

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week is naturally dominated by the description of the tragedy of the Golden Calf and its consequences. But the story of the Golden Calf in the parsha is preceded by teachings regarding the sanctity of the Shabat. The rabbis attributed the presence of this Shabat subject in the parsha as a further indication that even the construction of the Mishkan cannot take precedence over the sanctity of Shabat.

But there is another insight that is available here as well. The dangers of Golden Calves, false gods, apparently shining and enticing ideals that only lead to eventual disaster, is something that is always present in Jewish society. In our long history as a people there is a long list of Golden Calves that have led us astray and at great cost to us.

Paganism, Hellenism, false messianism, Marxism, secularism, nationalism, humanism and unbridled hedonism, just to identify some of these Golden Calves, have all exacted a terrible toll from us over our history. The Shabat and its holiness and its enforced withdrawal from the mundane and impious world have always stood as the bulwark of defense against these Golden Calves.

The Shabat is our first and strongest line of defense against the sea of falseness and evil that constantly threatens to engulf us. Without Shabat we are doomed and lost. With Shabat we are strong and eternal. There are not many things in history that are that simple to discern but the saving grace of Shabat for Jewish society is one of these really no-brainers.

This is why later in the Chumash in parshat Vayakhel the admonition regarding the laws of Shabat is again repeated in conjunction with a further review of the construction of the Mishkan. The Torah wishes to emphasize that short of human life itself, no cause no matter how seemingly noble takes precedence over the sanctity of the Shabat.

For all human causes, no matter how noble, contain dross with its gold. The Shabat in its eternity and God-given holiness is likened to the World to Come, eternal and everlasting. For many times in our rush to build, we destroy, and in our desire to accomplish great things we trample upon nobility and moral righteousness. The great sage, Baba ben Buta in

the Talmud warned King Herod not to destroy the old until the new has already been erected.

The world oftentimes believes that the destruction of the old is somehow a necessary prerequisite to construct the new. The Torah comes to teach us that the old Shabat already observed by the People of Israel even before the granting of the Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai will definitely outlive and outperform the shiny new Golden Calf that is now being worshipped so avidly.

Golden Calves come and go but the eternity of Shabat and Torah remain valid for all times and circumstances. This reflection is buttressed in the Torah by its repetition of the sanctity of Shabat many times in these parshiyot that mark the conclusion of the book of Shemot. Our Mishkan is built only with Shabat and never in contravention of Shabat. © 2011 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

Hew out for yourself [from yourself] two tablets of stone (Exodus 34:1). This week's biblical portion of Ki Tisa gives us a most profound insight into the real purpose of both the Sanctuary and the Torah, as well as the true meaning of God's presence in the world. These deep theological truths can best be explained by contrasting the two verbs of re'iyah (seeing) and shemiya (listening, or more correctly, internalizing).

The portion Yitro (Exodus 18:1) opens with the words, "And Yitro / Jethro internalized (Vayishma Yitro) all that God had done for Moses and for Israel..." until he could declare, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods..." (Ex. 18:11), and, according to a major view in the Midrash, he even converted to Judaism.

We have already shown (in our commentary on Mishpatim) how the Israelites, in contrast, seem to be inured by the more superficial experience of "seeing" rather than "internalizing". Even after they say, "we shall internalize" and enter into the Covenant, the nation quickly reverts to only "seeing the Lord of Israel", with Nadab, Abihu and the elders even degenerating to "gazing upon the Lord, and eating and drinking" (Ex. 24:10-11).

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God wants His words to be ingested within the hearts and minds of the Israelites, rather than for His "Persona" (as it were) to be "perceived" - or thought to be perceived - by their eyes alone.

Indeed, even before the Revelation at Sinai, God told Moses: "Behold, I am coming to you in the thickness of a cloud in order that the nation may internalize that which I speak with you" (Ex. 19:9). Similarly, "...and Moses drew near to the nebulous mist, where only there is God" (Ex. 20:18). This is why, throughout the Bible, the Sanctuary is identified with a cloud and a mist. And alas, it is the obsessive desire of the nation to "see" God, to objectify and limit Him to some external, finite and physical entity that leads directly to the sin of the Golden Calf. Unfortunately, the Israelites still don't understand. They seek an icon; an entity called God which will visually and physically be in the midst of rather than merely within the hearts and minds of the nation.

God explains that what they want is impossible; God will send human leaders, messenger-angels, informed by His spirit, who will lead them (Ex. 33:1-11). And Moses then makes a logical and important request: "Teach me (and through me, the nation) that I (we) may know - may cleave to, internalize and become united with (Your ways/Your attributes/ Your inner character traits) so that we may become informed by Your spirit, so that You may truly dwell within us."

God agrees to do this, explaining that in the unique morality, compassion and loving-kindness of the nation, it will become clear that God is specifically within Israel (Ex. 33:14-17). Moses then asks (perhaps as a concession to the nation), "Can I not see (with my eyes) your glory?" to which God responds, "No mortal can see Me and live"; but God will reveal His inner spiritual traits, and these must lead the Jews in their quest for God, in their desire to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers to the world. This revelation will constitute the second Sinaitic epiphany.

What follows seems a bit misplaced, but it is essential, precisely at this point in the text. God now commands Moses, "Hew out for yourself two tablets of stone like the first" (Ex. 34:1), as a sign of Divine forgiveness for the Golden Calf; a "tikkun" (repair) for the broken fragments of the Ten Commandments which Moses smashed when he saw the people dancing around the Calf. This time, however, there is one major

and crucial difference: These tablets will be the work of Moses, not of God. Religious leaders and the Jewish nation will be God's partners in the development of the Torah in the form of the Oral Law.

The Jewish nation will become the tablets of stone, with the words showing through on both sides (Ex. 30:15). Moses must hew out these stones "for himself and from himself," from the God within him. And even the Hebrew word for stone, "even," is a contraction of av and ben, father and son, Knesset Yisrael, the historic House of Israel. God is in words, not objects or "houses," God is in ideas and ideals, not in any specific individual. And these Divine messages must be expressed by Israel and then the world. ©2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah reveals to us Hashem's indescribable love for His people and our inseparable relationship with Him. The setting is one of massive spiritual decline in which most of the Jewish nation was involved in some facet of idolatry. After three years of severe famine and drought Hashem instructed Eliyahu Hanavi to appear before the Jewish King Achav. This wicked leader together with his idolatrous wife were gravely at fault for the Jewish people's decline. Eliyahu faithfully fulfilled his mission and, at the risk of his life, challenged Achav and his idolatrous prophets to a crucial demonstration at Mount Carmel. Eliyahu, the only known remaining prophet of Hashem represented Hashem while the other prophets represented their false deities. Each would attempt to offer a sacrifice and whoever received a response from above would be proven the real prophet. After several futile attempts of the false prophets Eliyahu stepped forward to prove, once and for all, the authenticity of Hashem. Eliyahu filled a ditch with water, thoroughly drenched his altar and offered his bullock to Hashem. Hashem responded in a miraculous fashion and sent afire which received the sacrifice, consumed the altar and even dried the water in the ditch. This clear demonstration convinced the Jewish people that Hashem was the exclusive power of the world and after this experience they forsook their idolatrous ways.

This incredible experience is unparalleled in all of Jewish history. Its uniqueness is due to the fact that this sacrifice was, under normal circumstances, a violation of a serious Torah prohibition. The Torah sternly warns us against offering a sacrifice to Hashem outside the Bais Hamikdash. Once erected, the Bais Hamikdash served as the exclusive site for sacrificial purposes. And yet, at this crucial moment of truth Eliyahu involved the Jewish people in a sacrifice on Mount Carmel, one normally punishable by death. Chazal, in resolution of this perplexing issue, quote a Torah passage which states, "To him (the prophet) you

shall hearken." (Dvorim 18:15) This passage establishes the precedent that an unequivocally authoritative prophet may temporarily order the violation of a Torah commandment. In fact, Eliyahu's sacrifice on Mount Carmel is cited as the prime example for this principle. But, the question begs to be asked, "Why was it necessary to violate a Torah principle at this juncture? Wouldn't this clear demonstration result from the ordinary sacrificial procedure in the Bais Hamikdash?"

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

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

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

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

But now, the time had finally arrived for the Jewish people to realize Hashem's presence

everywhere and to appreciate their relationship with Him outside of the Bais Hamikdash. To facilitate this, Eliyahu accepted the difficult task of revealing this truth and offered a sacrifice outside of the Bais Hamikdash proper. He reasoned that Hashem's response would prove that His relationship transcended the physical boundaries of Yerushalayim. Hashem could even be found on Mount Carmel at a time when the Jewish people appeared like a foreign nation. Hashem responded warmly and displayed His presence at Mount Carmel by accepting this "foreign" sacrifice. Through this the Jewish people were convinced that their name Yisroel was the true representation of their relationship with Hashem. As their name suggests Hashem maintains an inseparable relationship with His people whenever and wherever they may be found. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & Project Genesis, Inc.

### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

**W**hen Moshe was told to sculpt another set of "Luchos" (stone tablets) for G-d to write the "Ten Commandments" on, he was told "sculpt for yourself" (Shemos 34:1). Rashi tells us (quoting Midrash Tanchuma 29) that "for yourself" refers to the sapphire that was leftover after the Luchos were carved. The same word for "sculpt" (peh-samech-lamed) also means "unfit;" Moshe was able to keep the remnants ("p'sol'es") of this precious stone for himself. The Talmud (Nedarim 38a) echoes this idea, adding that just as the extra sapphire belonged to Moshe, G-d telling him to "write for yourself" (34:27) the words of the Torah (the part just taught to him) meant that the Torah really belonged to Moshe as well. Moshe was generous, though, and shared it with the entire nation.

Rabbi Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh"lita, (Rinas Yitzchok, 2nd edition) asks why it was only when the second set of Luchos were given that we are taught that the Torah initially belonged only to Moshe. Wasn't this concept true when the Torah, and the original Luchos, were first given? In Derasha 18, the Bais HaLevi suggests that the first set of Luchos had more than just the "Ten Commandments" on them; the entire Torah, both written and oral, were written on them as well. Had we not sinned, every aspect of Torah-even the Oral Law -- would have been in writing. Rabbi Sorotzkin suggests that this is why the Torah only belonged to Moshe after the first Luchos were broken; originally we would have had everything in writing, so it couldn't have been just his.

Even after Moshe was willing to share it with us, though, we needed him-and the subsequent sages through whom the Oral Law was taught-to teach it to us, and our confidence in the accuracy of the Oral Law is directly dependant upon our confidence in the sages from whom we learn it. "Emunas Chazal," our confidence in the sages of the Talmudic era, is

therefore of primary importance to our religion. Ran (Rabbeinu Nissim, 14th Century) labels anyone who "strays from the words of our sages, even regarding things that are not an explanation of the commandments," an "apikores (heretic) [who] does not have a portion in the world to come" (Derasha 13, which is the alternate version of Derasha 5 in most editions). Although "emunas Chazal" isn't listed as one of Rambam's 13 "Principles of Faith," these principles are the list of (what Rambam considered) the foundations of our religion, not a complete list of our beliefs, or what beliefs are necessary in order not to be considered a heretic. In his halachic masterpiece (Hilchos Teshuva 3:8), Rambam includes "those who deny [the Torah's] explanation, which is the Oral Law, and contradict those who told it over" in his list of those who do not have a share in the world to come. But what does having "emunas Chazal" really mean? What is it about our sages, of blessed memory, that we are supposed to believe?

In that same Derasha, Ran says that it is possible for Chazal to reach conclusions that are not (objectively) true, even in matters of Jewish law. We are nevertheless required to follow their conclusions, as this is what G-d wants (and demands, in a Biblical commandment). Much has been written in scholarly circles regarding the possibility of Chazal being wrong about scientific or medical issues (see [http://leimanlibrary.com/texts\\_of\\_publications.html](http://leimanlibrary.com/texts_of_publications.html), text #73); if the Talmud is clear (Bava Metzia 59b) that Chazal can come to a conclusion other than G-d's regarding halachic issues, there would seem to be no reason to insist that they had to reach every conclusion regarding the sciences perfectly. "Emunas Chazal" therefore cannot mean believing (or trusting) that everything they said, or concluded, is the same objective truth as G-d's.

Another area that has been given much treatment is how to view Agada, the non-halachic Midrashim found throughout the Talmud and Midrashic literature. On one hand, Rambam (Sh'moneh Perakim) is among the many Rishonim that state explicitly that we are not required to take every Midrash literally. On the other hand, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 100a) calls someone who doesn't take Chazal's Midrashic teachings seriously a heretic, implying that Midrashim have to be accepted at face value. This is not a contradiction, however, as Rambam also insists that Midrashim be taken seriously, attributing hidden meanings to those Midrashim that are irrational (at face value); the heresy might have been the lack of value (and/or belittling) that the heretic mentioned in the Talmud placed on the Agadic teaching. It is also possible that there is a difference between Midrashim that attribute something unnatural to G-d, and Midrashim that attribute unnatural things to people or objects; G-d paving the streets of Jerusalem with precious stones should be taken at face value (which

the heretic didn't) since the stones were naturally occurring and it was G-d doing the paving, while Og's ankles being 30 cubits high (Berachos 54b) need not be (and perhaps should not be). In any case, it would certainly seem that belittling anything said by Chazal (rather than saying it was not meant to be taken literally, or that they were misled by information they had no way of knowing to be false, or had made an honest error in judgment) would be problematic.

Very often, we find Rishonim (early commentators) that disagree with Chazal's explanation of a verse. This usually occurs when Chazal explain things on a "d'rash" level, while the commentator explains it on a "p'shat" level, and there is therefore no contradiction. Sometimes, different, mutually exclusive, approaches are given within Chazal, indicating that at least one of them can't be (objectively) true. There may be extremely valuable lessons learned from each approach, and some might suggest (see *Vikuach HaRamban*) that the lesson might have been the goal of the teaching (not historical accuracy), but the fact that not every Midrash can be historically accurate leaves room for the commentators to suggest other possibilities.

An example of this is Ibn Ezra's approach towards the wood used to build the Mishkan. Chazal (see Rashi on Shemos 25:5) tell us that Yaakov knew (prophetically) that the Children of Israel would build the Mishkan in the desert, so he brought cedar trees with him down to Egypt, planted them there, and instructed his children to cut them down and take them when they left Egypt. Ibn Ezra questions how they could explain (to the Egyptians) why they were taking such large pieces of wood with them if they were returning to Egypt just a few days later. "[But] we don't know if this was a tradition that our ancestors had that [this wood] was taken out of Egypt; [if it was] we will turn to their teaching. And if it was [their own] suggestion (to explain where the wood came from), we will seek out other possibilities." Ibn Ezra acknowledges the possibility that the information Chazal relayed was based on historical facts; those who carried the wood out of Egypt might have told their children where it came from, and this information was handed down through the generations. There is no way to know whether this information was part of a tradition or not, so Ibn Ezra mentions that if it was, it can be trusted, but adds that if it wasn't, he can offer his own suggestion (that there was a nearby forest). When Ran mentioned the need to follow Chazal, he said, "and just as we were commanded to follow their conclusions for the laws of the Torah, so were we commanded regarding whatever they told us, based on tradition, in relation to religious ideas and the exegetical explanations of verses, whether their statement is in regards to a mitzvah or not." Ran (elsewhere) also suggests possible explanations for verses that differ from Midrashim; this could be because he is suggesting something on a p'shat level

(while Chazal are teaching us the d'rash), or because he was unsure if their teaching was "based on tradition" or not. Ibn Ezra often prefaces his suggestions by saying "if [Chazal] had a tradition, we will accept it," adding that "their knowledge is deeper than ours." Aside from showing Chazal respect, these Rishonim indicate that included in having "emunas Chazal" is recognizing that much of what they teach us is based on a received tradition, and must be taken seriously even if there are questions that we don't have an answer for.

Ran added another dimension to the equation, "religious ideas" ("dayos"). Chazal's religious authority extends beyond practical law, beyond transmitting traditions that reflect historical accuracy, to teaching us what our religion stands for. The lessons hidden within the non-rational Midrashim (and the rational ones), their teachings regarding what G-d expects of us, what the soul is about and how to develop it, and how to best emulate and get closer to G-d, are of primary value to the religious Jew. Dismissing what they teach us about these things indicates a major lack of "emunas Chazal," and (as Ran put it), "a Jew who strays from their words is a heretic, and has no share in the world to come."

Belief cannot be legislated, and statements such as this can only be meant as a guide for those seeking what our traditions teach. Nevertheless, without "emunas Chazal," if we do not take their teachings seriously for our own religious journey, we will likely end up taking a wrong turn. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

**K**i Tissa tells of one of the most shocking moments of the forty years in the wilderness when—less than six weeks after the greatest revelation in the history of religion, Israel's encounter with God at Mount Sinai—they made a golden calf. Either this was idolatry or perilously close to it, and it caused God to say to Moses, who was with him on the mountain, "Now do not try to stop Me when I unleash my wrath against them to destroy them" (32:10).

What I want to look at here is the role played by Aaron, for it was he who was the de facto leader of the people in the absence of Moses, and he whom the Israelites approached with their proposal: "The people began to realize that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Make us a god [or an oracle] to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt.'" (32:1)

It was Aaron who should have seen the danger, Aaron who should have stopped them, Aaron who should have told them to wait, have patience and trust.

Instead this is what happened: "Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.' So all the people took off their

earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf. Then they said, 'This, Israel, is your god, who brought you out of Egypt.' When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, 'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.' So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented peace offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.'" (32:2-6)

The Torah itself seems to blame Aaron, if not for what he did then at least for what he allowed to happen: Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. (32:25)

Now Aaron was not an insignificant figure. He had shared the burden of leadership with Moses. He had either already become or was about to be appointed High Priest. What then was in his mind while this drama was being enacted?

Essentially there are three lines of defence in the Midrash, the Zohar and the medieval commentators. According to the first, Aaron was playing for time. His actions were a series of delaying tactics. He told the people to take the gold earrings their wives, sons and daughters were wearing, reasoning to himself: "While they are quarrelling with their children and wives about the gold, there will be a delay and Moses will come" (Zohar). His instructions to build an altar and proclaim a festival to God the next day were likewise intended to buy time, for Aaron was convinced that Moses was on his way.

The second defence is to be found in the Talmud and is based on the fact that when Moses departed to ascend the mountain he left not just Aaron but also Hur in charge of the people (Ex. 24:14). Yet Hur does not figure in the narrative of the golden calf. According to the Talmud, Hur had opposed the people, telling them that what they were about to do was wrong, and was then killed by them. Aaron saw this and decided that proceeding with the making of the calf was the lesser of two evils: "Aaron saw Hur lying slain before him and said to himself: If I do not obey them, they will do to me what they did to Hur, and so will be fulfilled [the fear of] the prophet, 'Shall the priest [=Aaron] and the prophet [=Hur] be slain in the Sanctuary of God' (Lamentations 2:20). If that happens, they will never be forgiven. Better let them worship the golden calf, for which they may yet find forgiveness through repentance." (Sanhedrin 7a)

The third, argued by Ibn Ezra, is that the calf was not an idol at all, and what the Israelites did was, in Aaron's view, permissible. After all, their initial complaint was, "We have no idea what happened to Moses." They did not want a god-substitute but a Moses-substitute, an oracle, something through which they could discern God's instructions—not unlike the function of the Urim and Tummim that were later given to the High Priest.

Those who saw the calf as an idol, saying, "This is your god who brought you out of Egypt," were only a small minority—three thousand out of six hundred thousand—and for them Aaron could not be blamed.

So there is a systematic attempt in the history of interpretation to mitigate or minimize Aaron's culpability—inevitably so, since we do not find explicitly that Aaron was punished for the golden calf (though Abrabanel holds that he was punished later). Yet, with all the generosity we can muster, it is hard to see Aaron as anything but weak, especially in the reply he gives to Moses when his brother finally appears and demands an explanation: "'Do not be angry, my lord,' Aaron answered. 'You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, 'Make us a god who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!'" (32:22-24)

There is more than a hint here of the answer Saul gave Samuel, explaining why he did not carry out the prophet's instructions. He blames the people. He suggests he had no choice. He was passive. Things happened. He minimizes the significance of what has transpired. This is weakness, not leadership.

What is really extraordinary, therefore, is the way later tradition made Aaron a hero, most famously in the words of Hillel: "Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them close to the Torah." (Avot 1:12)

There are famous aggadic traditions about Aaron and how he was able to turn enemies into friends and sinners into observers of the law. The Sifra says that Aaron never said to anyone, "You have sinned"—all the more remarkable since one of the tasks of the High Priest was, once a year on Yom Kippur, to atone for the sins of the nation. Yet there is none of this explicitly in the Torah itself. The only proof-text cited by the sages is the passage in Malachi, the last of the prophets, who says about the Cohen in general: "My covenant was with him of life and peace... He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin." (Malachi 2:5-6)

But Malachi is talking about priesthood in general rather than the historical figure of Aaron. Perhaps the most instructive passage is the Talmudic discussion (Sanhedrin 6b) as to whether arbitration, as opposed to litigation, is a good thing or a bad thing. The Talmud presents this as a conflict between two role models, Moses and Aaron: Moses's motto was: Let the law pierce the mountain. Aaron, however, loved peace and pursued peace and made peace between man and man.

Moses was a man of law, Aaron of mediation (not the same thing as arbitration but considered similar). Moses was a man of truth, Aaron of peace. Moses sought justice, Aaron sought conflict resolution.

There is a real difference between these two approaches. Truth, justice, law: these are zero-sum equations. If X is true, Y is false. If X is in the right, Y is in the wrong. Mediation, conflict resolution, compromise, the Aaron-type virtues, are all attempts at a non-zero outcome in which both sides feel that they have been heard and their claim has, at least in part, been honored. The Talmud puts it brilliantly by way of a comment on the phrase: "Judge truth and the justice of peace in your gates..." (Zechariah 8:16)

On this the Talmud asks what the phrase "the justice of peace" can possibly mean. "If there is justice, there is no peace. If there is peace, there is no justice. What is the 'justice of peace?' This means arbitration." Now let's go back to Moses, Aaron and the golden calf. Although it is clear that God and Moses regarded the calf as a major sin, Aaron's willingness to pacify the people—trying to delay them, sensing that if he simply said No they would kill him and make it anyway—was not wholly wrong. To be sure, at that moment the people needed a Moses, not an Aaron. But under other circumstances and in the long run they needed both: Moses as the voice of truth and justice, Aaron with the people-skills to conciliate and make peace.

That is how Aaron eventually emerged in the long hindsight of tradition, as the peace-maker. Peace is not the only virtue, and peacemaking not the only task of leadership. We must never forget that when Aaron was left to lead, the people made a golden calf. But never think, either, that a passion for truth and justice is sufficient. Moses needed an Aaron to hold the people together. In short, leadership is the capacity to hold together different temperaments, conflicting voices and clashing values.

Every leadership team needs both a Moses and an Aaron, a voice of truth and a force for peace. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

Is it appropriate to challenge God when things are going wrong? The role of the prophet is usually associated with transmitting the word of God 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 God to intercede.

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

Why does God demand "haniha li," the Midrash asks? After all, Moshe was not holding on to God. 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 God 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." God wanted to witness Moshe's care for the Jewish people and therefore gave him the chance to challenge God. By entering into dialogue of challenging God, 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 God with ahavat Yisrael and demanded of God 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 God 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 God actually wants from us, to hear our voices and to create a true covenantal relationship. © 2011 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 MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Internalize-Eternalize**

**W**e say it every Shabbos quite a number of times, yet it always bothered me. We say it before the Amidah of Maariv on Friday night. We say it as a preface to Kiddush. And in its simplest form, I really did not think twice about its meaning. In Hebrew, it is known as "V'Shomroo" and loosely translated it means: "Thus

the children of Israel shall observe the (Shabbos) Sabbath, to make the Sabbath throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant. Between Me and the children of Israel, it is forever a sign that [in] six days the Lord created the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested" (Exodus 31:16-17). One Shabbos evening, I stared at the words and was troubled by the language, "the children of Israel shall observe the (Shabbos) Sabbath, to make the Sabbath throughout their generations." How could the Jewish people observe the Shabbos "to make it an eternal covenant for generations"? After all, each generation must keep the Shabbos for its own society. Of course, every command of the Torah was meant for each and every generation. But I can only take care of my generation. After all, when the Torah tells me to don tzitzith, it is commanding for all generations, but my wearing of tzitzis will not affect the charge to my descendants. So how can the children keep Shabbos in order to make the Sabbath throughout their generations"?

Indeed, the commentator, Orach Chaim offers a number of enlightening explanations to clarify the meaning, I will try to offer my own. Judith Cohen was only about 17 years old when the Nazi killing machine brought destruction to her native Gherla or Szamosjyr in the historical region of Transylvania, Hungary. Until then, she led a wonderful life, her father was a prestigious Rabbi and community leader, she had her friends and community and she had a wonderful family. But most of all, she had Shabbos. Her home sparkled. Her parents sat at the table with the nobility they engendered in their entire family. The children sang in unison and the spirit of the day transported them to a level unattainable during the entire week.

And then came the Nazis. And it was all lost. She and her parents were carted off to the concentration camps together with her friends and their parents, where the former students of Kant, Nietzsche and Goethe became the disciples of Hitler, Himmler and Goering, destroying any humanity that they could find in the souls of their innocent victims.

It was not long before Judith and her friends were left orphaned and with hardly any siblings. Alone and disillusioned, it was barely a comfort when the Russians finally broke through the barbed wire of their earthly hell and "liberated" them. They had no one to go to and nowhere to go.

But Gherla was the only place they knew and Judith and her teenage friends decided that they would see if they could go back and try to recoup their lives.

Bitter and dejected, they entered a different town than the one they had left. Their homes were overrun, ransacked and bare. The group walked on, their hollow faces seeing their former gentile neighbors looking away in a mixture of shame and disgust. And then they approached the town's shul. It still stood -- empty and in mourning. But the teens did not view it

with a sense of mercy. All they saw was the building that represented the G-d that had forsaken them. They looked at each other and as if in unison, each one of them picked up a rock and aimed it at the wall of the shul. As Judith bent down to pick up a rock, she froze. She looked at the wall of the shul and saw flames. They were not the flames of Auschwitz or Matthaussen. They were the flames glowing warmly on the Shabbos table of her home. She saw her father and mother dressed in royal splendor and heard her brothers and sisters singing the Shabbos songs together as one. Her tears fell down her face wetting the rock that she never picked up.

Judith walked away from her friends, but not from her distant past. With a new spirit, she embraced her past and started a new life. She married Yehuda Mandel, and settled in the United States. Judith's son, Rabbi Hillel Mandel, is a renowned educator in the United States, and her daughter, Miriam (Mandel) Freilich, is a mental health professional in Israel. Together with their families, the next generation, continue their grandparent's traditions, singing around the Shabbos table.

Perhaps the Torah is giving us a formula for eternal Shabbos observance: "The children of Israel shall observe the (Shabbos) Sabbath, to make the Sabbath throughout their generations." We must keep Shabbos in a way that it shall be loved, cherished and kept by future generations. The only way to guarantee the future of Shabbos observance is only if our own observance is done with such a passion, fervor and warmth that the future generations will cherish it as well. And thus it is a charge to us and a directive for our own observance. Keep your Shabbos properly, for in that manner, you will be making Shabbos for the future of our nation. © 2011 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky torah.org

### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

If this year were not a leap year on the Jewish calendar, this Friday and Shabbat, the 14th and 15th of Adar, would have been Purim and Shushan Purim, respectively. Instead, these days are known as Purim Kattan / "Little Purim," while the actual holiday will be observed one month from now. The custom is that certain signs of joy are observed on the two days of Purim; for example, tachanun-and on Shabbat, "Av Ha'rachamim"-is not recited and eulogies are not delivered. Why do we mark these days which,

after all, are not Purim? R' Mordechai Menashe Zilber shlita (Stutchiner Rebbe in Brooklyn, N.Y.) explains:

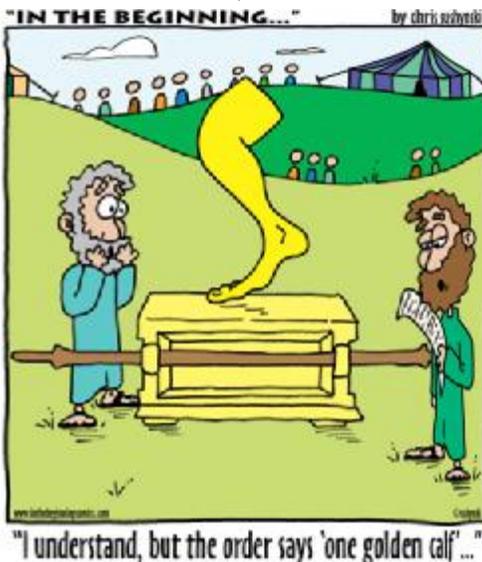
We read in Megillat Esther (9:26), "That is why they called these days 'Purim' from the word 'pur' / 'lottery'." However, "pur" is singular, while "Purim" is plural. Why? The answer is found in another verse (3:7), "He cast a pur-that is, the lot-in the presence of Haman from day to day, and from month to month." In fact, R' Zilber explains, there were two lots-one, a lottery of days, to identify a propitious day on the solar calendar to annihilate the Jews (G-d forbid), and the second, a lottery of months, to identify a propitious day on the lunar calendar. Miraculously, both lots-the "purim" - - identified the same day, the 13th day of the twelfth month [starting from Nissan], i.e., the month of Adar.

Why are there two months of Adar in some years? Because the Torah requires that Pesach be observed in the spring. The beginning of spring, like all the seasons, is determined by the sun. On the other hand, the fact that we have months at all is a function of the lunar calendar. In most years, the solar and lunar calendars roughly coincide, and we observe only one Purim. In leap years, however, we separately acknowledge Purim's place on the lunar calendar (by observing Purim Kattan in the twelfth month) and its place on the solar calendar (by observing Purim near the onset of spring). [The Gemara explains that the "main" Purim is the second one so that we observe the two holidays of redemption-Purim and Pesach-adjacent to each other.]

R' Zilber adds: The Torah commands (Devarim 25:17-19), "Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt... You shall not forget." These verses state both an affirmative commandment ("Remember") and a negative commandment ("You shall not forget"). Amalek was an ancestor of Haman, and Purim, the holiday associated

with Haman's defeat, also includes both affirmative mitzvot (e.g.,

Megillah-reading, mishloach manot) and negative mitzvot (e.g., not fasting or delivering eulogies). Purim Kattan, however, has only negative mitzvot (e.g., not fasting or delivering eulogies), paralleling the negative commandment, "You shall not forget." Purim Kattan, which is tied to the lunar calendar, falls twelve months after last Purim, which parallels our Sages' teaching that memory fades after twelve months. [That is why mourning lasts twelve months.] (Gilyon Divrei Torah 5765) © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org



"I understand, but the order says 'one golden calf' ..."