

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The Torah in Parshat Vayakhel, which describes the making of the Mishkan, goes out of its way to emphasize the role women played in it: "The men accompanied the women, and those who wanted to make a donation brought bracelets, earrings, finger rings, and body ornaments, all made of gold." (35:22)

"Every skilled woman put her hand to spinning, and they [all] brought the spun yarn of sky-blue wool, dark red wool, crimson wool and fine linen. Highly skilled women volunteers also spun the goats' wool." (35:25-26).

"Every man and woman among the Israelites who felt an urge to give something for all the work that G-d had ordered through Moses, brought a donation for G-d." (35:29)

Indeed the emphasis is even greater than it seems in translation, because of the unusual locution in verse 22, Vayavo-u ha-anashim al hanashim, which implies that the women came to make their donations first, and the men merely followed their lead (Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rabbenu Bachye).

This is all the more striking since the Torah implies that the women refused to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf (see the commentaries to Ex. 32:2). The women had a sense of judgment in the religious life-what is true worship, and what false-that the men lacked.

Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550-1619) makes the further point that since the Tabernacle was an atonement for the Golden Calf, the women had no need to contribute at all, since it was the men not the women who needed atonement. None the less, women gave, and did so before the men.

Most moving, though, by far is the cryptic verse: "He [Betzalel] made the copper washstand and its copper base out of the mirrors of the dedicated women [ha-tzove'ot] who congregated at the entrance of the Communion Tent." [Ex. 38:8]

The sages (in Midrash Tanhuma) told a story about this. This is how Rashi tells it: "Israelite women owned mirrors, which they would look into when they adorned themselves. Even these [mirrors] they did not hold back from bringing as a contribution toward the Mishkan, but Moses rejected them because they were made for temptation [i.e., to inspire lustful thoughts].

The Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, "Accept [them], for these are more precious to Me than anything because through them the women set up many legions [i.e., through the children they gave birth to] in Egypt." When their husbands were weary from back-breaking labour, they [the women] would go and bring them food and drink and give them to eat. Then they [the women] would take the mirrors and each one would see herself with her husband in the mirror, and she would seduce him with words, saying, "I am more beautiful than you." And in this way they aroused their husbands' desire and would be intimate with them, conceiving and giving birth there, as it is said: "Under the apple tree I aroused you" (Song 8:5). This is [the meaning of] what is bema'rot hatzove'ot [lit., the mirrors of those who set up legions]. From these [the mirrors], the washstand was made."

The story is this. The Egyptians sought not merely to enslave, but also to put an end to, the people of Israel. One way of doing so was to kill all male children. Another was simply to interrupt normal family life. The people, both men and women, were labouring all day. At night, says the Midrash, they were forbidden to return home. They slept where they worked. The intention was to destroy both privacy and sexual desire, so that the Israelites would have no more children.

The women realised this, and decided to frustrate Pharaoh's plan. They used mirrors to make themselves attractive to their husbands. The result was that intimate relations resumed. The women conceived and had children (the "legions" referred to in the word tzove'ot). Only because of this was there a new generation of Jewish children. The women, by their faith, courage and ingenuity, secured Jewish survival.

The Midrash continues that when Moses commanded the Israelites to bring offerings to make the tabernacle, some brought gold, some silver, some bronze, some jewels. But many of the women had nothing of value to contribute except the mirrors they had brought with them from Egypt. These they brought to Moses, who recoiled in disgust. What, he thought, have these cheap objects, used by women to make themselves look attractive, to do with the sanctuary and the sacred? G-d rebuked Moses for daring to think this way, and ordered him to accept them.

The story is powerful in itself. It tells us, as do so many other midrashim, that without the faith of women, Jews and Judaism would never have survived. But it also tells us something absolutely fundamental to the Jewish understanding of love in the religious life.

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In his impressive recent book *Love: A History* (2011) the philosopher Simon May writes: "If love in the Western world has a founding text, that text is Hebrew." Judaism sees love as supremely physical and spiritual. That is the meaning of "You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and all your soul and all your might" (Deut. 6:5). This is not the language of meditation or contemplation, philosophical or mystical. It is the language of passion.

Even the normally cerebral Maimonides writes this about the love of G-d: "What is the love of G-d that is befitting? It is to love G-d with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one's soul shall be knit up with the love of G-d, such that it is continually enraptured by it, like a lovesick individual whose mind is never free from passion for a particular woman and is enraptured by her at all times... Even intenser should be the love of G-d in the hearts of those who love Him. They should be enraptured by this love at all times." (Laws of Repentance, 10:5)

This is the love we find in passages like Psalm 63:2, "My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." Only because the sages thought about love this way, did they take it for granted that The Song of Songs-an extremely sensual series of love poems-was about the love between G-d and Israel. Rabbi Akiva called it "the holy of holies" of religious poetry.

It was Christianity, under the influence of classical Greece, that drew a distinction between eros (love as intense physical desire) and agape (a calm, detached love of humanity-in-general and things-in-general) and declared the second, not the first, to be religious. It was this self-same Greek influence that led Christianity to read the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit as a story of sinful sexual desire-an interpretation that should have no place whatsoever in Judaism.

Simon May speaks about the love of G-d in Judaism as being characterised by "intense devotion; absolute trust; fear of his power and presence; and rapturous, if often questioning, absorption in his will... Its moods are a combination of the piety of a vassal, the intimacy of friends, the fidelity of spouses, the dependence of a child, the passion of lovers..." He later adds, "The widespread belief that the Hebrew Bible is all about vengeance and 'an eye for an eye,' while the

Gospels supposedly invent love as an unconditional and universal value, must therefore count as one of the most extraordinary misunderstandings in all of Western history."

The Midrash dramatises this contrast between eros and agape as an argument between G-d and Moses. Moses believes that closeness to G-d is about celibacy and purity. G-d teaches him otherwise, that passionate love, when offered as a gift to G-d, is the most precious love of all. This is the love we read about in Shir ha-Shirim. It is the love we hear in Yedid Nefesh,[1] the daring song we sing at the beginning and toward the end of Shabbat. When the women offered G-d the mirrors through which they aroused their husbands' love in the dark days of Egypt, G-d told Moses, "These are more precious to Me than anything else." The women understood, better than the men, what it means to love G-d "with all your heart and all your soul and all your might." © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Bezalel made the ark... He made two cherubs of gold... at the two ends of the cover... The cherubs had their wings spreading out upwards... with their faces turned towards each other..." (Exodus 37:1-9)

This week's Biblical portion repeats the detailed construction of the Tabernacle, including the protective cover of the Holy Ark, which featured the two winged cherubs facing each other. In the previous portion of Terumah, the Biblical text noted: "It is there I will set My meetings with you, and I shall impart to you - from above the Cover and from between the two cherubs who are above the Ark of the Covenant - everything that I will command to the children of Israel" (Exodus 25:22). Thus, G-d spoke to Moses from between the cherubs.

The Bible insists that from the time of the Divine Revelation at Sinai the Almighty continues to communicate with us in "a great voice that never ceases." The Ramban says that the Tabernacle was a continuation of the revelation on Mount Sinai, hence the Divine Voice was heard from between the cherubs. (See Deuteronomy 5:19, Targum ad loc).

But where does that leave us today? How do we hear G-d without the Tabernacle, and without a Holy Temple? Who speaks for G-d when there is no Sanhedrin whose Sages were infused with some of the Divine Spirit and no prophets who can speak in the name of the Lord G-d? How does G-d communicate with us today?

The tractate obligates Jews to fair business practices - no undue pressure, no charging of interest and no withholding payment for hire beyond the day of labor - when dealing with resident aliens. It also stipulates that Jews may not intermarry with gentiles

who have not fully converted to Judaism. Nevertheless, despite the prohibition against intermarriage with these resident aliens, they must have the option of acquiring good homes in the midst of the land of Israel where they have good business opportunities. (See Deuteronomy 23: 16, BT Gerim 1-4) I believe the symbol of the cherubs will help us to find our answer: G-d communicates through people. After all, did not the Almighty create the mortal in His own Divine Image (Gen 1:27)? Does not the Bible picture the Divine act of creation as G-d's "breathing (in-spiriting)" into the dust of earth the "breath (nishmat, soul) of life," and does not the Sacred Zohar make the point that "everyone who exhales, who breathes out, exudes the inner essence of Himself, as it were"?! Hence there is a trace of G-d within each and every one of us - and it is that G-dliness within which reaches out and communicates to us.

You will remember that when the Biblical Joseph searched for his brothers, an unnamed personage pointed where they had gone. Rashi suggests that this anonymous man was the angel Gabriel, literally, a man of G-d (Gavri-El). The Ramban adds that he was merely a mortal, probably unaware of the function he was performing, but thanks to him, Joseph - and the entire family of Israel - realized their destiny through the enslavement in and exodus from Egypt.

Rabbenu Tzadok, the famed Pri Tzaddik of Lublin, records how he learned one of the most important lessons of his life from a Gentile Polish peasant, whose wagon had collapsed. The peasant asked him to help to gather the hay that had fallen to the ground. "I can't," said the Pri Tzaddik. "You mean you won't," said the peasant. "If you wanted to, you could." As he helped the farmer gather the hay, the rabbi felt the great importance of the lesson G-d had taught him through the mouth of this peasant. Our challenge is to sensitize our hearts, minds and souls to every one of our human encounters - and to listen for the emanations of the Divine messages.

Many years ago, when visiting our Ohr Torah Stone rabbinical emissaries in Germany, I was invited to speak in a synagogue in Munich. The congregation consisted of approximately 150 Polish Jews, survivors of the Holocaust, who had come from DP camps outside the city. They had remained in Germany after the war to begin new families and successful businesses.

It was the strangest congregation that I have ever encountered. It was not only that people were engaged in conversation during the prayers; they acted as if there wasn't a synagogue service being conducted in the room at all. They walked around, conversed, and called out to friends from the windows. And although they were respectfully silent for the fifteen or twenty minutes that I spoke, I could not understand why they came to shul!

My host gave me the answer. "Every one of them lost most, if not all, of his family in the Holocaust. They cannot live with G-d and they cannot live without G-d. They are traditional Jews, so they come to synagogue, but it is as if they are on strike: they speak to each other, but not to G-d. They are too angry to speak with him. And they let Him know how angry they feel by speaking to each other when the service dictates they should be speaking to Him!"

I think about this synagogue a great deal. I even admire their faith; after all, if they questioned G-d's existence, they couldn't be angry at Him. I even believe G-d loves their "prayers." Does not G-d Himself say according to the Midrash Rabbah, "Would that you forget about Me and remember my children"?

Rav Haim Vital teaches that when we enter the synagogue to pray, we must intone the verse, "You shall love your friend like yourself", since closeness to G-d must bring us close to all humanity, to all G-d's children. As the anonymous poet wrote: I looked for myself and could not find me

I sought my G-d and couldn't find Thee I reached out to others and found all three." © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The book of Shemot concludes with a key message for Jews - accountability. The Torah records for us how the Mishkan was actually built and then it records for us a detailed accounting of how the donations for its building were actually spent and accounted for. The Torah holds Bezalel and Ahaliav accountable for their talents and industry. Their actual efforts and final accomplishments are compared to the original plans for the Mishkan as detailed to us in parshiyot Trumah and Tetzaveh.

The praise for the architects, supervisors and builders of the Mishkan is that they did not deviate from the original plans and fulfilled their tasks completely and enthusiastically - with a full heart and great commitment. They fulfilled their obligation of accountability to G-d and man.

There can be no greater accomplishment for a human being than fulfilling that obligation of accountability. It disciplines our minds and our behavior and creates a responsible and secure society. Much of the Jewish world today says openly or subliminally: "Don't count on me." People do not want to commit themselves to marriage, to ideals, to the Torah or the Jewish people. They do not want to engage with the test of accountability so they avoid the issue completely.

The Jewish future cannot be built on people who do not wish to be held accountable for the use of their lives, their talents and their material blessings. That is really the most important message that these parshiyot impart to us. And make no mistake about it,

Judaism holds all human beings accountable in an exact fashion.

The Torah also holds Moshe accountable for the materials that were collected in order to construct the Mishkan. Every item that was donated has to be accounted for. The story is told about a bookkeeper for a certain company that was unable to balance the books of the company. He was off by five dollars. So he simply left a five dollar bill in the ledger and went home. That type of accounting is not acceptable when it comes to dealing with public funds.

Moshe feels compelled to account for every piece of silver donated to the construction of the Mishkan. And when he finds the books don't balance, he is terror stricken until he remembers that the missing amount of silver was used to manufacture the hooks that held the curtains of the Mishkan upright and taut. Only then is he relieved and his leadership role is again justified and secure.

A leader, more than the average person or simple citizen, is held to the highest possible standard of fiscal and moral accountability. The Bible records for us how the kings of Judah and Israel were continually reminded and often chastised by the prophets of their times for failing this test of responsible accountability. The Torah states the matter succinctly: "And you shall be found innocent and blameless before G-d and Israel."

The Torah demands accountability and is loath to accept excuses. A generation that does not feel itself accountable to the Jewish past and to the Jewish future fails miserably in its role as being the conduit of Jewish life and holiness. © 2012 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd he made a screen for the doorway of the tent (Sh'mos 36:37) and its five pillars and their hooks, and he coated their tops and decorated them with gold (36:38).” One of the advantages of being taught about the Mishkan in such detail is that it gives us the opportunity to compare how each element was described when it was commanded with how it was described when it was made. When the pillars that supported the screen were first mentioned (Sh'mos 26:37), they were supposed to be "coated with gold, and their hooks gold," yet when they were made, only their tops were coated with gold, with some additional gold used to decorate it. [No mention is made regarding what material its hooks were actually made from, but if the tops of the pillars were gold and the decorative trim was gold, the hooks attached to the pillars being gold may not need to be mentioned.] Why

were the pillars that stood in the doorway of the Mishkan/Ohel originally described as being coated with gold, if, when actually made, only part of each pillar was gold-plated?

Malbim (Sh'mos 27:10) raises this issue, without suggesting an answer. Netziv (36:38) does as well, suggesting that these pillars were completely coated with gold, but an extra layer was added on the top, as well as additional golden decorations. Chizkuni puts this discrepancy in the category of "things that Betzalel understood despite Moshe's instructions not being complete." The implication is similar to Netziv's explanation, with Betzalel realizing that besides being completely coated with gold, these pillars had additional golden ornamentation. It is also possible that the expression "coat them with gold" didn't mean the entire pillar; Betzalel understood that, which is reflected in the description of how the pillars were made.

Several Rabbonim (sh'lita) have suggested that differences between the commandment to build the Mishkan and how it was built can be attributed to how the Mishkan would have been had there been no sin of the golden calf compared to how it actually was, after the sin occurred. There were differences regarding other things, such as the nature of the Luchos (see Nesivos/Nachalas Yaakov and Beis HaLevi), based on the different spiritual level the nation had been on before the sin and the level they were on afterwards; it makes sense that the way the nation related to G-d through the Mishkan changed as well. Ramban (Vayikra 9:2) tells us that the special offerings brought on the "Eighth day" only became necessary because of the sin of the golden calf; Rav Meir Spiegelman (<http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.64/22vayakhel%20pekudei.htm>) and Rav Nathaniel Helfgott (<http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha/20tetzav.htm>) extend this to the "Seven Days of Consecration" as well (albeit in different ways). Rav Moshe Shamah ("Recalling the Covenant," pgs. 449-450) and Rabbi Spiegelman apply this concept to the Golden Altar, using it to explain why it wasn't commanded with the other vessels that function inside the Mishkan's sanctuary, and why the Torah implies that the Copper Altar would be the only altar operating in the Mishkan (Sh'mos 27:1). [Even though the ingredients for the incense were included in the list of things to be donated (25:6), they may have originally only been intended to be used when the Kohain Gadol (or Moshe) entered the inner sanctum, the Kodesh HaKadashim (Holy of Holies), placed upon a fire-pan.] Only after the sin of the golden calf, when a daily appeasement of incense became necessary, did the Golden Altar become a primary part of the service. Rabbi Spiegelman also applies this concept to explain why the pillars that supported the screen at the entrance of the Mishkan were made differently than the way Moshe had originally been commanded, as does Rabbi Avrom Shain (Birkas Ish). I would like to synthesize and build upon their ideas, and present a possible

explanation for why these pillars were different as a result of the sin of the golden calf.

There is a discussion as to whether the screen was hung from the east side of these pillars, adjacent to the courtyard of the Mishkan, or on the west side of the pillars, adjacent to the vertical beams (k'rashim) in the southeast and northeast corners of the Mishkan. The location of the screen would determine whether the pillars themselves would be considered part of the Mishkan (if they were within the screen that separated between the Mishkan and its courtyard) or part of the courtyard (if they were outside the screen).

If these pillars were part of the Mishkan, it would follow that their appearance would be similar to the rest of the Mishkan's structure, i.e. completely coated with gold, like its beams (see Sh'mos 26:29). If, on the other hand, these pillars were not part of the Mishkan itself, but in the courtyard, we would expect them to resemble the other pillars in the courtyard—the ones that held up its outer curtains. These pillars were not completely coated with a precious metal (in this case, silver), only their tops were (see 38:19; compare with 27:17), and they were decorated with the same precious metal that their tops were coated with. It would therefore seem that originally these pillars were supposed to be part of the Mishkan structure, completely coated with gold, with the screen on the east (outside). After the sin of the golden calf, though, this changed, and the screen was moved to their western side, and the precious metal (gold, to match the gold used for the Mishkan's walls) only covered the tops of the pillars and decorated the rest of the pillar, consistent with the courtyard's other pillars. (It's possible that having only golden decorations was not enough, so the tops were coated as well, which, in turn, caused the tops of the outer pillars to be coated as well, to match.) The question becomes how the sin of the golden calf relates to this change.

Rabbi Shain suggests that the Mishkan represented the Children of Israel, since both were holy in their own right, while the courtyard represented the Eirev Rav, the mixed multitude of people that joined the Children of Israel when they left Egypt; just as the courtyard of the Mishkan didn't have any holiness without the Mishkan within it, so too the Eirev Rav needed their connection with the Children of Israel for their holiness. The sin of the golden calf was committed by the Eirev Rav, but it affected the Children of Israel as well, because (Rabbi Shain says) they didn't protect themselves well enough. This deficiency manifested itself through the change in the pillars (where the Mishkan meets/connects with the courtyard), which were no longer fully coated with gold. I would add that because of this deficiency, the nature of how we connect with those we are trying to positively influence changed as well.

The area of the [thickness of the] pillars is where the Mishkan met the courtyard, and represents

the area where "teachers" are engaged with "students" who are trying to become closer to G-d. [Kohanim served as the spiritual advisors of the nation; Kohanim were allowed in the Mishkan, while the rest of the nation was allowed in the courtyard.] But who influences whom more? If the possibility exists that values and goals can change through such contact, is there a guarantee that the change will only be one way? Although it is far more likely that the one coming to the "Mishkan" for guidance will change than the Kohain who "works" in the Mishkan changing, and there are times when the one doing outreach gains as much (or more) from the process, there is a danger that the "Kohain" will be adversely affected. If this engagement occurs in the "Mishkan" itself, the risk spreads beyond the individual "Kohain;" the very nature of the "Mishkan" could be compromised. This is exactly what happened as a result of the nation's interaction with the Eirev Rav, despite the fact that after Matan Torah (the public revelation on Mt Sinai) they had reached the level of Adam before he sinned, and didn't need a Mishkan for G-d's divine presence to rest upon them (see Meshech Chuchmuh on Sh'mos 35:2-3). It was therefore made clear that, from then on, even though it is a worthwhile endeavor, engaging others to try to positively influence them is considered leaving "home" (i.e. the "Mishkan") and entering foreign territory. Instead of the pillars in the passageway that connects the Mishkan with the courtyard being part of the Mishkan, they were in the courtyard. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

A Little Bit More

Mazel Tov! After a magnanimous show of unity, men and women of all the shevatim opened their hearts, minds, talents and purses to complete the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, in the desert. In the next two Torah parshiyos (Torah portions), the Torah summarizes the accomplishment by detailing the work that was done by Betzalel and the devoted artisans and craftsmen.

Moshe declares the success of the campaign and the generosity of the donors by announcing, that "the work (and contributions) had been enough for all the work, to do it—and there was extra" (Exodus 36:7). Not only was there enough for the completion of the task—there was extra.

But many commentaries are concerned about Moshe's seemingly strange expression of completion. "There was enough, and there was extra." After all, if there was enough, then there was not extra. And if there was extra then it should not be called enough! Further, what is the difference if there was extra or not?

In the whY I Matter Parsha sheet by the Young Israel of Midwood Edited by Yedidye Hirtenfeld, I saw the following story about one of the great sefardic chachamim of our generation, R' Ben Zion Abba Shail,

z"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Porat Yosef in Yerushalayim.

When R' Ben Zion was about 20 years old, and learning at Yeshivat Porat Yosef, one of the leading American sages, R' Eliezer Silver, came to the Yeshiva in the company of a wealthy American who was investigating which yeshiva was most worthy of his sizable donation. R' Ben Zion was chosen as the student to be tested by R' Silver who asked the young scholar a question in the obscure area of Taharat (laws of ritual purity). When R' Ben Zion gave his answer, R' Silver said that he had asked the same question 40 years earlier to R' Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk (author of *Ohr Sameach* and *Meshech Chochmah*) and had received the same answer. R' Ben Zion later told R' Attiah that he had a second answer to the question as well, but since the first answer sufficed to secure the donation, offering a second answer might have been considered showing-off.

I was curious as to why R' Benzion actually related that he had an extra answer, even though he did not offer it. Isn't that showing off as well?

Maybe the answer lies within these verses.

Magnanimous giving is not only in the fulfillment of the request, but in the way it is fulfilled. The noble manner in which something is prepared- in a way that there is always more, or with a desire to give even more, is an indicator of the significance of the actual gift that was eventually given.

When one has the ability, the desire and preparedness to give not only what he is asked, but to even give more, then we know that the original gift is not a begrudged offering, it is as special as if more was actually given. © 2012 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's Haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Parah, describes the Jewish people's state of purity in the time of Mashiach. Hashem reminds them of their sinful behavior that kindled His wrath and sent them into exile. After endless years of darkness Hashem will purify His children and return them home. The prophet Yechezkel says in Hashem's name, "And I will sprinkle pure waters upon you that will be purify you from all your impurities and repulsive actions..." (36:25) Yechezkel is referring to the Jewish people's ultimate state of purity wherein Hashem will totally cleanse them from sin. Yechezkel compares this spiritual cleansing to purification from ritual impurity. It is worthwhile to understand this particular analogy. Instead of comparing this purification to the traditional immersion process Yechezkel compares it to the sprinkling of the red heifer waters. This detailed and mysterious procedure purified one from direct contact with a corpse. Such contact produced the most severe state of ritual impurity and required a unique purification

process. Yechezkel's analogy suggests a direct corollary between sin and death. Apparently, the ultimate removal of sin is similar to the removal of the impurity of death.

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

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

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

We can further develop this through Sefer Hachinuch's understanding of the red heifer and its ritual mixture. He explains death's ritual impurity in the following manner. When one passes away, his soul departs from his body leaving behind a total physical entity. The body, barren of any trace of spirituality, projects a penetrating image of vanity and reflects a lifetime of earthly urges and sinful practices. Direct contact with a barren body damages one's spirituality

and renders him ritually impure. This impure status has a positive effect and forces one to view his body and its effects in a different manner. His impure predicament reminds him that his body was meant to unite with his soul and he helps one senses the repulse of total earthly cravings. (Sefer Hachinuch Mitzva 263)

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

We now understand the red heifer's crucial role in the purification process. We realize that atonement from the golden calf was a prerequisite for ritual purity. Hashem introduced this impurity to assist one in detaching himself from his physical drives. One's impure state sent him a clear message about the body's shameful role in sin. However, one was reminded that his physical cravings were not necessarily part of his Jewish psyche. There was a time in the Jewish people's history where body and soul craved for something of true content and substance namely, association with Hashem. The first step of purification was to contemplate the damaging effect of physical drives. After detaching oneself from his deep rooted urges the red heifer mixture completed the process. Its goal was to remind one of his true potential, to unify body and soul thereby achieving spiritual perfection.

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

The analogy of the purifying waters is now complete. Throughout the years, the red heifer's sacrificial waters purified one from association with earthly cravings. The ritual mix removed ritual impurity

and reduced one's sinful urges. In addition, the atonement process brought one in contact with his soul's innermost cravings, to cleave to Hashem. It linked one to his glorious past at Har Sinai and inspired him to his glorious future in Meshiach's times. And it will ultimately complete its role and detach the Jewish people from all physical drives and passions and direct body and soul's total focus towards Hashem.

How timely is this lesson immediately following Purim with our sights set on Pesach. The mitzvos of Purim allows us to contact our innermost feelings and ascertain our true essence. After this uplifting experience we begin preparing for our total redemption. Indeed, the Sages teach us that as the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the month of Nissan they will be ultimately redeemed in that same month. May we merit that this refer to our upcoming Nissan. © 2012 *Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org*

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the double-parsha of Vayakhel-Pekudai and complete the Sefer {Book of} Shmos.

These two Parshios deal with the actual production of the Mishkan {Tabernacle}, its vessels and the garments of the Kohanim {priests}. Once that had been completed, Shmos concludes with the Shchinah {Hashem's presence} filling the Mishkan. The Ramban explains that Shmos, the Sefer of exile and redemption, ends with Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} being in that ultimate redeemed state of intense closeness to Hashem.

Pekudai begins with an exact accounting of the donations that were given toward the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels. "These are the accounts of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of testimony (that Hashem had forgiven the sin of the golden calf by having His Shchinah dwell among them-Rashi), that were accounted through Moshe. [38:21]"

The Ohr HaChaim, based on the Medrash [Shmos Rabbah 30:3], points out that there are times when the Torah states "V'Aileh-And these" and there are times when it states "Aileh-these." He explains that "V'Aileh-And these" comes to add to whatever had been mentioned before. "Aileh- these" means these and these alone-no others.

As such, he explains that the Torah is teaching us that this accounting of the donations for the Mishkan is the only true counting that exists! This is a counting that will stand for all eternity-its merit will never be taken away from those who gave-as it contributed toward Hashem's presence entering this world.

However, any counting or accounting that a person makes of his alleged acquisitions and property is not a true counting. (I don't think I'll hear any dissent from stockowners...) That, he explains, is contained within the Hebrew word for money "mamone." It is

actually a composite of two words: "ma," meaning what, and "mone" meaning count. In other words, what are you counting? It's not really yours!

I once heard a similar idea expressed, pointing out that the Talmudic term for coins is "zuz" which means to move. The wealth moves around-it never really belongs to someone. Coins are always round...

It's amazing how our view of the world can be so off as compared to the Torah's view. We feel that when we count what we have, that is ours. What we've given away is gone, goodbye! The Torah here is teaching us the exact opposite. That which is given toward worthwhile causes is ours for eternity. That which we have is just waiting to roll away...

The other day, a similar idea came out in a different way. I was studying Mesilas Yesharim {The Path of the Just by the Ramcha"} with one of my students and the topic was purifying oneself in interpersonal relationships. The Torah forbids taking revenge and even just harboring any ill will in one's heart. If one refused to lend you something and then asks to borrow something from you, it is forbidden to refuse him as revenge for his having refused you. Furthermore, it is even forbidden to lend to him while pointing out the difference between his and your response. The Ramcha"l writes that you need to purify yourself to the point that your actions will bear no reminder or even a tinge of the wrong that was done to you.

This student was bothered by this and presented the following scenario. A boy refuses to lend out some of his CD's to a friend and then, a few days later, he asks to borrow something from that friend. How is it humanly possible to wholeheartedly go ahead and lend to him after he refused you!

We at first explored the possibilities of judging favorably and trying to assume that there is a very good reason why the other person didn't lend. I then realized that perhaps we were totally missing the point. We were looking at things through our eyes and ignoring the Torah viewpoint. "If a friend didn't want to take a million dollars for himself but later offered you a million dollars, would you harbor any ill will against him?" I asked. "Of course not," he answered, wondering what I was getting at. I explained that when a person lends or does any act of kindness, the mitzvah {commandment} he fulfills acquires a 'chunk' of eternity that is worth far more than a million dollars. The other person, by refusing to lend, passed up a million bucks. Now when he asks to borrow, he's offering a million dollar opportunity. Does it make any sense to 'take revenge' by passing up that opportunity?

Once again, our view of a situation was the opposite of the Torah's. That which is given away actually becomes ours for eternity. That which we hold on to is just waiting to roll away...

"Aileh-these." Only that which was given toward the Mishkan-toward Hashem's Presence being brought

into this world-could really be counted. In order for us to once again have that Presence evident, we must use the Torah's viewpoint to see what really counts. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why was the kiyor—the basin used by the priest to wash his hands and feet before serving in the Temple—made from the mirrors used by women? (Exodus 38:8) Ibn Ezra notes that mirrors were used by the women to "beautify themselves." "But," adds Ibn Ezra, "there were pious women in Israel who overcame their worldly temptation and freely gave away their mirrors."

For Ibn Ezra the kiyor came from these mirrors as they represented a denial of the physical. Here, holiness according to Ibn Ezra is attained by rejecting "worldly temptation."

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, takes an opposite approach. The mirrors contributed for the kiyor had been previously used by Jewish women to make themselves more attractive. When the women brought the mirrors to the Tabernacle, "Moshe (Moses) rejected them because they were made to satisfy the evil inclination. Whereupon the Holy One Blessed Be He said to him, accept! These are dearer to me than everything else, because through them the women raised up countless hosts in Egypt. When their husbands were weary from the hard labor, they would take the mirrors (to them in the fields). Each one would look into the mirror together with her husband and egg him on with words saying: I am more comely than you! In the course of this they would arouse their husbands' desire and copulate, becoming pregnant and giving birth." For Rashi even mirrors can be used for lofty purposes. The mirrors were instrumental for Jewish continuity in Egypt, even as the mirrors helped sanctify the very basin used by the priests to prepare themselves for the Temple service.

The message: There is nothing which is fundamentally unholy. Everything in the world has the capacity to become holy. Even mirrors.

It is told that after being shown the Chabad women's dormitory, the Lubavitcher Rebbe remarked that the dorm was beautiful but needed mirrors. An echo of things past; of the kiyor made from mirrors. ©1998 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns

