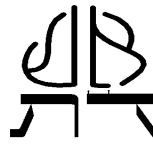


# Toras



# Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the nation saw that Moshe was delayed in descending from the mountain” (Shemos 32:1). This “delay” started the cascade that led to the sin of the “golden calf.” Rashi (ibid and—almost exactly word for word—in Shabbos 89a) explains that Moshe had told them that he would return from Mt Sinai after 40 days, by the 6th hour. The nation (mistakenly) thought that the 40 days started on the day he went up, which was the 7th of Sivan, so that his return would be on the 16th of Tammuz. They didn’t realize that Moshe meant full days, i.e. days and nights, and being that he went up during the day on the 7th, the (previous) night could not have counted, so the 40 day period could not have ended on the 16th, but rather on the 17th (when he came down, saw the “golden calf,” and broke the luchos). It was when Moshe didn’t return by midday (i.e. within the 6 hours) on the 16th that the nation panicked, leading to the sin of the “golden calf.” Numerous questions arise from this explanation:

(1) If the 7th day of Sivan did not count towards the 40 days, there would be only 23 days left in Sivan (which had 30 days that year), leaving 17 days for Tammuz. However, the Talmud (Yoma 4b and Ta’anis 28b, and Rashi himself in his commentary on both) explicitly says that the breakdown of the 40 days was 24 days in Sivan and 16 days in Tammuz. Obviously, then, the 7th of Sivan must have counted towards the 40 days. (This question is asked by Tosfos on Shabbos 89a. As far as why Moshe actually came down on the 17th rather than the 16th, the Eitz Yosef (on Shemos Rabbah 41:10) suggests that he would have, but when G-d told him that the nation had sinned and He would therefore destroy them, Moshe stayed longer to pray on their behalf.)

(2) If the “mistake” was based only on a misunderstanding of whether or not there would (also) be 40 nights (and therefore whether or not the 7th of Sivan counted towards the 40 days), why didn’t Aharon (or Chur) explain this to the people? The nation was

willing to wait till the next day to “serve” the “golden calf,” surely they would have waited a day to see if Aharon was right that the 40th day was the 17th rather than the 16th! (The Pa’ane’ach Raza, one of the later Ba’alei Tosfos, asks this question.)

(3) Since the misunderstanding led the nation to believe that Moshe was late, even though in reality Moshe was not late, the verse should have said, “And the nation thought that Moshe was delayed” rather than that they “saw that Moshe was delayed.” Why imply that Moshe really was late if he wasn’t?

(4) While we can understand why Moshe told them that he would be away for 40 days (so that they wouldn’t panic when he didn’t return for a while, thinking that he had either died without food and water for so long or had become angel-like and would not return), why would he tell them by which hour he would return? It was only when he didn’t return by noon on the 16th that the nation panicked. Even according to their mistaken impression that he would return on that day, they wouldn’t have started to worry until nightfall, when it would have been much easier for Aharon to push them off until Moshe actually returned. What purpose did giving a “by-the-sixth-hour” deadline serve?

The Maharsha (Ta’anis 28b) and the Taz (Shemos 32:1), in order to answer Tosfos’ question, explain that Rashi didn’t mean that the night must come before the day for the day to count, only that there must also be 40 nights. Since on the eve of the 7th of Sivan Moshe had not yet ascended Mt. Sinai, the 7th couldn’t be counted as a full day (i.e. 24 hour period, day and night). However, the day portion of the 7th did count, but required an additional night be tacked on at the end, i.e. the eve of the 17th of Tammuz. Once the night of the 17th had passed, the 40-day (and night) period had passed, and Moshe came down on the morning of the 17th, as he had originally planned. There were 24 days in Sivan, but only 23 nights. Tammuz had 16 days and 17 nights (for a total of 40 and 40). Since the people thought that a 40th night was unnecessary (and therefore that the last day-part of the 40 days was the 16th), they understood Moshe’s mention of coming in the 6th hour to mean that part of the day (or most, if it was just after noon) would count as a whole day. Once the “deadline” passed, they thought that Moshe must have died.

As those who have taken a communications class know, there are four parts (aside from the feedback) to communication: (a) the “sender,” i.e. the

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in memory of  
Yocha bas Isser  
Gussie Boxer  
May her Neshama have an Aliya!**

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thought attempting to be conveyed; (b) the medium used to convey the thought (i.e. speech or the written word, pictures, etc.); (c) the message itself (i.e. the words used); and (d) the receiver (how it is understood).

The Ralbag, explaining the conversation between G-d and Moshe at the "burning bush" (4:10-17), says that Moshe's request that He send someone else instead stemmed from his closeness with G-d. Because he was so attached to G-d, and his mind was so focused on Him, Moshe could not properly communicate with, or relate to, other people. Moshe was also afraid that if he became the leader of the nation, and began to relate to people in a way that they could understand what he was trying to convey, he would lose this intense connection with his Creator. It was for this reason that Aharon became Moshe's "communications director," telling Paro and the Children of Israel what G-d had told Moshe to say.

Perhaps this was the cause of the miscommunication here. Moshe was trying to avoid any grounds for concern by the nation, and was trying to say that he would be away for 40 days and 40 nights. However, the message was a somewhat cryptic one, couched in words that seemed simple enough: "At the end of 40 days, by the 6th hour, I will have returned." Moshe's addition of "by the 6th hour" was his way of saying that the last morning was not part of the 40 day period, so he must be back before noon, or it will be considered a 41st day. And the reason he wouldn't return after the 6th hour on the 40th day (so that it could be considered the 40th day) was that there needed to be a 40th night as well. Moshe thought that this was clear (that coming before noon meant that the day he returned didn't count, and that not coming after noon meant that there needed to be 40 nights), but the "message" was not understood by the "recipients." Not even by Aharon, who was also unsure as to why Moshe hadn't returned on the 16th. (Except that Aharon trusted

that there must be a valid explanation, and tried to stall the nation until Moshe's return.)

This would explain why Aharon didn't just explain to the nation that Moshe meant 40 full days (i.e. days and nights), as he might not have understood that from Moshe's message either. And since a misunderstood message can be the fault of either the sender or the receiver (or both), and in our situation the message could have been (and was) easily understood to mean that Moshe would return on the 16th, the Torah doesn't pin the blame only on the people (by saying that they "thought" he was late), but- since Moshe didn't fulfill the way the message was understood- says that the people "saw" that he was late.

There are several "messages" we can take from this. Not only is it important for us to try to correctly understand what others are trying to say (and where it is coming from), but it is just as important to make sure that the things we say are put in a manner that allows them to be correctly understood. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA  
GUEST SICHA BY RAV YA'AKOV MEDANA SHLIT"A

*Summarized by Matan Gildai*

*Translated by David Silverberg*

**T**wo verses in our parasha seem to contradict one another. On the one hand, "God would speak to Moshe face to face, as one man speaks to another" (33:11). Yet, God Himself tells Moshe, "...You will see My back; but My face must not be seen" (33:23). Did Moshe merit face-to-face communication or not?

The answer, however, is clear. The first verse relates to the period when Moshe had relocated his tent outside the Israelite camp, away from the nation, in the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf. At that point, God spoke to him face to face (so to speak). The second verse, however, describes the situation after Moshe returned to the nation. The people's spiritual level had declined with the incident of the Golden Calf, and, accordingly, Moshe's prophetic level decreased when he rejoined the camp.

In Parashat Beha'alotekha, God describes the superior quality of Moshe's prophecy: "With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly [be-mar'eh] and not in riddles" (Bemidbar 12:8). This image clearly corresponds to the first verse cited above and thus refers to the situation prior to the Golden Calf. After the sin, Moshe's prophecies resembled those of other prophets, of which God says, "I make Myself known to him in a vision [be-mar'a]" (ibid., verse 6). The prophetic quality before the sin is called "mar'eh," whereas after the sin it becomes "mar'a," literally, a mirror. A mirror absorbs some of the rays of light, and the resulting image is thus of inferior quality. Chazal described the difference between these

two levels of prophecy with the terms "aspaklaria ha-me'ira" and "aspaklaria she-eina me'ira." Herein, then, lies the distinction between looking at God "face to face" and seeing only His "back." The view of the back is obscured, the clarity diminished.

What is the meaning and significance of this distinction?

In describing these two prophetic visions, Chazal employ the image of tefillin. They liken the prophetic vision of "face to face" to the viewing of the tefillin proper, while the view "from the back" they compare to the sight of the knot of the tefillin (worn on the back of one's neck). However, we may gain a clearer understanding through a comparison to the "tzitz"—head plate—worn by the Kohen Gadol. When viewing the High Priest from the front, one sees a golden strip with the inscription, "Kodesh La-Hashem" ("Sacred to God"). A rear view reveals the string of "tekhelet" (bluish dye) that held the "tzitz" around the Kohen Gadol's forehead. The Gemara (Menachot 43b) explains the significance of "tekhelet." This shade of blue resembles the color of the ocean, which itself brings to mind the color of the sky, which is similar to Heavenly Throne. Thus, one who looks straight at the Kohen Gadol beholds the Divine Name, whereas one looking from behind must employ his imagination and behold the Almighty only through the process indirect association.

Similarly, herein lies the distinction between Benei Yisrael's situation before the Golden Calf and after. The nation had earned a direct revelation of the Shekhina in its most natural form, which required no exertion on their part. After the sin, they merited the revelation only through hard work and concentrated effort.

The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:12) recounts that Benei Yisrael slept on the morning of Matan Torah, and the Almighty had to wake them. (In commemoration, we have the custom of remaining awake all night long on Shavuot engaged in Torah study.) This passage in the Midrash underscores the passivity that marked Am Yisrael's experience at Mount Sinai; they slept and God reached out to them. After the sin, however, we must search for God: "And I will return to My abode—until they realize their guilt. In their distress, they will seek Me and beg for My favor" (Hoshea 5:15). The depiction in Shir Ha-shirim of the maiden searching out her beloved who hides accurately depicts this concept.

Nowadays, we stay awake all night long on Shavuot, rather than sleeping and waiting for the Almighty to awaken us. Similarly, the kohen Gadol would remain awake the entire night before Yom Kippur in preparation for his encounter with God the following day. Indeed, this encounter takes place in the Kodesh Ha-kodashim, where God appears in the cloud of the incense—in a clouded, obscured revelation. This type of revelation requires active effort and preparation, as

opposed the direct revelation at Sinai, which could be attained passively.

This may also mark the distinction between the first and second sets of tablets. The Ramban explains that the first tablets contained the Ten Commandments as recorded in Parashat Yitro, while the second tablets featured the commandments as they appear in Parashat Vaetchanan. The two sets of commandments differ significantly from one another, particularly in their presentation of the mitzva of Shabbat. It stands to reason that Moshe repeats the mitzva of Shabbat when introducing the Mishkan to Benei Yisrael (at the beginning of Parashat Vayakhel) because the content of this commandment underwent a certain change with Moshe's receiving the second tablets. In Parashat Yitro, God bases the institution of Shabbat on the fact that "in six days God made heaven and earth and sea... and He rested on the seventh day" (20:11). The Vaetchanan version, however, presents a different reason for Shabbat: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt... therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the day of Shabbat" (Devarim 5:15). In the first Tablets, the individual need not expend any effort to understand the mitzva of Shabbat. He sees God and imitates Him—just as the Almighty "rested" on the seventh day, so do we. In the second Tablets, by contrast, one cannot readily behold God. To appreciate this mitzva, then, one must recall the Egyptian bondage and thereby contemplate the meaning of Shabbat.

An additional discrepancy between the two different sets of Tablets relates to their manufacture. The first tablets were produced by God Himself. Presumably, they were not chiseled; God simply took two prefabricated slabs and engraved the commandments thereupon. In the situation prior to the Golden Calf, the natural order was complete and God revealed Himself therein. One saw Him without searching and discovered Him without effort. In such circumstances, God could take a primitive, undeveloped object from the natural world and inscribe upon it the Divine Word. The second tablets, as we know, were manufactured by Moshe. It seems that God did not even instruct Moshe how to make them; he worked independently. The writing was not engraved upon the tablets, but rather written on them. By this point God was not directly revealed through nature, and, consequently, one needed to perfect nature to see Him.

The significance of brit mila—circumcision—also relates to this idea. Adam was "born" circumcised; nature needed no further processing or development. One may even suggest that Adam had a foreskin, but it constituted no problem whatsoever. Nature was perfect and did not call out for any form of correction or improvement. Rabbi Akiva's celebrated remark that "the work of humans is superior to that of the Almighty," as evidenced by the superior quality of bread over wheat (Tanchuma Tazria, 5), likely refers specifically to the

aftermath of Adam's sin. In fact, Adam did not need to bake any bread; he plucked fruits straight from the tree and ate. Only after the sin did he fall under the decree, "By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat," at which point he needed to perfect nature, to turn the wheat into loaves of bread through the painstaking processes of agriculture and baking. Nature was no longer perfect.

Only when Am Yisrael experiences difficult times does the Almighty reveal Himself to them and dwell among them. During times of oppression, Benei Yisrael take the ark with them to battle, symbolizing the accompaniment of God's Presence. In such situations, one needs not labor to find the Almighty:

"Since the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you..." (Devarim 23:15). (*Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Ki-Tisa, 5755 [1995].*)

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**s Moshe (Moses) descends the mountain, aware that the Jews had made the golden calf, Joshua awaits him. Hearing noise coming from the camp, Joshua tells Moshe that he hears the voice of war. In the words of Torah, "when Joshua heard the sound of the people...he said to Moshe, there is a sound of battle in the camp." (Exodus 32:17) Moshe responds that it is not the sound of war in the camp, but rather the sound of anot. (Exodus 32:18)

What exactly does this term mean?

Abraham suggests that Joshua did not know that the golden calf had been built. Hearing sounds, he assumed it was that of war. Moshe, aware of the reality of the situation, responds that it was not the sound of war, but rather "it was simply the sound of people making a noise." For Abarbanel, anot, simply means "noise."

Ramban suggests that anot describes the type of noise being heard. Moshe "was reluctant to speak disparagingly of Israel. So he told him [Joshua] that it was the noise of merriment." For Ramban, anot, means a joyous song. As Nechama Leibovitz explains, "Moshe would never denounce his people unless it were for the purpose of reproofing them....He was reluctant to let Joshua have the 'latest news' of their disgrace."

Another thought comes to mind. Joshua may have indeed known what happened. He may have been telling Moshe that the Jews have rebelled, and in fact, are prepared if you will, to go to war with God. Joshua's words then make sense: "There is a sound of battle in the camp."

Moshe responds that he understands the actions of the people to be very different. He states that he does not hear the voice of victory or defeat as Joshua does, but he hears the voice of a nation

painfully crying out. From this perspective, the word anot comes from the word enui which means "affliction"; the people were afflicted and confused. They were confused about their relationship to God and were in deep conflict about belief.

For Joshua, the cry means that the Jews were rebelling. Kol milchama, "the sound of battle" not only reflected the actions of the people, but was also advice to Moshe that he should take up arms in response to the challenge.

Moshe, who hears the cry as the confused state of belief of the people, believed that the reaction should be to bring the Jews back through love and care.

While it is true that Moshe takes strong action and shatters the Tablets and thousands of Jews die, it must be remembered that it is God's thirteen attributes of mercy that brings about the giving of the second set of Tablets. (Exodus 34:6-7)

The message: When seeing someone struggle with faith, we should hear a cry rather than rebellion and respond with love and mercy. © 2000 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

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## Daf HaShavua

by Rev Michael Binstock, Staines & District Synagogue

**I**n this week's Parshah an enlarged letter Resh concludes the phrase Ki lo tishtachaveh l'eil acher—

For you shall not bow down to another god. Since the Hebrew letters Dalet and Resh are similar in appearance, this emphasis is necessary so we should not, Heaven forbid, read echad—one instead of acher—another.

Conversely, the well known verse Shema Yisrael (Devarim 6:4) concludes with an enlarged Dalet to emphasise that Hashem is indeed One.

Tragically, we read of the sin of the golden calf in this week's Parshah. The Israelites put the Resh of Acher before the Dalet of Echad, and instead of remaining faithful to the One G-d, they constructed an idol—hence the letters Resh and Dalet spelling the word Reid—Descend. Moses is commanded to descend the mountain to observe how the people had descended to one of the lowest points in their history when not long out of Egypt, they turned to idolatry.

When Moses saw this, he smashed the Luchot (tablets). Why did he do this rather than put them aside for a future occasion when the Israelites would be worthy of them? And what did G-d think of his action? The clues can be found in the very last phrase of the Torah: l'einei kol Yisrael—before the eyes of all Israel.

On this phrase, Rashi comments: And his heart inspired him to break the tablets in their sight and the Holy One Blessed Be He agreed with him saying 'may your strength be firm for having broken them'. G-d actually gave Moses a "Yishar Koach" for smashing them!

It is significant that the first set of Luchot were given amidst great pomp and ceremony. Every single man, woman and child stood in awe and actually heard the voice of G-d. It was the greatest audio visual experience ever known.

Yet the second set was given without any pomp and ceremony whatsoever. Moses merely ascended the mountain and returned 40 days later—on Yom Kippur—having secured G-d's pardon for the sin of the Golden Calf. Nevertheless, it was the second set that endured—not the first. This teaches us the importance of being unostentatious. So often in life, what is done without fanfare stands a far greater chance of success than what is done under the glare of publicity. Therefore, Moses saw fit to destroy the first set of Luchot. The second set, however, would endure because it was acquired through human effort. Now perhaps we can understand why Moses received a "Yishar Koach" from G-d for his action. Let us, therefore, apply ourselves in our Torah study so that we too will deserve a "Yishar Koach" for our efforts. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**T**his week's Torah portion raises the most complex and controversial theological issues with which all seekers of faith must wrestle: the definition of G-d, and the question of theodicy (Divine justice in a world in which the righteous often appear to suffer and the wicked often appear to prosper). These challenges present themselves within the context of Moses' seemingly sacrilegious act of shattering the stone Tablets of Testimony, the holiest object in the world. I believe that a careful reading of our Biblical text will illuminate the Torah's approach to these very significant and sensitive issues and events.

Chapter 32 of the Book of Exodus opens with two contradictory scenes happening simultaneously. Moses receiving from the Almighty the sacred Tablets of Testimony in his hideaway with the Divine Presence, and the Israelites' worship of the golden calf in their encampment down below. G-d informs Moses that he must descend from his lofty heights "for your nation has acted corruptly"—combining an awful threat with a personal promise:

"Now leave Me alone (do not try to stop Me) when I unleash My wrath against them to destroy them, and I shall (begin again) by making from you a (new) great nation" (Exodus 32:10).

Moses defies the Divine command and offers a heartfelt prayer, emphasizing the fact that Israel is G-d's nation and not Moses' nation and invoking the Divine covenant with the Patriarchs as well as the desecration to G-d's name in the eyes of the Egyptians as reasons for His not destroying the Israelites. We are immediately

informed that "G-d refrained from doing the evil that He planned for His people."

Moses then descends from the mountain with the Tablets of Testimony, sees the Israelites dancing in front of the golden calf, and smashes the two Tablets. In effect, Moses is graphically responding to G-d's earlier command that the prophet "leave Him alone" and He will establish a new nation from Moses himself. In breaking the Tablets, Moses is declaring: Better a broken Torah and a whole nation than a broken nation and a whole Torah!

And why? Because the nation must be harnessed and energized in order to complete the Torah. This new understanding of G-d is magnificently explained in chapter 34, when the almighty commands Moses: "Hew out for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones" (Exodus 34:1). After all these second Tablets are not like the first—at least not in design. The first Tablets were the writing of G-d by the Finger of G-d; the second Tablets are the writing of man by the finger of man. The Midrash teaches that these second Tablets included the Oral Law, a corpus of teachings which would develop throughout the generations and which would add the interpretations and decrees of the pious scholars of Israel to the initial words of the Divine.

It is as though G-d is explaining that just as He created an imperfect (incomplete) world awaiting its completion by humanity whose task is to "perfect (complete) the world in the Kingship of the Almighty", so did He decide to give Israel an incomplete Torah awaiting its completion at the hands of the Israelites. Only with such a Torah, which empowers the Israelites with partnership-ownership, is there a chance of Israelite compliance, is there a possibility that the worship of a golden calf only forty days after the initial Revelation at Sinai will not repeat itself. If the world is to be redeemed, humanity must take responsibility for the world, and Israel must take responsibility for Torah!

All of this comes as a result of Moses' second prayer to the Almighty, after he smashes the Tablets and after he has the 3,000 men who are primarily responsible for the calf desecration killed: "And it happened on the morrow, And Moses said, You have sinned a great sin. I shall go up to the Lord. Perhaps I shall gain forgiveness for your sin" (Exodus 32:30). Moses is not satisfied with his having averted the disaster of the destruction of Israel; he wants the Israelites to be forgiven, to be purified. He asks from G-d the very antithesis of what G-d had planned to do, to destroy Israel and start a new nation from Moses. If You don't forgive their sin, blot me (Moses) out from your book; remove me from recorded history but purify our people.

G-d responds by explaining to Moses that the people must purify themselves! The process of redemption is apparently going to be a lengthy one, fraught with trial and error, a historical process of education which is predicated upon a partnership

between G-d and Israel. G-d will not deal with us directly; for Him to do so would mean immediate reward and punishment, which would more likely result in immediate destruction following a national transgression. G-d will operate through intermediaries: people who will lead, and a Torah which will give direction. There is a special relationship between G-d and Israel, there is an ultimate promise of redemption, but G-d's face will be hidden behind the curtains of the stage of world history and the Israelites must learn to assume responsibility for the world.

And so G-d reveals His name: Y-HVH, the G-d of historic process, of future becoming; the G-d of patience and forgiveness, who has the cosmic time to wait for humanity to repent and for the world to ultimately redeem itself. (Exodus 34:6,7 and B.T. Yoma 69b) In the month of Sivan was the public Divine Revelation at Sinai, in the month of Tammuz (forty days later) the smashing of the Tablets, and on Yom Kippur (80 days later), the second Tablets and the new covenant based on Israel's repentance. Israel must come of age by taking responsibility for their actions and for the world; G-d is hidden behind the curtains of the Holy of Holies in the Sanctuary—Temple. The mask, which covers Moses' face when he descends from the mountain for the second time, reflects the mask which will hide the Almighty from directly guiding His people and His world. Neither Israel nor humanity are yet ready for such direct Divine intervention. The new paradigm for G-d-in-world is not to be the direct revelation at Sinai but is rather to be the Israelites' repentance on Yom Kippur, or, -- even more to the point—the masquerade of Purim, when G-d's name is frontally absent from the Scroll of Esther (literally, hiddenness). The Israelites must now carry their new responsibility of Oral Law and human activity into their long march towards redemption! © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he narrative of the incident of Israel and the Golden Calf in the desert is so riveting and fascinating that we return to it year after year with renewed and refreshed interest. How did human beings that experienced godly revelation at Sinai revert to worshipping a Golden Calf just a few short weeks later? What happened to the "the kingdom of priests and holy nation" to cause this terrible reversal of course? The great commentators to the Bible, and in fact, the Jewish people itself, in its deepest soul, have all wrestled with the problem of understanding this unfathomable fall of Israel and its consequences. And even though a full solution to this problem is not present, at least not in this limited space, I think that there are a number of insights that are apparent from this event, and that

these insights are pertinent and necessary to us, personally and nationally, today as well.

The Torah stresses that the absence of Moses from the Israelite encampment for so many weeks after the granting of the Torah on Sinai was a strong contributing factor to the debacle of the Golden Calf. Jews, like all other humans, need strong, courageous, sensitive, wise leadership. Every person must, perforce, make difficult decisions for themselves. The world and Jewish society especially, is not a dictatorship governed by infallible people. But, at the same time, people require guidance, direction and vision in their lives. There must always be someone to point the way, to identify the goals and to formulate plans and ideas. The Jewish people were still too raw, too insecure, and too new to freedom to be able to be weaned from Moses' continuing presence and leadership. Panicked, they searched for a substitute Moses and reverted back to the idolatrous ways of the society of Egypt where they had been raised. After forty years, the Jewish people would be able to bear the permanent loss of Moses. But it would take many years of Torah life and training for them to make it on their own with Joshua as their new leader.

The absence of visionary leadership in many sections of today's Jewish world is what has contributed to the plethora of Golden Calves that surround and bedevil us. The Holocaust has crippled us in many ways. Visionary leadership has been one of its worst casualties. The creation of the Golden Calf was instigated by a group of people described by the Rabbis as "the eiruv rav" (a great mixture of peoples.) This section of the Jewish people was comprised of members of many other nations in Egypt who escaped from their bondage by attaching themselves to the Jewish people at the moment of the Exodus from Egypt. These people became "fair-weather" Jews. During the decades of Jewish wandering in the desert of Sinai, the 'eiruv rav' constantly agitated against Moses and against true Jewish interests. At every opportunity, whenever problems and discomfort arose on the road to the Land of Israel, they always raised the option of returning to Egypt, of becoming pagans once more, of discarding the great Jewish dream for "watermelons and leeks and onions and cucumbers." Unfortunately, whether out of malice or ignorance, the 'eiruv rav' still is present amongst us today.

In a wholesale manner, Jews are abandoning Judaism and are being encouraged to do so by others whose commitment to Judaism and Jewish survival is tepid at best. In the present society's permissive atmosphere that allows one to construct the rules of one's own religion as one wishes, the 'eiruv rav' agitates for the destruction of tradition and the elimination of explicitly stated Torah values and behavior. Is it any wonder that the people yet dance around the Golden Calf? Lastly, I wish to point out that saving the Jewish people from the clutches of the Golden Calf is not

always pleasant and joyful work. When Moses returns to the encampment of the Jews and sees for himself the destruction - both physical and moral - that the creation of the Golden Calf has wrought, he calls for action, even for civil war in order to save the people. "Who is unto God, let him come unto me!" is his battle cry. And the men of the tribe of Levi who rallied to his cause at that fateful moment in Jewish history, slew thousands in order to save Israel from the wrath of Godly destruction. Moses remembers the loyalty of Levi to the cause of Jewish survival in his final blessings to the people of Israel. "They spared not even family in their loyalty to God's covenant," he exclaims. Moses allows no compromise with the Golden Calf, for that will only lead the people down the slippery slope of spiritual annihilation. It is an insight that we should ponder in our current society as well. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**his week's Torah portion begins with a command to donate half a shekel as a penance during the census that was taken, in order to prevent a plague. "There will be no plague among them when they are counted" [Shemot30:12]. How does donating money solve the problem? Rashi explains, "Everybody will give half a shekel, and you shall count the shekelim and know how many there are." That is, the shekelim are counted and not the people, preventing the plague. However, this presents a problem, since nowhere in the passage is it explicitly mentioned that the shekelim are to be counted. Thus, perhaps the gift of the money should be explained in a different way.

First of all, we should try to understand why there is a danger of a plague when a census is taken. According to Rashi, "a detailed count is under the control of the Evil Eye," but he does not explain why this should be so. Malbim explains, "as long as the nation is unified and acts as one person, their public virtue is very great. But when they are counted every person is seen as a different individual. Then their evil deeds are revealed and they are in danger of a plague." Thus, as long as the nation is viewed as a single unit, every individual is protected because he is seen as part of the whole. But a census causes every person to be seen as an individual, counted separately, putting an emphasis on everybody's personal status. This viewpoint removes the protection of the community. And when a person stands alone and unprotected his is liable to be judged according to his own deeds. What person can be sure that because of his actions he will be judged favorably? Therefore, at the time of a census the people are in

need of a special factor that will protect them, namely, money for atonement.

This explains why the Torah stresses that "the rich man shall not give more and the poor man shall not give less" [30:15]. Since the danger stems from the possibility that somebody might stand out as different, the objective is to blur the distinctions by having everybody give exactly the same amount. Thus, it may well be that in the end the people themselves are counted, but the donation of half a shekel provides them with protection against the danger of a plague.

It is possible that this idea can be seen in the way the money was used in the Tabernacle after the first census took place, as described in this week's portion. The amount that was collected was "a hundred kikar and one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekelim, in holy shekelim; a bekah per person, that is, half a shekel in holy shekelim, including everybody counted in the census" [38:25-26]. The silver was used in two ways: (1) "The hundred kikar of silver was used to cast the sockets of the Tabernacle and the sockets of the curtain—one hundred sockets from a hundred kikar, one kikar per socket" [38:27]. (2) "And the thousand seven hundred and seventy-five was used for hooks for the poles, and their tops were coated and connected" [38:28]. This silver was not meant for specific utensils in the Tabernacle but rather for the poles and the hooks, items which have no individual status. And this is how the objective was to be fulfilled: "Let them be a memory for Bnei Yisrael before G-d, as atonement for your souls" [30:16]. In the Tabernacle, the sockets and the hooks demonstrated the idea that Bnei Yisrael do not emphasize their individual personalities. Rather, they see themselves as part of the nation of Yisrael, and because of this they will be privileged to receive atonement for their souls.

#### **RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND**

## **Rav Frand**

Transcribed by David Twersky

Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

**I**f One Does Not Own Land, He Need Not Go 'Up' for the Festival

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" [Shmos 34:23]. This is the command of "aliyah l'regel" [Going up (to Jerusalem) for the Festival]. On Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot the Jews were commanded to go up to the Beis HaMikdash to see and be seen by the 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." We are guaranteed that we have nothing to fear while everyone is in Jerusalem. We might have been nervous about leaving no males at home, because it would be an open invitation to thieves

and enemies. The pasuk tells us to have no fear— no one will covet our land while we go up to Jerusalem to see the Shechinah [Divine Presence of G-d].

The Talmud derives a halacha from this— whoever does not own land is not obligated to go up to Jerusalem on the Festival [Pesachim 8b]. The entire halacha of going up three times a year is for one who owns land.

The Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859) asked, "Why is it that someone who doesn't own land is excused from going up to Jerusalem?" The Kotzker Rebbe answered, "Because he doesn't need to."

Only the person who owns land, who has a connection to this world, who is into materialism, needs to go up to Jerusalem 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.

One who has the property, the mortgage, the two garages and the Jacuzzi, etc., etc., must go to Jerusalem to see the Shechinah. But one who is free of the materialism of this world sees the Shechinah everywhere, so he is excused from the mitzvah of 'Reiyah,' going to see.

### The Chofetz Chaim & Rav Shimon Schwab: A Tale of Two Grandfathers

This is a true story involving the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) and Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995).

Rav Schwab once visited the Chofetz Chaim, and the Chofetz Chaim asked him if he were a Kohen, Levi or Yisroel. Rav Schwab answered that he was a Yisroel. As it is well known, the Chofetz Chaim was a Kohen [Priest, descended from Aharon the High Priest].

The Chofetz Chaim said to Rav Schwab, "Do you know the difference between me and you? Soon the Beis HaMikdash [House of Sanctity—Temple] will be rebuilt. Everyone will go crowd into the Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash for the first time. There will be a guard at the door who will ask the people whether they are Kohanim, Leviim [Jews descended from the tribe of Levi], or Yisraelim [Jews from tribes other than Levi]. The Kohanim will get to go inside and do the Service of the Beis HaMikdash. I will be one of those people. You, Rav Schwab, with all the other Yisraelim will be left outside. All the Yisraelim will be terribly jealous of me. They are going to want to do the Service, but the Halacha will be NO! -- Kohanim inside; Yisraelim outside."

The Chofetz Chaim continued, "Do you know why it will be like that? Because of something that happened thousands of years ago. Thousands of years ago, there was an incident called 'the sin of the Golden Calf.' The Jewish people sinned with the calf. Only 3,000 people participated in that heinous act of idolatry. But when Moshe Rabbeinu called out and asked everyone else to come and put out the fire... When he issued those famous words 'Whoever is for G-d, gather

around me' [Shmos 32:26], do you know what happened? Only the tribe of Levi showed up. My grandfather came and responded to that call and your grandfather sat there and did nothing. Therefore, the Kohanim, who come from the tribe of Levi, will go into the Beis HaMikdash. But you, Yisraelim are going to be on the outside because you sat there and did not respond."

The Chofetz Chaim then looked at Rav Schwab and said to him, "What do you think? Am I trying to make you feel bad? Am I trying to rub your face in it? Chas V'Sholom [Heaven forbid]! I want to teach you a lesson. Many times in life, you will hear a little voice go off in your head that will say 'Whoever is for G-d, gather around me.' An event will occur or an issue will be raised. Everybody is going to be told 'Stand up and be counted.' In whose camp are you? I want you to know that questions like that and challenges like that have implications not only for you but for generations and generations after you. Because your grandfather did not answer 'Yes' in the affirmative to 'Who is for G-d, gather to me', you are excluded from the Beis HaMikdash Service. It was an act that has implications thousands of years later. Because my grandfather said yes, I am a Kohen now and I am going to do the Service."

"Never forget", the Chofetz Chaim told Rav Schwab, "everybody has his moments of 'Who is for G-d, gather around me.' When you hear that voice, stand up and be counted!" © 2004 by Rabbi Y. Frand and [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org)

### YITZ WEISS

## Tzedakah

“A wealthy person should not give more, nor should a poor person give less than one-half shekel.”

The Vilna Gaon points out in his Kol Eliyahu that the trup on “A wealthy person should not give more” is a munach rev'i. The Gra goes on to explain that this hints to what our Rabbi's teach us in Kesuvot (20a), “A person who gives charity should not give more than one fifth.”

Munach rev'i literally means “set aside four parts. No matter how wealthy someone is, he should keep “four parts” for himself, and a maximum of one part (the fifth part) can be given to tzedakah.

Many sources explain the phrase “Asser TayAsser” (Devarim 14:22) as “Give charity (asser) so that you merit to become wealthy (tit-asher).” My father always reads it with a different twist: “Ashir - become wealthy, she-titaser - so you'll have the means to give charity properly!

May we all merit to have the means to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah in the fullest way possible! ©

