end of the first chapter of Eruvin; Ramban’s notes to Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Saaseh #321; Tosafos, Chagigah 17b s.v. Dichsiv) contend that the Bavli disagrees with this Yerushalmi and holds that the concept of techum Shabbos is completely miderabbanan, and that the halachah follows the Bavli, as it usually does.

A nice-sized place

Six miles sounds like a distance considerably more than I would walk on a Shabbos. From where did the Yerushalmi get this measurement?

The basis for this distance is the encampment of the Benei Yisrael while in the Desert, which occupied an area that was 12 mil by 12 mil. Thus, when the Torah told each Israelite not to leave his “place,” it prohibited walking outside an area this size (Tosafos, Chagigah 17b s.v. Dichsiv). According to the Talmud Yerushalmi, no matter when and where one is spending Shabbos, one draws a square or rectangle 12 mil by 12 mil around one’s city, colony or campground and this area is considered your “place.” Beyond this area, the Torah prohibited you to walk, according to the Yerushalmi.

Although it is anyway prohibited to walk beyond one’s 2000 amos techum on Shabbos and Yom Tov because of the rabbinic ruling of techumin, there are some practical instances where the question of whether there is a Torah-mandated techum of 12 mil becomes germane. For example, the Gemara (Eruvin 43a) discusses whether the prohibition of techumin applies when one is more than ten tefachim above ground level, called yesh techumin lemaalah miyud or ein techumin lemaalah miyud. An example of this case, quoted by the poskim, is a situation in which someone wants to walk quite a distance on Shabbos atop narrow stands or poles that are all more than ten tefachim above ground. If one rules that there is no law of techumin above ten tefachim, ein techumin lemaalah miyud, then it is permitted to travel this way on Shabbos, no matter how far one goes. On the other hand, if there is a law of techumin above ten tefachim, it is prohibited to travel this way.

This question is raised by the Gemara, which does not reach a definite conclusion (Eruvin 43a). Both the Shulchan Aruch and the Rema (Orach Chayim 404:1) rule that one may travel lemaalah miyud for a distance greater than 2000 amos, because one may be lenient in a doubt regarding the rabbinic prohibition of techum Shabbos. However, since traveling 12 mil is prohibited min hatorah according to those authorities who rule like the Yerushalmi, one should be stringent not to travel lemaalah miyud for a distance of 12 mil or farther. The Gra, however, rules that one may disregard the opinion of the Yerushalmi and the ruling of the Rambam, because the halachah follows the Bavli that there is no prohibition of techum at all min hatorah. Since the prohibition of techumin is always miderabbanan, one may be lenient to rule that ein techumin lemaalah miyud. A contemporary application of these opinions is if someone was on an airplane when Shabbos began (for example, because of a life-threatening emergency), would he be permitted, upon landing, to leave the airport terminal before Shabbos ends.

How do we rule?

Regarding the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and the Sages whether the requirement of remaining within a techum of 2000 amos is min hatorah or miderabbanan, it is universally accepted that we follow the opinion of the Sages that techum Shabbos of 2000 amos is miderabbanan. A result of this ruling is that if someone needs to use comfort facilities and there are none available within his techum, he is permitted to leave his techum for this purpose, because of the rule that kovod haberiyos, human

dignity, supersedes a rabbinic prohibition (Eruvin 41b, based on Berachos 19b).

Moving my techum Shabbos

“A lecturer will be speaking in the mountains not far from where I will be spending Shabbos. I was told that he will be just a bit beyond my techum Shabbos. Is there a way that I can go to hear him?”

The answer is that one certainly can, by creating an eruv techumin. This halachic entity allows me to move the “place” from where we measure my techum Shabbos. Ordinarily, my techum Shabbos is measured from where I am when Shabbos starts. However, when I make an eruv techumin, I move my “place” to the location of the eruv. If my eruv is placed such that both locations -- where I am when Shabbos begins and where the speech will be delivered -- are within its techum Shabbos, I may go hear the speaker.

But be careful. Creating an eruv techumin is not only a leniency, it also creates a stringency. Since I cannot be in two different “places,” when I use an eruv techumin, I have moved my techum Shabbos, not expanded it. Although I gain in the new direction, I lose the full techum I would have had in my actual location.

In this way, eruv techumin is different from the other two types of eruv, eruv tavshillin made when Yom Tov falls on Friday, and eruv chatzeiros, which is made so that I can carry between two adjacent, enclosed properties that are owned by different people. The other two eruvim create leniencies but have no attached stringencies. For this reason, the other two eruvim can be made for someone who does not know that the eruv is being made, since it provides him with benefits and no liabilities. However, since an eruv techumin includes liabilities, one cannot make an eruv techumin for someone who does not want it or who does not know about it (Mishnah, Eruvin 81; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 414:1).

Only for a mitzvah

There is another major difference between eruv techumin and the other two types of eruvim. One may use an eruv techumin only if there is a mitzvah reason to walk where it would otherwise be outside one's techum (Eruvin 31a, 82a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 415:1). For example, someone who wants to hear a shiur or attend a sheva berachos may use an eruv techumin to do so. On the other hand, one may make and use either an eruv tavshillin or an eruv chatzeiros even if there is no mitzvah reason to do so.

How do I make an eruv techumin?

To make an eruv techumin, one puts some food before Shabbos where you want your “place” for Shabbos to be. There must be enough food there so that each person who wants to use the eruv techumin could eat two meals. If one uses a condiment for an eruv, one needs to have enough so that each person who wants to use the eruv would have enough condiment for two meals. One recites a beracha asher kiddeshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu al mitzvas eruv, and then makes a declaration that this is his eruv to permit him to walk in this direction.

Since this food will basically be left exposed to the elements and animals, many people use a bucket of saltwater, which qualifies as an eruv techumin. Note that saltwater does not qualify for the other two types of eruv, eruv chatzeiros and eruv tavshillin. Another popular option is to use a jar of peanut butter.

Because there are many complicated laws about eruvim that are beyond the scope of this article, I suggest that someone who needs an eruv techumin should consult with his rav or posek.

Who instituted eruv techumin?

The Gemara teaches that Shelomoh Hamelech instituted eruvim (Eruvin 21b). We find a dispute as to which type of eruv the Gemara is referring to. Rav Hai Gaon (Teshuvos Hageonim #44) explains that Shlomoh Hamelech instituted eruv techumin, whereas Rashi (Eruvin 21b) and the Rambam (Hilchos Eruvin 1:2) explain that he instituted eruv chatzeiros.

Conclusion

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than the Torah laws. In this context, we can explain these mitzvos, created by Chazal to guarantee that the Jewish people remember the message of Shabbos.

* All measurements in this article are meant for illustration only. For exact figures, consult your rav or posek.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 2 March 2024 / 22 Adar Alef 5784

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Ki Tisa --- A Watched Pot

“For this man Moshe, who brought us up from Egypt, we do not know what became of him.” (32:1)

My father was a keen Zionist. In fact, he got into serious trouble with my mother when, at their wedding reception, which was a few days after the founding of the State of Israel, he managed to toast the State of Israel and somehow forgot to mention my mother.

But my father, as so many Jews, found it difficult to believe in the coming of the Mashiach. I said to him once, “Daddy, you were born in 1910. You saw the worst horror unleashed on the Jewish People in history, and four years after the end of that nightmare, the Jewish People had a sovereign state for the first time in over a thousand years. If I’d been around in 1930 and told you then that all this was about to happen, you’d have laughed at me. So, is the coming of Mashiach that much more outlandish?”

It seems to me, at the time of my writing this article, that there is no natural solution, no realistic ‘day after’ scenario for the war in Gaza. It is clear that Hamas will not settle for a state unless it’s from the river to the sea. And Hamas isn’t just the voice of Gaza. A recent Palestinian poll showed that 44% of the adult population in the West Bank support Hamas, up from just 12% in September. And in Gaza itself, the atrocities of October 7th enjoy 42% support, up from 38% three months ago. The idea that Hamas enslaves the poor peace-loving citizens of Gaza, and all we need to do is to get rid of those nasty Hamas terrorists and the Palestinian street will rush out to welcome a two-state solution, is a dangerous pipe-dream.

And, on the other side, Israel isn’t going to meekly accept a set of water wings – supplied no doubt by the UN - and happily paddle out into the Mediterranean Sea with Tel Aviv fading into the distance. This is an existential war without a solution. It’s not a question of how to divide up the cake. Not a question of where to draw the line on the map, as in “You get this bit and I’ll swap you this bit.” This is a war of ideals, a titanic clash of cultures that will not, and cannot, end in a stable compromise.

As a believing Jew, it’s clear to me that the only solution to this situation is Mashiach, the Messiah, for whom we daily hope, wait, and pray. I’m sure that to some people this hope seems like a pipe dream. Because nothing in our experience has ever resembled Mashiach.

Imagine you’d never seen water boil. Imagine you lived in a world where there was just no means to heat something hotter than around 200 F or 90 C. You’d imagine that water just got hotter and hotter and hotter. The idea that a cataclysmic change in the nature of water, turning it into vapor, would seem absurd and fanciful in the extreme. It’s difficult for us to imagine cataclysmic change. Today was like yesterday, and yesterday was like the day before that, but things actually do change, and, sometimes, cataclysmically.

Hashem has promised us He will bring Mashiach to us, and just as He promised to preserve His people throughout our long years of exile and torment, which He has done against all the laws of history, so I believe that He will bring His redeemer to Zion.

© 2020 Ohr Somayach International

chiefrabbi.org

Office of the Chief Rabbi

D’var Torah: Parashat Ki Tisa

21 February 2019

This week the Chief Rabbi explains that during those difficult moments in life, there is one person who can always see us through.

How can we find comfort when tragedy strikes?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom.

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

Rav Frand – Parshas Ki Tisa

No Need to Go Anywhere

At the end of the parsha, the pasuk (verse) says, “Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the L-rd, Hashem, the G-d of Israel” (Shemos 34:23). This is the mitzva of “aliyah l’regei” – going up (to Jerusalem) for the Festival. Three times a year, on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot, the Jews were commanded to go up to the Beis HaMikdash to see and be seen by the Shechinah (Divine Presence of G-d).

The pasuk continues “...and no man shall covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem your G-d, three times a year.” Hashem guaranteed that we have nothing to fear while everyone is in Yerushalayim. We might have been nervous about leaving no males at home because it would be an open invitation to thieves and enemies. The pasuk says to have no fear – no one will covet our land while we go up to Yerushalayim to see the Shechinah.

The Gemara derives a halacha from this. Whoever does not own land is not obligated to go up to Yerushalayim on the Shalosh Regalim (Pesachim 8b). The whole halacha of going up three times a year is only for someone who owns land.

The Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859) asked, “Why is it that someone who does not own land is excused from going up to Yerushalayim?” The Kotzker Rebbe answered, “Because he doesn’t need to.”

Only a person who owns land, who has a connection to this world, who is into materialism, needs to go up to Yerushalayim to see the Shechinah. The person who is unencumbered by materialism does not

need to go anywhere to see the Shechinah, because he sees the Shechinah everywhere.

Someone who has property, a mortgage, two garages and a Jacuzzi, etc., needs to go to Yerushalayim to see the Shechinah. However, someone who is free of the materialism of this world sees the Shechinah everywhere, so he is excused from the mitzvah of ‘Reiyah,’ – going to be seen.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Edited by David Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

The Difference between Seeing and Hearing

Parashat Ki Tisa – 5784

The story at the center of Parashat Ki Tisa is the story of the “Sin of the Golden Calf.” This sad story occurred shortly after the Revelation at Mount Sinai, where G-d established an eternal covenant with the people of Israel, a covenant centered on mutual commitment: “If you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples,” or as later formulated by the Torah: “I will be your G-d, and you shall be My people” (Leviticus 26:12).

The basic condition for the existence of this covenant is the prohibition against idolatry. Yet, only forty days after the Revelation at Mount Sinai, when the Israelites feared that Moses had disappeared, they created a golden calf and danced before it, proclaiming, “This is your God, O Israel.” When Moses descended from the mountain and witnessed this event, he broke the tablets of the covenant received from G-d, punished the instigators of the sin, and interceded with G-d to forgive the people for their calf-worship.

The last part of the portion describes a dialogue between Moses and G-d in which Moses seeks forgiveness for the people and, beyond that, makes a surprising request to G-d:

“Reveal to me Your glory.” Moses asks to see G-d! The resolute response Moses receives is: “You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.” Man cannot see G-d.

Throughout the generations, Jewish sages explained that Moses did not expect to literally see G-d. He sought an intellectual elevation beyond human capacity, but G-d explained to him that living beings cannot ascend to such heights. As long as man is alive, he is limited not only in his physical abilities but also in his intellectual capacities. Such a high level of intellectual comprehension cannot be realized.

Why is intellectual comprehension specifically likened to the sense of sight? Because through the eye that sees, man cannot grasp the essence of a thing but only its external shell. When we see a person, we do not see his essence, his character, or his qualities, but only his external appearance. Similarly, man’s intellectual comprehension is not capable of grasping the essence of things but only definitions – the external framework of the thing.

The Torah offers another way to encounter G-d: *“Hear, O Israel.”* Hearing is a deeper sense than seeing. When we hear someone speak, we are able to understand his essence. When we hear music, we are elevated to a profound experience that we cannot reach through sight alone. Man aspiring for a deep encounter with G-d cannot do so through intellect alone but through hearing – hearing the law, hearing the truth, hearing and obeying.

Thus, Moses described the Revelation at Mount Sinai that the people experienced:

“You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12).

At Mount Sinai, all of Israel heard the revelation of G-d through the Ten Commandments, but they did not see Him. There was a cloud and thick fog on the mountain, from which the voice emanated.

This led to the sin of the Golden Calf. The people, who had lived for hundreds of years in Egypt among idolaters, struggled to adapt to an abstract faith, to a G-d who could not be seen. At the first opportunity, they created a calf that symbolized to them the gods, a tangible calf that could be seen and touched.

Indeed, a person seeking a religious experience may resort to ecstatic experiences that lead him to a feeling of divine attainment. But this is a mistake. The one and only G-d, the G-d of Israel, does not expect anything from man but one thing, in the words of the prophet Micah:

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d” (Micah 6:8).

Justice, kindness, and humility are the qualities that lead man to a true encounter with G-d.

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Ki Sisa

פרשת כי תשא תשפ"ד

לך רד כי שחת עמך... סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתם עשו להם עגל מסכה

Go, descend – for your people has become corrupt... they have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them. They have made themselves a molten calf. (32:7,8)

Hashem ordered Moshe *Rabbeinu* to return to his people. They were no longer worthy of his leadership. They had quickly strayed – they had made a molten idol. Upon reading the text, the first question that emerges is: Was this a digression in which they first strayed, and their turning away from Hashem ultimately led to the nadir of idol worship? Or, is it all one sin, in which the people strayed by creating and worshipping the idol?

Let us return to the text: when Hashem informs Moshe that his people have strayed quickly. Does it really make a difference if their breach came quickly, or slowly over time? A sin is a sin. It is related in the name of *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, who explains that it was not impossible to fathom that, over some time, with exposure to the mundane issues of everyday life, the impression of the awesome fiery spectacle of Revelation would begin to wane. Indeed, unless one acutely works on reviewing and renewing the events which led up to – and including – the Revelation, it soon becomes part of “history,” and one becomes victim to the dangers of complacency. For *Klal Yisrael* to lose the emotion that accompanied Revelation in a mere forty days, however, smacked of more than mundane influence. It gave the indication that when they stood at *Har Sinai* and accepted the Torah, it was not with whole-hearted compliance. If such a seminal experience can be so quickly lost, it is an indication that they had never fully accepted the Torah. This was the underlying tragedy of *saru ma’heir*; they quickly strayed. [Indeed, when the effect of one’s religious experience quickly dissipates, it bespeaks a lack of genuineness. Contrived experiences, with all the singing and hoopla, the dancing and *kumtitz*, should last more than an hour or two. If it does not, it lacks spiritual integrity.]

With this idea in mind, we may suggest that the Golden Calf was the nadir of their “quickly strayed.” It took forty days until they blatantly showed how far they had plummeted. It began with *saru ma’heir*, and they then descended to *asu la’hem eigel maseichah*.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, asks the same question: How did they fall so quickly from the apex of spirituality to the nadir of depravity? Indeed, *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 105) teach that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, does not work like this. It has extraordinary patience. One day, it tells the individual, “Do this.” The next day, it encourages the sinner to commit another minor breach. All of these “innocuous” infractions, with time lead to full-blown idol worship. If so, how did they, almost overnight, become captives of the *yetzer hora*?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that, when Moshe was “late” (according to their erroneous calculations), the people became very anxious, thinking that he was gone, and they were now leaderless, a ship without a rudder. This anxiety transformed into full-fledged depression. When one is depressed, nothing prevents him from slipping and falling into the abyss of sin. When someone is depressed, his self-esteem takes a significant hit. He may have negative thoughts about himself, his worth, and his abilities. In such a state, individuals might engage in behaviors they would not consider when they are emotionally balanced.

Furthermore, one who is depressed may forget to whom he owes his life and success. He may lose his sense of gratitude. He simply does not care. Such a person is now vulnerable to the manipulations of the *yetzer hora*.

Perhaps this is why the people singing and dancing, that accompanied their idol worship so angered Moshe. If they were so depressed – why were they singing? If they had given up hope, thrown in the towel – why were they dancing? Unless, this, too, was a sign of depression. They simply did not care.

We may suggest a practical approach toward coming to terms with the nation’s sudden about-face and its tragic repercussion.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, Telshe Rosh Yeshivah, would often relate the story of his journey from America to Lithuania. Hundreds of travelers were taking their minds off the long voyage with party after party. The ship had become an entertainment center on water. Suddenly, in middle of the trip, a massive storm interrupted their frivolity at sea. The heavy ship was tossed around as the wind pushed the waves higher and higher. They all thought this was it. They feared the end was near – the ship was no match for the fierce storm. The passengers were panic-stricken; family members bid farewell to one another. Then, as suddenly as it started – it stopped, and the water became calm. The transformation was almost weird – like suddenly from night to day. The *Rosh Yeshivah* thought for sure that his fellow travelers had learned their lesson, and they would act differently now that they had confronted the sobering truth of their own mortality. However, nothing of the sort happened. No sooner had the sea calmed down, and the winds dissipated, than the parties began once again in earnest. In fact, they had become more frivolous now that they had confronted death – and survived. He could not believe what he was observing.

The experience troubled him greatly, and, when he arrived in Telshe, he posed his dilemma to the *Rav* – *Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl*. How could people stare at death one moment and carry on with abandon in the next moment – as if nothing had happened?

“This is not a question at all,” the *Rav* replied. *“Dos iz a mentch*, ‘This is a human being!’” This is the true nature of a human being – one minute overcome with fear – the next minute filled with unconstrained joy. Likewise, *Klal Yisrael* stood in awe at the foot of *Har Sinai*, but as human beings, their reactions were not etched in stone. When the urge to join the frivolity surrounding the Golden Calf surfaced, they joined the party, because, after all, they were only being human.

ויהר אף משה וישלך מידי אלהות וישבר אותם תחת ההר

Moshe’s anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. (32:19)

To break something which Hashem made is an act that transcends. Unquestionably, for someone of Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s stature to make such a move requires remarkable insight into what he was about to do. This was not a simple decision. Indeed, the fact that Hashem agreed with Moshe is in and of itself an indication that Moshe did not act out of anger, but rather, because he felt that it was the correct and proper thing to do. The commentators endeavor to provide a rationale to come to grips with this decision. *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*, offers a novel explanation.

He quotes *Chazal* (*Eruvin* 54a) who teach that the *Luchos HaRishonos* (first Tablets) had a unique characteristic: Had they not been shattered, Torah would never have been forgotten from *Klal Yisrael*. They had within them a G-d-given attribute that as long as they were extant, anyone who studied Torah would never forget what he had learned. As such, when Moshe beheld the tragedy of the Golden Calf before his eyes, he realized that this wonderful Heavenly attribute could be used to profane Hashem’s Name and the entire foundation of religious observance. Imagine not forgetting Torah; whatever one learns becomes an integral part of his psyche, never to be forgotten. A person could learn and later in life decide that he wants to see how the other half live. Within a short space of time, this man becomes a *mushchas*, a coarse, obnoxious individual, whose religious leanings are practically non-

existent and his moral character equally so. Had the first *Luchos* remained, this man could go around expounding citations from the *Shas/Talmud*, all the while denigrating the Written and Oral Law!

As a result of this image that passed before Moshe's eyes, he decided that it would be far better to shatter the *Luchos* and have a new set made, which would not include this supplementary characteristic of non-forgetting. Hashem created the first *Luchos* by engraving the letters into the stone. Thus, it would last forever. The second set of *Luchos* was Moshe's handiwork, so that they would remain in force only as long as certain criteria were met.

Today we are connected to the Torah via the second set of *Luchos*. Moshe toiled in Heaven in order to master the Torah. All of this toil was imbued into the second set of *Luchos*, which he fashioned at the behest of Hashem. If we learn Torah with such ardor and love, it will become a part of us and will remain with us. If we learn Torah as if it were only an intellectual pursuit, then our memory will grasp only so much for so long. Moshe saw to it that Torah should become the *kinyan*, acquisition, of only those who work for it – those who deserve it.

The Torah is the Heavenly bequest to every Jew. It is up to us to accept it. This acceptance is a task borne of love and toil. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, puts it perfectly. "We might have researched and studied all of it (the Torah) and found everything in it except ourselves." One must seek and find his personal *cheilek*, portion, in Torah. He can only discern his *cheilek* through intense searching.

In his Collected Writings, *Rav Hirsch* explains a Jew's requisite relationship to the Torah. Architects and their assistants may have a knowledge of blueprints and plans for a magnificent edifice – perfect in its every detail; yet, they might have no inkling of the central idea behind the blueprint which governs the entire construction. They would have neither feeling for – nor understanding of – the one who will occupy this building and whose personality and conduct will constitute the atmosphere that will permeate the house. Likewise, one may possess the entire Torah – which is the blueprint and ground plan for the individual, the family and the community; one may have studied all the texts and delved through all the sources of Jewish learning, even gain the title Jewish theologian/scholar. Yet, despite all these attainments, he may still be lacking in true Jewish knowledge. He may know it all, but he might be too absorbed in particulars to understand the underlying concept. As a result, his knowledge is not integrated into his psyche. [He is very much a *chamor nosei sefarim*, donkey carrying books. He has the knowledge, but it is merely like books carried externally, never fused into his essence.] Love of Torah and *ameilus*, toil in Torah, are more than slogans. They represent criteria for attaining Torah scholarship. One must, however, first understand the principle upon which these requisites are established: recognizing the value of Torah (what it means to us).

In his biography of *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero quotes from one of the *Rosh Yeshivah's shmuessen*, ethical discourses. The *Rosh Yeshivah* quoted the *Lutzker Rav, Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl*, concerning a well-known *Chazal (Sanhedrin 94b)* which

teaches us about the unique character of *Chizkiyahu Hamelech: No'atz cherev al pesach bais hamedrash*; He planted a sword at the entrance to the *bais hamedrash* and declared, "Sancheirev is here with a powerful army who helped him conquer the world. We are the end of the line, the last ones to be attacked by him. He has a sword, and we must be fearful of his sword."

The king then took his own sword and placed it at the door of the *bais hamedrash*. He called out, "Whoever shall leave the *bais hamedrash* and cease studying Torah shall be killed by this sword." As a result of his decree, the king's agents searched throughout *Eretz Yisrael*. They did not find any man, woman, or child who was not well versed even in the difficult laws of ritual purity.

Obviously, *Chizkiyahu's* actions require elucidation. To think that whoever leaves the *bais hamedrash* should be killed is a bit extreme. Wasting time from Torah study is a transgression of a *mitzvas asei*, positive *mitzvah*. It certainly does not warrant that the *bais din* execute him. *Rav Zalman* explains that *Chazal* are conveying to us a powerful lesson concerning Torah study. We understand that visual explanation/optics make a world of difference in getting an idea across to an audience, regardless of size. We all know that Torah is our life; *Ki heim chayeinu*. However, if someone stands in front of us with a sword and a message asserting that, if you leave, you die, then leaving the *bais hamedrash* is suicide.

Chizkiyahu's message was clear: "Torah is your lifeblood. Without it, you cannot survive." As a result, the men left their fields and vineyards and proceeded to the *bais hamedrash*. They had no interest in worldly pursuits. When they came to the *bais hamedrash*, they were greeted by the sword which reminded them, "If I leave the *bais hamedrash*, I am killing myself. If I remain in the *bais hamedrash*, no sword can harm me – not even the sword of Sancheirev."

I conclude with a thought gleaned from the insightful, yet powerful words of the *Gerrer Rebbe*, the *Imrei Emes, zl*. His *Rebbetzin* was concerned that her husband was late for his meal. He usually came at a specific time and then returned to his learning. That time had long passed, and, atypically, he had communicated to her that he might be late. She went over to his private room and peeked inside. She saw that he was deeply engrossed in his learning. She was now relieved. He had probably lost track of time. The *Rebbe* noticed her and he looked up. She asked, "Until when will you be learning?"

He replied immediately, without batting an eyelash, "Until the very last second (of my life). *Kol ze'man she'ha'neshamah b'kirbi*; "As long as my soul is within me!"

This was the *Imrei Emes*. His *dveikus ba'Torah*, deep-rooted bond with the Torah, was equaled by his love for it. Indeed, as long as his heart beat within him, he would learn. His life did not just revolve around Torah – his life was Torah! They were one and the same. As long as he lived, he remained totally immersed in it.

In Honor Of Dr. Dennis & Mrs. Marianne Glazer
Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל

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

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
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' [ev'il / reish.ayin.hey.] in 32:12-14. Relate to 32:17, 32:22, 32:25?, 33:4. Relate to Shmot 10:10; see Rashi, Ramban, Chizkuni, Rashbam.

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

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

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

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

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

[page 84 in Kapach edition Mosad Harav Kook]

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

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