

THE DEPTHS OF WINTER

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

for a long period of time into the future. But...we are definitely coming out of the depths of winter and that itself is a good thing.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha KI TISA 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

How Leaders Fail (Ki Tissa 5781)

Covenant & Conversation

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

As we have seen in both Vayetse and Vaera, leadership is marked by failure. It is the recovery that is the true measure of a leader. Leaders can

fail for two kinds of reason. The first is external. The time may not be right. The conditions may be unfavourable. There may be no one on the other side to talk to. Machiavelli called this Fortuna: the power of bad luck that can defeat even the greatest individual. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we fail. Such is life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tell me," Saul replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

God becomes angry. Moses pleads with Him to spare the people. He then descends the mountain, sees what has happened, smashes the

Tablets of the Law he has brought down with him, burnes the idol, grinds it to powder, mixes it with water and makes the Israelites drink it. Then he turns to Aaron his brother and asks, "What have you done?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now let us fast forward to the sin of the Golden Calf and its aftermath. Moses pleads with God to forgive the nation. God responds that He dare not dwell in the midst of Israel, lest He destroy them at their next transgression. Moses then asks to be shown God’s glory, to understand God’s ways in this world. God explains that a living human cannot see His face, since that would require a complete understanding of the Divine. But His back – a partial glimpse – could and would be revealed. Moses then stands on the cleft of a rock on Mount Sinai, the very place of God’s previous revelation of the Ten Commandments, and he receives a second revelation, a second “service to God on this mountain:”

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

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

Ki Tisa 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana | Mar 2, 2021

Frustrating the Diabolical Plans of Enemies

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

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

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

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

I submit:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the Song at the Sea (Shirat Hayam, Shemot 15:7) the survivors sang:

“With Your infinite genius You destroyed those who rose up against You. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like straw”

At first glance, one would think that instead of:

“With Your infinite genius You destroyed those who rose up against You”

the wording should be:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Christian Crusades (of the 21st Century?)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Me Yoday'ah – Who Knows?!

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Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 6 March 2021 / 22 Adar 5781

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Ki Tisa

No Spare Tie

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

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

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

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

Life is about distinguishing the essence from the nonsense.

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

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

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

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

“Reverence for Learning in Jewish Tradition”

(updated and revised from Kee Tisah 5763-2003)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

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

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

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

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

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

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

The determining factor that governs this relationship of ultimate reverence for a teacher is the primacy of Torah—which is regarded as the elixir of life! As our Maariv (evening) liturgy states (based on

Deuteronomy 32:47)—“They [the words of the Torah] are our life and the length of our days, and upon them we must meditate day and night.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

May you be blessed.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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

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

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

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

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

Moshe came down from the mountain and saw the nation worshipping the golden calf. He was so upset and enraged that he smashed the tablets. The Midrash asks a great question: Why didn’t Moshe smash the tablets when he was on top of the mountain? After all, Hashem had already told him everything that was transpiring, and without sparing any of the details!

Seeing for yourself

The Midrash answers by saying,

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

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

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

Appreciation

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas Ki Sisa - Higher than Sinai

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Good Shabbos

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

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

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

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

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Ki Tisa: What was Aaron thinking?!

Ben-Tzion Spitz

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

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

Aaron then commands that the crowd gather all the gold in their families' possession and bring it to him. The crowd obliges. Aaron throws the gold into the fire and out comes the infamous Golden Calf, which members of the crowd rapidly announce to be Israel's new god, just a number of weeks after they had heard the voice of God commanding them not to worship anybody or anything else.

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

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

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

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

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

Dedication - To Pesach cleaning. Now it begins.

Shabbat Shalom

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

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Ki Tisa - 17 Adar 5781 March 1, 2021

Sin, Compassion, and Leadership

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

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

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

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

Moses began a series of actions. First, he broke the Tablets of the Covenant that he had brought down from Mount Sinai, understanding that a nation that worships a golden calf could conceivably also make

the tablets into a sort of idol. After that, he burned the calf and punished those who had initiated the sin. Then Moses turned to G-d to plea that He not punish the nation for their sin. During the prayer, a fascinating dialogue took place between Moses and G-d; one whose significance has been analyzed by commentators and philosophers for generations. We will take a peek at the writings of the giant of Jewish thought, Maimonides, who dedicated a long chapter to this in his monumental book "A Guide to the Perplexed."

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

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

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

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

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

Rav Kook Torah

Ki Tissa: A Chair with Three Legs

Chanan Morrison

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

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

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

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

What was this "chair with three legs"?

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

Three Inherited Traits

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

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

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

How did worshipping the golden calf change this?

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

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

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

The Advantage of Three Legs

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

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

(Adapted from *Ein Eyah vol. 1, pp. 143-144*)

1 See *Yevamot 79a*.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Sisa

פרשת כי תשא תשפ"א

זה יתנו כל העבר על הפקדים מחצית השקל השקל הקדש

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

Why were the people commanded to give only a half-shekel? It clearly was not due to financial difficulty. It is not as if another half-shekel would have placed anyone on the poverty list. It is almost as if the Torah wants to send a message with the “half” shekel amount. Indeed, the commentators, each in his own inimitable approach, underscore the value of a “half” and how it applies to each Jew – knowing that on his own he is fractioned, he is not whole. He needs his fellow in order for him to become whole. *Horav YOSHIAHU PINTO, Shlita*, offers a powerful insight which should engender some non-ambiguous deliberation on our part. A Jew should believe, and this conviction should remain the principle upon which he is able to confront issues – both adverse and propitious – that all we see, all with which we are confronted, is only “half,” part of reality. There is always another perspective, the rest of the story, a second look, two sides to every coin. In other words, what we see and what we experience constitute partial reality. It may appear dismal and bleak now, but be patient, it will change for the better. Likewise, one should not think that his good fortune is here to stay. He could be experiencing the “other side, second half” of the coin – or the beginning.

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

(grind) the kernels into white powder. When he saw the flour mixed with water produce delicious bread, however, he understood that he had always been looking at part of the story.

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

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

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

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

The last three words of the Torah are: *l’inei Bnei Yisrael*, “before the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*.” This refers to Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s greatest act of leadership, indeed, his epitaph: He broke the *Luchos* before the eyes of the Jewish people. Hashem agreed with Moshe’s decision. This is how the Torah ends. It begins with the Creation of the world and ends with (so to speak) the breaking of the *Luchos*. Clearly this begs elucidation. Does the Torah not present any other closing lesson, any other leadership decision that Moshe made that might deserve greater mention? Furthermore, how was Moshe able to break the *Luchos*? It is not as if the *Luchos* were made by man and, thus, susceptible to human intervention. What is made by man can be broken by man. The *Luchos* were created by Hashem. The Almighty did not just go down to a quarry, pick up some stones and engrave them with the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. He fashioned them from the raw material (which some say was sapphire) to the unique, miraculous engraving (from both sides). A human being cannot destroy what Hashem makes unless...the letters flew off (as they did), leaving plain stone. How could this be broken?

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

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, supplements this with a commentary from the *Daas Zekeinim M’Baalei Tosfos*. (I have searched for the source and have not succeeded in locating it.) What prompted Moshe to break the *Luchos*? *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 87b) explain that Moshe made the following *kal v’chomer* (the most basic hermeneutic principle; an argument *afortiori*; literally lenient and strict, deriving one law from

another, using the logic that, if a case which is generally strict has a particular leniency, then a case which is generally lenient will certainly have that leniency). *Korban Pesach*, which is only one of the 613 *mitzvos*, may not be eaten by a ben *neichar*, one whose actions have estranged him from Judaism (or a gentile), so certainly, if one becomes a total apostate by embracing an idol, then he surely has no part of our religion. In other words, people who reject Hashem by trading Him for a Golden Calf have no business connecting to the *Luchos*. The question is obvious: Reject the people, but why shatter the *Luchos*? Punish the sinners, but place the *Luchos* in a safe place for another time, for another group of Jews. Why do something that completely puts an end to all hope for reconciliation? Hashem agreed and even thanked Moshe for his taking the law into his own hands, so it obviously was a good decision. Agreed, but why?

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

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

ילך נא ד' בקרבנו כי עם קשה ערף הוא

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hashem looked at the Jewish people who were sinning with the Golden Calf. This was an egregious sin generated by the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, but, like a conflagration burning through a forest of dry trees, it was quickly swallowing up the people whose defenses against sin were still weak. Hashem told Moshe, “You had better get down there. They need you. Without your merits to protect the nation, there might no longer be a nation. Your presence is demanded elsewhere.”

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

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

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

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

The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* was an outspoken proponent of *aliyah*, emigration, to *Eretz Yisrael*. He wanted to personally relocate to the Holy Land. It was not, however, part of Hashem’s plan for him. The *Gaon’s talmidim*, students, did make a strong, dedicated effort to immigrate there. It was a difficult and dangerous undertaking, given that

the high seas were not easily traversable with the wooden sail/ships that was the mode of travel over two centuries ago. If one survived the ordeal and safely embarked in the Holy Land, he had experienced a miracle. Since survival in the Holy Land was also far from a bed of roses, these individuals were highly-dedicated, spiritually devoted to living a life of greater connectivity to Hashem in a place that bespoke spirituality, where every stone and mound of earth was sacred.

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

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

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

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

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

"Days passed, and the economic adversity in our home became more intense. It was then that I started my 'lie.' I told my mother that the *cheder* I attended would be serving lunch. For two years, my mother

would ask me, 'Yankele, did you have lunch?' and I replied, 'Yes.' This is my lie for which I am terribly ashamed." He sat down and once again broke down in incessant weeping.

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

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

Va'ani Tefillah

ובה וברכה הן והסד ורחמים – *Tovah u'vrachah, chein v'chesed v'rachamim*. Good and blessing, favor and kindness and mercy.

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

Dedicated לזכר נשמת our father, grandfather

Horav Doniel Schur Z"l הרב דניאל בן הרב אברהם ארי' ליב שור ז"ל

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הונצח על ידי בניו, בנותיו וכל משפחתו

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Anointing Oil

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Who?

Who may be anointed with the shemen hamish'cha?

Question #2: What?

What are the ingredients of the shemen hamish'cha?

Question #3: Where?

Where is the shemen hamish'cha poured?

Introduction:

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

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

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

smears shemen hamish'cha on his leg as a balm violates the prohibition of the Torah (Kerisus 7a).

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

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

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

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

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

How much kinneman?

How many units of kinneman are used? In other words, what do the words, "kinneman, half of which is 250 shekel," mean? And, if it means simply that we are to take 500 shekel-weight of kinneman, why not say so, clearly?

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

What are its ingredients?

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

Mor

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

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

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

Kinneman

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

Fragrant smelling reed

The Ramban (Commentary to Shemos 30:34) identifies knei bosem, fragrant-smelling cane or reed, with a species called, in Arabic, darasini, which I am told is the Arabic word for cinnamon. Thus, the Ramban agrees with Rashi that cinnamon is one of the spices used in the shemen hamish'cha, but disagrees as to

which Hebrew word refers to it. There will be a difference between them as to how much cinnamon is included, since there are 500 shekel-weights of kinneman and only 250 of "fragrant smelling reeds."

Kiddah

According to Rashi and Targum Onkelos, the Aramaic word for kiddah is ketziyah, which is cognate to, and usually translated as, cassia, a tree whose scientific name is Cinnamomum cassia, which is similar to cinnamon and also has a fragrant bark. Again, this identification is not certain. The Rambam calls it "kost" (often pronounced and printed with the Hebrew letter shin as kosht), which is usually assumed to be costus, the root of an annual herb called Sausurea lappa.

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

How is it used?

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

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

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

Qualitative or quantitative?

What do the words, "any likeness of its formulation shall not be made" mean?

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

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

Kareis

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

Part II

Question Group #1: Who?

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

Question Group #2: What?

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

Question Group #3: Where?

Where is the *shemen hamish'cha* poured?

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

Introduction:

Parshas Ki Sissa contains the beautiful mitzvah of processing and using the anointing oil, the *shemen hamish'cha*, a mitzvah with which most people are not that familiar. I should, actually, say "three mitzvos," since the *Rambam* and the

Sefer Hachinuch note that there are three *mitzvos*, one positive *mitzvah* (*mitzvas aseih*) and two negative (*lo saaseh*) *mitzvos*:

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

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

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

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

Who?

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

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

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

(2) The *kohein gadol*.

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

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

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

Seven days of dedication

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

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

The *kohein gadol*

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

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

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

The *kohein meshuach milchamah*

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

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

Judaic kings

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

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

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

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

Where?

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

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

Moshiach's arrival

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

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

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

How much?

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

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

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

Blending

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

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

Using

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

One of Rav Moshe Feinstein's *talmidim* related to me the following story that he, himself, observed. A completely red, female calf had been born. Since this is, indeed, a rare occurrence, much conversation developed concerning whether this

was positive indication that the *Moshiach* would be arriving soon, and this would provide the *parah adumah* necessary to make the *Beis Hamikdash*, the people and the vessels *tahor*.

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

לע"נ

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