

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Leaders can fail for two kinds of reason. The first is external. The time may not be right. The conditions may be unfavourable. There may be no one on the other side to talk to. When British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was asked what was the most difficult thing he had to deal with in government, he replied, “Events, dear boy, events.” Machiavelli called this Fortuna: the power of bad luck that can defeat even the greatest. Sometimes despite your best efforts, you fail. Such is life.

The second kind of failure is internal. A leader can simply lack the courage to lead. Sometimes leaders have to oppose the crowd. They have to say No when everyone else is crying Yes. That can be terrifying. Crowds have a will and momentum of their own. To say No may be to put your career, even your life, at risk. That is when courage is needed, and not showing it can constitute a moral failure of the worst kind.

The classic example is King Saul, who failed to carry out Samuel’s instructions in his battle against the Amalekites. Saul was told to spare no one and nothing. This is what happened, as told in 1 Samuel 15:

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.”

But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?”

Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your G-d, but we totally destroyed the rest.”

“Enough!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.” “Tell me,” Saul replied.

Samuel said, “Although you may be small in your own eyes, are you not head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you

on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?”

“But I did obey the Lord,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to G-d, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your G-d at Gilgal.”

Saul makes excuses. The failure was not his; it was his soldiers’. Besides which, he and they had the best intentions. The sheep and cattle were spared to offer as sacrifices. Saul did not kill King Agag but brought him back as a prisoner. Samuel is unmoved. He says, “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.” Only then does Saul admit, “I have sinned.” But by then it was too late. His career as a leader was at an end.

There is an apocryphal quote attributed to several politicians: “Of course I follow the party. After all, I am their leader.” There are leaders who follow instead of leading. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter compared them to a dog taken by its master for a walk. The dog runs on ahead, but keeps turning around to see whether it is going in the direction the master wants it to go. The dog may think it is leading but actually it is following.

That, on a plain reading of the text, was the fate of Aaron in this week’s parsha. Moses had been up the mountain for forty days. The people were afraid. Had he died? Where was he? Without Moses they felt bereft. He was their point of contact with G-d. He performed the miracles, divided the Sea, gave them water to drink and food to eat. This is how the Torah describes what happened next: When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us a god who will go before us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ 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 he fashioned it with a tool and made it into a molten calf. Then they said, ‘This is your god, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ (Ex. 32: 1-4)

G-d became angry. Moses pleaded with Him to

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Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weiss עמו"ש
(a.k.a. Zaydy Moshe)
on the occasion of his 95th birthday! בע"ה
May we celebrate many more years together with
you, in happiness, health and prosperity!

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spare the people. He then descended the mountain, saw what had happened, smashed the tablets of the law he had brought down with him, burned the idol, ground it to powder, mixed it with water and made the Israelites drink it. Then he turned to Aaron his brother and said, "What have you done?"

"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 man 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 jewellery, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (Ex. 32: 22-24)

Aaron blamed the people. It was they who made the illegitimate request. He denied responsibility for making the calf. It just happened. "I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" This is the same kind of denial of responsibility we recall from the story of Adam and Eve. The man says, "It was the woman." The woman says, "It was the serpent." It happened. It wasn't me. I was the victim not the perpetrator. In anyone such evasion is a moral failure; in a leader, all the more so.

The odd fact is that Aaron was not immediately punished. According to the Torah he was condemned for another sin altogether when, years later, he and Moses spoke angrily against the people complaining about lack of water: "Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah" (Num. 20: 24).

It was only later still, in the last month of Moses' life, that Moses told the people a fact that he had kept from them until now: I feared the anger and wrath of the Lord, for he was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the Lord listened to me. And the Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too. (Deut. 9: 19-20)

G-d, according to Moses, was so angry with Aaron for the sin of the golden calf that He was about to kill him, and would have done so had it not been for Moses' prayer.

It is easy to be critical of people who fail the leadership test when it involves opposing the crowd, defying the consensus, blocking the path the majority are intent on taking. The truth is that it is hard to oppose the mob. They can ignore you, remove you, even

assassinate you. When a crowd gets out of control there is no elegant solution. Even Moses was helpless in the face of the people at the later episode of the spies (Num. 14: 5).

Nor was it easy for Moses to restore order now. He did so only by the most dramatic action: smashing the tablets and grinding the calf to dust. He then asked for support and was given it by his fellow Levites. They took reprisals against the crowd, killing three thousand people that day. History judges Moses a hero but he might well have been seen by his contemporaries as a brutal autocrat. We, thanks to the Torah, know what passed between G-d and Moses at the time. The Israelites at the foot of the mountain knew nothing of how close they had come to being utterly destroyed.

Tradition dealt kindly with Aaron. He is portrayed as a man of peace. Perhaps that is why he was made High Priest. There is more than one kind of leadership, and priesthood involves following rules, not taking stands and swaying crowds. The fact that Aaron was not a leader in the same mould as Moses does not mean that he was a failure. It means that he was made for a different kind of role. There are times when you need someone with the courage to stand against the crowd, others when you need a peacemaker. Moses and Aaron were different types. Aaron failed when he was called on to be a Moses, but he became a great leader in his own right in a different capacity. Aaron and Moses complemented one another. No one person can do everything.

The truth is that when a crowd runs out of control, there is no easy answer. That is why the whole of Judaism is an extended seminar in individual and collective responsibility. Jews don't, or shouldn't, form crowds. When they do, it may take a Moses to restore order. But it may take an Aaron, at other times, to maintain the peace. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**W**hen Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" (Exodus 34:29)

What is the significance of the dazzling radiance of Moses' face and why did it not attain this shining glow until he received the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur? And, perhaps the most difficult question of all, why did Moses break the First Tablets? Yes, he was bitterly disappointed, perhaps even angry, at the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf only forty days after G-d's first Revelation on Shavuot; however, these tablets were "the work of G-d and they were the writing of G-d." (Ex. 32:16) How could the holiest human being take the holiest object on earth and smash it to

smithereens? Was he not adding to Israel's sin, pouring salt on the wounds of the Almighty (as it were)?

My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik ztz"l, taught that Moses emerges from our Biblical portion of Ki Tisa not only as the greatest prophet of the generations but also as the exalted rebbe of Klal Israel, as Moshe Rabbeinu: Moses the teacher and master of all the generations. This unique transformation of his personality took place on Yom Kippur; it is the sobriquet of Rebbe that occasions the rays of splendor which shone forth from his countenance. (See Rabbi Avishai David, Darosh Darash Yosef, p. 188 ff).

The Midrash on the first verse of the Book of Leviticus, "And (G-d) called out to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting" provokes a remarkable insight. The Biblical word for "called out" in this text is *vayiker*, a word which suggests a mere chance encounter rather than an actual summoning or calling out of the Divine (*vayikra*); indeed, our Masoretic text places a small aleph at the end of the word. The Midrash explains that it was Moses' modesty which insisted upon an almost accidental meeting rather than a direct summons. However, when G-d completed the writing down of the Five Books, there was a small amount of ink left over from that small letter aleph; the Almighty lovingly placed the overage of sacred ink on Moses' forehead, which accounts for the glorious splendor which emanated from his face.

Allow me to add to this Midrash on the basis of the teaching of Rabbi Soloveitchik. The essence of the Second Tablets included Torah She-be'al Peh, the Oral Law, the human input of the great Torah Sages throughout the generations which had been absent from the first tablets. Hence chapter 34 of our Biblical portion opens with G-d's command to Moses, "Hew for yourself two stone tablets." You, Moses, are to do the engraving, not Me, G-d; the first tablets were hewn by G-d and the commandments were engraved by G-d, whereas the Second Tablets were hewn by the human being Moses and the commands were engraved by him. The chapter concludes: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Write for yourself these words for on the basis of these words [the Oral Law, the hermeneutic principles and the interpretations of the rabbis of each generation] have I established an [eternal] covenant with Israel" (Ex. 34:27).

Rabbi Soloveitchik maintains that during the 40 days from Rosh Hodesh Elul to Yom Kippur, Moses re-learned the 613 commandments with the many possibilities of the Oral Law; Moses' active intellect became the "receiver" for the active intellect of the Divine, having received all of the manifold potential possibilities of the future developments of Torah throughout the generations. This is the meaning of the Talmudic adage that "Every authentic scholar ("talmid vatik") who presents a novel teaching is merely recycling Torah from Sinai." (Midrash Vayikra Rabba 22) In this manner, Moses' personality became totally

identified and intertwined with Torah, a sacred combination of the Divine words and the interpretations of Moses. Moses became a living Sefer Torah, a "ministering vessel" (*kli sharet*) which can never lose its sanctity.

The Beit Halevi (Rav Yosef Dov Baer Halevi Soloveitchik, the great grand-father of my teacher) maintains that the special radiance which emanated from Moses' countenance originated from the concentrated sanctity of Moses' identity with the many aspects of the Oral Torah which his own generation was not yet ready to hear, but which Moses kept within himself, for later generations. Whenever the inner world of the individual is more than it appears to be on the surface, that inner radiance becomes increasingly pronounced and externally manifest. Moses' radiant glow was Oral Torah, something not at all germane to the First Tablets containing only the Written Law.

Why did Moses break the First Tablets? Moses understood that there was a desperate need for a second set of tablets, born of G-d's consummate love and unconditional forgiveness, with an Oral Law which would empower the nation to be G-d's partners in the developing Torah. But G-d had threatened to destroy the nation! Moses breaks the first tablets as a message to G-d: just as the tablets are considered to be "ministering vessels" which never lose their sanctity, even if broken, so are the Jewish people, Knesset Yisrael, teachers and students of Torah, "ministering vessels", which will never lose their sanctity, even if G-d attempts to break them! The Jewish nation, repositories of the oral teachings, are heirs to the eternal sanctity of Moses their Rebbe. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Though the main topic of this week's parsha is certainly the fateful and nearly fatal incident of the Golden Calf, the opening subject of the parsha also bears study and insight. We see throughout the Torah that there is an emphasis placed on counting the numbers of Jews that left Egypt, those that existed in the Sinai desert and finally, those that arrived in the Land of Israel.

In this week's parsha the Torah provides us with the "Jewish" way of counting the people of Israel. We do not count people directly but rather indirectly, as is the case of the half-shekel tax that was imposed by Divine commandment at the beginning of this week's parsha. The number of Jews present and accounted for was arrived at by counting the number of half-shekels that were collected.

We also see later in Jewish history, at the time of King Saul, when he wanted to conduct a census of Israel he did so by having everyone donate a sheep. He then counted the sheep, again not counting the people

directly. Even when we count the ten people necessary for a prayer quorum we do not count them directly but rather only by counting the number of words that appear in a certain verse in the Bible.

The Talmud teaches us that King David was found guilty and punished for counting the people directly during his reign. Why is the Torah so interested in the numbers of Jewish population? And why is the Torah so loath to count people in a direct manner?

Even today, the census here in Israel, unlike the ones I remember in the United States, is taken indirectly and no one has ever appeared at my door here in Jerusalem to count how many people live in our home. Apparently this is the "Jewish" way of determining population numbers, always in an indirect fashion.

I think that the lesson here is fairly obvious. No two people are alike and each one is really number one by himself or herself. There is no number two because there is no one else like number one. The uniqueness of every individual is one of the axioms of Jewish life and thought. While people may appear to be similar they are never identical.

Fingerprints and DNA testify to this phenomenon in the physical world. In the spiritual and personal world of our souls, personalities, creativity and accomplishments are unique to each one of us. We are all different for so have we been created by the Lord.

The Torah treats every individual as special and because of this places a emphasis on the numbers of the Jewish people. Look and see how many different people exist within us and yet somehow we are all connected and part of the great whole that is the people of Israel! By counting people directly we somehow minimize their individual qualities and uniqueness.

The Torah, which is interested always in promoting individuality and creativity, counts us many times to indicate our importance, but never directly. The Talmud teaches us that the greatness of G-d can be seen in the fact that all human beings are stamped from the same die and yet no two are alike.

The Torah wishes us to understand and appreciate this lesson and transmit it to our lives through our actions and attitudes, our behavior and sensitivities. By so doing we "raise our heads" – ki tisa et rosh bnei yisrael - and become worthy of the Lord counting us amongst the eternal people of Israel. ©2014 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

Upon seeing the nation worshipping the golden calf (Sh'mos 32:19), Moshe shattered the Luchos, the stone tablets that were "G-d's handiwork, with

G-d's writing engraved into them" (32:16). This "writing" was, at the very least, the "Ten Commandments," the directives G-d spoke during His public revelation on Mt. Sinai (see D'varim 4:13 and Rashi on Sh'mos 24:12), an event that had occurred a mere 41 days prior to this incident (from the 6th or 7th of Nisan until the 17th of Tamuz). Since the nation started worshipping the golden calf early on the morning of the 17th (Sh'mos 32:6), and Moshe didn't descend until hours later (see Rashi on 32:1), how could G-d give Moshe the Luchos at all? G-d approved of Moshe breaking them (see Shabbos 87a), so why give them to Moshe in the first place?

Chizkuni (Sh'mos 31:18) says that G-d gave Moshe the Luchos "at the end of the 16th of Tamuz" (these are his words as they appear in the manuscript; many printed editions say "as morning broke" instead). If so, G-d gave Moshe the Luchos before the sinning had started (even if He gave them to Moshe "as morning broke," it was still before they sinned); for all we know G-d would not have given him the Luchos had the nation already begun to worship the golden calf. [Even though the golden calf was formed the day before (32:4-6), Aharon's intentions were pure (see Rashi on 32:5), and it was only the "Eiruv Rav" who sinned on the 16th (see Rashi on 32:4); the Children of Israel didn't sin until early on the 17th.] The Torah does tell us that G-d gave Moshe the Luchos before it tells us about the golden calf, indicating that they were given to him before the sinning began.

Aside from side-stepping the issue of G-d giving Moshe the Luchos after the nation had sinned, Chizkuni's approach helps address another issue. The Torah says that Moshe "was late coming down from the mountain" (32:1), which is understood to mean that there was a miscommunication between Moshe and the people about when he would return (see Rashi). However, if Moshe wasn't really late (only that they thought he was late), why does the Torah phrase it as if Moshe really was late? Based on Chizkuni's approach, we can understand why the Torah says that Moshe tarried before he came back down; G-d didn't give Moshe the Luchos until He had "finished speaking with [Moshe]" (31:18), so there was no imperative for Moshe to stay atop Mt. Sinai any longer. He may have wanted to, in order to extend the unique spiritual experience for as long as possible, but he certainly didn't have to. (Much can be inserted here about the balance between the need for a leader to forgo personal benefit in order to be fully devoted to the community with the need for a leader to continue his or her personal growth in order to be able to better serve the community.) After daybreak, Moshe could have descended Mt. Sinai, with the Luchos, and been there in time to prevent the tragedy of the golden calf. Instead, because he "tarried," the sinning began. Although the "tarrying" is mentioned on the 16th, which was before Moshe was given the Luchos and before his work atop Mt. Sinai was done (so

the misunderstanding about when he would return allowed the process of making the golden calf to begin), because he actually did "tarry" on the 17th, the Torah says "he tarried" rather than that "the people thought he had tarried." [This explanation is supported by the wording of Midrash Tehillim (18:13) which says "when Moshe went up on high and remained there and Israel made the calf." There is no reason to include "and remained there" if his staying longer than necessary was not a contributing factor.]

Many Midrashim connect the word "as He finished," (Sh'mos 31:18) which has the root letters of kaf-lamed-hey, with the Hebrew word for "bride," which has the same letters (likely because that is when she is considered "complete," an inverted version of the old joke that a man is not complete until he's married; then he's finished), comparing the giving of the Luchos to things that occur when a bride gets married. Midrash HaGadol compares it to a king who was getting engaged to a woman, but was afraid to give her an engagement ring (or whatever jewelry would have been expected at an engagement) in case she denied that they were ever engaged, yet keeps the jewelry. At the same time, the king didn't want to hold on to it lest she accuse him of promising to give her jewelry without ever intending to give it to her. To avoid this, the king gave the jewelry to a third party, so that she knew that he did intend on giving it to her without risking her keeping it without going through with the marriage. Similarly, Moshe was a "third party" when he received the Luchos, indicating that they were not yet being given to the nation. If Moshe was given the Luchos to indicate that G-d was willing to give them to us, but not until they committed to only worshipping the One True G-d, it would not be problematic that He gave them to Moshe even after the sin of the golden calf (since the "gift" was contingent on a subsequent recommitment to G-d).

The commentators on Rashi discuss why he insists (31:18) that the commandment to build the Mishkan couldn't have come before the sin of the golden calf (in some editions of Rashi, the publisher asks this question without suggesting an answer; I am also puzzled by it, and haven't found a satisfactory answer). In his expansion of Mizrachi's approach, B'er Yitzchok differentiates between G-d commanding the Mishkan despite knowing that the nation would sin (which Mizrachi says He wouldn't do since He would have to repeat the commandment anyway after they repented; I don't understand why this is different from teaching Moshe the rest of the Torah, or why He couldn't just say "the Mishkan is back on" after they repented without having to repeat every detail) and giving Moshe the Luchos despite knowing they would sin. Although neither (Mizrachi or B'er Yitzchok) see any reason for G-d to teach Moshe about the Mishkan if it wasn't relevant until after Moshe achieves forgiveness for them, B'er Yitzchok adds that G-d gave Moshe the Luchos so that he would break them, thereby

demonstrating to the nation how serious their offense was, which was instrumental in their repentance. If this was enough of a reason to give Moshe the Luchos despite knowing that they were about to worship the golden calf, it would also be enough of a reason to give them if they were given after sinning had started. Nevertheless, it would seem that there is a more fundamental reason why G-d gave Moshe the Luchos despite either knowing that the nation would sin or despite their having already started to.

Before Moshe descended Mt. Sinai with the Luchos, G-d had already retracted his threat to wipe out the nation (32:14-15). [It should be noted that according to Chizkuni (32:11), based on Ibn Ezra (ibid) and possibly the Midrash quoted by Yalkut Shimoni (744, source 18), Moshe's prayer on behalf of the nation (32:11-13) and G-d's response to it (32:14) didn't occur until after Moshe had descended and worked on repairing the damage. (Chizkuni paraphrases Ibn Ezra's argument by asking how Moshe could consider asking G-d to forgive them if they were still sinning.) This fits with Chizkuni saying that Moshe was given the Luchos before the sinning had ever started, as there was no "forgiveness" before Moshe descended. Most sources, however, are of the opinion that G-d retracted his initial threat before Moshe descended on the 17th of Tamuz.] The wording of the verse is that He retracted "the evil that He spoke of doing to His nation." Yes, they were still "His nation," even before Moshe was able to halt their sinning and start the process of repentance. In his prayer, Moshe referenced the promises G-d made to our forefathers about their descendants being heirs to their spiritual legacy. It would be impossible for this to occur (or for them to be "G-d's nation") without the Torah, so once there was even a partial retraction (i.e. not destroying them, see Ramban on 32:11), the Torah had to be given to them. (This is similar to Mizrachi's explanation as to why G-d would give us the Luchos even if there wouldn't be a Mishkan.) Since ultimately we would need the Torah in order to fulfill our mission as His nation, G-d gave Moshe the Luchos despite the sinning that was still going on. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

The relationship between the construction of the mishkan and Shabbos is two-fold. Notwithstanding its significance, work on the mishkan must cease when Shabbos arrives. Additionally, construction of the mishkan is the model for all prohibited categories of work. The foundation of the laws of Shabbos is that whatever was necessary to build the mishkan is labeled as a melacha on Shabbos.

There is no need for the Torah to clearly delineate what cannot be done on Shabbos. Each of the thirty nine melachos was in fact performed in the construction of the mishkan and each one is included in

the all-encompassing phrase, "lo sa-a-se kol melacha -- do not do any labor".

Chazal single out the prohibition of carrying as being unique. A special source is necessary to teach us that carrying is actually prohibited on Shabbos and the rishonim question why this is so. If carrying was done as part of the process of the mishkan's construction it should obviously be prohibited, no less than the other thirty eight melachos. Tosafos (Shabbos 96b) explain that carrying is a "mleacha ga-ru-ah -- inferior melacha" and thereby needs an independent source to prohibit it. What is unique about carrying that makes it "inferior"? The Ohr Zaruah explains that unlike the other melachos, carrying doesn't change the item; the object is merely transported from one place to another. If carrying is so radically different from the other thirty eight melachos, why does the Torah prohibit it? Is there a unique dimension of Shabbos that can be derived from this unique melacha?

Shabbos is referred to as both a "zecher l'ma'aseh Breishis" and a "zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim"; it simultaneously commemorates the creation of the world and our leaving Mitzrayim. These two events highlight two aspects of the relationship Hashem has with the world, namely Hashem is both the Creator and the One who controls the world. Thirty eight melachos highlight His role as Creator. We refrain from creative activities thereby acknowledging Hashem as the "Boreah shomayim va'aretz -- Creator of heaven and earth". Not carrying is not a confirmation of creation, but rather a declaration that Hashem is the One who controls the heaven and the earth. When Yosef is appointed by Pharoh to control the land of Mitzrayim, he is assured that without permission granted by Yosef no one will be permitted to lift their hands or feet -- "lo yarim ish es yado v'es raglo bechol Eretz Mitzrayim" (Breishis 41.) Total submission to a ruler includes the acknowledgment that permission must be granted to "move" anything, because only the ruler is in control. On Shabbos we commemorate yetzias Mitzrayim by refraining from carrying unless permitted to do so according to the intricate laws of Eruvin. Whereas thirty eight melachos are a zecher l'ma'aseh Breishis, observing the thirty ninth melacha of carrying declares our commitment to zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim.

Both dimensions of Shabbos are fundamental to our entire service of Hashem. One would have expected that priority should be given to acknowledgment of Hashem as Creator which preceded His role as the One who took us out of Mitzrayim. However, the aseres hadibros begin with Hashem as the One who took us out of Mitzrayim. The mefarshim explain that only through yetzias Mitzrayim did we come to recognize Hashem also as our Creator. Nobody witnessed creation but our actual experiencing yetzias Mitzrayim enabled us to accept Hashem as the One who controls the world. The corollary to yetzias Mitzrayim is creation. Only the Creator of the world can

control it as the events of yetzias Mitzrayim indicated. In the realm of the laws of Shabbos the melacha of carrying teaches us this same lesson. Perhaps this is why the introduction to Shabbos was given to the Jewish people in the context of carrying. The first melacha was not to carry the mon in the desert. The Jewish people were introduced to Shabbos via their experience at yetzias Mitzrayim. It was only through the vehicle of zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim did they eventually realize Shabbos as the zecher l'ma'aseh Breishis. Even Maseches Shabbos which encompasses all of the laws of Shabbos begins with the topic of carrying. It is the commitment to the proper observance of this melacha that enables us to eventually observe all of the halachos of Shabbos. We thereby affirm our complete belief in ma'aseh Breishis and yetzias Mitzrayim, the two fundamentals of Shabbos observance and the foundation of our entire service of Hashem. ©2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

Although there are no prophets today, it seems that G-d wants each of us to make such demands of Him. In doing so we acknowledge that we are in a true relationship with G-d and G-d has the power to fulfill our requests.

This idea of making demands of G-d is echoed in this week's portion. After the Jews constructed the golden calf, Moshe (Moses) who is atop the mountain, is told by G-d "haniha li-let me be," so that I can destroy the Jewish people (Exodus 32:10).

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

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

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

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

Only then, will we respect what G-d actually wants from us, to hear our voices and to create a true covenantal relationship. ©2012 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

Consumer Oriented

In one of the most difficult portions of the Torah, and chapters in our history, this week the Children of Israel make a Golden Calf and serve it. The act warrants their annihilation, and Hashem threatens Moshe with just that, adding that He is ready to build a nation from Moshe himself. "Hashem said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold! it is a stiff-necked people: And now, desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them, and I shall annihilate them, and I shall make you a great nation.'" (Exodus 32:9-10) But Moshe beseeches Hashem to forgive the nation for the calamitous sin of the Golden Calf, and Hashem acquiesces, offering an historic formula which is the precursor to every prayer of penitence. Hashem entails the supplication that is known as "the thirteen attributes of Hashem."

They include the words "Hashem, Hashem, G-d, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth..." (Exodus 34:6-7).

Those powerful, deep, and concise statements that embody anthropomorphic qualities to an Omnipotent Creator contain significant meaning far beyond mortal comprehension.

What is astonishing is that almost immediately after Hashem forgives the people, Moshe beseeches

Hashem to accompany them for the precise reason that Hashem was angered by them!

"If I have now found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, let my L-rd go among us -- for it is a stiff-necked people, and You shall forgive our iniquity and error, and make us Your heritage." (Exodus 34:9) Was it not stiff-neckedness that caused Hashem to want to annihilate them?

It had become a nuisance for most of those who strolled in the Swiss forest in the early 1950s. Hikers would come home and spend time removing the sticky cockleburs that had fastened to their clothing. But it was something that their forebears had lived with for years and another hindrance that nature had put in their way.

But George de Mestral did not look at the cockleburs that had snagged his sweater as a nuisance. In fact, he realized that Divine genius played a vital role in their physiology.

Returning home after a walk one afternoon, he took out a microscope to get a better look at Hashem's prodigy. When he realized that the burs were actually comprised of thousands of natural hooks that would engage countless loops he realized that this was no nuisance of nature. Their sticky nature was actually the way that these seed pods were transported to find new breeding grounds. They would latch themselves to the fur of animals and be transported.

De Mestral realized that he could carry this wisdom to the more mundane world. And so with a system of a fuzzy felt and crocheted hooks, he combined more than just two divergent materials. He also combined two words, velvet and crochet, now employed in the lexicon and inventory of both schoolchildren and rocket-scientists. He invented, or perhaps introduced us to, Velcro®.

The Dubno Maggid explains that after Moshe heard the wondrous quality of Unrestricted Compassion, he realized that Hashem was actually offering a product that was well-tailored to our mortal needs. It was in fact Moshe's biggest argument for Hashem to accompany His nation.

"Angels don't need those attributes! It is the fallible human who needs that ever-lasting, unceasing mercy! It is only because we are stiff-necked that we need Your unending kindness!"

That is why after Moshe heard Hashem's argument, followed by His attributes, he presented his plea for Divine accompaniment. Often, we do not take advantage of the great goodness of Hashem. We leave His attributes in heaven, distancing our mundane needs from His all-powerful abilities. Moshe teaches us that it is distinctly our capriciousness and mortality that needs His omnipotence. We must realize that the attributes of Hashem are specifically assigned to sustain His nation. And all we have to do is utilize that unceasing, unyielding, and everlasting product to our advantage.

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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

This week's Parsha, Ki Tisa, includes the unfortunate sin of the Golden calf, and includes Moshe's negotiations on the Jews' behalf. While there are many things one can learn about the art of negotiations, what seems out of place is that after things are smoothed over and G-d is appeased, Moshe asks to see G-d's presence (and was denied) (33:18). While there are varying explanations as to what Moshe really wanted to see (from G-d's attributes to His essence), why would Moshe ask such a question right after G-d had gotten so angry that he threatened to destroy the world?

One possible answer lies in the very nature of struggle and challenge. When we are faced with a challenge, whether we overcome it or succumb to it, the most valuable aspect of the challenge is the "we". Not if, but when a couple, a family, a community, a people is faced with a challenge, they naturally become more attached to each other, and grow more cohesive. This is often the point of life's challenges, although this is frequently overlooked. Moshe worked out a reprieve for the Jews with G-d, and as a result they became close enough that Moshe thought he had a chance to see G-d's essence, and although he was denied his request, Moshe was granted other insight. We too can gain insight into each other, as long as we focus on each other when faced with life's challenges. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

With this week's parsha, Ki Tisa, the Torah completes the instructions for the building of the Mishkan {Tabernacle} and then immediately commands about Sabbath observance: "And you shall speak to Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} saying: Ach {But} My Sabbaths you shall observe because it is a sign between you and I, for all generations, to know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you. [31:13]"

What is the connection between the Mishkan and the Sabbath?

Rashi explains that Moshe was told: Although I have instructed you to command them to build the Mishkan, do not treat the Sabbath lightly and push it aside in order to build. This is referring to the actual bringing of the materials [Sifsei Chachamim]. Rashi also teaches that the word Ach {But} always comes to limit and minimize. In this case it comes to limit the actual construction work performed by the artisans, forbidding it from being done on the Sabbath.

The Ramban takes issue with Rashi's explanation. "Ach {But} My Sabbaths" seems to be limiting the Sabbath, not the construction of the Temple! If it was referring to the Mishkan, it would come to allow

the building on the Sabbath! He therefore explains that it in fact comes to limit the observance of the Sabbath, pushing it aside in the case of a circumcision and a life-and-death situation.

The Ohr HaChaim explains this concept further. "Ach {But} My Sabbaths": when a person's life is at stake, do what must be done to save that life, even if it will involve desecrating the Sabbath. This applies to all days that are called "Sabbath" all the Sabbaths: including Sabbath, Yom Kippur {the Day of Atonement} and all holidays.

According to the Ohr HaChaim, the passuk also contains two explanations as to why the Sabbath is pushed aside in order to save a life.

"Ach {But} My Sabbaths... " We desecrate a Sabbath in order to (by keeping this person alive) allow for the observance of many, many Sabbaths in the future. As such, it's not even considered desecration but rather, in such a life-threatening situation, 'breaking' the Sabbath would be considered its proper observance! This explains that although we are not allowed to sin, even to help someone else, in the case of saving a life it's not a sin but rather a mitzvah.

"...to know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you." This law, that the Sabbath is broken in order to save a life, enables us "to know that I am Hashem and I have sanctified you." The holiness of a nefesh {soul of a} Yisroel is greater than the holiness of the Sabbath. The lesser (Sabbath) is pushed aside for the sake of the greater (a nefesh Yisroel). How was this holiness attained? Because Hashem, in all of His glory, is the one who sanctifies us.

In a few short words the Ohr HaChaim is revealing volumes. If one is careful with the time when the Sabbath begins and ends, not wanting to shortchange it in any way, how meticulous must one be with the 'time' given to people, giving them the full attention they deserve. If one is careful to honor the Sabbath because it is Hashem's day of rest, how careful must one be to honor a person in whom Hashem rests...©2014 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

