

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd it shall come to pass while My glory passes by I shall put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand...” (Exodus 33:22).

What is true spirituality? Is it to be found in an Indian Ashram or at an esoteric Kabbalah center? Ought not our Bible itself be the best source for at least Jewish Spirituality? After the Revelation at Mt. Sinai, we find in this week's portion, Ki Tisa, a second 'revelation', the revelation which I believe holds the key to the unique spirituality desired by G-d.

That events surrounding the creation of the Golden Calf echo a dilemma implicit in the creation of the first human being. We read in Genesis that G-d says, "Let us create man in our image," (1:26) an expression distinctly different from what G-d says during the previous five days of creation. 'Our,' the Ramban explains is G-d speaking to the physical world of creation. He has brought into the world heretofore as well as to Himself, as it were. The human being shall be comprised of everything in creation, his lower self subject to all the limitations of the physical and animal worlds: birth, development, decay, death, as well as requirements for nutrition, excretion, rest and sexual reproduction, but at the same time, his higher self a veritable reflection (shadow) of the Divine (tzef, tzelem), containing a soul which is "a portion of G-d from on high". "In the capacity of his body, he will be similar to the earth from which he was taken," the Ramban phrases it, "and in spirit he will be similar to higher beings because the spirit is not a body, and will not die." (loc. cit.); the spirit of every individual is a part of G-d!

Hence every human being, complex and even dualistic, is engaged in a life-long battle over which aspect of himself will gain ascendancy, the divine or the bestial, the positive force towards life and development or the negative force towards death and destruction. And since our physical properties are also divine creations, the greatest challenge facing us is how to energize every aspect of our beings, physical and

**As you learn these divrei torah, please keep
Chaya Sarah Gittel bat Fayga
in mind for a Refuah Shelaima**

spiritual together in service of G-d and humanity.

And the first commandment which Moses brought down from Sinai is the declaration to believe in a G-d who is not removed from this world, who is willing to descend from His unfathomable supernal heights to appear in a lowly, prickly thornbush and to free a nation from slavery, a G-d concerned in uplifting ennobling sanctifying. But the second commandment immediately warns against worshiping false G-ds, idolatrous images created from the sun and the moon, the animals and the beasts, objects which are more obviously accessible and readily touchable than the spiritual, ethereal, incorporeal G-d of creation and freedom. So how do we, corporeal creatures, reach out to G-d? How do we make contact with Him, feel and communicate with Him in our daily earthly lives?

The Israelites in Egypt and the desert had a head-start: they had Moses, a human being who spoke to G-d "mouth to mouth", a mortal son of mortal parents who developed his "active intellect" to such an extent that it kissed the Divine Active Intellect and divined the Divine Will. But now Moses was gone, and the bereft Israelites feared that their prophetic leader might never return. They lost their bridge, their conduit to G-d - and in their panic they substituted one of G-d's physical creations for that conduit, the calf which symbolized vigorous physical strength and the gold which symbolized resistant physical endurance. But once they chose purely physical symbols to help them to reach out for G-d, they lapsed into an idealization of the physical - and into a hedonistic debauchery which almost caused the Divine to give up on them completely!

Hence, after Moses returns to them and gains for his errant nation Divine forgiveness, he seeks from G-d a deeper revelation: "Show me your ways..." (Exodus 33:13), he asks G-d, and several verses later continues to plead for a "vision of G-d's glory" (33:18).

What Moses wants is for G-d to teach him how the Israelites can reach out to Him without a prophet as great as he is, how the people can approach G-d without resorting to the idealization, the idolatry, of physical objects.

First G-d warns that no human being - not even Moses himself - can 'see' G-d's glory and live, can see G-d's face and understand Him completely. But it is possible to see G-d's "back", to catch some glimpse, albeit imperfect, into the Divine. The following day

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Moses is to hide in a cleft of a rock, clutching in his hands two new hewed-out tablets. And then G-d's glory will pass by, that imperfect yet detailed glimpse into G-d which humanity is allowed to perceive: "The Lord of love, the Lord of love, G-d, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in love and truth, keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and who cleanses the guilty" (Exodus 34:6-7).

G-d is telling Moses and Israel that He is not physical, but that there is an aspect of His Divine essence, thirteen attributes, thirteen intellectual and spiritual characteristics, which can and must be idealized and realized by human beings; insofar as the human being expresses these characteristics of freely giving and unconditional love, of kindness and truth, the human being is reaching out to G-d and bringing the Divine into this world.

In effect, these thirteen Divine attributes are less of a theological statement and more of an anthropological and humanistical statement. After all, a central command is for us humans to walk in the Divine ways, and as the Talmud and Maimonides teach "just as He is loving, so must we be loving, just as He is compassionate, so must we be compassionate".

As Maimonides cites at the conclusion of Guide to the Perplexed, citing the ninth chapter of the prophet Jeremiah "Thus says the Lord, let the wise not revel in their wisdom, let the wealthy not revel in their wealth, let the strong not revel in their strength, but in this ought he who would revel, revel: know and understand me, for I am the G-d of love who does lovingkindness, justice and compassion on earth. Those are the things I desire, says G-d". © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

After all of the commentaries and explanations regarding the event of the Golden Calf that is the centerpiece of this week's parsha, one is still left, somehow, with an empty feeling of not understanding how such an event could have in fact occurred.

After all, did not the splitting of the sea, the war against Amalek, the manna and the miraculous wells of water, the revelation at Sinai, make an impression upon

them? No doubt that all of the answers and explanations have validity, but how do we deal with this story? What is the relevance of this story to us, a generation that has many Golden Calves but certainly not that Golden calf of the parsha?

I think that the most direct and simple answer to this is to view the event in its simple reality. It is enough to know that such an event, though not understandable or rational, can and does occur. It should teach us about the irrationality of people, nations and political leaders. It should put us on notice that nothing in human affairs is unlikely or impossible.

The possibility of a Golden calf incident is always with us. By discounting the vagaries of human nature we expose ourselves to such sad incidents as described in this week's parsha. Moshe never imagines that such an event can occur amongst the people of Israel and so he ascends the mountain for his own spiritual development and to bring the Torah down to the Jewish people. Aharon also never thinks that a Golden calf can spring forth from his attempts to mollify the frenzied mob that now surrounds him. But, no matter, the Golden Calf arrives, alive and snorting fire. And that is life's lesson? that the unexpected and impossible is itself always present in our lives and society.

Anyone who reviews the events of the twentieth century will stand amazed at the events, wars, changes and profound diplomatic and political errors that shaped its story. Nothing that happened was rational or predictable in 1901.

Who could have thought that the great empires of Germany, Russia, France, England, Austria and the Ottomans would never survive that century? And who could have imagined the State of Israel arising and the destruction of European Jewry? That disaster of the Holocaust is a Golden Calf of unbelievably major proportions.

All rumors later circulated to the contrary notwithstanding, no one really envisioned such a catastrophe of so great a proportion. Since prophecy is no longer present amongst us, the future is always murky and undecipherable. Therefore the only thing certain in our lives, both personal and national, is uncertainty.

And that is the basic and troubling message of the Golden Calf incident. The parsha is here to warn us of trusting only in our judgments, conclusions and prescience. That is not how life really works and not how events play themselves out.

The events of the Golden Calf constantly repeat themselves in our life story. Fortunate are those who are not seduced by that idol and are wary initially of the attempts to construct and deify it. © 2008 *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.*

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Rabbi Menachem Liebttag argues that the thirteen attributes which are used to describe G-d, parallel attributes of G-d found previously in the Torah.

For example, the thirteen attributes begin with the words "Hashem Hashem Kel rahum ve-hanun, the Lord the Lord is a G-d of mercy and graciousness." (Exodus 34:6) Earlier in the ten declarations (aseret ha-dibrot), G-d says "Hashem Kel kana, G-d is a jealous G-d." (Exodus 20:5)

The difference between these two descriptions of G-d is obvious. At Sinai, G-d reveals himself as a G-d of strict judgment. He appears to be harsh. Here, in our portion, G-d, for the first time, paints Himself as merciful.

Hence, in the aseret ha-dibrot, Hashem (the Lord), the special name for G-d which connotes mercy, is mentioned only once. Here, in our portion, Hashem is mentioned twice, to teach us that G-d is not only merciful before we sin, but even after. (Rabbeinu Tam, Rosh HaShanah 17b)

Furthermore, in Exodus 34, G-d is described as rahum from the word rehem which means womb. This because G-d's love for us, like the love of the womb, is infinite and unconditional. Hanun stems from the word hinam, which literally means free. G-d's love is free, even if not reciprocated. These terms in contrast to G-d described in the aseret ha-dibrot, Kel kana - a G-d of jealousy and vengeance.

It is not surprising that the thirteen merciful attributes immediately appear after Moshe (Moses) tells the Jewish people that because they worshipped the golden calf, an angel, not G-d, would henceforth lead them. This disturbs the nation and they demand that G-d himself lead them. In the end, the Almighty relents. (Exodus 33)

It is here that the merciful attributes appear for the first time. From a legal perspective, the Israelites were not deserving of G-d's direct accompaniment. Only when G-d allows strict law to merge with mercy does He agree to lead the people directly.

Today we take these attributes of mercy for granted as they are part of our Jewish consciousness. But when first introduced, these characteristics were revolutionary.

G-d's decision to lead the Jewish people mercifully is of tremendous import. Created in the image of G-d, we too should follow in His footsteps. As G-d tempered justice with mercy, so should we give others and ourselves, the benefit of the doubt and judge favorably - with love. © 2008 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's Torah portion begins with a few "additions" to the passages about the Tabernacle.

After the entire matter of the Tabernacle was given to Moshe in a single declaration at Mount Sinai, this week's portion contains a few short passages, most of them starting with the phrase, "And G-d spoke to Moshe, saying" (see: Shemot 30:11,17,22; 31:1). Two sections seem to be very closely linked together—the descriptions of the anointing oil and the incense. Both start in a similar way, with a command to take raw materials from plants and fashion them into a holy mixture: "And you shall take for you special spices... And make it into a holy oil for anointing, blended as by one who makes perfume, let it be a holy oil for anointing" [30:23-25];

"Take spices for you... and make it into incense, blended as for making perfume, well mixed, pure and holy" [30:34-35]. The oil is for anointing the vessels of the Tabernacle and the priests, leading to a special high degree of holiness, "sanctify them, and they will be holiest of the holy" [30:29]. This same phrase appears in connection with the incense, "let it be the holiest of the holy for you" [30:36]. Both passages include a similar prohibition to make similar material for secular purposes. With respect to the oil, "Do not rub it onto human flesh, and do not make oil according to the same formula... Any person who makes something like it or who puts any of it on a stranger will be cut off from his nation" [30:32-33]. With respect to the incense, "About the incense which you will make: Do not make anything similar for you... Any man who makes the same in order to smell it shall be cut off from his nation" [30:37-38].

The two passages also seem to be part of a single passage from the point of view of the text. The first passage, about the oil, begins with the common phrase, "And G-d spoke to Moshe," while the passage of the incense starts with the phrase "And G-d said to Moshe," which gives it the appearance of being secondary to the previous passage. In general, the anointing oil and the incense are regularly mentioned together throughout the description of the construction of the Tabernacle (for example -- 25:6; 31:11; 35:8,15,28). Does this apparent link stem from an external similarity or does it have some deeper meaning?

At first glance, the two substances are quite different from each other. The oil was meant for a one-time event, anointing the vessels and the priests to prepare them for use in the rituals. The incense, on the other hand, was used twice a day, as a way of

expressing the continuity of the appearance of the Shechina in the Temple—"Let Aharon burn the incense on it every morning... in the evening he shall burn the incense, constantly, before G-d for all your generations" [30:7-8]. But just this difference can be the key to explaining the strong link between the two materials. Two approaches complement each other. On one hand, there is a need for special events to mark the sanctity at the beginning of a holy process. But there is also a need to create a mechanism which will broaden the holy atmosphere from the one-time event and extend it into daily life. Thus, the incense serves as a continuation of the sanctity which was initiated by the oil of anointment.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The end of Sefer Shemos (the Book of Exodus) is primarily about the building of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary that was first built at Mt. Sinai, taken apart when the nation traveled, and rebuilt at each stop. Parashas Terumah deals with the structure of the Mishkan and the vessels within it (such as the Holy Ark, the Menorah and the Altar that the offerings were brought on), Parashas Tetzaveh with the clothing worn by the Kohanim (Priests) and the mechanism through which they (the Kohanim) were consecrated, and Parshiyos Vayakhel and Pekuday with the actual making of the Mishkan, its vessels and clothing, culminating with G-d's Divine Presence descending and resting in the completed structure. Our Parasha, Ki Sisa, which is smack in the middle of these four, is largely about the sin of the golden calf and its aftermath. Nevertheless, the first part of the Parasha concludes the commandments necessary for the Mishkan, including the collection of the half-shekel from everyone, the making of the Mishkan's washing station (the Kiyor), and the formulas of the anointing oil and incense offering. However, since the commandments to make the vessels are really in Parashas Terumah, it would seem that the commandment regarding the Kiyor belongs there, not here. Why didn't the Torah include it with the other vessels?

This question is also asked regarding the Mizbach Haketores, the golden altar that the incense was brought on, which isn't commanded until the end of Parashas Tetzaveh. Many answers are given, with most revolving around the fact that these two vessels were not necessary to cause the Divine Presence to rest on the Mishkan. The incense offering could be brought even without its altar, as long as it was brought on the spot where the altar should be (Rambam, Hilchos Temidin Umusafin 3:2). Similarly, if a Kohain washed his hands and feet with water from a vessel other than the Kiyor, as long as it was a vessel designated for use in the Mishkan and the washing took place in the area of the Mishkan, he does not need

to rewash them with water from the Kiyor (Hilchos Biyas Hamikdash 5:10). Therefore, since G-d sums up the main part of the commandments regarding the Mishkan by saying that He "will dwell in the midst of the Children of Israel" (Shemos 29:45), only those things in the Mishkan that were needed for G-d's Divine Presence to rest in it were included up until that point.

We would have expected, though, that the next two things to be taught would be the Mizbach Haketores and the Kiyor. And, in fact, the Mizbach Haketores is the very next commandment (30:1-6). However, before teaching us about the Kiyor, the Torah first teaches us about the half-shekel donated by every male above the age of 20. Why did the Torah "interrupt" between these two vessels with the commandment to collect the half-shekel?

Several answers have been suggested, including the need to differentiate between the actual service being performed on the Mizbach Haketores and washing before doing the service, which is only a preparation for service, not a part of the service itself (Oznayim Latorah; see Rav Saadya Gaon, Rabbeinu Bachye and Sifsay Kohain for other answers). I would like to suggest another possibility, based on the way most understand the way the lower layers of the Mishkan's coverings covered its walls.

The width of the lowest covering was 28 cubits, with the second covering being 30 cubits wide. Since the interior of the Mishkan was 10 cubits, there were 10 cubits left to cover the northern wall and 10 left to cover the southern wall. The walls were 10 cubits tall, but since we also must account for the thickness of the walls themselves (which were one cubit thick), only 9 cubits of these walls were covered, leaving the bottom cubit exposed. This bottom cubit was comprised of the silver "adanim," sockets, into which the tooth-like protrusions at the bottom of the beams of the wall were placed. This made the otherwise-wooden walls of the Mishkan bottom heavy, and more stable. Even though the rest of the Mishkan was covered, the silver bottoms of these walls were visible.

Although the rest of the materials donated for the Mishkan was donated voluntarily (see 25:2), the silver for the base of the walls was made from the mandatory (silver) half-shekel that was collected from all (see Rashi on 30:15). Even if the rest of the materials came primarily from the more wealthy members of the nation, everyone shared equally in providing the silver for these sockets; "the rich could not give more and the poor could not give less" (30:15). And when performing the service in the Mishkan, the Kohanim represented all of them equally as well. As a reminder of this, when preparing to perform the service by washing their hands, the Kohanim were able to see the silver that everyone had donated. Perhaps this was also the reason that the Torah had to teach us about the half-shekel donations before teaching us about the

Kiyor. After telling us that everyone had an equal share in the silver "adanim," the Torah could then teach us about the Kiyor used to help the Kohanim prepare to represent the entire nation in the Mishkan. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

This 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.

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 G-d'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 G-d 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 G-d 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.

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 G-d 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 G-d's People-the Nation chosen to convey His message throughout the world. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.com

RABBI ZVI MILLER

Parsha Insights

Kindness and compassion is the root of the Torah and the basis of all of its laws. Man and the Torah are interrelated entities of pure kindness. The very act of creation springs from kindness because HaShem desires to bestow the ultimate goodness on His creations. All of the Torah's laws governing human relations flow from kindness; and comprise the elements of a healthy and happy community.

For instance, the prohibitions neither to steal nor to hurt another person emanate from pure kindness. As we study and practice the merciful teachings of the holy Torah, the attribute of kindness is internalized in our heart and becomes our very nature.

After the People of Israel fell to the sin of worshipping the golden calf, Moshe prayed for forgiveness. In response, HaShem revealed a new aspect of Torah. Namely, He revealed the infinite and wondrous attributes of Divine Compassion and forgiveness that HaShem bestows upon people after they have sinned. This second dimension of Divine Mercy was revealed in the second set of Tablets of Testimony that HaShem gave to Moshe.

In summation, both aspects of the Torah, i.e., the laws of the Torah before we sinned, and the laws of the Torah after we sinned, are founded upon and share

the exact same attribute - PURE AND UNADULTERATED DIVINE MERCY AND LOVING-KINDNESS.

Just as HaShem incorporates forgiveness into a law of the Torah, so too, we aspire to internalize the precious trait of forgiveness into our hearts. Indeed, HaShem forgave us for the ultimate sin of worshipping a golden calf and declaring to it, "This is your G-d, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Egypt."

May we make the goodly trait of forgiveness a natural part of our personality and forgive others for their flaws and mistakes, just as HaShem mercifully forgives us. [Based on Da'as Torah of Rav Yerucham HaLevi of Mir]

TODAY: Integrate forgiveness into your heart as a mainstay of your personality. © 2008 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Things don't just happen by themselves. And yet, when the Jewish people built a golden calf while Moses was away on the mountaintop receiving the Torah from Hashem, something very strange happened. The Midrash in this week's Torah portion tells us that the people threw their golden ornaments into the flames and a fully formed golden calf emerged. Amazing! Why would such a thing happen? Surely, this must have been an aberration. Surely, something like this could not happen again.

But wait. Let us peek into next week's Torah portion. Lo and behold, the same thing happens. The people are building the Tabernacle, Hashem's earthly Abode. The time arrives for the construction of the golden candelabrum, the mystical symbol of wisdom that will illuminate in the Inner Sanctum. The construction of this transcendent vessel is exceedingly complicated, and to make matters even more difficult, the entire candelabrum is to be made from a single ingot of gold. Although he gives it his best effort, Moses cannot accomplish this baffling task. Finally, Hashem tells Moses to throw the gold into the fire and the candelabrum will emerge by itself. And this is exactly what happens. What is the connection between these two strange phenomena? Is it coincidence that they transpired one right after the other?

The commentators explain that these two incidents are actually two sides of the same coin. They both reflect the tremendous power inherent in the human will. When a person's heart is set on a goal, when he is consumed with a flaming desire to attain that goal, nothing can stand in his way. Where there is a will there is way, says the old adage.

The implication, of course, is that human ingenuity can always discover a solution to any problem. But it is far deeper than that. The human will generates an almost mystical energy that can penetrate

any barrier. When Moses did not return from the mountaintop on schedule, the people were confused and disoriented, and they instinctively turned to their old idolatrous habits for reassurance. In their distress, they were overcome with a burning desire for the illusory comforts of the idol worship to which they were accustomed in Egypt. This desire was so strong, the Torah tells us, that all they had to do was throw their golden ornaments into the fire and the golden calf emerged.

But just as the human will penetrates all barriers to attain its sinister goals, it can also be channeled to the good. If a person is inspired to reach for the highest spiritual goals, his very desire will generate a mystical energy that will carry him there, one way or another. This is what Hashem was teaching Moses. Nothing stands in the way of the indomitable human will, not even the near impossibility of forming the intricate candelabrum from a single piece of gold. The fire of his enthusiasm would create the candelabrum even if his hands could not.

This was the true reversal of the sin of the golden calf. The flaming desire to sin had generated the abominable idol. But now Moses channeled his flaming desire in the opposite direction, and by doing so, he created the perfect vessel of wisdom and spiritual illumination.

A great emperor of ancient times ruled most of the civilized world with an iron hand. After he was assassinated, civil war broke out among his potential successors to the throne. Both pretenders to the throne were powerful charismatic figures, and each was able to rally many local kings and princes of the empire to his standard.

The war raged on for several years until one of the pretenders finally emerged victorious and was acclaimed as the new emperor. One of the kings who had fought valiantly on the side of the loser feared for his life. He traveled to the imperial city and pleaded for an audience with the new emperor. The audience was granted, and the defeated king prostrated himself before the new emperor. "What have you to say for yourself?" declared the emperor.

"Your majesty," said the king, "do not look at whose friend I was but rather at what sort of friend I was. You saw that I was a loyal and devoted friend to your rival. If you honor me by accepting my friendship, you now know what sort of friend I will be to you."

The emperor smiled and nodded. "You have spoken well, my friend. Your life is spared, and you will retain all your lands and honors."

In our own lives, it is important to recognize the enormous power we hold in our own hands. We are capable of attaining any goals we pursue with true single-minded perseverance, but sometimes we would do well to stop and consider where we are going. Only if we channel our energies correctly and pursue goals

of enduring value can we truly enrich our lives and find true happiness and fulfillment. © 2008 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Some time in the last century, the great Rabbi Noson Adler, searching for a position as Rav, visited the community in Prague. He was concerned that there should be someone in the city, more or less on his level, with whom he could study Torah. He made enquiries, and was told of a "talmid chochom" who lived there. He visited this man, and was amazed to discover that he was, in fact, the author of a great book, the "Machtzis Hashekel". He could not understand why the Prague community had not chosen this man as their Rav, since he was a greater Torah scholar (even) than Rabbi Adler. The man then explained to him that although he was a gifted Talmid Chochom, he did not have all the other qualities a Rav should possess, such as skill in counselling. In fact, he told Rabbi Adler, the realization of this was why he had called his book the "Machtzis Hashekel", which means "half shekel", and is a quotation from this week's parsha (as we will explain further below). The author of the "Machtzis Hashekel" went on to express the hope that Rabbi Adler would stay in Prague, so that the two of them could work together—the strength of each compensating for the weakness of the other.

Now let us turn to this week's parsha. Everyone was to give half a shekel of silver towards the construction of the Tabernacle. Why half instead of a whole shekel? The "Machtzis Hashekel" explains—so as to remind them that no-one can make it on his own. Each person is incomplete, a half, so to speak, and requires another half to make him whole.

As Americans we are taught to strive for independence on every level—economic independence, social independence, even spiritual independence. This is good in one sense, but bad in another, because it weakens the whole concept of community—of mutual dependence.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai, after he had fasted there for forty days for the sake of the children of Israel, and after they had made the golden calf and worshiped it, G-d said to him: "Go, get down" (Exod. 32:7). The simple meaning for this is: "Get down from Mount Sinai to see what is happening below", but Rashi explains this as meaning: "Go down from your greatness, for I only gave you greatness on account of the people!" Here again we see this idea of interdependence—Even Moses was not great enough to stand on his own, but needed the people to make him great.

In the Gemara we read: "Moses was equivalent ('shakul') to the people." This seems simply like strong praise of Moses, but the situation is more like a scale or

balance ('mishkal') in which each side supports the other. If either side should jump off, the other will fall! Moses carried the Jewish people, but just as strongly the Jewish people carried him.

And this interdependence applies not only to the Jewish people in relation to their leaders, but to all of us in relation to one another. © 1989 Rabbi Y. Haber

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

All Things Considered

One of the episodes in the Torah that is most difficult to understand is the story of the Golden Calf. Not only is it almost incomprehensible that a nation which saw the hand of Hashem redeem them had become so perfidious. After such majestic revelation, the words that they used to declare the Golden Calf as their new G-d are inconceivable.

The Torah tells us that Moshe, according to the Jews' calculations, tarried in returning from Sinai's mountaintop. The Jews panicked. Egyptian converts who joined the Jews at the exodus stirred the crowd. So Ahron stalled for time. He asked them to donate prized possessions—the gold and silver that were taken from the Egyptians and now were worn by the women and children. The men didn't wait for their spouses. In the most enthusiastic response to an appeal to date, they gave their own gold. This gold meant a lot to them. It was their first taste of freedom in 210 years. But they gave impulsively and passionately. Ahron took the gold and heaved it into a large fire, and with uncalled-for input from a few sorcerers, a Golden Calf emerged. That was bad enough. What is more striking is the declaration of the nation that followed. The people danced around their newly created deity and shouted, "These are your G-ds which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (Exodus:32:8)

What could they have meant? Could they truly have thought that the molten image of the Golden Calf led them from Egypt? It's an absurdity! Surely they did not believe that a Golden Calf was their leader.

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman of Atlanta, in his recent work *Tales Out of Shul*, related that he once made a hospital visit to a gentlemen from south Georgia. He promptly received the following letter.

"Dear Rabbi: Thank you for visiting my husband in the hospital. I thought that orthodox Rabbis just sit and study and pray all day. I am pleased that you do not."

Another time, Rabbi Feldman writes, he was on a plane, and due to overbooking he was bumped up from economy class to a seat in the first class section of the aircraft. During the entire flight, a major Jewish philanthropist, who was seated in first class as a matter of monetary right, kept staring at Rabbi Feldman with a look of curious displeasure. As they were departing the aircraft, the wealthy man could control himself no

longer. "Excuse me, Rabbi," he imposed. "Do you always fly first class?"

At first Rabbi Feldman was taken aback but he composed himself and without apologies he comfortably replied, "Doesn't everybody?"

People have impressions of defining actions, moments, and behavior. "Orthodox Rabbis pray all day and don't tend to the sick." "A Rabbi is paid to fly in economy class—not first class." The same holds true of mitzvos. Often we designate certain mitzvos as the *raison d'etre* of Judaism. Certain mitzvos or ideals become a cause celebre as others fall to the wayside. We ignore some as we point our fingers to our favorites and shout, "This is our G-d!"

The Jews thought that Moshe would never return. They were left in the dessert with nothing—except one mitzvah. Their beloved leader Moshe had asked them to ask the Egyptians for gold and silver. And they did. That gold and silver represented their emergence into freedom. It was the remnant of the glory of their redemption and the now-missing man who importuned them to ask for gold. It was all that reminded them of the man that gave them a sense of pride and justice. That gold now stood in front of them in the form of a calf. That gold was now their G-d! They had chosen a mitzvah, cherished it, danced about it, and unfortunately, now they worshipped it.

There is no one aspect to Judaism. There are 613 mitzvos, and not one of them can stand alone. When one mitzvah is chosen and placed as the defining moment of Judaism, it is nothing more than a Golden Calf. For Judaism cannot depend on one good deed alone. All things must be considered. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our parashah relates that as part of Moshe's prayers following the sin of the golden calf, he prayed (33:18), "Show me Your glory." Hashem answered him, "You will not be able to see My face, for no man can see My face and live."

R' Chaim "Brisker" Soloveitchik z"l (1853-1918) explains this in light of Rambam's teaching (based on Yevamot 49b) that all of the prophets "saw" Hashem through many "curtains," while Moshe saw Him through only one curtain. Moshe's request here, explains R' Soloveitchik was that that last curtain be removed. Hashem refused. Why?

Also, Chazal teach that Moshe attained 49 of the 50 levels of understanding that exist. However, he never attained that last level. Why?

R' Soloveitchik explains that the mitzvah of emunah/faith presumes that there is something beyond man's understanding. If man could see G-d, there would be no room left for faith. Man need not "believe" in that which he already "knows." Moshe, too, was

commanded to believe in Hashem, and he therefore could not be allowed to "see" Hashem. (Quoted in *Torat Chaim* p. 87)

"On the day pokdi/that I make an accounting, u'fakadeti/I shall account against them for their sin." (32:34)

Rashi explains: Hashem agreed not to destroy Bnei Yisrael at that moment in retribution for the sin of the golden calf. However, He declared that whenever the Jews would sin in the future, they would suffer a portion of the punishment that they (or their ancestors) should have received for the sin of the golden calf.

R' Ayeh Leib Zunz z"l (rabbi of Plock, Poland and a prolific author; died 1830) offers an additional explanation of this verse, based on two other meanings of the Hebrew root "pkd": "to remember" and "to appoint." He writes as follows: Before the First Temple was destroyed, the prophet Yirmiyahu foretold that the exile would last for 70 years. The gemara (Megilah 12a) states that the reason that Achashvairosh made a feast (as told at the beginning of Megilat Esther) was that, by his calculations, the 70 years were over, and the Jews had not been redeemed. The gemara teaches that although the redemption was not in fact due when Achashvairosh thought—he erred by beginning the count from the wrong event—that year was a propitious time for a partial redemption. [Thus, the wicked Vashti was killed at that time.]

From time to time, history reaches a point which is an auspicious moment for the final redemption to occur. However, because the ultimate redemption will spell the destruction of the yetzer hara, Hashem has given the yetzer hara permission to "defend" itself by trying to prevent the redemption. Thus, whenever one of these propitious times nears, the risk that the Jewish people will commit a grave sin becomes greater. For example, at the time that the redemption should have occurred by Achashvairosh's calculations (and which was a time of partial redemption, according to our Sages), the Jews sinned by partaking from Achashvairosh's feast. Instead of a meaningful redemption occurring, events unfolded which led to Haman's rise.

This is the meaning of our verse, writes R' Zunz. "On the day pokdi/that I remember [the Jewish people and Am prepared to bring the redemption], u'fakadeti/I will appoint [the yetzer hara to bring] sin upon them." (Melo Ha'omer: Esther 1:3) © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

