

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**MACHON ZOMET**

### Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**A**fter the sin of the Golden Calf, the Almighty gives Moshe the bad news that He will not directly accompany the nation of Yisrael on their journey to Eretz Yisrael but will instead send an angel to accompany them. Bnei Yisrael react to this news by mourning. "They mourned, and nobody wore his jewelry" [Shemot 33:4]. But surprisingly Moshe himself does not say anything at all about the news. Moshe even expands the broken contact between the Almighty and the nation: "And Moshe took the tent and placed it outside the camp, far from the camp, and he called it 'The Tent of Meeting'" [33:7]. This seems to be the direct opposite of how Moshe reacted in the previous chapter. At that time, Moshe used all his strength to defend Bnei Yisrael, but now when the people have been told about a bad decree, his actions only serve to make the situation worse. Only after this passage are we told that Moshe did indeed pray to G-d asking that He cancel the decree: "Look, you have told me to raise up this nation, but you have not told me whom you will send with me..." [33:12]. What is the meaning of the way Moshe acts in this week's Torah portion?

Evidently Moshe is trying to test the people in a meaningful way. The Torah describes the reaction of the nation at length: "And when Moshe would go to the Tent the whole nation would stand at attention, every man in front of his own tent, and look at Moshe, until he arrived at the Tent. And then, when Moshe came to the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and remain at the entrance of the Tent, and He would speak to Moshe. And the whole nation would see the pillar of cloud at the entrance to the Tent, and the entire nation would stand and bow down, every man in front of his own tent." [33:8-10]. This reaction is the direct opposite of what might have been expected. We might have thought the people would object to what Moshe did, isolating himself from the nation. This is in fact the way people reacted later on, when they wanted to complain about Moshe, "And Datan and Aviram went out to stand up at the entrance to their tents..." [Bamidbar 16:27]. But for the present Bnei Yisrael showed that they were most interested in the great sin that they had committed. They did not complain to Moshe, just the opposite. They showed their great appreciation and

admiration for the person who was privileged to have constant revelations by the Shechina.

It can be assumed that this was in fact Moshe's goal. The reason that he moved away from the camp was to serve as a countermeasure for the sin of the Golden Calf. The last time that Moshe was separated from the camp, the people made a calf and worshipped it. But now the people showed that they had not abandoned the service of G-d, and that they were worthy of renewed contact with Him. This is exactly what Moshe was waiting for. Now that Bnei Yisrael had passed the test, Moshe could return to G-d and ask that the previous decree be changed, and that the nation be allowed to continue their journey to Eretz Yisrael. During the entire incident of the sin, the Almighty continued to relate to the people of Yisrael as a foreign nation, such as when He said to Moshe, "Go down, for your nation has sinned" [Shemot 32:7], or when He said, "Rise up from this, you and the nation that you raised up from the land of Egypt" [33:1]. Now, Moshe could base his approach on the test of the tents, and expand his request, by saying: "Look and see that this nation is your people" [33:13].

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

### What's Bothering Rashi

**O**ur Parsha tells of the Nation's inconceivable fall from grace and horrendous sin when 3,000 of its members worshipped the Golden Calf, merely days after they all had personally experienced the extraordinary spiritual encounter with G-d. They heard His voice proclaim to them "I am Hashem your G-d Who brought you out of the land of Egypt." It is difficult, to say the least, to grasp how after such an experience these privileged humans could have done such a thing. We probably never will be able to fully understand this. Our Sages have warned us against such judgementalism when they said "Don't judge your fellow until you have come to similar circumstances (and then see how you yourself act.)" With this in mind let us look at a verse and Rashi's comment on it. "And the people saw that Moses had delayed in descending from the mountain and the people gathered around Aaron and said to him 'Rise up, make for us G-ds who will go before us, for the man Moses, who brought us up from Egypt- we do not know what became of him.'" (Exodus 32:1) "Who will go before us"-RASHI: "They desired to have many G-ds."

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On what basis does Rashi conclude that the people wanted "many G-ds"? Maybe they just wanted one G-d to replace Moses, as they seem to be saying. Do you see which word(s) (in the Hebrew) indicate that they wanted many G-ds?

An Answer: The Hebrew has "asher yai'lchu" meaning "who will go (in the plural) before us." So it wasn't one G-d that they asked for, the plural verb shows that it was many G-ds that they desired.

A Question: But this interpretation is problematic, because the word "elohim," meaning G-d, is always in the plural even when it refers to the One G-d, Hashem. So the plural verb ("they will go") is appropriate. Maybe they desired only one G-d and referred to him as "elohim" just as Hashem is also called "Elohim" (in the plural)? Can you justify the Drash?

An Answer: Hashem is referred to as Elohim in the plural, as a sign of respect (in English this is called "the Royal We"). Just as "Adonoi," another name for Hashem, literally means "my Lords" in the plural. BUT even when Hashem is called "Elohim" in the Torah, the verb is always in the singular. As in the oft repeated phrase "Va'yadaber Elohim..."-"And G-d spoke..." the verb "spoke" is in the singular. But in our verse the people used the plural "they will go," indicating that they desired many G-ds. This is the basis for Rashi's interpretation.

What is the significance of this request in the plural? What difference does it make if they desired just one G-d to replace their leader or if they desired many? Both requests are blasphemous. What message does such a request convey?

An Answer: It is not the arithmetic that makes the difference. We could just as well ask: What difference does it make that Hashem is one? What's the big deal? The idea that there is only one ruler of the universe is that one ruler demands and deserves complete allegiance. More than one ruler would mean that a person might, at times, follow one and at other times follow the other G-d's demands. The decision about whom to follow at any one time would undoubtedly depend on which demand was more appealing to the believer. This is not just a matter of "dual loyalty." More significant is the fact that one's service to his masters is, in the final analysis, a

"service" to his Lord, which is actually just a front for a self-serving worship; a self-centered religion. His G-d can make no demands of him that would require the worshiper's self sacrifice because he can always appeal to his other master, his other G-d, to find an easier path.

To make the matter more concrete, we can take as an example disciplining one's child. As is known in too many families, when father and mother don't agree on matters of discipline, the child can always escape the rigorous demands that discipline always requires by appealing to the other parent's mercy. When the child succeeds in this maneuver, he remains undisciplined and may often cause a battle between the "G-ds" of the household(!) -- while he walks away scott-free.

Such is the heresy of "serving" many G-ds!  
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**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

Is it appropriate to challenge G-d when things are going wrong? The role of the prophet is usually associated with transmitting the word of G-d to his people. Yet there are times when the prophet takes on another role-that of the defense attorney for the people of Israel, protecting Am Yisrael and cajoling G-d to intercede.

Although there are no prophets today, it seems that G-d wants each of us to make such demands of Him. In doing so we acknowledge that we are in a true relationship with G-d and G-d has the power to fulfill our requests. This idea of making demands of G-d is echoed in this week's portion. After the Jews constructed the golden calf, Moshe (Moses) who is atop the mountain, is told by G-d "haniha li-let me be," so that I can destroy the Jewish people (Exodus 32:10).

Why does G-d demand "haniha li," the Midrash asks? After all, Moshe was not holding on to G-d. It can be compared, the Midrash continues, to a king, who becomes angry with his child. Taking him into a small room, the king begins to yell, "Leave me alone to kill him." The child's teacher passes by and hearing the king, wonders: The king and his child are alone inside, why does he shout, "leave me alone?" Obviously the king really wants me to go make peace between him and his child. What he's really saying is: "don't let me kill him, stop me." In this case, what was said may have meant the exact opposite.

The Midrash concludes that although G-d says to Moshe, "Let me be," what He's really saying is: "Moshe please don't let me be. Stop me. Don't let Me destroy the people. Intervene on their behalf." G-d wanted to witness Moshe's care for the Jewish people and therefore gave him the chance to challenge G-d. By entering into dialogue of challenging G-d, the Jewish people were saved.

It is told that when the Klausenberger Rebbe came to America he insisted that the tokhaha, the passages in the Torah referring to the curses upon the Jewish people, be read aloud. (Leviticus Chapter 26) His Hasidim were distressed. After all the custom is to read the curse in a low tone and for that matter to read it quickly. The Klausenberger explained: During the Shoah I lost my wife and eleven children. As I begin anew, I insist that the curse be read loud and I insist that it be read slowly. This is my, way of saying: "Listen Oh Lord, each of the curses have come true. Now," the saintly Klausenberger Rebbe said, "I insist that the time of blessings, which are also contained in this part of the Torah, come true." Because of his commitment to the relationship with the Divine, the Klausenberger Rebbe approached G-d with ahavat Yisrael and demanded of G-d that a new era begin.

Part of entering into a serious relationship is by placing demands on the other. We must uphold our responsibilities by doing our share in fulfilling our partnership with G-d to redeem the world. But, in the same breath, we have a right and even a responsibility to respectfully ask: "Oh Lord are You doing enough?"

Only then, will we respect what G-d actually wants from us, to hear our voices and to create a true covenantal relationship. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

**“W**hen you lift up the heads of the children of Israel to count them (in a census), let each one give an atonement offering for his soul when they are counted, so that there not be a plague in the counting of them" (Exodus 30:12)

This opening verse of our Biblical portion teaches that it is forbidden to take a number count of the Israelites, a census activity which Jewish organizations are constantly involved in doing. This prohibition is reinforced by the prophet Hosea (chapter 2), when he ringingly declares: "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sands of the sea, which cannot be numbered and cannot be counted..." And historically even King David learned the bitter lesson of the power of this command, when- against the will of his Chief Commander Joab- he ordered a census, and the Israelites suffered a plague (II Samuel, 24). Why can't we count Jews? What is the meaning of "giving atonement offering for his soul"? And didn't Hosea realize that we are not now- and were not in his day nor in any other time in Jewish history- as numerous as the sands of the sea?

The answer is to be found in a very strange incident during the judgeship of Gideon, great leader of

Israel, against the Midianite enemy (Judges 6-7), which is cited by Chief Rabbi Sacks in his "Covenant and Conversation". G-d encourages war against Midian, Gideon assembles 32,000 soldiers, and G-d says they are too many for Him to place Midian in their hands (sic)!? Gideon allows exemption for those who are frightened and wish to return home; only 10,000 remain. G-d believes that there are still too many and orders Gideon to take his men to a waterway and have them drink. Ninety seven hundred kneeled down on their knees to drink and three hundred lapped up the water with their hands, remaining in an upright position. G-d has Gideon wage the battle only with the 300 who did not kneel- with those soldiers who understand that it is only permissible to kneel before G-d. Even though the opposing Midianite forces were "innumerable (unable to be counted) like the sand at the edge of the sea in large quantity (Judges 7:12)", the small band of 300- waging a surprise nocturnal battle accompanied with great victorious sounds of the Shofar- won the day!

The message is indubitably clear. A census presupposes that in battle and when compared to other nations, there is strength in numbers, numbers count. The Divine commandment forbidding a census comes to teach that if G-d is with Israel, then numbers become totally unimportant; to be alone with G-d is to always be with a majority of one. And to be with G-d means to be righteous, to be committed to the cause, to believe in oneself, in one's nation and one's mission. A small band of dedicated people willing to sacrifice one's life to a Divine cause- such as a Jewish homeland poised and inspired to teach the world about a G-d of love, morality, pluralism and peace- is automatically as numerous as the sands at the edge of the shores of the sea. Such an army is as united as are the sands of the sea, and such an army contains soldiers each of whom is willing to give up his life (soul) as an atonement for G-d. That is why we successfully defeated all of the Arab hordes with a population of barely 600,000 in our War of Independence, while our corrupt leadership claims we are even too tired to win wars today with a population of close to six million! Jews who lack the faith to risk their lives meaningfully in a just war for the sake of peace may well find that their lives will be taken absurdly by plague, G-d forbid. And if our Biblical portion begins by teaching that it is forbidden to count Jews in a census for the sake of comparison to other nations, it continues on to teach that nevertheless every single Jew within Israel certainly does count. Moses is atop Mt. Sinai (or in the supernal heavens) receiving the Decalogue of morality from G-d, while the panicking Israelites- having expected their great prophet to return on the fortieth day when he planned his return for the forty first day- are worshipping the golden calf. G-d commands Moses: "Get down, because your nation whom you took up from the land of Egypt is acting perversely" (Exodus 32:7)

The Sages of the Talmud expand on G-d's words: "Get down from our exalted state. I only gave you greatness because of your nation. Now that your nation is sinning, what do I need you for?" (B.T. Berakhot 32a). Picture the scene: here is the greatest Kollel (Rabbinical Seminary) in history, with the Almighty as Dean of the Academy (Rosh HaYeshiva) and Moses as disciple (avrech). Nevertheless, G-d explains that He did not enter into a covenant with the elite, most dedicated Jewish scholars; G-d entered into a covenant with every single Jew, from the elders and judges to the choppers of wood and the drawers of water.

Just as a Holy Torah Scroll is invalidated by a single letter which is missing, so is historic Israel (Knesset Yisrael) invalidated if one Jew is disaffected. Moses must go down to his errant nation and lift up each of the Israelites, restore every Jew to the commitment of the Divine message and mission. Yes, the Jews must not be counted, but each and every Jew certainly counts! © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BARUCH LEFF**

### **Kol Yaakov**

**W**e've all said it ourselves or we have at least heard someone else say it: "If only G-d would appear and show me some miracle, then I would truly believe and serve Him." This is what we sincerely think would be our reaction to a wonder or sign from Heaven.

But would it? History, including the episode of the worshipping of the Golden Calf in this week's Torah portion, has proven otherwise.

We are familiar with the story of the Golden Calf. The Jewish People heard G-d Himself, without an intermediary, speak and gave them His Torah. G-d also informed them that Moshe is His trustworthy prophet and that anything Moshe says in His Name should be accepted as G-d's word. Moshe then ascended to the top of Mount Sinai to receive all the details of the Torah. Moshe told them he would return in 40 days. (See Exodus 24:12-18.) When, according to their mistaken calculation Moshe tarried, (see Rashi, 32:1) they formed an image of a Golden Calf and worshipped it.

(It is highly unlikely that their actions involved actual idol worship. We find later in Jewish history that the idolatrous King Yerovam re-introduced golden calves into Jewish worship. He even used the same phrase in reference to the calves, with which the Jews of the Desert were punished so severely: "These are your G-ds, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." (Compare Exodus 32:4 with Kings I, 12:28.) Is it possible that Jews would tolerate the arrangement of golden calves, as idols, when they had to have been

aware of the terrible punishments that resulted from the original golden calf?

Perhaps one can rationalize use of other idols, but to make the same image that was a cause of terrible destruction for Jews and ask them to worship it? Unless, we understand, that the original golden calf was not actual idol worship. Rather, it was a sin of using an image as an inspiration or focus for prayer and service. Yerovam told them that golden calves as symbols of focus may have been inappropriate at the time of the Desert, but they are not forbidden for all generations since they did not involve actual idol worship. Yerovam is, of course, mistaken. G-d views the use of any image, even to enhance service of Him, as an offshoot of idol worship and reckons with it accordingly.)

When reading the story of the Golden Calf, a common question is: How could the Jews commit such a terrible transgression just 40 days after receiving the Torah? Shouldn't the impact of hearing G-d speak have lasted much more than 40 days? How could this have happened? For some people, the rebellion of the Jews so soon after the Revelation at Sinai serves as an indictment of the truth of the Torah. After all, if G-d really did appear to the Jews, could they have sinned so quickly? It must be that G-d did not truly appear to them as is recorded in the Torah. How do we answer this charge?

Think for a moment. Even if you suggest, for argument's sake, that G-d is not the author of the Bible, but that it is written by a human, you must agree that this author was very perceptive and had a deep sense of the psychology of people. This is true to such an extent, that in the whole history of mankind, no one else was able to write a book that penetrated the hearts of all. There is no book that has been translated into as many languages and has had as deep an effect on humanity as the Bible. So, if we are intelligent enough to realize that there is a problem of disconnect with the Jews sinning 40 days after Sinai, how could it be that the author of the Bible was not smart enough to realize this? Rather, we must admit that such a phenomenon can happen. The revelation by G-d at Sinai can occur and people can ignore it a short time after that event.

What is the reason for this? How is it that we human beings are able to disregard a clear inspiration and wondrous appearance by G-d? The answer is that we are resilient in both a positive sense and in a negative one. Experiences that affected and moved me today may last a couple of days but will always wear off. I may have heard a motivating speech on controlling anger and I may really think that from now on I will control my anger. But we all know that given a week, that speech's effects will be largely lost.

Have you ever been to a funeral of a young person? Don't we leave the funeral vowing to appreciate life more and aren't we sure that we are

going to tell our loved ones how much we love them every day of the rest of our lives? Yet, usually our resolutions do not last more than a day or two. Of course, this tendency applies in a positive sense as well. We are able to bounce back from negative experiences soon after we encounter them. But our emotional elasticity haunts us whenever we are trying to maintain inspiration and growth. We might call this the 'What have we lived through lately' syndrome.

And this syndrome destroys the impact of even miraculous events. It is not true that, "If only G-d would appear and show me some miracle then I would truly believe and serve Him." Unfortunately, the spiritual stimulus does not usually last. We learn this most succinctly from Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet.

In Kings I, (Haftorah of Ki Tisa, Chapters 18 & 19) Eliyahu challenged the idolatrous ruler, King Ahab to a "competition" which would take place in front of the entire people. The worshippers and false prophets of the idol, Baal, would offer sacrifices and pray to Baal and Eliyahu would offer sacrifices and pray to G-d. Whichever one would answer with a fire consuming the sacrifice would be accepted as the true G-d.

This proposal was accepted and a fire came down to consume only Eliyahu's sacrifice and not the men of the Baal. All of the people saw this and proclaimed, "Hashem, He is the G-d! Hashem, He is the G-d!" (Kings I 18:39). (This is the phrase with which we end the Yom Kippur prayer service.) Eliyahu then destroys the false prophets of the Baal. In addition, Eliyahu brings forth a miraculous rainstorm that ended a prolonged drought.

King Ahab reports back to his wife, the equally evil Queen Jezebel, thoroughly dejected. It seemed that Eliyahu has defeated them and their idolatrous practices. The Jewish People would give up the service of the Baal and only serve G-d. This threatened Ahab and Jezebel's entire hold on their kingdom! Then a most curious thing occurs. Seemingly incongruous, Jezebel sends a messenger to Eliyahu saying, "Tomorrow, I am going to kill you." Eliyahu receives the message, reacts by running into the desert and is ready to give up. He requests that G-d take his soul. He wants to die.

What is going on here? Did Eliyahu actually think that Jezebel would have an epiphany? Jezebel was the epitome of evil. Surely, Eliyahu could not have ever hoped to change her idolatrous ways. In addition, Eliyahu has been running away from her his entire life and never gave up his mission of removing idolatry from the Jewish People. Now, he is ready to give up? Didn't he just perform a wondrous miracle which transformed the entire Jewish nation?

And how do we explain Jezebel's actions? Doesn't she realize that the chips are stacked against her now that Eliyahu has successfully and miraculously defeated the worship of the Baal? And if indeed she

does not care about public opinion but simply wants to murder Eliyahu for the nuisance that he is to her, why doesn't she kill him today? Why does she say that she will only kill him tomorrow?

It is clear that Jezebel was not sending Eliyahu a message that she wants to kill him. This is not what she meant. Rather, she was saying the following: "Eliyahu, you think you have defeated me? You performed a grand miracle for all to see. Today I can't touch you. But TOMORROW I'll kill you and nobody will say a word. For just one day your miracle will work. That's how effective your miracle is."

Eliyahu had thought that the Jews' reaction to his monumental miracle would be grandiose change. He assessed the Jewish national soul and felt that finally they would repent as a result of his very public miracle. But then Eliyahu hears Jezebel's message and realizes that her assessment is more accurate than his. This new miracle would not be viewed differently than the standard reaction to miracles. The power and inspiration of miracles does not permanently last and it won't now either. Yes, Jezebel is right. Eliyahu is then ready to give up for he feels that there is nothing more that he can do to help transform the Jewish people.

We think that if the world saw miracles it would be a different world. But it would not. It would be the exact same world. Miracles do not change people. We remain with our ability to rebel and sin a short while after the miracle's effect wears off.

Judaism is not based upon the performance of miracles. Maimonides writes (Mishna Torah, Yesodei Torah, Chapter 8) that Moshe did not perform miracles in order to prove the truth of his prophecy. He (as a messenger of G-d) took water out a stone because the Jews were thirsty. He brought manna from heaven because they were hungry, etc. We believe in the Torah's truth only because G-d appeared Himself at Mount Sinai and told us that it is true.

We are aware that inspirations fade. We all know that the emotions we felt on September 11, 2001 have faded. Yet we still desire to gain something permanent when we are inspired to change. We don't want to waste the inspiration. So what can we do?

Here's a key. When we are motivated to change, we must think of some small, slight area in which we can grow. If we take on something too overwhelming and drastic, then it is all the more likely to fail. We should take, for example, the area of prayer, and accept upon ourselves to recite an additional short section that we never said before. Or we can choose the area of Torah study and learn for an extra few moments per day. We can decide to perform an extra act of kindness daily, or just smile at one person every day. There are thousand of small things we can do to change subtly. Of course, the long-term goal is to increase amounts and levels of change but we must start slowly if we are to change at all. (See "Go Slow",

and "Act, Don't Just React".) So when the next inspiring event occurs in our lives, we now know what to do. Never expect the inspiration to last. Make just a small change. Over a lifetime, these tens and tens of changes will produce the transformation we are all looking for. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's Haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Parah, describes the Jewish people's state of purity in the time of Mashiach. Hashem reminds them of their sinful behavior that kindled His wrath and sent them into exile. After endless years of darkness Hashem will purify His children and return them home. The prophet Yechezkel says in Hashem's name, "And I will sprinkle pure waters upon you that will be purify you from all your impurities and repulsive actions..." (36:25) Yechezkel is referring to the Jewish people's ultimate state of purity wherein Hashem will totally cleanse them from sin. Yechezkel compares this spiritual cleansing to purification from ritual impurity. It is worthwhile to understand this particular analogy. Instead of comparing this purification to the traditional immersion process Yechezkel compares it to the sprinkling of the red heifer waters. This detailed and mysterious procedure purified one from direct contact with a corpse. Such contact produced the most severe state of ritual impurity and required a unique purification process. Yechezkel's analogy suggests a direct corollary between sin and death. Apparently, the ultimate removal of sin is similar to the removal of the impurity of death.

Let us examine the nature of the red heifer process and understand its relationship to sin. We read in the maftir portion of Parshas Parah that the kohain was commanded to slaughter the heifer and sprinkle its sacrificial blood outside the Bais Hamikdash's walls. The kohanim then burned the heifer's body and mixed her ashes with spring water producing a ritual mixture. The mixture was then sprinkled on anyone who was associated with a corpse. The Sages comment on the unique nature of this sacrifice and explain that it atoned for the Jewish nation's sin of the golden calf. They show how every detail of this sacrifice ran parallel lines with the details of the sinful golden calf experience. (see Rashi to Bamidbar 19:2 II)

This indicates a direct relationship between the spiritual impurity of death and the golden calf. For this reason the purification process began with atonement from the golden calf sin. In fact, the purifying mixture was a product of the atonement of that sin. Whenever the Jewish nation required purification ashes they would atone for the golden calf sin and produced their necessary mixtures. Apparently, this sin's impact was so far reaching that it left an indelible impression on the Jewish people's ritual purity. Yet, this atonement was

specifically related to association with a corpse and only required when producing purifying ashes.

We can appreciate this intriguing phenomenon through the Sages' profound insight in Mesichta Avoda Zara (5a). They teach us that when the Jewish people received the Torah they transcended the curse of mortality. They cleaved to Hashem's will with such intensity that their bodies were transformed into semi-spiritual entities. After two thousand years of world existence the body finally cooperated with the soul and created a harmonious unit of Hashem's perfect service. Regretfully, this lofty experience was short lived and, after forty days of elevation the Jewish people succumbed to fear and anxiety. They doubted if their revered leader Moshe Rabbeinu would ever return and desperately sought a qualified spiritual replacement. This set the stage for their insincere Egyptian converts who seduced the Jewish people into idolatry. This infamous plunge returned them to mortality. Their bodies returned to their physical state replete with all earthly urges and cravings.

We can further develop this through Sefer Hachinuch's understanding of the red heifer and its ritual mixture. He explains death's ritual impurity in the following manner. When one passes away, his soul departs from his body leaving behind a total physical entity. The body, barren of any trace of spirituality, projects a penetrating image of vanity and reflects a lifetime of earthly urges and sinful practices. Direct contact with a barren body damages one's spirituality and renders him ritually impure. This impure status has a positive effect and forces one to view his body and its effects in a different manner. His impure predicament reminds him that his body was meant to unite with his soul and he helps one senses the repulse of total earthly cravings. (Sefer Hachinuch Mitzva 263)

In truth, this vanity and sinful association traces back to the Jewish people's shameful sin of the golden calf. That single act returned the Jewish body to its physical state and created its ritual impurity. During that infamous scene the Jewish people traded their closest relationship with Hashem for shameful bodily cravings. Although this became reality their brief Har Sinai experience proved that one can free himself from earthly drives and direct his total being towards Hashem.

We now understand the red heifer's crucial role in the purification process. We realize that atonement from the golden calf was a prerequisite for ritual purity. Hashem introduced this impurity to assist one in detaching himself from his physical drives. One's impure state sent him a clear message about the body's shameful role in sin. However, one was reminded that his physical cravings were not necessarily part of his Jewish psyche. There was a time in the Jewish people's history where body and soul craved for something of true content and substance

namely, association with Hashem. The first step of purification was to contemplate the damaging effect of physical drives. After detaching oneself from his deep rooted urges the red heifer mixture completed the process. Its goal was to remind one of his true potential, to unify body and soul thereby achieving spiritual perfection.

We can now begin to understand Yechezkel's comparison between ultimate purity from sin and the red heifer mixture. The prophet Yechezkel describes this ultimate purity in the following words, "And I shall give you a new heart and place a new spirit in your midst and remove the stone heart from your flesh..." (36:26) Ramban teaches us that this refers to the Jewish people's pure desire to fulfill Hashem's will. The time will ultimately arrive for the body and all its drives to take a back seat. The Jewish people in the Messianic era will return to Adam's perfect state before his involvement in sin. Their single minded desire will be similar to that of the Jewish people during their first forty days at Har Sinai. They will totally detach themselves from physical passions and crave for the closest relationship with Hashem. (Ramban D'vorim 30:6) This process will ultimately return them to their semi-spiritual state of Har Sinai. This time, however, it will be everlasting and Hashem will permanently remove the curse of mortality from His people. (see Daas T'vunos 3:40)

The analogy of the purifying waters is now complete. Throughout the years, the red heifer's sacrificial waters purified one from association with earthly cravings. The ritual mix removed ritual impurity and reduced one's sinful urges. In addition, the atonement process brought one in contact with his soul's innermost cravings, to cleave to Hashem. It linked one to his glorious past at Har Sinai and inspired him to his glorious future in Meshiach's times. And it will ultimately complete its role and detach the Jewish people from all physical drives and passions and direct body and soul's total focus towards Hashem.

How timely is this lesson immediately following Purim with our sights set on Pesach. The mitzvos of Purim allows us to contact our innermost feelings and ascertain our true essence. After this uplifting experience we begin preparing for our total redemption. Indeed, the Sages teach us that as the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the month of Nissan they will be ultimately redeemed in that same month. May we merit that this refer to our upcoming Nissan. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd if [You] don't [bear their iniquity], please erase me from Your book which You have written" (Shemos 32:32). Which "book" was Moshe asking G-d to erase him from? There are two

basic approaches in Chazal and the Rishonim- the "book of life" and the Torah. If Moshe was asking to be erased from the "book of life," it could mean that he preferred to die rather than seeing the nation wiped out (see Ibn Ezra), or that Moshe was requesting that his merits be transferred from his "book of life" to the nation's, so that they can now have enough merits to survive (see Ramban). According to these approaches, G-d's response of "whomever sinned against Me will I erase from My book" (32:33) is a denial of Moshe's request, as He either would only kill those that worshipped the "golden calf" (but not Moshe), or refused to transfer Moshe's merits to them (or indicated that adding merits does not offer protection from being punished for their sins).

If Moshe was asking that his name be erased from the Torah, there seems to be two approaches as well. According to Shemos Rabbah (47:9), since the overwhelming majority of the communications between G-d and Moshe mentioned in the Torah were the instructions Moshe was to relay to the nation (i.e. "speak to the Children of Israel"), Moshe was arguing that if G-d destroyed the nation (and there was no longer anyone to "speak" to), his name should be removed as well. G-d's response could then be understood to be that He would only remove the names of those who had sinned (the nation), but not Moshe's.

Rashi also understands Moshe's request to be that his name should be removed from the Torah, but for a different reason, "so that they won't say about me that I wasn't worthy of asking for mercy on their behalf." If Moshe's name remained in the Torah, all later generations would know which leader wasn't able to save the nation from such harsh punishment. The Ramban asks how this could be Moshe's request, as G-d's response does not address this issue. How does only erasing the names of those who sinned ease Moshe's concern that later generations will not consider Moshe to have been an able leader? And, the Ramban adds, which "others" would have been mentioned that now won't be?

The Ramban's second question, however, may not be that difficult to answer. After all, the reason we don't know who they are is precisely because they were erased! There may have been leaders that we would have learned about (in the Torah) had they not been doomed to obscurity because of their involvement in the "golden calf." More than that, though, Vayikra Rabbah (7:1) tells us exactly whom G-d was referring to-Aharon, who had been involved in making the "golden calf" (even if his intentions were pure). When Moshe tells the nation how upset G-d was with Aharon (Devarim 9:20), erasing his name from the Torah was part of what G-d planned on doing. Some of the services performed in the Mishkan/Temple were assigned to "Aharon's sons" (see Vayikra 1:5, 7, 8, 11, et al) and not to Aharon himself, at least until Moshe

prayed on his behalf. Nevertheless, even if we can figure out whose name(s) G-d would erase from the Torah, we are still left trying to figure out how erasing these names from the Torah alleviates Moshe's concern that he will be seen as a poor leader.

Moshe's request had two options-either "bear their iniquity" or "erase me from your book." G-d chose the former, as He told Moshe (32:34) "and now, go and lead the people to where I have spoken to you (i.e. the Promised Land), and on the day that I remember/punish, I will (also) remember their sin [and punish them for it]." According to Rashi, this is the answer to Moshe's request, not the previous verse where G-d told him that he will only erase the names of those who have sinned. As Rashi paraphrases, "now I have listened to you [when you asked that I not] destroy them together (at once). [Instead], whenever I remember/punish them for their sins I will [also] remember/punish them a bit for this sin with the other sins. And no punishment comes on Israel that does not contain in it some punishment for the sin of the [golden] calf." Moshe had asked that G-d not destroy them, as doing so would reflect poorly on his leadership, and G-d acquiesced; instead of punishing them completely right then and there, He spread it out over the generations.

Why did G-d choose to spread it out instead of destroying the nation as He had originally planned? Because the only other way to avoid making Moshe look bad would be to erase his name from the Torah, and "only those who have sinned should be erased." Since Moshe did not sin, G-d spared him from being adversely affected. This meant not having his name removed from the Torah and not having been thought of as a leader unable to plead for mercy for his people.

Moshe's ploy had worked. Moshe knew that G-d wouldn't make him look bad, so he made Him choose between allowing the nation to survive despite having committed such an egregious sin and removing his name from the Torah. How did G-d respond? "It would be improper to erase your name being that you didn't commit the sin, so I will let the nation endure."

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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he Torah in this week's parsha discusses the composition of the rare and fragrant incense that was offered daily on the golden altar in the mishkan and later in the Temple. The exact formulation of the incense is not given - i.e. the amount of each of the ingredients relative to the entire amount of incense produced - but some of the thirteen different spices and herbs described later in the Talmud as being the components of the Temple incense are mentioned in the parsha.

Among the ingredients mentioned is chelbanah - usually translated in English as being galbanum. This spice was one that did not emit a pleasant odor. This may have been true when used alone but apparently when it was combined with the other pleasant smelling spices, the total effect was intoxicatingly wonderful and very pleasant aromatically. The Talmud saw in this use of chelbanah in the incense formulation a moral and social lesson for all of Israel and for all time.

The Talmud teaches us that any public fast day that does not include "the sinners of Israel" in its program of prayer and fasting is deficient in its role. Rashi here in the parsha emphasizes that point. Rashi states that they are not to be treated "lightly" and that they are to be included and "counted with us."

The Talmud certainly indicates with this statement that we are to be inclusive of Jews who are sinners, who do not act as we wish them to behave and with whom we are therefore loath to associate. This attitude of exclusion is unfortunately the usual pattern of behavior in our religious world where the tendency to greater and greater exclusivity amongst Jews has become the accepted rule of our different societies.

Nevertheless, there has been great progress in attempting to reach out to the "sinners of Israel" and to expose them to our religious and national agenda. I speak not only of the continuing accomplishments of the institutions that have headed Jewish outreach for the past number of decades, but of new initiatives to help unite the Jewish people and restore the traditions of Judaism to Jews who, through no immediate fault of their own, are estranged or ignorant of their rich heritage.

Megillat Esther was read for the first time in a number of kibbutzim this Purim. Jewish education lectures are being given in places where previously Judaism was not allowed to conflict with the dogmas and religion of Marxism. Changing someone else's lifestyle in midstream is difficult to accomplish. But bringing people who evidently wish to be part of the Jewish people, to prayer, to observe fast days and to celebrate feast days without preconditions and maximum demands, and having patience and true concern while doing this, is possible and very necessary.

A united Jewish people, with all of the internal differences that will always remain within our society, is seen to be equal to the great formulation of the incense in the Temple. That formulation produced a marvelous fragrance and engendered joy. Our attempts to unite the Jewish people are also guaranteed to produce great joy and positive purpose for all of Israel. © 2007 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).