

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

**“W**hy O Lord are you so angry at your nation whom you took out of the land of Egypt with great strength and with a strong hand.” (Exodus 32:11)

Who is to blame when a tragedy occurs to the Jewish people? Is it G-d's fault? Is it the fault of Jewish leaders? Is it the fault of the Jewish people?

A careful look at this week's Torah portion will reveal the answer. The Israelites have emerged from the dizzying and rapturous heights of the Revelation at Sinai only to have descended to tragic immorality with the worship of the Golden Calf. It almost seems as if a glorious potential history will conclude before it has really begun. The Almighty G-d seems to blame the nation, when He says to Moses, "Go forth and descend because your nation which you have taken out of Egypt has become corrupted... and now allow Me to vent my anger against them and I will destroy them; I will make from you a new nation." (Exodus 32:7). From G-d's perspective, it is the Israelites who have defiled themselves by descending from heavenly purity to licentious idolatry.

Moses blames G-d, when he turns around almost the very words which the Almighty used against Israel. "Why O Lord are you so angry at your nation whom you took out of the land of Egypt with great strength and with a strong hand?" (Exodus 32:11) In effect Moses is criticizing G-d who initially brought them into Egypt and now has taken them out of that idolatrous nation before they were really ready for a life of Torah and commandments. Yes, G-d may very well have wrought many miracles to have gotten Pharaoh to let them go and to have enabled them to cross the Reed Sea. In effect G-d's very greatness of power and strength of hand pampered them and did not give them the inner resources to stand on their own two feet against the challenges of the desert while G-d and Moses (as it were) were otherwise occupied.

And then, to a certain extent, Moses blames

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himself. After all, he was their leader-and perhaps he should have prepared them much better for a life of independent Divine service even in his absence. Indeed, Moses even suggests that he serve as a vicarious atonement-a kapara-for his nation:

"And it happened the next day that Moses said to the nation, 'You have sinned a great sin; now I shall ascend to the Lord so that perhaps I may achieve forgiveness (be a kapara) for your sin.' And Moses returned to the Lord and he said, 'Please this nation has sinned a great sin... and now perchance You will bear (literally take upon Yourself) their sin; and if not, blot me out now for your book which you have written.'" (Exodus 32:30-32)

The rabbis of the Talmud even compare Moses to the suffering servant of Isaiah (53) who takes upon himself the sins of the multitude and is willing to give up his life on their behalf (B.T. Sotah 14a). In another Talmudic passage, the sages interpret the words, "VaYehal Moshe," usually translated as "Moses entreated G-d," as meaning "Moses made himself a corpse (hallal) before G-d" (B.T. Berakhot 32a).

You will certainly be aware that this idea sounds frighteningly like the vicarious atonement of the founder of Christianity, the major subject of the Passion movie of Gibson. Undoubtedly the entire concept of vicarious atonement or kapara stems from the sacrifice of the sin offering, where the animal dies instead of the repentant individual as an expression of G-d's graciousness and forgiveness. Here our rabbis extend this notion to the Jewish leader, to Moses, who seems to be willing to take "ministerial responsibility."

However, G-d does not permit such vicarious atonement! The Almighty responds to Moses in no uncertain terms, "The one who has sinned against Me, he shall be blotted out from My book" (Exodus 32:33). And our Bible stresses this cardinal principle of individual responsibility with the clear exhortation, "Parents shall not die because of their children and children shall not die because of their parents; each individual shall die because of his/her sin" (Deuteronomy 24:6).

And so the Almighty continues to explain to Moses a fundamental truth of Jewish history and Jewish theology: "And now you (Moses) go and lead the nation to where I have spoken to you; behold My messengers shall walk before you and when I exact punishment, I shall exact it upon those who have sinned" (Exodus 32:33).

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G-d has told Moses that He Himself is not yet ready to walk in the midst of the nation and to show His face frontally as the manifest leader of the people; to do so would mean an immediate system of Divine reward and punishment which would remove individual free will and which would make G-d ultimately responsible for Jewish history. G-d wants to make the Israelite nation itself responsible. G-d wants the nation to perfect itself and perfect the world. Hence, G-d does not take responsibility for the nation's backsliding nor does He allow for blameless leaders to take upon themselves vicarious atonement. Israel must take responsibility for what happens to Israel.

This is one important place in which Judaism diverges from Christianity. Judaism believes that the people-indeed, all of humanity-has the inner strength to perfect and redeem itself. G-d believes in us, despite our many failures. The least we can do is to believe in ourselves. After all, we have His Torah and all of us humans are created in the image of G-d. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**A**fter the sin of the golden calf, G-d asked Moshe to "leave Me be, and My anger will be enraged against them and I will destroy them, and I will make you into a great nation" (Shemos 32:10). Moshe realizes that G-d is actually telling him how to prevent the nation from being destroyed- by *not* leaving Him be, and begins beseeching G-d to not destroy them (32:11-13). Moshe presents several arguments as to why G-d shouldn't destroy them, including the request to "remember Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov Your servants" to whom G-d had promised to "multiply their offspring like the stars in the heavens" and give the Land of Israel as a "permanent inheritance." Although reminding G-d of the extreme righteousness of our

forefathers was a very effective tool, saying that G-d can't destroy their offspring and start anew from Moshe because of His promises to them seems problematic. After all, Moshe was also a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, so all of his descendants would be theirs as well. By making Moshe into a great nation (who would inherit the land) G-d would actually be *fulfilling* His promise to them; how could he use this as an argument *against* starting again from Moshe?

Another (similar) question asked by some of the commentators stems from Rashi's comment, based on the Talmud (Berachos 32a), on the above arguments: "If a chair with three legs (i.e. the forefathers) cannot stand before You at the moment of Your anger, certainly a chair with one leg (i.e. Moshe) [will not be able to]." In other words, if a nation built on the foundation of three exceedingly righteous men was unable to survive, how could a nation built from just one person survive? However, rather than looking at it as two separate entities, why not consider it as one stronger entity, that is now built on four foundations? Moshe was certainly a product of the groundwork laid by the forefathers, not a brand new beginning. By restarting the divine mission through Moshe alone, the new nation could fulfill the promises to the forefathers and have an even more solid foundation!

The Maharsha therefore explains that Moshe was not really comparing a three-legged chair with a one-legged chair, but saying that if even a three-legged chair - which is extremely sturdy - cannot survive during the moments of G-d's anger, then adding an additional leg (i.e. Moshe) will not make a difference; it will collapse nonetheless. The key would seem to be surviving even when our actions provoke G-d's anger, with Moshe's argument being that a mechanism must be in place that allows the nation to survive even when it falters.

The nation falls from its previously high level at the public revelation by sinning. G-d tells Moshe that He should destroy them and start from scratch, but indicates that there's a way to avoid this. Moshe realizes that G-d is indicating that the damage done can be (somewhat) repaired, and that he (Moshe) must start the process. What is this process? Teshuvah-repentance. Moshe immediately begs G-d not to destroy them before they have a chance to repent, for if the possibility of repentance is denied, the nation cannot survive. Sure we must strive for perfection, and avoid faltering as much as possible, but perfection is impossible for humans. Just as the nation sinned shortly after hearing G-d's words with their own ears, it is inevitable that there will be future sins. If G-d insists on starting anew every time there is a slip-up, the nation will *never* be able to grow to become "like the stars in the heavens" or to permanently inherit the land, and G-d's promise to the forefathers can never be fulfilled. Moshe was not arguing that starting from scratch would prevent those promises from being fulfilled, but that the

only way to keep those promises is to allow for the opportunity of repentance. And this is precisely what G-d had in mind.

G-d agrees not to destroy the nation (32:14), and Moshe gets to work starting the teshuvah process. He destroys the golden calf (32:20) and has the obvious perpetrators punished (32:27-28). He returns to G-d to ask for forgiveness (32:31), and the end result is the ultimate Day of Forgiveness (Yom Kippur), the day Moshe returns with the second set of the "10 Commandments" (see Rashi on 34:29). During the course of Moshe's learning about teshuvah, he (and we) are taught G-d's 13 attributes (34:6-7), which is the focal point of the Selichos (prayers asking for forgiveness) we say on public fast days and during our period of repentance (from before Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur). Right after Moshe returns with the good news that G-d had forgiven the nation (for the most part), the building of the Mishkan starts. According to some, this portable Holy Temple was commanded as a direct response to the teshuvah process necessitated by the sin of the golden calf. Even according to those that say that the Mishkan was commanded even before that sin, certain aspects became a direct atonement for it (i.e. donating gold to atone for having given gold for the calf). Either way, much of the service done in the Temple is intended specifically to atone for our sins, and as a means to foster the teshuvah process.

Would it have been better had the nation not made a golden calf? Obviously. But it brought to light the need to be able to correct our mistakes. And Moshe took advantage of the opening G-d showed him, setting up the vehicle through which we all have the opportunity to return to G-d. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### 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?

Abarbanel 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 reproving 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. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he tribe of Levi distinguishes itself in this week's parsha by responding to the call of Moshe: "Mi laHashem ailie" - "Let whoever is for God rally and come together around me." The tribe of Levi, Moshe's tribe and his relatives, answer the call. The frightful sight of the Jews in the desert, still fresh from the revelation at Sinai and the acceptance of God's Torah, now dancing around the golden calf calls for drastic action. And the tribe of Levi therefore goes amongst its fellow Jews in a violent attempt to destroy the golden calf, its instigators and its ideas and beliefs. Thousands of Jews are killed by the tribe of Levi in this encounter. Moshe, in his final words to Israel, will thank the tribe of Levi for their courage and sacrifice in this incident. However the tribe of Levi, because of this violent incident once again runs the risk of being labeled as perpetual purveyors of violence. The words of Yaakov

echo in the ears of the Jewish people: "...Shimon and Levi...the instruments of violence are their wares in life." But the antidote to Levi's apparent penchant for violence, justified as it may be, was also prescribed by Yaakov: "I will divide them among the children of Yaakov, I will scatter them amongst Israel." Moshe now takes the tribe of Levi and elevates it to the perpetual service of God and Israel. The tribe will own no land in the Land of Israel, it will not be mobilized for the armies of Israel, it will be dependent upon the largesse and the goodness of its fellow Jews for material support. Now, it will put aside the sword and take up the pen. It will serve in the Temple and it will be the teachers and scholars of Israel. Thus it will be defanged from its propensity to do violence and its ability to easily slay others.

Levi's streak of violence came from a holy and just source. Levi tells Yaakov: "Shall we allow our sister to be treated as a prostitute?" Moshe sees no nice way to stem the tide of idol worship which is about to engulf Israel because of the presence of the golden calf in its midst. Judaism is not pacifism at all costs. Justified use of self-defense is a cardinal Jewish value. Levi's sense of justice and self-sacrifice are admirable traits. But the use of violence to achieve one's ends, even if those ends are in themselves justifiable and necessary, inevitably leaves scars on the spirit and soul of Israel. Levi can only be saved, so to speak, by channeling its motivation, daring, self-sacrifice and devotion to the causes of God and Israel into a more holy mode and spiritual occupation. Thus, at the moment of Levi's and Israel's greatest crisis, when Levi's violence saves the day and arrests the wave of idolatry, Levi is removed from the front line and becomes a special, holy, elevated tribe. The words of the prophet Zecharia were said directly to the tribe of Levi, and through them eventually to all of Israel: "Not by might nor by strength shall you prevail, but only through My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." Rambam states that any human being can become a member of the tribe of Levi, metaphorically speaking, by trusting only in God and devoting one's self to His service and cause. Apparently, this is the true antidote to becoming a violent society. © 2005 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).

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah reveals to us Hashem's indescribable love for His people and our inseparable relationship with Him. The setting is one of massive spiritual decline in which most of the Jewish nation was involved in some facet of idolatry. After three years of severe famine and drought Hashem

instructed Eliyahu Hanavi to appear before the Jewish King Achav. This wicked leader together with his idolatrous wife were gravely at fault for the Jewish people's decline. Eliyahu faithfully fulfilled his mission and, at the risk of his life, challenged Achav and his idolatrous prophets to a crucial demonstration at Mount Carmel. Eliyahu, the only known remaining prophet of Hashem represented Hashem while the other prophets represented their false deities. Each would attempt to offer a sacrifice and whoever received a response from above would be proven the real prophet. After several futile attempts of the false prophets Eliyahu stepped forward to prove, once and for all, the authenticity of Hashem. Eliyahu filled a ditch with water, thoroughly drenched his altar and offered his bullock to Hashem. Hashem responded in a miraculous fashion and sent a fire which received the sacrifice, consumed the altar and even dried the water in the ditch. This clear demonstration convinced the Jewish people that Hashem was the exclusive power of the world and after this experience they forsook their idolatrous ways.

This incredible experience is unparalleled in all of Jewish history. Its uniqueness is due to the fact that this sacrifice was, under normal circumstances, a violation of a serious Torah prohibition. The Torah sternly warns us against offering a sacrifice to Hashem outside the Bais Hamikdash. Once erected, the Bais Hamikdash served as the exclusive site for sacrificial purposes. And yet, at this crucial moment of truth Eliyahu involved the Jewish people in a sacrifice on Mount Carmel, one normally punishable by death. Chazal, in resolution of this perplexing issue, quote a Torah passage which states, "To him (the prophet) you shall hearken." (Dvorim 18:15) This passage establishes the precedent that an unequivocally authoritative prophet may temporarily order the violation of a Torah commandment. In fact, Eliyahu's sacrifice on Mount Carmel is cited as the prime example for this principle. But, the question begs to be asked, "Why was it necessary to violate a Torah principle at this juncture? Wouldn't this clear demonstration result from the ordinary sacrificial procedure in the Bais Hamikdash?"

In search for an insight to this let us focus on a specific reference in this week's haftorah. The Scriptures, in describing Eliyahu's altar say, "And Eliyahu took twelve stones corresponding to the twelve tribes of Yaakov about whom Hashem said, 'Yisroel will be your name.'" (18:31) Rashi (ad loc.) comments on the relevance of the name Yisroel here. He quotes the Midrash which explains that Yaakov Avinu foresaw this sacrificial procedure transpiring on Mount Carmel. In fact, this vision was shown to Yaakov at the exact moment of his name change from Yaakov to Yisroel. Hashem told Yaakov, "A nation and an assembly of nations will emerge from you." (Breishis 35:11) Rashi (ad loc.) explains that the moment will come for the Jewish people to resemble the nations of the world.

They will offer a sacrifice outside the Bais Hamikdash and Hashem will accept it with pleasure.

The above reference suggests a mysterious relationship between the name Yisroel and this sacrifice on Mount Carmel. For one, this revelation transpired at the exact moment Yaakov received his new name Yisroel. In addition, the Haftorah seems to focus on this name change as a prelude to the miracle of Eliyahu's sacrifice. A careful analysis of the name Yisroel will reveal its hidden dimension and its association to the sacrifice on Mount Carmel.

The Torah, in explaining the name Yisroel, states, "For you (Yaakov) have become a prince unto E-l." (Breishis 32:29) The name Yisroel actually includes within itself the name of Hashem suggesting an essential relationship between Hashem and His people. And as is reflected by the essence of a name, this relationship continues to exist under all circumstances and at all times.

With this insight we can now appreciate the sacrifice on Mount Carmel and the necessity for its deviation from the ordinary sacrificial procedure. During Eliyahu's days, the Jewish people's perceived their relationship with Hashem as one confined to the Bais Hamikdash itself. When they approached Hashem in His sanctuary His presence could be truly sensed. However outside of Yerushalayim no tangible presence of Hashem could be felt and, in their minds, no relationship existed. This perverted perspective resulted in the Jewish people's reverting to idolatry for their sense of security.

But now, the time had finally arrived for the Jewish people to realize Hashem's presence everywhere and to appreciate their relationship with Him outside of the Bais Hamikdash. To facilitate this, Eliyahu accepted the difficult task of revealing this truth and offered a sacrifice outside of the Bais Hamikdash proper. He reasoned that Hashem's response would prove that His relationship transcended the physical boundaries of Yerushalayim. Hashem could even be found on Mount Carmel at a time when the Jewish people appeared like a foreign nation. Hashem responded warmly and displayed His presence at Mount Carmel by accepting this "foreign" sacrifice. Through this the Jewish people were convinced that their name Yisroel was the true representation of their relationship with Hashem. As their name suggests Hashem maintains an inseparable relationship with His people whenever and wherever they may be found. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel and [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org)

### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In his words to the tribe of Levi after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe says, "This is what the G-d of Yisrael said: Let every man put his sword on his thigh... and let every man kill his brother..." [Shemot

32:27]. The phrase "ish charbo"-every man and his sword-appears only once more in the Torah, in the description of the actions of the ancestor of this tribe together with his brother Shimon: "And two sons of Yaacov, Shimon and Levi, the brothers of Dina, each took his sword, and they attacked the city in safety. And they killed every male." [Bereishit 34:25]. Is there some link between these two passages?

Evidently the actions of the tribe of Levi after the sin of the Calf can be viewed as atonement for their father's sins in Shechem. We have noted in the past that the main sin in Shechem might have been the taking of booty from the city. Even if it was right to kill all the people of Shechem, as some of the commentators feel, in such a serious case as killing an entire city it is necessary to be especially careful and not to obtain any material benefit (just as we are commanded when we destroy a city where the people were influenced to worship idols). Yaacov therefore reprimanded them sharply: "Shimon and Levi are brothers, their possessions are terrible weapons... For they have killed a man in their anger, and by their desire they have destroyed an ox. Their anger is cursed because it is strong, their rage is harsh; I will divide them within Yaacov and disperse them among Yisrael." [Bereishit 49:5-7]. Now, after the sin of the Calf, the Levites atone for this sin. They are once again called on to perform the difficult task of killing, but in this case they must kill their brothers and their relatives, totally accepting the command of G-d, even if it is against their own personal interests. According to the Midrash, "Shimon and Levi joined together in Shechem, as is written, 'And two sons of Yaacov, Shimon and Levi, the brothers of Dina, each took his sword...' Levi paid back his debt in the desert, as is written, 'Moshe stood in the camp and said, let every man put his sword on his thigh.'" [Sifri, Devarim, 349].

Thus, this act by the tribe of Levi reversed their status completely. Yaacov had cursed Levi that they would be distributed throughout Yisrael, but now Moshe informs the tribe that this is in fact a blessing. "And Moshe said, you have fulfilled your task today, in that every man fought his son and his brother, so that you will be given a blessing today" [Shemot 32:29]. Before his death, Moshe repeats the blessing of the tribe of Levi, because they had the courage to follow G-d's orders. "He who says to his father and mother, I have not seen you, and who did not recognize his brothers or know his sons. For they fulfilled your command, and they observed your covenant." [Devarim 33:9]. This was the only tribe that was given an explicit blessing by Moshe: "G-d, bless his people, and favor the work of his hands." [33:11].

It seems that the blessing that Levi received was in the end the complete opposite of Yaacov's curse. According to the curse, the tribe of Levi was not to receive any inheritance. This did not change, but its significance was transformed, since ever since the

event of the Golden Calf it would characterize their advantage over the other tribes. "At that time, G-d separated the tribe of Levi, to carry the Ark of G-d's Covenant, to stand before G-d and serve Him, and to bless in his name... Therefore, Levi did not have a portion and a heritage with his brothers; G-d is his heritage, as your G-d promised him." [Devarim 10:8-9].

### Unity of Yisrael

*By Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg, Head of Yeshivat Kerem Beyavneh*

The beginning of the Torah portion of Ki Tissa defines the essence of Yisrael, including the relationships between the nation and the Almighty and Bnei Yisrael among themselves. The community of Yisrael is not a group of individuals who have joined together to form a single nation. Rather, it is a single entity, one organism, which consists of many individuals linked together as the organs in a body. The definition of the Tanya (chapter 32) and the RADBAZ (Hilchot Mamrim 2:4) is that the community of Yisrael is a single soul made up of separate bodies.

The relationship between one man and another is that of a colleague, "rei'ah"-*"Love your colleague as yourself"* [Vayikra 19:18]. According to the interpretation of the Midrash, the Almighty is also called a "rei'ah." *"Do not abandon your colleague and your father's colleague"* [Mishlei 27:10]. The same root, resh-ayin, is the basis of the word "teruah." This is a series of short bursts of the shofar, as opposed to the long blast of the "teki'a." *"Tear them apart with an iron staff, shatter them like a clay vessel"* [Tehillim 2:9]. Anything that is unified that is then divided into two parts is considered to be broken and partial. A man in Yisrael is not complete by himself, he is part of a community. And he is therefore called "rei'ah." A woman is part of the completeness of man: *"He created them as male and female, and He called them Adam"* [Bereishit 5:2]. She is therefore known as "rei'ah." The Almighty and Yisrael are also one, and that is why the Holy One is referred to as "rei'ah." A hint of this can be seen in the way the Sanhedrin sits, in a semicircle, since Yisrael is only half of the whole. The Almighty completes the missing part of the Sanhedrin, as is written, *"G-d stands in the Divine community"* [Tehillim 82:1]. G-d is the second half of the circle.

This also corresponds to the fact that every person in Yisrael donates half a Shekel, showing that our existence is only partial, to be completed by joining the whole.

This week's Torah portion includes the matter of the incense. Eleven spices are used to make up the incense, and the sages have taught us, *"Every fast day that does not include the sinners of Bnei Yisrael is not a fast. This can be compared to the chelbanah, which has a bad odor, but is one of the spices of the incense."* [Keritut 10]. This does not mean that the sinners are added to the community as an afterthought, rather that

the absence of sinners in a fast day is a deficiency in the role of Yisrael, just like a lack of chelbanah in the incense. The bad odor of the chelbanah helps to emphasize the scents of the other spices.

However, all of this is true only when the sinner has joined the rest of the nation. If the nation is not unified, any bad traits become conspicuous. This is what the prophet noted: *"Do not bring me vain sacrifices, it is an incense of abomination for me... I will not accept sin in the community"* [Yeshayhu 1:13]. When the actions are based on evil, there is no unity, the chelbanah omits a bad odor, and the incense becomes an abomination.

### THE SALANT FOUNDATION

## Parsha Insights

*by Rabbi Zvi Miller*

**A**fter the sin of the golden calf, Moshe beseeched Hashem on behalf of the Jewish nation. His prayer-which evoked the merit of the Patriarchs-succeeded to alleviate the Divine justice from instantaneously destroying Klal Yisrael, but did not succeed to annul the judgment against them. Subsequently, Moshe immersed himself in prayer, supplicating Hashem to forgive his people. Yet, after 40 days of prayer Hashem still did not grant atonement.

At that point, Moshe attempted a different approach. Instead of crying out for Am Yisrael, he asked Hashem to grant him a personal request: if I have indeed found favor in Your eyes, make Your way known to me.

At the time when the survival of B'nai Yisrael was in the balance, how would a new Divine revelation for Moshe help them? Moreover, since Hashem revealed the Torah to Moshe at Sinai-what knowledge was Moshe lacking?

Moshe understood that there are two categories of Divine Mercy -- (1) before the sin, and (2) after the sin. At Sinai, prior to the incident of the golden calf, Hashem revealed to Moshe the first attribute of His compassion, i.e. His love and care for all of His creations. After the offense of the golden calf, Moshe asked Hashem to show him the second attribute of compassion, i.e., forgiveness.

Just as the revelation of the first luchos (Tablets) was received by Moshe and transmitted by him to Klal Yisrael-it was appropriate-that the second luchos be received and transmitted by Moshe. Since the second attribute renders forgiveness, it is an even greater magnitude of mercy and kindness than the first.

Hashem answered Moshe, and revealed to him the second attribute of compassion and forgivenessâ *"and in his merit-to all B'nai Yisrael. And on that merit Hashem granted atonement and restored the Shechinah amongst them."*

Implement: Show an extra level of compassion to everyone. [Da'as Torah of Rabenu Yerucham HaLevi]

**RABBI SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

**W**e read in our parashah (31:14-15): "You shall observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you... For six days, work may be done..." R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1843-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia; author of Ohr Sameach) notes that the prohibition against working on Shabbat is mentioned several times in the Torah. In some verses (for example Shmot 20:9), the Torah uses the active voice, "Six days shall you work." In other verses, the Torah uses the passive voice, as in the above verse from our parashah. The passive voice also is used in next week's parashah (35:2): "On six days, work may be done." Why?

He answers: In the sections in which the Torah uses the passive voice, the Torah also refers to the holiness of Shabbat. For example, our parashah says, "You shall observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you... For six days, work may be done." Similarly, we read in next week's parashah, "On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you." In contrast, the verses that use the active voice do not refer to the holiness of Shabbat.

What does this teach? R' Meir Simcha explains: Our Sages teach, "When you do the Will of Hashem, your work will be done by others. When you do not do the Will of Hashem, you will have to do your own work." If we infuse the Shabbat with holiness, that holiness will rub-off on us, helping us do the Will of Hashem all week long. Then our work will be done passively, i.e., by others. However, when our Shabbat is not infused with holiness, then we will have to do our own work actively. (Meshech Chochmah)

"Between Me and Bnei Yisrael it is a sign forever that in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." (31:17)

Making a play on the last word of this verse, our Sages derived the existence of a Neshamah Yetairah—literally "extra soul"—that enters man on Shabbat. What is this Neshamah Yetairah?

R' Moshe Shick z"l (19th century rabbi of Huszt, Hungary) explains: Ancient philosophers believed that a completely spiritual Being could not have created our physical world. Rather, they suggested, G-d created a world that was slightly less spiritual than Himself; that world created the next world, and so on, until our world was created.

Shabbat is our declaration that the ancient philosophers' belief is false. We declare that G-d Himself created everything that was made in the six days of creation and that He "rested" on the seventh day—not, as the philosophers claimed, that He rested already on the first day.

Yet the question remains: How can G-d relate to our lowly world? To Jews, the answer is that our world must not be so lowly. Man is capable of elevating himself and the world around him.

What is this Neshamah Yetairah? It is the extra push that we get from Shabbat to realize our potential, for Shabbat is the proof that G-d expects more from us. (Maharam Shick Al Ha'Torah)

"Why should Egypt say the following: 'B'ra'ah / With evil intent He took them out, to kill them in the mountains and to annihilate them from the face of the earth'? Relent from Your flaring anger and reconsider regarding the ra'ah / evil against Your people:" (32:12)

R' Baruch Zvi Hakohen Moskowitz z"l (20th century rabbi in Budapest and Vienna) asks: Following this verse, Moshe invokes the merit of the Patriarchs in defense of the Jewish People. Shouldn't his request, "Relent from your flaring anger etc.," have waited until the end of his prayer?

He explains: Moshe's intention was to resolve an apparent hypocrisy in his prayer. His prayer was, in effect: "A Chillul Hashem / desecration of G-d's Name will result if You annihilate Bnei Yisrael." Hashem could have answered, "What about the Chillul Hashem that resulted from the Golden Calf itself?" To this Moshe answered, "Relent from Your flaring anger and reconsider regarding the ra'ah / evil against Your people." He meant: The Golden Calf was certainly a ra'ah. However, the ra'ah that would result from Your annihilation of Bnei Yisrael would surely be greater. Therefore, there is no hypocrisy in my request that You forgive them. (Mishmeret Zvi)

"He [Moshe] said, 'Show me Your glory'. He [G-d] said, 'I shall make all My goodness pass before you, and I shall call out with the Name Hashem before you; I shall show favor when I choose to show favor, and I shall show mercy when I choose to show mercy.'" (33:18-19)

R' Yechiel Michel Halevi Epstein z"l (1829-1907) explains these verses as follows: Moshe's request was to be able to reach the highest possible level in his grasp of the Torah so that he could then attain the ultimate love for Hashem. Hashem answered that He would reveal His "goodness"—an allusion to Torah, which is called "good"—and would teach him His Name—another reference to Torah, which kabbalists say is entirely made up of different Names of G-d.

Moshe was then concerned: How will other Jews attain such an understanding of the Torah? Hashem answered: "I shall show favor when I choose to show favor." The Hebrew root "chen" (translated here as "favor") connotes something undeserved ("chinam"). Hashem assured Moshe, "I will teach the Torah even to the undeserving." G-d also promises in our verse to act mercifully, and it is based on this that we pray every morning (in the blessing before Shma):

"The merciful Father, Who acts mercifully, have mercy on us, instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, teach..." [Without this explanation, it is difficult to understand the repeated references to G-d's mercy in this prayer, which primarily asks G-d to help us study Torah.] (Derashot Kol Ben Levi No. 15) © 2004 Rabbi S. Katz and [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org)

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## What's Bothering Rashi

**T**his week's parsha's main themes are a repeated command to keep the Shabbat, and the sin of the Golden Calf. We will look at some main aspects of the Shabbat.

### A QUESTION ABOUT THE REASON FOR THE SHABBAT

The mitzvah of the Shabbat is one of the Ten Commandments. It is found in Exodus 20:7 and again in Deuteronomy 5:12. In Exodus, the reason given for the Shabbat is that it is the day when Hashem rested after the week of Creation. As He rested, so too are we to rest. But in Deuteronomy, the reason given for the Shabbat is that we were slaves in Egypt and as remembrance of that experience and God's redemption, we are to keep the Shabbat.

How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction between the two reasons for keeping the Shabbat?

Look at both of these sections-read them carefully-and you should be able to understand why this difference exists.

An Answer: If you read both sections carefully, you certainly noticed that they both end with a phrase beginning with the word "Therefore." The Ten Commandments in Exodus, which speak of God creating the world and resting on the seventh day, ends with: "Therefore, Hashem blessed the Shabbat day and He sanctified it." The section in Deuteronomy, on the other hand, which speaks of the Jews being slaves in Egypt, ends with: "Therefore Hashem commanded you to keep the Shabbat."

Now it should be quite clear. The reason for the Shabbat is certainly that the world was created in six days and on the seventh Hashem rested. That is why the seventh day is holy. And that is what the verse says: "Therefore, Hashem blessed the Shabbat day and He sanctified it." But in Deuteronomy the reason is given to explain why this holy day was given to the Jews and only to them (even though all of mankind was created by Hashem). This is because God took us out of the slavery of Egypt and therefore we are beholden to Him. We alone, among all the Peoples of the world, have a covenant with Him. So there is no contradiction between the two reasons given.

### SHABBAT PRAYERS

In the Shabbat morning Shemona Esrei prayer we read a section from this week's parsha referring to the mitzvah of Shabbat. It says:

"...and two tablets of stone he (Moses) brought down (from Sinai) in his hand. And it is written in them about the observance of Shabbat. And so it also says in Your Torah (the following quote is from Exodus 31:16-17 -- this is from our parsha):

'And the children of Israel shall keep the Shabbat to make it an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and the children of Israel it is a sign forever that in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.'

A Question: Why was this section from the Torah chosen for the prayer? It would seem more appropriate to choose the verses from the Ten Commandments which tell of the mitzvah of Shabbat.

Can you see the special relevance of this section?

An Answer: This section, more than the verses in the Ten Commandments, stresses the special relationship between the Jews and Hashem. The covenant is mentioned and Shabbat is the sign of that special covenant. And since these prayers are from the Jews and are directed to Hashem, it is natural to mention our special relation with the God who is the object of our prayers. This section expresses that.

See the very next paragraph in the prayer. It stresses the exclusive privilege that the Jews have as being the only nation chosen to observe the Shabbat. This, as we said above, is unusual since the Shabbat really commemorates the creation of the world and of all mankind. We would expect that all Peoples would be obligated to observe the Shabbat. It is our special gift that we alone observe the Shabbat-this is our identity card as God's People-the Nation chosen to convey His message throughout the world. © 2005 Dr. Avigdor Bonchek and [aish.org](http://aish.org)

