

Potomac Torah Study Center

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

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of all our hostages from Gaza and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer notes that it is difficult for a physical human to relate to a non-physical Deity. This difficulty is especially difficult for B'Nai Yisrael in the Midbar after living for several generations in the pagan environment of Egypt – a land that had dozens of physical gods. While Moshe is with the people in the camp, his presence and influence serve as a representation and symbol of Hashem. However, after he spends forty days and nights on Har Sinai, above the clouds and in what appears to be fire on top of the mountain, they worry that Moshe will not survive and be able to return.

Even Moshe struggles with finding a way to understand God and explain Him to the people. Moshe asks God to permit him to see God's face and understand His essence. Hashem responds that no human may see or understand His face and survive the experience. Hashem permits Moshe to stand in a crevice while He goes by, covers Moshe's face, and recites the new Covenant, the thirteen Divine Attributes of Hashem. Not even Moshe may see or learn Hashem's "face," what will be in the future, but Moshe may see His back (understand the past), and other Jews may study Hashem's Torah and Halacha, and thereby come closer by learning how to know more about and ways to serve God.

Ki Tisa is an excellent parsha for Shabbat Parah. When the people want a representation to go before them on the way to the promised land, an egel (a male calf) emerges from the fire. The Maftir reading for this Shabbat is Parah Adumah, the red heifer, an entirely red male cow that is to be sacrificed and burned with a few other specified items. The ashes are to be combined with pure water, with the water then collected and stored to be used in a purification ritual for tamei Jews (ritually impure) after contact with a dead body or encountering various types of near death experiences. We read the Torah of Parah Adumah on Shabbat two weeks before starting Nisan, enough time to remind Jews to become tahor (ritually pure) in time to participate in the Korban Pesach (Passover sacrifice).

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the Haftorah (from Yechezkel). After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and dispersion of the Jews, is there a future for B'Nai Yisrael to be Hashem's chosen people? Yechezkel's vision responds that God will raise up the defeated Jewish people and return them to His land – not because the people necessarily deserve His mercy, but because God must keep His promise to our ancestors and because otherwise the other nations of the world will infer that Hashem is not strong enough to keep His promises to B'Nai Yisrael. Yechezkel's vision is a later version of Moshe's argument to God on Har Sinai after the Jews worship a golden calf. Moshe argues that God MUST forgive the Jews and lead them to the promised land – otherwise the non-Jews will say that He is not powerful enough to take them to and to conquer Canaan. As Moshe did centuries earlier, Yechezkel warns the people that they must prove worthy of God's redemption if they are to stay in Israel.

Rabbi Brander remarks that Yechezkel could have been writing for the Jews of today. Do we act kindly enough to our fellow Jews to deserve the wonderful condition of Israel today? Rabbi Brander especially warns that religious and secular

Jews must find a way to respect and help each other. In particular, he warns that the religious community in Israel must do its part in serving and defending Israel. While many Modern Orthodox Jews are serving in the IDF, far too few Haredi do their part. In the early days of Israel, the percentage of Haredi Jews was small enough that their absence in the IDF may not have been a significant cost for the country. However, as the percentage of Haredi in the population has increased substantially, the case for them to do more to support the country becomes stronger.

Rabbi Marc Angel extends the analysis to critics of Israel. Many Jews, both in Israel and abroad, criticize the Israeli government. When critics argue for a more moral path and seek a more moral path, their criticism can be positive and loving. However, unfortunately there are too many Jew-haters, to quote Rabbi Angel, and those who oppose the concept of a Jewish country and seek to destroy everything Jewish are destructive. Unfortunately, there are too many Jew-haters in the world. We Jews have far too many anti-Semites among the non-Jews. I certainly have contempt for Jewish anti-Semites and would like to find a way to get them to understand that enemies of the Jews would come after them if they could.

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 studying Chumash, I hope to share this love of Torah with them.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Para: Not For Your Sake, But For My Name

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

This week's parsha is dedicated to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

Few mitzvot are as mysterious as the one described in this week's Torah reading of the *para aduma*, the Red Heifer, the ritual meant to purify those who came into contact with death, the most severe of impurities. Yet beneath its inscrutable surface lies one of the Torah's most urgent ideas: that even after contact with death, there can be purification; even after defilement, we can become whole. At a moment when the Jewish people are once again sovereign in their land – yet grappling with war and the profound questions of existence that accompany it – the haftara for this Shabbat asks those very questions on a national scale.

In Yechezkel's vision (chapter 36), that national reckoning begins with a stark accusation: *"The House of Israel dwelled upon their soil and defiled it with their ways and their deeds,"* God charges Israel (v. 17). Israel sinned through their depraved actions, the concrete way they lived and treated one another in the land they had been given. The consequence was exile.

But exile brought its own terrible complications. As the scattered Jewish people were humiliated among the nations, their degradation seemed to call into question God's own reputation. Could this broken, dispersed people truly be the nation of the one God? The verse Yechezkel identifies as the pivot is remarkable: *"I am concerned for My holy name, which the House of Israel has desecrated among the nations"* (v. 21). The next verse doubles down on the point: *"Not for your sake do I act, O House of Israel, but for My holy name"* (v. 22). In other words, God's decision to restore Israel is driven not by the people's own merit – the text is explicit that they have not yet earned their return – but by a quest to end the chillul Hashem, the desecration of His name, that their continued exile perpetuates.

For Yechezkel, the process of purification is placed within the national life of Israel to restore the people as a whole. Unlike Parshat Para, which focuses on the restoration of an individual so they can rejoin the community, the haftara focuses on a process of national restoration so that it can fulfill its communal mission.

The communal redemption is set into motion *lema'an shemo* — for the sake of His name. And the fruits of that act are tangible: *peri ha'etz* and *tenuvat ha'sadeh*, the fruits of the trees and the produce of the field, are abundant, so that Israel will *"no longer suffer the reproach of famine among the nations"* (v. 30). But God reminds us that it can't end there; we need to be worthy of this communal redemption.

Reading this haftara today, I find myself asking whether it is speaking directly to our generation. After nearly two thousand years of exile and humiliation, the Jewish people have begun to return to Israel. The land has responded: cities are rising, the economy flourishing: *"On the day when I cleanse you of all your iniquities, I will reinhabit the cities; the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be tilled there"* (vv. 33–34). The land indeed blooms and rebuilds before our eyes. Even with the difficulties and human loss in the ongoing war, the country is resilient, with the selfless commitment of our people, as well as the shekel at strongest against the dollar in our history.

And yet, have we truly learned the lesson of exile? Beneath this renaissance, are we still defiling the land?

Yechezkel's indictment of ancient Israel was not primarily about paganism. It was about how the people treated one another – the moral rot at the heart of a society entrusted with a sacred mission. A Torah society cannot be sustained by meticulous ritual piety. It requires moral courage, communal responsibility and mutual respect. And so I find myself asking: if exile was brought about not only by external enemies but by internal moral failure, have we truly changed the habits that once defiled this land? Do we guard against contempt, corruption, and callousness as fiercely as we guard our borders? Do we speak to one another with dignity, even when we disagree? And do we ensure that our civic, moral, and spiritual responsibilities are shared fairly, in a way that strengthens our society rather than dividing it? [emphasis added]

This past Shabbat, we witnessed tens of thousands of reservists across Israel change from their Shabbat clothing into the sacred uniform of the IDF. Fathers of young children heard the reading imploring us to remember the cruelty of Amalek, then left their families to answer the call once again. Children watched with pride as their parents stepped up with courage, embodying what it means to partner with God in shaping Jewish history. In those moments, we saw Yechezkel's vision coming alive.

Yes we still have a way to go. And before pointing fingers elsewhere, we must reflect: **have we, the religious Zionist community, done enough? Have we genuinely sought to build bridges with our brothers and sisters across the divide, engaging one another with the dignity the Torah demands? Or do we too bear responsibility for still defiling the land through division and contempt?** [emphasis added]

The haftara ends with words of profound comfort. God promises that He will not exile Israel again (36:30). That guarantee is not conditioned on our merit – it is anchored, as it always has been, in His name. But that same anchor is a summons. If we are here *lema'an shemo*, for the sake of His name, then how we treat one another in this land is not merely a political or

social question; it is a matter of kiddush Hashem. Redemption may be guaranteed, but it is not yet complete. We have risen to the challenge in so many ways, yet we must all muster the courage and moral clarity to finish the task.

Shabbat Shalom.

* 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.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-para-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

Ki Sisa: Shabbos Has Kept the Children of Israel Holy

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5763

“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever that in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.” (Shemos 32:16-17)

He promised them that this sign will remain forever and Israel will make great personal sacrifices for its sake and through this the sign will remain with them forever. He also promised them that no other peoples will accept this day as their day of rest, rather they will seek to rest on another day. (Malbim)

What’s so special about Shabbos? Why is it the central day in the Jewish week? Let’s see if we can appreciate one small sliver of an approach.

A Rabbi was speaking to an elder group of Jews in Florida some time back. He wanted to impress upon them the greatness of the sainted Chofetz Chaim. He told them that in a town near to Radin where the Chofetz Chaim resided there was a butcher whose son had become a flagrant desecrater of the Shabbos. This presented a tremendous problem for the whole town. The son’s ill behavior reflected on the butcher and cast a shadow of over the credibility of his Kashrus.

It was the source of great controversy for the whole community and deep personal pain for the butcher. After many discussions and after having exhausted every other option it was decided that they would bring the young man to meet the Chofetz Chaim. They did. After a brief encounter in a closed room the boy came out transformed and from then on was dutifully observant of the Shabbos.

After the Rabbi concluded his lecture an older man approached him and told him that he was from a certain small town adjacent to Radin. His father was a butcher. In his youth he had gone on a streak of rebelliousness and had desecrated the Shabbos. His father had taken him to the Chofetz Chaim and from then on he ceased from violating the Shabbos. *“I was that young man in the story!”* he confessed. The Rabbi pressed him, *“What happened in that room?”*

He related, “I entered the room and saw this sweet elderly Rabbi. He took my hand with his two soft and gentle hands and he began to say, “Shabbos, oy Shabbos...” He repeated over and over again and he began to cry. A tear ran off his cheek and landed on the back of my hand. When I felt that hot tear I gave a shriek and ran out of the room, vowing at that moment I would never violate Shabbos again.”

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, the Kuzari, relates a remarkable fact. For all the various measurements of time there is some corresponding celestial cue. During the course of a month the moon does its dance across the sky. A year can be measured by the angle of the sun’s rays. These are openly observable phenomena.

However, a week is a peculiar creature. Why is the entire world obedient to a seven-day week. What heavenly signal keeps all of humanity in concert with this schedule? The Kuzari posits that it is a remnant of the persistent memory of all humanity. That from the very beginning the world had an original and continuing cycle of Shabbos.

A second point of interest is that the other faiths have chosen days in the week other than Shabbos as days of relaxation. They do not contest which day is Shabbos. On that all are in agreement. These have parked ¼ of humanity on Friday the 6th day and these have placed ¼ of mankind on Sunday, the 1st day of the week.

With ink as hot as that holy tear, it's in the verse above for 3315 years now, the 7th day has been "an exclusive" for the Children of Israel who have always kept the Shabbos Holy, and so Shabbos has kept the Children of Israel Holy.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-kisisa/>

Ki Tisa: Torah as a Way to Know God

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

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

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

Now, when it comes to idolatry, the Torah recognizes two types. There is the idolatry of worshipping other gods. This is the idolatry that is prohibited in the second of the Ten Commandments. "*You shall not have any other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an engraved image... You shall not bow down to them and you shall not serve them because I am the Lord your God, a jealous God...*" (Shemot 20:3-5). The focus here is the worship of other gods, and the imagery of God as a jealous God evokes the husband who is jealous because of his wife's actual or suspected adultery (see Bamidbar 5:14). It is a violation of the fidelity of the God-Israel relationship, it is a "*whoring after other gods.*" (Devarim 31:16).

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

When it comes to the Golden Calf, the commentators debate which form of idolatry took place. Did the people believe the Calf to be a different god, as is perhaps indicated by the use of the plural ("*your gods, who have brought you up...*"), evoking the constellation of pagan gods, or did they create the Calf as a physical representation of God, as a more immediate way to connect to and worship God? Psychologically, it seems hard to believe that after everything they had just experienced, that the People would so quickly backslide into their earlier pagan beliefs, but perhaps this is just evidence of how hard it is and how much work is necessary to change a person's deeply ingrained practices and beliefs. So while the psychological argument is debatable, the textual evidence is, I believe, quite clear: "*The Lord said to Moshe: Go down; for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted; They have strayed quickly from the path which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf...*" (Shemot 31:7-8). The key word, here again, is *shecheit*,

corrupted. They have not abandoned Me; they have not whored after other gods; they have corrupted – corrupted the worship of God and the idea of God. They have strayed from the path that they were commanded, they have violated the rules, and left narrow path that allows only certain forms of worship, but that have not violated the faith, they have not believed in or worshiped other gods.

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

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

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

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

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

The study of Torah and Halakha, I believe, is the most traditional and most realizable path, but even it has its potential

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

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

Shabbat Shalom.

From my archives

Nishmat haTorah: Parashat Ki Tisa
From Shattered to Sacred: The Rabbinic Twinning of the Luchot
By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

Even in a busy parsha like ours, Parshat Ki Tisa, the breaking of the tablets stands out as the most dramatic. Personally, I am struck by how the Rabbis append a crucial detail to the event, transforming a narrative of loss and shame into a paradigm of enduring sanctity.

Briefly, here is the story in this week's parsha:

Following Matan Torah, Moses ascends to heaven for forty days. He returns bearing the Tablets, which serve as a covenantal contract. To his shock, his long absence led the Jews astray; they cast a golden calf and are reveling. Moses is incensed and hurls down the tablets in a fury. They shatter completely. After a long process, the tablets are re-inscribed, and he's given new ones. With that, the story seemingly ends: the first set of tablets have been discarded and replaced with the second set.

Yet, the story does not end there.

While it is how the story ends in the Torah, the Rabbis append a profound detail, revealing that even though the first Tablets were shattered, they were not discarded. We know the tablets eventually take a place of honor in the Mishkan and Beit Mikdash. Once the tabernacle was built, the tablets were placed in the holy ark, stationed in the Holy of Holies. Perhaps surprisingly, the rabbis teach that the new tablets weren't there by themselves. Instead, the broken shards of the first set took their place of honor in the ark, lying side by side with the new tablets (See *Bava Batra* 14:).

On the surface this makes no sense: why preserve the shattered fragments? I believe this twinning delivers an incredibly powerful twofold message about the nature of the religious journey.

The religious journey isn't linear or smooth; it is, instead, a process of breaking and reconstituting. There are times when our spiritual vitality is perfectly aligned with the divine will, and commitment to the commandments is effortless and complete. But then there are times that alignment breaks, when we feel detached and out of sync — and that, we must understand, is not a spiritual failing. That is the nature of the religious life: there is an ebb and flow. In Chassidut, that is expressed as *בושו אוצר תיחהו*. Religious Cheyut is a perpetual journey of moving close, pulling back, and again moving close. It oscillates. Thus, the broken luchot belong alongside the new ones: they are not a pause, but an integral part of that story.

The other, and perhaps more important, lesson this twinning teaches is that even after old paths are abandoned and outdated paradigms are shattered, they should not be discarded. While the old paradigm might not work in its pristine form and had to be crushed, its wisdom is not entirely lost. Instead we need to keep it constantly before us, with one eye observing the new luchot and the other looking at the broken one for guidance and inspiration. Because our religious journey is an amalgam of various religious states, even when we realize we need to change paths, we should not completely negate the previous journey.

And this is not just true for the luchot but also for our religious experience as a whole. A notion in Chassidut teaches that Matan Torah occurs in perpetuity, with every generation having its own Har Sinai experience.

Following this logic, we too must pass through our own *"breaking-of-the-tablets"* moment, much like the Jews' in the desert. That moment is the realization that existing religious paradigms are insufficient for our contemporary religious struggles, requiring them to be broken. The old tablets are shattered, so to speak — yet their core is not discarded; they are then refurbished and reconstituted, yielding a restored set of tablets. The immutable core of the content endures, simply re-examined — taken apart and put back together again, emerging stronger and better.

In fact, this mode of *בושו אוצר*, going back and forth, breaking and reconstituting, breaking with old paradigms while not discarding it completely, is in our DNA, going back all the way to our forbear Yakov, *"God's favorite (according to the Midrash)."*

Jacob does battle with an agent of God. He triumphs. Yet, despite dealing a crushing blow to a manifestation of the Divine, the encounter is commemorated by a name change which puts God front and center in Jacob's reconstituted identity. His new name is Yisra-EL, conveying subservience to the very God he just defeated; EL now an intimate part of his new sense of self.

This mode of *בושו אוצר*, of going back and forth, of breaking with old paradigms and reconstituting them, is not an exception but a core feature encoded in our spiritual DNA. The struggle for a deeper, more authentic religious life is not a spiritual failing, but an echo of the transformational encounter that changed our forbear, Jacob, into the new man, Yisra-EL.

And this is why, even in a Parsha as rich as ours, the story of the broken luchot, especially as told by the Rabbis, stands out. It is a testament to their genius. They take a story meant to underscore the fragility of faith and turn it into the exact opposite. The rabbinic epilogue transforms it into a profound teaching on resilience and religious fortitude. Our breaks are not detours; they are part and parcel of the perpetual journey of *krivat elokim* (drawing close to God); *בושו אוצר*, in and out and in — and so on and so forth.

Shabbat Shalom.

[note: because of problems formatting across different word processing problems, I had to omit most Hebrew text, and some remaining Hebrew text will end up out of order, depending on word processing format.]

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2026/03/from-shattered-to-sacred-the-rabbinic-twinning-of-the-luchot/>

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

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

It is bizarre and morally repugnant that the one tiny Jewish country in the world has to suffer so much abuse. It is a matter of honor to stand up for Israel and to remind the world of the right of the Jews to their own homeland. We need to counter the attacks against Israel in every forum. We need to speak truth to combat the unceasing stream of lies heaped up against Israel.

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

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

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

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

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

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Book Review: Joshua Berman on the Haggadah

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Book Review: Joshua Berman, *Echoes of Egypt: A Haggada* (Koren, 2026), 138pp.

The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel has just published the next volume in its ongoing series. Professor Joshua Berman presents a visual commentary on the slavery and exodus narratives, featuring ancient Egyptian images. Like the Shemot commentary of this excellent series, the vivid images with scholarly explanations bring the Egyptian setting of the Pesah story to life. This pedagogical technique distinguishes this Haggadah and will enhance the Seder experience for a wide variety of readers.

Several pictures simply enable readers to see artifacts and wall reliefs that provide vivid depictions of our slavery. A photograph of a vast ancient Egyptian mudbrick storage facility (p. 38), a detailed Egyptian tomb illustration of the backbreaking labor of brickmaking (pp. 64-65), and a relief of a pharaoh in a chariot (105) bring the experience of our slavery and redemption to our Seder table.

Berman’s introductory essays provide meaningful background to the Torah’s narratives in Exodus. He outlines how the Torah broke with ancient political thought and the many political and economic ramifications of the Torah’s revolutionary ideology. He then discusses Egyptian royal propaganda, and how the Torah ironically turns those terms on their head as God overwhelms the helpless pharaoh and his nation.

On other occasions, we gain greater insight into the meaning of the Torah. God repeats the phraseology that He will redeem Israel with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. Clearly, these terms refer to God’s power. However, Berman observes that these expressions — used throughout Tanakh — appear only in association with the exodus from Egypt and not other narratives where God displays His power. Berman explains this seeming anomaly by noting that these terms appear in Egyptian writings, particularly in the zenith of Egypt’s power from 1550-1100 BCE. A relief showing Seti I holding his captives down with his left hand while wielding a mace (p. 14) illustrates the Egyptian propaganda regarding their pharaohs. Berman explains that **the Torah thereby uses Egyptian propaganda against Egypt — now, God will devastate them as He frees a slave nation from their grip.** The visual medium makes the propaganda argument tangible at the Seder table — tying archaeology to lived ritual. [emphasis added]

Several of Berman’s comments present interesting tidbits. He observes (23) that Egyptians refer to their own country in Arabic as Misr. We would intuitively conclude that the Hebrew Mitzrayim and the Arabic name derive from the ancient Egyptian name for their land. However, this is not so. When the ancient Coptic Christians translated the Torah into Coptic, they transliterated the Torah’s Mitzrayim directly into Coptic. After the Muslim conquest in the 7th century, Muslims adopted

the Coptic form of the name into Arabic. Therefore, Egyptians refer to their land as Misr because of the Torah's transmission of that name into Coptic.

Occasionally, the connections between our Seder and ancient Egypt remain unclear. Not every element of the rabbinic Seder requires Egyptian background; some reflect later Greco-Roman cultural adaptation. For example, we eat maror, bitter herbs. However, the Torah itself does not prescribe which species of vegetation qualify for this commandment. By the Mishnah, the preferred vegetable is romaine lettuce (Mishnah Pesachim 10:3). The Talmud goes on to describe several other options that qualify for fulfillment of the maror. Berman observes (8) that depictions of the Egyptian god of fertility, Min, frequently include offerings of romaine lettuce. He suggests that romaine may symbolize fertility and growth.

However, it may be overly speculative to connect romaine lettuce to ancient Egypt, given that the Torah does not specify any vegetable for maror. Scholars such as Joseph Tabory (*JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, 2008) outline the similarities between the prescribed rabbinic Seder rituals and the Greco-Roman symposium. In the latter, intellectuals gathered to share wine, food, and stimulating discourse. A common appetizer before the main course was romaine lettuce dipped in a sauce. Since maror is a required commandment for our Seder, the rabbinic Sages moved that practice to the maror section of our Seder, while substituting karpas, or a non-maror vegetable such as celery, to the earlier appetizer stage of our Seder. In this instance, it is unclear that we should link romaine lettuce as the preferred maror of the Mishnah with ancient Egyptian rituals.

The Haggadah exhorts all of us: "*Generation by generation, each person must see himself as if he himself came out of Egypt.*" By presenting Egypt in its historical and cultural setting, Berman demonstrates how contextual scholarship can illuminate and sharpen the Torah's message. When used with care, archaeology and comparative study clarify the polemical and theological force of the Exodus narrative. In this way, Echoes of Egypt models how serious scholarship can deepen and enrich religious experience at the Seder table.

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Ki Sisa: The Sacred Wait

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The revelation at Sinai was a wondrous experience. The Jewish people were promised a great ongoing connection with Hashem. They yearned for the day when Moshe would return from his personal audience with Hashem to guide them to greater heights. But it seemed that Moshe was delayed and the Jewish people really wanted more. So, a small but significant group decided to pursue a sort of elevated spiritual connection. They made the Eigel, a golden calf.

As we see recorded in the prophecy of Yechezkel, one of the conduits of connection with Hashem is described as a calf. But we are forbidden to use such conduits to reach Hashem. We are obligated to connect to Hashem without intermediaries. To use an intermediary is Avodah Zarah (idol worship); to create a graven image, icon, or figurine, is strictly forbidden.

The Beis Haleivi commentary explains that the yearning for connection with Hashem is a good thing. But the relationship with Hashem must follow the commandments that Hashem gives us. Even the most sincere and spiritually sophisticated person cannot choose on their own how to connect with Hashem. The invitation must come from Hashem's side. Without that invitation, even the most well-intentioned gesture can be Avodah Zorah.

Interestingly, there was one person who was personally spared from the Eigel story. Yehoshua, the loyal student of Moshe, had not been assigned any task while Moshe was away. Free and available, he decided that the best use of his time would be as an honor guard, outside the camp, at the foot of the mountain, waiting for Moshe.

But what emerges is that Yehoshua's waiting wasn't just fortuitous. There is a theological difference between the path of those who followed the Eigel and the path of Yehoshua. Yehoshua's wait wasn't just patience — it was a statement of faith that Hashem will provide the terms of connection. He didn't fill the void with his own initiative. Instead, he held the space waiting for Moshe to return.

Waiting is an interesting thing. To Yehoshua it was purposeful and deliberate. But sometimes waiting can seem like a waste of time.

I recall on one occasion a man was honored to take out the Torah on Shabbos morning, and he went up to the Aron holding the Parsha sheets he was reading. Not to waste time while the congregation was singing, he opened the Aron quickly and stood by reading his sheets until the singing and prayers would be completed and it would be time to take out the Torah. In a certain way it seemed admirable. The Parsha sheets were interesting, and he didn't want to waste any time. Yet I called him over afterwards to chat. Because standing as the honor guard when we take out the Torah is not called wasting time. Consider the guards at Buckingham Palace. They stand motionless for hours and nobody accuses them of wasting time. Their stillness is not emptiness — it is a statement. Their presence declares: what stands behind these doors matters. That is what they are doing. And so it is **when the Aron is opened. The congregation standing at attention, present and unhurried, is declaring that what is about to emerge matters infinitely. That standing is not the gap between two activities. It is itself the activity. And perhaps more — it is a moment of receiving, of being open, of waiting for Hashem's word to reach us rather than rushing to fill the space ourselves. That waiting is sacred waiting.** [emphasis added]

How we experience waiting depends entirely on the lens we use to measure it. The most common lenses are time and money. When things happen, we typically ask, "How much time did it take?" and "How much money did it cost?" Based on that, we determine if it was a worthwhile endeavor.

Yet there are other important lenses that we would do well to consider. Asking ourselves how it impacts the relationship is also an important question to ask. Sometimes the very things that seem to be so time-consuming or costly are actually investments in a relationship.

A woman once shared with me how she made peace with one of her husband's "mistaken" behaviors. She described how whenever they were going somewhere together, she found that her husband would always take the longer route. When she tried to set him straight, he mumbled some excuse about left hand turns being difficult to make without a traffic light. But it bothered her because it was such a great waste of time to always take the longer route.

One day it dawned on her that she was making a big mistake. She said to herself, *"For the longest time I have wanted that we spend more time together. Here he is taking the longer route and giving us more time together, and I am busy complaining?!"*

I think the same lens exercise could be practiced whenever we are inconvenienced by a loved one. We can process behaviors through the lenses of time or money, as if these are the only lenses possible. Or we can realize that there are other lenses, such as the lens of relationships which will help us process and discuss behaviors in a much calmer way.

Waiting and yearning have great value. In the story of the Jewish people, had the waiting and yearning stayed within the

framework of Halacha it would have produced the Mishkan without the Eigel detour. For Yehoshua, standing at the foot of the mountain, he could easily have calculated the cost: time lost or tasks undone. But Yehoshua was measuring with a different lens entirely. Yehoshua knew that Moshe would return and would guide them to the Mishkan — by Hashem's invitation.

For Family Discussion:

- The woman in the story reframed her husband's longer route from "waste of time" to "gift of time together." What's a situation in your own life that might look different through the lens of relationship rather than time or money?
- The man at the Aron was trying not to waste time — a genuinely good instinct. Where is the line between productive use of time and missing the sacred moment you're already in?

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Ki Sisa – The Colorful Grays of Life

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

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

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

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

While we can understand how Aharon's act may have been appropriate under these circumstances, it is hard to understand why it was so courageous. Aharon was desperate and saw that there was nothing he could but play along and delay them.

So he did. Perhaps it displays Aharon's wisdom and his ability to maintain a clear mind under pressure, but how does it show dedication and devotion?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

stalling them. This strength of character was the greatest display of devotion that Aharon – or any human being – could display.

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

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Spiritual Intimacy – Know God, Know Yourself

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia

Moshe Wants to Know God

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

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

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

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

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

YHWH, YHWH, a God compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yet I do not remit all punishment, but visit the iniquity of parents upon children, and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generation.

Is God Merciful or Vengeful?

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

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

To Love is to Know

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

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

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

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

Keeping the Flame Alive

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

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

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

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

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

Spiritual Intimacy

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

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

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

There is Always a Mystery

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

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

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

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

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

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

Footnote:

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

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

I hope you all had an uplifting Purim. I know I certainly did! What we experienced over the past few days is not something that comes once in a generation, but perhaps once in a century or even a millennium. We witnessed a live biblical miracle come to life, and even more poignantly, on the very day of the reading of Zachor – remembering what happened all those years ago and then suddenly, we are living it ourselves.

It felt like a reenactment of the Purim story with a new cast in the year 5786, 2,381 years after the original events (yes, I did check!). Just the other week, Khamenei was yelling at the top of his lungs, claiming he would be the one to destroy all the Jews, as others had threatened before him. Yet everything turned upside down for him in an instant.

We have so much to be thankful for, and many prayers to say for all those in Israel and for Jews around the world. May we only hear good news from now on, and may we merit to see ****Mashiach**** soon, in our days.

I had a wonderful Purim celebrating with everyone at night (and I heard the womens Megillah was amaizing), at the school and preschool, at Shalom Court, at the Brit, and in the community reading with an amazing show. Truly, it was a fun, blessed and packed Purim. I look forward to celebrating many more simchot, holidays and life moments with all of you.

Bahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

** Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah Ki Tissa: The Recipe for Ketoret

“God said to Moses: Take fragrances such as balsam, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, all of the same weight, as well as other fragrances. Make the mixture into incense, as compounded by a master perfumer, well-blended, pure and holy.” (Ex. 30:34-5)

The Torah does not provide the exact recipe for the Ketoret, the incense that was burned daily in the Temple. Only in the oral tradition do we find a detailed list of eleven ingredients:

70 portions of the four fragrances mentioned in the verse.

16 portions of myrrh, cassia, spikanard, and saffron.

12 portions of costus.

9 portions of cinnamon.

3 portions of cinnamon bark.

Each portion (maneh) weighed five pounds. The total weight was 368 portions — one measure for each day, plus three extra measures for Yom Kippur. That's 1,840 pounds (835 kilos) of incense.

Lofty Perspective

Why doesn't the Torah explicitly list all of the ingredients of the Temple incense?

Rav Kook explained that the Ketoret was a link between the material and spiritual realms. The word ketoret comes from the root kasher, meaning a tie or knot. The incense rose in a straight column upwards. It was like a vertical band, connecting our divided physical world, our alma d'peruda, to the unified Divine realm.

From the elevated standpoint of overall holiness, it is impossible to distinguish between the distinct fragrances. Each fragrance signifies a particular quality; but at that elevated level, they are revealed only within the framework of absolute unity. It is only in our divided world that they acquire separate identities.

Sanctifying Time and the Natural World

What is the significance of the various amounts of each ingredient that went into making the Ketoret?

Each of the major four fragrances explicitly mentioned in the Torah contributed seventy measures. Why seventy? The number 'seven' indicates the natural universe, created in seven days. Seven thus corresponds to the framework of the physical universe — especially the boundaries of time, and the seven-day week.

Seventy is the number 'seven' in tens. The number 'ten' represents both plurality and unity, so seventy conveys the idea of unifying the multitude of forces in the natural world. This is the underlying message of the ketoret. These holy fragrances illuminate and uplift the plurality of natural forces in the world.

Sanctifying the Dimension of Space

While the first tier of four fragrances sanctified the dimension of time, the second tier of four fragrances sanctified the dimension of space. The number 'six' corresponds to space, as there are six cardinal directions in three-dimensional space (north, south, east, west, up and down).

Time is less physical, and more receptive to spiritual elevation, than space. Thus, for the first four fragrances representing the dimension of time, the number 'seven' was multiplied by ten. Space, on the other hand, is only influenced by its closeness to holiness. Therefore, the unifying quality of ten is only added to the six, so that the Ketoret used sixteen measures of these fragrances.

The final amounts of twelve, nine, and three signify the limitations of a non-unified spatial realm. 'Three' is the first number to indicate multitude, and 'nine' is the last number, before the multitude is once again combined into a unit of ten.

(Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 136-138.)

https://ravkooktorah.org/ki_tisa58

Ki Tissa: How Leaders Fail (5774, 5781)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tell me," Saul replied.

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

"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their King. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal." (I Sam. 15:13–21)

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

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

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

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

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

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how these people are prone to evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god who will go before us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery,

take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!" (Ex. 32:22-24)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTE:

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

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tissa/how-leaders-fail/> 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 Devar.

Why Is the Kiyor (Laver) Not Listed With the Other Vessels?

In Parshat Ki Tisa, between the command for each individual to donate a half-shekel and the infamous sin of the golden calf, we find the instruction to construct a wash basin.

*The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: You shall make a washstand of copper and its base of copper for washing, and you shall place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and you shall put water therein. Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet from it.*¹

With the exception of the Kiyor and the Golden Incense Altar, all the other vessels of the Tabernacle — the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread, the Menorah, and the Outer Altar — are listed in Parshat Terumah.² The Golden Incense Altar is mentioned in Parshat Tetzaveh after the clothing of the Priests is detailed, and the Kiyor is mentioned here in Ki Tisa.

This distinction naturally raises the question: Why are these two vessels listed separately? In this article, we will focus on the Kiyor but also touch on the reasoning behind the separate listing of the Incense Altar.

1. It Served as a Prerequisite to the Service

Bechor Shor explains that since no actual service was done with the Kiyor and it merely served as a way for the Priests to purify themselves in order to perform the service, it is not listed with the other vessels.³

2. It Was Not Essential

Regarding the Golden Incense Altar listed in Parshat Tetzaveh, Sforno explains that it is mentioned separately from the other vessels because those vessels were essential to the sanctuary's primary function — drawing G d's presence into the physical world. In contrast, the Incense Altar served to honor G d after He had accepted the sacrifices. Similarly, the Kiyor was not a vessel intended to draw forth G d's presence.⁴ There is no explicit requirement that the hands must be washed specifically from the Kiyor, and if it were unavailable, the Kohanim could sanctify their hands in another way.⁵ As such, it is not listed with the other vessels that were essential to the functioning of the service.

3. It Resolves a Difficulty

The two explanations above clarify why the Kiyor is not listed alongside the other vessels, but do not directly address its placement immediately after the half-shekel donation. To explain this, Abarbanel examines the purpose of the half-shekel collection — namely, its use for the sockets of the Tabernacle:

After the Torah clarified any doubts regarding the silver that was needed for the sockets of the Tabernacle, it proceeded to resolve another uncertainty concerning what was stated at the end of Parshat Tetzaveh — that Aaron would enter the Tent of Meeting in the morning to burn incense and to kindle the lamps. The question arises: How could it be that after offering burnt offerings and sacrifices on the Outer Altar, with his hands soiled and stained with fat and blood, he would then enter the sanctuary of G d?

Therefore, G d instructed Moses: *“And you shall make a copper Kiyor.”* The Kiyor is a vessel designed like a pipe that holds a large quantity of water externally. It has an opening, and when this opening is released, the water flows outward, washing the hands and feet.⁶

4. The Half-Shekel Coins Were Used for the Kiyor

Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia Gaon who explains that the instructions for the Kiyor directly follow the half-shekel donation because part of the collected silver was used for the channel and reservoir that supplied water to the Kiyor.⁷

5. Donations From Individuals

Ibn Ezra himself explains that the juxtaposition signifies that both the half-shekel and copper donations for the Kiyor were given by individuals rather than being part of the general collection for the Tabernacle's construction.⁸ The copper for the Kiyor specifically came from the women's mirrors, we are told:

*And he made the washstand of copper and its base of copper from the mirrors of the women who had set up the legions, who congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.*⁹

6. A Reference to Charity

Baal Haturim offers a unique explanation for the convergence of the half-shekel donation and the command to fashion a Kiyor. He understands the positioning to subtly imply that giving charity will lead to an abundance of rain, symbolized by the water that filled the Kiyor.¹⁰

7. Purification Through the Study of Torah

In his work, *Tzeror HaMor*, 15th-century Spanish sage Rabbi Avraham Saba explores the deeper significance hinted at in the flow of these verses.¹¹ According to his interpretation, the half-shekel given to charity symbolizes our inherent incompleteness — the idea that we are not whole without a connection to the Divine. Thus, after the completion of the Mishkan, which atones for the deficiencies of the people, the Torah first describes the half-shekel collection and then follows with the command to construct the Kiyor. The Kiyor signifies that, despite our imperfections, approaching G d requires purification with water, symbolizing the cleansing of impure thoughts through the study of Torah, which is called *"living waters."*¹²

8. A Dwelling in the Lowest Realm

In the Rebbe's reading, the Kiyor presents a dichotomy. On the one hand, it was merely a preparatory vessel with no direct role in the Temple service. On the other hand, it is uniquely connected to Moses, illustrated by the fact that the Talmud says, *"Any basin that is not large enough for four Kohanim to sanctify [their hands and feet] in it may not be used for sanctification,"* and as Rashi articulates, *"Moses and Aaron were two, and his sons were two."*¹³ Even though Moses only participated in the service for the seven days of inauguration, a basic law, a requirement for all generations, emerged as a result of his participation. This demonstrates Moses' unique connection to the Kiyor and the preparations necessary for the service of the Tabernacle.

The Rebbe connects this dichotomy with another seeming contradiction. The copper mirrors donated by the women from which the Kiyor was fashioned were associated with material temptation. These mirrors were used by the women to beautify themselves to elicit the desire of their husbands in Egypt — to the extent that Moses initially rejected them. Yet G d declared them *"more cherished than all else."* These mirrors symbolize the dedication of the Jewish women who ensured the survival and continuity of the Jewish people in the darkest of times.¹⁴

This idea aligns with the entire point of the Tabernacle in the first place, as a *"home for G d in the lower realms."* Moses, on the other hand, whose vision of G dliness was clear and direct (*aspaclaria hamei'ira*), sought an unfiltered Divine presence. He viewed materials linked to earthly desires as a concealment of G dliness. G d, however, insisted that even the lowest elements must be elevated into holiness. The mirrors, despite or because of their origin, were to be used to create the Kiyor, a vessel of purification, emphasizing that true Divine service involves refining the material world and subjugating one's natural tendencies to fulfill G d's ultimate purpose.

On the surface, the Kiyor, made from these mirrors, was merely a preparatory vessel, not directly involved in the Temple service, and thus not listed among the other sacred vessels. However, G d declared the mirrors *"more cherished than all else"* because they symbolized the subjugation of physical desire to holiness. Likewise, the act of washing with the Kiyor,

though only preparatory, is deeply valued by G d — in a way even more than the actual service — because it represents subduing the negative forces and serving G d with full devotion.¹⁵

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 30:17-18.
2. Exodus, Chapters 25–27
3. Bechor Shor, Exodus 30:17.
4. Sforno Exodus 30:17 and Exodus 30:1.
5. Talmud, Zevachim 21b.
6. Abarbanel, Exodus 30:17.
7. Ibn Ezra Exodus 30:17.
8. Ibn Ezra Exodus 30:17.
9. Exodus 38:8.
10. Baal Haturim, Exodus 30:17.
11. Tzeror HaMor Exodus 30:17.
12. Shir HaShirim Rabbah on verse 4:15.
13. Zevachim 19b.
14. Rashi, Exodus 38:8, Midrash Tanchuma, Pekudei 8.
15. Likkutei Sichot Vol 6, p 196 - 200.

* Content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6813230/jewish/Why-Is-the-Kiyor-Laver-Not-Listed-With-the-Other-Vessels.htm

Ki Tisa: True Freedom
By Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky *

The Tablets were G-d's handiwork and the script was G-d's script, engraved on the tablets. (Ex. 32:16) .

The Ten Commandments were engraved upon the tablets. Our sages point out that the word “engraved” (charut) is related to the word “free” (cherut). Based on this relation, they assert that true freedom is possible only by observing the Torah’s

rules. But, given its great number of prescriptions and proscriptions, the Torah would seem to be more restrictive than liberating.

The explanation lies in the fact that we are constantly torn between our animal and G-dly natures, each one pulling us in its own direction. Since our Divine nature will never relent, we can be truly free only when our Divine spirit is fully victorious. Our animal nature, once it is refined, realizes that submitting to the Torah's directions is in fact its true desire; its natural state is to be guided and governed by spirituality.

Thus, the Torah's restrictions on our animal nature in fact liberate us, enabling us to actualize our full, Divine potential for spiritual growth and expression.

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

— from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Potomac Torah Study Center

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

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of all our hostages from Gaza and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer notes that it is difficult for a physical human to relate to a non-physical Deity. This difficulty is especially difficult for B'Nai Yisrael in the Midbar after living for several generations in the pagan environment of Egypt – a land that had dozens of physical gods. While Moshe is with the people in the camp, his presence and influence serve as a representation and symbol of Hashem. However, after he spends forty days and nights on Har Sinai, above the clouds and in what appears to be fire on top of the mountain, they worry that Moshe will not survive and be able to return.

Even Moshe struggles with finding a way to understand God and explain Him to the people. Moshe asks God to permit him to see God's face and understand His essence. Hashem responds that no human may see or understand His face and survive the experience. Hashem permits Moshe to stand in a crevice while He goes by, covers Moshe's face, and recites the new Covenant, the thirteen Divine Attributes of Hashem. Not even Moshe may see or learn Hashem's "face," what will be in the future, but Moshe may see His back (understand the past), and other Jews may study Hashem's Torah and Halacha, and thereby come closer by learning how to know more about and ways to serve God.

Ki Tisa is an excellent parsha for Shabbat Parah. When the people want a representation to go before them on the way to the promised land, an egel (a male calf) emerges from the fire. The Maftir reading for this Shabbat is Parah Adumah, the red heifer, an entirely red male cow that is to be sacrificed and burned with a few other specified items. The ashes are to be combined with pure water, with the water then collected and stored to be used in a purification ritual for tamei Jews (ritually impure) after contact with a dead body or encountering various types of near death experiences. We read the Torah of Parah Adumah on Shabbat two weeks before starting Nisan, enough time to remind Jews to become tahor (ritually pure) in time to participate in the Korban Pesach (Passover sacrifice).

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the Haftorah (from Yechezkel). After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and dispersion of the Jews, is there a future for B'Nai Yisrael to be Hashem's chosen people? Yechezkel's vision responds that God will raise up the defeated Jewish people and return them to His land – not because the people necessarily deserve His mercy, but because God must keep His promise to our ancestors and because otherwise the other nations of the world will infer that Hashem is not strong enough to keep His promises to B'Nai Yisrael. Yechezkel's vision is a later version of Moshe's argument to God on Har Sinai after the Jews worship a golden calf. Moshe argues that God MUST forgive the Jews and lead them to the promised land – otherwise the non-Jews will say that He is not powerful enough to take them to and to conquer Canaan. As Moshe did centuries earlier, Yechezkel warns the people that they must prove worthy of God's redemption if they are to stay in Israel.

Rabbi Brander remarks that Yechezkel could have been writing for the Jews of today. Do we act kindly enough to our fellow Jews to deserve the wonderful condition of Israel today? Rabbi Brander especially warns that religious and secular Jews must find a way to respect and help each other. In particular, he warns that the religious community in Israel must do its part in serving and defending Israel. While many Modern Orthodox Jews are serving in the IDF, far too few Haredi do their part. In the early days of Israel, the percentage of Haredi Jews was small enough that their absence in the IDF may not have been a significant cost for the country. However, as the percentage of Haredi in the population has increased substantially, the case for them to do more to support the country becomes stronger.

Rabbi Marc Angel extends the analysis to critics of Israel. Many Jews, both in Israel and abroad, criticize the Israeli government. When critics argue for a more moral path and seek a more moral path, their criticism can be positive and loving. However, unfortunately there are too many Jew-haters, to quote Rabbi Angel, and those who oppose the concept of a Jewish country and seek to destroy everything Jewish are destructive. Unfortunately, there are too many Jew-haters in the world. We Jews have far too many anti-Semites among the non-Jews. I certainly have contempt for Jewish anti-Semites and would like to find a way to get them to understand that enemies of the Jews would come after them if they could.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Para: Not For Your Sake, But For My Name

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

This week's parsha is dedicated to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

Few mitzvot are as mysterious as the one described in this week's Torah reading of the *para aduma*, the Red Heifer, the ritual meant to purify those who came into contact with death, the most severe of impurities. Yet beneath its inscrutable surface lies one of the Torah's most urgent ideas: that even after contact with death, there can be purification; even after defilement, we can become whole. At a moment when the Jewish people are once again sovereign in their land – yet grappling with war and the profound questions of existence that accompany it – the haftara for this Shabbat asks those very questions on a national scale.

In Yechezkel's vision (chapter 36), that national reckoning begins with a stark accusation: "*The House of Israel dwelled upon their soil and defiled it with their ways and their deeds,*" God charges Israel (v. 17). Israel sinned through their depraved actions, the concrete way they lived and treated one another in the land they had been given. The consequence was exile.

But exile brought its own terrible complications. As the scattered Jewish people were humiliated among the nations, their degradation seemed to call into question God's own reputation. Could this broken, dispersed people truly be the nation of the one God? The verse Yechezkel identifies as the pivot is remarkable: "*I am concerned for My holy name, which the House of Israel has desecrated among the nations*" (v. 21). The next verse doubles down on the point: "*Not for your sake do I act, O House of Israel, but for My holy name*" (v. 22). In other words, God's decision to restore Israel is driven not by the people's own merit – the text is explicit that they have not yet earned their return – but by a quest to end the chillul Hashem, the desecration of His name, that their continued exile perpetuates.

For Yechezkel, the process of purification is placed within the national life of Israel to restore the people as a whole. Unlike Parshat Para, which focuses on the restoration of an individual so they can rejoin the community, the haftara focuses on a process of national restoration so that it can fulfill its communal mission.

The communal redemption is set into motion *lema'an shemo* — for the sake of His name. And the fruits of that act are tangible: *peri ha'etz* and *tenuvat ha'sadeh*, the fruits of the trees and the produce of the field, are abundant, so that Israel will "*no longer suffer the reproach of famine among the nations*" (v. 30). But God reminds us that it can't end there; we need to be worthy of this communal redemption.

Reading this haftara today, I find myself asking whether it is speaking directly to our generation. After nearly two thousand years of exile and humiliation, the Jewish people have begun to return to Israel. The land has responded: cities are rising, the economy flourishing: "*On the day when I cleanse you of all your iniquities, I will reinhabit the cities; the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be tilled there*" (vv. 33–34). The land indeed blooms and rebuilds before our eyes. Even with the difficulties and human loss in the ongoing war, the country is resilient, with the selfless commitment of our people, as well as the shekel at strongest against the dollar in our history.

And yet, have we truly learned the lesson of exile? Beneath this renaissance, are we still defiling the land?

Yechezkel's indictment of ancient Israel was not primarily about paganism. It was about how the people treated one another – the moral rot at the heart of a society entrusted with a sacred mission. A Torah society cannot be sustained by meticulous ritual piety. It requires moral courage, communal responsibility and mutual respect. And so I find myself asking: if exile was brought about not only by external enemies but by internal moral failure, have we truly changed the habits that once defiled this land? Do we guard against contempt, corruption, and callousness as fiercely as we guard our borders? Do we speak to one another with dignity, even when we disagree? And do we ensure that our civic, moral, and spiritual responsibilities are shared fairly, in a way that strengthens our society rather than dividing it?]emphasis added[

This past Shabbat, we witnessed tens of thousands of reservists across Israel change from their Shabbat clothing into the sacred uniform of the IDF. Fathers of young children heard the reading imploring us to remember the cruelty of Amalek, then left their families to answer the call once again. Children watched with pride as their parents stepped up with courage, embodying what it means to partner with God in shaping Jewish history. In those moments, we saw Yechezkel's vision coming alive.

Yes we still have a way to go. And before pointing fingers elsewhere, we must reflect: **have we, the religious Zionist community, done enough? Have we genuinely sought to build bridges with our brothers and sisters across the divide, engaging one another with the dignity the Torah demands? Or do we too bear responsibility for still defiling the land through division and contempt?**]emphasis added[

The haftara ends with words of profound comfort. God promises that He will not exile Israel again)36:30(. That guarantee is not conditioned on our merit – it is anchored, as it always has been, in His name. But that same anchor is a summons. If we are here *lema'an shemo*, for the sake of His name, then how we treat one another in this land is not merely a political or social question; it is a matter of kiddush Hashem. Redemption may be guaranteed, but it is not yet complete. We have risen to the challenge in so many ways, yet we must all muster the courage and moral clarity to finish the task.

Shabbat Shalom.

* 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.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-para-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

Ki Sisa: Shabbos Has Kept the Children of Israel Holy

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5763

“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is a sign forever that in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.” (Shemos 32:16-17)

He promised them that this sign will remain forever and Israel will make great personal sacrifices for its sake and through this the sign will remain with them forever. He also promised them that no other peoples will accept this day as their day of rest, rather they will seek to rest on another day. (Malbim)

What's so special about Shabbos? Why is it the central day in the Jewish week? Let's see if we can appreciate one small sliver of an approach.

A Rabbi was speaking to an elder group of Jews in Florida some time back. He wanted to impress upon them the greatness of the sainted Chofetz Chaim. He told them that in a town near to Radin where the Chofetz Chaim resided there was a butcher whose son had become a flagrant desecrater of the Shabbos. This presented a tremendous problem for the whole town. The son's ill behavior reflected on the butcher and cast a shadow of over the credibility of his Kashrus.

It was the source of great controversy for the whole community and deep personal pain for the butcher. After many discussions and after having exhausted every other option it was decided that they would bring the young man to meet the Chofetz Chaim. They did. After a brief encounter in a closed room the boy came out transformed and from then on was dutifully observant of the Shabbos.

After the Rabbi concluded his lecture an older man approached him and told him that he was from a certain small town adjacent to Radin. His father was a butcher. In his youth he had gone on a streak of rebelliousness and had desecrated the Shabbos. His father had taken him to the Chofetz Chaim and from then on he ceased from violating the Shabbos. *“I was that young man in the story!”* he confessed. The Rabbi pressed him, *“What happened in that room?”*

He related, “I entered the room and saw this sweet elderly Rabbi. He took my hand with his two soft and gentle hands and he began to say, “Shabbos, oy Shabbos...” He repeated over and over again and he began to cry. A tear ran off his cheek and landed on the back of my hand. When I felt that hot tear I gave a shriek and ran out of the room, vowing at that moment I would never violate Shabbos again.”

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, the Kuzari, relates a remarkable fact. For all the various measurements of time there is some corresponding celestial cue. During the course of a month the moon does its dance across the sky. A year can be measured by the angle of the sun's rays. These are openly observable phenomena.

However, a week is a peculiar creature. Why is the entire world obedient to a seven-day week. What heavenly signal keeps all of humanity in concert with this schedule? The Kuzari posits that it is a remnant of the persistent memory of all humanity. That from the very beginning the world had an original and continuing cycle of Shabbos.

A second point of interest is that the other faiths have chosen days in the week other than Shabbos as days of relaxation. They do not contest which day is Shabbos. On that all are in agreement. These have parked ¼ of humanity on Friday the 6th day and these have placed ¼ of mankind on Sunday, the 1st day of the week.

With ink as hot as that holy tear, it's in the verse above for 3315 years now, the 7th day has been "*an exclusive*" for the Children of Israel who have always kept the Shabbos Holy, and so Shabbos has kept the Children of Israel Holy.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-kisisa/>

Ki Tisa: Torah as a Way to Know God

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

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

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

Now, when it comes to idolatry, the Torah recognizes two types. There is the idolatry of worshipping other gods. This is the idolatry that is prohibited in the second of the Ten Commandments. "*You shall not have any other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an engraved image... You shall not bow down to them and you shall not serve them because I am the Lord your God, a jealous God...*" (Shemot 20:3-5). The focus here is the worship of other gods, and the imagery of God as a jealous God evokes the husband who is jealous because of his wife's actual or suspected adultery (see Bamidbar 5:14). It is a violation of the fidelity of the God-Israel relationship, it is a "*whoring after other gods.*" (Devarim 31:16).

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

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

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

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

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

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

you can understand how I act in the world, what are My attributes, what are My ways. **God then provides us an alternative to connecting through the physical, and that is connecting through the intellect, through striving to understand God and God's ways.** [emphasis added]

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

The study of Torah and Halakha,, I believe, is the most traditional and most realizable path, but even it has its potential pitfalls. For many people study Torah and halakha as an intellectual pursuit alone, not as the use of the intellectual in the pursuit of knowing God. This can be seen from the lack of interest in studying the aggadata, the sections of the Talmud that are less intellectually challenging but that are the essence of Hazal's understanding of God, Humanity, and Creation. It can also be seen among those who have no interest in anything outside of the Talmud – whether it is Tanakh, Jewish thought,

or other pursuits that can heighten a person's awareness of God and God's will. When **Rambam**, in his Book of Mitzvot, describes the mitzvah to love God (Positive Mitzvah 5), he states that one achieves love of God through the study of Torah. But when he describes this mitzvah in Mishneh Torah, **he states that love of God is achieved through understanding the natural world, not God's revelation, but God's creation** (*Laws of the Foundations of the Torah* 2:2). How many of us try to connect to God in this way? [emphasis added]

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

Shabbat Shalom.

From my archives

Nishmat haTorah: Parashat Ki Tisa
From Shattered to Sacred: The Rabbinic Twinning of the Luchot
By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

Even in a busy parsha like ours, Parshat Ki Tisa, the breaking of the tablets stands out as the most dramatic. Personally, I am struck by how the Rabbis append a crucial detail to the event, transforming a narrative of loss and shame into a paradigm of enduring sanctity.

Briefly, here is the story in this week's parsha:

Following Matan Torah, Moses ascends to heaven for forty days. He returns bearing the Tablets, which serve as a covenantal contract. To his shock, his long absence led the Jews astray; they cast a golden calf and are reveling. Moses is incensed and hurls down the

tablets in a fury. They shatter completely. After a long process, the tablets are re-inscribed, and he's given new ones. With that, the story seemingly ends: the first set of tablets have been discarded and replaced with the second set.

Yet, the story does not end there.

While it is how the story ends in the Torah, the Rabbis append a profound detail, revealing that even though the first Tablets were shattered, they were not discarded. We know the tablets eventually take a place of honor in the Mishkan and Beit Mikdash. Once the tabernacle was built, the tablets were placed in the holy ark, stationed in the Holy of Holies. Perhaps surprisingly, the rabbis teach that the new tablets weren't there by themselves. Instead, the broken shards of the first set took their place of honor in the ark, lying side by side with the new tablets)See *Bava Batra* 14:(.

On the surface this makes no sense: why preserve the shattered fragments? I believe this twinning delivers an incredibly powerful twofold message about the nature of the religious journey.

The religious journey isn't linear or smooth; it is, instead, a process of breaking and reconstituting. There are times when our spiritual vitality is perfectly aligned with the divine will, and commitment to the commandments is effortless and complete. But then there are times that alignment breaks, when we feel detached and out of sync — and that, we must understand, is not a spiritual failing. That is the nature of the religious life: there is an ebb and flow. In Chassidut, that is expressed as *והחיות רצוא ושוב*. Religious Cheyut is a perpetual journey of moving close, pulling back, and again moving close. It oscillates. Thus, the broken *luchot* belong alongside the new ones: they are not a pause, but an integral part of that story.

The other, and perhaps more important, lesson this twinning teaches is that even after old paths are abandoned and outdated paradigms are shattered, they should not be discarded. While the old paradigm might not work in its pristine form and had to be crushed, its wisdom is not entirely lost. Instead we need to keep it constantly before us, with one eye observing the new *luchot* and the other looking at the broken one for guidance and inspiration. Because our religious journey is an amalgam of various religious states, even when we realize we need to change paths, we should not completely negate the previous journey.

And this is not just true for the *luchot* but also for our religious experience as a whole. A notion in Chassidut teaches that *Matan Torah* occurs in perpetuity, with every generation having its own *Har Sinai* experience.

Following this logic, we too must pass through our own *"breaking-of-the-tablets"* moment, much like the Jews' in the desert. That moment is the realization that existing religious paradigms are insufficient for our contemporary religious struggles, requiring them to be broken. The old tablets are shattered, so to speak — yet their core is not discarded; they are then refurbished and reconstituted, yielding a restored set of tablets. The immutable core of the content endures, simply re-examined — taken apart and put back together again, emerging stronger and better.

In fact, this mode of *רצוא ושוב*, going back and forth, breaking and reconstituting, breaking with old paradigms while not discarding it completely, is in our DNA, going back all the way to our forbear Yakov, *"God's favorite)according to the Midrash(."*

Jacob does battle with an agent of God. He triumphs. Yet, despite dealing a crushing blow to a manifestation of the Divine, the encounter is commemorated by a name change which puts God front and center in Jacob's reconstituted identity. His new name is Yisra-EL, conveying subservience to the very God he just defeated; El now an intimate part of his new sense of self.

This mode of *רצוא ושוב*, of going back and forth, of breaking with old paradigms and reconstituting them, is not an exception but a core feature encoded in our spiritual DNA. The struggle for a deeper, more authentic religious life is not a spiritual failing, but an echo of the transformational encounter that changed our forbear, Jacob, into the new man, Yisra-EL.

And this is why, even in a Parsha as rich as ours, the story of the broken luchot, especially as told by the Rabbis, stands out. It is a testament to their genius. They take a story meant to underscore the fragility of faith and turn it into the exact opposite. The rabbinic epilogue transforms it into a profound teaching on resilience and religious fortitude. Our breaks are not detours; they are part and parcel of the perpetual journey of *krivat elokim* (drawing close to God(; רצוא ושוב, in and out and in — and so on and so forth.

Shabbat Shalom.

[note: because of problems formatting across different word processing problems, I had to omit most Hebrew text, and some remaining Hebrew text will end up out of order, depending on word processing format.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2026/03/from-shattered-to-sacred-the-rabbinic-twinning-of-the-luchot/>

Standing Tall and Strong for Israel and the Jewish People: Thoughts on Parashat Ki Tissa By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

It is bizarre and morally repugnant that the one tiny Jewish country in the world has to suffer so much abuse. It is a matter of honor to stand up for Israel and to remind the world of the right of the Jews to their own homeland. We need to counter the attacks against Israel in every forum. We need to speak truth to combat the unceasing stream of lies heaped up against Israel.

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

While fair and loving critics are vital to Israel's welfare, haters are destructive. Haters do not seek to improve Israel – they seek to destroy it. Their goal is not to encourage a vibrant, flourishing Jewish State – their goal is to eliminate the Jewish

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

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

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

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

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Book Review: Joshua Berman on the Haggadah

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Book Review: Joshua Berman, *Echoes of Egypt: A Haggada* (Koren, 2026), 138pp.

The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel has just published the next volume in its ongoing series. Professor Joshua Berman presents a visual commentary on the slavery and exodus narratives, featuring ancient Egyptian images. Like the Shemot commentary of this excellent series, the vivid images with scholarly explanations bring the Egyptian setting of the Pesah story to life. This pedagogical technique distinguishes this Haggadah and will enhance the Seder experience for a wide variety of readers.

Several pictures simply enable readers to see artifacts and wall reliefs that provide vivid depictions of our slavery. A photograph of a vast ancient Egyptian mudbrick storage facility (p. 38), a detailed Egyptian tomb illustration of the

backbreaking labor of brickmaking (pp. 64-65), and a relief of a pharaoh in a chariot (105) bring the experience of our slavery and redemption to our Seder table.

Berman's introductory essays provide meaningful background to the Torah's narratives in Exodus. He outlines how the Torah broke with ancient political thought and the many political and economic ramifications of the Torah's revolutionary ideology. He then discusses Egyptian royal propaganda, and how the Torah ironically turns those terms on their head as God overwhelms the helpless pharaoh and his nation.

On other occasions, we gain greater insight into the meaning of the Torah. God repeats the phraseology that He will redeem Israel with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. Clearly, these terms refer to God's power. However, Berman observes that these expressions — used throughout Tanakh — appear only in association with the exodus from Egypt and not other narratives where God displays His power. Berman explains this seeming anomaly by noting that these terms appear in Egyptian writings, particularly in the zenith of Egypt's power from 1550-1100 BCE. A relief showing Seti I holding his captives down with his left hand while wielding a mace (p. 14) illustrates the Egyptian propaganda regarding their pharaohs. Berman explains that **the Torah thereby uses Egyptian propaganda against Egypt — now, God will devastate them as He frees a slave nation from their grip.** The visual medium makes the propaganda argument tangible at the Seder table — tying archaeology to lived ritual. [emphasis added]

Several of Berman's comments present interesting tidbits. He observes (23) that Egyptians refer to their own country in Arabic as Misr. We would intuitively conclude that the Hebrew Mitzrayim and the Arabic name derive from the ancient Egyptian name for their land. However, this is not so. When the ancient Coptic Christians translated the Torah into Coptic, they transliterated the Torah's Mitzrayim directly into Coptic. After the Muslim conquest in the 7th century, Muslims adopted the Coptic form of the name into Arabic. Therefore, Egyptians refer to their land as Misr because of the Torah's transmission of that name into Coptic.

Occasionally, the connections between our Seder and ancient Egypt remain unclear. Not every element of the rabbinic Seder requires Egyptian background; some reflect later Greco-Roman cultural adaptation. For example, we eat maror, bitter herbs. However, the Torah itself does not prescribe which species of vegetation qualify for this commandment. By the Mishnah, the preferred vegetable is romaine lettuce (Mishnah Pesachim 10:3). The Talmud goes on to describe several other options that qualify for fulfillment of the maror. Berman observes (8) that depictions of the Egyptian god of fertility, Min, frequently include offerings of romaine lettuce. He suggests that romaine may symbolize fertility and growth.

However, it may be overly speculative to connect romaine lettuce to ancient Egypt, given that the Torah does not specify any vegetable for maror. Scholars such as Joseph Tabory (*JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, 2008) outline the similarities between the prescribed rabbinic Seder rituals and the Greco-Roman symposium. In the latter, intellectuals gathered to share wine, food, and stimulating discourse. A common appetizer before the main course was romaine lettuce dipped in a sauce. Since maror is a required commandment for our Seder, the rabbinic Sages moved that practice to the maror section of our Seder, while substituting karpas, or a non-maror vegetable such as celery, to the earlier appetizer stage of our Seder. In this instance, it is unclear that we should link romaine lettuce as the preferred maror of the Mishnah with ancient Egyptian rituals.

The Haggadah exhorts all of us: *“Generation by generation, each person must see himself as if he himself came out of Egypt.”* By presenting Egypt in its historical and cultural setting, Berman demonstrates how contextual scholarship can illuminate and sharpen the Torah's message. When used with care, archaeology and comparative study clarify the polemical and theological force of the Exodus narrative. In this way, Echoes of Egypt models how serious scholarship can deepen and enrich religious experience at the Seder table.

* Yeshiva University and National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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Ki Sisa: The Sacred Wait

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The revelation at Sinai was a wondrous experience. The Jewish people were promised a great ongoing connection with Hashem. They yearned for the day when Moshe would return from his personal audience with Hashem to guide them to greater heights. But it seemed that Moshe was delayed and the Jewish people really wanted more. So, a small but significant group decided to pursue a sort of elevated spiritual connection. They made the Eigel, a golden calf.

As we see recorded in the prophecy of Yechezkel, one of the conduits of connection with Hashem is described as a calf. But we are forbidden to use such conduits to reach Hashem. We are obligated to connect to Hashem without intermediaries. To use an intermediary is Avodah Zorah (idol worship); to create a graven image, icon, or figurine, is strictly forbidden.

The Beis Halevi commentary explains that the yearning for connection with Hashem is a good thing. But the relationship with Hashem must follow the commandments that Hashem gives us. Even the most sincere and spiritually sophisticated person cannot choose on their own how to connect with Hashem. The invitation must come from Hashem's side. Without that invitation, even the most well-intentioned gesture can be Avodah Zorah.

Interestingly, there was one person who was personally spared from the Eigel story. Yehoshua, the loyal student of Moshe, had not been assigned any task while Moshe was away. Free and available, he decided that the best use of his time would be as an honor guard, outside the camp, at the foot of the mountain, waiting for Moshe.

But what emerges is that Yehoshua's waiting wasn't just fortuitous. There is a theological difference between the path of those who followed the Eigel and the path of Yehoshua. Yehoshua's wait wasn't just patience — it was a statement of faith that Hashem will provide the terms of connection. He didn't fill the void with his own initiative. Instead, he held the space waiting for Moshe to return.

Waiting is an interesting thing. To Yehoshua it was purposeful and deliberate. But sometimes waiting can seem like a waste of time.

I recall on one occasion a man was honored to take out the Torah on Shabbos morning, and he went up to the Aron holding the Parsha sheets he was reading. Not to waste time while the congregation was singing, he opened the Aron quickly and stood by reading his sheets until the singing and prayers would be completed and it would be time to take out the Torah. In a certain way it seemed admirable. The Parsha sheets were interesting, and he didn't want to waste any time. Yet I called him over afterwards to chat. Because standing as the honor guard when we take out the Torah is not called wasting time. Consider the guards at Buckingham Palace. They stand motionless for hours and nobody accuses them of wasting time. Their stillness is not emptiness — it is a statement. Their presence declares: what stands behind these doors matters. That is what they are doing. And so it is **when the Aron is opened. The congregation standing at attention, present and unhurried, is declaring that what is about to emerge matters infinitely. That standing is not the gap between two activities. It is itself the activity. And perhaps more — it is a moment of receiving, of being**

open, of waiting for Hashem's word to reach us rather than rushing to fill the space ourselves. That waiting is sacred waiting. [emphasis added]

How we experience waiting depends entirely on the lens we use to measure it. The most common lenses are time and money. When things happen, we typically ask, "How much time did it take?" and "How much money did it cost?" Based on that, we determine if it was a worthwhile endeavor.

Yet there are other important lenses that we would do well to consider. Asking ourselves how it impacts the relationship is also an important question to ask. Sometimes the very things that seem to be so time-consuming or costly are actually investments in a relationship.

A woman once shared with me how she made peace with one of her husband's "mistaken" behaviors. She described how whenever they were going somewhere together, she found that her husband would always take the longer route. When she tried to set him straight, he mumbled some excuse about left hand turns being difficult to make without a traffic light. But it bothered her because it was such a great waste of time to always take the longer route.

One day it dawned on her that she was making a big mistake. She said to herself, *"For the longest time I have wanted that we spend more time together. Here he is taking the longer route and giving us more time together, and I am busy complaining?!"*

I think the same lens exercise could be practiced whenever we are inconvenienced by a loved one. We can process behaviors through the lenses of time or money, as if these are the only lenses possible. Or we can realize that there are other lenses, such as the lens of relationships which will help us process and discuss behaviors in a much calmer way.

Waiting and yearning have great value. In the story of the Jewish people, had the waiting and yearning stayed within the framework of Halacha it would have produced the Mishkan without the Eigel detour. For Yehoshua, standing at the foot of the mountain, he could easily have calculated the cost: time lost or tasks undone. But Yehoshua was measuring with a different lens entirely. Yehoshua knew that Moshe would return and would guide them to the Mishkan — by Hashem's invitation.

For Family Discussion:

- The woman in the story reframed her husband's longer route from "waste of time" to "gift of time together." What's a situation in your own life that might look different through the lens of relationship rather than time or money?
- The man at the Aron was trying not to waste time — a genuinely good instinct. Where is the line between productive use of time and missing the sacred moment you're already in?

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, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Ki Sisa – The Colorful Grays of Life

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

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

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

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

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

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

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

Imagine the emotions that must have raged within Aharon's heart. These people had abandoned G-d right on the heels of the Exodus and the experience at Sinai, with lightning speed they had fallen to the lowest depths and were about to

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Spiritual Intimacy – Know God, Know Yourself

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia

Moshe Wants to Know God

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

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

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

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

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

YHWH, YHWH, a God compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yet I do not remit all punishment, but visit the iniquity of parents upon children, and children's children, upon the third and fourth generation.

Is God Merciful or Vengeful?

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

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

To Love is to Know

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

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

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

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

Keeping the Flame Alive

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

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

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

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

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

Spiritual Intimacy

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

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

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

There is Always a Mystery

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

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

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

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

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

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

Footnote:

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

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights)copyright(to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

I hope you all had an uplifting Purim. I know I certainly did! What we experienced over the past few days is not something that comes once in a generation, but perhaps once in a century or even a millennium. We witnessed a live biblical miracle come to life, and even more poignantly, on the very day of the reading of Zachor – remembering what happened all those years ago and then suddenly, we are living it ourselves.

It felt like a reenactment of the Purim story with a new cast in the year 5786, 2,381 years after the original events)yes, I did check!(. Just the other week, Khamenei was yelling at the top of his lungs, claiming he would be the one to destroy all the Jews, as others had threatened before him. Yet everything turned upside down for him in an instant.

We have so much to be thankful for, and many prayers to say for all those in Israel and for Jews around the world. May we only hear good news from now on, and may we merit to see **Mashiach** soon, in our days.

I had a wonderful Purim celebrating with everyone at night)and I heard the womens Megillah was amazing(, at the school and preschool, at Shalom Court, at the Brit, and in the community reading with an amazing show. Truly, it was a fun, blessed and packed Purim. I look forward to celebrating many more simchot, holidays and life moments with all of you.

Bahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

]Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

** Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in

this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah **Ki Tissa: The Recipe for Ketoret**

“God said to Moses: Take fragrances such as balsam, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, all of the same weight, as well as other fragrances. Make the mixture into incense, as compounded by a master perfumer, well-blended, pure and holy.” Ex. 30:34-5

The Torah does not provide the exact recipe for the Ketoret, the incense that was burned daily in the Temple. Only in the oral tradition do we find a detailed list of eleven ingredients:

70 portions of the four fragrances mentioned in the verse.

16 portions of myrrh, cassia, spikanard, and saffron.

12 portions of costus.

9 portions of cinnamon.

3 portions of cinnamon bark.

Each portion)maneh(weighed five pounds. The total weight was 368 portions — one measure for each day, plus three extra measures for Yom Kippur. That’s 1,840 pounds)835 kilos(of incense.

Lofty Perspective

Why doesn’t the Torah explicitly list all of the ingredients of the Temple incense?

Rav Kook explained that the Ketoret was a link between the material and spiritual realms. The word ketoret comes from the root kasher, meaning a tie or knot. The incense rose in a straight column upwards. It was like a vertical band, connecting our divided physical world, our alma d’peruda, to the unified Divine realm.

From the elevated standpoint of overall holiness, it is impossible to distinguish between the distinct fragrances. Each fragrance signifies a particular quality; but at that elevated level, they are revealed only within the framework of absolute unity. It is only in our divided world that they acquire separate identities.

Sanctifying Time and the Natural World

What is the significance of the various amounts of each ingredient that went into making the Ketoret?

Each of the major four fragrances explicitly mentioned in the Torah contributed seventy measures. Why seventy? The number ‘seven’ indicates the natural universe, created in seven days. Seven thus corresponds to the framework of the physical universe — especially the boundaries of time, and the seven-day week.

Seventy is the number ‘seven’ in tens. The number ‘ten’ represents both plurality and unity, so seventy conveys the idea of unifying the multitude of forces in the natural world. This is the underlying message of the ketoret. These holy fragrances illuminate and uplift the plurality of natural forces in the world.

Sanctifying the Dimension of Space

While the first tier of four fragrances sanctified the dimension of time, the second tier of four fragrances sanctified the dimension of space. The number 'six' corresponds to space, as there are six cardinal directions in three-dimensional space (north, south, east, west, up and down).

Time is less physical, and more receptive to spiritual elevation, than space. Thus, for the first four fragrances representing the dimension of time, the number 'seven' was multiplied by ten. Space, on the other hand, is only influenced by its closeness to holiness. Therefore, the unifying quality of ten is only added to the six, so that the Ketoret used sixteen measures of these fragrances.

The final amounts of twelve, nine, and three signify the limitations of a non-unified spatial realm. 'Three' is the first number to indicate multitude, and 'nine' is the last number, before the multitude is once again combined into a unit of ten.

)Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 136-138.(

https://ravkooktorah.org/ki_tisa58

Ki Tissa: How Leaders Fail (5774, 5781)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tell me," Saul replied.

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

"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their King. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.")I Sam. 15:13–21(

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTE:

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

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tissa/how-leaders-fail/> 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 Devar.

Why Is the Kiyor (Laver) Not Listed With the Other Vessels?

By Mordechai Rubin * © Chabad

In Parshat Ki Tisa, between the command for each individual to donate a half-shekel and the infamous sin of the golden calf, we find the instruction to construct a wash basin.

*The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: You shall make a washstand of copper and its base of copper for washing, and you shall place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and you shall put water therein. Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet from it.*¹

With the exception of the Kiyor and the Golden Incense Altar, all the other vessels of the Tabernacle — the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread, the Menorah, and the Outer Altar — are listed in Parshat Terumah.² The Golden Incense Altar is mentioned in Parshat Tetzaveh after the clothing of the Priests is detailed, and the Kiyor is mentioned here in Ki Tisa.

This distinction naturally raises the question: Why are these two vessels listed separately? In this article, we will focus on the Kiyor but also touch on the reasoning behind the separate listing of the Incense Altar.

1. It Served as a Prerequisite to the Service

Bechor Shor explains that since no actual service was done with the Kiyor and it merely served as a way for the Priests to purify themselves in order to perform the service, it is not listed with the other vessels.³

2. It Was Not Essential

Regarding the Golden Incense Altar listed in Parshat Tetzaveh, Sforno explains that it is mentioned separately from the other vessels because those vessels were essential to the sanctuary's primary function — drawing G d's presence into the physical world. In contrast, the Incense Altar served to honor G d after He had accepted the sacrifices. Similarly, the Kiyor was not a vessel intended to draw forth G d's presence.⁴ There is no explicit requirement that the hands must be washed specifically from the Kiyor, and if it were unavailable, the Kohanim could sanctify their hands in another way.⁵ As such, it is not listed with the other vessels that were essential to the functioning of the service.

3. It Resolves a Difficulty

The two explanations above clarify why the Kiyor is not listed alongside the other vessels, but do not directly address its placement immediately after the half-shekel donation. To explain this, Abarbanel examines the purpose of the half-shekel collection — namely, its use for the sockets of the Tabernacle:

After the Torah clarified any doubts regarding the silver that was needed for the sockets of the Tabernacle, it proceeded to resolve another uncertainty concerning what was stated at the end of Parshat Tetzaveh — that Aaron would enter the Tent of Meeting in the morning to burn incense and to kindle the lamps. The question arises: How could it be that after offering burnt offerings and sacrifices on the Outer Altar, with his hands soiled and stained with fat and blood, he would then enter the sanctuary of G d?

Therefore, G d instructed Moses: *“And you shall make a copper Kiyor.”* The Kiyor is a vessel designed like a pipe that holds a large quantity of water externally. It has an opening, and when this opening is released, the water flows outward, washing the hands and feet.⁶

4. The Half-Shekel Coins Were Used for the Kiyor

Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia Gaon who explains that the instructions for the Kiyor directly follow the half-shekel donation because part of the collected silver was used for the channel and reservoir that supplied water to the Kiyor.⁷

5. Donations From Individuals

Ibn Ezra himself explains that the juxtaposition signifies that both the half-shekel and copper donations for the Kiyor were given by individuals rather than being part of the general collection for the Tabernacle's construction.⁸ The copper for the Kiyor specifically came from the women's mirrors, we are told:

*And he made the washstand of copper and its base of copper from the mirrors of the women who had set up the legions, who congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.*⁹

6. A Reference to Charity

Baal Haturim offers a unique explanation for the convergence of the half-shekel donation and the command to fashion a Kiyor. He understands the positioning to subtly imply that giving charity will lead to an abundance of rain, symbolized by the water that filled the Kiyor.¹⁰

7. Purification Through the Study of Torah

In his work, *Tzeror HaMor*, 15th-century Spanish sage Rabbi Avraham Saba explores the deeper significance hinted at in the flow of these verses.¹¹ According to his interpretation, the half-shekel given to charity symbolizes our inherent incompleteness — the idea that we are not whole without a connection to the Divine. Thus, after the completion of the Mishkan, which atones for the deficiencies of the people, the Torah first describes the half-shekel collection and then follows with the command to construct the Kiyor. The Kiyor signifies that, despite our imperfections, approaching G d requires purification with water, symbolizing the cleansing of impure thoughts through the study of Torah, which is called *"living waters."*¹²

8. A Dwelling in the Lowest Realm

In the Rebbe's reading, the Kiyor presents a dichotomy. On the one hand, it was merely a preparatory vessel with no direct role in the Temple service. On the other hand, it is uniquely connected to Moses, illustrated by the fact that the Talmud says, *"Any basin that is not large enough for four Kohanim to sanctify [their hands and feet] in it may not be used for sanctification,"* and as Rashi articulates, *"Moses and Aaron were two, and his sons were two."*¹³ Even though Moses only participated in the service for the seven days of inauguration, a basic law, a requirement for all generations, emerged as a result of his participation. This demonstrates Moses' unique connection to the Kiyor and the preparations necessary for the service of the Tabernacle.

The Rebbe connects this dichotomy with another seeming contradiction. The copper mirrors donated by the women from which the Kiyor was fashioned were associated with material temptation. These mirrors were used by the women to beautify themselves to elicit the desire of their husbands in Egypt — to the extent that Moses initially rejected them. Yet G d declared them *"more cherished than all else."* These mirrors symbolize the dedication of the Jewish women who ensured the survival and continuity of the Jewish people in the darkest of times.¹⁴

This idea aligns with the entire point of the Tabernacle in the first place, as a *"home for G d in the lower realms."* Moses, on the other hand, whose vision of G dliness was clear and direct (*yaspaqlaria hamei'ira*), sought an unfiltered Divine presence. He viewed materials linked to earthly desires as a concealment of G dliness. G d, however, insisted that even the lowest elements must be elevated into holiness. The mirrors, despite or because of their origin, were to be used to create the Kiyor, a vessel of purification, emphasizing that true Divine service involves refining the material world and subjugating one's natural tendencies to fulfill G d's ultimate purpose.

On the surface, the Kiyor, made from these mirrors, was merely a preparatory vessel, not directly involved in the Temple service, and thus not listed among the other sacred vessels. However, G d declared the mirrors *"more cherished than all else"* because they symbolized the subjugation of physical desire to holiness. Likewise, the act of washing with the Kiyor,

though only preparatory, is deeply valued by G d — in a way even more than the actual service — because it represents subduing the negative forces and serving G d with full devotion.¹⁵

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 30:17-18.
2. Exodus, Chapters 25–27
3. Bechor Shor, Exodus 30:17.
4. Sforno Exodus 30:17 and Exodus 30:1.
5. Talmud, Zevachim 21b.
6. Abarbanel, Exodus 30:17.
7. Ibn Ezra Exodus 30:17.
8. Ibn Ezra Exodus 30:17.
9. Exodus 38:8.
10. Baal Haturim, Exodus 30:17.
11. Tzeror HaMor Exodus 30:17.
12. Shir HaShirim Rabbah on verse 4:15.
13. Zevachim 19b.
14. Rashi, Exodus 38:8, Midrash Tanchuma, Pekudei 8.
15. Likkutei Sichot Vol 6, p 196 - 200.

* Content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6813230/jewish/Why-Is-the-Kiyor-Laver-Not-Listed-With-the-Other-Vessels.htm

Ki Tisa: True Freedom By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Tablets were G-d's handiwork and the script was G-d's script, engraved on the tablets.)Ex. 32:16(.

The Ten Commandments were engraved upon the tablets. Our sages point out that the word “engraved”)charut(is related to the word “free”)cherut(. Based on this relation, they assert that true freedom is possible only by observing the Torah’s rules. But, given its great number of prescriptions and proscriptions, the Torah would seem to be more restrictive than liberating.

The explanation lies in the fact that we are constantly torn between our animal and G-dly natures, each one pulling us in its own direction. Since our Divine nature will never relent, we can be truly free only when our Divine spirit is fully victorious. Our animal nature, once it is refined, realizes that submitting to the Torah’s directions is in fact its true desire; its natural state is to be guided and governed by spirituality.

Thus, the Torah’s restrictions on our animal nature in fact liberate us, enabling us to actualize our full, Divine potential for spiritual growth and expression.

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

— from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gut Shabbos,

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TheTorahAnyTimes **Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum** **When Smallness is Greatness**

The Arizal taught an extraordinary idea.

Every mitzvah a Jew performs today, even the smallest mitzvah, carries greater significance in Heaven than the mitzvos performed in the days of the Tannaim and Amoraim.

At first glance, this seems difficult to understand. How could a mitzvah performed in our generation compare to the mitzvos performed by the giants of the Talmud?

The Arizal explains that the answer lies in the spiritual environment of our time. We live in a generation of yeridas hadoros, a generation of spiritual decline. The Divine Presence is hidden; there is profound hester panim, concealment of Hashem's face in the world; and emunah is challenged in ways that earlier generations rarely experienced. Precisely because of this concealment, the spiritual struggles of our generation are far greater.

When a Jew therefore performs even a small mitzvah today, it is often done in the face of confusion, distraction, and enormous spiritual obstacles. But specifically because the challenges are so great, the value of every mitzvah becomes immeasurably precious.

Now, if the Arizal already felt that the mitzvos of his generation, in the sixteenth century, possessed such elevated value, how much more so in our generation today. The spiritual tests we face are ones that earlier generations could hardly imagine. The distractions, the pressures, and the temptations of modern life are challenges that even the doros harishonim could fathom.

Yet despite all of this, Jews continue to serve Hashem.

The Pnei Menachem, the Gerrer Rebbe, offered a remarkable insight related to this idea.

Perhaps one reason the exile has been so long is because of the tremendous nachas ruach Hashem derives from the struggles of His children during this period. When Mashiach comes, the yetzer hara will no longer exist (Sukkah 52a). The inner battle that defines human spiritual life today will disappear. Without that struggle, the dynamic of overcoming temptation will no longer be part of the human experience. But today, every Jew who resists the yetzer hara, every Jew who struggles and still chooses kedusha, gives Hashem immeasurable pleasure. Hashem sees the difficulty of the nisayon. He sees the confusion of the world. And He sees a Jew who nevertheless chooses

Torah, chooses mitzvos, and chooses to rise above the pull of the yetzer hara. That victory brings enormous nachas ruach to the Ribbono Shel Olam. Perhaps, suggested the Pnei Menachem, this is part of the reason the exile continues. Hashem treasures the spiritual heroism of His people during these difficult times.

So never doubt the smallness of yourself. Because, in Heaven, it is just the opposite. It is greatness.

From: Chaim Shulman with some help from chatgpt **The Second Luchos, the Birth of the Oral Torah, and the Acceptance of Torah on Purim**

Parashas Ki Tisa recounts one of the most dramatic turning points in the Torah: the breaking of the first luchos and the giving of the second. What initially appears to be a tragic collapse of the covenant ultimately becomes the foundation for the form of Torah that has sustained Jewish life ever since. When Moshe descends from Har Sinai carrying the first luchos and sees the sin of the *ehava*, the Torah describes his reaction: "וישליך מידי את הלוחות ועגל הזהב וישבר אותם תחת ההר" "He threw the luchos from his hands and shattered them beneath the mountain." (*Shmos 32:19*)

At first glance, the shattering of the luchos appears to signal the failure of the entire Kabalas Hatorah. Yet the Torah quickly moves toward renewal. After Moshe prays for forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish people, Hashem commands him: "פסל לך שני לוחות אבנים כראשונים." "Carve for yourself two luchos of stone like the first." (*Shmos 34:1*)

These words mark the beginning of a new stage in the unfolding of Torah.

The First Luchos: Pure Divine Revelation

The Torah describes the first luchos in striking terms: "הלוחות מעשה אלקים הוא והמכתב מכתב אלקים הוא." "The luchos were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d." (*Shmos 32:16*)

Everything about them was entirely divine. The stone itself was created by Hashem, and the writing engraved upon them was likewise the direct work of Hashem.

By contrast, the second luchos begin differently. Before Hashem inscribes the words of the covenant, Moshe must hew the stone himself.

Chazal emphasize the significance of this change. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that when Moshe was told "פסל לך"—"carve for yourself"—Hashem also told him "פסולתן שלך", that the chips from the carving would belong to him (Rashi to *Shmos 34:1*). The Gemara adds that Moshe even became wealthy from these fragments (*Nedarim 38a*).

The point is not Moshe's wealth. Rather, the Midrash highlights that the second luchos were formed through human effort. The covenant was now being rebuilt through a partnership between heaven and earth.

The Midrash: The Second Luchos Introduced an Expanded Torah

An important explanation appears in *Midrash Shmos Rabbah* (46:1). The Midrash teaches that when the second luchos were given, they came together with "halachos, midrash, and aggados." In other words, the second luchos included the entire Torah, not just the 10 Commandments, and included the Torah she-be'al peh, the Oral Torah, as expanded on by the Beis Halevi (18). The first luchos contained the written revelation of the Torah. The second luchos brought with them the interpretive tradition that would develop through study, discussion, and transmission across generations. This idea explains the dramatic shift from the first luchos to the second. The first represented Torah in its perfect, heavenly form. The second introduced a Torah that would now unfold through human engagement and intellectual effort.

Torah After the Sin: The Role of Human Effort

Later meforshim expanded on this Midrashic insight. The *Netziv* (Ha'amek Davar to *Shmos 34:1*) explains that before the sin of the Egel Hazahav, Israel stood at such a high spiritual level that Torah could have remained entirely clear and fully revealed. But after the sin, Torah would now have to be acquired through pilpul—through analysis, reasoning, and study. The second luchos therefore mark the beginning of the Torah that must be developed through learning and interpretation.

A profound formulation of this idea appears in **Rav Yitzchak Hutner's** Pachad Yitzchak (Shavuos, Maamar 11). Rav Hutner explains that if the first luchos had remained intact, Torah would have remained perfectly transparent. The breaking of the luchos introduced complexity and struggle into Torah learning. That struggle gave rise to the world of machlokes, interpretation, and discovery that characterizes Torah study in every generation. In Rav Hutner's words, the broken luchos ultimately gave birth to the depth and creativity of Torah she-be'al peh.

Yom Kippur: The Day the Second Luchos Were Given

Chazal teach that Moshe descended with the second luchos on Yom Kippur, after forty days of prayer and repentance following the sin of the Egel Hazahav. Rashi notes this chronology in his commentary to Devarim 9:18, based on the traditional timeline preserved in **Seder Olam Rabbah**.

This explains why Yom Kippur became the eternal day of forgiveness for the Jewish people. It commemorates the moment when Hashem restored the covenant after the Egel and gave the second luchos. The Torah that emerged from that moment was therefore a Torah born from teshuvah.

Purim: The Voluntary Acceptance of Torah

The story does not end with Har Sinai or with Yom Kippur. The Gemara teaches that centuries later, during the days of Achashverosh, the Jewish people accepted the Torah again: "אמר רבא: אף על פי כן הדור קבלוה בימי" "Rava said: Even so, they accepted it again in the days of Achashverosh, as it says: 'The Jews fulfilled and accepted.'" (*Shabbas 88a*)

The Gemara's statement refers back to another teaching that the Torah at Har Sinai was accepted under extraordinary divine pressure that Hashem held the mountain over the people.

Purim represents a different moment. There was no open revelation, no thunder and lightning, no visible miracles. In fact, the name of Hashem does not appear even once in the entire Megillah.

Yet in that hidden world the Jewish people declared: "קיימו וקבלו היהודים" "The Jews fulfilled and accepted."

Tosafos (Shabbos 88a) and other meforshim explain that the coercion at Har Sinai related particularly to **Torah she-be'al peh**, whose depth and complexity require great intellectual effort. While the Written Torah was readily accepted at Har Sinai, the demanding nature of the Oral Torah required additional commitment. According to this view, the declaration of קיימו וקבלו in the days of Achashverosh represents the moment when the Jewish people willingly embraced that responsibility. The **Maharsha** (Shabbos 88a) explains that the events of Purim completed the acceptance of Torah begun at Har Sinai. In the days of Achashverosh, the Jewish people reaffirmed the covenant not through overwhelming revelation but through their own voluntary commitment. Similarly, the **Maharal of Prague** (Tiferes Yisroel ch. 32) explains that Har Sinai revealed the authority of Torah, but Purim revealed the love of Torah—the willingness of the Jewish people to embrace it freely.

The Torah That Endures

Seen together, these moments form a remarkable progression. At Har Sinai, Torah was revealed from heaven. With the second luchos, Torah became a covenant sustained through human effort—one that included halakhah, midrash, and interpretation. On Yom Kippur, that covenant was renewed through teshuvah after the sin of the Egel. And on Purim, the Jewish people embraced that Torah willingly, even in a world where Hashem's presence was hidden.

The first luchos represented perfect revelation. The second luchos created something deeper: a Torah that lives through the partnership between Hashem and the Jewish people.

It is this Torah—the Torah of study, debate, interpretation, and renewal—that continues to live in every generation.

From Chaim Shulman

Parshas Ki Sisa: Avoiding Evil

(Summarized from *רוח אליהו* by **Rav Elya Svei** zt"l)

Sur Meira – Turn Away from Evil

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 43:6–8) discusses when Klal Yisroel first began thinking about making the Golden Calf. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that they only did so based on a misunderstanding of the verse. But could it really be that they began considering making the calf so quickly? The Torah states: "אחד עשר יום מהרב דרף הר שעיר" "Eleven days from Chorev by way of Mount Seir." (Devarim 1:2)

Rabbi Yehudah bar Rabbi Ila'i says that they were with HaKadosh Baruch Hu only **one day**.

Rabbi Meir says **not even one day**. Rather, they stood at Har Sinai and said with their mouths "**Na'aseh veNishma**", yet their hearts were already inclined toward idolatry.

As the verse states: "וּנְפֹתוּהוּ בְּפִיהֶם וּבְלִשׁוֹנָם יִקְזְבוּ לוֹ" "They enticed Him with their mouths, but with their tongues they lied to Him." (Tehillim 78:36)

The Mirrer Mashgiach **Rav Yerucham Levovitz** zt"l asks (Daas Torah, Parshas Bo): How did Chazal know to diminish the acceptance of **Na'aseh veNishma** to such an extent? How could they say that perhaps only one day—or not even a full day—passed before the people's hearts had already turned away?

After all, Klal Yisroel had reached an extraordinarily lofty level at Sinai. Why would Chazal cast doubt on their acceptance?

The Test of Authenticity

Rav Yerucham explains the matter as follows. In physical matters everyone understands that there must be a **test of authenticity**. When a person goes to purchase merchandise, he knows he must bring along someone knowledgeable who can determine whether the merchandise is genuine.

Already in earlier times manufacturers began producing **counterfeit goods**—items that looked identical to real products.

There were fabrics that appeared to be wool or silk, and an ordinary person could not distinguish whether the material was authentic or merely an imitation. Therefore, one needed an expert who could recognize the difference. What is the ultimate test? **Time**. If the product is genuine, it remains strong and durable over time. If it is counterfeit, it quickly deteriorates.

Authentic Spirituality

The same principle applies in **ruchniyus**, spiritual matters. One must discern whether something is **true spirituality** or merely an imitation. Here too, the test is **whether it endures**. True spirituality endures.

As the Navi says: "דְּבַר אֱלֹהֵינוּ יָקוּם לְעוֹלָם" "The word of our God shall stand forever." (Yeshayah 40:8)

Anything that does not endure reveals itself as lacking true substance.

This is also the distinction Chazal describe between the righteous and the wicked.

The verse states: "בְּפֶרֶחַ רְשָׁעִים כְּמוֹ עֵשֶׂב וְיִצְיָצוּ כָּל פְּעֻלֵי אָוֶן לְהִשָּׁמְדָם עֲדֵי עַד" "When the wicked flourish like grass and all evildoers blossom, it is only so that they may ultimately be destroyed forever." (Tehillim 92:8)

At first glance, the wicked may appear to flourish. But their success is temporary.

In contrast: "צַדִּיק כְּתֵמַר יִפְרַח כְּאֶרֶז בְּלִבְנוֹן וְיִשְׁגֶּה" "The righteous shall flourish like the date palm; he shall grow tall like a cedar in Lebanon." (Tehillim 92:13)

The righteous will flourish like a date palm, and the wicked will be destroyed like grass.

The Eternal Root of Klal Yisroel

When speaking about Klal Yisroel, Bilaam declared: "מֵרֶאֶשׁ צְרִיִם אֲרָאֵנוּ" "I see them from the mountain tops, and I behold them from the hills." (Bamidbar 23:9)

Rashi explains: I look at their origins and the roots of their beginning, and I see that they are firmly established in the hills of their forefathers.

This expresses the unique quality of Klal Yisroel: Their roots are eternal.

The foundations laid by the Avos ensure that the Jewish people endure forever. Even when a Jew stumbles, the underlying foundation remains intact.

Knowing Hashem Without Intermediaries

Another question remains: How could the same people who declared

Na'aseh veNishma later sin with the Golden Calf?

The **Meshech Chochmah** explains that the mistake of the people was subtle. Bnei Yisroel could not fully grasp that HaKadosh Baruch Hu's has direct **השגחה** of the world without intermediaries.

They therefore thought that Divine governance operates through agents.

Initially they believed that **Moshe Rabbeinu** served as that intermediary.

When Moshe delayed returning from the mountain, they panicked and sought another intermediary. Thus they made the Golden Calf.

Their error was not a denial of God, but the lack of belief of Hashem's direct governance of the world, believing that a **mediator** was necessary between man and God. But the truth is that there is **no intermediary**.

The Difference Between a Human and an Angel

The Meshech Chochmah adds a profound insight. The Jewish people assumed that, just as angels carry out Divine tasks, perhaps humans must also rely on heavenly intermediaries. But this is incorrect.

An **angel** is merely a messenger whose role is to carry out a specific mission.

A **human being**, however, was created to serve Hashem directly. Man is meant to stand before HaKadosh Baruch Hu himself.

When a person serves Hashem directly, no intermediary is needed. That is the pure faith of Torah.

From: **Ira Zlotowitz** <iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Mar 5, 2026, 7:02 PM

subject: Tidbits for Parashas Ki Sisa - Parah 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz

Parashas Ki Sisa - Parah • March 7th • 18 Adar 5786

Parashas Parah is leined this week (the Shabbos before Parashas HaChodesh). Two Sifrei Torah are taken out, and the maftir of Parashas Parah (Bamidbar 19:1-22) is read from the second sefer. Parashas Parah discusses the preparation and use of the parah adumah ashes. Some maintain that this k'riah is a mitzvah d'Oraisa. Many congregations say Yotzros during Shacharis. Av Harachamim is omitted.

At 2:00am this Motzaei Shabbos, March 8th, the USA (and Canada) will change the clock forward one hour, shifting from Standard Time to Daylight Savings Time. Eretz Yisrael won't change their clocks until Friday morning, March 27th; in the interim there will be a six hour time difference between the eastern time zone and Eretz Yisrael.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Menachos 55 • Yerushalmi: Beitzah 45. Siyum this Wednesday, mazal tov! Masechta Rosh Hashana begins next • Mishnah Yomis: Kereisos 6:8-9. Siyum is today, mazal tov! Masechta Me'ila begins next • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 38a-40a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 7:35-End

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Parashas Parah is this Shabbos, Parashas Ki Sisa.

Shabbos Parashas HaChodesh is next Shabbos, Parshas Vayakhel - Pekudei, and is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Nissan as well.

Pesach begins on the evening of Wednesday April 1st.

Summaries

KI SISA: Bnei Yisrael are counted using the Machatzis HaShekel • The Kiyor • Formulation of the Shemen HaMishchah and the Ketores • Betzalel and Oholiav are appointed to lead the Mishkan construction • Mitzvah of Shabbos • Forty days after Moshe went up the mountain, Bnei Yisrael fear that Moshe will not return • The Chet HaEigel • Hashem states His intention to destroy His people • Moshe intercedes • Moshe descends from the mountain and, seeing people celebrating the Eigel, shatters the Luchos • The Leviim execute 3,000 idol worshippers • Plague strikes Bnei Yisrael • An angel, not the Shechinah, will accompany Bnei Yisrael • Moshe sets up his tent outside the camp • Moshe successfully intercedes to have the Shechinah escort Bnei Yisrael • The second Luchos • The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy • Bnei Yisrael should not learn from the nations • Observe the Shalosh Regalim • Aliyah l'Regel • Firstborn animals are to be brought as a korban •

Shabbos • Basar b'Chalav • Moshe's face shines from the Shechinah and he wears a veil to hide it

Parashas Parah: An unblemished, completely red heifer that has never done any work is slaughtered on Har Hazeisim, a mountain opposite the Beis Hamikdash, and its blood is sprayed in the direction of the Ulam doors • The cow is burned there together with cedar wood, hyssop, and a thread of dyed crimson wool; the resulting ashes are mixed into spring water • This mixture is sprayed onto one who is impure with tumas meis, on the third and seventh days of the seven-day purification process • An impure person (including tumas meis) who enters the Mikdash is punished by kareis • Laws of tumas meis

Haftarah: The haftarah relates the prophecy of Yechezkel (36:16-38), listing the purification process that Hashem will perform upon us at the time of the final redemption.

Dvar Torah

"וַיִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת־הַעֲגֹל וּמַחֲלַת וַיִּתְרַאֲף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלַף מִיָּדוֹ אֶת־הַלְּחָת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם"

"And he saw the Golden Calf and the dancing, and Moshe became upset and threw the Luchos from his hands and broke them" (Shemos 32:19)

Surely the worship of the Golden Calf was egregious enough to upset Moshe Rabbeinu. If so, why does the Torah highlight that Moshe witnessed the dancing that accompanied the sin as well?

Seforno writes that when Moshe witnessed their simchah in doing the sin, he understood that the sin would have a permanent and lasting impact. Rav Ahron Dovid Willner shlit'a explains that while a sin may be reversible, when performed joyfully it causes the sin to become deeply ingrained in a person's psyche.

The same is true regarding the effect of a mitzvah that is performed joyously. The joy infuses the mitzvah into a person. The Arizal is quoted as saying that his lofty levels were attained through performing mitzvos with great simchah (M.B. 669:11). As we are marbin b'simchah in Chodesh Adar, the great simchah shel mitzvah should imbue the effect of these mitzvos into our hearts (Sefer Abir Yaakov).

Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org

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Continuing from <https://parsha.net/shmos/Terumah86.doc>

from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

date: Feb 12, 2026, 9:56 PM

subject: Parashat Mishpatim

Hachazarah

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Halachah, Volume 35

5786/2026

Hachazarah Part Three

Opening an Oven or Warming Drawer – Rav Willig vs. Rav Neuberger

OU Kosher (Daf HaKashrus 19:10 pp.59-60) and theaStar-K

(<https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/476/oven-kashrus-for-shabbos-use/>)doanota permit opening a warming drawer on Shabbat since

one may ignite the oven's fire. Although many Poskim share this concern, Rav Mordechai Willig is not concerned about this, since one does not intend to ignite the fire and there is a delay between opening and ignition (a Psik Reisha L'Achar Zman, see the Shiltei Gibborim, Shabbat 45a:2; The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat pp. 143-144).

However, Rav Yaakov Neuberger (The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p. 280 in the Hebrew section) questions Rav Willig's assertion, noting that he investigated the matter and found that after opening the oven, the fire ignites in less than ten seconds. In response, my wife Malca and I experimented in our oven and found that in six tries, it took from seventeen to thirty seconds for the fire to turn on from the time we opened the door. Significantly, the Star-K (ibid.) regards the result of opening the oven door as grama (indirect), fitting the results in the Jachter home.

Rav Yisrael Rosen of the Zomet Institute (Techumin 34:23) defines a delay for grama purposes as ten seconds, arguing that ten seconds is the amount of time which people in general regard as a delay. The Star-K defines the delay as fifteen seconds (<https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/4629/oven-kashrus-for-yom-tov-use/>). I reported my findings to Rav Willig, who was grateful for our defense of his ruling. Even according to Rav Neuberger's findings, there is room to be lenient, as the Grama time delay might be defined as shorter than ten seconds. Rav Yisrael Rosen writes (Techumin 34:23) that the Zomet Institute prefers to use ten seconds as a time delay, but in case of great need, they consider a delay of two to three seconds sufficient. Elsewhere, the Star-K (<https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/6473/urns-pump-pots-in-halacha-part2/>) writes that five seconds suffice to count as Grama. These numbers are based on the idea of Toch Kedei Dibur (the time it takes to say "Shalom Alecha Rabi") being considered an interruption in many Halachic contexts (see, for example, Nedarim 87a). Accordingly, a delay of this length suffices to disconnect the person from the resultant action, the definition of Grama.

The Shiltei Gibborim

Another potential criticism of Rav Willig's approach is that the Shiltei Gibborim only presents as a possibility that Psik Reisha L'Achar Zman is permitted. One may respond that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:10) permits opening a refrigerator on Shabbat even when its motor is running based on the Shiltei Gibborim. Moreover, Rav Auerbach and Rav Willig support their contention on our entering and leaving our thermostatically regulated homes on Shabbat despite the inevitable resultant impact of the summer heat and winter cold on these systems. Thus, we have accepted the Shiltei HaGibborim's suggestion in practice.

Rav Neuberger responds that it is not inevitable that one will trigger the heating when entering the house in the winter. He argues that the heat may already be running at the time. Moreover, he suggests that the body heat of those entering the house may help balance out the cold air.

We may respond to the first point, that we have never heard of people not entering the home until the people inside report that the heat is already running (as some do regarding opening a refrigerator when its motor is not running. Regarding the second point, it is difficult to imagine that Rav Neuberger's point is true, especially on very cold days.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's Lenient Consideration

Another point supporting Rav Willig is an argument Rav Auerbach advances that causing fire or the motor to go on earlier is not considered melacha, since the person is not introducing anything new; rather, he is merely altering the pace and rhythm of the device's cycle. Rav Auerbach writes about refrigerators:

Allowing heat into the interior of the refrigerator does not cause it to function any differently. Rather, the refrigerator is built such that it turns on the motor when a certain temperature is reached, and by letting warm air in, one merely causes that to happen sooner, but does not cause anything to happen faster than it would have otherwise. It seems, therefore, that even if one were to intentionally and immediately cause the motor to run sooner, because this melacha is transient, and one also cannot say that this causes the refrigerator to attain its function... it is not even a rabbinic prohibition.

Rav Auerbach's point is equally relevant to causing the oven fire to ignite by opening its door. Although no other Poseik advances this argument, and even Rav Auerbach himself did not rely on it alone, it is a potent S'nif L'Hakel, lenient consideration.

Conclusion

The consensus appears to be concerned about opening ovens and warming drawers when their fire is not ignited (see, for example, Dayan Yaakov Yechzekel Posen, *Kitzur Hilchot Shabbat* p. 51). However, Rav Willig is not a lone voice. Rav Dovid Ribiat (*The Thirty Nine Melocho's*, p. 1220) is also lenient, noting, based on a ruling of Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrat Moshe O.C. 4:74 Bishul – 28), that "Most ovens will not automatically ignite when the door is opened," and that it is therefore permissible to open the

door of these ovens on Shabbat. He further cites (n. 86 ad. loc.) an expert who reports that, "In general, the thermostats in ovens are not that sensitive to the extent that they would quickly change due to a temperature change." If one wishes to be strict about this matter, it is not difficult to do so, as one merely needs to wait until the fire ignites before opening the oven (the oven fire turns on and off fairly frequently). Moreover, the OU and Zman Technologies have developed a system that enables one to open the oven without igniting the fire (<https://www.zmantechologies.com/shabbos-keeper-ovens>).

In terms of a warming drawer, the OU recommends that caterers ask a non-Jew to open the door. The Amirah L'Nochri prohibition does not apply to a Psik Reisha (Mishnah Berurah 277:15, Teshuvot Igrat Moshe Orach Chaim 2:68, and Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 31:1 and footnote 1). However, those who are lenient have strong authority and reasoning upon which to rely.

Hachazara Part Four

Malca's Practice – Low Flame and an Inverted Pan on a Blech

My wife Malca warms food for Shabbat lunch by lighting a low flame on the stove and placing a Blech on it before Shabbat. She places an inverted, empty pan on the Blech and, on Shabbat day, places cold chicken from the refrigerator on top of the inverted pan an hour or so before lunch. The chicken becomes hot but never reaches Yad Soledet Bo of 120 degrees Fahrenheit (and probably not even 113 degrees Fahrenheit). This strategy also eliminates the concern of reheating the liquids that accompany the chicken.

Malca's approach satisfies Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrat Moshe Orach Chaim 1:94), who permits placing food in a place where it will never reach Yad Soledet Bo. Malca's approach also constitutes a valid Kedaira Al Gabei Kedaira according to the Magen Avraham (318:26).

Malca has been doing this for years, and the food she makes is delicious, but never reaches the 120 degrees standard or even the 113 degrees Fahrenheit standard of Yad Soledet Bo.

Question Number One- Tzilyah Achar Afiya One may question Malca's practice due to two concerns. First, the Shmirat Shabbat K'Hilchata (1:40), based on the Mishna Berurah (318:41) Biur Halachah 318:15 d"h V'hu Yavesh), forbids placing even fully cooked and completely dry food to reheat. His concern is that one is thereby roasting food that was previously cooked, which is prohibited according to the Yere'im we discussed in an earlier section. We refer to this as Tzilyah Achar Bishul.

We can defend Malca on two levels. Rav Schachter (*The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat*, p. 184) and Rav Willig (*The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat*, pp. 39-40) follow the Chazon Ish (Orach Chaim 37:14), who rules that reheating food is not considered roasting since the food will not thereby attain a roasted taste. Moreover, there is no intention of roasting the food, unlike when dipping Challah into burning hot chicken soup; there is an intention to cook it after it has been baked (Bishul Achar Afiya).

Second, and more importantly, since the food does not reach Yad Soledet Bo, there is no concern for Tzeliya.

Question Number Two – Placing on a Blech when it will not Become Yad Soledet Bo Rav Eliashiv (cited in *The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat*, p. 139) considers all of the Blech to be "on the fire," even the parts where food placed on it will not reach Yad Soledet Bo, lest he put the food in a place it will reach Yad Soledet Bo. Thus, Rav Eliashiv does not permit placing even fully cooked solid food on a part of the Blech where it will not reach Yad Soledet Bo.

This seems to run counter to Malca's practice.

We can defend Malca's approach in two ways.

First, Rav Nissim Karelitz (cited in *Orchot Shabbat* 37:10; Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv disagrees) considers the part of the Blech where food will not reach Yad Soledet Bo as near (Smicha) but not on the fire. Second, Malca places the food on an inverted pan, which is not on the fire, even by Rav Eliashiv's standards, even though it does not contain food. The Mishna

Brura (318:90), Bi'ur Halacha (318:6 d'h Ad Shetehei and 318:14 d'h L'Hafig), and Shmirat Shabbat Kehilchata (1:36) support this understanding. Accordingly, one who follows Malca's lead should not move the chicken off the inverted pan after the Shabbat afternoon meal, even to a part of the Blech where the food will not reach Yad Soledet Bo, as this would run counter to Rav Eliashiv's view.

Conclusion - Malca's approach is rock solid, and all families can benefit from her wise guidance.

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>date: Thursday Mar 5, 2026, 8:19 PM subject: **Rabbi Yakov Haber** - The Two Days of Purim Revisited
Rabbi Yakov HaberThe Two Days of Purim Revisited Eight years ago, I had the privilege of writing a dvar Torah presenting four different approaches as to the reason that Purim is the only holiday observed on different days depending on whether one lives in an unwalled or a walled city, even though both days are partially celebrated everywhere. Briefly summarizing: Ramban theorizes that the separate celebration on the fifteenth was meant to highlight that the Jews residing in all Jewish walled cities – who did not initially feel the need to celebrate since they felt protected by the walls of their city against Haman's willing partners – erred, since without Divine protection, the wall would not help them. By contrast, Ran opines that there was a wish to commemorate the extra day of victory experienced by Shushan, a walled city. Both Shem Mishmuel and Pachad Yitzchak maintain that the two days of Purim highlight some unique aspect of the battle against Amalek manifested during the Purim salvation. Shem Mishmuel notes that in the times of Esther, even absent a Jewish king, a necessary unifying presence enabling battling Amalek, the Jewish unity caused by the decree of Haman allowed them to successfully battle this nation. Just as even if the Jews appear externally distinct and apart, internally they can still be united, so too, even though there are two separate days of Purim, essentially, they are part of one holiday. Alternatively, Pachad Yitzchak contrasts the first day of Purim's defensive battle against Amalek and the second day's offensive battle. Although when I initially presented these important concepts, it was on a theoretical plane, recent events have directly catapulted them into "halacha l'ma'aseh."

The approximately seven and a half million strong Jewish yishuv in the Holy Land (kein yirbu!) is once again living under daily, deadly, missile attacks, now from two fronts: from Iran in the East and from Hezbollah in the North, modern-day Amalekites sharing Haman's visceral hatred of the Jewish people, seeking to destroy them for "refusing to bow" to Moslem dhimmihood and for daring to reclaim sovereignty of their Divinely promised land. However, this latest threat comes in a fundamentally different context from the past. This past Shabbos, when we read Parshas Zechiras Amalek,[1] after months, if not years, of precise intelligence gathering, the Israeli Air Force obliterated much of the top-tier leadership of the terror-sponsoring state of Iran, the modern-day Persia, with thousands of pounds of bombs without a single plane being lost in the operation! This included its monstrous "religious" leader, Ali Khamenei (osiyos Haman!) yimach shmo – one responsible for the creation of a network of proxies terrorizing the Jews in Israel and elsewhere for over thirty years through multifaceted, nefarious methods, one responsible for thousands of deaths worldwide. Arur Haman, Baruch Mordechai! The relatively weak response of Iran compared to the past is reflective of the enormous Divine Providence the Jewish people have witnessed over the past two and half years through so many Divine agents in weakening the Iranian regime, both by destroying its terror proxies and directly harming Iranian capabilities. Among these are the IDF, the various missile defense systems, a right-wing government and a philosemitic, pro-Israel president at the helm of the United States who is actively partnering with Israel to neutralize the Iranian threat once and for all.

All of the above-mentioned reasons for the two days of Purim are eerily relevant to the current situation. The lesson of Shushan Purim according to Ramban is not to attribute the salvation to the physical causes but to reflect on the sibas hasiba, the One who is the Cause of causes before Whom the

natural and the supernatural are one and the same, merely agents of His specific Providential intervention. Inculcating this message – so pointedly relevant to this current war – in our mindsets remains a constant challenge. While recognizing the mesirus nefesh or our brave pilots, our soldiers fighting in Lebanon and those manning the anti-missile batteries and having sufficient gratitude toward them, we must simultaneously reflect on the true Master Planner who caused all of this to happen in perfect synchrony to be ready for the right moment in history and feel profound gratitude and closeness to Him. The recent tragic casualties of a direct missile strike in the heart of a largely populated city, so close to home, serve as an open reminder to never take physical, earthly protection as a given, and to fully realize that we are always dependent on Divine mercy, regardless of whatever tools Hashem Yisbarach chooses to utilize.

Ran's teaching that an extra salvation – seemingly only relevant to a specific segment of the Jewish people – should also be celebrated by all is also relevant to the present reality. Whereas at first glance, the current distress and constant, miraculous salvations are only relevant to the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael, all of world Jewry has its eyes and ears peeled toward the East, pouring out their hearts to Avinu Shebashamayim to protect all of the Jewish people as well as celebrating its salvations.

In the lead-up to and during the last two and a half years of difficult war and many losses, many internecine, conceptual battles have been taking place among the Jewish people. Among them are right-wing versus left-wing views of running the State of Israel, religious and secular divides, intense disputes over the role of Yeshiva students in Israel's army and the arrests of significant numbers of them, in turn touching upon debates over secular versus religious values and viewing Torah scholars as central pillars in Jewish society or worthless pariahs (chas v'shalom). Even though these disputes are not easily resolvable, as Mori v'Rabi Rav Mayer Twersky shlit" a recently noted, the first step in resolution, or at least détente, is reflecting deeply on the feelings and vantage point of one's opponents. Shem Mishmuel's impactful statement of the power of Jewish unity in defeating Amalek is extremely pertinent now. We hope that the current lull in internal Jewish fighting, uniting around the urgent battle against our enemies – who do not distinguish between religious and secular or right-wing or left-wing – will be counted in Heaven as a display of achdus adding sources of merit in the battle against conceptual, modern-day Amalekites.

Finally, Rav Hutner's distinction between defensive and offensive battles against Amalek is directly relevant to the various rounds of attacks against Iran in the past months. Even offensive battles in these contexts are really just assuring that our enemies do not threaten us in the future. The total eradication of the Biblical Amalek assures that this nation would no longer serve as either a physical or a spiritual threat to the Jewish people. We hope and pray that those taking up the role of the Biblical Amalekites will be similarly totally defeated soon.

While realizing that Jewish history is constantly being written before our eyes and that Hashem did not reveal His ultimate game plan to us, we hope and pray that by the end of this epic battle, the Jewish people will be safer and that we will be ever closer to the Final Redemption!

[1] Notably, this fell on the 11th of Adar, the earliest day of the "z'maneihem" (Esther 9:31) – the multiple authorized times for reading the megilla. (See Mishna Megilla 2a.) A recent news report indicated that this operation was backed up by several months; the timing seems of Biblical significance!

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Mar 5, 2026, 5:38 PM

subject: We all count

Of Holy Cows and Unholy Calves

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The Red Heifer, or Parah Adumah, is considered one of the most mysterious commandments in the Torah. The reasoning behind its structure—a protocol to purify those who are impure, yet also with the potential to confer impurity to the pure—is considered so elusive that even the wisest of all men, King Solomon, lamented his inability to comprehend the "Parah-dox" (Ecclesiastes 7:23; see Niddah 9a and Yoma 14a).

The mystery extends beyond its basic concept and includes a contemporary practice that teaches about it. Public Torah reading, for the most part, is a rabbinical obligation. The one exception generally noted is the reading of the commandment to remember the attack of Amalek before Purim (according to many understandings). However, a number of the medieval commentators, such as Rashba (Berakhot 13a), have included another reading as a biblical obligation: Parashat Parah, the section describing the Parah Adumah protocol, which appears originally in Parashat Chukkat (Numbers 19:1-22) and is traditionally read right after Purim. This notion is quoted as well in Shulchan Arukh (Orach Chaim 146 and 685:7).

This is a somewhat puzzling assertion. It is unclear where exactly in the Torah we find such a commandment, leading some authorities to reject the possibility (see Magen Avraham, O.C. 685). Others maintain that the entire statement is actually a scribal error and that the reference was not to Parashat Parah but to another section referred to with the same initials, such as the aforementioned passage about Amalek or "Parashat Purim." Still others, hesitant to label as error a statement found in numerous rishonim, offer innovative theories to explain the source.

One theory that is put forward concerns those select concepts and commandments that the Torah has distinguished with an imperative of "remember" (zekhirot). Authorities differ as to the precise count of these precepts, but they include prominently such concepts as Amalek, Shabbat, and the Exodus from Egypt. Indeed these three find halakhic expression: we remember Amalek through the special Torah reading; Shabbat through kiddush Friday night; and the Exodus is mentioned twice daily in the third paragraph of the recitation of the Shema, among many other practices. However, one concept that appears to deserve inclusion seems to lack halakhic representation. The Torah commands: "Remember, do not forget, how you angered Hashem your God in the desert" (Deuteronomy 9:7; see Nachmanides' commentary).

If so, how come no ritual or reading commemorates the incident of the Golden Calf? Should there not be an implementation in Jewish practice of this obligation?

Therefore it is suggested that perhaps this could indicate a source for a biblical obligation of Parashat Parah. The Rabbis perceived a linkage between the commandment of Parah Adumah and the sin of the Golden Calf. As Rashi quotes (Numbers 19:2): "Let the mother come and clean up the soiling of the child."

The adult cow symbolizes the parent, and in atoning for the sin it is "cleaning up" the mess of the calf.

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Such a reading would reflect the nature of the obligation of remembering the calf. The focus is not on the sin, but on the path back from impurity. The Torah wishes to impress upon the psyche that even in the aftermath of egregious moral failure, the route of return remains open.

However, there were those who assumed a different theme in this commandment of remembering. Some suggest that we are told to constantly recall the instance of the calf as a cautionary measure. At the time of the sin, the Jewish people were on an extremely high level of spirituality, so close to the giving of the Torah. One might believe himself invulnerable to temptation or moral error. The incident of the calf must therefore always be remembered to warn that no one is protected in that manner.

If that is the theme, then it might seem that using the Parah Adumah as a reminder would be ineffective. It may represent atonement, perhaps, but the message of vigilance would be lacking.

However, it could be suggested that even this motif is present as well in the Parah Adumah. We are well aware of the central paradox of this commandment: is the Red Heifer a vehicle of purity or of impurity?

It may be that this is precisely where the warning lies. One may feel that if he is involved in a religious activity—a rite of purification—he is insulated from spiritual failing. Yet we find that even this activity contains the elements of impurity.

The message is clear: no context or activity is a spiritual guarantee. Only constant self-awareness ensures that behavior is actually proper and praiseworthy.

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

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subject: We all count

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The true greatness of Torah is when its lessons move from the sanctuary into daily living.

from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

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Hachazarah parts 3 & 4

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Hachazarah Parts Three & Four

Continuing from <https://parsha.net/shmos/Terumah86.doc>

Opening an Oven or Warming Drawer – Rav Willig vs. Rav Neuberger OU Kosher (Daf HaKashrus 19:10 pp.59-60) and theaStar-K(<https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/476/oven-kashrus-for-shabbos-use/>)doanota permit opening a warming drawer on Shabbat since one may ignite the oven's fire. Although many Poskim share this concern,

Rav Mordechai Willig is not concerned about this, since one does not intend to ignite the fire and there is a delay between opening and ignition (a Psik Reisha L'Achar Zman, see the Shiltei Gibborim, Shabbat 45a:2; The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat pp. 143-144).

However, Rav Yaakov Neuberger (The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p. 280 in the Hebrew section) questions Rav Willig's assertion, noting that he investigated the matter and found that after opening the oven, the fire ignites in less than ten seconds. In response, my wife Malca and I experimented in our oven and found that in six tries, it took from seventeen to thirty seconds for the fire to turn on from the time we opened the door. Significantly, the Star-K (ibid.) regards the result of opening the oven door as grama (indirect), fitting the results in the Jachter home.

Rav Yisrael Rosen of the Zomet Institute (Techumin 34:23) defines a delay for grama purposes as ten seconds, arguing that ten seconds is the amount of time which people in general regard as a delay. The Star-K defines the delay as fifteen seconds (<https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/4629/oven-kashrus-for-yom-tov-use/>). I reported my findings to Rav Willig, who was grateful for our defense of his ruling.

Even according to Rav Neuberger's findings, there is room to be lenient, as the Grama time delay might be defined as shorter than ten seconds. Rav Yisrael Rosen writes (Techumin 34:23) that the Zomet Institute prefers to use ten seconds as a time delay, but in case of great need, they consider a delay of two to three seconds sufficient. Elsewhere, the Star-K (<https://www.star-k.org/articles/kashrus-kurrents/6473/urns-pump-pots-in-halachah-part2/>) writes that five seconds suffice to count as Grama. These numbers are based on the idea of Toch Kedei Dibur (the time it takes to say "Shalom Alecha Rabi") being considered an interruption in many Halachic contexts (see, for example, Nedarim 87a). Accordingly, a delay of this length suffices to disconnect the person from the resultant action, the definition of Grama.

The Shiltei Gibborim

Another potential criticism of Rav Willig's approach is that the Shiltei Gibborim only presents as a possibility that Psik Reisha L'Achar Zman is permitted. One may respond that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:10) permits opening a refrigerator on Shabbat even when its motor is running based on the Shiltei Gibborim. Moreover, Rav Auerbach and Rav Willig support their contention on our entering and leaving our thermostatically regulated homes on Shabbat despite the inevitable resultant impact of the summer heat and winter cold on these systems. Thus, we have accepted the Shiltei HaGibborim's suggestion in practice.

Rav Neuberger responds that it is not inevitable that one will trigger the heating when entering the house in the winter. He argues that the heat may already be running at the time. Moreover, he suggests that the body heat of those entering the house may help balance out the cold air.

We may respond to the first point, that we have never heard of people not entering the home until the people inside report that the heat is already running (as some do regarding opening a refrigerator when its motor is not running). Regarding the second point, it is difficult to imagine that Rav Neuberger's point is true, especially on very cold days.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's Lenient Consideration

Another point supporting Rav Willig is an argument Rav Auerbach advances that causing fire or the motor to go on earlier is not considered melacha, since the person is not introducing anything new; rather, he is merely altering the pace and rhythm of the device's cycle. Rav Auerbach writes about refrigerators:

Allowing heat into the interior of the refrigerator does not cause it to function any differently. Rather, the refrigerator is built such that it turns on the motor when a certain temperature is reached, and by letting warm air in, one merely causes that to happen sooner, but does not cause anything to happen faster than it would have otherwise. It seems, therefore, that even if one were to intentionally and immediately cause the motor to run sooner, because this melacha is transient, and one also cannot say that this causes the refrigerator to attain its function... it is not even a rabbinic prohibition.

Rav Auerbach's point is equally relevant to causing the oven fire to ignite by opening its door. Although no other Poseik advances this argument, and even Rav Auerbach himself did not rely on it alone, it is a potent S'nif L'Hakel, lenient consideration.

Conclusion

The consensus appears to be concerned about opening ovens and warming drawers when their fire is not ignited (see, for example, Dayan Yaakov Yechzekel Posen, Kitzur Hilchot Shabbat p. 51). However, Rav Willig is not a lone voice. Rav Dovid Ribiat (The Thirty Nine Melochos, p. 1220) is also lenient, noting, based on a ruling of Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 4:74 Bishul – 28), that "Most ovens will not automatically ignite when the door is opened," and that it is therefore permissible to open the door of these ovens on Shabbat. He further cites (n. 86 ad. loc.) an expert who reports that, "In general, the thermostats in ovens are not that sensitive to the extent that they would quickly change due to a temperature change." If one wishes to be strict about this matter, it is not difficult to do so, as one merely needs to wait until the fire ignites before opening the oven (the oven fire turns on and off fairly frequently). Moreover, the OU and Zman Technologies have developed a system that enables one to open the oven without igniting the fire (<https://www.zmantechologies.com/shabbos-keeper-ovens>).

In terms of a warming drawer, the OU recommends that caterers ask a non-Jew to open the door. The Amirah L'Nochri prohibition does not apply to a Psik Reisha (Mishnah Berurah 277:15, Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 2:68, and Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 31:1 and footnote 1). However, those who are lenient have strong authority and reasoning upon which to rely.

Hachazara Part Four

Malca's Practice – Low Flame and an Inverted Pan on a Blech

My wife Malca warms food for Shabbat lunch by lighting a low flame on the stove and placing a Blech on it before Shabbat. She places an inverted, empty pan on the Blech and, on Shabbat day, places cold chicken from the refrigerator on top of the inverted pan an hour or so before lunch. The chicken becomes hot but never reaches Yad Soledet Bo of 120 degrees Fahrenheit (and probably not even 113 degrees Fahrenheit). This strategy also eliminates the concern of reheating the liquids that accompany the chicken.

Malca's approach satisfies Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 1:94), who permits placing food in a place where it will never reach Yad Soledet Bo. Malca's approach also constitutes a valid Kedaira Al Gabei Kedaira according to the Magen Avraham (318:26).

Malca has been doing this for years, and the food she makes is delicious, but never reaches the 120 degrees standard or even the 113 degrees Fahrenheit standard of Yad Soledet Bo.

Question Number One- Tzilyah Achar Afia One may question Malca's practice due to two concerns. First, the Shmirat Shabbat K'Hilchata (1:40), based on the Mishna Berurah (318:41) Biur Halachah 318:15 d"h V'Hu Yavesh, forbids placing even fully cooked and completely dry food to reheat. His concern is that one is thereby roasting food that was previously cooked, which is prohibited according to the Yere'im we discussed in an earlier section. We refer to this as Tzilyah Achar Bishul.

We can defend Malca on two levels. Rav Schachter (The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p. 184) and Rav Willig (The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, pp. 39-40) follow the Chazon Ish (Orach Chaim 37:14), who rules that reheating food is not considered roasting since the food will not thereby attain a roasted taste. Moreover, there is no intention of roasting the food, unlike when dipping Challah into burning hot chicken soup; there is an intention to cook it after it has been baked (Bishul Achar Afia).

Second, and more importantly, since the food does not reach Yad Soledet Bo, there is no concern for Tzilyah.

Question Number Two – Placing on a Blech when it will not Become Yad Soledet Bo Rav Eliashiv (cited in The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food

on Shabbat, p. 139) considers all of the Blech to be "on the fire," even the parts where food placed on it will not reach Yad Soledet Bo, lest he put the food in a place it will reach Yad Soledet Bo. Thus, Rav Eliashiv does not permit placing even fully cooked solid food on a part of the Blech where it will not reach Yad Soledet Bo.

This seems to run counter to Malca's practice.

We can defend Malca's approach in two ways.

First, Rav Nissim Karelitz (cited in Orchot Shabbat 37:10; Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv disagrees) considers the part of the Blech where food will not reach Yad Soledet Bo as near (Smicha) but not on the fire. Second, Malca places the food on an inverted pan, which is not on the fire, even by Rav Eliashiv's standards, even though it does not contain food. The Mishna Brura (318:90), Bi'ur Halacha (318:6 d"h Ad Shetehei and 318:14 d"h L'Hafig), and Shmirat Shabbat Kehilchata (1:36) support this understanding. Accordingly, one who follows Malca's lead should not move the chicken off the inverted pan after the Shabbat afternoon meal, even to a part of the Blech where the food will not reach Yad Soledet Bo, as this would run counter to Rav Eliashiv's view.

Conclusion - Malca's approach is rock solid, and all families can benefit from her wise guidance.

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Mar 5, 2026, 5:38 PM

subject: We all count

Of Holy Cows and Unholy Calves

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The Red Heifer, or Parah Adumah, is considered one of the most mysterious commandments in the Torah. The reasoning behind its structure—a protocol to purify those who are impure, yet also with the potential to confer impurity on the pure—is considered so elusive that even the wisest of all men, King Solomon, lamented his inability to comprehend the "Parah-dox" (Ecclesiastes 7:23; see Niddah 9a and Yoma 14a).

The mystery extends beyond its basic concept and includes a contemporary practice that teaches about it. Public Torah reading, for the most part, is a rabbinical obligation. The one exception generally noted is the reading of the commandment to remember the attack of Amalek before Purim (according to many understandings). However, a number of the medieval commentators, such as Rashba (Berakhot 13a), have included another reading as a biblical obligation: Parashat Parah, the section describing the Parah Adumah protocol, which appears originally in Parashat Chukkat (Numbers 19:1-22) and is traditionally read right after Purim. This notion is quoted as well in Shulchan Arukh (Orach Chaim 146 and 685:7).

This is a somewhat puzzling assertion. It is unclear where exactly in the Torah we find such a commandment, leading some authorities to reject the possibility (see Magen Avraham, O.C. 685). Others maintain that the entire statement is actually a scribal error and that the reference was not to Parashat Parah but to another section referred to with the same initials, such as the aforementioned passage about Amalek or "Parashat Purim." Still others, hesitant to label as error a statement found in numerous rishonim, offer innovative theories to explain the source.

One theory that is put forward concerns those select concepts and commandments that the Torah has distinguished with an imperative of "remember" (zekhirot). Authorities differ as to the precise count of these precepts, but they include prominently such concepts as Amalek, Shabbat, and the Exodus from Egypt. Indeed these three find halakhic expression: we remember Amalek through the special Torah reading; Shabbat through kiddush Friday night; and the Exodus is mentioned twice daily in the third paragraph of the recitation of the Shema, among many other practices. However, one concept that appears to deserve inclusion seems to lack halakhic representation. The Torah commands: "Remember, do not forget, how you angered Hashem your God in the desert" (Deuteronomy 9:7; see Nachmanides' commentary).

If so, how come no ritual or reading commemorates the incident of the Golden Calf? Should there not be an implementation in Jewish practice of this obligation?

Therefore it is suggested that perhaps this could indicate a source for a biblical obligation of Parashat Parah. The Rabbis perceived a linkage between the commandment of Parah Adumah and the sin of the Golden Calf. As Rashi quotes (Numbers 19:2): "Let the mother come and clean up the soiling of the child."

The adult cow symbolizes the parent, and in atoning for the sin it is "cleaning up" the mess of the calf.

Within that understanding, it may be posited that the sin of the calf is indeed commemorated in an indirect manner. Rather than directly evoke the disgraceful episode of the Golden Calf, we choose a less embarrassing path, reading about the commandment that atones rather than the transgression that incurred guilt.

Such a reading would reflect the nature of the obligation of remembering the calf. The focus is not on the sin, but on the path back from impurity. The Torah wishes to impress upon the psyche that even in the aftermath of egregious moral failure, the route of return remains open.

However, there were those who assumed a different theme in this commandment of remembering. Some suggest that we are told to constantly recall the instance of the calf as a cautionary measure. At the time of the sin, the Jewish people were on an extremely high level of spirituality, so close to the giving of the Torah. One might believe himself invulnerable to temptation or moral error. The incident of the calf must therefore always be remembered to warn that no one is protected in that manner.

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However, it could be suggested that even this motif is present as well in the Parah Adumah. We are well aware of the central paradox of this commandment: is the Red Heifer a vehicle of purity or of impurity?

It may be that this is precisely where the warning lies. One may feel that if he is involved in a religious activity—a rite of purification—he is insulated from spiritual failing. Yet we find that even this activity contains the elements of impurity.

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Ki Tisa 5786: Mishkan & Shabbos

Michal Horowitz <donotreply@wordpress.com>

Mishkan & Shabbos

By Michal Horowitz on March 5, 2026

Parshas Ki Tisa begins with the topic of Mishkan, a continuation of the preceding parshios of Terumah and Tetzaveh.

From the beginning of Terumah (Shemos 25), through the opening chapters of Ki Tisa (Shemos 30:11-31:18), the beautiful plans for the Mishkan have been laid out for us.

We have learned about (including but not limited to) all the materials to be collected for its construction, the aron kodesh (holy ark), shulchan for the lechem ha'panim (golden table for the twelve loaves of bread), the golden menorah, mizbayach ha'nechoshes (copper altar), coverings, beams, walls, sockets and courtyard of the mishkan, the bigdei kehunah (priestly vestments), mizbayach ha'zahav (the golden altar for incense offerings), the machatzis ha'shekel annual contribution, spices for the anointing oil and spices for the ketores, the construction of the kiyor (the laver for washing of hands and feet before the avodah in the mishkan was performed), and the master craftsmen who were to oversee the building of the Mishkan and all of its keilim (vessels).

Interestingly, when the instructions for Mishkan conclude in our parsha, the Torah moves abruptly to a different topic, one that is seemingly unrelated to Mishkan.

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: "And you shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying: However, you must observe My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am Hashem Who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you...For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to Hashem. Whoever performs labor on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death.

"וְשָׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עֹלָם - The Children of Israel shall guard the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath throughout their generations as an eternal covenant. בְּנֵי וְבִין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹת הוּא לַעֲלֵם כִּי־עֲשִׂיתָ יָמִים. וְעֲשָׂה ה' אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנְפָשׁ - It is a sign forever between Me and the Children of Israel, for in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and was refreshed" (Shemos 31:12-17).

Why, at the end of all the details regarding Mishkan, does the Torah shift its focus to Shabbos?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches, "There is an equation between the Sabbath and sanctity - the Sabbath is a source of holiness. There

is, therefore, a commonality between the Sabbath and the Mikdash. There exists both a sanctuary in space and a sanctuary in time.

"Of the two imperatives, the Sabbath is clearly the more significant.

Otherwise one would have been ordered to violate the Sabbath for the construction of the Mishkan. Sabbath as a sanctuary is more significant than the Mishkan as a sanctuary. The Temple is not indispensable for the survival of the people, but the Jew cannot survive without the Sabbath" (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Shemos, p.284).

In a fundamental teaching of Rav Soloveitchik, we learn that there are two different sanctuaries in this world. There is the sanctuary in space, the Mishkan (and Mikdash). And there is the sanctuary in time, Shabbos. While both Mishkan and Shabbos are of crucial importance to Am Yisrael, to paraphrase the Rav: we have existed for almost 2,000 years without the sanctuary in space, without the Mikdash. And while we yearn, pray, hope and long for the speedy rebuilding of this holy place and space - may it be immediate and in our days - "we could not have survived one week without Shabbos."

Hence, the concluding verses of Mishkan are about Shabbos. This teaches us that while the building of Mishkan is certainly very important, it does not push off Shabbos. When Shabbos comes, the construction of Mishkan is put to rest. And when Shabbos comes, our work must also be put to rest.

Shabbos is a day to focus on the sanctuary in time that Hashem gifts to us (Shabbos 10b) and a day to reconnect with Hashem, putting all of our weekly focuses aside.

Furthermore, Rav Soloveitchik teaches that "The Yalkut Shimoni suggests that (there) are three sanctifications on earth: God's Name, Sabbath and the people of Israel (Yalkut Shimoni 830). Yet we know of many other sanctifications: the Land of Israel and the Temple, among others. In fact, however, all other sanctifications derive their kedushah from the first three. "The Land of Israel and the Temple were sanctified by the people of Israel.

In contrast, the sanctification of the Sabbath preceded the sanctification of Israel. It was God who sanctified the Sabbath, and in turn, it is the Sabbath that sanctified Israel. Thus, the words of the Friday night Amidah begin: you sanctified the seventh day for Your Name; it was God Who sanctified the Sabbath. In the morning Amidah, the words, and the two tablets he [Moses] brought down upon his arm and in them were written about guarding the Sabbath signify that the sanctification of Israel was realized through giving them the Sabbath" (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Shemos, p.284-285).

Thus we learn that the primary source of all sanctity is HKB"H b'kevodo u've'atzmo - the Almighty Himself. And from that Primary Source of sanctity, the kedusha of Shabbos is derived (Bereishis 2:1-3), and from Hashem's glory, and the kedusha of Shabbos, the nation of Israel attains her elevated holiness.

May we cherish the gift of Shabbos, appreciate our role in bringing holiness to the world, make time for Hashem - and His Torah and mitzvos - in our lives, and transmit our glorious mesorah to the coming generations.

In the merit of our shemiras Shabbos, and our living elevated lives of distinction and holiness, as is befitting of Am Yisrael, may we merit the yom she'kulo Shabbos u'menucha l'chayei olamim with the ultimate redemption, in our days and in our time.

Michal בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

Parshat Ki Tisa: A Conspiracy to Forgive (Part I)

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT KI TISA

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

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

INTRODUCTION:

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

The process of forgiveness takes place in two different arenas: 1) Interaction between Hashem and Moshe, and 2) interaction between Moshe and the people.

AT THE BARGAINING TABLE WITH GOD

The conversations in our parasha between Hashem and Moshe comprise a process of negotiation and bargaining through which Moshe successfully 'convinces' Hashem to forgive the people for worshipping the egel. These conversations are exceedingly complex and require very thorough unpacking. Often, when we encounter negotiations in the Torah, it seems unclear what is at issue and what each party is arguing. This tendency is especially pronounced in Ki Tisa, where a superficial read shows Moshe simply repeating the same "Forgive the people" request again and again, and Hashem responding indirectly and, often, obscurely. Hopefully, a more careful look will shed light on the substance of the negotiations:

- a) What do Hashem and Moshe want at each stage of the conversation?
- b) What is Moshe's strategy in 'convincing' Hashem to forgive the people? A careful reading of Moshe's requests and arguments reveals a definite strategy, to which Moshe remains faithful and which eventually succeeds in achieving his goal for the people.

MOSHE AND THE PEOPLE:

Moshe's relationship with the people through this crisis is also complex and subtle: Is his role to represent the people and achieve forgiveness for them, or to represent Hashem and punish the people -- or both?

THE EGEL:

We pick up as the Torah reports that the people make the egel and worship it:

SHEMOT 32:1-4:

The people saw that Moshe was delayed in descending the mountain. They gathered upon Aharon and said to him, "Arise and make us a god to go before us, for this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we have no idea what has happened to him . . . They made a plated calf ("egel") and said, "This is your god, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

At first, the people credit Moshe credit with "bringing us up from the land of Egypt." But once they have created the egel, the people transfer this credit to the idol: "This is your god, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Who indeed brought the people up from the land of Egypt? To us it seems clear that it is Moshe and not the golden calf who deserves credit, but when we turn to the conversation between Hashem and Moshe, it is apparent that they, too, debate this question: Who brought Bnei Yisrael up from the land of Egypt? This question, a recurring theme in the struggle between Hashem and Moshe, will assume tremendous importance as we continue.

PLACING THE BLAME:

The Torah now 'switches cameras' from the scene of the egel-worship to the scene at the top of Har Sinai, as Hashem reports to Moshe what the people have been up to in his absence. As you read the section (reproduced below), think about the following questions:

- 1) Whose nation is it that has worshipped the egel?
- 2) Who is responsible for "bringing them up from Egypt"?
- 3) Whose God/god is whose?
- 4) What arguments does Moshe use to convince Hashem not to kill the people, and why?

SHEMOT 32:7-14

Hashem said to Moshe, "Go down [the mountain], for YOUR NATION has become corrupt, whom YOU BROUGHT UP from the land of Egypt. They have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a plated calf and have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your god, Yisrael, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Hashem said to Moshe, "I have seen this nation, and it is a stiff-necked nation. Now, let Me alone, so My anger may burn against them and I will consume them, and I will make you into a great nation."

Moshe beseeched Hashem, his God, and said, "Why, God, let Your anger burn against YOUR NATION, whom YOU BROUGHT out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should Egypt say, 'Evilly did He take them out, to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the Earth'? Return from Your burning anger, and retract the evil [decree] for Your nation! Remember Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya'akov, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your name, saying, 'I shall increase your descendants as the stars of the sky, and all of this land which I have mentioned, I shall give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" God retracted the evil He had said He would do to His nation.

WHOSE NATION?

Hashem claims that this nation is "amkha," your (Moshe's) nation. He distances Himself from the people at the same time as He makes Moshe responsible for them and their actions. This is the first hint Hashem drops that Moshe is supposed to rise to the people's defense.

But Moshe shoots back that the nation is Hashem's nation, insisting that He 'must' acknowledge His connection to them. This is one of the major themes which will control much of what Moshe says in Ki Tisa in attempting to regain Hashem's favor for the people.

WHO "BROUGHT THEM UP FROM EGYPT"?

Hashem claims that it is Moshe who brought the people out of Egypt. This is yet another way of making Moshe

responsible for the people, and therefore a hint to him that he is supposed to defend them. It also distances Him from the people, weakening the covenantal relationship as it sarcastically echoes the idolatrous people's claim: The people first gave Moshe credit for taking them out of Egypt, and then transferred this credit to the egel; Hashem does the same thing, first giving credit to Moshe and then quoting the people giving credit to the egel. The subtext: "What chutzpah! First they give you credit, then they give the idol credit, when it was I who took them out of Egypt! Not just idol-worshippers, but ungrateful idol-worshippers!"

But Moshe claims that it was Hashem who took the people out of Egypt. Moshe is once again reminding Hashem of His relationship with and responsibility for Bnei Yisrael.

THIS GOD IS MY GOD, THIS GOD IS YOUR GOD . . .

Hashem, furious with the people for worshipping the idol, echoes their claim that for them, the egel is god. Moshe does not try to argue with Hashem on this score; it would be tough to make the case that the people remain devoted to Hashem while they idolatrously cavort around the work of their own hands at the foot of the mountain. Reflecting the fact that at this point, it is Moshe alone who remains faithful to Hashem, the "narrator" of the Torah refers to Hashem as Moshe's God alone: Moshe beseeches "the Lord, HIS God."

MOSHE'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Moshe marshals several arguments to convince Hashem not to kill Bnei Yisrael on the spot:

1) Relationship: You have already taken them ("YOUR nation") out of Egypt with great fanfare and a display of awesome power.

2) Hillul Hashem (desecration of God's name or reputation): the Egyptians will think of You as an evil God, confirming their pagan beliefs that a deity is basically a demonic being who must be appeased, rather than what You are, a benevolent being who must be positively worshipped.

As we saw in Parashat Bo, one of the primary aims of the plagues and the other miracle of the Exodus was to teach Egypt and the rest of the world about Hashem's power and His benevolence toward His nation. Nothing could uproot this lesson more thoroughly than Hashem's destruction of that special nation.

3) Past Promises: You have sworn to their forefathers that they will inherit the land.

None of Moshe's arguments come anywhere near saying that the people actually deserve to survive on their own merits; all of Moshe's arguments depend on external factors.

One other interesting note to the above scene is that although the text gives the impression that Moshe immediately responds to Hashem's fury by begging Him to spare the people, after which he descends the mountain to deal with the people himself, mefarshim (commentators) disagree about the chronology of the scene.

Ibn Ezra believes that Moshe does not actually respond here, and that he first goes down to destroy the egel and punish its worshippers; only then does he return to Hashem and deliver the tefila (prayer) above (this requires Ibn Ezra to assert that the Torah records Moshe's tefila here out of chronological order). Ibn Ezra is motivated to read the story this way partly for textual reasons, but also (as he states) because he thinks it impossible that Hashem would forgive the people while the egel remained among them.

Ramban, however, believes that Moshe does respond immediately to Hashem's threat to destroy the people. He, too, is motivated partly by textual reasons, but also by the argument that Moshe simply did not have the 'luxury' of descending the mountain to deal with the sinners. He had to deal with the Divine emergency and convince Hashem not to simply wipe the people out; then he could begin to address their crime.

DEALING WITH THE PEOPLE:

Moshe succeeds in saving the people from immediate, utter destruction, but there is still a lot left to do:

1) To seek complete forgiveness from Hashem for the people. So far, all he has achieved is preventing Hashem from

destroying Bnei Yisrael. He still must give the relationship a future.

2) To punish the people, help them understand the magnitude of what they have done, and guide them in a process of teshuva (repentance).

First, the Torah says that Moshe turns to go down to 'take care' of the people. But then, strangely, the Torah pauses for a detailed description of the Luhot and how specially they were formed; one senses that the Torah treats us to this detailed description of the divinely carved character of the Luhot because they are about to be smashed.

SHEMOT 32:19-20 --

When he approached the camp and saw the egel and the dancing, Moshe's anger burned. He cast the Luhot from his hands and shattered them at the base of the mountain. He took the egel they had made, burned it in fire, ground it up fine, spread it over the surface of the water, and made Bnei Yisrael drink.

"PLANNED SPONTANEITY":

The Torah's account of Moshe's approach to the camp makes it sound like seeing the egel and the dancing is what arouses his anger. But we know that Moshe already knows what is ahead even before he sees it -- after all, Hashem himself has told Moshe how they have been keeping busy while he is gone -- and in fact, Moshe tells Yehoshua what is ahead as they descend the mountain! Why does the Torah make it sound as if the sight of the egel and the dancing arouses Moshe's anger? Why is he angry only now, and not since all the way back when he heard about the egel? Furthermore, while the Torah makes Moshe's smashing of the Luhot sounds like a spontaneous reaction to spontaneous anger, since we know that Moshe has known about the egel the whole way down the mountain, it seems logical that he brings the Luhot with him for the express purpose of smashing them. How do we look at the smashing of the Luhot -- as a calculated demonstrative act or a spontaneous expression of fury?

Note also the irony connected with Moshe's anger: while we just heard him beg Hashem, "Al ye-khereh apekha," "Do not let Your anger burn," now we see him doing exactly that himself: "Va-yi-khar af Moshe"! Note also the irony in that despite his begging Hashem not to kill the people, he is about to turn around and do exactly that himself! Yes, Hashem had wanted to kill everyone and Moshe had "only" 3,000 people killed, but it is still highly ironic that the defender turns into the accuser! Moshe has us coming and going -- is he with us or against us?

Moshe's job is to heal the relationship between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. This means he has to play both ends. When Moshe faces Hashem and Hashem tells him to stand aside so that He can blast the people with a lightning bolt (so to speak), Moshe knows that even in His anger, Hashem is hinting that Moshe should defend the people - Hashem wants to be appeased. (If He did not mean to hint to Moshe to stand his ground and defend, He would just blast the people without warning Moshe). Moshe plays the role of appeaser, reminding Hashem of all the reasons He shouldn't destroy the people. Moshe's role in the face of Hashem's anger is to hold his own anger completely in check for if he, too, becomes angry, how will he be able to save the people?

But when Moshe faces the people, he allows his anger to blossom. The people have been attacked by a virulent form of spiritual cancer, and to survive they need radical surgery. If, without knowing the context, you watched a surgeon amputate a limb, you might think the surgeon a cruel torturer. But the truth is that he or she is a healer; without the amputation, the patient would die. Moshe seems full of cruelty and anger, but the truth is that he comes as a healer. The people need an amputation to avoid the greater threat, so that Hashem will be satisfied that justice has been done. Also, in order to be rehabilitated back into relationship with Hashem, the people need to experience punishment and guilt. They need to understand what they have done, deeply regret it, and deeply desire to return to Hashem. So when Moshe faces the egel and the dancing, he gives free reign to the anger he choked back before.

The mefarshim pick up on various themes which hint that part of Moshe's strategy is to induce in the people an awareness of what they have done and a sense of guilt. Seforno addresses the question of Moshe's use of the Luhot to teach the people a lesson:

SEFORNO, SHEMOT 32:15:

"With the two tablets in his hand": He [Moshe] reasoned that when he returned, they would repent, and if not, he would smash them [the Tablets] right in front of them to shock them into repentance.

The smashing of the Luhot is not a completely spontaneous reaction to Moshe's own anger; it is something he plans

while he makes his way down the mountain. His anger at seeing the egel and the dancing -- anger which he purposely lets loose at this point -- adds authentic passion to the gesture of smashing the Luhot in front of the people.

Ramban adds to the picture with his explanation of why Moshe has the people drink the dust of the egel. Other mefarshim say that eating the dust reveals who has participated in the worship: just as the waters drunk by the sota [woman accused of adultery] show whether a woman has been unfaithful, these waters will show if the people have been unfaithful to Hashem. But the Ramban adds a different suggestion, a psychological one:

RAMBAN, SHEMOT 32:20:

. . . He wanted to show contempt for what they had made, so he ground up their god and put it into their bellies so that they should excrete it in their excrement, as it says, "Cast them [your idols] out like an outcast, tell them, 'Get out!'" (Isaiah 30:22). According to our rabbis, he also meant to test them like a sota, so that "their belly would swell and their thigh fall away," and that is the truth.

Before they can do teshuva, Bnei Yisrael need to understand what they have done and develop a sense of revulsion for it. They need to feel a powerful sense of harata [regret], an integral part of teshuva. One way of making the people feel this revulsion is to transform the egel, the object of their worship, into something palpably disgusting; in addition, Moshe's action forces the people to demonstrate (literally) their rejection of the egel, also a basic element of teshuva.

Moshe's next task is to respond to the demands of justice by wiping out the chief participants in the worship of the egel. Last week we developed the picture of the Kohen as a person who relinquishes his personhood, his individuality, in order to function as a proper conduit between Hashem and the people. If this Kohenic character is shared to some degree by the rest of Shevet Levi, it fits that specifically Levi volunteers to mete out punishment in Hashem's place, ignoring the bonds of love and friendship in representing Hashem's justice to the people -- in carrying out in microcosm the destruction Hashem had wanted to carry out in macrocosm.

A CONSPIRACY TO FORGIVE:

This brings us to the next encounter between Hashem and Moshe.

SHEMOT 32:30-35 --

The next day, Moshe said to the people, "You have sinned greatly; now I shall ascend to Hashem -- perhaps I will be able to atone for your sin." Moshe returned to Hashem and said, "O, this people have sinned greatly and made for themselves a golden god. Now, if You will forgive them, [good,] but if not, erase me from the book You have written!" Hashem said to Moshe, "Whomever has sinned against Me, him will I erase from My book! Now go and lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you; My angel shall go before you. But on the day I choose, I will recall their sin upon them!"

Moshe saved the people's lives with his first tefilla, but now he must find a way to convince Hashem to forgive them and reestablish relationship with them. He adopts a very aggressive strategy: "Erase me from the book You have written!" Many of us know Rashi's interpretation: "Erase me from the Torah." But most other mefarshim disagree and say that "the book You have written" is not the Torah, it is the Book of Life, or the book of merits and sins which is before Hashem. In other words, "If You will not forgive them, then kill me!" (Rashbam and others).

"NO" MEANS "YES":

On the surface of things, Hashem seems to brush Moshe off and refuse his request -- "I will erase the sinners, not you. Now go back to your job and lead the people." But buried in this refusal is something quite new: "Take them to Israel" (!) Not only will Hashem not destroy Bnei Yisrael, but in fact they will still be traveling to Eretz Yisrael to inherit the land promised to them. This subtle shift -- subtle because it seems buried within a context of refusal of Moshe's bold demand -- is a pattern which spans the parasha: Moshe demands complete forgiveness in different ways, and Hashem, seeming to refuse, actually grants the request in part. The cumulative result is that Hashem edges closer and closer to completely forgiving the people, until, close to the end of the parasha (as we will see next week), He forgives them completely and returns His Presence to them.

This pattern raises our awareness of a fascinating aspect of these conversations: Hashem seems angry and vengeful, threatening to destroy the people, refusing to forgive, turning Moshe down again and again. But along the way, Hashem continues to drop hints to Moshe that he is doing the right thing by defending Bnei Yisrael and challenging Hashem's decrees. If not for these hints, it would be difficult to understand why Hashem does not simply blast Moshe to dust for his

chutzpah and stubbornness [who is more "keshei oref" than Moshe himself?] in refusing His commands: "Leave Me, so that I may destroy them!" Moshe refuses to budge, and instead launches into a tefila to save Bnei Yisrael -- a successful tefila. Moshe understands that by telling him to "stand aside" so that he can destroy the people, Hashem is really saying, "Don't stand aside! Play the defender!" Hashem certainly does not need Moshe to stand aside to strike at Bnei Yisrael, so when Hashem asks Moshe to make way, Moshe reads, "I [Hashem] am so angry that I am about to destroy the people. The only thing 'in the way' is you, Moshe -- the only thing that can stop Me is your interceding for the people. If you stand aside, if you do not pray for them, I will destroy them."

Moshe then takes the initiative, demanding forgiveness or death (reminding all of us Americans, of course, of Patrick Henry). While the exoteric formulation of Hashem's response is a refusal, it is actually a partial accession to Moshe's request. As we will see, this pattern is one that will continue. [You may recall that Avraham displays similar 'chutzpah' in challenging Hashem's plan to destroy Sedom and Amora. Avraham knows that he is expected to challenge; if not, God would have had no need to tell him of His plans for Sedom.]

Hashem does not want to destroy the people; He wants to forgive them. He communicates this to Moshe in subtle ways, but on the surface He remains angry and distant. In a sense, Hashem and Moshe are partners in a conspiracy of mercy, an under-the-table effort to forgive the people. Moshe immediately senses this and plays the role of audacious defender, while Hashem continues to play the role of vengeful and angry prosecutor and punisher. Hashem helps Moshe, as we will see, by supplying Him with the strategy which will allow him to achieve the goal desired by both of them: the return of Hashem's Presence to the people.

This 'conspiracy,' and the fact that Hashem is implicitly instructing Moshe to play the defender's role, is noted by Hazal in a midrash quoted by Rashi (33:11). Moshe has moved the "Ohel Mo'ed" outside the camp, a move interpreted by Hazal as Moshe's understanding that just as Hashem has withdrawn from the Bnei Yisrael, so should His faithful servant, Moshe, withdraw from them. But Hashem tells Moshe that he is wrong:

RASHI 33:11 --

Hashem told Moshe to return to the camp. He said to him, "If I am angry, and you are angry, who will draw the Bnei Yisrael close?!"

Despite His anger, Hashem wants to forgive the people, and He communicates this to Moshe, although perhaps with subtler hints than the conversation imagined by the midrash to express this idea.

MY ANGEL SHALL GO BEFORE YOU":

Getting back to the scene above, although Hashem promises to punish the people at some point, it seems that they are basically "back on track" to go to Eretz Yisrael and inherit the land. If so, however, then the parasha should end here; the reason it does not is also 'buried' in this section: "My angel shall go before you." Hashem Himself will not be coming with the people (=no Mishkan, as we have discussed at length). Moshe notices this, and does not respond -- but he also does not carry out Hashem's orders! So Hashem gives the orders again. Usually, when the word "va-yomer" appears to tell us that someone says something, and then "va-yomer" appears again to introduce another statement by the same person, the implication is that the other party to the conversation has not responded to the first statement; the first party has paused, waiting for a response, but when it does not come, he begins again, so the Torah gives us another "va-yomer," as it does here:

SHEMOT 33:1-6:

HASHEM SAID ["va-yomer" again] to Moshe, "Go, arise from here, you and the nation you brought up from Egypt, to the land I promised to Avraham, to Yitzhak, and to Ya'akov, saying, 'To your descendants shall I give it.' I will send an angel before you, and I shall drive out the Kena'ani, Emori, Hiti, Perizi, Hivi, and Yevusi. [Go to] the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go up with you, for you are a stiff-necked nation, and I might destroy you on the way." The people heard this evil thing and mourned. No one put on his decorative ornaments. Hashem said to Moshe, "Tell the Bnei Yisrael, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if I accompany you for even a second, I will destroy you. Now remove your decorations, and I will decide what to do to you.'"

Hashem repeats to Moshe the command to lead the people to Eretz Yisrael (since Moshe has not budged so far), repeats that He will send an angel before them, and makes even clearer than before that He Himself will not be making the trip with them. It seems that there is no progress in the forgiveness effort. But a second look shows that Moshe's silent refusal to budge has quite effectively 'changed' Hashem's mind on several scores:

1) The land has now become "the land I promised to the Avot," not simply "the place I told you," as in Hashem's last command. This implies that Hashem has accepted Moshe's reminder (in his first tefila) that He promised the land to their forefathers, and that He therefore 'must' acknowledge a strong historic connection with and commitment to the people.

2) The angel will not just "go before them," but will help them conquer the powerful nations there.

3) The land is described as a wonderful place to be, flowing with milk and honey. The angry Hashem who commanded, "Take them to that place I told you!" now says, "Take them to the land flowing with milk and honey, the land promised to their forefathers, the land I will help them conquer through My angel." The latter statement simply cannot come out of an angry countenance.

4) Hashem's not accompanying the people is formulated not as a punishment, a punitive withdrawal of the Divine Presence, but as a form of mercy. Hashem recognizes that the people's ingrained habits and beliefs make it impossible for them to walk the straight and narrow, remaining always completely obedient. If He were to accompany them personally, any failure on their part to meet divine standards of faithfulness would demand that He destroy them, for His accompanying them would mean that any rebellion would be "in His face" and demand swift and extreme punishment. Hashem must withdraw so that when the people fail, they will, in a sense, be rebelling only against Hashem's angel, not against the Divine Presence itself.

The Torah tells us that the people hear this and mourn, understanding that their behavior has caused the departure of the Shekhina. But then, puzzlingly, Hashem commands Moshe to deliver this message again. Also puzzling is Hashem's command to the people to remove their ornaments, despite the fact that the Torah tells us that the people, in their mourning, had already removed their ornaments on their own, caught up in sadness and guilt. Why command what has already been done?

Hashem's command to Moshe to repeat to the people that He will not accompany them fits perfectly into the pattern we have noted of Hashem's external anger but internal mercy and desire to forgive. Hashem is trying to emphasize to the people that the withdrawal of His Presence is not a punishment, but a merciful recognition that the people cannot handle the demands of faithful obedience implied by Hashem's immediate personal Presence. And the command to remove the already-removed decorations reinforces the impression that Hashem is only externally angry -- He decrees a non-decree, prescribing mourning that the people have already performed independently. He purposely adds nothing substantive to the people's mourning or sadness, only preserving the outward facade of His unforgiving, blaming posture.

We will continue next week with the final scenes of the 'conspiracy to forgive.'

Shabbat Shalom

Note: Emphasis added

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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 a 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 Unkelus 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 letzachek" - 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 letzachek', 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** letzachek'! [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 yenekeh 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 yenekeh Hashem** - He will not forgive

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

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

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

MORE MIDOT HA-DIN

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

following promise:

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

[On the other hand...]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIRST LUCHOT

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

SECOND LUCHOT

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

FROM DIN TO RACHAMIM

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

Let's take now a closer look:

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

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

C. **Rav chesed ve-emet --> (3) oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
abounding kindness for all, potentially even for the wicked [This may allow the possibility of 'rasha ve-tov lo'] in contrast to **exacting** kindness, and hence, limited exclusively to those who obey Him.
[Note that the mida of emet is now required, for this abounding kindness for all must be complemented by the attribute of truth to assure ultimate justice.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SELICHOT

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part One

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

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

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

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

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

FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part Two

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. The second luchot are carved by man, and not by God.

Attempt to relate this requirement based on the nature of the 13 **midot**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

this verb (r.a.h.) at Ma'amad Har Sinai, especially 20:15, 20:19. See also 19:21, 24:10, & Dvarim 5:21! Could you say that 'seeing is believing'?

If you had fun with that one, you can also try an easier one: the use of the word 'ra'a' [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.