

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

**A**s we have seen in both Vayetse and Vaera, leadership is marked by failure. It is the recovery that is the true measure of a leader. 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. Machiavelli called this Fortuna: the power of bad luck that can defeat even the greatest individual. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we 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 could place your career, or 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: "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 God, 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 God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.'" (I Sam. 15:13 -- 21)

Saul makes excuses. The failure was not his; it was the fault of 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." (I Sam. 15:23). Only then does Saul admit, "I have sinned." (I Sam 15:24) But by this point it is too late. He has proven himself unworthy to begin the lineage of kings of Israel.

There is an apocryphal quote attributed to several politicians: "Of course I follow the party. After all, I am their leader." (This statement has been attributed to Benjamin Disraeli, Stanley Baldwin and Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin.) There are leaders who follow instead of leading. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter compared them to a dog taking a walk with its owner. The dog runs on ahead, but keeps turning around to see whether it is going in the right direction. 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 God. 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 gave 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)

God becomes angry. Moses pleads with Him to spare the people. He then descends the mountain, sees what has happened, smashes the Tablets of the Law he has brought down with him, burns the idol, grinds it to powder, mixes it with water and makes the Israelites drink it. Then he turns to Aaron his brother and asks, "What have you done?"

"Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how these people are prone 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 blames the people. It was they who made the illegitimate request. He denies 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 such as Saul the King of Israel and Aaron the High Priest, 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 that point: "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) God, 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's demands during the

later episode of the spies (Num. 14:5).

Nor was it easy for Moses to restore order. He did so with the most dramatic of acts: 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 God 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. And as two different leaders working together, 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 do not, or should not, 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. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"Lord, Lord a God 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 God demands fealty and morality –and after all of the miracles God 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 God 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 nation's 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 God. This culminates in the revelation of the thirteen Divine attributes and the “normative” definition of God 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 naught, 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 God 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 God sends Moses back to this developing, albeit prickly Hebrew nation, urging him to lead the Israelite slaves out of their Egyptian servitude.

God 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 God to forgive the nation. God 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 God's glory, to understand God's ways in this world. God 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 God's previous revelation of the Ten Commandments, and he receives a second revelation, a second “service to God 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 (God), Compassionate and forgiving, Slow to Anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth...” (Ex 34: 4-7).

In this second revelation, God is telling Moses two things: first of all, that He is a God of unconditional love, a God who loves the individual before he/she sins and a God who loves the individual even after he/she sins (Rashi ad loc), a God who freely forgives. Hence God will never reject His covenantal nation, will always forgive with alacrity and work with Israel on the road to redemption. Secondly, if God is fundamentally a God 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 (God) 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 God of the cosmos loves each and every one of His children, and is always ready to forgive us, no matter what. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

I approach this week's Torah reading while still under the influence of the great holiday of Purim. As such, I have long noticed that according to the Talmud, the name of the hero of the Purim story, Mordechai, is alluded to in the portion of this week's Torah reading, which describes the spices that constitute the incense offering in the tabernacle and temple. The names of Haman and Esther, that the rabbis also connected to verses that appear in the Torah, are more easily found in the explicit texts that the Talmud makes reference to.

However, the name of Mordechai, that is hidden within the ingredients for the incense service, is more difficult to discern, and seems to be somewhat of an esoteric stretch. It seems there must be a deeper connection and message involved, as well as the link between Mordechai and the incense service of the tabernacle and temple.

All of the interpretations that appear in the Talmud contain far deeper meaning than the literal words. That is why the Talmudic commentaries are so abundant and seemingly endless, both in number and in the analysis and interpretations. So, when the rabbis of the Talmud associated Mordechai with this particular incense service, they wished to convey a deeper and more subtle message than merely a clever play on words.

The ideas and words of the Talmudic sages speak to every generation of Jews, in every circumstance and for all societies. The task of the scholars of Israel is to be able to ferret out the specific ideas that are intended for them and for their times.

The incense service was viewed by the Torah as having enormous positive, curative and ennobling powers. It could prevent plagues and pandemics, could purify the atmosphere, cleanse the temple of odors and flying insects and also serve as the protective cloud that preserved the priests who offered it on behalf of the people of Israel. However, at the same time, it also had the power of being lethal, destructive, with the ability to cause immense personal and national tragedy.

The sons of Aaron died because of this incense, while their brother Elazar was able to use it to allay the ravages of a plague. I feel that this depicts the specific connection between Mordechai and the incense service. In the hands of the righteous and altruistic holy servants of God, the incense serves as a blessing and has enormous curative powers. In the

hands of those who wish only to profit for themselves and have base motives, even if only at the moment that they are performing the sacred service, the incense can be a lethal and destructive force.

The greatness of Mordechai was his humility and self effacement. It is his total devotion to the salvation of the Jewish people and his willingness to risk all in order to save the people, that elevates him to the highest rank of Jewish leadership and heroism. He becomes a living incense, with all of the blessings that this service entails and brought to the Jewish people. All of us should strive to be disciples of Mordechai and to sanctify ourselves with our spiritual incense service. ©2021 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

Is it appropriate to challenge God when things go wrong?

The role of the prophet is usually associated with transmitting the word of God to His people. Yet there are times when the prophet takes on another role—that of defense attorney, protecting Am Yisrael and cajoling God to intercede. Here, the prophet transmits the claims, even the complaints of the people to God.

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

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

Why does God demand "ha'nicha li," the Midrash asks? After all, Moshe was not holding on to God. It can be compared, the Midrash continues, to a king, who becomes angry with his child. Taking him into a small room, the king begins to yell, "Leave me alone to kill him." The child's teacher passes by and hearing the king, wonders: The king and his child are alone inside, why does he shout, "leave me alone"? Obviously the king really wants me to go make peace between him and his child. What he's really saying is: "don't let me kill him, stop me." In this case, what was said may have meant the exact opposite. (Exodus Rabbah 42:9)

For the Midrash, although God says to Moshe, "Let me be," what He's really saying is: "Moshe please don't let me be. Stop me. Don't let Me destroy the people. Intervene on their behalf." God wanted to witness Moshe's care for the Jewish people and

therefore gave him the chance to offer a challenge. In so doing, the Jewish people were saved.

My son Dr. Dov Weiss, in his book *Pious Irreverence*, eloquently articulates what can be called the “theology of protest.” Amongst the many arguments he makes, is that making demands of God are not expressions of disrespect, but of love. It shows that one is close enough to God to express – without fear of repercussions – his or her deepest feelings.

As the Midrash says, “Any love that does not include reprimand is not [true] love.” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 54:3) ©2021 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

### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Prosecutor and Defender

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The principle of “*Ein kategor na’aseh sanegor*” (“A prosecutor cannot become a defender”) means that items which contributed to Jews sinning cannot be used as part of the divine service to bring the Jews atonement. Thus, the Rosh Hashanah *shofar* is not made from the horn of a cow, because it brings to mind the sin of the Golden Calf. However, according to the Talmud, this principle is limited to articles that were used for the divine service in the Temple (such as a *shofar*, which was blown there daily). Thus, the *Parah Adumah* (Red Heifer) could be used to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, since the ceremony involving it took place outside the Temple.

If this is correct, why can’t a *Kohen* who committed murder recite the priestly blessing? *Tosafot* (*Yevamot* 7a) suggests that the reason he is excluded is “*Ein kategor na’aseh sanegor*.” But this blessing is recited outside the Temple, so he should be permitted to do so! It would seem that outside the Temple, what is permitted for the divine service is the use of an object (such as gold or a cow’s horn) even though it might bring to mind a certain sin. In contrast, the sinner himself (such as a *Kohen* who committed murder) may not perform the divine service, even outside the Temple.

If this is correct, how do we explain the command to Aharon to take a calf during the eight days of the dedication of the Tabernacle (*Vayikra* 9:2)? Rashi answers that this was done to indicate that G-d had forgiven the Jewish people for the sin of the Golden Calf. But based on what we just said, a calf itself should not have been allowed! It would seem that when asking forgiveness for a specific sin, the chance of true repentance increases when the very item which was used to commit the sin is used for atonement. This is why the gold donated to make the Tabernacle was able to atone for the gold which people had

enthusiastically donated to make the Golden Calf. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

“And Aharon said to them, ‘Take off the golden rings that are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me.’” (*Exodus* 32:2) When some Jews miscounted and felt that Moshe was delayed in coming down from the mountain, they got discouraged and asked Aharon to give them a leader in Moshe’s place.

He was in a quandary. If he appointed someone like Nachshon ben Aminadav or Kalev ben Yefuneh then when Moshe came down there might be a power struggle. If he were to take the leadership for himself, he felt Moshe would be hurt. He therefore decided to stall for time hoping that Moshe would come down before anything happened.

Aharon told the men to bring him their wives’ jewelry. Knowing that the woman and children cherished these items, Aharon believed it would cause a delay. In fact, there are those who explain Aharon was counting on the fact that the women would not give their possessions for an *avoda zara* and would refuse to cooperate.

The language of Rashi is interesting. He says, “Aharon thought to himself, ‘the women and children value these items; perhaps this will delay things and in the meantime Moshe will come.’” Rashi doesn’t explain what the delay would be; he doesn’t say, ‘they value their items and they will delay.’ Rather, because they value these items, a delay would come about on its own somehow.

Perhaps Aharon believed that when he told the men to take the golden earrings from their wives’ ears (not their jewelry boxes!), the men would pause and ask themselves, “How can I take away something that is so dear to my wife and may cause her anguish?” If they followed his instructions, they would have to find a way to gently convince their wives or children to give the items up, or desist entirely, and in that time space, Moshe could return.

Sadly, instead of thinking about their wives or children, they thought of themselves, and used their own gold as it was faster and easier. But the message of Aharon’s command may even go deeper: Chazal tell us, “*Hakol b’ydei Shomayim, chutz m’yiras Shomayim*.” Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven. That is to say, Hashem can’t (or won’t) put awe and reverence and love of Hashem in our hearts. That’s something we have to do ourselves, and it is the only thing we can ‘give’ Him.

Aharon said, “Take the rings out of the ears of your wives and children.” Where did they get the earrings? Presumably they got them from their husband and father. The gift itself added to the value and

esteem they had for the items and that's why they wore them.

Aharon was pointing out: "You've just said *na'aseh v'nishma* and "given" your devotion to Hashem. Are you now going to yank that away by finding another 'god'? How will Hashem 'feel'? It should have given them pause and made them reflect on what they were doing. Alas, in their "religious fervor" they failed to think, and that led to catastrophe.

*R' Moshe Feinstein z"l would generally leave the Yeshiva during the lunch break, and a different boy was honored each day with escorting him down the steps to a waiting car. One day, the boy, not realizing that the Rosh HaYeshiva was not settled in the car, slammed the door on R' Moshe's fingers.*

*He let out not a peep. A few blocks away, R' Moshe asked the driver to pull over, whereupon the sage opened the door and released the bloody fingers of his frail hand. The driver realized what had happened and exclaimed, "Why didn't the Rosh Yeshiva say something earlier?!"*

*R' Moshe explained that if he had cried out in pain, or even opened the door immediately, the boy who had done it to him would have felt terrible about what was clearly an accident. He therefore controlled himself not to react in any way, lest he cause pain to another. © 2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## Raising the Mundane

**T**he final sentence which completes the sin of the Golden Calf is strikingly familiar. "And they rose up early on the next morning and they brought up sacrifices and they brought near peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and they drank and they got up to frolic." It is important to note the number of verbs that are found in this pasuk: "they rose up, and they brought up, and they brought near, and the people sat down, to eat, and they drank, and they got up, to frolic." We can find one other famous pasuk in the Torah with a similar number and type of verbs: "And Ya'akov gave Esav bread and lentil soup and he ate and he drank and he got up and he went and Esav despised the birthright". Note also that three of the verbs involve the same action: eating, drinking, and getting up. It is not a coincidence that both mark sins in which the perpetrators turned away from Hashem. But there is another connection to our pasuk which is found after the brothers throw Yosef into the pit. The Torah tells us "and they sat down to eat bread". Again, this is not coincidental that the words "they sat to eat" are repeated. In each case we find a serious sin which is committed that centers on the mundane act of eating.

If we examine each of these cases, we can spot a common problem. Esav was never intended to be the same child as his brother. There was nothing inherently wrong with his inclination towards hunting.

We even see that he is valued for his skill by Yitzchok. Then where did he go wrong? The Midrash tells of three things that Esav did that day: inappropriate sexual behavior, the spilling of blood, and worshipping idols. Another Midrash also comes to tell us that Avraham died that day and that is why Ya'akov was making lentil soup. Esav is self-centered; he does not think that Hashem is the One who enables his success. He does not feel the need to thank Hashem for his skills. He does not thank Hashem for the food that he eats. His final action here of hating the birthright is a sin against Hashem as much as any that he performed. He discarded a gift from Hashem that He could have given just as easily to his twin brother. Still, he could justify his actions: I was starving and my brother blackmailed me for a bowl of soup. But that would not cause him to despise the birthright. His sin is his alone, and the hatred that he developed towards his brother has damaged the B'nei Yisrael ever since.

Our second example is from the story of Yosef and his brothers. Yosef's dreams alienated his brothers to the extent that they leave home. When Ya'akov sends Yosef to ask about his brothers' well-being, they threw him in a pit after first plotting to kill him. They sat down to eat, ignoring Yosef's pleas to save him. They then sold him into slavery thinking that this would nullify the message of these dreams. This was an attempt to subvert the will of Hashem. The brothers knew that these dreams were prophetic, and they did not like the prophecy. Their attempt to prevent the fulfillment of that prophecy caused them to turn away from Hashem. They too could justify their actions by claiming that Yosef was usurping power that was not rightfully his. But we cannot dismiss their actions in the light of prophecy. Kidnapping their brother and selling him into slavery was a horrible sin to Hashem. Yet almost as important was their lack of sensitivity to Yosef's pleas. How could they have sat down to eat when their brother was suffering? Our Rabbis tell us that every punishment that B'nei Yisrael suffers today carries a part of the punishment for this sin.

The Golden Calf represents our third example of turning away from Hashem. The B'nei Yisrael were frightened because Moshe had not returned on time according to their erroneous calculations. They wanted a leader or a symbol of Hashem's protection and they ignored Hashem's commandment that this was forbidden. They thought that they could interpret Hashem's laws by themselves. According to Midrash, they were so adamant in their desire that they killed Chur (Miriam's son) who refused to aid them. Aharon told them to wait for the celebration the next day, yet they arose early to sacrifice to this image. They not only sinned by making an image, they began to worship it. This ignored two commandments: not to make an idol and not to worship it. But aside from the problem of turning away from Hashem, there is still the problem

of their insensitivity. In their minds, Moshe must have died on the mountain. Instead of celebrations there should have been mourning and crying. Were they not grateful for all the good that Moshe performed? Instead of sackcloth and ashes, they sit down to eat and drink. Our Rabbis tell us again that part of every punishment that we receive is due to our participation in or our lack of preventing the Golden Calf.

It is interesting that each case that we have mentioned here involves a meal. When we think of food, we understand that eating is a mundane act of existence. Yet each food that we eat should remind us of Hashem's generosity in providing us with sustenance. In the desert, this was even more recognizable because of the Manna. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin brings a Midrash that says that the food that the Jews ate in front of the Golden Calf was Manna. This gift from Hashem should have reminded them how much they owed Hashem and prevented them from sinning by disregarding His Will.

There is one last example of this lack of sensitivity that is demonstrated through eating and drinking that does not occur in the Torah but in the later books of the Bible. We have just read the Megillah (The Book of Esther) on Purim. After Haman purchased the right to kill all of the Jews, we are told that Haman and King Achashveirosh "sat down to drink". They too wished to change the Will of Hashem by destroying His people. Their lack of sensitivity to the destruction of others is in sharp contrast to Hashem's sympathy to the Egyptians that were drowned in the Red Sea, even though it was they who caused their own destruction.

Eating and drinking are necessities of life. The Torah elevates these necessary activities into a way to serve Hashem and recognize all that He does for us. When we fail to acknowledge Hashem in this mundane activity, we open ourselves to the same insensitivity that we have seen above. In truth, all of the commandments elevate our mundane acts into ways to serve Hashem. May we bring this acknowledgement of Hashem into our lives which in turn will create the sensitivity we must have to interact with our fellowmen.

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### **RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL**

## **Build Your Portfolio**

**G**rowing up, I was an avid baseball fan. The Baltimore Orioles were my team. My oldest child was born just hours after my wife and I attended a game. We are still uncertain if the disappointment in another Oriole loss or the kosher hot dog stand fare actually induced the labor. There is one player, however, and not even an Oriole, that gained my deepest respect.

Nolan Ryan. To me, he was a true celebrity.

Nolan Ryan would remain after a game and sign autographs for all those waiting. Long after the bus took his teammates to the hotel, Nolan was there talking to the fans. A taxi driver remarked that he once drove Nolan Ryan to the hotel over three hours after the game ended.

When asked why he was so dedicated to the fans, Nolan replied, "because it's the fans who make me who I am. Without them, I'm just another guy in a uniform".

In Pirkei Avot (4<sup>th</sup> Chapter) we learn: Who is an honored person? One who honors others. For one to be truly important, they must see the value of others.

Too often when people find fame or fortune, they forget their humble beginnings. Even worse are those climbers who forget or neglect the very people who helped them achieve their status.

Parshat Ki Tisa details the story of the sin of the golden calf. HaShem tells Moshe that such betrayal deserves the destruction of the nation. In his plea to HaShem to forgive the Jewish people, Moshe gives HaShem an ultimatum: "Now if You will forgive their sin (then good) and if not, erase me from the Book which You have written".

HaShem told Moshe that he would be the new beginning of the Jewish nation. The status of the *avot* would be transferred to him. For Moshe, it wasn't about "me". His essence was responsibility for his people. He was chosen by HaShem to lead this nation, in any circumstance. If there would be no more people, then there would be no more Moshe.

As much as the nation is influenced by its leader, that leader is the only the sum of his people. Rather than being incensed by what could be considered insolence on the part of Moshe, HaShem brought him closer than ever, spoke to him "one to one" and revealed to him what no other person would ever see.

Moshe's concern was for his people, not just his family and friends, not just the righteous, but rather for every person despite who he was or what she might have done. His caring for others did not diminish his stature. It solidified him as the greatest leader in our history.

That is the essence of a true leader or influencer. It's not who I am or what I know. It's about what I *do*. Perhaps even for those whom I have never met.

Imagine, if you will, that you are surrounded by a glass window. Glass is clear allowing you to see out and others to see in. Take that same glass and coat one side in silver or glitter. It now becomes a mirror. When looking in a mirror, one only sees themselves.

Fortunate are those who attain wealth or fame and don't let that silver or glitter coat their window. "Unhappiness comes from mirrors. Happiness comes from windows."

I know someone who is climbing the ladder of social media fame. Their "followers" and fan base steadily increase. Yet, as busy as they are, they acknowledge or reply to every comment or post.

They recently posted the following on one of a social media platform: **"I decided that I'm getting tired of taking selfies all the time and posting them here.**

**Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! It's what my life has become. And I don't like it.**

**I may be a performer and, hence, an attention seeker, but I don't want to keep up this self-absorbed social media parade any longer. It just doesn't feel right to who I am.**

**Where's the fine balance between sharing one's Gd-given talents and shoving one's presence down others' throats?"**

These are words of an influencer who won't let the glitter of notoriety shade their commitment to remain true to themselves.

May all celebrities learn by their example.

Today, we are able to reach massive numbers of people through social media and countless applications. Someone formally unknown can achieve celebrity status literally overnight. Thanks to these tools, the potential to influence and impact is greater than ever before.

It's our choice to decide how to use these amazing tools of communication. Will they be like glass, allowing us to be seen while still seeing others? Or, will it become a silver or glitter coated mirror which only allows us to see ourselves?

True leaders and influencers understand that is not about "who I am" but rather **what we are**. Our care and concern for others create a legacy far beyond those "15 minutes of fame". ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal. *Rabbi Leventhal is the Executive Director of Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org*

#### **RABBI YISROEL CINER**

### **Parsha Insights**

**W**ith 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

