

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

KI TISA 5784

Weekly Parsha KI TISA

Rabbi Berel Wein's Weekly Blog

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Between Truth and Peace

KI TISSA

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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

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

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

Ex. 32:1

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

Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten Calf. Then they said, "'This, Israel, is your god, who brought you out of Egypt.'" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the Calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented peace offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Ex. 32:2-6

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

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

Ex. 32:25

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

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

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

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

Sanhedrin 7a

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

So there is a systematic attempt in the history of interpretation to mitigate or minimise Aaron's culpability – understandably so, since we do not find explicitly that Aaron was punished for the Golden Calf (though Abarbanel holds that he was punished later). Yet, with all the generosity we can muster, it is hard to see Aaron as

anything but weak, especially in the reply he gives to Moses when his brother finally appears and demands an explanation:

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god who will go before us...' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!"

Ex. 32:22-24

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

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

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

Avot 1:12

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

My covenant was with him of life and peace . . . He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

Malachi 2:5-6

But Malachi is talking about priesthood in general rather than the historical figure of Aaron. Perhaps the most instructive passage is the Talmudic discussion (Sanhedrin 6b) as to whether arbitration, as opposed to litigation, is a good thing or a bad thing. The Talmud presents this as a conflict between two role models, Moses and Aaron:

Moses's motto was: Let the law pierce the mountain. Aaron, however, loved peace and pursued peace and made peace between man and man.

Moses was a man of law, Aaron of mediation (not the same thing as arbitration but considered similar). Moses was a man of truth, Aaron of peace. Moses sought justice, Aaron sought conflict resolution. There is a real difference between these two approaches. Truth, justice, law: these are zero-sum equations. If X is true, Y is false. If X is in the right, Y is in the wrong. Mediation, conflict resolution, compromise, the Aaron-type virtues, are all attempts at a non-zero outcome in which both sides feel that they have been heard and their claim has, at least in part, been honoured.

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

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

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

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

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

Revivim -

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

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

The Commandment to Draft Yeshiva Students

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

The clarification was written at the initiative of Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv Cohen, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, son of Rabbi David HaCohen “the Nazir” (Nazirite) ztz”l, one of the heads of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav. It can be said that Rabbi Shaar Yeshuv was the first child to grow up in the bosom of the Torah of the Land of Israel, and thanks to his faith, studies and talents, paved the way for those after him, such as clarifying the commandment

of military service for yeshiva students, and paving the way for combining army service with yeshiva studies, which continues with the immense sanctification of God’s name by all Hesder yeshiva students, until today.

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

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

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

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

The Blessing of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda and the Nazirite

“I received the blessing and consent for this initiative from the head of the yeshiva, my teacher and rabbi Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook ztz”l, and of course the blessing of my father, my teacher and rabbi, the holy Nazir ztz”l. There were indeed yeshiva heads who were hesitant about the initiative, perhaps due

to the concern that it would lead to the cancellation of the 'draft deferment arrangement' practiced until today. The head of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, the Gaon, Rabbi Yaacov Moshe Charlap ztz"l, remained silent, but there were members of his family, and those close to him, who acted against the idea...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Concern for his Fate

While the pamphlet was being printed, the Old City fell into enemy hands, and the Nazir and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda were informed that Officer Shaar Yeshuv was severely wounded, and his fate was unknown. Imagine their feelings. They had ruled there was an obligation to serve in the army, knew the price could be extremely painful, and now, while arguing with other rabbis about the mitzvah of army service, the Nazir may have to sit shiva for his only son (he had a daughter, the wife of Rabbi Goren), and Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda would have to mourn his beloved student, who went out to battle at their encouragement, and did not return.

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

Receiving the Pamphlet

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

Wedding in Military Uniform

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

of the Nazir, the groom's father, and on the side of the bride's grandfather, the famous philanthropist Harry Fischel.

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

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

עקב וינברגר

Parshat Ki Tisa: To Count or Not to Count

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

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

To count or not to count is not the question, but rather how to count! And whom you cannot count! At first glance, one of the more curious laws in the Torah is the prohibition to count Jews. The Talmud records:

"R. Elazar said, "Whoever counts an Israelite, transgresses a [single] prohibition, as it is written, 'And the number of the children are as the sand of the sea which cannot be measured'" (Hosea 2:1). R. Nahman bar Isaac says, "He transgresses two prohibitions, as the verse concludes, 'and cannot be counted.'" (Yoma 22b)

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

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

Furthermore, how are we to understand the word "tisa?" The Hebrew root implies "lifting up." Rashi, citing Targum Onkelos, informs us that it means to obtain, or to receive, which is how most translations treat the word: "When you take sum of the children of Israel..." The Midrash (Pesikta Rabati 11) picks up on the idea of "lifting" but goes one step further; more than to lift, Ki Tisa is about uplifting, not just to raise but to exalt. And in this count of counts, we are exalting not only Israel, but also the God of Israel. "In whatever manner you can uplift this nation, uplift. For it says, ki tisa et rosh bnai Yisrael [When you lift up the head of the children of Israel]. And there is no head of the Jewish people except for God."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And why a half-shekel? Simply stated, we are being taught that every Jew is incomplete without every other Jew.

Every Jew must be brought closer, not pushed away. The whole is comprised of the sum of its parts, and every part is unassailably precious.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And this "eternal" aspect of our existence is really the reason why we do not count Jews. We don't count because we can't count. Since the Jewish people are an eternal people, all those Jews who have lived before us, and all those Jews who haven't even been born yet, are part of our nation, part of *knesset Yisrael*. In the words of Rabbi

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the daily sacrifice is not an offering of partnership (*korban shutfut*), but rather an offering of historic community (*korban tzibbur*). And if Israel includes within it the metaphysical idea of a historic nation, how can we ever count eternity?

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Broken

Why Breaking the Tablets Was Moses' Greatest Accomplishment

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

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

Broken

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

Yet a few major questions come to mind.

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

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

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

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

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

great fearsome deeds, which Moses did before the eyes of all Israel.”

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

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

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

In the Fragments

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

Moses did not break the tablets because he was angry and lost his control. Rather, the breaking of the tablets was the beginning of the healing process. Before the golden calf was created, the Jews could find G-d within the wholeness of the tablets, within the spiritual wholeness 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 wholeness, but also—sometimes primarily—in the broken fragments of the human spirit[5]. There are moments when G-d desires that we connect to Him as wholesome people, with clarity and a sense of fullness; there are yet deeper moments when He desires that we find Him in the shattered experiences of our lives.

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

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

What Moses accomplished with breaking the tablets was the demonstration of the truth that the stuff we call holiness can be carved out from the very alienation of a person from G-d. From the very turmoil of his or her psychological and spiritual brokenness, a new holiness can be discovered.

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

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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.’”

The Inspiring Story Of Rabbi Dr. Professor Avraham Steinberg

Rabbi Chaim Goldberg

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

For simplicity’s sake, I will generally refer to him as Rabbi Steinberg, but each title of his is wholly deserved and independent of the others. Most medical doctors who are professors teach in their field of medical expertise (e.g., a

cardiologist is a professor of cardiology). Dr. Professor Steinberg does not. Medically, he practices pediatric neurology, serving as the senior pediatric neurologist at Shaarei Zedek Hospital, while his professorial duties are in the field of medical ethics. He doesn't just teach medical ethics, but has written the decisive Jewish work in the field. (More on that later.)

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

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

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

Identifying the Mutilated

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

The cases Rabbi Steinberg shared are tragic. He had never seen difficulties in identifying the dead – both quantitatively and qualitatively – as he did after October 7. Different thresholds for identification carry serious implications, such as when a family will start sitting shiva or whether one's spouse is considered a widow(er). Many victims were treated so brutally that the only hope of identifying them was DNA testing. Even so, some victims' homes were burned so completely that there was nothing from their home to match the DNA material with.

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

Following Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Ovadia Yosef, and others that brain death determines cessation of life, Rabbi Steinberg allows for organ donation after brain death. There is a debate in

the Orthodox world, where encouraging organ donation remains an uphill battle. A recent article reported that 30 lives have been saved due to organs donated by 7 IDF soldiers killed in Gaza. This was at a time that over 190 soldiers had already been killed, indicating that less than 5% of soldiers had agreed to have their organs donated. It seems that everyone is reluctant, religious or secular.

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

Festschrift at Age 60

In our post-Covid world, sometimes people still wonder, "Why bother traveling to meet in-person? This interview could just as well be done over Zoom!" Sitting face-to-face for two hours with someone who measures his time in minutes was rewarding enough, but my travels on a rainy day were rewarded further still. At one point, a book on Rabbi Steinberg's shelf suddenly caught my eye. It turned out to be a festschrift presented to Rabbi Steinberg in honor of a milestone birthday. Commonly, such commemorative volumes are put together for someone's 70th, 75th, or 80th birthday, after a lifetime of accomplishment. This one was for Rabbi Steinberg's 60th, by which point he had already accomplished more than most people would in 120 years. The volume is graced by in-depth essays from leading lights across Israeli society, including Supreme Court justices, former chief rabbis, dayanim of the Bet Din HaGadol (Israel's highest level beit din), and first-rank poskim.

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

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

Medical Halacha & Medical Ethics

While Rabbi Steinberg charted his own path, pursuing a career in medicine, the deeply rooted tradition of Torah study remained a mainstay of his life. More than anything else, though, it was the unprecedented synthesis of the two fields which warranted a festschrift at age 60. When Rabbi Steinberg began his medical career, a yeshiva student turned doctor was a rarity. Even basic

questions, such as how to practice medicine in a modern hospital as a religious Jew, especially on Shabbat, were barely addressed. The dawn of groundbreaking medical technologies such as organ transplants, respirators, IVF, and artificial insemination, though, meant the interface of medicine and Jewish law needed serious attention. A young Rabbi Dr. Steinberg dove right in.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fourth Life

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

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

Conceived of during the Holocaust and started shortly thereafter, its founding director was Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, a towering scholar of that era. Under his stewardship, the entries were top-notch quality but concise, with over 40% of the entries completed within 30 years. Upon his passing, though, the new editors took to adding much analytical discussion to each entry, and the work slowed. Over the next 30 years, only about 15% was completed. By the time Rabbi Steinberg came on board in 2007, new volumes barely received attention and the project was in danger of being shelved altogether. Rabbi Steinberg endeavored to bring the project back to Rabbi Zevin's style, with more concise, focused entries, and would constantly tell the writers to cut this part out, cut that part out. It wasn't always an easy transition. Then, in 2014, came the breakthrough.

Encyclopedia Talmudit

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

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

On two conditions.

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

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

What about that 40% of the alphabet which remains to be done? It's done, says Rabbi Steinberg....online! In a stroke of ingenuity spurred by the need to meet the 2024 deadline, Rabbi Steinberg restructured the entire process of entry writing. Previously, a few entries were worked on at a time, and only once they had gone through an intensive editing process and received full approval were new entries begun. Now, Rabbi Steinberg has many more

scholars writing entries which are good quality and are available online. Since the senior editors can only handle so much at once, their final approval and publication in book form will happen at a later stage.

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

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

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

Achdut & Respectful Disagreement

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

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

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

On the other hand, his dress and lingo bespeak an affiliation with the charedi community.

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

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

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

The Basics of Techum Shabbos

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Camp sisters

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

Question #2: Bungalow bar mitzvah

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

Question #3: Eruv Techumin

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

Introduction:

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

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

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

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

Staying in place

Although someone might interpret the words, Each person should remain where he is -- no man should leave his place

on the seventh day, to mean that it is forbidden even to leave one's home, this is not what the Torah intends. According to Rabbi Akiva (Shabbos 153b; Sotah 27b; Sanhedrin 66a), the Torah, here, is indeed prohibiting walking beyond your "place" on Shabbos, although this proscription only prohibits walking more than 2000 amos (approximately half to two-thirds of a mile*) beyond the "locale" where you are spending Shabbos. This border beyond which it is forbidden to walk is called techum Shabbos, quite literally, the Shabbos boundary. How do we determine where this boundary is, beyond which I may not walk on Shabbos?

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

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

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

Techum Shabbos in a bungalow colony

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

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

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

Shabbos while hiking

Someone spending Shabbos in an open field is entitled to four amos (between 6 - 7.5 feet*) as his "place," and the 2000 amos are measured from beyond these four amos. His

"place" is determined by where he is located at sundown on Friday evening.

Proper placement

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

Property placement

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

Camp sisters

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

These two families are spending Yom Tov in locations that have different techumin, yet they are close enough that there is some overlapping area located within both of their techumin. Each family may walk on Yom Tov to this overlapping area, carrying the items necessary for the barbecue. Everyone must be careful not to walk beyond the area of his own techum. In addition, since the items used

for the barbecue were owned by one or the other of the families when Yom Tov started, each item may not be removed beyond its owner's techum until Yom Tov is over. Thus, if one sister brought the hotdogs or the paper plates, the other sister may not take those items back with her, if she will be removing them to a place beyond her sister's techum.

Min hatorah or miderabbanan?

The rules of techumin that I have so far presented are held universally. However, there is a major dispute whether these rules are min hatorah or miderabbanan. There are three basic opinions. The tanna Rabbi Akiva, mentioned above, rules that the Torah forbade walking on Shabbos more than 2000 amos from one's place, as we previously defined it. The Sages who disagreed with Rabbi Akiva contend that the prohibition of traveling 2000 amos is only miderabbanan. (Whether Rabbi Akiva held that the rules of techumin on Yom Tov [as opposed to Shabbos] are prohibited min hatorah or only miderabbanan is a dispute among rishonim; see Rashi, Tosafos, and Turei Even, Chagigah 17b.) However, there is a further dispute whether the Sages contend that there is no prohibition of techumin min hatorah at all, and the prohibition is always only miderabbanan, or whether the basis for the prohibition is min hatorah. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Eruvin 3:4), traveling more than 12 mil, which is the equivalent of 24,000 amos (approximately 6 - 8.5 miles*), is prohibited min hatorah. This last position is quoted by the Rif (end of the first chapter of Eruvin). Several rishonim rule according to this Yerushalmi (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 27:1 and Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Saaseh #321; Semag (Lo Saaseh 36); Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #24). On the other hand, many rishonim (e.g., Baal Hamaor, Milchemes Hashem, and Rosh, all at the end of the first chapter of Eruvin; Ramban's notes to Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Saaseh #321; Tosafos, Chagigah 17b s.v. Dichsiv) contend that the Bavli disagrees with this Yerushalmi and holds that the concept of techum Shabbos is completely miderabbanan, and that the halachah follows the Bavli, as it usually does.

A nice-sized place

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

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

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

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

How do we rule?

Regarding the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and the Sages whether the requirement of remaining within a techum of 2000 amos is min hatorah or miderabbanan, it is universally accepted that we follow the opinion of the Sages that techum Shabbos of 2000 amos is miderabbanan. A result of this ruling is that if someone needs to use comfort facilities and there are none available within his techum, he is permitted to leave his techum for this purpose, because of the rule that kovod haberiyos, human dignity, supersedes a rabbinic prohibition (Eruvin 41b, based on Berachos 19b).

Moving my techum Shabbos

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

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

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

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

Only for a mitzvah

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

How do I make an eruv techumin?

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

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

eruv chatzeiros and eruv tavshillin. Another popular option is to use a jar of peanut butter.

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

Who instituted eruv techumin?

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

Conclusion

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

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

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 2 March 2024 / 22 Adar Alef 5784

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -

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Parshat Ki Tisa --- A Watched Pot

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

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

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

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

Palestinian street will rush out to welcome a two-state solution, is a dangerous pipe-dream.

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

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

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

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

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Office of the Chief Rabbi

D'var Torah: Parashat Ki Tisa

21 February 2019

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

How can we find comfort when tragedy strikes?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rav Frand – Parshas Ki Tisa

No Need to Go Anywhere

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

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

pasuk says to have no fear — no one will covet our land while we go up to Yerushalayim to see the Shechinah.

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

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

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

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

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by David Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

The Difference between Seeing and Hearing
Parashat Ki Tisa – 5784

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

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

The last part of the portion describes a dialogue between Moses and G-d in which Moses seeks forgiveness for the people and, beyond that, makes a surprising request to G-d: “Reveal to me Your glory.” Moses asks to see G-d! The resolute response Moses receives is: “You cannot see My

face, for man shall not see Me and live.” Man cannot see G-d.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Ki Tisa

פרשת כי תשא תשפ"ד

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“This is not a question at all,” the *Rav* replied. “*Dos iz a mentch*, ‘This is a human being!’” This is the true nature of a human being – one minute overcome with fear

– the next minute filled with unconstrained joy. Likewise, *Klal Yisrael* stood in awe at the foot of *Har Sinai*, but as human beings, their reactions were not etched in stone. When the urge to join the frivolity surrounding the Golden Calf surfaced, they joined the party, because, after all, they were only being human.

וַיַּחַר אֶף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת הַלְּוָחוֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אוֹתָם תַּחַת הָהָר

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

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

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

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

Today we are connected to the Torah via the second set of *Luchos*. Moshe toiled in Heaven in order to master the Torah. All of this toil was imbued into the second set of *Luchos*, which he fashioned at the behest of Hashem. If we learn Torah with such ardor and love, it will

become a part of us and will remain with us. If we learn Torah as if it were only an intellectual pursuit, then our memory will grasp only so much for so long. Moshe saw to it that Torah should become the *kinyan*, acquisition, of only those who work for it – those who deserve it.

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

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

In his biography of *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero quotes from one of the *Rosh Yeshivah's shmuesen*, ethical discourses. The *Rosh Yeshivah* quoted the *Lutsker Rav, Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl*, concerning a well-known *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 94b) which teaches us about the unique character of *Chizkiyahu Hamelech*: *No'atz cherev al pesach bais hamedrash*; He planted a sword at the entrance to the *bais hamedrash* and declared, "Sancheirev is here with a powerful army who helped him conquer the world. We are the end of the line, the last ones to be attacked by him. He has a sword, and we must be fearful of his sword."

The king then took his own sword and placed it at the door of the *bais hamedrash*. He called out, "Whoever shall leave the *bais hamedrash* and cease studying Torah shall be killed by this sword." As a result of his decree, the

king's agents searched throughout *Eretz Yisrael*. They did not find any man, woman, or child who was not well versed even in the difficult laws of ritual purity.

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

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

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

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

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

In Honor Of Dr. Dennis & Mrs. Marianne Glazer
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לע"נ

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