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ON KI SISA (Parah) - 5783

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PARASHAT KI TISA 5774, 2014:  
"INSIGHTS FROM RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK ZATZAL"  
Parashat Ki Tisa, 5774, 2014:

**The Golden Calf: Insights from Rabbi Soloveitchik  
Rabbi David Etengoff**

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, and Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

One of the best-known passages that occurs in our parasha is that of the Chet Haegel (the Sin of the Golden Calf). Beyond a doubt, it is one of the most difficult and heart-rending incidents in the entire Torah. Our people were nearly destroyed because of this sin. Chazal (Our holy Sages) teach us in a variety of sources that this horrendous act was forgiven, but never "forgotten" by our Creator. This is how our parasha depicts the episode that tore asunder our relationship with Hashem:

Meanwhile, the people began to realize that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Make us an oracle to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who

brought us out of Egypt. Take the rings off the ears of your wives and children," replied Aaron. "Bring them to me." All the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took [the rings] from the people, and had someone form [the gold] in a mold, casting it into a calf. [Some of the people began to] say, "This, Israel, is your god, who brought you out of Egypt." When Aaron saw [this], he built an altar before [the calf]. Aaron made an announcement and said, "Tomorrow, there will be a festival to G-d." Getting up early the next morning, [the people] sacrificed burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, and then got up to enjoy themselves. (Sefer Shemot 32:1-6, this and all Torah translations, The Living Torah, Rav Aryeh Kaplan zatzal)

Year after year we ask ourselves the same question: How was it possible for our ancestors to have participated in this heinous activity? After all, Hashem had just taken them out of Egypt with unrivaled wonders and miracles. In addition, He had revealed Himself to the entire nation at both Kriyat Yam Suf (the splitting of the Sea of Reeds) and at Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah) on Mount Sinai. The entire episode seems to defy rational understanding and leaves us baffled.

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zatzal (1903-1993), known as "the Rav" by his students and followers, analyzed the Chet Haegel on many occasions. In a public lecture held on March 12, 1979, he labeled this event a "puzzle that deals with great people which reached the highest heights who were converted into a primitive band of idol worshippers and idolaters." Based upon the commentaries of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi (1075-1141), Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), Rabbi Don Yitzhak Abarbanel (1437-1508), the Beit HaLevi (Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, 1820-1892), and the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, 1809-1879), however, the Rav maintained that the Golden Calf was not really pure avodah zarah (idol worship). Instead, it was, at worst, an instance of shituf (adding or combining) wherein the people viewed the Egel Hazahav as the intermediary between themselves and G-d, rather than His replacement.

Rav Soloveitchik maintained that the entire concept of an intermediary between man and G-d is false from its inception. Unfortunately, many of our ancestors viewed Moshe precisely in this manner:

The sin of the Egel was, in contrast, to the Original Sin, the consequence of man's self-negation and self-downgrading. The awareness of their smallness actually motivated them to sin... the people could not visualize the fulfillment of the great promise without Moshe's leadership. (My transcription, 10 minutes, 17 seconds into the lecture)

The Rav cited Sefer Shemot 32:1 to buttress his contention: Meanwhile, the people began to realize that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered

around Aaron and said to him, “Make us an oracle to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt...”

Therefore, the Rav declared: “This was their mistake; no matter that Moses was the greatest prophet, the greatest of all men. Every plain Jew has access to the Ribono shel Olam (The Master of the Universe, transcription my own 11:05-11:18).” Moreover, according to the Rav, Hashem’s promise to take the Jewish people out of Egypt was independent of Moshe’s presence.” Hence, the purpose of the Egel Hazahav was to replace Moshe, not G-d, so that Hashem’s spirit could abide therein [i.e. in the Egel], just as it had in Moshe.

Heartbreakingly, even though it was not straightforward idol worship, the Egel Hazahav created a pirood (split) between Hashem and His beloved people that remains in effect until our own historical moment:

After the Revelation [Mount Sinai], Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu [the Holy One blessed be He] was in the midst of the community. When the Jews worshipped the Golden Calf, however, He moved away once again; Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu absented Himself. Had the sin of the Golden Calf not taken place, He would have been with the people forever. Jewish history would have been different. But the people did not understand. They made the Golden Calf, and as a result the Shekhinah [Divine Presence] removed Itself from their midst. (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The L-rd is Righteous in All His Ways: Reflections on the Tish’ah be-Av Kinot, Rabbi Jacob J. Schachter, editor, page 111, brackets my own)

The incident of the Golden Calf took place over three thousand years ago. How, then, can we understand it in terms that speak to us in the 21st Century? Once again, we can turn to Rabbi Soloveitchik and his trenchant analysis of this chata’ah gedolah (great sin, Sefer Shemot 32:31):

The Golden Calf epitomizes individuals throughout the ages who have sought to create new forms of religious experience and expression. Although many such efforts may be well-intentioned, they are not legitimate because they lack a divine mandate. This was the essence of the Golden Calf. Tampering with prayer, the priestly blessings, the synagogue or any other form of religious service is another form of that sin. At that time, the Israelites offered sacrifices to G-d. However, because G-d had not commanded such service, it was illegitimate and unacceptable. Therefore, we can see how critical it is that we maintain tradition, particularly regarding prayer. It is important to our survival as a people. (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Darosh Darash Yosef: Discourses of Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parashah, Rabbi Avishai C. David, editor, page 192)

With Hashem’s help, may we be zocheh (merit) to witness the fulfillment of Yermiyahu’s heartfelt prayer: “Hashiveinu Hashem alechah v’nashuvah chadash yemeinu kekedem”

(“Enable us to return to You Hashem and we will return, renew our days as they were in former times”). Then, please G-d, may the Sin of the Golden Calf be erased forever more with the arrival of Mashiach ben David (the true Messiah) and the building of the Beit Hamikdash. V’chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

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<http://reparashathashavuah.org> The email list, b’chasdei Hashem, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email [rdbe718@gmail.com](mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com). \*\*\* My audio shiurim for Women on “Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd> \*\*\* I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s English language audio shiurim (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>. \*\* Follow new postings on my Twitter accounts: @theRavZatzal and @Torahtech613.

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date: Mar 9, 2023, 11:16 PM subject: **Rabbi Yisroel**

**Reisman's Weekly Chumash Shiur**

**Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Ki Sisa – Parah 5783**

**1 – Topic – A Thought from Rav Pam**

As we come off a glorious Purim and Shushan Purim and head into the Shloshim Yom Kodem Hachag of Pesach as Chazal call it being Mekareiv Geulah L’geulah, putting one Geulah next to the other, and certainly we hope to feel a sense of Geulah of the Chashivus of the Geulah. And so, on Parshas Ki Sisa I would like to share with you a Shmuz that Rav Pam gave a very long time ago, back in the early 1980’s and he asked a fascinating question regarding the Cheit Ha’eigel. I have never heard or seen this question anywhere else. He asked the following question. What was the Cheit Ha’eigel? It was Avoda Zorah. Avoda Zorah is a terrible Aveira. We understand that the Cheit Ha’eigel is treated with the severity which it deserves.

Freigt Rav Pam, just 80 days earlier Klal Yisrael was at the edge of the Yam. They were coming to the Yam Suf, it was 7 days after they left Mitzrayim and the Yam said (הללו עובדי זרה (עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה), the Jews are also Oved Avoda Zorah. Why should I split? The Ribono Shel Olam was Melamed Zechus on Klal Yisrael. He said look, Klal Yisrael they were Anusim in Mitzrayim so don’t hold them responsible for being (עובדי עבודה זרה). The Yam split. Here we are two months later, there is a tremendous Taina on Klal Yisrael that they were (עובדי עבודה זרה). What do you expect after two months there is a Tevia that they relapsed to being (עובדי עבודה זרה). Why is it such a strong Taina if two months earlier HKB”H dismissed the Taina of the Saro Shel Yam.

Kasha # 2 – the Ramban and the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh among others say that when they made the Eigel they were

really Mechavein to the Ribbono Shel Olam. They had seen the Demus of the Chayos Hakodesh, when they went in they saw the Demus of certain angels, and there are angels that have a Pnei Hashor. One of the four faces they have is the Pnei Hashor so they made an Eigel. Now, of course they shouldn't have done it, but why is it so severe. If the Kavana was really for the Ribbono Shel Olam, you give me explanations and then you have to explain why it was such a serious Aveira?

To answer this, Rav Pam related the following. He said in the year Taf Reish Ayin, the year 1910, Rav Chaim Brisker addressed an Asifa of Rabbanim. He said the following. He was explaining Eliyahu at Har Hacarmel. When Eliyahu stood at Har Hacarmel he said to the Jewish people if you believe in the Baal then (לכו אַחֲרָי), go after the Baal. If you believe Kavayochel in G-d, believe in the Ribbono Shel Olam. Melachim I 18:21 (עַד-מָתַי אַתֶּם פֹּסְחִים עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַסְּעָפִים). Why are you half Baal and hal

Rav Chaim asked Eliyahu shouldn't talk that way. Eliyahu should say if you believe in G-d go after G-d. Why is he saying if you believe in Baal go after Baal? What kind of speech is that?

Answers Rav Chaim, a Yesod. A mixture of Baal and Ribbono Shel Olam is not half Yiddishkeit and half Baal. It is not Yahadus at all. It is a corrupted Yahadus. It is much worse. (וְאַם-הַבְּעַל לְכוּ אַחֲרָיו). Go after him, don't pretend that you are partially Ovdei Hashem and partially Ovdei Haba

When the Yidden were in Mitzrayim, the Yidden were (עובדי זרה (עבודה זרה). HKB"H was Melamed Zechus. They were in Mitzrayim so many years, they were downtrodden, they fell to the Yeitzer Hora of Avoda Zorah. Here, something else happened. Here, they tried to make the Avoda Zorah like a Cheilek of Torah. They tried to combine Torah and Avodah Zora. They said as is found in Ki Sisa 32:5 (חַג לִיקְנֹק מְחָר), they said Chag La'Hashem not Chag L'eigel Machar. Chag to the Yud K Vav K Machar. They said we will have the Eigel and it will be a combination, we will have an Eigel along with a Chag La'Hashem. It is a distortion of Torah. The distortion of Torah is terrible. When a person tries to combine Torah and other Hashkafos together, he makes Yiddishkeit lite. He makes a lite verion of Yiddishkeit. It is a distortion. It comes out that those who are real Avdei Hashem, they come across as extremists. They come across as caveman. They come across as people who are not in the real world. Look, we have other Shomrei Shabbos that do these other things as well. The others Taina that like Hillel Hanasi, they make accommodations.

Zagt Rav Pam, the distortion is worse. The distortion is a corruption of Yiddishkeit. Better be Ovdei Habaal and maybe someday you will decide to come back to the faith of your forefathers, then to make a new Judaism, a combination Judaism. When it comes to Emunah, there is no Taruvos, there is no mixtures. The Emunah has to be full. You have a Yeitzer

Hora and you do an Aveira, fine. But don't make that Aveira as if it is justified in the eyes of the Torah.

Rav Pam compared that to Matzah which is Maichal Dim'hai'manusa. Matzah is called the bread of Emunah. By Matzah, a Mashahu of Chometz Pasuls. Here also, in Emunah a Mashahu Pasuls. A person does Aveiros, a person has a Yeitzer Hora. We are here in this world to fight our Yeitzer Hora. But to make a Shittah out of it, that is a corruption of Torah and that is really worse.

Zagt Rav Pam, Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai with the Luchos. When he came to Klal Yisrael they were dancing. Rav Pam said and I don't remember from whom, he said they were dancing, you know what? They were dancing around the Luchos. They were delighted with the Luchos. They didn't dance around the Eigel, they danced around the Luchos. The Mecholos were around everything. They wanted to have the Luchos and the Avoda Zorah with it.

The Maharsha asks why did Moshe Rabbeinu break the Luchos when he came down? When HKB"H told him in 32:8 (עָשׂוּ לָהֶם, עֲגָלָה) he should have broken the Luchos right away and not brought them down. Why did he bring the down

The Maharsha answers that seeing is more than hearing. Rav Moshe in numerous places is Matmia, he says what? It is true that seeing is more than hearing, but seeing is not more than hearing from G-d. If Hashem told you that is as good as seeing. The Kasha comes back. Why didn't Moshe Rabbeinu leave the Luchos in Shamayim or break them immediately, why only when he saw the dancing?

Rav Pam said because they were dancing around Avoda Zorah, fine. Torah Tavlin. I'll work with them and they will do Teshuvah. When he came down and he saw they were dancing around the Eigel wrapped in Tallis and Tefillin as if this is somehow part of serving the Ribbono Shel Olam like the Ramban and Ohr Hachaim say, then he broke the Luchos. He told Klal Yisrael don't make a mistake, this is a contradiction to the Luchos.

The idea, the Nekuda, the important point is this. Sometimes we have difficulties in Avodas Hashem. Sometimes we say this is hard for us, this is difficult for us. We are challenged. Don't make a Shittah out of it. This was Rav Pam's lesson.

I thought about it. Those years that I learned sometimes in the summer with Rav Yitzchok Isbee Tatzal, we used to learn in the summer in Ateret Torah. I remember, we saw when the boys went to camp. How parents who had very small connection to Torah and Avodah, you can see on them and they had sons who were dressed as Bnei Torah and talking in Davening and Learning like Bnei Torah. We realized something. In the western culture from which we come, European culture, if you have a perversion you make a Shittah out of it, you try to say it is right. If you have some area in serving G-d where it is just hard for you, it is difficult for you,

leave me alone already with the Mezuzos. Leave me alone already with the Kashrus when you go to a restaurant. I look at the ingredients and it is good. You make a Shittah out of it. You make everybody else as if they are extremists and you are the normal one. You make a Shittah out of it. It is very very difficult.

The greatness of the Sefardic community is that even when it was difficult for them to be religious or even to keep Shabbos, they didn't make a Shittah out of it and they still had a love for Torah, they had a love for Rav Ovadiah, they had a love for their Talmidai Chachamim, a love for anything that represents the Ribono Shel Olam and Torah. Therefore, the house was imbued with Ahavas Hatorah. That idea, the idea of not making a compromise, that is everything. And this was the Shmuz that Rav Pam gave at that time.

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From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> date: Mar 9, 2023, 2:49 PM

Do the Right Thing – Even If You Won't Succeed  
By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1241 The Case of the Mishloach Manos That Was Delivered to the Wrong Person. Good Shabbos!

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

Among other things, the way that the Torah introduces Betzalel is striking. Normally, when introducing people by name, the Torah mentions the person's name and his father's name. So it is with Kalev ben Yefuneh and so it is with Yehoshua bin Nun, to cite just two of many examples. In general, we do not introduce a person by his whole genealogy—who his father was and who his grandfather was. This is an exception to the rule. Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of the Tribe of Yehudah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chazal say that when Pharaoh made the decree to throw all male children into the Nile, Amram divorced his wife. Why? He concluded: “We are toiling for naught! Why should we bring babies into the world to be thrown into the Nile?” He divorced his wife. The Gemara says that Amram was the leader of the generation (Gadol haDor) and therefore everybody followed suit and divorced their wives. Along came little

Miriam and said to her father, who was the Gadol haDor:

“Daddy, guess what? I don’t think you are right! Pharaoh only decreed regarding the boys. You are decreeing against the girls as well! Pharaoh only decreed that the children should be killed in this world, you are decreeing (by preventing children from ever being conceived) that the children should not even have a World-to-Come!

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

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

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

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

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

There is a fourth example: The Rishonim write that the women wove the wool for the curtains of the Mishkan while the wool was still attached to the goats and to the sheep. The Talmud calls this “Chochma Yeseira” (requiring special talent). Now, why did they do that? The Rishonim explain that a certain percentage of the women were Niddos. If a Niddah touches the detached wool, the wool becomes tameh (impure). They complained to Miriam that they wanted to weave but they were not allowed to weave because they were tameh. They asked Miriam for advice. Miriam does not tell them flat out, “Sorry,

this is forbidden. There is nothing you can do.” She suggests an ingenious idea. A live animal is not susceptible to become tameh. “Weave on the backs of live animals!”

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

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

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayakeil/Pikudei is provided below: ...A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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From: Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky <[rmk@torah.org](mailto:rmk@torah.org)> to: [drasha@torah.org](mailto:drasha@torah.org) date: Mar 8, 2023, 1:19 PM subject: Drasha - Masked Emotions

### ***Drasha Parshas Ki Sisa - Masked Emotions Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky***

In what is probably the most anti-climactic event in Jewish history, the nation that was about to receive the Torah from Moshe turns away from the will of Hashem. After 40 days they begin to worry that Moshe will never return and they panic. They create a new leader for themselves — The Golden Calf. The Torah describes the scene in Exodus 32:6: “The people offered (the calf) peace offerings and they sat down to eat and drink and they got up to revel.” Hashem immediately commands Moshe to descend Mount Sinai in order to admonish his corrupt nation. As Moshe comes down the mountain he hears tumultuous shouts emanating from the people who were celebrating their new found deity. His student, Yehoshua, also hears the sounds and declares (Exodus 32:17) “the sound of battle is in the camp.” Moshe listens and amends the theory. He tells Yehoshua, “It is not the sound of victory, nor the sound of defeat: I hear the sound of distress.” When Moshe sees the Golden Calf he breaks the Tablets and restores order, sanity, and the belief in Hashem. What is strange about the episode is the contrast of the sounds made and the sounds heard. If the Jewish People reveled and celebrated then why did Yehoshua hear sounds of war and how did Moshe hear sounds of distress? They should both have heard the sound of celebration and festivity. Rav Chaim of Sanz had a custom: he would test the local children on a monthly basis. The children would recite orally from the Mishnah or Talmud and Rav Chaim would reward them generously with sweets and money. Once a group of secular Jews decided to dupe Rav Chaim. They taught a Talmudic selection to a gentile child and reviewed it with him until he knew it perfectly. They dressed him like a Chasidic child and had him stand in line with all the other children to be tested. The rabbi listened to the young boy intently. The other children were puzzled: they did not remember this boy from their cheder, yet they were amazed at the remarkable fluency he displayed in reciting his piece. Rav Chaim was not impressed at all. He turned to the young man and said, “please tell your father that there are better ways to earn a few coins!” With that he dismissed the child. The secularists were shocked. “How did the Rabbi know?” Their curiosity forced them to approach Rav Chaim. Rav Chaim smiled as he answered them. “There are two ways to say the Gemorah. One is filled with spirituality. The child’s body is swaying and filled with the emotion of Torah. The other is just repetitive rote. This young man lacked the fire and the true joy that the Jewish children have when learning Torah. I knew he was not one of ours.” The Jews got up to revel around the golden calf. Moshe and Yehoshua however knew the difference between true joy — simcha — and confusion. The Jews revel were in essence distressed but it was masked with drinks and noise makers. True joy is coupled with a certainty and a sense of direction; something lacking for

those Jews celebrating the idol. The Jews may have gotten up to celebrate, but it was no celebration. It may have looked like a party to the untrained eye, but Moshe knew the true sound of joy. It did not exist with the Golden Calf. True joy is the harmony of spirituality and contentment. Superficial sounds of euphoria and celebration are heard by those with true insight as sounds of battle and distress. *Dedicated in memory of Leah Lieberman by Jonathan and Sarah Weber Good Shabbos! Copyright © 1998 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc. Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore. Drasha © 2022 by Torah.org.*

<https://jewishaction.com/religion/jewish-law/ai-meets-halachah/>

Spring 2023 issue of Jewish Action.

#### **AI Meets Halachah**

#### **Jewish Action in conversation with Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt**

Jewish Action: Can one use ChatGPT to find answers to halachic questions?

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt: I wouldn’t trust ChatGPT for a halachic pesak.

One of the best uses that I can see for AI right now is in data gathering. If one wants to study, for example, the halachot of Ya’aleh V’yavo, AI can be a phenomenal gatherer of information. It can provide you with a listing of all the sources on the subject and can even cite the full text of all of the relevant responsa. Many sefarim may be familiar to you; other sefarim you may not even recognize or have at your disposal. In this scenario, the purpose is not to pasken halachah (render halachic decisions), but to use AI as a tool for information gathering.

As AI matures, the potential for it playing more of a role in pesak halachah may change as well.

JA: So, is AI a more enhanced version of “Rabbi Google”?

Rabbi Glatt: You can do Google searches that will bring up plenty of sources, but AI could theoretically be much more comprehensive. Many sources are simply unavailable via a Google search. You can purchase Judaic digital libraries, such as the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project, but even that kind of database is not as comprehensive as AI. Theoretically, if every single sefer were to be scanned into AI, it should be able to provide a comprehensive compendium of all piskei halachah on a particular topic. Now I wouldn’t rely on that for pesak halachah, but it can certainly be relied upon as a summary document for one who is investigating the issue.

One of the controversial areas in medicine is how halachah views brain death, for example. Even at this point, AI could come up with numerous published opinions that say brain death constitutes halachic death. At the same time, it could come up with an equal number of published opinions that say brain

death is not halachic death. So if one is writing a comprehensive survey of the halachic literature, he could use AI as a data gatherer.

Using AI, a posek could render a halachic decision more easily as he has access to all the sources he needs. In that sense, AI could be a phenomenal resource for a posek.

JA: Is there a danger in having access to too much information?

Rabbi Glatt: For the layperson, absolutely. Too much information is not helpful. A comprehensive document, for instance, of all the opinions on reheating food on Shabbat is not going to help the layperson know what to do. He might see many contradictory opinions depending on the kind of food and other factors. He could very well throw up his hands and say, "I have no idea what to do. I'll do whatever I want, and then I'll find one of the rabbis cited online who agrees with me." This would represent a serious misunderstanding of the halachic process.

In the Gemara, Rabbi Yosi HaGlili rules that one can eat chicken with cheese, lechatchilah (a priori). But we don't pasken like that. If, however, one does an online search and sees Rabbi Yosi HaGlili's opinion, he might think that that's acceptable in halachah. He won't necessarily realize that it's a minority opinion that is not accepted.

Other people might deliberately seek out non-accepted halachic opinions. ChatGPT could easily write a convincing document based upon non-accepted halachic positions, albeit from great individuals, illustrating how eating chicken and cheese together is permissible in Jewish law, when, of course, it is not. Some might use the information to then proceed to do what they want to do. This is a distortion of the halachic process.

JA: Right. So it would seem that AI would be most useful as a tool for Torah scholarship.

Rabbi Glatt: Currently, that seems to me to be the best use for it. One could use AI not to get a halachic pesak, but rather for limud Torah, to study the various opinions of Chazal for the sake of learning. One could ask ChatGPT: Can you provide me with all the gemaras in Bavli and Yerushalmi on this topic? Can you then show me the Rishonim on the subject, then the piskei halachah and any relevant she'eilot and teshuvot that are in Shulchan Aruch?

So yes, AI could be an excellent tool for learning.

JA: Could a machine ever really pasken anyway?

Rabbi Glatt: The human element is essential in pesak halachah. There's a well-known story about the great posek Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l. In response to a person who asked him a she'eilah, Rav Shlomo Zalman got up from his chair. I must have asked Rav Shlomo Zalman a really good she'eilah, thought the questioner. I'm making him pace. He's walking to the window. Rav Shlomo Zalman then motioned to

the individual to come to the window. He approached the rav, anxious to hear what he would say. Rav Shlomo Zalman pointed to a house down the street and said, "That's where your rav lives; ask your rav this she'eilah."

When it comes to pesak halachah, the relationship is critical. The rav has to know the individual asking the question. There are many considerations that are taken into account when rendering a halachic decision. Is the questioner wealthy? Is he poor? Will the halachic decision impact a couple's shalom bayit, et cetera?

Rabbi Hershel Schachter recalls that his rebbi, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, would sometimes be asked the same she'eilah twice in one day and would give two different answers. Rabbi Schachter explains that the Rav understood the individual's personal situation, and therefore the halachah for that person was X. For the second individual, whose circumstances didn't allow for that leniency, the halachah was Y.

It's not that the halachah changes willy-nilly, but it allows for factors other than objective data to be taken into consideration. The halachah of the beit midrash, that is, the theoretical halachah, will always be the same. But its application will depend upon various factors.

There's another aspect as well. A man once came to the Beit Halevi and asked, "Is it permissible for me to fulfill the mitzvah of dalet kosot at the Seder with milk?" The Beit Halevi responded to the man's question in the affirmative. But he realized that if the man was asking about using milk at the Seder, he obviously didn't have enough money for meat or chicken at the Seder. The Beit Halevi told his wife to give the family funds to ensure their needs would be met for Pesach. A gadol b'Yisrael does not simply provide a mechanical yes-or-no answer to a she'eilah. He recognizes the real question underlying the question that is being asked.

JA: Can you explain the halachic process?

Rabbi Glatt: The halachic process is thousands of years old. A posek does not decide a halachic she'eilah, such as the permissibility of a heart transplant, in a vacuum. In order to render a halachic decision, he builds upon the incredible edifice erected by the Tanaim, Amoraim, Rishonim and Acharonim and the she'eilot u'teshuvot of contemporary gedolei Yisrael who preceded him.

This is a fundamental reason why one cannot rely on AI or on Google for piskei halachah. There is a halachic process that has evolved over the generations—an understanding of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, what was accepted lechatchilah, what was accepted bedieved (ex post facto), and what was accepted only b'sha'at hadechak, in an emergency situation.

It's also critically important to know what is being programmed into AI—the values and piskei halachah being

programmed constitute a bias in and of itself. To use an example cited earlier: in every state in the United States, for example, brain death is officially recognized as death. Therefore, if a person is brain dead and the family doesn't object, a death certificate will be written and the patient will be removed from a respirator. But there is an intense controversy among posekim as to whether halachah recognizes brain death as the definition of death. If AI is programmed to accept brain death as halachic death, that will steer its piskei halachah in one direction. Conversely, if it is programmed not to accept it, that will steer all of its conclusions in the opposite direction. And this is the exact problem AI will encounter in every situation where there are legitimate conflicting halachic opinions. This doesn't even touch upon the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic pesak, Litvish and Chassidic, and so on.

JA: What role does mesorah play?

Rabbi Glatt: That's a good question. There is a mesorah when it comes to halachah. AI doesn't have access to anecdotal material. In other words, it can never say: "I heard from my rebbi." AI wasn't in a shiur with Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. It wasn't in shiur with Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

There is a famous teshuvah written by Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer in the 1800s, in which he opines that one is permitted to bring a korban Pesach. He addresses the issue from all angles, including the fact that we don't have bigdei kehunah, a parah adumah or a Beit Hamikdash. After addressing every concern, he concludes that one is permitted to bring a korban Pesach today.

The Binyan Tzion, Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, wrote a treatise opposing Rabbi Kalischer's position. The overwhelming consensus of the posekim is that Rabbi Kalischer's position is not accepted and we cannot bring a korban Pesach—which is why we don't bring a korban Pesach nowadays. That's the mesorah.

Mesorah is not only the oral tradition that your rebbi taught you in the classroom; it is also what you observed your rebbi pasken in real-life cases (shimush). That is not something AI can do.

JA: Any concluding thoughts for our readers?

Rabbi Glatt: Is the internet good or bad? I would say it's neutral. On the one hand, it could, G-d forbid, lead one to see immorality worse than Sodom and Amora; on the other hand, there is a tremendous proliferation of Torah learning through the internet. AI is like the internet. It's a tool. Used properly, it can be a fantastic aid in harbatzat Torah. Used inappropriately, it could lead to the opposite. The full potential of AI is unknown, and it is certainly much greater than what we discussed. It is a dynamic new tool with seemingly limitless capabilities.

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt is the associate rabbi at the Young Israel of Woodmere and is an international lecturer on medical

and halachic issues. He has been giving a Daf Yomi shiur for thirty years and also gives a weekly gemara b'iyun shiur, daily halachah shiurim, and many other shiurim. His Dirshu Mishnah Berurah shiurim can be accessed at outorah.org. A board-certified infectious disease physician, he is currently a professor and chair of the Department of Medicine at Mount Sinai South Nassau.

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From: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org> reply-to: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org> to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Mar 9, 2023, 11:17 AM subject: The Closeness of God (Ki Tissa)

### **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l**

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

It was as if Moses was saying: Until now, they have experienced You as a terrifying, elemental force, delivering plague after plague to the Egyptians, bringing the world’s greatest empire to its knees, dividing the sea, overturning the very order of nature itself. At Mount Sinai, merely hearing Your voice, they were so overwhelmed that they said, if we continue to hear the voice, “we will die” (Ex. 20:16). The people needed, said Moses, to experience not the greatness of God but the closeness of God, not God heard in thunder and lightning at the top of the mountain, but as a perpetual presence in the valley below.

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

universe live within the universe in a predictable, comprehensible way, not just in the form of miraculous intervention?

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

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

However, third, you can see My “glory.” That is what Moses asked for once he realised that he could never know God’s “ways” or see His “face.” That is what God caused to pass by as Moses stood “in a cleft of the rock” (Ex. 33:22). We do not know at this stage, exactly what is meant by God’s glory, but we discover this at the very end of the book of Exodus.

Chapters 35–40 describe how the Israelites built the Mishkan. When it is finished and assembled we read this:

Then the Cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the Cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Ex. 40:34–35

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

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

That is the ongoing miracle of Jewish spirituality. No one before the birth of Judaism ever envisaged God in such abstract

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

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

Between the lines of Exodus 33, if we listen attentively enough, we sense the emergence of one of the most distinctive and paradoxical features of Jewish spirituality. No religion has ever held God higher, but none has ever felt Him closer. That is what Moses sought and achieved in chapter 33, in his most daring conversation with God.

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

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

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the 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, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein**

<[ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com](mailto:ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com)> date: Mar 9, 2023, 6:59 AM subject: Pshuto Shel Mikra in Ki Tisa

**PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA**

**From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l PARSHAT KI TISA**

The Exclusions of “Ach” and “Rak”

אך: אף על פי שתהיו רדופין וזריזין בזריזות המלאכה, שבת אל תדחה מפניה. כל אכין ורקין מיעושיין הן

אך: However, you must observe My Shabbatot. (Shemot 31:13)

In keeping with the well-known principle of Chazal (Yerushalmi Berachot 9:7) that the words אך and רק are “exclusionary” in nature, that is, that they serve to diminish or

limit the scope of something mentioned in the pasuk, Rashi comments (s.v. ach):

אף על פי שתהיו רדופין וזריזין בזריזות המלאכה, שבת אל תדחה מפניה. כל אכין ורקין מיעושיין הן Even though you are driven and energetic regarding the work (of building the Mishkan), Shabbat shall not be pushed aside by it. All instances of the word “אך” and “רק” are exclusionary.

Between אך and רק — The Malbim's Distinction The idea that both אך and רק denote some form of exclusion leads us to raise the following question; what is the difference between the exclusionary nature of these two terms? For it is important for us to know that, in the same way there is no happenstance when it comes to the writing the Torah, so, too, there is no such thing as two words that happen to mean exactly the same thing. Every word has its distinct nuance and connotation. There are no synonyms in the Torah.

The Malbim, in his “Ayelet Hashachar” introduction[1] to his peirush to Chumash Vayikra, expresses the difference as follows (siman 591):

The word אך denotes an exclusion within the “second” sentence, that is, the sentence that contains the word אך. In this respect, it differs from the word רק, which comes to exclude regarding something mentioned in the previous sentence.

To put this idea slightly differently: The word אך indicates an exclusion concerning something we are about to learn. The word רק indicates an exclusion concerning something we have already learned.

Applying the Principle — Parshat Mishpatim Let us illustrate this distinction with an example from the peirush of the Malbim himself.

The pasuk in Parshat Mishpatim (21:18) describes a case where two people are fighting, and one administers a severe blow to the other which, if it would kill him, would render the perpetrator liable to be killed by Beit Din (“וכי יריבו אנשים והכה “איש את רעהו באבן או באגרוף”). However, the pasuk proceeds to state that in this case, it was (subsequently) assessed that the victim would not die from the blow (“ולא ימות”). Hence, the verdict is (pasuk 19) “רק שבתו יתן ורפא ורפא” he must only pay for the victim's lost time (shevet) and for his healing expenses (ripui).

The Malbim explains the connotation of the word רק:

Even though until this point[2] (the perpetrator) was under the presumption that he was deserving of death, in which case he would not be liable for shevet or ripui,[3] now that he has been cleared from the liability of the death penalty, the obligation to pay shevet and ripui return, and similarly he is obligated in the other three payments of nezek (damage), tzaar (suffering), and boshet (embarrassment).

For one cannot say that the use of the word “רק” regarding the payment of shevet and ripui come to exclude the obligation of the other three payments, for if that were to be the case, the

pasuk should have said “אך שבתו יתן ורפא ירפא”; the explanation would then be “Only shevet and ripui, but not nezek, tzaar, and boshet.” The use of the word “רק,” however, comes to exclude regarding that which was mentioned (previously), namely “ונקמה — the injurer is exonerated,” as if to say, he is cleared from the liability of death, but not from paying shevet and ripui. For we have explained many times that the word “רק” excludes something that is part of what was mentioned in the previous sentence, while the word “אך” excludes something that is part of what is mentioned in the subsequent sentence.

Support from the Rishonim Appreciating this distinction between אך and רק will help us understand the comment of Rabbeinu Bachye on our pasuk of “את שבתתי תשמרו” (s.v. ach):

Seeing as the word “אך” comes to exclude — as Chazal have indeed told us that the words אך and רק are both exclusionary — it appears to me that the word אך in our pasuk comes to exclude keeping the Shabbat when it comes to bringing the korbanot that override the Shabbat, as Chazal (Pesachim 86a) expounded the word “במועדו — in its appointed time”[4] (Bamidbar 28:2) to teach us “even on Shabbat.” This is similar to their drashah (Shevuot 13a) concerning the pasuk which states (Vayikra 23:27) “אך בעשור לחדש השביעי הזה יום הכפרים הוא” — but, on the tenth of this seventh month it is Yom HaKippurim,” that the word אך also comes to exclude something, namely, to exclude those who don’t do teshuvah from receiving kaparah. And the opinion of Chazal[5] (regarding the word “אך” in our pasuk regarding Shabbat) is that it comes to exclude keeping the Shabbat in a situation of pikuach nefesh.

It is most significant to note, in terms of our discussion, that in both cases mentioned by Rabbeinu Bachye, the word אך is taken as indicating an exclusion concerning the matter about to be discussed (shemirat Shabbat or shemirat Yom Kippur). This would seem to provide ample basis and support for the approach of the Malbim.

Rashi’s Approach It would appear, however, from Rashi’s comments (quoted in the beginning of our discussion) that he does not concur with the distinction of the Malbim and Rabbeinu Bachye. Rashi explains the word “אך” to refer to the fact that building the Mishkan does not override Shabbat. This means that although the word אך appears in the beginning of the pasuk which talks about Shabbat, it does not come to exclude any aspect of Shabbat itself, but rather comes to exclude the matter that was mentioned in the previous pesukim, that is, the building of the Mishkan, from taking place on Shabbat. In fact, the Ramban (Shemot ibid.) takes issue with Rashi over this very matter.

For in all instances Chazal understood these excluding words to exclude regarding the matter being discussed.[6] If the excluding word in our pasuk (“אך”) was indeed stated with

reference to the building of the Mishkan, it would then mean that it is permitted to build it on Shabbat! Rather, the exclusion is stated with regard to milah or pikuach nefesh and other similar matters which supersede the Shabbat.[7]

The Word אך in Drash and in Pshat Interestingly, a further look into Rabbeinu Bachye’s comments on our pasuk may provide a way to understand the word “אך” as referring to building the Mishkan, and teaching us that it does not override the Shabbat. The chiddush here is that this understanding will come from relating to the word אך not as a tool of drash, but rather on the level of pshuto shel mikra:

The pasuk teaches us that the building of the Mishkan does not override the Shabbat...and similarly, Chazal expounded (Torat Kohanim, Kedoshim, parshah 3 perek 7), that “One might think that building the Beit Hamikdash overrides the Shabbat, to this end the Torah states (Vayikra 19:30) “את שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו — keep My Shabbatot, and fear My Sanctuary.”[8] According to this approach, the word “אך” is understood as similar to the word “אכן,” which has a connotation of “however,” as if to say, behold I have commanded you regarding the building of the Mishkan, however, observe My Shabbatot, and do not push Shabbat aside for purposes of building the Mishkan.

In other words, the message that Chazal derived through the means of drash from the pasuk “את שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו,” Rabbeinu Bachye derives through pshuto shel mikra from our pasuk, whereby the word אך is taken as relating to אכן, meaning “however.”

[1] This introduction comprises six hundred and thirteen principles of language and grammar relating to lashon hakodesh, which are nuances that Chazal used to expound halachot from Torah SheBichtav. [2] [I.e., prior to the point when it was assessed that the victim would not die from the blow.] [3] Since one who is liable to be killed is not obligated in monetary payments as well, based on the principle of קם ליה — let him remain with the greater punishment. [4] Stated with reference to the two daily tamid offerings. [5] Which is in contrast with Rabbeinu Bachye’s own explanation mentioned earlier in the paragraph. [6] This constitutes further support for the Malbim’s approach from among the Rishonim. Indeed, Rabbeinu Bachye’s comments themselves, mentioned above, are based on these words of the Ramban. [7] See mefarshei Rashi who discuss Rashi’s position on this matter, at length. [8] [The drash is explaining that by mentioning Shabbat before the Mikdash, the pasuk is indicating that it takes precedence over the Mikdash.] Copyright © 2023 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved. You're receiving this email either because you signed up on the website or you requested to be added. <http://www.journeysintorah.com>

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from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <[chanan@ravkooktorah.org](mailto:chanan@ravkooktorah.org)>  
date: Mar 9, 2023, 2:03 AM subject: **Rav Kook on Ki Tissa: A Lesson in Leadership**

Ki Tissa: A Lesson in Leadership

Moses was on top of Mount Sinai, experiencing Divine revelation on a level beyond the grasp of ordinary prophets. At the foot of the mountain, however, the people began to worry. Not knowing why Moses was taking so long, not understanding how he could live without food and water for forty days, they felt abandoned and leaderless. They demanded that Aaron make them a golden calf, and they worshipped it. God's response was immediate — He banished Moses from Mount Sinai:

“Leave! Go down! The people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt.” (Exodus 32:7)

It seems unfair. The people sin, and Moses is kicked off the mountain?

A Suitable Leader

In order for a leader to succeed, he must be appreciated and valued by his followers. The leader may possess a soul greatly elevated above the people, but it is crucial that the people should be able to relate to and learn from their leader.

At Mount Sinai, the Jewish people were on a lofty spiritual level. As a result, Moses was able to attain a supreme level of prophecy and revelation on top of the mountain. But after they sinned with the golden calf, Moses would no longer be a suitable leader were he to retain his spiritual attainments. It was necessary for Moses to “step down,” to lower himself, in order to continue serving as their guide and leader.

This idea is clearly expressed by the Talmud in Berachot 32a: “What does it mean, ‘Go down’? God told Moses, ‘Go down from your greatness. I only gave you pre-eminence for the sake of the Jewish people. Now they have sinned — why should you be elevated?’ Immediately, Moses’ [spiritual] strength left him.”

Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 160-161. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 142-143.) Get your book today!

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Ki Sisa R' A. Leib Scheinbaum** פרשת כי תשיב"ג תשפ"ג

וישכימו ממחרת ויעלו עולות ויגישו שלמים וישב העם לאכל ושתו וישיבו  
The next day they rose early, offered up burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and they got up to make merry.

**(32:6)** *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, posits that this *pasuk* offers us a window into the mindset of the idol worshippers. At first, it begins with burnt offerings, which are wholly burnt and offered up to the higher being whom they claim to worship. This step is filled with idealism. After all, the entire animal is offered up, indicating the participants' desire to give up their money and their lives on the altar of idealism. They still think that something will happen; their idol will speak to them. This step does not last very long, because nothing happens – no response from the idol. Their idealism begins to wane, to sputter. They moderate their position vis-à-vis the idol. Now they offer a peace-offering – a sacrifice which reflects a partnership between the spiritual and the physical spheres. The owner keeps part of the sacrifice, he gives part to on high, and he gives part to the priests. They are being more realistic. Stage three sees their enthusiasm dwindle to the point that they sit down to eat and drink. It is now all about them. Their deity has not come through for them. No more Heaven; no more Priests. Why waste good meat? We are eating it all. The digression continues with stage four, the final stage of their infamy. They get up to make merry. This concept of “making merry” has nothing to do with amusements. It denotes mockery and scorn. They are upset. After supporting their idol through three stages of delusional belief, they publicly mock it and heap scorn on it. The idol which they have so loved is now the object of their loathing and disgust. Their eyes have been opened, and what has been revealed is not pretty. They see the folly of their ways, the foolishness and falsehood their idol represents. This is the cycle of idol worship, the veneration of the various “isms” that have plagued us. These “isms” are no less false idols than the molten, stone statues that the early pagans worshipped. Do we have any idea how many Jews have fallen on the Altar of this false idealism? Some returned – after they realized the folly of their sham beliefs. The ones who have had the courage and fortitude to return were embraced and welcomed home. The others? They destroyed themselves and their future generations who have assimilated, having traded their Jewish identities and destinies for a misconception which was false from the very beginning. At first, they refused to see the truth – now they are blind to it. *Rav Galinsky* relates how one of the most infamous heretics of the pre-World War II era, a heretic whose virulent writings dripped with venom against anything even remotely related to *frumkeit*, religious observance, returned to Jewish observance. It occurred during the war, when he came face-to-face with the devotion and commitment evinced by a *frummer Yid*. He went by the name Priokin. The *Ponovezher Rav, zl*, met Priokin in America and asked him, “Tell me, what was it that catalyzed your return to *Yiddishkeit*?” Priokin wanted very much to bare his soul and reveal the inner turmoil with which he had dealt during the war. “At the beginning of the war,” he began, “I was in Warsaw when it came under siege. Through

much suffering, I was able to make it to Vilna where I walked around like a refugee. Gone was my once proud self-esteem. I was like all other Jews, searching for crumbs to sustain myself. My entire world had been destroyed. My soapbox had been the newspaper in which I was free to write what I wanted and heap vitriol against whomever I pleased. The newspaper was gone, my readership, refugees like myself, had nothing. My ‘restaurant’ was the soup kitchen, where I stood in line like everyone else. My once impressive apparel was now in tatters. I walked through the streets dejected, looking for shelter and a roof over my head. “Suddenly, a loud explosion rent the air. I knew that I might not be so lucky the next time. The bombs were falling. I had to locate a shelter. I ran to the nearest building. Ironically, it was a *bais hamedrash*, a building I had not entered in years. For some reason, I felt I would be safe here. “Bombs were exploding outside. Who knew how long the walls of the *bais hamedrash* would protect me? I hid under a table for added protection from both the bombs and the blood-thirsty murderers who were searching for those who had survived the bombing. No one was safe. Hiding under the table, I heard faint sounds. Two *bachurim*, *yeshivah* students, were next to me beneath the table, heads together, learning! They were immersed in a *sugya*, topic, of the *Gemorah*. “When I saw this, I understood what it is that makes us different. We have access to the eternal wellspring. If two *yeshivah* students can concentrate on their learning while bombs are falling all over, they know the truth. This is where the desire for the truth could be quenched. Then and there, I decided that if I lived, I would become a *baal teshuvah* and spend the rest of my mortal days imbibing from the wellspring of truth.”

**אנא חטא העם הזה חטא גדולה The people have committed a grievous sin. (32:31)** One would think that Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who is presently interceding on behalf of *Bnei Yisrael*, would attempt to decrease the seriousness of their sin, not magnify it. *Horav Yechezkel, zl, m'Kuzmir (Maamer Yechezkel)* explains that the first step on the road to *teshuvah*, repentance, is *hakoras ha'chet*, recognizing and acknowledging that one has sinned. One who puts his head in the ground in an attempt to ignore his misdeed, or rationalizes his actions with a list of excuses to absolve – and even justify – his wrongdoing, will not repent. Even if he makes a feeble attempt at *teshuvah*, it will have little to no effect, since he has not acknowledged his sin. Adam *HaRishon* sinned, and his *teshuvah* was considered deficient. The *Rebbe* explains that Adam did not view his actions as being particularly sinful. Chavah not only had initiated it, but, as *Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 19:5)* teach, she wailed until he ate. This is sufficient rationalization to diminish the severity of the sin. When the sin is not clearly defined, the repentance either does not follow or, at best, is flawed. This is why Moshe magnified the people’s transgression concerning the Golden Calf. Once the sin had been clearly delineated and

the spiritual stain outlined in all its gory detail, the people understood the need for repentance. Thus, what would appear to be Moshe’s condemnation was actually his manner of encouraging and facilitating their *teshuvah*.

**וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם On the day I make an accounting (of sins) I will bring their sin to account against them. (32:34)** The sin of the Golden Calf is mind-boggling. *Klal Yisrael* is essentially a holy people. In addition, this outrage occurred shortly after the Giving of the Torah. How could they have fallen to such a nadir, so fast? While a number of expositions focus on the nation’s spiritual/emotional level, the simple explanation for their actions is that they really did not perpetrate the sin. It was actually the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude of Egyptians, who joined our people as we were leaving, claiming allegiance to Hashem. They were the ones responsible for making the Golden Calf; they were the ones who acted profligately, who exchanged Hashem for a molten calf of their own creation. Specifically, it was Bilaam’s sons, Yonus and Yabrus, who had originally served Pharaoh as his magicians, that had joined the Jewish people along with the *eirev rav*, who made the calf. If so, why was the entire nation (excluding *Shevet Levi*) held in contempt – until this very day? Why are we still paying for the Golden Calf? The answer is one that goes to the core of much that we are guilty of even today: We watched; we stood there with folded hands; we did not protest the outrage that was happening before everyone’s eyes. Indifference to *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem’s Name, is tantamount to committing the sin. One who cares about *Yiddishkeit* will not stand idly by as usurpers who flagrantly violate the Torah egregiously impugn it to suit their fancy. On the other hand, we may not view anyone who violates the Torah as doing so maliciously. In most circumstances, he is acting out of ignorance, as the product either of an upbringing in which he was not taught anything or of living in an environment which was not conducive to *shemiras ha'mitzvos*. The protest that we might want to register must be well-thought out and carefully mulled over to ascertain that, indeed, the individual had violated the Torah. Quite possibly, to the spectator’s view, the individual transgressed a prohibition, while, in truth, he had a very good rationale to justify this behavior. The following story, related by *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, is not only an eye-opener, but it also illustrates the frightening scenario that can occur when we do not judge others favorably and do not look at the big picture before passing judgment. A *frum* family from Tel Aviv adopted a couple who were recent emigres from Russia. They were both well-educated doctors, and they expressed an interest in wanting to learn and know more about *Yiddishkeit*. The host family went out of their comfort zone to help the immigrants acclimate themselves to the country. Until now, they had lived in a country under the reign of an oppressive regime, which not only scoffed at religion as being

the “opiate of the people,” but actually forbade it and severely punished anyone who adhered to Torah and *mitzvos*. All went well. It was an idyllic relationship. The Bnei Brak couple was excited that they had brought a once assimilated family back to *Yiddishkeit*. Then, one Friday night, after parting from one another in their usually friendly manner, for some reason the host walked over to the window of his third-floor apartment to see his guests flagging down a taxi, entering the vehicle and taking off. It goes without saying that the disappointment and hurt the host family felt was saddening. Sadness gave way to anger, as they exclaimed, “What *chutzpah* these people have! They exhaust our time, making us believe that they were really interested in learning about *Yiddishkeit*. They joined us for the *Shabbos* meals, as if they cared. They just wanted our food. Did they have to take a taxi right in front of our house? Could they not have walked to the next corner, out of sight, and flagged a taxi there? Furthermore, in order to take a taxi, they would have needed money. So, they had money in their pockets the entire visit. Who knows? Maybe they even came by taxi. How dare they sit at our table, eating our food and singing *zemiros* as if they were observant, while, in truth, they were not.” Their decision was made. They would sever all relationship with the Russian couple. The couple called a number of times and received a cool response. After a while, they took the hint and accepted the message: we are no longer interested in you. Two months passed, and they received a call from an acquaintance of the Russian couple. The husband had passed away in the prime of his life. Could they make a *shivah* call to the young widow? She was heartbroken and had few friends. They decided they would go. A *shivah* call is not contingent upon a relationship. A Jew is grieving; his fellow is present to comfort him. They went to the Russian couple’s apartment where the young widow, her eyes red from weeping, greeted them. They started a conversation, the way people do at a *shivah* home, first abstract, then talking about the *niftar*, deceased, his sudden passing, and what they could do to help. “What was the cause of death? Had he been sick?” “He suffered a massive heart attack – in the hospital.” “Did he suffer from heart disease?” the Bnei Brak couple asked. “He suffered from a heart problem that surfaced a short while ago. The first episode happened when we were leaving your home the last *Shabbos* that we were there. As we were walking down the stairs, my husband suddenly began to complain of chest pains and pain in his arm. Being a doctor, he knew this could be serious. When we reached the street, he immediately flagged down a taxi and went straight to the hospital. We made it in time, and they saved him. This time, his heart just gave out and he died.” We all make mistakes in judgment. We protest and often get carried away. It is prudent to step back, think and analyze the situation and ask ourselves, “Could we be mistaken? Could there be a reason for this behavior which

eludes us?” Thinking before we act can spare repercussions for both parties involved.

ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך ד' ילך נא ד' בקרבינו כי עם קשה עורף

**הוא If I have favor in Your eyes, My Lord, let my Lord go among us – for it is a stuff-necked people.**

(34:9) A superficial reading of the *pasuk* will cause the reader to pause and question Moshe *Rabbeinu's* comment concerning the stiff-necked nature of *Klal Yisrael*. On the surface, stiff-necked does not appear to be a positive attribute. It denotes one who is imperious, overly-assertive, and pretentious. These traits may have positive sides to them, but Moshe was seeking to ameliorate their side – not to present it as an act of *chutzpah* by a people who seem to have audacity as part of their DNA. When seeking forgiveness for the nation, it would seem best to downplay their brashness. *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, quotes *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, who defines *akshanus*, stiff-neckedness, as one’s total fidelity to Torah and *mitzvos* under extreme situations. Vicissitude and travail do not cause the Jew to run away. On the contrary, when the pressure becomes stronger, the Jew girds himself to stand resolute and triumph over pressure. This is what Moshe intimated to Hashem: Yes – the Jewish people committed a grave sin, but, despite their infraction, they remain committed under all circumstances. Their faithfulness will not waver; they will not bend. No other nation maintains such an assertive nature as its defining characteristic. The story is well-known, having been printed in the *hakdamah*, preface, to his *Mekadshai Hashem*. I merited to hear the story from the author, *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, zl*, who was my family’s *Rebbe*. Every year prior to *tekias shofar*, the *Veitzener Rav (Rav Meisels)*, who survived Auschwitz and now lived in Chicago, would ascend to the lectern, his tear-stained *Tallis* pulled over his head – and he would begin to speak. The words were hardly audible because they were uttered amid heavy, uncontrolled sobbing. He was not the only one who cried. Everyone in the *shul*, comprised primarily of Holocaust survivors, wept bitterly. I was a young boy, sitting next to my father, whose relationship with the *Veitzener Rav* hailed back to their days in Auschwitz. The memories I have from the pre-*shofar drashah* are indelibly seared in my mind. The *Rav* spoke about the 1,400 boys who were doomed to die on *Rosh Hashanah*. The *Rav* had somehow been able to procure a *shofar* which he blew for the internees in twenty different venues. Each instance was fraught with extreme danger. Being caught meant certain death, but these men and *Rav Meisels* had already walked through the valley of the shadow of death. The Nazis could take their bodies, but they were powerless to vanquish their love for, and commitment to Hashem, which was the only thing that kept them going. What catalyzed in others depression and even insanity, in others was the fulcrum that urged them on to live. When the 1,400 boys who had been selected and isolated in a

separate block heard that the *Veitzner* had a *shofar*, they pleaded with him to blow the *shofar* for them. He was acutely aware of the penalty should he be caught. Nonetheless, how could he deprive these holy children of what would be their last *mitzvah*? He walked into the block to be confronted by a sight that remained etched in his mind for the rest of his mortal days. He saw a bitter sea of tear-stung eyes, children weeping uncontrollably – not with fear, but with pride in their preparation to ascend to the highest levels of holiness in leaving this world *Al Kiddush Hashem*, accompanied the sound of the *shofar*. They swarmed around the *Rav*, kissing his hand, his clothing, anything- as long as they could touch him. He knew many of them, members of his congregation in Veitzen. He briefly spoke words of Torah in an attempt to hearten them for the inevitable. He blew the *shofar* as they all cried. This was followed by a passionate rendering of *Shema Yisrael*. The *Rav* bid them farewell, knowing that, in moments, they would all be ensconced in *Gan Eden*. This is the definition of *am kshei oref*, a stiff-necked people. Yes, we are obstinate and uncompromising. We will neither yield to those who attempt to convince us to lower our religious standards, nor fall victim to persecution. We stand with Hashem, because that is what a Jew does. |

*Mazel tov on bar mitzvah of Gidon Salamon - גזעון כלב יחזקאל*  
 "May he continue to be a source of nachas and joy to his family, to Klal Yisrael and to HaShem Yisborach Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

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Parshas Ki Sisa When To Assume Risk I Moshe stood at the gateway of the camp and said, "Whoever is for Hashem, join me." All the Levi'im gathered around him. He said to them, "So said Hashem the G-d of Israel, 'Every man, put his sword on his thigh and pass back and forth from gate to gate in the camp. Let every man kill his brother, every man his fellow, and every man his relative.'"

If Moshe meant to rally to his side all those innocent of idolatrous service, he would have raised quite an army – not just the shevet of Levi! The majority of the Bnei Yisrael had not been guilty of avodah zarah. Moshe raised the bar much higher than that, however. He asked for volunteers who knew that they were absolutely dedicated to Hashem, to the exclusion of any other interest. He asked for those who would give up anything and everything for love of Hashem and His honor.

Moshe sought this spiritual elite because he was reluctant to place people in danger. The task he assigned this group was fraught with danger. Those earmarked for execution were hardly going to go to their deaths without resistance and struggle. Moshe's "special forces" were commissioned to perform a great mitzvah of national importance – but that did not guarantee their safety. Chazal teach[2] that mitzvah emissaries are Divinely protected from harm – but not where danger is particularly great. Moshe understood that he indeed was exposing his men to great risk, and did not want to put them in harm's way.

The solution he hit upon was to recruit a force of extraordinary people. The "great danger" exception to the rule that mitzvah emissaries are protected from harm has its own exception. Those who perform mitzvos for the usual reasons that motivate people, i.e. expectation of reward, be it in this world or the next, cannot expect to emerge unscathed from places of great danger. On the other hand, there are people who rise above the level of the ordinary good person. They dedicate themselves entirely to the Divine cause without any sense of personal needs and preferences. Such people have nothing to fear, even in the face of great apparent danger.

Hashem sent the navi Shmuel to anoint a new monarch, replacing Shaul who had been stripped of his kingly future. Shmuel balked. How can I go? Shaul will find out and kill me! Hashem agreed to give him cover. Shmuel should take along a calf, and claim that his business was offering a korban[3]. If Shmuel needed to employ subterfuge to ensure his safety, why had Hashem not suggested it to him from the start?

Following our approach, the sequence of events is entirely reasonable. Although Shmuel was leaving on a mission associated with great risks, he was one of those few people who genuinely acted with no self-interest whatsoever. Ordinarily, he would not have to worry at all about danger; G-d therefore did not provide him with any special safety net. Shmuel's closeness with Hashem was all the protection he needed. He would protect him even outside the laws of teva.

So it would have been under ordinary circumstances. Shmuel, however, felt some resistance within himself. He was not happy at having to wrest the crown from Shaul's head, so to speak. This unhappiness told him that he was not operating on the highest level of selflessness, at which the opportunity to perform a mitzvah would have brought him nothing but joy, elation, and devekus. Understanding that he was not at peak spiritual performance, he knew that he was not vouchsafed success on his mission. He therefore had to ask Hashem for Plan B instructions – how he could protect himself even within the confines of natural law and probability. Hashem responded with the ruse of the calf-offering.

Moshe tells the people that Hashem commanded them to punish the guilty by killing the guilty. It is noteworthy that

there is no text in the Torah that says as much. We do not read of Hashem giving such a command to Moshe. Clearly, Hashem did give such an instruction, but it is significant that the text omits it. We can attribute this to the fact that Hashem does not demand of people that they transcend the ordinary limitations of humankind. The madregah of ahavas Hashem that Moshe was looking for exceeds the capacity of human beings operating within the laws of human nature. Significantly, after he found his very special group in shevet Levi, Moshe transmits instructions to them in the name of “Hashem, the G-d of Israel.” The last phrase was meant to underscore that Hashem would be there for His people, prepared to save them in situations of great peril and danger.

The Torah orders the Levi'im to accomplish the grim deed, pitting them against brothers and relatives. Even though Divine assistance and protection was assured to them, their responsibility included minimizing the extent of the miraculous intervention. By showing themselves ready and able to kill those closest to them, they demonstrated that they were exceptional people, with a stronger than ordinary devotion to HKBH. This would be noted by others, who would then be less likely to offer fierce resistance, recognizing their spiritual power.

The upshot of this is a practical and common application of a similar principle. The community often has to protect itself against evildoers. Persuasion and reason do not always work. We sometimes need to pursue an evildoer, inflicting harm upon him that is justifiable and necessary to achieve justice. The role of pursuer is always one of great danger. It is important to minimize the risk from those situations. When we are forced into such a position, it is crucial that the pursuer have no personal stake, no self-interest in the case. If this is not true, the pursuer will not be free of guilt in the estimation of Heaven.

Yaakov Avinu caused great anguish to his father when he impersonated his brother in order to receive the berachos. He was not punished for this. He himself was pained for having to inflict pain upon his father. He had no choice; there was no other way. He also caused great sorrow to Esav. According to Chazal, for this he was indeed punished[4]. This pain was no less justified than that of Yitzchok. But Yaakov did find some measure of satisfaction in this triumph over his brother.

For this he had to pay a price.

1. **Based on Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar**, Shemos 32:26-27 2. Pesachim 8B 3. Shmuel I 16:2 4. Bereishis Rabbah 67:4

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from: contact@michalhorowitz.com date: Mar 9, 2023, 11:02 AM  
subject: [New post] Ki Sisa: Between the First and Second Luchos

Ki Sisa: Between the First and Second Luchos  
By **Michal Horowitz** on Mar 09, 2023 08:01 am

In this week's parsha, Parshas Ki Sisa, the Bnei Yisrael commit the egregious sin of the Eigel Ha'zahav, the sin of the Golden Calf. With

Moshe absent for forty days and forty nights post Revelation at Sinai, the people panic as they miscalculate the moment of his return, and in the mayhem (and under Aharon's well-intentioned guidance), a molten calf is fashioned. Intoxicated with sin, the people wake up early in the morning to worship the golden calf (Shemos 32:6 w/ Rashi).

When Moshe descends from Har Sinai with the Luchos ha'Eidus (the Tablets of Testimony) in his hands, he hears the sounds of the nation in their sin. In response to the great travesty they have committed, the pasuk tells us: וַיִּצְרַח אֶת-מֹשֶׁה, וַיִּשְׁלַח מִיָּדוֹ אֶת-הַלְּחֹת, וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם, פַּחַח – and the wrath of Moshe flared, and he flung the tablets from his hands, shattering them at the foot of the mountain (32:19).

After many tefillos on behalf of the nation, as well invoking the power of the Yud-Gimmel Middos Ha'Rachamim (13 Divine Attributes of Mercy), Hashem commands Moshe to carve a second set of Tablets, and ascend the mountain with this new set in hand. פָּסַל-לָךְ שְׁנַי-לְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרַאשֵׁימוֹת; וְכָתַבְתִּי עַל-הַלְּחֹת אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עָלַי – Hew for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke (34:1).

The first set, brought down in the aftermath of the Golden Calf, was shattered and destroyed. But the second set, carved by Moshe and inscribed by G-d, and brought down by Moshe on motzei Yom Kippur – when Hashem declared “Salachti ki'd'varecha – I have forgiven (the nation) like your word (as you, Moshe, requested)” was everlasting.

The first ones were given amongst the throngs, and the second ones were given in intimate privacy between Hashem and Moshe. From here Chazal derive a beautiful lesson and instruction as to how we should always strive to live our lives: הִרְאֵנוּנוֹת עֵינֵי שְׁהָיוּ בְּתַשׁוּאוֹת וְקוֹלוֹת – the first (set of Luchos) were given amidst great noise and a large assembly, and so, the evil eye had power over them (and they were destroyed), but the second set, given in privacy and quiet endured; for there is no finer quality than modesty (Rashi to 34:3).

The wise words of the Sages are words to live by, especially in the society in which we live, where modesty is virtually (pun intended) absent and intimate details of our lives are shared with all.

Another lesson derived from the distinction between the two sets of Tablets is taught by Rabbi Shmuel Goldin, who writes that we must consider the differences between the two sets of Tablets received by Moshe on Sinai: the first set, destroyed as a result of the cheit ha'eigel, and the second set, mandated by G-d to take their place.

“The most obvious distinction is that the first set of tablets were both carved and inscribed by G-d while the second set were carved by Moshe at G-d's command and then divinely inscribed on the summit of Mt. Sinai.

“A second, more subtle, yet fascinating distinction between the two sets emerges as part of Moshe's recollections in the book of Devarim.

There Moshe states that accompanying the command to carve the second set of tablets and to ascend the mount with them in hand was an added Divine directive: פָּסַל-לָךְ שְׁנַי-לְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרַאשֵׁימוֹת, וַעֲלֵה אֹלַי, along with the stone tablets, Moshe was commanded ‘and make for yourself a wooden ark [in which to place the tablets].’ So important is this Ark, that Moshe cites it no fewer than four times within the span of five sentences (Devarim 10:1-5).



“Perhaps the message of the second tablets and the Ark into which they are placed is the message of context. The Torah is valueless in a vacuum. Its words are only significant when they find a ready home in the heart of man – only when those words are allowed to shape the actions of those who receive them.

“Moshe, descending the mount and witnessing the nation in sin, recognizes that the tablets and the law they represent have no context within which to exist. The nation is simply unready to accept G-d’s word. Were that word to be given to them in their present state, the Torah itself would become an aberration misunderstood and even misused. Therefore, Moshe publicly destroys the luchos and then, at G-d’s command, begins the process of reeducating the people.

“Central to the process of reeducation will be the symbolism of the second set of Tablets of Testimony, themselves. G-d will inscribe upon them His decrees but, this time, only on stone carved by Moshe. The tablets themselves will thus represent the word of G-d, finding a home in the actions of man. These new tablets must also immediately be placed into a symbolic home, a simple Ark of wood. Only if the contents of those tablets find their home, as well, in humble hearts of men – only if the Torah finds its context – will that Torah be worthy of existence” (Unlocking the Torah Text, Shemot, p.287-288).

Of his father-in-law, HaRav HaGaon Maran Sar HaTorah Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt”l, Rav Shraga Steinman recalls the following incident. “A certain darshan in Bnei Brak was once trying to find the source of an idea but couldn’t trace its origin. He was certain he had seen it in a Medrash, but when he presented his question to Rav Chaim, the gadol thought for a moment and then replied, ‘It’s not in the Medrash. It’s in the Abarbanel’s commentary on the Haggadah, on the piyut of ‘Vayehi b’chatzi ha’laylah.’

‘Who in the world is capable of instantly remembering such obscure sources?’ Rav Steinman said in wonder” (Mishpacha, Issue 950, p.102). זכורתו יגן עלינו.

The Torah’s infinite value and wisdom can only ennoble and enlighten us, guide our path and serve as a beacon in darkness, when we create a receptacle to hold the Torah. Each person must fashion himself as the Ark where the luchos rested. In this way, for each of us on our own level, we will merit an everlasting bond with the Torah that shapes our lives, in this world and the next.

בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום,

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Broken

## **Why Breaking the Tablets Was Moses' Greatest Accomplishment**

**Rabbi YY Jacobson**

**August 9, 2012**

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

Broken

The simple reading of the story (recorded twice in Torah, in Exodus, in this week's portion, and then again in Deuteronomy) goes like this: After the Jews created a Golden Calf, Moses smashed the stone tablets created by G-d, engraved with the Ten Commandments. Moses and G-d then "debated" the

appropriate response to this transgression and it was decided that if the people would truly repent, G-d would give them a second chance. Moses hewed a second set of stone tablets; G-d engraved them also with the Ten Commandments, and Moses gave them to the Jewish people.

Yet a few major questions come to mind.

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

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

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

3. In its eulogy for Moses, the Torah chooses this episode of smashing the tablets as the highlight and climax of Moses’ achievements.

In the closing verses of Deuteronomy we read: “Moses, the servant of G-d, died there in the land of Moab... And there arose not since a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom G-d knew face to face; all the signs and wonders which G-d sent to do in the land of Egypt... that mighty hand, those great fearsome deeds, which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel.”

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

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

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

In the Fragments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1) Talmud Bava Basra 14a. 2) On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the high priest would not perform the service with his usual golden garments, since gold was remotely reminiscent of the golden calf. Yet in this instance, throughout the entire year, the very symptom of the golden calf – the broken tablets – were stored in the holy of holies! Cf. Ramban and Ritva to Bava Basra *ibid*; Likkutei Sichos vol 26 Parshas Ki Sisa. 3) Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), whose work is the most basic of biblical commentaries. 4) See Talmud Shabbas 87a and *rashi ibid*; Rashi to Deut. 34:12, the final verse of the Torah. 5) "G-d said to Moses: 'Do not be distressed over the First Tablets, which contained only the Ten Commandments. In the Second Tablets I am giving you, you will also have Halachah, Midrash and Aggadah'" (Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 46:1.) This means, that it was precisely the breaking of the tablets that became the catalyst for a far deeper divine revelation. 6) This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, on the 20th of Av 5725, August 18th 1965, on the occasion of his father's yartziet. In this talk, in which the Rebbe broke down twice, he described the agony of many deeply spiritual Jews put in situations where they are unable to study Torah and observe its Mitzvos. "There are times when G-d wants your mitzvos," the Rebbe said, "and other times when He wants your 'broken tablets.'"