

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the immensely lengthy and detailed account of the making of the Tabernacle, the Torah tells the story twice: first (Ex. 25:1-31:17) as Divine instruction, then (Chs. 35-40) as human implementation. In both cases, the construction of the building is juxtaposed to the command of the Sabbath (31:12-17; 35:1-2).

There are halakhic and theological implications. First, according to Jewish tradition, the juxtaposition was intended to establish the rule that the Sabbath overrides the making of the Tabernacle. Not only is the seventh day a time when secular work comes to an end. It also brings rest from the holiest of labours: making a house for G-d. Indeed, the oral tradition defined 'work' -- melakhah, that which is prohibited on the Sabbath -- in terms of the thirty-nine activities involved in making the sanctuary.

At a more metaphysical level, the Sanctuary mirrors -- is the human counterpart to -- the Divine creation of the universe (for the precise linguistic parallels between Exodus and Genesis, see Covenant and Conversation, Terumah 5763/2003). Just as Divine creation culminates in the Sabbath, so too does human creation. The sanctity of place takes second position to the holiness of time (on this, see A. J. Heschel's famous book, *The Sabbath*).

However, there is one marked difference between the account of G-d's instruction to build the Sanctuary, and Moses instruction to the people. In the first case, the command of the Sabbath appears at the end, after the details of the construction. In the second, it appears at the beginning, before the details. Why so?

The Talmud, in the tractate of Shabbat (69b), raises the following question: what happens if you are far away from human habitation and you forget what day it is. How do you observe the Sabbath? The Talmud offers two answers: R. Huna said: if one is travelling on a road or in the wilderness and does not know when it is the Sabbath, he must count six days [from the day he realises he has forgotten] and observe one. R. Hiyya b. Rav said: he must observe one, and then count six [week] days. On what do they differ? One master holds that it is like the world's creation. The other holds that it is like [the case of] Adam.

From G-d's point of view, the Sabbath was the seventh day. From the point of view of the first human

beings -- created on the sixth day -- the Sabbath was the first. The debate is about which perspective we should adopt.

Thus, at the simplest level, we understand why the Sabbath comes last when G-d is speaking about the Tabernacle, and why it comes first when Moses, a human being, is doing so. For G-d, the Sabbath was the last day; for human beings it was the first. However there is something more fundamental at stake.

When it comes to Divine creation, there is no gap between intention and execution. G-d spoke, and the world came into being. In relation to G-d, Isaiah says: "I make known the end from the beginning, / from ancient times, what is still to come. / I say: My purpose will stand, / and I will do all that I please." (Isaiah 46:10)

G-d knows in advance how things will turn out. With human beings, it is otherwise. Often, we cannot see the outcome at the outset. A great novelist may not know how the story will turn out until he has written it, nor a composer, a symphony, nor an artist, a painting. Creativity is fraught with risk. All the more so is it with human history. The 'law of unintended consequences' tells us that revolutions rarely turn out as planned. Policies designed to help the poor may have the opposite effect. Hayek coined the phrase 'the fatal conceit' for what he saw as the almost inevitable failure of social engineering -- the idea that you can plan human behaviour in advance. You can't.

One alternative is simply to let things happen as they will. This kind of resignation, however, is wholly out of keeping with the Judaic view of history. The Sages said: 'Wherever you find the word *vayehi* ['and it came to pass'] it is always a prelude to tragedy.' When things merely come to pass, they rarely have a happy ending.

The other solution -- unique, as far as I know, to Judaism -- is to reveal the end at the beginning. That is the meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not simply a day of rest. It is an anticipation of 'the end of history', the Messianic age. On it, we recover the lost harmonies of the Garden of Eden. We do not strive to



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do; we are content to be. We are not permitted to manipulate the world; instead, we celebrate it as G-d's supreme work of art. We are not allowed to exercise power or dominance over other human beings, nor even domestic animals. Rich and poor inhabit the Sabbath alike, with equal dignity and freedom.

No utopia has ever been realised (the word 'utopia' itself means 'no place') -- with one exception: 'the world to come'. The reason is that we rehearse it every week, one day in seven. The Sabbath is a full dress rehearsal for an ideal society that has not yet come to pass, but will do, because we know what we are aiming for -- because we experienced it at the beginning.

We now begin to sense the full symbolic drama of the making of the Tabernacle. In the wilderness, long before they crossed the Jordan and entered the promised land, G-d told the Israelites to build a miniature universe. It would be a place of carefully calibrated order -- as the universe is a place of carefully calibrated order. Nowadays, scientists call this the 'anthropic principle', the finding that the laws of physics and chemistry are finely tuned for the emergence of life. Just so did the Tabernacle have to be exact in its construction and dimensions. The building of the Tabernacle was a symbolic prototype of the building of a society. Just as it was an earthly home for the Divine presence, so would society become if the Israelites honoured G-d's laws.

The ultimate end of such a society is the harmony of existence that we have not yet experienced, living as we do in a world of work and striving, conflict and competition. G-d, however, wanted us to know what we were aiming at, so that we would not lose our way in the wilderness of time. That is why, when it came to the human execution of the building, the Sabbath came first, even though in global terms, the 'Sabbath of history' (the Messianic age, the world to come) will come last. G-d 'made known the end at the beginning' -- the fulfilled rest that follows creative labour; the peace that will one day take the place of strife -- so that we would catch a glimpse of the destination before beginning the journey.

Only those who know where they are travelling to will get there, however fast or slow they go.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Lord, Lord a G-d of Compassion..." (Exodus 34:6). It is difficult to imagine the profound disappointment and even anger Moses must have felt upon witnessing the Israelites dancing and reveling around the Golden Calf. After all of his teachings and exhortations about how G-d demands fealty and morality --and after all of the miracles G-d had wrought for them in Egypt, at the Reed Sea, in the desert and at Sinai, how could the Israelites have so quickly cast away G-d and His prophet in favor of the momentary, frenzied pleasures of the Golden Calf?

"And it happened that when he drew near to the encampment and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses burned with anger and he cast the tablets from his hands, smashing them under the mountain" (Ex 32:19). Whether he broke the tablets in a fit of anger, disgusted with his nation and deeming them unworthy to be the bearers of the sacred teachings of the Decalogue (Rashi), or whether the sight of the debauchery caused Moses to feel faint, to be overcome with a debilitating weakness which caused the tablets to feel heavy in his hands and fall of themselves, leading him to cast them away from his legs so that he not become crippled by their weight as they smattered on the ground (Rashbam, ad loc), Moses himself appears to be as broken in spirit as were the tablets in stone. After all, ultimately a leader must feel and take responsibility for his nations' transgression! All of these emotions must have been swirling around Moses' mind and heart while the tablets were crashing on the ground.

But what follows in the Biblical text, after capital punishment for the 3,000 ring leaders of the idolatry, is a lengthy philosophical -- theological dialogue between Moses and G-d. This culminates in the revelation of the thirteen Divine attributes and the "normative" definition of G-d at least in terms of our partial human understanding. What does this mean in terms of Moses' relationship with his nation Israel after their great transgression, and what does this mean for us today, in our own lives?

This was not the first time that Moses was disappointed by the Israelites. Early on in his career, when he was a Prince in Egypt, Moses saw an Egyptian task-master beating a Hebrew slave. "He looked here and there, and he saw there was not a man" -- no Egyptian was willing to cry out against the "anti-Semitic" injustice and no Hebrew was ready to launch a rebellion -- "and he slew the Egyptian task-master and buried him in the sand" (Exodus 2:11). Moses was no fool; he would not have sacrificed his

exalted position in Egypt for a rash act against a single Egyptian scoundrel. He hoped that with this assassination he would spark a Hebrew revolution against their despotic captors.

Moses goes out the next day, expecting to see the beginnings of rebellious foment amongst the Hebrews. He finds two Hebrew men fighting – perhaps specifically about whether or not to follow Moses' lead. But when he chastises the assailant for raising a hand against his brother, he is unceremoniously criticized: "Who made you a master and judge over us? Are you about to kill me just as you killed the Egyptian?" (Ex 2:14).

Moses realized that he had risked his life for nought, that the Hebrews were too embroiled in their own petty arguments to launch a rebellion. Upset with his Hebrew relatives, Moses decides to give up on social action and devote himself to G-d and to religious meditation rather than political rebellion (see Lichtenstein, Moshe, Tzir V'tzon). To this end, he apparently chose to escape to Midian; a desert community whose Sheikh, Yitro, was a seeker after the Divine. (see Ex 2:21, Rashi ad loc and Ex 18:11)

Moses spends sixty years in this Midianite, ashram-like environment of solitary contemplation with the Divine, culminating in his vision of the burning bush when Moses sees an "angel of the Lord in flame of fire in the midst of a prickly thorn-bush, – "and behold, the thorn-bush is burning with fire, but the thorn-bush is not consumed" (Exodus 3: 1-3). The prickly and lowly thorn-bush seems to be symbolizing the Hebrew people, containing within itself the fire of the Divine but not being consumed by it. And G-d sends Moses back to this developing, albeit prickly Hebrew nation, urging him to lead the Israelite slaves out of their Egyptian servitude.

G-d is teaching His greatest prophet that his religious goal must not only be Divine meditation, but also human communication; and specifically taking the Israelites out of Egypt and bringing them to the Promised Land, no matter how hard it may be to work with them.

Now let us fast forward to the sin of the Golden Calf and its aftermath. Moses pleads with G-d to forgive the nation. G-d responds that He dare not dwell in the midst of Israel, lest He destroy them at their next transgression. Moses then asks to be shown G-d's glory, to understand G-d's ways in this world. G-d explains that a living human cannot see His face, since that would require a complete understanding of the Divine. But His back – a partial glimpse – could and would be revealed. Moses then stands on the cleft of a rock on Mount Sinai, the very place of G-d's previous revelation of the Ten Commandments, and he receives a second revelation, a second "service to G-d on this mountain:"

"... Moses arose early in the morning and

ascended to Mt. Sinai...taking the two stone tablets in his hand. The Lord descended in a cloud and stood with him there, and he called out with the Name Adonai (YHVH). And Adonai (YHVH) passed before him and he proclaimed: Adonai, Adonai, El (G-d), Compassionate and forgiving, Slow to Anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth..." (Ex 34: 4-7).

In this second revelation, G-d is telling Moses two things: first of all, that He is a G-d of unconditional love, a G-d who loves the individual before he/she sins and a G-d who loves the individual even after he/she sins (Rashi ad loc), a G-d who freely forgives. Hence G-d will never reject His covenantal nation, will always forgive with alacrity and work with Israel on the road to redemption. Secondly, if G-d is fundamentally a G-d of love and forgiveness, we must be people of love and forgiveness. From Moses the greatest of prophets to the lowliest hewers of wood and drawers of water, just as He (G-d) loves freely and is always ready to forgive, so in all of our human relationships we must strive to love generously and always be ready to forgive. This second Revelation is the mirror image of the first, yes, we must firmly ascribe to the morality of the Ten Commandments, but we must at the same time be constantly aware that the G-d of the cosmos loves each and every one of His children, and is always ready to forgive us, no matter what. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the most important, albeit only subtly presented, messages in this week's Torah reading is that of the enormous influence that current culture fads and beliefs have upon the society of its time. I do not believe that there is any other way for us to review the events of the creation and the worship of the Golden Calf by the Jewish people.

Amazing in its brazenness and brainlessness, a people witness to a plethora of miracles and G-dly revelation itself, in a moment of crisis, reverts back to paganism and idolatry. The whole idea of worshiping images and statues as though they had life and powers is completely foreign to our society. It is not part of our current culture and by simply applying basic logic, we are able to see it for the empty falsehood that it is.

However, were we to live in a culture of paganism and idolatry as did our ancestors when they left Egypt there is no doubt that the Golden Calf could and would speak to us and enlist our thoughtful consideration, if not even our allegiance.

The Talmud tells us that Menashe, a king of Judah in First Temple times, when in a dream, was questioned by a leading rabbi who lived many centuries after the death of the king as to how he could believe and worship statues and idols responded: "Had you lived in my generation you also would have raised your

garment in order to run more quickly to worship those statues and idols.”

Menashe was a creature of his times and a captive of its prevailing culture. The rabbi who questioned him had other cultural challenges but could no longer relate to the culture that prevailed when Menashe was the king of Judah.

We see many cultural battles on challenges that are present in today's current Jewish world. These cultural battles raise passionate feelings on both sides of the questions that they raise. Nevertheless, I feel that even a few generations from now our descendants will look back at these cultural challenges and battles in amazement and wonder. They will say about us what we say about the generation that created the Golden Calf – “How could they have been so wrong?”

The answer to that lies in the recognition of the enormous influence that the prevailing culture plays in our lives and thoughts. The culture of liberalism, tolerance for wickedness and basically immoral behavior has so corroded our judgment and our view of the purpose of our lives that we see everything through a distorted mirror.

Jewish survival, moral growth and the preservation of the Jewish people and the Jewish State are the actions that should dominate our thoughts and behavior. Passing fads, which so occupy our current media, will be obsolete as we move on to newer fads and a different type of culture. The Torah attempted and attempts to raise us above temporary, passing fads. Only a traditional lifestyle based on Jewish core values and Torah principles will save us from the mockery of later generations. ©2017 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Moshe (Moses) descends the mountain, aware that the Jews had made the golden calf, Joshua awaits him. Hearing noise coming from the camp, Joshua tells Moshe that he hears the voice of war. In the words of Torah, “when Joshua heard the sound of the people...he said to Moshe, there is a sound of battle in the camp.” (Exodus 32:17) Moshe responds that it is not the sound of war in the camp, but rather the sound of anot. (Exodus 32:18)

What exactly does this term mean?

Abarbanel suggests that Joshua did not know that the golden calf had been built. Hearing sounds, he assumed it was that of war. Moshe, aware of the reality of the situation, responds that it was not the sound of war, but rather “it was simply the sound of people making a noise.” For Abarbanel, anot simply means

“noise.”

Ramban suggests that anot describes the type of noise being heard. Moshe “was reluctant to speak disparagingly of Israel. So he told him [Joshua] that it was the noise of merriment.” For Ramban, anot means a joyous song. As Nechama Leibowitz explains, “Moshe would never denounce his people unless it were for the purpose of reproving them...He was reluctant to let Joshua have the ‘latest news’ of their disgrace.”

Another thought comes to mind. Joshua may have indeed known what happened. He may have been telling Moshe that the Jews have rebelled, and in fact, are prepared if you will, to go to war with G-d. Joshua's words then make sense: “There is a sound of battle in the camp.”

Moshe responds that he understands the actions of the people to be very different. He states that he does not hear the voice of victory or defeat as Joshua does, but he hears the voice of a nation painfully crying out. From this perspective, the word anot comes from the word enui which means “affliction”; the people were afflicted and confused. They were confused about their relationship to G-d and were in deep conflict about belief.

For Joshua, the cry means that the Jews were rebelling. Kol milchama, “the sound of battle” not only reflected the actions of the people, but was also advice to Moshe that he should take up arms in response to the challenge.

Moshe, who hears the cry as the confused state of belief of the people, believed that the reaction should be to bring the Jews back through love and care.

While it is true that Moshe takes strong action and shatters the Tablets and thousands of Jews die, it must be remembered that it is G-d's thirteen attributes of mercy that brings about the giving of the second set of Tablets. (Exodus 34:6-7)

The message: When seeing someone struggle with faith, we should hear a cry rather than rebellion and respond with love and mercy. ©2017 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 SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Rav Aron Tendler explains that in this week's Parsha, Ki Tisa, Moshe confronted his greatest challenge as teacher and leader of the Jewish people. His nation and children were threatened with extinction for building a golden calf to worship, and all the evidence pointed to the Chosen People's intentional betrayal of G-d. What possible defense could he have offered on behalf of his nation?

The Gemara in Berachot 32a explains Moshe's strategy in defense of the Jews. Rav Tendler explains that Moshe's argument focused on the nature of the human and how it must modify G-d's view of justice. Moshe argued that G-d Himself must accept partial blame for what had happened. It was G-d who had created a free willed creature that was inherently flawed. It was therefore inevitable that this creation would fail at some point. As it says, "There is no such thing as a Tzaddik (righteous person) who only does good and will never sin." Therefore, Moshe argued, "If You created humans who inevitably will sin, You must have also established a system of justice that allows these flawed creatures to learn from their mistakes. There must be the possibility of Teshuva -- repentance, or else Your entire system of justice does not make any sense. G-d agreed with Moshe because of the love that He had for his nation, and thus Moshe had established "unqualified love" as the foundation for our existence. However, unqualified love does not mean that actions do not have consequences -- just the opposite. Moshe himself punished the 3,000 people who were directly involved in the sin of the Golden Calf. Unqualified love means that you always do what is in the best interest of those whom you love. Punishment, if it is truly warranted and properly executed, can be the greatest expression of love. Love, on the other hand, can only be true if it's unwarranted and absolutely unqualified. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
SICHA OF HARAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN

Adapted by Binyamin Fraenkel

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Our parasha opens with a command: "And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: When you take (ki tisa) the sum of Bnei Yisrael by their number (lifkudeihem), then every man shall give a ransom for his soul to the Lord, when you number them (bifkod otam), that there be no plague among them when you number them. This they shall give: every one that passes among them that are numbered, half a shekel according to the shekel of the Sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gera); half a shekel shall be the offering of the Lord." (Shemot 30:11-12)

Rashi cites the midrash: "'When you take the sum'... When you wish to obtain their total number, to know how many they are, do not count them by person; rather, let each one give a half-shekel, and count the shekels, and you will know their number. 'That there be no plague among them' -- for a total number is something that the evil eye can control, and then they are smitten by plague, as we find in the days of David."

In other words, when counting Bnei Yisrael there is some danger involved, and therefore they must

be counted using the half-shekel coins.

On the other hand, the Gemara offers a midrash that seems to suggest the opposite: "R. Abbahu taught: Moshe said to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Master of the world, how will the honor of Israel be uplifted?' He answered him, 'Through [the command,] When you take the sum...' (Bava Batra 10b)

This tells us that the half-shekel census not only need not cause harm to Bnei Yisrael, but has the power to uplift them.

How are these two midrashim to be reconciled? The two sources appear to present the risk and the potential entailed in the census. The risk is not difficult to understand: the act of counting people can turn them into mere numbers, statistics, data. This is the opposite of what the census is meant to accomplish, as the Ramban explains elsewhere: "'You shall number them' (tifkedu otam) -- this matter of 'pekida' (numbering) means remembering and taking care of something, as in, 'And G-d remembered (pakad) Sara, as He had said' (Bereishit 21:1), and this is the meaning of this term wherever it appears: not one of them will escape My attention. It is also related to the idea of 'pikadon' (a pledge), because His guardianship and providence is spread over them. When G-d commands that Israel be counted, he says, 'tifkedu otam,' hinting that they should not be physically numbered, but rather that they should give a half-shekel as a ransom for their souls, and through that G-d will watch over them and their number will be known." (Ramban, Bamidbar 1:2)

The numbering of Bnei Yisrael is supposed to be a 'remembering' of sorts, not just an arrival at some numerical figure. This idea is further supported by the fact that the text notes the census being conducted 'le-gulgelotam' ('by head'), i.e., individually. Moshe does not ask the head of each household or the head of each tribe how many people he has under him; rather, he counts the entire family and the entire tribe, entailing a personal encounter with each individual.

Plague strikes when people are treated as numbers, and therefore a census entails danger. On the other hand, the process also offers a special platform for personal encounters, and Moshe is therefore commanded to undertake the census, which will enhance Israel's glory. The solution that the text offers, to prevent a situation whereby people are counted as part of a total sum, such that their individuality is erased, is to count their half-shekels. This emphasizes that a person is encountered in his own right.

The dilemma of population data vs. individual worth has intensified with modernity and especially with the progress of industry. Progress requires data, in which great masses of people are treated as numbers, their individual and human worth irrelevant to the tasks. Capitalism, with its view of the products of human effort

as nameless, faceless capital, may advance the world economically, but at the same time it erases the human dimension.

Let us consider two examples. A medical procedure is "sterile" -- seemingly removed from the patient himself. A delicate surgical procedure is performed while the patient is anesthetized; no one speaks with him, listens to him or interacts with him in any way. But in fact medicine can be conducted on a human level. Rabbi Dr. Avraham Steinberg used to say a "Mi She-Berakh" prayer for patients before operating on them, thereby strengthening and empowering the human and spiritual dimension.

In the educational world, too, a person may enter the teaching profession with great aspirations, but become worn out with time. Teachers can come to view their pupils as mere addresses for information and knowledge that must be transferred, rather than as people whose spiritual world must be strengthened and enriched.

Likewise, business partners, salespeople, etc., may come to view the people in their environment as mere objects. Such phenomena exist in day-to-day life, too. A person travelling on a bus may treat the driver as part of the general decor, appreciating him as a human being only in the wake of a traumatic episode, such as a terror attack.

The Torah teaches the importance of individualized personal attention -- even when performing a seemingly mechanical action, devoid of human emotion. Counting people presents us with the challenge of transforming them from a sum, over which 'the evil eye has control,' to a more profound human appreciation, which ultimately 'uplifts the honor of Israel.' (*This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Ki Tisa 5774 [2014].*)

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Golden Calf

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In this week's portion we read of the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah later (Devarim 9; 6) recalls this by stating "remember (Zachor); Do not forget how you angered Almighty G-d in the Desert". It would seem that just as we can fulfill the Mitzva of Zachor (with relation to Amalek and the story of Purim) by listening intently to the reading of the Torah that week, so also we can fulfill the Mitzva of "Zachor" in relation to the Golden Calf, by simply listening intently to the reading of the Torah of that week. Yet many of our Rabbis do not include this Mitzva in the list of the six hundred and thirteen Mitzvot. The Ramban (Nachmanides) queries whether this Mitzva should be counted at all, since it was a one-time occurrence and is not applicable for generations.

Even if we state that it is a Mitzvah for future generations, no Rabbi believes that by listening to the story of the Golden Calf in this week's portion, one

fulfills the Mitzvah of "Zachor" (to remember). Perhaps it is because here, we are telling a story which humiliates and embarrasses the Jewish people.

The author of the "Sefer Charedim" states that perhaps the Mitzva here for generations is that just as we must remember the sin of our forefathers, individually we should look introspectively at our own lives and repent if we are not worthy. The Magen Avraham on the Shulchan Aruch (code of Jewish law) strengthens this point by stating that we should concentrate on the word b'ahavah" (with love) that appears before the reciting of the Shema in our daily prayers, to stress that we must strive to love G-d even in trying times. Perhaps this is why the portions that are in one's Tifillin are wrapped with the hair of a calf; to remind us of the sin of the "Golden Calf".

The Accuser cannot become the Advocate (Ein kategor Naaseh Sanegor)

The definition of the term "Ein kategor Naaseh Sanegor" (The accuser cannot become the advocate) applies in cases of utensils or animals that became a source of guilt and sin against the Jews (causing them to stumble), which as a result cannot be used to fulfill a Mitzva. Thus a Shofar that is used on Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) cannot be made from the horn of an ox since the ox was integral in the sin of the "golden calf". However according to the Talmud this only applies to articles that were used, or were similar to what was used in the Temple (as in a Shofar). Thus the mitzvah of the "Para Adumah" (Red Heifer) could be used as atonement for the sin of the "Golden Calf" since its service was completed outside the Temple.

If all this is valid, then why can't a Kohen who committed murder perform "Nesiat Kapayim" (the priestly blessings)? For if the reason is "Ein kategor Naaseh Sanegor" (the Kohen who killed cannot give a blessing), as it appears to be the reason given by Tosafot in Tractate Yevomot 6a, "Nesiat kapayim" is performed outside the Temple and should be permitted!

One might answer that outside the Temple we may use gold or an ox which reminds us of the sin, but in the case of the Kohen who committed murder, he was the actual perpetrator of this crime and therefore it would be improper for him to bless the Jewish people with the priestly benediction.

However, how ten was Aharon commanded as part of the seven days of the inauguration of the Kohanim, ("Shivat yemei Miluim") to take a calf ("Kach Lecha Egel" -Vayikra 9; 2) which according to Rashi indicates that G-d forgave the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf?

In that case however we are asking for forgiveness for the actual sin, and quite the contrary we would have a better chance at securing forgiveness because we use the animal that caused the sin, just as we accept gold that was donated to the Temple which

atoned for the actual gold that the Jewish people contributed for the construction of the Golden calf.
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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 YAAKOV HOROWITZ

Knot What it Seems

Shortly after Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded in securing Hashem's forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, he asked Hashem, (Shmos 33:13) "Hodiani noh es drochecha - Please make your ways known to me." Rashi explains that since this was a time where Hashem's rachamim (mercy) was granted to the Jews, Moshe felt that it would be an especially opportune moment to beseech Hashem to share His wisdom with Moshe. The Gemorah (Brachos 7a) explains that Moshe wanted to understand the age-old question of why so many righteous people suffer while it often seems that the wicked are prospering. This understanding was the 'derech' of Hashem that Moshe wanted to understand.

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

showed Moshe the knot of the tefillin.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I would like to offer an analogy that may shed some light on this matter. GPS, Global Position Satellite technology, allows drivers to navigate unfamiliar roads by offering precise maps and directions. One of the features of GPS is that it allows drivers to 'zoom' in and out of a map of any given area - to see the details of the streets or the 'big picture' of the entire city or state. When one zooms in on any particular street, however, it is impossible for him to see the directions that will take him from one city to another. Only the larger map will allow one to navigate properly.

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

Occasionally, we are granted the understanding of events that transpired years, or even decades ago. At the time, we were 'zoomed in' on the present and did not comprehend why we were given

certain challenges. When growing up, we may wonder: Why are some people (or ourselves) born into a challenging family situation? Why do people lose their parents? Why are some born with significant handicaps, or learning disabilities? .

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

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

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"Moshe pleaded before Hashem..." (32:11) The gemara (Berachot 32a) teaches that following the sin of the golden calf, Moshe prayed for the Jewish people "until his bones were burning." R' Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk z"l (died 1926) explains: Chazal say that Moshe's grandson, Yonatan, was a priest to an idol. Thus, as Moshe prayed that the Jewish people be forgiven for their idolatry, his bones, his body from which his grandson would come, were burning with shame.

On the other hand, this very fact gave Moshe's prayers added credibility, for Hashem had said (in verse 10), "Let Me destroy them and make you a great nation." As Hashem offered to make Moshe into a great nation despite the failings in Moshe's own family, He can similarly overlook Bnei Yisrael's faults. (Meshech Chochmah) © 2001 S. Katz & torah.org

