

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Due to a miscommunication and/or misunderstanding, the nation thought that Moshe was late returning from his 40 days and nights on Mt. Sinai. The recent converts that had joined the emerging Nation of Israel during the exodus from Egypt gang up on Aharon, and force him to help them find a replacement, albeit one they can worship rather than just follow. In an attempt to stall them (see Rashi on Shemos 32:5), Aharon forms the golden calf. After seeing his nephew Chur murdered for trying to stop them (ibid), he builds an altar before it and tells them to wait until the next morning before bringing any offerings on it, offerings that he says should be brought to G-d (not to any intermediary). Aharon was hoping that Moshe would return before any offerings are brought, and the problem resolved.

Satan has other ideas (see Rashi on 32:6), and these converts wake up early the next morning to bring offerings to the golden calf. After a festive meal, "they got up to enjoy themselves." Rashi (ibid, based on numerous Midrashim) tells us what type of enjoyment this was: idol worship, licentiousness, and murder. After bringing proof texts to show that the word for "enjoy" (tzadik-chaf-kuf) refers to these three things (although the idol-worshipping part is explicit in the verses here), Rashi (again based on the Midrashim) tells us that the "murder" implied was (or included) the murder of Chur. However, this "enjoyment" (which apparently included murdering Chur) occurred the next morning, while Rashi had just told us that Chur had been killed before Aharon built the altar, the day before! How could Chur have been murdered "the next day" (32:5) if he had already been murdered by the previous day?

This issue becomes even more perplexing if we examine the way Rashi and the Midrashim "prove" that there was more than just idol-worship going on. First the use of the word "tzechok" ("letzachek") by the wife of Potifar, when she accused Yosef of trying to seduce her (Beraishis 39:14 and 17), is quoted to show that here too the word "letzachaik" includes immoral behavior. Then the use of the related word "sechok" regarding the war between the soldiers of Avner and Yoav (Shemuel II 2:14) is quoted to show that "tzechok" also includes murder. There is no additional proof brought to show that there was immorality by the

golden calf, so there should be no need to bring any additional proof that there was murder (see Maharai). Yet, Rashi and the Midrashim add that murder did occur (as Chur was murdered), even though there is no textual source for his being killed. True, his no longer being mentioned after being cited as a prominent leader (see Shemos 17:10-12 and 24:14) clued Chazal in (or they had a tradition) that he was murdered trying to prevent the golden calf, but this is not an addition textual proof that murder was committed by the golden calf. Why was there a need to bring the Midrashic "reading between-the-lines" to further support the notion that they also committed murder? Especially if this "murder" had already occurred at least a day before the nation "got up to do tzechok!"

The verse under discussion contains an inordinate amount of verbs. "And they (1) arose early the next day, and they (2) brought burnt offerings, and they (3) brought closer peace offerings, and the nation (4) sat down (5) to eat and (6) to drink, and they (7) got up (8) to enjoy themselves." A straight-forward reading of the verse indicates that all eight verbs were done on "the next day," including the last two ("getting up" and doing "tzechok"). However, it could be suggested that these last two are referring to the entire episode that led to the golden calf and not just the events that occurred on that day before Moshe came down from the mountain. In other words, don't think that their initial intention was good, that they really, genuinely felt that they needed an intermediary to replace Moshe in order to better serve G-d, but, unfortunately, things got out of hand. By saying that they "got up to enjoy themselves," the Torah may be telling us that their motivation from the very beginning was idol-worship, which Chazal tell us was so tempting because it removed the moral lifestyle that serving G-d demands. And since these last two verbs in the verse are referring to the whole episode from the time they requested a replacement for Moshe, it would not be inconsistent to include something that happened shortly after the request was made.

Even though the "tzechok" was definitely going on after they finished "eating and drinking," when Moshe and Yehoshua heard the noise of the "party" (32:17-18) and then saw the people dancing in front of the golden calf (32:19), this doesn't preclude the possibility that it was well before then as well. Nevertheless, it is also possible that the last two verbs

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
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in the verse also occurred on "the next day," even if Chur had been killed at least a day prior to it.

Some of the commentators on Rashi point out the difference between "simcha" (usually translated as happiness) and "tzechok," (which, following Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, I translated as "enjoyment," but has also been translated as "revel" and "merriment"). As the Be'er Yitzchok puts it, "simcha which is the result of something positive and useful and purposeful is referred to as just plain 'simcha,' while the happiness [that results from] folly and lack of seriousness and [things that] entice the [evil] inclination are referred to as 'tzechok.'" In other words, "tzechok" implies self-indulgence, specifically the big three - idol-worship, adultery and murder. Based on this, it could be suggested that the point of Rashi and the Midrashim is not so much that they committed other crimes besides idol-worship, but that the "happiness" resulted from self-indulgence (which is made possible by worshipping deities other than the one true G-d, who demands ethics and morals). The revelry may have occurred after bringing the offerings (on "the next day"), but it was the result of self-indulgence, not a spiritual celebration. And to prove this point, the Midrashim add that Chur had been killed for trying to stop them, a sure indication that their intentions were not pure and that it was not the right kind of "happiness."

If Rashi and the Midrashim were trying to "prove" which kind of "enjoyment" they experienced (on "the next day"), mentioning that they committed murder in order to accomplish it is just as relevant as the textual proofs of what "tzechok" really is. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As 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 G-d. 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 G-d 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 G-d'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. © 2009 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Talmud teaches us that in every generation a portion of the punishment for the construction of the Golden calf in the desert by the Jewish people

is exacted. I think that in a greater measure we can state that the sin of the Golden Calf itself is repeated in every generation.

The obvious problem arising out of the Golden Calf is how could the Jewish people, fresh from the miracles of Egypt, Yam Suf, manna and the revelation at Sinai revert to paganism and to the worship of a man-made deity. What possessed them to be so blind as to their own recent experiences and to their stated destiny?

Of course, this incident is the ultimate proof of the allowance for free will in human affairs, even for the most destructive form of free will. And, yet, it is most troubling to realize how seriously error prone the Jewish people can be.

And, the fact that this weakness constantly asserts itself in every generation is itself part of the punishment. This portion has been meted out to us over the many generations since that Golden Calf was constructed and worshipped in the desert of Sinai. After all, one could hope that after 3321 years something might have been learned.

And yet we are witness to the fact that the Golden Calf in all of its modern and secular manifestations still dances and prances amongst us. Apparently this punishment still exacts its pain and finds its victims even though much time has elapsed since the original sin of the Golden Calf.

There appears to have been multiple causes for the construction of the original Golden Calf. The absence of Moshe, Aharon's vacillation, the presence of a large and vocal non-Jewish section within the Jewish people - the eirev rav, - the always present memories of Egypt and its pagan society and culture, and the uncertain self-worth of a recently emancipated people from slavery, are all contributory factors in the unfolding tragedy of the Golden Calf.

Almost all of these factors exist in our time as well. The absence of inspiring religious leadership, the inability to formulate a positive vision for the people and the state, the influences of a non-Jewish world that has turned all basic human values on its face, the revival of pagan ideas and lifestyles of the ancient world in the guise of new liberal ideas and permissive values, the difficulties of adjusting to national independence after millennia of exile, all combine in our time to allow the Golden Calf to still exist within us.

The failures of assimilation, secularism, and Westernization at all costs, are all visible to all of us. Yet, we are all reluctant to abandon the allure of the shine of the Golden Calf.

Only when we will have our fill of these false hopes and retrograde ideas will we be free to accept Moshe's dramatic act of destroying the Golden Calf to dust and powder. Perhaps then will our bill for the original Golden Calf be finally stamped as being paid in full. © 2009 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“When 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 week's Biblical portion seems to cry out directly to us, the reborn State of Israel, surrounded by enemies many times more numerous than we, almost constantly involved in war, and subject to oft-made threats by the fundamentalist despot of Iran, with his finger dangerously close to the nuclear trigger. What we must attempt to understand is what allows a seemingly weak nation to win wars, and seemingly strong nation to lose a crucial battle. Just listen to the lesson of the Bible.

The opening verse of our portion Ki Tisa, quoted above, 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 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 may be found in a very strange incident during the judgeship of Gideon, great leader of Israel, cited by Chief Rabbi Sacks in his "Covenant and Conversation." Encouraging war against the Midianite enemy (Judges 6-7), Gideon assembles an army of 32,000 soldiers, but G-d declares this army too numerous for the Midianites to be placed into Gideon's hand. Exemptions are then offered to anyone who feels frightened, and 22,000 depart, leaving an army of 10,000. But G-d declares it's still too large a number and Gideon is ordered to bring his men to a waterway and have them drink. The vast majority, 9700 men, kneel down to drink, while the rest lap up the water with their hands, remaining in an upright position. The 300 who do not kneel on their knees comprise the select soldiers that Gideon will wage war against the Midianites - soldiers who understand that it is only permissible to kneel before G-d and nothing else. Even

though the Midianite forces are described as "...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, win the day!

The message is clear. A census presupposes that in battle there is strength in numbers. However, the Divine commandment forbidding a census teaches that if G-d is with Israel, then numbers are unimportant, and there is no need to start comparing our numbers with the numbers of other nations. To be alone with G-d is to always be with a majority of One. And to be with G-d first and foremost means that the soldiers, and especially their leaders and the leaders of their nation, believe that they are fighting G-d's battle, the battle of the just and the good and the righteous. To be with G-d means to be committed to the victory of the cause, to believe in oneself, in one's nation and one's mission. A small band of dedicated people willing to sacrifice their lives 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 when our population was barely 600,000 in the War of Independence, whereas we sometimes hear from frightened leaders debilitating claims that even with a Jewish population of nearly six million we are too tired to win wars today! The Bible warns that Jews who lack the faith to risk their lives meaningfully in a just war for the sake of peace may find that their lives will be taken (absurdly) by plague, G-d forbid.

And if our portion of Ki Tisa opens by teaching that it is forbidden to count Jews in a census which essentially implies that quantity equals quality, our portion goes 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 had 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 only the elite and 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 as a nation must not be counted, especially if the census becomes the criterion for a successful battle in warfare, nevertheless each and every Jew certainly counts, and each and every Jew is invaluable to Knesset Yisrael, historic Israel. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Translated by Ellil Fischer

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.” (Mishlei 25:21)
The Maharal explains that man is defined by his characteristic of lacking. G-d can only complete what a person lacks once that person becomes aware of what he is missing. A similar idea underlies prayer- a sense of incompleteness and need of G-d's assistance is necessary for prayer to warrant a response.

For this reason, the punishment of the primordial serpent was that its diet would consist of dust-something available everywhere. Its punishment was that it would always be satiated and never lack anything, and therefore never have anywhere to progress. The lack of ability to advance is the greatest possible punishment!

Based on this idea, it is possible to explain why Esther invited Haman to a party. She wished to implant a sense of honor and satisfaction within him so that he felt satiated. Only in such a state, when he did not feel any lack in his honor or wealth, would it be possible to engineer his downfall. As long as he still had the drive to advance, it was very hard to bring him down. Only when Haman thought that he had nowhere to advance anymore and that he had reached the pinnacle of his desires, could Esther pull him down into the gutter.

Indeed, this is the subject of the verse in Mishlei: If you wish to defeat your enemies, fulfill their every wish. Only in such a state, when they are satiated, will you be able to lead them to their demise.

In its aggadeta on Megillat Esther, the Gemara states: "A Song of Ascents, of David... If G-d had not been with us when a man rose against us' (Tehillim 124:1-2) -- a man, not a king" [Rashi: this man is Haman]. (Megilla 11a)

The Maharal, in his work *Or Chadash*, explains that the objective of this aggada is to express the extraordinary wickedness of Haman. According to him, a king would subjugate a nation in order to obtain cheap labor. Haman, however, did not plot against Israel to obtain a workforce or some other benefit, rather, but rather to exterminate them. Haman did not obtain any benefit from it. Thus, the aggada states, according to the Maharal's explanation, that the decree of a "man"-the wicked Haman-is more terrifying than the decree of a "king."

The Maharal goes on to explain why Haman attempted to destroy Israel without any prospect of personal gain.

Man was created alone. Furthermore, the first blessing that he was given after being created was: "Fill the Earth and subdue it" (*Bereishit* 1:27). Thus, it became part of man's nature to want to rule the world and return to its primordial state-in which man was the sole ruler over all creation, without competitors. That being the case, how can man exist within society? The Maharal explains that the "man" within each of us is subject to the "king" above him-the Supreme King of Kings, G-d. Only by recognizing this Higher Authority can he refrain from imposing himself on those around him. In other words, the balance to our quality of being "man" is the recognition of the existence of the "King."

Haman, however, did not recognize the existence of any "King" and lived his life with the consciousness of "a man, not a king." Therefore, he truly lived with an awareness that he must rule over everyone, and he dedicated all of his resources to that objective. As a result, specifically Haman allowed himself to destroy an entire nation without reason or hope of profit- for no cause other than the attainment of absolute control.

Kohelet Rabba (end of parasha 2) states: "'For to the man who is good before him he gave wisdom, understanding, and joy' (*Kohelet* 2:26)-- this refers to Mordekhai; 'but to the sinner He gives the idea to gather and hoard'-this refers to Haman."

The Maharal explains that the sinner obtains the ability to gather and hoard wealth and assets in this world, only so that everything he gathered will ultimately be given to the righteous. If so, why can the wealth not be given directly to the righteous? Why must it get to him through the agency of the sinner?

The Maharal explains that the sinner achieves wealth and property because he always feels lacking in the material realm. Therefore, he is constantly pursuing more glory and power, to address that sense of lack. In contrast, the righteous are satisfied with what they have, and therefore do not pursue money. For that reason, the righteous cannot accrue wealth and property in this world by themselves.

The Maharal continues and explains that in order for the righteous person to gain in mundane

terms as well, G-d gave sinners the power to gather and hoard-that is, that sense of constant lacking that fuels the need to keep hoarding more money. Ultimately, G-d will arrange things so that the righteous obtain the wealth that the wicked pursued. Since those characteristics that relate to the pursuit of money are unbecoming of the righteous, G-d lets the sinners do the "grunt work" and ultimately gives the fruit of their labor to the righteous.

This idea is borne out in the megilla itself. Mordekhai could not have become vizier on his own, since he did not have the characteristic ambition and lust for power that Haman had. Therefore, Haman sought the ministry by virtue of his negative traits, and only later, at the culmination of a Divine process, was the ministry handed to Mordekhai without him needing to exert himself for it. Ultimately, the righteous profits without being affected by the negative attributes that are inextricably linked to that profit. Thus, "wisdom and understanding" refers to Mordekhai, whereas "the power to gather and hoard" refers to Haman.

Practically speaking, this idea underlies Rav Kook's vision of the reconstruction of the Land of Israel. According to him, the State of Israel was built by secularists since material construction requires characteristics that generally exist only amongst those who are not imbued with spirituality and in the quest for?wisdom and understanding?; physical construction mandates the pursuit of conquest and glory. Therefore, only secularists could build the State on Israel. Ultimately, however, the righteous will win the state from its irreligious builders, since that is how the world must be run. (*This sicha was delivered on Purim 5762 [2002].*)

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

When somebody from Bnei Yisrael appears before the heavenly court at the end of his days, he is asked the following question: "Did you anticipate the redemption?" Anticipating redemption is an act of yearning to return to our roots, and this deep yearning has many levels. At one level we are waiting to return to being a free nation in our own land, linking us to the spirit of Bar Kochba, who raised the banner of national independence without any outward signs of Torah and without being visibly close to G-d. In many ways, we could say that David Ben-Gurion brought Bar Kochba's revolution to a successful conclusion when he acted as the commander in chief of the War of Independence and established the basic security situation in Israel.

However, this was not enough. We anticipate and yearn for the return of the holy banner of the days of the Chashmona'im, "Whoever is for G-d, come to

me!" We await the return of prophesy, as in the era of the First Temple, and beyond this we yearn for the repair of the sin of the Golden Calf. This will bring us back to the spiritual level of the time of the first Tablets, when we were cleansed from the filth of Adam's sin, and when the final redemption almost arrived.

It is obvious that the way to be fully occupied with anticipating redemption is for us to become highly involved in this matter and to bind our souls tightly to it. This is not an easy task. Within a short span of two generations of the Amora'im, the masters of the Talmud, the younger rabbis praised the level of the older ones? if the early generations were like angels we are like normal people, if they were like regular people we are mere donkeys. How then can we expect to reach the level of Bnei Yisrael in their finest hour, when they stood at Mount Sinai, and their souls left their bodies? But we have still been commanded to anticipate the redemption, and this would not be possible unless we were able to develop a relationship to the future that we anticipate.

The Torah tells us of the very high spiritual level of the first Tablets, "and the writing was Divine writing, engraved on the Tablets" [Shemot 32:16]. This refers to the miracle of the letters "mem" and "samech." The letters of the Tablets were engraved within the stone, "written on this side and that" [Shemot 32:15]. But mem and samech are hollow and they provide no visible support for the central pieces of stone, so that the only way for them to keep their shape was through a constant miracle.

Why, in fact, were the Tablets engraved? It is because the Divine lettering is a unifying force and not one that causes separation. When a person writes a letter to a friend, no matter how well he expresses his thoughts, when his friend reads the letter he sees the silent print and not the living image of the author. This is the nature of human writing, which only leaves an impression but cannot provide anything more than a memory of the living essence of the person making contact.

The letters engraved by the Almighty, on the other hand, are engraved within the stone, passing through from one side to the other. The writer does not hide behind them, rather He is revealed to us through them and peers at us while we are reading them. This is an expression of the salvation which we anticipate, a redemption based on life in the light of the true Torah. Every letter of the Torah reveals to us the One who gave it to us, lighting up the entire world with His light.

RABBI YAAKOV HOROWITZ

Growing With the Parsha

Shortly after Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded in securing Hashem's forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, he asked Hashem, (Shmos 33:13) "Hodiani noh es drochecha - Please make your ways

known to me." Rashi explains that since this was a time where Hashem's rachamim (mercy) was granted to the Jews, Moshe felt that it would be an especially opportune moment to beseech Hashem to share His wisdom with Moshe. The Gemorah (Brachos 7a) explains that Moshe wanted to understand the age-old question of why so many righteous people suffer while it often seems that the wicked are prospering. This understanding was the 'derech' of Hashem that Moshe wanted to understand.

Although Hashem granted many other requests of Moshe, Hashem informed him that this particular one would be denied. "Lo suchal liros es ponai, (Shmos 33:20) - You shall not be able to see My face." He explained that no man could see His 'face' and [continue to] live. Several pesukim later, Hashem informed Moshe that He will permit him to see the 'back' of Hashem. Rashi explains that at that point, Hashem showed Moshe the knot of the tefillin.

Even a casual reading of these sentences seems to indicate that this was a seminal moment in the life of Moshe. However, it is exceedingly difficult to understand exactly what transpired between Hashem and Moshe. Several questions arise:

* After granting Moshe forgiveness for the entire Jewish nation, why did Hashem refuse this particular request of Moshe?

* What exactly was the request of Moshe, to "See the face of Hashem", and why was it so important for Moshe to do so?

* The Torah relates that Moshe spoke to Hashem 'face-to-face.' So Moshe did, in fact, see the 'face' of Hashem?

* And finally, how did Hashem comfort Moshe by informing him that he could see the 'back' of Hashem and specifically by showing him the knot of the tefillin?

To gain a deeper understanding of these matters, it is important to understand what Moshe was really requesting of Hashem. Moshe wanted to understand the ways of the world. Moshe, as so many throughout history, wanted to understand the reward and punishment system of this world. Why is it that so many good people suffer while the wicked prosper? Moshe asked to see the face of Hashem. To see one's face is to examine every detail of their being. Moshe wanted a clear understanding of what transpires in this world. Hashem denied his request, not because He did not wish to grant it to Moshe, but rather it is simply impossible for a human to understand all the details of Hashem's world.

I would like to offer an analogy that may shed some light on this matter. GPS, Global Position Satellite technology, allows drivers to navigate unfamiliar roads by offering precise maps and directions. One of the features of GPS is that it allows drivers to 'zoom' in and out of a map of any given area - to see the details of

the streets or the 'big picture' of the entire city or state. When one zooms in on any particular street, however, it is impossible for him to see the directions that will take him from one city to another. Only the larger map will allow one to navigate properly.

Hashem was explaining to Moshe that humans have a limited life span, and cannot always understand Hashem's world. We cannot see the 'face' of Hashem - as we are unable to see the larger picture. Just as flying in an airplane affords people a different view of the earth, so too, Hashem, in His infinite wisdom and His global view, sees things in a way that we humans cannot. Hashem, however, did grant Moshe the ability to see things in retrospect - to see the 'back' of Hashem.

Occasionally, we are granted the understanding of events that transpired years, or even decades ago. At the time, we were 'zoomed in' on the present and did not comprehend why we were given certain challenges. When growing up, we may wonder: Why are some people (or ourselves) born into a challenging family situation? Why do people lose their parents? Why are some born with significant handicaps, or learning disabilities? .

Only decades later, we may observe that some of these very children grew into adulthood and rose above these challenges. They became stronger as a result of the moral strength that it took to overcome them, and grew into outstanding adults who inspire others.

I would like to suggest that the image that Hashem showed Moshe reflected the very nature of a kesher. When two individual straps join together to form a knot, the two straps become hidden from view at times. They both emerge, however, as a stronger and firmer unit. It is this deep understanding that Hashem offered to comfort Moshe - and all future generations of His children. © 2007 by Rabbi Y. Horowitz and Torah.org.

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

Following G-d's promise not to destroy the Jewish people, after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses requested that G-d make known to him the qualities of Divine mercy. In response, G-d showed Moses a prophetic vision, in which He was wrapped in a Tallit as a communal prayer leader, while reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy (Talmud, Rosh Hashana 17b). G-d informed Moses that whenever the Jewish people sin in the future, they should recite the Thirteen Attributes, and He will forgive them. Moses subsequently employed the Thirteen Attributes during the second and third 40-day periods on Mount Sinai, which culminated with the atonement on Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Yehudah in the Talmud adds that a covenant exists concerning these Thirteen Attributes, guaranteeing their effectiveness forever. The Brisker

Rav explains that all the mercy that the Jewish people would require until the final redemption was, as it were, deposited into an account at that time, to be withdrawn when necessary. Today, writes Rabbeinu Bachaye, we are without the Holy Temple, without a High Priest, and without the sacrifices to aid in atoning for our sins. All that is left is the ability to invoke these Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy in our prayers. Though we do not understand the true nature of these terms, and we lack the perception of how they affect the Heavenly realms, still they remain the key with which to open the gates of mercy in every generation for both the community and the individual.

There are two basic opinions as to how the Thirteen Attributes work. According to some commentators (Tzror Hamor, Reishis Chochmah and Alshich), the mere recitation of these attributes is not enough. One must accompany their recitation with action by emulating these attributes in his relationships with his fellow man. (Rabbi Moses Cordevero in the first chapter of Tomer Devorah gives guidance as to how to integrate these attributes into one's interpersonal relationships.) For this reason, says the Ma'or Vashemesh, these Divine attributes are only recited in a minyan. It is difficult for any one individual to embody and apply all of these attributes in his personal life. However, among a congregation, all of the attributes can be found.

The prophetic vision of G-d wrapped in a Tallit relates to this need to emulate His Attributes by reminding us of our obligation to perform all the Mitzvot. The Tallit hints to the fact that one must clothe himself in these attributes and not merely recite them.

Ibn Ezra asks why we wear a large Tallit only during prayer (while otherwise we wear a small fringed garment underneath our shirt). Would it not be more logical to wear a reminder of G-d's Mitzvot when engaged in our mundane pursuits? The wearing of a Tallit addresses the danger that one will mistakenly think that the words of prayer are enough to effect Divine mercy. The Tallit reminds us that lip service alone is not effective. One must live and fulfill that which his prayers represent.

The second line of opinion (Tzedah Laderech and Bnei Yissachar) views recitation of the Thirteen Divine Attributes as effective by itself. They point to the fact that the first three attributes, according to many opinions, are proper names of G-d which do not lend themselves to emulation.

Two questions must be addressed according to the opinion that the mere recitation is effective. First, how can mere recital of words be effective? And if it can, how can we reconcile this to the fact that these attributes are often recited without any noticeable result? The Maharal answers the first question. Even if recitation is sufficient, he writes, it must be with concentration, intention and understanding. This is

hinted to by the wrapping of the Tallit over one's head. The Tallit signifies concentration and the banishment of outside distractions.

The recitation of these attributes creates a period of Divine favor and grace brought about by recitation of the Divine Attributes (Malbim). In this respect, the Heavenly Kingdom patterns itself after the earthly kingdom: the periods of Divine favor and grace, parallel those times when an earthly king grants pardons not mandated by the law (Netziv). There are, says Ramchal, two types of Divine Providence, on in which G-d has, as it were, subjugated Himself to a system of reward and punishment dependant on man's conduct, and another where G-d acts independent of man's worthiness.

We can elucidate this last idea as follows: The entire creation was designed so that G-d could shower good on man, the ultimate good being the experience of the Divine Presence. To that end, G-d created a physical world in which man can earn this reward and develop his relationship with G-d through Torah and mitzvot. At the same time, G-d created an intricate system of reward and punishment through which His kindness is funneled.

Under normal circumstances, kindness outside this system would be detrimental to man, for it would suggest to him that justice does not exist and one can receive good without deserving it. That would obscure recognition of G-d. However, there are times when the application of justice would permanently impair kindness and thus place the entire purpose of creation in jeopardy. At such times, G-d chooses to let us know that He exists by showering upon us undeserved kindness beyond our understanding.

But to receive this undeserved beneficence, we must first recognize that this mercy and kindness emanates from G-d and is not an indication (G-d forbid) of a random universe and refutation of G-d's control over the world. Hence, the necessity to recite these attributes with intention and concentration to bring about this period of favor.

Although there is a covenant that the recitation of these attributes is always effective, this depends, according to the first opinion, on our emulation of these attributes and, according to the second opinion, on their being said with concentration, intention and understanding. Though a proper recitation of the Divine Attributes is always effective according to the Vilna Gaon, sometimes the effect only results in mitigation of the Divine decree, not its complete annulment (Tzedah Laderech). That is why we sometimes fail to see the effect of the recitation.

We are now in the midst of trying times for the Jewish people, a time in which we need Divine mercy. Let us attempt to recite, learn and live these Divine Attributes of Mercy - and thereby fulfill all these various opinions - so that we can partake of the

abundant wellsprings of Divine mercy already prepared for us, and effect a period of Divine favor and grace.

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RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“**T**he wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half a shekel.” (30:15)
R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l writes: It is now common in many countries to tax "progressively," meaning that not only do the wealthy pay more taxes because they have a bigger taxable base (e.g., higher incomes), they also pay at a higher rate. This is not a new idea, writes R' Zevin. It is found in the Mishnah (Peah 1:2): "One should give not less than 1/60 of his field as peah [i.e. leaving part of the field unharvested so the poor can come and take for themselves]." The mishnah continues: "Although [according to Torah law] there is no minimum level of peah, it all depends on the size of the field." Commentaries ask: What is the meaning of the last phrase, "it all depends on the size of the field"? Of course, the larger the field, the more peah one will give! The answer is that the mishnah is describing a progressive tax system. According to Torah law, there is no minimum amount that a person must give as peah. However, the Sages decreed a minimum -- 1/60 of the field. Nevertheless, it all depends on the size of the field, and one who has a larger field should give at a higher rate than 1/60.

On the other hand, the Torah also imposes flat taxes, which require everyone to pay the same thing. Our verse is an example of a flat tax. Why? So that no person would think that the Mishkan / Tabernacle or Bet Hamikdash / Temple belonged to him more than to his poorer neighbor. Indeed, it was for this reason that each person gave half a shekel, to remind him that he made only part of the contribution.

In this light we can better understand the Gemara's teaching (Megillah 13b) that the merit of the mitzvah of the half-shekel outweighed the 10,000 shekels that Haman offered Achashveirosh. What this really means is that Jewish unity saved the Jewish people in the days of Haman. This is what Esther had in mind when she told Mordechai (Esther 4:16), "Go, gather all the Jews." And, the Jews were successful in battle against Haman's allies because (Esther 9:16) they "congregated and defended themselves." (La'Torah Ve'la'moadim p.118) © 2003 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org

