

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

Ki Sisa 5774

שבת פרשת כי - תשא

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein

My Keyboard

A few days ago my computer screen showed me the dreaded words “your keyboard batteries are low.” Well even I know how to replace batteries or so I thought. For then I discovered that one of the batteries was completely wedged and stuck in the small tube that governs the keyboard. I could not remove it no matter how hard I tried or whatever instruments of destruction I used.

So I took the keyboard to my friendly Apple distributor here in Jerusalem and asked them to remove the battery. They labored mightily, consulted with each other often in dire whispers, and finally told me that they would have to send the keyboard away to some mysterious laboratory that would pursue the problem but they could not guarantee any results. And they also told me I would have to pay a considerable amount of shekels for the laboratory's unguaranteed attempt.

Needing my keyboard to produce my immortal prose and seeing that a new keyboard was almost the same price as fixing the old one, if the old one could in any way be fixed at all, I opened my wallet and plunged into the purchase of a new keyboard.

Arriving at home I followed the instructions as to how to install this miraculous device so that it would pair with my computer. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to follow the instructions on the screen some miracle happened and the keyboard began to work. Hence this brilliant article which you are now reading.

Since the keyboard is a wireless one, to my technologically ignorant mind its effectiveness borders on the miraculous and I am grateful for its ability to somehow transfer my thoughts on to the computer screen and eventually on to paper and into your psyche.

It struck me that my advanced computer with all of its gadgets, programs, preferences and connections to the entire world is fairly ineffective without a keyboard. Without it I could not respond to my emails nor could I work on the book that I am currently toiling to write. And certainly, I would be unable to write this article if I did not possess a working keyboard that somehow pairs with my computer.

For the first time I really realized why this device is called a keyboard and not a word board or letter board. Because it is the key to the entire project and to all of the technology associated with it. Without the keyboard one can perhaps receive but certainly not send messages and responses. Without the keyboard one cannot give written expression to one's thoughts and ideas. Without the keyboard the computer and all of its wondrous complexity is pretty much a useless machine.

And this set me thinking further about how halacha and ritual are the keyboards to Torah and Jewish life generally. Pretty much everyone agrees to the value system and general moral ideas that the Torah represents – charity, compassion, peace, human and personal harmony, knowledge and purposeful living. Yet that value system pretty much resembles the computer without the keyboard, for there is no detailed instruction sheet that will enable us to activate and actuate these values in our everyday lives. Without the keyboard that pairs with our moral computer, that system remains pretty much vacuous phrases and piously uttered platitudes.

Since I am mechanically challenged, I was delighted that somehow I was able to get my new wireless keyboard paired with my computer and working. I can't really explain how I did it or how the keyboard and the computer work together to produce written words. Yet, as you can see by reading this article somehow it works and pretty much to perfection.

The same is true of halacha, detail and ritual regarding Jewish life. The observance of the commandments, of the traditions of Israel and even of the apparently nagging minutiae in Jewish law and daily behavior

somehow connects us and pairs us with the great computer of Torah values and eternal life.

All of Jewish history proves this axiom of Jewish personal and societal life to be true. Meaningful survival as a people and as individuals has always been connected to having a keyboard that works and pairs us with the value system and eternity of Torah.

It would be wise for all of us to recharge the batteries of our keyboard and to make certain that they are strong and full so that we may also be blessed with the greatness of Torah observance and with a productive and valuable Jewish existence.

Shabat shalom

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Ki Tisa

Though the main topic of this week's parsha is certainly the fateful and nearly fatal incident of the Golden Calf, the opening subject of the parsha also bears study and insight. We see throughout the Torah that there is an emphasis placed on counting the numbers of Jews that left Egypt, those that existed in the Sinai desert and finally, those that arrived in the Land of Israel.

In this week's parsha the Torah provides us with the “Jewish” way of counting the people of Israel. We do not count people directly but rather indirectly, as is the case of the half-shekel tax that was imposed by Divine commandment at the beginning of this week's parsha. The number of Jews present and accounted for was arrived at by counting the number of half-shekels that were collected.

We also see later in Jewish history, at the time of King Saul, when he wanted to conduct a census of Israel he did so by having everyone donate a sheep. He then counted the sheep, again not counting the people directly. Even when we count the ten people necessary for a prayer quorum we do not count them directly but rather only by counting the number of words that appear in a certain verse in the Bible.

The Talmud teaches us that King David was found guilty and punished for counting the people directly during his reign. Why is the Torah so interested in the numbers of Jewish population? And why is the Torah so loath to count people in a direct manner?

Even today, the census here in Israel, unlike the ones I remember in the United States, is taken indirectly and no one has ever appeared at my door here in Jerusalem to count how many people live in our home. Apparently this is the “Jewish” way of determining population numbers, always in an indirect fashion.

I think that the lesson here is fairly obvious. No two people are alike and each one is really number one by himself or herself. There is no number two because there is no one else like number one. The uniqueness of every individual is one of the axioms of Jewish life and thought. While people may appear to be similar they are never identical.

Fingerprints and DNA testify to this phenomenon in the physical world. In the spiritual and personal world of our souls, personalities, creativity and accomplishments are unique to each one of us. We are all different for so have we been created by the Lord.

The Torah treats every individual as special and because of this places a emphasis on the numbers of the Jewish people. Look and see how many different people exist within us and yet somehow we are all connected and part of the great whole that is the people of Israel! By counting people directly we somehow minimize their individual qualities and uniqueness.

The Torah, which is interested always in promoting individuality and creativity, counts us many times to indicate our importance, but never directly. The Talmud teaches us that the greatness of God can be seen in

the fact that all human beings are stamped from the same die and yet no two are alike.

The Torah wishes us to understand and appreciate this lesson and transmit it to our lives through our actions and attitudes, our behavior and sensitivities. By so doing we “raise our heads” – ki tisa et rosh bnei yisrael - and become worthy of the Lord counting us amongst the eternal people of Israel.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tisa

For the week ending 15 February 2014 / 15 Adar I 5774

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

The Danger of Photography

"...these are your 'gods', Yisrael" (32:4)

It's difficult to imagine a world without photography.

Everywhere we are bombarded with images: social media, billboards, in magazines and newspapers, on television. On average more than 250 million photos per day were uploaded to Facebook in the three months ended December 31, 2011. That's equivalent to 7.5 billion photos a month or 10.4 million photos an hour; roughly 174,000 per minute, or almost 3,000 photos per second.

How does this mega-overload of images affect our view of the world?

Photography used to be expensive. A little more than a century ago, the first generation of photographers was likely to be comprised of the rich who could indulge their inquisitiveness in this newborn wonder. Fast forward to the 1960s when I started to photograph: 35 mm film, chemicals, and paper were much cheaper — but far from free; and anyway, almost every photographer who wanted to be taken seriously used film that was at least 2 1/4 inches square or 5 x 4 inches, or even 10 x 8 inches — and that meant serious money.

Apart from purely financial considerations, the cost of film and related materials provoked aesthetic ones as well. Before you trip the shutter to expose a piece of film that may cost you five dollars or more, you ask yourself, "Do I really want to photograph this? Is it worth it?"

Nowadays you can take a phone (who needs a camera anymore?) and make a photograph that costs virtually nothing. Nowadays, the last thing that enters your mind when you take a photograph is the cost.

We are awash in a gigantic ocean of photographic artifacts, almost beyond number. And each one declares itself to be a discrete existence; a stand-alone frozen moment of reality.

To create a verisimilitude of life in the days before the photograph required tremendous artistic skill. Before the photographic era the number of lifelike images and statues could be numbered in the thousands, maybe the tens of thousands, but no more. We live in an era littered with almost limitless artifacts of moments of reality.

How does this affect the way we see the world?

The Three Powers of Man

Man's powers may be divided into three: thought, speech and action. The power of thought is the highest, the most ephemeral and the most removed from physicality. A thought exists only for as long as the thinker thinks it. It has no independent existence. It lives just as long as the thinker thinks the thought.

Speech has a less evanescent lifespan. While the speaker speaks, the words have life. Unlike a thought, speech is not grasped instantaneously at a flash and all in one, but rather incrementally like the unfurling of a scroll. You only understand the full meaning of the speaker when he reaches the end of his words. Thus, speech does have a certain expansion in time — unlike thought. However, it has no definitive concrete existence and no independence from the speaker. When the speaker ceases to speak, the words cease to exist.

The power of action, which relates to the world of “things”, is the most concrete of the powers of Man. When you create a thing it proclaims an independent existence of its own. A “thing” seems to say, "I am real, I am solid, I am immutable, I have a life of my own." For only things can exist

without the constant input of their creator. When you create a thing — a photograph for example — the photograph exists independently of its creator and may well outlast him.

Three Worlds

In the mystical sources, these three powers of Man: thought, speech and action parallel three “worlds”. They are in descending order: the world of bria - “creation”, yetzira - “formation”, and this lowest of worlds in which we exist, asiya - “action”.

In the highest of these three worlds, the world of bria, it is impossible to think that anything has any independent existence. The angels ('spiritual messengers' would be a better term) in the world of bria are called Seraphim, from the Hebrew word meaning 'to burn' (l'srof). Anyone looking at a fire knows that the flame he is seeing now is not the flame that he saw a moment ago. That flame is already gone. What you are looking at now is a new reality, and then it is gone, and so on and so on. A thought is like a flame; its existence is for a second and then it is replaced with another, and another and another.

In the World of bria, the world of thought, every second is a separate unsustainable split-second of reality passing through the 'Mind' of the Creator.

But here in this world of asiya, the world of objects, it's all too easy to think that things have an independent existence. All objects, all things, are no more than the continuous creations of the Creator, and if the Creator withdrew His Will for that existence for the smallest fraction of a second, it would cease to exist.

In the Holy Tongue, the word for a thing, davar, has the same three letter root as dibbur, meaning 'a word.' “Things” are no more than the continual “speech” of The Creator constantly giving them existence.

When Yaakov came before his blind father Yitzchak to take the blessings of the firstborn, Yitzchak said, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esau". Two worlds: the world of the voice (the world of Speech) and the world of the hands (the world of action). The Midrash (Midrash Rabba Shemot 21:1) explains how the power of speech - the kol - is given to Yaakov. The power to bridge the worlds of thought and action is the province of the Jewish People.

We live in Esav's world. A world of things. A world that proclaims the independence of physical objects. The root of all idol worship is the belief that anything can have an existence independent of the Creator.

When the Jewish People made a golden calf to worship they were divesting themselves of their chosen role in existence: to proclaim the evanescence of all physical creations.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Ki Sisa

You shall observe the Shabbos, for it is holy to you. (31:14)

Shabbos is to the Jew much more than a mitzvah imperative. Shabbos is a holy day, consecrated from the beginning of time by the Almighty Himself. This is an idea which we often do not consider. If Hashem made this day holy, what right do we mortals have to desecrate it? People tend to offer two common excuses/answers to this question. First, "I do not care." This is the response of the individual who disregards the Torah. It has no bearing on his life. Such a person simply does not fit into the equation. He has written himself off from the Torah. He has divorced himself from the centerpiece, the nucleus, of Judaism. Second, is the Jew who claims to be a Jew at heart. He cares, but it is difficult for him to accept the yoke of mitzvos. He is a sort of non-practicing Jew. Regrettably, he is very much like a flashlight without its battery. It is still called a flashlight - but, without the battery, what function does it have?

If we keep in mind that Shabbos is holy and that devout Jews embrace this idea, we will better understand and appreciate the following vignettes: One Shabbos morning Horav Avraham, zl, m'Kopichnitz was walking to the Mikveh, to immerse himself prior to davening. He chanced upon two

young Jewish men who were not wearing headgear (hat or a yarmulke) standing outside the Mikveh. One of them held a lit cigarette between his fingers. The righteous Kopichnitzer turned to him and said, "I do not know you well, but I am certain that within your chest pounds a good Jewish heart. If you would realize how much pain you are causing me by smoking on Shabbos, you would surely not smoke."

The young man was moved by the Rebbe's sincerity, and immediately disposed of the cigarette. His friend, however, was not so acquiescent. "If we want to smoke, what is it your business? We are not in Europe. This is a free country. If I have no problem with your Shabbos observance, why then should you deprive me of my pleasure?"

The Rebbe smiled, "I recognize you, too," he said. "You also have a good heart. If you see someone fall and hurt himself, you would immediately run to help him. Why? Why do you simply not say, 'This is a free country, I do not have to help him!' You should know that one who profanes Shabbos breaks not only his leg; he endangers his entire spiritual dimension. He is punished with Heavenly excision. If I walk down the street and notice a Jew bleeding to death - will I not do everything to save him? Surely, I would be wrong to say, 'It is a free country!'"

The young man understood fully well where the Rebbe was going with his critique. "Rebbe, what should I do?" he asked.

"Keep Shabbos, observe it properly." The Rebbe said.

"I cannot do that. I already take off on Sunday. There is no way I can be free for two days."

"I understand," said the Rebbe, "but, at least, observe this Shabbos." The young man acquiesced and observed that Shabbos. Sometime later, he visited the Rebbe and said, "Once I observed that one Shabbos, my entire outlook was altered, and I now accept upon myself to observe Shabbos every week."

The second story takes us back seventy years to the Lodz Ghetto. Unique among Polish cities, Lodz was able to secure an agreement with the accursed Nazis to allow its Jewish citizens to work for the Third Reich. In return, the city would be designated as a labor camp, rather than an extermination camp. This, of course, did not prevent its inhabitants from succumbing to starvation, deprivation of health, infection and disease. Furthermore, every once in a while, the Nazis selected the infirm and sickly and sent them away to the dread extermination camps. So, yes, Lodz was not as dreadful a ghetto as the others, but it was a ghetto no less, and far from a happy place. In 1944, when it was clear that the tide had turned against them, the Nazis saw the Russians breathing down their necks and poised for an attack on Lodz, they began liquidating a good portion of the Jewish population. In the end, only 10,000 Jews remained in this once beautiful Jewish city.

There was a factory in Lodz which, prior to the occupation, had belonged to a Jew. Now it was under Nazi control. Its workers, however, were all Jewish. Among the workers was an individual who was nicknamed Reb Shabbos, because he related everything to Shabbos. Each day of the week was Shabbos related - either to the previous Shabbos or to the coming Shabbos. No one knew his origins. They knew only that his knowledge of Judaism seemed to be limited, but his knowledge and passion concerning Shabbos were prodigious.

Now that the Nazis had assumed ownership of the factory, the work week included Shabbos. This troubled Reb Shabbos, who rallied the men around him saying, "If we work an hour or two extra each day, we will fill our quota without having to work on Shabbos." His suggestion was accepted. The workers would show up on Shabbos at the designated time, but, instead of working, they davened. A worker stood guard at the door to notify them if any Nazis were coming to visit. One day, catastrophe struck. The guard had dozed off from sheer exhaustion and was not awake when one of the camp guards came visiting - during Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai.

This guard grew up in Lodz close to the Jewish neighborhood. He, therefore, was quite knowledgeable of Jewish tradition and conversant in Yiddish. "Ha! You are davening with such kavanah, concentration," the

guard began. "Have you begun laining, reading the Torah? Who is the Baal Korei, Torah reader?" he asked with a devious smile across his face.

The men realized that they were in a very serious predicament and were resigned to accepting the worst. Suddenly, Reb Shabbos came forth, approached the Nazi, and, with a sense of self-confidence, said, "Honored sir. Last night I had a compelling dream. My saintly father, may he rest in peace, appeared to me in the company of my departed mother. He implored me, 'My son, tomorrow is my yahtzeit. I beg of you to somehow convene a minyan and recite Kaddish. If you do not do this, I will descend from Heaven and take your life!' He reiterated his request and once again emphasized the punishment.

"It is because of this dream that I convinced nine other Jews to join me in prayer. Please do not hold them responsible. They are here because of me." The men could not believe what they were hearing. Essentially, Reb Shabbos was relinquishing his life for them. What was all the more shocking was the guard's reaction: "Good, but this better not happen again. The next time, you might not be so fortunate to have a 'nice' guard like me."

The men breathed a sigh of relief. They could not believe what had just transpired. It was a miracle. Nazi guards were not understanding people. They were cruel fiends. Apparently, there was something more to this Reb Shabbos than people realized. Indeed, as soon as the Nazi guard left the block, Reb Shabbos said, "Nu, let us return to our davening!"

They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf. (32:8)

Six weeks after the seminal event in Jewish history - the Giving of the Torah - the nation demonstrated that all was not "good." Thirty three hundred years later, we still experience the ramifications of chet ha'eigel, sin of the Golden Calf. Indeed, Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu, U'byom pakdi u'pakedeti aleihem chatasam, "And on the day that I make an accounting, I shall bring their sin to account against them" (Shemos 32:34). Rashi quotes the Talmud Sanhedrin 102a, where Chazal explain this pasuk: "There is no punishment that comes upon Yisrael which does not have in it some retribution for the sin of the Golden Calf." It is truly difficult for us, more than three millennia removed from that dreadful day, to come to terms with some understanding of how such an exalted nation could descend to such a nadir of depravity [after experiencing the greatest event in Jewish history].

Reasons are beyond our grasp, but lessons are not only within our level of comprehension - they are a requirement, a necessary tool to guide how a Jew should live and how he should serve Hashem. Every experience - both good and bad - imparts a lesson about which we must ruminate and with which we should imbue our lives. The most glaring lesson to be derived from the sin of the Golden Calf is that evil is not prejudiced. The yetzer hora, evil-inclination, can destroy anyone, regardless of his greatness and in spite of everything that he has experienced. Man is no match for the yetzer hora, and he must be acutely aware of that. Horav Moshe Rosenstein, zl, asked Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, this question: How could a nation that was so spiritually refined, that had been exposed to so much holiness and revelation of Godliness, plummet almost overnight to such a low point? The answer was simple, but incredibly profound: "This is the power of the yetzer hora."

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, would often relate how a young student, an exceptionally brilliant and holy student, lost an opportunity for spiritual distinction beyond anyone's dreams, in one night. At the funeral of Horav Moshe Kordovero, zl, author of the Tomar Devorah, the Arizal observed this young man who was in attendance. Speaking to him later on, the young man revealed that he had seen amudah d'nehora, an invisible pillar of Heavenly Fire, following behind the body of the deceased as it was carried to its final resting place. Rav Moshe Kordovero was, indisputably, a holy man. The fact that the young man saw what only the Arizal had been able to discern, was indicative of his own exalted spiritual plateau. The Arizal asked to speak with him again the next morning. It was the intention of this great mystic to propose his daughter to the young man.

The next day, the young man showed up, but, for some reason, the Arizal gave him the cold shoulder. Afterwards, the Arizal explained that he had noticed on the young man's forehead an indication that he had sinned that night. Overnight, he fell from his lofty, spiritual perch.

Horav Yerachmiel Kromm, Shlita, supports the notion of the invincibility of the yetzer hora with proof from Yaravam ben Nevat, whose erudite knowledge towered above that of all the scholars of his generation. It was no wonder that he was selected to succeed as Shlomo Hamelech's heir to the throne. Yet, due to a smidgen of envy for Rechavam's lineage from Shevet Yehudah, which allowed him to sit in the Azarah of the Bais Hamikdash, while Yaravam, who descended from Shevet Ephraim, could not, he diverted Klal Yisrael from going up to Yerushalayim. He was a choteh u'machati es ha'rabim, a sinner who also induced others to sin. Such a great man fell due to a twinge of unfounded jealousy. One cannot change his lineage. Obviously, Hashem wanted Yaravam to descend from the tribe of Ephraim. Live with it! He could not, and, as a result, he destroyed his life and the lives of countless others. Rather than go down in history as an exalted Jew worthy of emulation, he was recorded in infamy as a choteh u'machati.

Rav Kromm derives another important lesson from the chet ha'eigal: metinus, patience. The Satan succeeded in taking down the nation because they were befuddled, literally not knowing if they were coming or going. Everything was done b'mehirus, impetuously. They were impatient. Moshe had not returned on time. So what? Perhaps they were mistaken about his time of arrival. Why not give him the benefit of the doubt? When one lacks patience, is impulsive, acts without thinking the subject through, he will make critical mistakes, disastrous mistakes, like the Golden Calf. We are still paying for the impetuosity that they exhibited. "Seize the moment" applies to something good - not something bad. Saru maheir min ha'derech, "They have strayed quickly from the way": When one is flustered, not thinking cogently, he will make foolish, unforgivable mistakes.

Last, we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu exactly what should be the reaction when sinful behavior reaches a point of such depravity that there really is no return. He broke the Luchos. The Tablets had been fashioned by G-d. As such, they were no ordinary creation. Why did Moshe have to shatter them? Was there no other way for him to prove a point? Apparently, Moshe understood that if the nation had fallen to such a low point that they were dancing around a molten calf of their own creation, mere words would have no effect. He had to awaken them, to shatter their reverie, to bring them back to reality. Nothing less than breaking Hashem's handiwork would send the necessary message: It is all over. You have just acted in a manner so egregious that there is no other recourse but shattering the Luchos. You may do teshuvah and even receive a second set of Luchos, but, you have lost the first ones forever.

Indeed, Moshe's message worked, for, from that day on, until after Moshe's death, the nation never again lapsed in their relationship to Hashem. They complained; they bickered; they doubted, but they never turned to an idol. Moshe got his point across to them.

It becomes a serious problem when one begins to accept the behavior of others, which under normal circumstances would be offensive. Our comfort zone sadly seems to change when we become complacent. What used to be a shonda, shameful, now becomes tolerable. Fashionableness that once bespoke a level of sophistication today engenders an ambience of wanton shamelessness. What once troubled us, today has become trendy. Our comfort zone has been altered and, once this occurs, nothing short of an epic and shocking incident will rouse us from our slumber. Shattering the Luchos was Moshe's version of a wake-up call.

And now if You would but forgive their sin! - but, if not, erase me from this book that You have written. (32:32)

Herein lies the test of the true Torah leader. What are his priorities? Is it now about himself, or is it about his flock? Moshe Rabbeinu's first priority was to save his nation. The Almighty had threatened to put an end to this nation that seemed to keep on testing Him. Moshe first had to save them.

Then he would see to it that they regain their status as the Chosen People. Once again, it is important to underscore that it was not the entire nation that had sinned. It was a group of mixed multitude who had come along for the ride. They could not handle the pressure. While their influence on the people was not great, they engendered a feeling of indifference within the people. Therefore, while the hamon am, common Jew, did not sin - he did not prevent the eirav rav from sinning either.

A gadol, Torah leader, places his flock's welfare before his own needs. He will even sustain personal material loss in order to spare his people pain. The following analogy, quoted by Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, in his sefer Nitzotzos, aptly describes such a scenario. While the veracity of the story might not have been established, the message and intent is clear.

A small village in Japan was built atop a hill. At the foot of the hill was a beach that banked the ocean. The residents of this area were simple, hardworking family people. They lived a serene lifestyle, unbothered by the hustle and bustle of the big city. A wise old man lived in this city - right at the top of the hill. He was revered by the townspeople for his erudition and spiritual integrity. As such, he became the undeclared leader of the town. The sage was respected and loved by all, and these sentiments were reciprocated. The village was undergoing difficult times. During the last three years, it had not rained sufficiently, and the earth was parched. There was very little to eat, since, for the most part, the inhabitants sustained themselves through the produce which they yielded from farming. No crops - no food.

Then it began to rain. After three years of drought, it finally began to rain. The fields were irrigated, the seeds germinating and the crops returning. It was a bumper crop like no other. The people were excited and decided to throw a party to celebrate their good fortune. Since there was no room on top of the hill, they set up the festivities at the bottom of the hill, on the shore of the beach. Everyone joined in the celebration, except for the elderly sage and his grandson, who took care of him.

The sage sat atop the hill and watched with great joy and anticipation as his community's inhabitants enjoyed themselves. Suddenly, the sage and townspeople noticed the ocean move backward, at first just a few inches, then a few feet. Finally, the ocean came to rest fifteen feet from its original bank. When it pulled back, it left incredible treasures, such as fish and old coins of gold and silver left over from sunken ships.

The people were overwhelmed with the enormous bounty which had just literally been placed at their feet. They all began to dig in and claim the treasures. From above, the sage watched the entire scene with great joy. Suddenly, his joy turned to utter horror, as he saw the ocean rising up and forming a giant tidal wave. At any minute, this water would come crashing down on the unsuspecting people, crushing them all. What would any able bodied person do in such a situation? He would yell and scream, run down to warn the people, "Save yourselves! Save yourselves!" The elderly man was physically unable to walk - let alone run. His voice would never carry the distance to the ocean, let alone be heard over the cacophony of excitement as the people collected the ocean's booty.

The old man did not give up. He cared about the people. They were his community. He was their leader. He asked his grandson to take a torch, set it aflame and torch his house! The fire spread immediately and, within a few moments, everyone at the foot of the hill looked up in disbelief as they saw fumes of smoke rising up from their beloved leader's home. They dropped what they were doing and ran to save their leader's home. As a result, when the ocean came crashing down, they were no longer there. The old man had saved their lives by sacrificing all of his worldly possessions.

The analogy is obvious; the lesson is compelling. Our Torah leaders, who sit high up on the hill, have an ability to see lucidly without being impaired by involvement in hoarding material booty that claims our allegiance away from Hashem. We do not hear their cries, because we are too busy chasing our profligate visions of grandeur. We are so obsessed with obtaining the booty that we do not see the mountain of horror about to come crashing down on us. The gedolim attempt to get our attention, but we do not hear them above the sounds of our excitement. We are programmed on self-destruct. The fire in the hearts of the gedolim, the fiery passion with which

they cry out to us, even at the expense of their own health and welfare, can wake us up. The question is: Will they be in time?

Whenever Moshe would go out to the Ohel, the entire people would stand up and remain standing, everyone at the entrance of his tent, and they would gaze after Moshe until he arrived at the tent. (33:8)

Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma) derive from here the reverence one must accord to a Torah scholar. "One must stand in the presence of an elderly Jew, a Torah scholar, an Av Bais Din, Head of the Rabbinical court, and a king." Moshe Rabbeinu was the nation's quintessential leader; it would make sense that he be demonstrated such respect due to his position as leader - no different than a distinguished political leader, king, etc. Chazal do not say this explicitly. The fact that they mandate kavod talmid chacham, the respect one must show to a Torah scholar, indicates that Moshe Rabbeinu was respected because he was Rabban shel kol Yisrael, the Rebbe of the entire Jewish nation. They were honoring the Torah which he embodied. When one honors the Torah, he honors Hashem. The talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who devotes his life to Torah study is the present-day embodiment of a living Torah scroll. This is how one honors Hashem.

Regrettably, the "modern" human mind has difficulty equating Torah with Hashem, or, rather, the individual who studies Torah with great diligence and devotion with carrying out Hashem's command. It is, therefore, no surprise that the contemporary secular Jew has no understanding of the critical importance of the maintenance of Torah study in our midst. Indeed, a few decades ago, shortly before the petirah, passing, of the venerable sage, the Tchebiner Rav, Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, zl, the Gaon was approached by representatives of the security forces of Eretz Yisrael to discuss issues of national security. They presented a bleak picture, emphasizing that the newly-established State was under increased pressure from its surrounding enemies. This was their overture to getting him to "understand" permitting yeshivah students to leave the bais hamedrash and join the country's security forces. The Tchebiner Rav listened to their request, and very calmly he replied, "Let me share a story with you. I am hopeful that, after hearing the story, you will on your own understand my response to your request. A wagon laden with various wares attempted to make it up a steep mountain. The wagon driver nudged the horses along - at first, ever so gently, but then, as the climb became increasingly difficult, he applied greater pressure. At one point, the horses could no longer go on. They had reached their breaking point. It was just too much for them.

"The wagon driver descended from the wagon and began removing some of the heavier items that he was carrying. It was to no avail. The wagon would not budge. Finally, the driver removed everything from the wagon. Yet, the wagon was stuck in "park." It could not budge forward. What was the driver to do? Suddenly, he thought of a brilliant idea. The wagon's large wheels were made of steel. As such, they were quite heavy. If he could remove the wagon's four large wheels, the diminished weight should do the trick.

"Obviously, you understand that once its wheels had been removed, it was no longer a wagon. It was a large immovable box. A similar idea applies to the phenomenon of Torah study with relationship to the Jewish People. Without Torah, we have no "wheels." We cannot move! With their Torah study and prayer, the yeshivah students are truly protecting the Jewish nation. To halt their studies would be tantamount to removing the wheels of the wagon."

The Talmud Taanis 2a asks: "What constitutes service of the heart?" They reply: "Prayer." Usually the term avodah in the Torah is a reference to the service we offer Hashem through the vehicle of korbanos, sacrifice. Here, however, avodah is described as something carried out with the heart, which is tefillah, prayer. Merely thinking the tefillah is insufficient to fulfill the requirement of tefillah. One must vocalize the words, enunciating them properly. Of course, if one is ill or in an environment which is inappropriate for the recitation of holy words, this requirement is waived. While the verbalization of one's thoughts is the kiyum ha'mitzvah,

the manner in which the mitzvah is carried out, its essence, its spirit, is to pray with the heart, to place oneself at the mercy of G-d.

Although tefillah is essentially avodah she'b'lev, it is greatly enhanced when it is said as part of a tzibbur, group/minyan. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, observes that it is, indeed, quite presumptuous for an individual with all of his shortcomings and failings to assume that Hashem will listen to him - alone. Indeed, as the Rav notes, when we address Hashem at the beginning of Shemoneh Esrai, we do so by saying Elokeinu v'Elokei Avoseinu, which means, "We come to You not as individuals, but rather, as children of our parents, and we are all bound up together as descendants of the Patriarchs of our nation."

Every tzibbur, every shul, every minyan, regardless of its size, represents a segment of Klal Yisrael. When one speaks from within the "nation," he approaches Hashem as a segment of His nation, which has been assured of His closeness. The relationship serves us well - if we take advantage of it. If our shul attendance becomes more of a social function than a tefillah assembly, this unique connection might not function in our best interest.

Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Dovid Bergstein z"l Harav Dovid ben Yehoshua z"l niftar 24 Shevat 5774 t.n.tz.v.h.

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Ki Tisa**

"Little Did I Know"

Birthdays are important, and the older one gets, the more important he becomes. With age, birthdays begin to stimulate ambiguous feelings.

On the one hand, every birthday is cause for celebration. Another year of life and accomplishment has gone by, and a new year full of hope and great possibilities is about to begin. There is much to be thankful for.

On the other hand, one can no longer deny that he is getting older. Sadly, some who we celebrated with last year are no longer around to celebrate with us this year.

Birthdays bring back memories of the past. The memories themselves are sometimes wonderful, but sometimes remind us of tragic experiences that we would rather forget.

My own birthday is coming up soon, and one of the ways I know it is approaching is with the upcoming weekly Torah portion. You see, my Bar Mitzvah parsha was Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35), which we read this coming Shabbat. Each year, this Torah portion is an occasion for reflection for me, and this year is no exception.

My memories center about the people who were there. My parents, of course, are among them, and three of my grandparents, all long gone. A great-uncle, already old then, who went on to live until he was a hundred and ten years old, and who was one of the few people then who actually taught me something about my parsha. My sisters were there, although one was barely a year old.

I also remember fondly, and with great respect, the man who taught me to read the Torah. His name was Mr. Sender Kolatch, and he was a world class baal koreh, or Torah reader, himself. I would walk to his home every Friday night for lessons, each of which was followed by tea and cookies. I still keep in touch with one of his children. He too is long gone.

But what I reflect on most is the discrepancy between what I knew about my parsha then, and what I have learned about it in the many decades since my bar mitzvah. I did learn to read it from the Torah scroll, and I'm told I did it well, but I had only a very superficial knowledge about this profound parsha and its very diverse contents.

I knew, for example, that it opened with the mitzvah of machatzit hashekel that every Jew was to contribute a half shekel to a central fund, out of which the costs of the Tabernacle services would be paid.

I knew that the opening two sections of the parsha were among the longest, if not the longest, in the entire Torah. This was one of the biggest obstacles I had to mastering the Torah reading. But I hadn't a clue as to the details of those two sections: about the special oils and fragrances which were an essential part of the Temple service. It was much later that the Talmud

tractate which discusses these details and their significance, Masechet Kritut, became one of my favorite Talmud tractates.

I knew about the reference to Shabbat in the opening sections of the parsha, but it was not until much later that I began to appreciate the connection between sacred space—the Temple precincts, and sacred time—the Shabbat day.

I knew the story of the Golden Calf, but only as a story. I did not appreciate its contemporary relevance and rich symbolism until much later. I have since, for example, become enamored of Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi's explanation of the attractiveness of a Golden Calf for the people. He maintains that the demand to worship an invisible god was just too much for the Children of Israel, so that they chose a tangible object through which to worship a God Who could not be seen. How tempting it is to this very day to try to find tangible physical or ideological substitutes for the transcendent Almighty, a temptation which leads us to modes of worship which is more "sophisticated" than dancing around a Golden Calf, but no less idolatrous.

The courageous confrontation of Moses with God, as he intercedes for the sinful people and begs forgiveness for them, was "over my head." It made no impression upon me. And yet, now, these verses have come to exemplify what for me is the essence of true leadership: "Moses went back to the Lord and said: 'Alas. This nation is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold. Now, if You will forgive their sin (well and good); but if not, erase me from the record which You have written'" (Exodus 32: 31-32).

Nor did I in any way understand Moses' plea: "Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways." What ways? What exactly was Moses asking for?

I now have learned that Moses was asking to understand God's inscrutable will. He needed to understand so much that we find difficult in our daily lives as we struggle to make sense of "why the righteous suffer." But for a 13-year-old, blessed with a relatively problem-free life, I was protected from such a "need to know."

Our Torah portion contains so much else that was not part of the agenda of a 13-year-old boy, brought up in the United States in those years. It was not that the period of history in which I was born and raised did not have its immense trials and tribulations. After all, I was born months after World War II began. When I was safe and secure in my baby bunting, my cousins in Poland were being shot and buried alive. My childhood years were concurrent with the State of Israel's struggle for independence. My Bar Mitzvah took place during a time when our neighbors' sons were off in the distant land of Korea, from which one of them did not return.

Yet, there is much in the parsha that was relevant then: God's response to Moses' request that he know His ways: "You cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live;" the mysterious "cleft in the rock" in which Moses hid; the symbolism of the Second Tablets which Moses was instructed to carve of stone; the Thirteen Attributes of God's mercy; the radiance which graced Moses face, so that "the people shrank from coming near him;" and the mask, or veil, which Moses wore so as to frighten the people no longer.

All this rich content, and more, was not taught to me, and had it been taught to me, it wouldn't have meant very much.

There is a lesson in the ignorance of this particular Bar Mitzvah boy and all that he has subsequently learned about the Torah and about this parsha. It is lesson by which I have tried, albeit neither constantly nor consistently, to live by. The lesson is this: One cannot be complacently satisfied with the understanding of Torah that he attained as a schoolchild. As we mature, so must our knowledge of Torah mature. The Torah of a 13-year-old cannot slake the intellectual thirst of a 30-year-old, nor can the Torah we learned when we were 30 satisfy our spiritual needs when we turn 60.

Our Torah must be renewed as we grow older. Torah study must be a lifelong endeavor. Then, and only then, can it continue to inspire and instruct us as we struggle with the challenges of living, with the challenges that change as we age.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

How Leaders Fail

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. When British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was asked what was the most difficult thing he had to deal with in government, he replied, "Events, dear boy, events." Machiavelli called this **Fortuna**: the power of bad luck that can defeat even the greatest. Sometimes despite your best efforts, you 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 may be to put your career, 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, as told in 1 Samuel 15:

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."

Saul makes excuses. The failure was not his; it was 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." Only then does Saul admit, "I have sinned." But by then it was too late. His career as a leader was at an end.

There is an apocryphal quote attributed to several politicians: "Of course I follow the party. After all, I am their leader." There are leaders who follow instead of leading. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter compared them to a dog taken by its master for a walk. The dog runs on ahead, but keeps turning around to see whether it is going in the direction the master wants it to go. 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 handed 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 became angry. Moses pleaded with Him to spare the people. He then descended the mountain, saw what had happened, smashed the tablets of the law he had brought down with him, burned the idol, ground it to powder, mixed it with water and made the Israelites drink it. Then he turned to Aaron his brother and said, "What have you done?"

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god who will go before us. 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 blamed the people. It was they who made the illegitimate request. He denied 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, 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 now:

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 at the later episode of the spies (Num. 14: 5).

Nor was it easy for Moses to restore order now. He did so only by the most dramatic action: 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. 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 don't, or shouldn't, 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.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

Drasha Parshas Ki Sisa by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Consumer Oriented

In one of the most difficult portions of the Torah, and chapters in our history, this week the Children of Israel make a Golden Calf and serve it. The act warrants their annihilation, and Hashem threatens Moshe with just that, adding that He is ready to build a nation from Moshe himself. "Hashem said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold! it is a stiff-necked people: And now, desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them, and I shall annihilate them, and I shall make you a great nation.'" (Exodus 32:9-10) But Moshe beseeches Hashem to forgive the nation for the calamitous sin of the Golden Calf, and Hashem acquiesces, offering an historic formula which is the precursor to every prayer of penitence. Hashem entails the supplication that is known as "the thirteen attributes of Hashem."

They include the words "Hashem, Hashem, G-d, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth..." (Exodus 34:6-7).

Those powerful, deep, and concise statements that embody anthropomorphic qualities to an Omnipotent Creator contain significant meaning far beyond mortal comprehension.

What is astonishing is that almost immediately after Hashem forgives the people, Moshe beseeches Hashem to accompany them for the precise reason that Hashem was angered by them!

"If I have now found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, let my L-rd go among us -- for it is a stiff-necked people, and You shall forgive our iniquity and error, and make us Your heritage." (Exodus 34:9) Was it not stiff-neckedness that caused Hashem to want to annihilate them?

It had become a nuisance for most of those who strolled in the Swiss forest in the early 1950s. Hikers would come home and spend time removing the sticky cockleburs that had fastened to their clothing. But it was something that their forebears had lived with for years and another hindrance that nature had put in their way.

But George de Mestral did not look at the cockleburs that had snagged his sweater as a nuisance. In fact, he realized that Divine genius played a vital role in their physiology.

Returning home after a walk one afternoon, he took out a microscope to get a better look at Hashem's prodigy. When he realized that the burs were actually comprised of thousands of natural hooks that would engage countless loops he realized that this was no nuisance of nature. Their sticky nature was actually the way that these seed pods were transported to find new breeding grounds. They would latch themselves to the fur of animals and be transported.

De Mestral realized that he could carry this wisdom to the more mundane world. And so with a system of a fuzzy felt and crocheted hooks, he combined more than just two divergent materials. He also combined two words, velvet and crochet, now employed in the lexicon and inventory of both schoolchildren and rocket-scientists. He invented, or perhaps introduced us to, Velcro®.

The Dubno Maggid explains that after Moshe heard the wondrous quality of Unrestricted Compassion, he realized that Hashem was actually offering a product that was well-tailored to our mortal needs. It was in fact Moshe's biggest argument for Hashem to accompany His nation.

"Angels don't need those attributes! It is the fallible human who needs that ever-lasting, unceasing mercy! It is only because we are stiff-necked that we need Your unending kindness!"

That is why after Moshe heard Hashem's argument, followed by His attributes, he presented his plea for Divine accompaniment. Often, we do not take advantage of the great goodness of Hashem. We leave His attributes in heaven, distancing our mundane needs from His all-powerful abilities. Moshe teaches us that it is distinctly our capriciousness and mortality that needs His omnipotence. We must realize that the attributes of Hashem are specifically assigned to sustain His nation. And all we have to do is utilize that unceasing, unyielding, and everlasting product to our advantage. Good Shabbos

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Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org.. Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Ki Sisa

If I Were A Rich Man — I Too Would Be Challenged By the 1/2 Shekel Donation

Parshas Ki Sisa begins with the mitzvah of asking Klal Yisrael to contribute the Shekalim. The Shekel contributions had a three-fold purpose. One of the purposes was to serve as atonement. Each Jew's half shekel contribution served as a 'kparah': "The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than the half shekel to provide atonement for your souls." [Shmos 30:15].

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in his sefer Oznayim L'Torah asks a very interesting question. It is a big 'nisayon' (spiritual challenge) for a poor person who is struggling to put food on his table to give a half shekel donation. On the other hand, it was small change for a rich person. Rav Sorotzkin asks: How could the Torah give a mitzvah — which brought atonement — that was a major challenge for a poor person to fulfill but trivial for a rich person to fulfill? It does not seem fair!

Rav Sorotzkin suggests that there WAS a challenge in this mitzvah for a rich person as well. In general, rich people do not like to be treated the same way as poor people are treated. Someone who is wealthy does not like to be put in the same category as someone who does not have money. This explains why people spend thousands of dollars on 'sky boxes' in sports stadiums. The whole concept of "VIP Service" is because people (who can afford it) want to be treated as if they were Very Important People who deserve better and different treatment.

A rich man who needs to donate the same half shekel as the pauper, regardless of the vast differences in their financial assets, is experiencing a challenge, no less than that of the poor person who feels the pain of making a half shekel donation. That which the poor person experiences financially, the rich man experiences psychologically, in the fulfillment of "The rich should not exceed and the poor should not diminish."

The People Did Not Mourn The Loss of Moshe Rabbeinu

Parshas Ki Sisa contains the story of the grievous sin of making a Golden Calf. Whether or not the incident involved actual idolatry is a matter of discussion among the commentaries. However we explain this incident, it is certainly something that should not have occurred.

How did this come about? People became impatient. They saw that Moshe Rabbeinu was delayed in returning from the mountain. Rashi explains based on Chazal that everyone had in mind that Moshe Rabbeinu was supposed to come down at a certain time. When Moshe was late, the people started getting nervous.

To compound the problem, the Satan, through his powers, made there appear a tremendous sense of doom in the world. It became dark and cloudy — and ash; all to create the impression that Moshe Rabbeinu was dead. This is how it happened. The people were not just panicking for no reason. It was not just that Moshe was late. It was much direr than that. They actually thought he was dead: "This man Moshe — we do not know what happened to him." They felt the world was teetering because of the

demise of Moshe and they urgently felt the need for a new leader. The Calf was not supposed to be a deity — it was supposed to be their leader.

When Moshe finally did come down from Mt. Sinai, he saw the people dancing around the Golden Calf. Let us understand Moshe's reaction to this scene. This is transpiring mere hours after the nation "learned" that their leader was dead. Would it not be proper that there should have been some period of mourning for the loss of Moshe?

This was the man who took them out of Egypt. This was the man who could have stayed in the palace of Pharaoh and not cared about his brethren. Should there not have been some period of mourning? Rather than mourning they are dancing around the Calf! They are having a party!

When the Almighty told Moshe that He was prepared to destroy the Jewish nation "and make you into a great nation", what would have been the normal reaction of any human being? "You bet! Right on! They deserve it — they are a bunch of ingrates who did not even have the decency to at least observe a period of mourning for me! These people are a lost cause."

What was Moshe's response? The Medrash Tanchuma sites his answer to the Almighty: Let a thousand like Moshe die rather than one finger nail be removed from Israel." This teaches that the leader of Israel, like Moshe, was so devoted to the nation that in spite of all the grief he just had from them, his concern for his people overweighed everything else.

There is only one type of relationship in the world that is comparable to this — the relationship between a parent and a child. Baruch Hashem, we should all have nachas from our children, but sometimes children can do things to their parents that are so insensitive, that are so hurtful, and yet time and time again the parent will look the other way and be interested in the welfare of the child. This was the relationship between Moshe Rabbeinu and Klal Yisrael — as the nursemaid carries the suckling child. Mothers have this tremendous capacity to take a lot of grief and a lot of aggravation and still be mothers.

This was not a job for Moshe. This was his people. Therefore, he was willing to overlook insult and injury. We see the same concept from a Ramban in this week's parsha. In response to Yehoshua's comment that he heard "the sound of war in the Camp", Moshe responded: "It is neither the sound of strength nor is it the sound of weakness; it is simply a sound that I hear." [Shmos 32:18]. The Ramban writes that Moshe Rabbeinu was attuned to the nuances of screaming. He could tell what types of screams were emerging from the camp. This was not the sound of war, this was something else. The Medrash Rabbah says that Moshe's statement was an implied criticism of his disciple. "Yehoshua, you are going to be the future leader of Israel. You must be able to discern the differences between the various cries (kolos) you hear."

Again, the mother-child relationship is an appropriate analog to this example. Until a baby begins to talk, it is often very frustrating for parents to try to determine what a baby wants when it starts crying. But experienced mothers who know their children for a certain time can distinguish between the various types of crying the baby does. This cry means the baby is hungry. This cry means the baby is in pain. This cry means the baby is wet. This cry means the baby is just generally irritable. To the average listener, the cry is upsetting but they have no idea what it means. A mother can discern the different types of crying. This is the type of leader Moshe Rabbeinu was. He could discern the different cries of the Children of Israel. Just as a mother has inexhaustible patience for her child, so too, Moshe had inexhaustible patience for Klal Yisrael.

Non-Observant Chazan With A Lovely Voice

I would like to say over an idea I heard many times from Rav Ruderman, zt"l, the founding Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel. However, this idea comes with a warning: Do not try this at home. Not everyone knows when and how to use the following principle.

Rav Ruderman quoted a Sefer which records an incident involving the son-in-law of the Nodeh B'Yehudah. A city hired a Chazan with a beautiful voice. The people loved the Chazan's voice, but the problem was he was not at all a pious individual. His first name was Shimon and it was said about him (like the Talmud says about Shimon haAmsoni) that he expounded each time the word "es" appeared in the Torah: "Es haChazir",

"Es haGamal", and "Es haArneves" (examples of non-Kosher animals — pig, camel, rabbit — all of which he ate). Simply, although he had a beautiful voice, he was not Torah observant. The Rav said that such a person could not be the Chazzan. He was spiritually unfit. However, the congregation loved his voice. They wanted to keep him as chazzan.

The dispute between the congregation and their Rabbi was brought to the Nodeh B'Yehudah's son-in-law for a definitive ruling. The Nodeh B'Yehudah's son-in-law made the following statement (which Rav Ruderman used to always quote): It is preferable to place an idol in the Sanctuary, rather than causing proliferation of dispute in Israel. In other words, he advised the Rabbi not to fight with his congregation over this issue.

The Rabbi protested: "But it is an untenable situation. We cannot have such a person leading the davening as representative of the people!" The son-in-law of the Nodeh B'Yehudah advised him to find another way to get rid of the Chazan.

Fortunately, besides the Chazan's taste for non Kosher meat, he also liked to drink. The Rav began inviting him into his office every single morning for a shot of whiskey. Each morning he would have bigger shot glasses and offer him ever increasing numbers of refills. By the end of a week or so, he got the Chazan stone drunk. He stumbled out of shul and fell into the gutter. Congregants saw him lying in the gutter and said "How can we have a cantor who is a drunkard?" So they fired him. Thus the Rav got what he wanted — the firing of the Chazan — without machlokes.

Rabbi Shmuel Blum, who was a student of Ner Israel and heard this story from the Rosh Yeshiva many times, once told me that he heard that a source for the idea "It is preferable to place an idol in the Sanctuary rather than causing proliferation of dispute in Israel" may be found in the commentary of the Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos on this week's parsha.

The Daas Zekeinim asks how it was that Aharon acquiesced to the making of the Golden Calf. Aharon, he writes, was faced with a dilemma. They wanted a leader. What was he going to do? If he would go ahead and appoint a human leader — say Kalev ben Yefuneh, or Nachshon ben Aminadav — then when Moshe came back, there would inevitably be some people who liked and preferred the leadership of Kalev or Nachshon over that of Moshe. There would be machlokes. If Aharon would sit on his hands and not appoint anyone, the people would take the initiative and appoint their own leader, no doubt someone unworthy of the position. That would cause an even bigger argument when Moshe got back. Aharon came up with a "Plan C". He would ask the people for the gold. He would stall for time, expecting that before he made the Golden Calf, Moshe would be back already.

This calculation of Aharon was itself based on the concept that it is better to place an idol in the Sanctuary than to allow there to be machlokes in Klal Yisrael.

Placing an idol in a Sanctuary is clearly not a decision any of us should make on our own. However, promoting peace and avoiding machlokes is something we should all try to do.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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The TorahWeb Foundation
Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger
The Value of Questions

The fervor that the picture communicates is in and of itself striking. On the day that Moshe returns to his people, one day after the Torah has been revealed for a second time, he is immediately besieged by throngs of Jews, all waiting on line from dawn to dark for his sagacious words. Some come with questions, some come with disputes and many come to bare their hearts and seek his counsel and prayers (Ramban.)

The same picture evokes Yisro's great concern for his son in law's stamina, as Yisro observes Moshe respond to the questions and travails of every Jewish family with little more than the skeleton crew of Aharon, Chur and

seventy elders (Rashi.) "Navol tibol - you will certainly become exhausted, you and those who are with you, as you have over-extended yourself; you cannot do it alone."

One has to wonder why Yisro is worried about the physical capacity of someone who just completed three forty day stints with no sleep, no food and no water! Furthermore, has Yisro not been around long enough to expect that communal curiosity and excitement will eventually abate once Moshe has been home for a little longer?

Perhaps that is why the Rashbam interprets "navol tibol" to say that Moshe may confuse the various questions that the Jews raise and his responses may not be as accurate and as personal as Yisro thinks our people deserve. Perhaps Yisro wants to be assured that every Jew will feel Moshe's "humanness" as he listens to them and responds to them. Yisro might be concerned that Jews will be unsure of the advice they receive from one who brings the super human blessings of his divine encounters to this world, one who never tires and never falters, and they will forever wonder if they can rely on Moshe rabbeinu's judgment.

Yet Yisro's words display fear about the commitment of the Jewish people even as he is troubled by the schedule of his daughter's husband. "Also the people who are with you" is interpreted by Chazal as referring to the little team that Moshe had with him but, as the Ohr Chaim suggests, it can also refer to the Jewish people whose patience is being tested as they stand in long lines for hours and hours. Even Rashi (13:18) sees in Yisro's earlier words that he is bothered that the questioners are not accorded the respect that leadership has to show its constituents.

Thus it seems to me that Yisro is neither worried about Moshe's physical endurance that has been tested time and again, nor about the pressures of a people who within time may have to be inspired to ask respectfully or may well find wisdom among Moshe's students. Rather, Yisro was unsure of a system that did not sustain the passion to ask or the preciousness of inquiry. If there was only one address for questions regarding an entirely new body of knowledge that needed to be understood and applied, or even a few addresses, and those addresses would reasonably be perceived to be overextended, and there were terribly long lines to access them - could questions and clarity really be so important? It would almost seem that we really did not want questions, despite Moshe using all his strength to teach otherwise.

After all, Yisro's driving mission in life included the hot pursuit of questions and curiosities, pursued with rigor and vigor. Indeed Yisro, as Chazal deduce from various references, lived a life of intellectual integrity largely unsatisfied with the "truths" of his milieu. His readiness to sacrifice prestige and position was well proven and it now brought him, and he alone, to our people. Entire nations were awed by krias Yam Suf and countless tasted the runoff waters of the mon, but Yisro alone changed his life to seek "new" truths. He alone may have worried that a religion that would not enthusiastically embrace questioners and their inquiries would not inspire confidence in its teachings and wisdom, would not lead adherents to penetrate its depths, and its depths would not penetrate its adherents.

The joy that undoubtedly surged inside Yisro as he witnessed the dedication of the people to understand was possibly only muted by his anxiousness to maintain that excitement and preserve it for all time. We can well understand the alacrity with which Moshe accepted Yisro's perspective and perhaps that is why to this day students of Torah are often more impressed by an incisive question than an answer of equal insight.

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Rav Kook List
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
Ki Tissa: The Recipe for Ketoret

"God said to Moses: Take fragrances such as balsam, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, all of the same weight, as well as other fragrances.

Make the mixture into incense, as compounded by a master perfumer, well-blended, pure and holy." (Ex. 30:34-5)

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

- 70 portions of the four fragrances mentioned in the verse.
- 16 portions of myrrh, cassia, spikanard, and saffron.
- 12 portions of costus.
- 9 portions of cinnamon.
- 3 portions of cinnamon bark.

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

Lofty Perspective

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

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

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

Sanctifying Time and the Natural World

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

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

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

Sanctifying the Dimension of Space

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

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

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

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

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By Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parshat Ki Tisa

A precious gift

If we internalize this great privilege that was given to us and keep the Sabbath, we reach out our hands and accept the greatest present given to us by God in His love.

The weekly Torah reading, Ki Tisa, gives an overview of part of the period beginning with the Exodus and continues to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, the conclusion of the Torah. This story is spread over 40 years, but the most meaningful section takes place in the 49 days after the Exodus from Egypt, when the Jewish people stood at Sinai to receive the Torah.

In this week's Torah portion we read about Moses's descent from the mountain, which he had ascended after the revelation at Sinai, as is described at the end of Parshat Mishpatim: God said to Moses, "Come up to Me, to the mountain, and remain there. I will give you the stone tablets...."

And Moses was upon the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. (Exodus 24:12-18) Forty days later – "When [God] finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the Two Tablets of the Testimony..." There was an important goal in Moses's ascent to Mount Sinai: receiving the Two Tablets of the Covenant (referred to by the Torah as "Tablets of the Testimony"), these same tablets whose shape is familiar to us from the synagogue, and upon which was written the Ten Commandments. In those 40 days, Moses learned the entire Torah, comprised of the Written and the Oral Torah. However, between Moses's ascent to Mount Sinai and his descent, we read about the construction of the Tabernacle. This constitutes the Torah portions known as Truma, Tetzaveh, and the first part of Ki Tisa. The majority of these Torah readings deal with the laws of the building of the Tabernacle – the temporary sanctuary in the desert – and its operation. This information is essential for Moses, who is about to descend the mountain with the Two Tablets in hand, and their appointed place is the Tabernacle. It is clear that Moses must learn the laws surrounding the Tabernacle so that he can know how to treat the tablets to be placed within it.

But there is another subject mentioned in our Torah reading, one that Moses had to learn at Sinai as well, dealing with the commandment to observe the Sabbath.

"God said to Moses: 'However, you must keep my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you for all your generations.... Six days you shall work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to God... It is an everlasting sign between Me and the Children of Israel ...'" (Exodus 31: 12-17) The Sabbath is a very precious commandment, mentioned a number of times in the Torah. Why does the Torah emphasize that Moses received the commandment to observe the Sabbath during the period when he was on Mount Sinai more than other Torah commandments? Why does this precept appear among the Ten Commandments? To understand this, we must understand an important principle in Torah study. When a subject is repeated in the Torah, no mention is ever superfluous.

Neither is this done only for emphasis or as a reminder. The significance of repetition of the subject is that it has a number of aspects and meanings, and each time a different meaning is being stressed.

We do not have to search far to find examples. The commandment to observe the Sabbath provides an excellent example of this principle. The Torah gives a number of reasons for its observance: The Sabbath testifies to the belief in the Creator, it serves as a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt, it is a day of rest for man after working six days of the week, the Sabbath as an equalizing factor in all levels of society, and in this week's Torah portion another aspect of the Sabbath is expressed – it is a gift. The Sabbath is a unique gift presented by God to the Jewish people.

Our rabbis said: "God said to Moses: I have a precious gift in my treasury and it is called Shabbat. I want to present it to Israel – go and tell them! (Tractate Shabbat 10, Babylonian Talmud) One who examines the verses about the Sabbath in our Torah portion notices a personal note woven among them: "An everlasting sign between Me and the Children of Israel." Here God grants a personal gift to the nation, a gift called Shabbat. This

precious day is not just an ordinary day of rest, but rather a day of “loving rest” – rest given us by God with love.

Moses did not only go up the mountain to bring down the Two Tablets of the Covenant. He ascended Mount Sinai to bring down the unique gift that God gave to the Jewish people: the Sabbath. In addition to the Two Tablets of the Covenant that he was carrying to place in the Tabernacle, he carried in his heart this unique gift in order to bestow it upon each and every Jew.

If we internalize this great privilege that was given to us and keep the Sabbath, we reach out our hands and accept the greatest present given to us by God in His love.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.
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Is it Time for Maariv?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

When is the correct time to daven maariv?

Question #2:

Why is there no repetition of shmoneh esrei for maariv?

Question #3:

Must women daven maariv?

Introduction:

In citing the source for our three daily prayers, the Gemara quotes two approaches. Rabbi Yosi ben Chanina explains that our three daily prayers were founded by our forefathers: Avraham instituting shacharis, Yitzchak mincha, and Yaakov maariv. The source that Yaakov introduced maariv is in the second verse of parshas Vayeitzei, where it says *vayifga bamakom* and the Gemara explains the word *vayifga* to mean he prayed. The Gemara also cites Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's statement that shacharis and mincha were established by the Anshei Keneses HaGedolah (the great leaders of Klal Yisrael who lived during the time of the building and the beginning of the Second Beis Hamikdash) to correspond to the offerings that were brought every morning and afternoon in the Beis Hamikdash (see Bamidbar 28:1-8), whereas maariv corresponds to the burning of the remaining parts of these offerings that transpired at night (Brachos 26b).

What we call "maariv" actually fulfills three different mitzvos, and the above-quoted Gemara is referring to only one of these mitzvos, the part called the tefillah, which are the prayers we recite as shmoneh esrei. (The avos did not establish the shmoneh esrei, but the concept that one should daven three times a day. The text of the shmoneh esrei was written by the Anshei Keneses HaGedolah.)

The other two mitzvos that we fulfill when we pray maariv are kriyas shma, whose recital is required *min haTorah* every morning and night (Brachos 2a), and the birchos kriyas shma, which Chazal instituted to surround the shma with brachos (Mishnah Brachos 11a). These brachos together with the shma constitute the part of the davening between borchu and the shmoneh esrei. (Ashkenazim in chutz la'aretz also add another bracha that begins with the words *Baruch Hashem LeOlam* between the birchos kriyas shma and the kaddish that precedes the shmoneh esrei.)

Although we are very familiar with how we recite the order of the different parts of maariv, we should be aware that, at the time of the Gemara, this order was a topic of dispute between Rabbi Yochanan, whose opinion we follow, and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who contended that the shmoneh esrei of maariv should be recited before shma and the birchos kriyas shma, so that one recites shma closer to the time one retires (Brachos 4b).

Why is there no maariv repetition?

As a preamble to answering this question, let us examine a famous event that occurred shortly after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, after the main Sanhedrin and its associated yeshiva had been forced to evacuate Yerushalayim and reestablish itself in the city of Yavneh. To understand this anecdote properly, we must realize the historical context that the Beis Hamikdash, which had been the central focus of all organized Torah life,

had been recently destroyed, and there was concern whether an organized Jewish community could maintain itself without the Beis Hamikdash.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, then a young student in the yeshiva, posed the following query: Is maariv (referring to the tefillah part) *reshus*, usually translated as "optional," or is it required? First he brought his inquiry to the great scholar Rabbi Yehoshua, the rebbe of Rabbi Akiva, who ruled that tefillas arvis *reshus*. Afterwards, Rabbi Shimon shared his question with Rabban Gamliel, who was the rosh yeshiva and the head of the Sanhedrin, who responded tefillas arvis *chovah*, the maariv prayer is required.

Rabbi Shimon noted that he had previously heard Rabbi Yehoshua's opinion to the contrary, to which Rabban Gamliel responded that Rabbi Shimon should wait until all the scholars had arrived in the Beis Hamedrash. After the students entered the Beis Hamedrash, Rabbi Shimon repeated his inquiry, and Rabban Gamliel immediately answered tefillas arvis *chovah*. Rabban Gamliel then asked whether anyone disputed this, to which Rabbi Yehoshua responded in the negative. Rabban Gamliel challenged Rabbi Yehoshua, announcing that it had been reported that Rabbi Yehoshua had ruled that tefillas arvis *reshus*. Rabban Gamliel then ordered Rabbi Yehoshua to arise so that they could hear the testimony that he had indeed ruled maariv to be only *reshus*. Rabbi Yehoshua acknowledged that he had indeed ruled this way. Rabban Gamliel then continued the lecture, without granting Rabbi Yehoshua permission to sit down.

This continued for a short while, until the students objected to Rabban Gamliel's highhanded treatment of Rabbi Yehoshua. The lecture was stopped, and the decision was reached to remove Rabban Gamliel from his position as rosh yeshiva and as head of the Sanhedrin, and to install Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah in his stead. Eventually, all understood that although the consensus was that Rabban Gamliel was wrong for his strong tactics, his motives were completely sincere. He had been ruling with an iron fist to maintain a central authority for Torah in Klal Yisrael, out of concern that in the absence of such strong authority, the centrality of Torah leadership over Klal Yisrael may dissipate. Eventually, Rabban Gamliel was returned to his position with Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah serving as rosh yeshiva and the head of the Sanhedrin one week in four (Brachos 27b-28a).

Is Maariv Optional?

Ultimately, the halachic conclusion is that maariv is a *reshus*. Is maariv really optional? Can one decide every night if he wants to skip maariv?

The Rishonim already note a ruling that appears to contravene the statement that maariv is optional. Someone who missed maariv must recite a makeup prayer, called a tefillas tashlumim, after the next morning's shacharis. However, this ruling appears to contradict the statement that tefillas arvis *reshus*. If maariv is optional, why must one make up the missed prayer?

In response to this question, Tosafos explains that when the Gemara states that maariv is *reshus*, it does not mean that it is optional, but that it is less obligatory than other requirements. For example, should one need to choose between fulfilling two different mitzvos in a situation where one cannot fulfill both of them, maariv is pushed aside (Tosafos, Brachos 26a s.v. Ta'ah). In all other circumstances, one is obligated to recite maariv.

The Rif answers the question in a different way. He explains that indeed maariv is technically not obligatory. However, someone who decided to recite maariv makes it obligatory on himself and must pray correctly, even if he needs to pray a makeup.

Must a Woman Daven Maariv?

Does any other halachic distinction result from this difference of opinion between Tosafos and the Rif? It seems that a difference results regarding whether, according to those authorities who rule that women are obligated to daven shacharis and mincha daily, a woman must also daven maariv daily. According to Tosafos, who contends that maariv is obligatory, a woman should be required to daven maariv daily. This ruling is stated by the Aruch Hashulchan (106:7). However, other authorities rule that women

are not obligated to daven maariv since they never accepted it as a responsibility (Graz 106:2; Mishnah Berurah 106:4; cf. Magen Avraham 299:16). This approach reflects the opinion of the Rif that although maariv was originally reshus, since men daven maariv regularly, they must continue to do so, but women, who for the most part do not regularly daven maariv, are exempt from doing so (see Shach, Yoreh Deah 375:14).

Why should Yaakov lose out?

This previous discussion should arouse a question in every one of our readers. Since Yaakov Avinu introduced tefillas maariv, why is it treated "second rate" – why is maariv reshus, and only the tefillos founded by Avraham and Yitzchak are obligatory?

Why is Maariv Different?

To answer this question, let us revert to our previous discussion – where I noted that there were two approaches, one contending that the daily prayers were instituted by our forefathers, and the other maintaining that the prayers were created to correspond to the daily offerings. According to both of these approaches, we can explain why maariv is treated somewhat differently from shacharis and mincha.

According to the interpretation that the forefathers instituted the daily prayers, although Yaakov was the first to daven maariv, he had not intended to daven so late in the day, but Hashem caused the sun to set suddenly, giving Yaakov no choice but to daven after nightfall. Since this davening was performed not as Yaakov's first choice, but because he had no other option, the prayer instituted this way is reshus (Pnei Yehoshua, Brachos 26b s.v. Mihu).

According to the approach that our prayers correspond to the daily offerings, shacharis and mincha each represent the daily korban tamid that was offered in the Beis Hamikdash. Maariv represents the remaining parts of the daily tamid that were burnt the following night on the mizbei'ach. As such, since this step in the processing of the korban is non-essential, the prayer is also not required (Rashi to Shabbos 9b s.v. Lemaan).

Repetition of Maariv

With this background, we can now answer the question we raised above: Why does maariv not include a chazzan's repetition of shmoneh esrei, as is done for both shacharis and mincha. The answer is that although today maariv is obligatory, it is not the same level of requirement as are shacharis and mincha. Since everyone is required to daven shacharis and mincha, Chazal were concerned that unlettered individuals would be unable to fulfill the mitzvah. Chazal therefore instituted the repetition of the tefillah so that those unable to daven otherwise can fulfill their requirement by listening to the chazzan's prayer. However, since maariv is reshus, Chazal were less concerned that the unlettered would be unable to fulfill this responsibility and therefore they did not institute a repetition.

When Do We Daven Maariv?

Having established that maariv is indeed obligatory, our next question is: When is the earliest time that one may begin maariv? Indeed, although the Mishnah establishes times for the other prayers, it leaves the time for maariv fairly vague. The accepted halachah is that once the time for davening mincha is over, one may daven maariv (Tosafos, Brachos 2a).

So now we need to resolve: Until when can one daven mincha?

The Mishnah records a dispute between the Tana'im regarding this question. According to the Sages, one is allowed to daven mincha until "the evening," while according to Rabbi Yehudah, the last time for mincha is "plag hamincha," which I will soon explain. The dispute between them is dependent on how late one may offer the afternoon korban tamid. According to Rabbi Yehudah, one may offer it only until plag hamincha; whereas according to the Sages, one may offer it until evening (Brachos 26b).

So we now know. According to Rabbi Yehudah, one may daven mincha until plag hamincha, and maariv after plag hamincha, whereas the Sages

contend that one may daven mincha until "evening," and maariv afterwards.

When is Evening?

Of course, now we need to find out when is "evening," when is plag hamincha, and whether we rule like the Sages or like Rabbi Yehudah.

The authorities dispute whether "evening" here means shortly before tzeis hakochavim, nightfall (see Rama 233:1 and Mishnah Berurah #14) or whether it means sunset (Rabbeinu Yonah; authorities cited by Shaarei Tziyun 233:18). According to the first approach, the Sages hold that one may daven mincha until nightfall but one may not daven maariv until after nightfall. According to the second approach, one may not daven mincha after sunset but one may daven maariv then.

When is Plag Hamincha?

Rabbi Yehudah ruled that the latest time to daven mincha is a point in time called plag hamincha. When is plag hamincha? According to the most commonly accepted interpretation, plag hamincha is calculated by dividing the time between sunrise and sunset into 48 "quarter-hour" segments. The point of time that is five of those segments prior to sunset is plag hamincha. Obviously, each segment will not be exactly fifteen minutes, but will vary according to the length of the day. An easier way to express this is to say that plag hamincha is 1 1/4 "halachic hours" (in Hebrew, sha'os zemaniyos) before sunset, where a "halachic hour" is defined as a twelfth of the time between sunrise and sunset. (There are other authorities who calculate the halachic hours and plag hamincha from halachic dawn, alos hashachar, until nightfall, tzeis hakochavim. In their opinion, plag hamincha is considerably later in the day than it is according to the first opinion quoted.)

Do we Rule like the Sages or like Rabbi Yehudah?

Now that we have discussed the dispute between the Sages and Rabbi Yehudah, we need to know how we rule so that we can determine when is the latest time for mincha and the earliest time for maariv. Most disputes in the Gemara are resolved either by the Gemara itself or by the early halachic authorities. However, in regard to this dispute, the Gemara states something unusual -- that one can choose which opinion he wants to follow (Brachos 27a). One wishing to daven maariv after plag hamincha, following the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, may do so, and one who would rather recite mincha after plag hamincha may follow the opinion of the Sages and do so.

Now our question is:

How consistent must I be? May I follow Rabbi Yehudah's approach one day and the Sages approach on a different day? What about on the same day – may I daven mincha after plag hamincha following the Sages, and then daven maariv before sunset following Rabbi Yehudah?

Most Rishonim rule that one must consistently follow one of these two opinions. In other words, if one decides to daven maariv before sunset following Rabbi Yehudah, then he must be consistent and always daven mincha before plag. Once he follows Rabbi Yehudah's ruling in this matter, he may no longer daven mincha after plag -- to do so is contradictory (Rabbeinu Yonah, Brachos 18b, s.v. D'avad; Rosh, Brachos 4:3; Tur, Beis Yosef, and Shulchan Aruch 233). Being inconsistent is referred to as following a path that is tarti desasri ahadadi, two approaches that contradict one another, since neither Rabbi Yehudah nor the Sages approve of what he is doing, albeit for different reasons.

Some authorities permit one to follow Rabbi Yehudah on one day and the Sages on a different day, providing one is consistent on the same day by davening mincha after plag and maariv before sunset (Hashlamah and Mordechai, both quoted by Beis Yosef 233).

Notwithstanding this discussion, the frequent practice was to daven mincha and maariv together after plag hamincha, which appears to be inconsistent according to all opinions. Nevertheless, the poskim acknowledge that this was commonly done and suggest different reasons why this practice was accepted, or at least tolerated. Some explain that if this approach was not

accepted, many communities would be unable to consistently have a regular minyan, or people would not daven maariv since they would not wait in shul until the later time to daven maariv. As a result, for the sake of tefillah betzibur many authorities allowed the tarti desasri but ruled that someone who davened mincha after plag and is davening maariv privately (beyechidus) must wait until nightfall to daven maariv (Magen Avraham 233:7).

We should note that, according to the accepted halachah, one who davens maariv before nightfall, should recite the full shma over again after nightfall (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 235:1). This is for two different reasons. Firstly, although Rabbi Yehudah ruled that the cutoff time between mincha and maariv is plag hamincha, this is only germane to the shmoneh esrei parts of our davening, whose timing is dependent on the daily tamid offerings as mentioned above. However, the mitzvah of reading shma must be fulfilled at the time people retire for the evening, as the Torah says beshachbecha, and few people retire for the evening before it gets dark. Since the time for reciting the evening shma is when most people might consider it bedtime, one cannot not fulfill this mitzvah until nightfall according to most opinions. (However, see Rabbeinu Tam, quoted by Tosafos, Brachos 2a.)

Secondly, the requirements of davening at a specific time and reciting the birchos kriyas shma are rabbinic in nature rather than Torah mandated, which allows some leniency. However, regarding the Torah requirement of reading the shma, we should follow the stricter approach and recite it again after it is definitely nightfall.

I'll share one anecdote to show how far we should be concerned that one recites shma after it is dark. One gadol I knew from the previous generation, who established his community in America, was concerned that baalei batim would not recite shma after dark, and thus not fulfill the mitzvah min haTorah properly. He also knew that if the break between mincha and maariv was too long, many would not attend shul regularly. He thus established in his community that they began mincha after sunset, followed by a fifteen minute shiur and then maariv so that people would

daven maariv in its correct time. In other words, he decided that the entire community should daven mincha at a time that he himself considered non-optimal according to some poskim, in order to guarantee that everyone recite shma properly in its proper time! Although this approach is certainly not the most accepted, we should all be aware of the many considerations. Contemporarily, most communities have many minyanim scheduled both for mincha and for maariv. An individual can, therefore, with a small amount of planning, daven in a way that he avoids any question of davening tarti desasri.

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For the week ending 15 February 2014 / 15 Adar I 5774
by Rabbi Moshe Newman

“These are really named ‘maror’ but are called ‘maror of the marsh’ because they commonly grow in a marsh.”

This is how the Sage Rava explains why “mararita d’agma” is acceptable for the mitzvah of eating maror on Pesach despite it having an “accompanying name” of “marsh” instead of just being called plain “maror” as is written in the Torah. Although the Sage Abaye states a different reason on our daf to allow it, Tosefot points out that he also agrees with Rava’s explanation. Succah 13a

Rabbi Elazar said, “Why are the prayers of the tzaddikim compared to a pitchfork? To teach you that just as this pitchfork turns over the produce in the granary from place to place, likewise the prayers of the tzaddikim overturns the ‘mindset’ of G-d from the trait of severity to the trait of mercy.” (See Ber. 25:21 and Rashi on our daf regarding Yitzchak’s prayer for children being offered and accepted). Succah 14a

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