



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Ki Tisa 5782

Sleeping Gods

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered February 29, 1970)

Ever since Rachel Carson wrote her *Silent Spring* some seven years ago, and especially during the last year or two, the problem of man's mishandling of nature has come to the forefront of public consciousness. Once, a small, elite group used to advocate conversation, trying to protect certain specific preserves of nature from plundering by a careless humanity. Today, however, all segments of the public have become interested in ecology— not only in specific areas of nature, but in the totality of natural forces, based upon the premise that injury to any one significant segment of the natural scene will upset its fine balance of forces and so eventually destroy human life on the face of this planet.

We should not be deterred by the attraction ecology seems to have for many radicals and cultists, who apparently have tired of civil rights and even Mao and the Black Panthers. It is an extremely urgent project and deserves the most serious attention by all of us. The President and Congress have moved forward commendably in trying to legislate on the subject. Yet, that is still inadequate. It is not enough to eliminate known sources of pollution of the air and water. A distinguished scientist, Rene Dubos (in *Psychology Today*, March 1970), has reminded us that we still know very little indeed about pollution. Some 70% of the precipitate contaminants in urban air are still unidentified, and 20-30 years from now, those who today are infants, the ages of 1,2, and 3, will undoubtedly show varying signs of permanent and chronic malfunction. Modern technological man, apparently, is clever enough to subdue nature— and stupid enough to wreck it.

There is no doubt that Judaism fully supports the endeavors to restore the balance of nature with man's respect for it. The Bible teaches us that man was given

dominion over Nature: after creating man and woman, "God blessed them and God said unto them: 'be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth'" (Gen. 1:28). But to have dominion does not mean to destroy. We are to subdue nature, but we are also responsible for it.

The Halakhah has enshrined this principle in law. The Torah explicitly forbids the wasteful destruction of a fruit tree in a time of siege. The Halakhah extends this prohibition to cover all times, whether of war or of peace. But how about the wanton waste of other natural objects, not fruit trees? Most authorities (Tosafot and Sefer Yereim) hold that the "fruit tree" is but a single instance of any kind of wasteful destruction, all of which is equally forbidden by biblical law and punishable by flogging. Maimonides (who earlier had held to the same opinion, but then changed his mind) decided that only destruction of the fruit tree is punishable according to biblical law. What of other objects? Some commentators believe that Maimonides includes them as rabbinical prohibitions. But one important commentator (מנחת חינוך) holds that Maimonides proscribes flogging from the fruit tree, but all other objects, while not punishable, are equally prohibited by biblical law.

What we derive from all this, is that the Halakhah clearly enjoins any brutal, wanton, senseless offense against nature— and even against human produce. It demands of us a sense of responsibility before all creativity, and a special sense of reverence before God's work.

However, our theme this morning concerns not primarily the balance of nature, but a related problem of equal or greater urgency. I refer to what might be called

“moral ecology,” the offense against the spiritual tone of our environment. We must be concerned not only by the pollution spewed out from the chimneys of industry that contaminate our air and water, but by the moral rot that is projected on our movie screens, that infiltrates our homes through the television, that degenerates the stage and the newsstand. We must begin to pay more attention not only to the air which we breathe, but also to the atmosphere in which we grow and raise our children.

It is interesting that the Torah borrowed terms from the physical world to symbolize moral achievements. The Torah speaks of moral excellence as *taharah*, which literally means “cleanliness,” and moral corruption as *tum’ah*, which literally means “uncleanliness.” In English too, we speak of “filthy” and “clean” as moral categories. In the Jewish tradition sin is known as *zuhama*, dirt, and the great Prophet Isaiah calls his people to moral excellence and rehabilitation with the words *rachatzu, hizakku*, which literally means, “wash yourselves, come clean.” (Isa. 1:16)

That we are now morally in a state of ecological disaster is self-evident. Pornography has become a big business. Millions of customers are attracted to it every week in this country. We now hear of chains of “supermarkets of erotica.” Technology has been placed at the service of degeneracy.

This inundation of society by destructive elements has, paradoxically, been helped along by our own good intentions! As liberal-minded people, we are naturally against censorship. Our bitter historic experience with tyranny and dictatorship has sensitized us against it. Yet we may have overdone it. We have absolutized freedom—and that is dangerous. We have failed to foresee the consequences of our unthinking opposition to any form of control.

Now, I am not in favor of a rigid, hard, Victorian censorship. But I am not for the theory that “everything goes.” It is true that it is almost impossible to determine a consistent, objective, criterion for what constitutes salacious, immoral, and obscene material. But I prefer a crazy-quilt pattern of inconsistent regulations, irrational as they may appear, to the politics of exasperation which abandons all efforts at control because uniformity cannot be achieved and which therefore permits all society to turn scatological. In a totally permissive society, everyone and everyone’s children are threatened by the forces of moral filth. And in a democracy, we do not grant freedom to

some at the expense of others.

What we need therefore is a redressing of the ecological balance of society between freedom and responsibility, between civil rights and the right to maintain one’s moral integrity. The alternative to determined action to restore enlightened common-sense control is more environmental insult, a situation where we who do not wish to be overwhelmed by the universality of obscenity, will be forced, against our will and our better judgment, to accept these very values. We are in a situation of true *magefah*, a plague of obscenity which affects everyone with or without his consent, and it will take decades to undo the effects of this dense, spiritual smog.

What must we do?

First, as we have said, we must remove the forces of pollution. Government must control filth and literature, stage and cinema, no less than the protection of the air and the water from contamination by industry. We must do so without too heavy a hand— but we must do so. The courts must guard against excessive censorship, but they must accept responsibility for some form of elemental control.

Second, we must make use of our own “purifying” agents in an attempt to redress the balance. Against the plague from without, we must utilize positive forces from within.

The Sidra of this morning tells us of a service in the Temple which symbolized a moral anti-pollutant. We read of the service of the *ketoret*, the incense, offered in the Sanctuary. Elsewhere in the Torah, we read that the offering of the incense was effective in neutralizing *magefah*, the plague. I suggest that both terms must be taken morally as well: in a situation of moral plague, we must marshal our inner resources to sweeten the air again.

The Zohar (II, 230 a, to *Pekudei*) offers an answer to a question that has always bothered me. We read (in last week’s Sidra) that the incense was offered on a special altar or *mizbeiach*. But why should the platform on which the incense was offered be called *mizbeiach*, altar? After all, the word *mizbeiach* comes from the word *zevach*, which means a sacrifice, an animal or fowl which was slaughtered—and on the altar of incense there was no slaughtering. The Zohar answers: אל בגין דבטיל וכפית לכמה because the *ketoret* binds (as one does an animal for slaughter) and nullifies and destroys various manifestations of evil.

The incense represents the force against corruption. It

symbolizes the need for a clean moral environment, for a sweet and pure spiritual atmosphere. It is the Bible's form of drug culture: not pot or acid or speed, but incense to elevate man's conduct, to cleanse the moral milieu, to restore a healthy balance to a spiritually threatened society.

What do I mean by this? What relevance does ketoret have to our days? After all, we do not subscribe to those forms of "creative liturgy" that some ignorant young Jews, in imitation of their Christian counterparts, are trying to foist upon us as "the service of the future," and which is more influenced by Timothy Leary than by Moses or Maimonides.

However, the Talmud has taught us (Men. 110): תלמידי חכמים העוסקים בתורה בכל מקום מעלה אני עליכם כאילו מקטרין ומגישין לשמי. The Almighty accepts the study of Torah by scholars as if they had offered up ketoret or incense to him.

Torah, then, is the modern equivalent of the incense service. At a time when obscenity flourishes in an atmosphere of permissiveness, Torah demands decency by the means of self-discipline. At a time when pornography has become institutionalized as a new culture, Torah must be accepted not only as law, certainly not merely as literature, not even as religion—but as a powerful counter-culture. (Who would have thought ten or twenty years ago, that Torah, which in antiquity came as a protest against obscene pagan rites and religious orgies, would today have the same function! Once we considered such themes as irrelevant to modern times—and today it is unfortunately so very relevant!)

Torah as a culture means that we must create an environment of Torah, one in which its study is a matter of constancy, not a haphazard attempt to catch a word here and a stray thought there. This indeed is the attempt of Yeshiva University— from its high schools through the Yeshiva proper, from Stern College through Erna Michael College and the James Striar School. It is an effort to create not only a form of instruction, but a full environment which will generate countervailing pressures against the pollution and contamination of the larger contemporary environment, and in this sense we are opposed to what is happening around us.

And not only children must turn to Torah as the form of incense to stay the plague of immorality, and not only at the university level. Mature adults must do likewise. To send children to study is futile gesture. If they do not see us, their elders, behaving in the way we train them, then

everything we do for them is probably wasted. I therefore cannot fail to express mild disappointment with my congregation. People who are educated, enlightened, and sophisticated, as is the membership of The Jewish Center, are not doing enough for their own Torah education. Our attendance and interest and participation in the minimal adult education we do offer is far from sufficient, far from adequate.

And yet, I admit, that mere study of Torah is insufficient. It must be study in a certain manner.

We must face the facts. The new generation, about which so much has been said and written, wants to be "turned on." It seeks not only new ideas, but new experiences. And therefore so many of its numbers take to experimentation with drugs and with sex—and the two are related. Indeed, I am appalled at the extent to which this rot and corruption that infests society has seeped into our own ranks. I am shocked at the extent to which it has infected our own group—although we are much less affected than others. I am distressed at the "experimentation," the experience-searching, the thrill-seeking by respectable, well-to-do, stable, Jewishly-afflicted young people, even over the age of thirty.

What we must do, then, is reveal the experiential dimensions of Judaism. Torah is eternal, but the teaching of Torah varies with each generation. Judaism is unchanging, but the form of its transmission must always change. It is like a delicate musical instrument, which must be revered if it is to survive intact, but which can be plucked to offer new tones and suggest new insights. The cultural and emotional and social forms that appeal to the new generation today are not those that appealed to generations past, not even to American Jewry at The Jewish Center 20 years ago. Then the problem was to show that Orthodoxy is clean and decorous and aesthetic and dignified. We still have not reached the high point of this vision. We certainly must never abandon these ideals and forms. But they are not sufficient. What youth today seeks is feeling and involvement, warmth and experience, ecstasy and heart. If we are fixated at one level, if we fail to appreciate what it is that a generation wants and what we can and must offer— we may very well be bypassed.

Therefore, it is up to us to prove that the demands of life and dignity are not irreconcilable and that, in fact, they are supplementary to each other. We must put more passion into our prayers, more conviction into our study. We must

not allow aesthetics to anesthetize people. Our “davening” must not be so drily formal that one who comes to the synagogue feels he must put a muffler around his spirit lest it catch a death of a cold.

The same Sages who told us that ketoret symbolizes the study of Torah, taught that ketoret symbolizes joy and happiness: אין הקטורת באה לא על החטא ולא על העוון אלא על השמחה (M. Tanchuma). The incense was not meant to cover up sin or make up for the guilt of transgression, but to express joy and ecstasy. We must bring these potential dimensions of Judaism to the fore in our times: kavanah, life, warmth, and heart.

More or Less

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

This week’s parsha begins with the command to collect a half shekel from each Jew when there is a need to count the people. The Torah says that the people being counted would give this coin as a ransom for their souls, to avoid a ‘negef,’ or plague, when they are counted. A number of commentators ask, why this mitzvoh, recorded here after the command to build the inner altar, is mentioned at the end of parshas Tetzaveh, and immediately before the command to construct the kiyor - the copper washstand - and its base? Rabbi Ya’akov ben Chananel Sokoly, who was a student of the great Talmudic scholar, Rashba, explains, in his *Toras HaMincha*, that Moshe, as recorded in the midrash, was troubled after hearing the laws concerning the inner altar. Once a year, the Torah says, Aharon would bring an offering that would effect atonement for the people. That one day is Yom Kippur, when each person is counted and judged by God. When Moshe heard that the people are open to harm when they are counted individually, he wanted to know how they could protect themselves the rest of the year, at times when they would be counted. God settled his mind by telling him that the half shekel, given by each person, would protect them from any harm. This explanation, which is based on the Midrash Tanchuma, is given, in essence, by the Ba’al HaTurim, as well, albeit in a much briefer form. However, it does not explain the connection between the mitzvoh of giving a half shekel, and the mitzvoh which follows it, the construction of the kiyor and its base. I would like to offer a suggestion that will explain the connection of the giving of a half shekel to

Our moral ecology has been disrupted. The balance of moral forces in society is as threatened as the balance of natural forces in the air and the water about us. An insidious degeneracy endangers us and our families.

Before it is too late, we must betake ourselves to the ketoret of Torah— and let us do so with passion, with feeling, with simchah.

Then indeed our success will be an occasion for even more simchah, and the society we create will be as pure and as sweet-smelling as if it had been aerated with the ketoret of old itself.

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the command to build the inner altar that precedes it, as well as the command to construct the kiyor, that follows it.

In last week’s Netvort, we mentioned the explanation of Rav Aharon Soloveichik, zt”l, that the mishkan, in general, represents the form that a proper Jewish home should take. Just as the mishkan functioned as a dwelling place for God’s divine presence among the people, so, too, every Jewish home should be ordered in such a way that God’s presence is felt within it. The inner altar, which was overlaid with gold, symbolized, according to Rav Aharon, the need to make, at times, sacrifices with one’s wealth in order to assure that one follows the path of the Torah. The challenges of wealth, we noted, can be harder than the challenges of poverty, and perhaps it was for this reason that the golden altar was mentioned at the very end of the construction process. Perhaps, then, the placement of the mitzvoh of giving a half shekel, following immediately after the section of the golden altar, carries a message in regard to how one should view his financial place in life. The requirement to give a half shekel for the daily sacrifices brought in the mishkan applies equally to rich and poor, as we read in this week’s parsha, “the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less” (Shemos 30:15). Perhaps part of the message here is that everyone needs to realize that whatever level of wealth he has reached is decided upon by God, and, therefore, he should have an attitude of equanimity to his level of wealth, or lack thereof. This attitude will make it easier to meet the challenges of wealth or poverty, as the case may be.

The need for equanimity in regard to one’s financial

position is, according to Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l, the purpose behind a mitzvoh recorded in parshas Tetzaveh. There is an interesting requirement regarding two of the garments specific to the kohein gadol - the Ephod, an apron-like garment, and the Choshen Mishpot, the breastplate of judgment, worn over the Ephod. The Torah says, “And they shall bind the Choshen from its rings to the rings of the Ephod and the Choshen shall not be detached from upon the Ephod” (Shemos 28:28). The Ephod, says the Talmud, atones for the sin of idolatry, and the breastplate atones for the sin of corruption of justice. Rav Moshe explained that the Ephod and Choshen had to be bound together to demonstrate that one who has proper faith in God would never pervert justice and take something that does not belong to him. One who believes in God and His workings in the world understands that he receives exactly what is coming to him and what is necessary for him to accomplish his purpose in life (see Netvort, parshas Tetzaveh, 5761 - available at Torahheights.com - for another explanation of this mitzvoh).

Misappropriating someone else’s property betrays a lack of faith and trust in God. Treating the rich and the poor on an equal basis with regard to the mitzvoh of giving a half shekel, following on the mitzvoh to build the golden altar, can be seen, then, as conveying the message that one needs to view the sacrifices of wealth that he makes in maintaining a Torah-true life with a degree of equanimity, as well.

Following our explanation of the placement of the mitzvoh of the half shekel after the mitzvoh of the golden altar, we can understand, on a symbolic level, why the next mitzvoh mentioned is that of constructing the washstand.

Giving Your Fire

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Mar 16, 2017)

At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, the pasuk says: *Zeh yitnu kol ha-over al ha-pekudim machatzit ha-shekel be-shekel ha-kodesh esrim geira ha-shekel machatzit ha-shekel truma la-Hashem*. It uses the word *zeh* when stating that everyone should give a half a shekel. And Rashi quotes Chazal that whenever this word appears in the Torah, there is a special drasha to explain its use. It implies that someone shows you something, and you look at it. That’s the meaning of *Ba’avur Zeh* that we

The Torah says that the laver was placed in the mishkan so that the kohein could wash his hands and feet before entering the area in which he was to perform divine service. Connecting this mitzvoh to that of the half shekel, perhaps we can say that whatever wealth a person sacrifices in order to perform his holy work must be attained through halachically acceptable means - with clean hands and feet. Rabbi Chaim Kohn, one of the dayanim, or rabbinic judges, of the Breuer’s community in Washington Heights, New York, explained, in a similar way, the connection between two enactments of King Shlomo, that of *eiruv chatzeriros* - a device that allows us to interconnect houses and courtyards so that carrying between them is permissible on Shabbos - and washing one’s hands before eating. These two enactments, the rabbis tell us, were made at the same time. What is the connection between them? Rabbi Kohn explained that making an *eiruv chatzeiros* facilitates interaction between people. As long as a person is isolated and sticks to his own household, it is relatively easy to maintain clean hands. Once he begins to interact with society in general, however, it is much harder. In a similar way, the mitzvoh of constructing the *kiyor*, and the need to wash one’s hands and feet before entering holy ground to serve God, are mentioned after the mitzvoh of giving a half-shekel to symbolize that the money we sacrifice in order to serve God must be attained with clean hands. Belief in God’s providence as determining the degree of one’s wealth, symbolized by the requirement of everyone to give exactly a half-shekel towards the purchase of the daily Temple sacrifice, will assure that a person will maintain clean hands and feet as he approaches the holy.

read on Pesach—meaning that you should have Matzah and Marror in front of you when you read the Haggadah. From the words *zeh Keili ve-anveihu* we learn that a *shifcha al ha-yam* saw more than the navi Yechezkel—because they actually saw Hashem—in some sense. In the case of Ben Sorer u-Moreh, the word *zeh* teaches us that his parents cannot be blind because they need to point out to the judges that this son does not listen to them. And in the same vein, Rashi says here, that *zeh* means Hashem

showed Moshe a *matbeya shel eish*—a fiery half-shekel coin—saying: This you should give for Machtzis ha-Shekel donation. The question is, why did Hashem show this to him? Some things are complex, like the *ma'ase ha-Menora*. Therefore, Hashem showed Moshe a fiery Menorah because of its intricate construction and fancy decorations. And Hashem had to show Moshe exactly how the new moon appears when we can make Kiddush Ha-Chodesh. But what is so complex about a half-shekel coin? And if you say that Moshe didn't know its exact size, I don't know how seeing it would help—you would need a scale and weigh it. And since the coin that Hashem showed Moshe was fiery, mistake it didn't have any weight.

So, on the simple level, you could say that Hashem gave Moshe an idea of the size and the dimensions of this silver coin, so he would be able to reproduce it. But it still seems unnecessary to show a fiery coin. Why not simply show him a silver coin instead? Therefore, the Chassidim say: No, Hashem wasn't just showing him the shiur of half-shekel. Hashem was showing Moshe the essence of Machtzis ha-Shekel. After all, what is its purpose? *Le-chaper al nafshoseichem*. That's a big deal! A whole maseches discusses Shekalim! There are all kinds of drashas explaining why it's specifically a half-shekel. But what's the *amkus*? Why is it so important? What's so great if a Jew gives a half-shekel? If you tell him that he should give a lot of money, tithe his produce, *moser nefesh* for Hashem—that's one thing. But how does a

big kapparah result from just giving an ostensibly measly half-shekel to tzedaka? How does that save us from a plague and give us kapparah from all our aveiros? That's what Moshe didn't understand. Therefore, Hashem showed him a *matbeya shel eish*. It's not the silver in the coin that effects the kapparah. It's the *eish* of the coin. You could do something big and important but, in a cold, dispassionate fashion—just to be *yotzei zain*. Or you could do a small thing and do it with *eish*—with *hislahavus*. You could do it with excitement; you could do it with an appreciation of the opportunity to do even small things for avodas Hashem. *Derech drush*, maybe that's the *remez* for what Hashem showed Moshe, to teach you: Don't think that you are just *yotzei zain* with a small coin. Don't think that there are mitzvos that are not so important. Don't ask what's so deep and significant about this mitzva? After all, these are just small things. And the answer is: The physical aspect of this mitzvah might be small, but it's the inner aspect that's important. If you do it with a real desire to come close to Hashem, then it's tremendous, and it's heavenly—and a tiny half-shekel piece can connect you to Hashem. And that's perhaps the lesson of Parshas Shekalim that it doesn't only matter whether what we do is big or small, but it matters if it's a *matbeya shel eish*. If you do something, and inside you are really connecting with Hashem—then, no matter how big or small it is, it's really big in Hashem's eyes. And it gets you *le-chaper al nafshoseychem*—to bring you closer to Hashem. Shabbat Shalom.

The Aura of Shabbos

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Ki Sisa, the Bnei Yisrael are commanded regarding Shabbos (Shemos 31:12-15). After commanding us regarding Shabbos, the Torah records:

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְעִשׂוֹת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם. בֵּינִי וּבֵין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָהּ הוּא לְעֹלָם כִּי יִשְׁפֹּט יְמֵי עֲשָׂה ה' אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנְפֹּשׁ.

And the Children of Israel guarded the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant; Between Me and the Children of Israel, it is forever a sign that in six days Hashem created the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested (Shemos 31:16-17).

On the above verse (31:16), it is of significance to note

that the word “לְדֹרֹתָם, for their generations,” is written ‘*chaser*’, meaning without any ‘*vav*’s’ (which would have made it written maleh, לְדֹרוֹתָם). As each and every letter in the Torah is calculated and with intent, what is the lesson in the ‘missing’ *vav*’s?

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Bregman writes, “Yalkut Reuveni points out that the word לְדֹרֹתָם is written here without the one or two *vav*’s that we would usually expect to find in the spelling of the word. Why is this so?

“He answers that this is to enable the word to also be read as ‘*l’dirasam*’, which means ‘throughout their *diras*,’ i.e.: in all their homes and dwelling places.

“When this alternative rendering is plugged into the verse, it provides us with a powerful reminder as to how a Jew

is supposed to prepare his home for the Shabbos. Each and every Jew has an eternal covenant, a בְּרִית עוֹלָם, with the Shabbos that not only requires that we refrain from forbidden labor, but that our homes - our דירות (*diros*), our dwelling places - be ready for Shabbos in a timely fashion and with the proper atmosphere in the home” (*Short and Sweet on the Parsha*, Feldheim, p.271-218).

When we welcome the Shabbos Queen - Shabbos ha’Malka - to our homes, it must be with diligent preparation, an aura of holiness and calm, and an excitement for the special kedusha of Shabbos that graces our homes, our personal diros, where the Shechina (Divine Presence) desires to dwell.

In regard to the command to construct the Mishkan, which continues in our Parsha, there are multiple times when the Torah associates the topic of Shabbos with Mishkan (such as in Ki Sisa, and Parshas Vayakhel, Ex.35:1-3). Why are the topics of Shabbos and Mishkan intertwined?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt’l, the Rav, teaches, “The Beis HaLevi explains that there are basic necessities to maintain physical life, and there are luxuries which are greatly enjoyed but do not constitute necessities. In our spiritual lives, too, there are mitzvos which are basic to our existence as Jews, and there are other mitzvos which, although beautiful, we can survive without as a people if necessary.

“Knesses Yisrael have survived for 1,900 years without a Temple, sometimes very well. Without the Beis Ha’Mikdash (BHM”K) we produced Tanaim, the Mishnah was written, the Gemara followed. Without the BHM”K we had the Geonic period, Rishonim, Mekubalim, Chassidic leaders. Of course, Jews pined for the rebuilding of the Temple. Obviously, the presence of prophets and a BHM”K widens one’s religious horizons. Yet we can survive without these. On the other hand, a Klal Yisrael without Shabbos cannot exist. Shabbos to the soul is like

Returning to the Big Stage

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The circumstances were dire. Weeks after pledging allegiance to Hashem we debased ourselves, frolicking around a calf fashioned from gold. The crashing sounds at Sinai announced a bold new message: G-d had no face and wasn’t physical or visual. Sadly, we

water and bread to the body” (*Chumash Masores ha’Rav Shemos*, p.320-321).

For six days we work, and on the seventh day we cease. This cessation of work is a testimony to the Creator, Who fashioned the world in six days, and on the seventh day, keviyachol (as if it were possible) He rested. Hence, בְּיַיִן וּבְיַיִן, Shabbos is a sign between us and G-d forever. It is a sign over our homes and dwelling places that Hashem is the Creator, Sustainer, and Provider for us all.

Furthermore, Shabbos is referred to as “*me’ein Olam Ha’bah*, a holiness of the World to Come”, when all of our earthly concerns and worries are put aside.

Rabbi Dr. Twerski zt’l writes, “The earthly world is where we work to earn the merits of Gan Eden, to be in the immanent presence of G-d and to delight in the radiance of His glory. Once our earthly stay is over, there is nothing more to be done. That should be the Gan Eden of Shabbos, to delight in the radiance of Torah, in our prayers and in Torah study. There is nothing to distract us from this delight, because there is nothing more we must do.

“On Friday night, my mother would serve farfel tzimmiss. She would refer to this as ‘the Baal Shem Tov’s tzimmiss,’ using the symbolism of the world farfel for its similarity to the Yiddish word ‘farfallen,’ which means ‘over and done with.’ As she served the farfel tzimmiss, she would say, ‘Whatever happened until now is farfallen.’ In other words, we were not to bring any of the past into Shabbos. Everything in the past is over and done with. On Shabbos, we live in a state of completion, with nothing on our minds to distract us from bonding with G-d through Torah and prayer. וְשָׂמְרוּ בְּיַיִן וְשָׂמְרוּ בְּיַיִן אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת - this is what we do to make Shabbos holy” (*Twerski on Chumash*, p.176).

May we merit to keep Shabbos each week with the sanctity she deserves, until the End of Days, when we will be blessed with the Everlasting Day that is יום שְׂכּוֹל שָׁבָת. ומנוחה לחיי עולמים. May it be immediate and in our days.

corrupted this powerful idea by bowing to a human-sculpted creature. Rightfully, Hashem planned to replace us with a new nation- more intrepid and better suited to represent Him in this world

Moshe intercedes, heroically and desperately pleading

for our survival. First, he reminds Hashem of the great founders of our people and of their historical covenant. They alone, took the great leap of faith, rising from the darkness of an ancient world cursed by savagery and muddled by religious confusion. The grandchildren of these visionaries deserve a second chance-and a third, and a fourth. Covenants are forever. They outlast betrayal and infidelity.

While praying, Moshe asserts a second appeal on our behalf. More than four centuries had been invested a grand project of forming the nation of G-d. This nascent movement began to spread- from lone ideologues to an entire clan- and ultimately to an entire nation, three and a half million strong. Finally, after 2500 years of doubt, G-d was manifest in this world- through a community of humans which acknowledged Him.

All this religious progress was now jeopardized. To eliminate that nation, after so much investment, would have reversed hundreds of years of religious innovation. The Egyptians would, G-d forbid, mock and sneer, snickering that Hashem was powerless to steward the Jews through the desert or to deliver them to their homeland. Why else would he annihilate his beloved people? Religious skeptics would shrink Hashem to “one amongst many” ancient deities. If the Jews perished in the desert, the presence of Hashem would take a “hit, and would retreat from this world. This tragedy is called a chilul Hashem, and could not be tolerated. Perhaps we didn’t deserve to be spared, but we are the people of G-d and our condition in this world directly reflects directly upon His presence. This terrible worry about a potential chilul Hashem carried the day, and ultimately, Hashem offered us repentance and reconciliation.

As the chosen people, we bear enormous weight, and we wield mighty influence upon religious history. G-d spans all reality, but we hold the key to His presence on this planet. Through our behavior we can augment or diminish that presence. Throughout history, we valiantly defended His presence even to the point of martyrdom. Swords and fire could not defeat our great faith, nor could aggression and hatred conquer the bold religious ideas we introduced to humanity.

Of course, Judaism has no death wish and we prefer to sanctify His presence through life, rather than through blood. Through our religious lifestyles we model His will. We showcase the merit of a “godly” life of commandment,

morality, conscience, family and community.

During a long and dark period of history we abdicated the privilege of this “modeling”. For the past two thousand years we lived in a dreary tunnel of history. We were pushed aside to the margins of society, no longer inhabiting the front stage of history. Very few took notice of our “godly lifestyles”. We were depicted as historical castaways. When people did take notice of us, it was, typically, with rabid anger and venomous contempt. We had forfeited the opportunity to represent G-d through life, and were often called upon to represent him through death.

History has shifted. We have returned to prominence and to historical relevance. Society has welcomed us back, offering us influence and opportunity. They haven’t been disappointed. We have spearheaded modernity, revolutionizing our world while spreading prosperity. We have driven the advance of science, reason, technology, culture, economics and philosophy. We have offered the world our best light and, in doing so, have represented Hashem well.

But not always. This newfound prominence has come at a steep price. Sadly, many Jews in public roles, haven’t always risen to the occasion, and haven’t always acted as children of G-d. As a people it has yet to fully sink in: After centuries of living on the fringes of society we haven’t yet learned the consequences of living on the big stage. The world is once again paying attention to us, and we don’t always acquit ourselves well. We haven’t yet fully understood the connotations of the historical moment.

Our moral failures tarnish the presence of Hashem. We may not bow to gold idols, but modern society provides plenty of idolatrous temptations which have entrapped us. We must do a better job educating consciousness of this new reality. We live in a different era, and we can’t enter positions of leadership or public influence without realizing that our personal conduct impacts the presence of Hashem.

In previous generations Jews were nervous about creating a “shander” (literally “shame” in Yiddish) or disgracing our people. Living in a fragile post- Holocaust world, we stood on shaky ground. We reasoned: better not rock the boat or cause shame and undue attention.

Thankfully, our community is well beyond the “shander” syndrome. Today buoyant Jewish communities rightfully feel confident and relatively secure. We shouldn’t strive for

moral behavior based on fear of “shander”. Firstly, acting with conscience and conviction is crucial even if no one is paying attention. However the world is paying attention we must represent Hashem more capably and more nobly than we often do.

Something else has changed. Not only have Jews been restored to the societal “stage”, but our national identity has been reconstituted in Israel. Blessed with a state and with a homeland, we have crafted a democracy, a military superpower, and an bustling economy, winning us well-deserved international admiration. These accomplishments augment Hashem’s presence, as his ascendent people have

Shifting from Mikdash to Mishkan

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

The sin of the Golden Calf breaks up the Torah’s lengthy narrative about building the Mishkan. It comes after the building instructions, and before their execution. The Torah’s narrative flow raises the question of the actual chronology of events. Which came first, the Mishkan or the Calf? This question is debated by the various commentaries on the Torah. Rashi argues that the command to build the Mishkan was a response to the sin of the Calf. (commentary to Shemot 31:18) Ramban assumes the opposite. According to him, the plans for the Mishkan were revealed directly after the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. (commentary to Shemot 25:2)

These opposing positions point to different understandings of the purpose of the Mishkan. Ramban (ibid.) views the Mishkan as an extension of the Mount Sinai experience. The communication between God and the Jewish People didn’t end when the fire and sounds departed from the mountain. They continued via the Mishkan, where God’s presence rested on the Ark and spoke to Moshe. Within Rashi’s view, the Mishkan was likely a vehicle for atonement. It was a way to maintain a connection with God, despite the rupture in the relationship caused by the sin of the Calf. Variations on this kind of argument are presented in Midrash Tanchuma (Terumah 8), and by Seforno (in his Kavanot Hatorah).

Both of these positions are strained when it comes to explaining the Torah’s narrative flow. This is especially true for Rashi. If the Mishkan came about as a result of the Calf, then why does the Torah place two of the portions describing the Mishkan before describing that episode?

bucked the odds and built a masterpiece.

Having shifted into a world in which we glorify his name at a state level, we carry even greater responsibility to reinforce this message at an individual level. We can’t dream of national representation of G-d if we don’t reflect that message in our personal lives.

One day all of humanity will gather in Jerusalem and herald G-d and His people. Let us not wait for that day. Through our conduct we are building that Jerusalem. We better not wreck that city with dishonesty or moral weakness.

This question is somewhat less pressing for Ramban. According to him, the Torah is simply presenting the events as they occurred. Nevertheless, it still seems like the Torah’s presentation is intended to teach us something.

There is a third explanation that addresses both the chronology of events and the Torah’s narrative flow. The plan for the Mishkan was, in fact, revealed to Moshe at Sinai. After the sin of the Calf, however, the purpose of the Mishkan changed, though the physical structure stayed the same. This is why the Torah places the story of the Calf in the middle of the Mishkan narrative.

Close reading of the descriptions of the Mishkan before and after the episode of the Calf indicate that something changed:

1. In Parshat Terumah, the objects that compose the Mishkan are described in sequence, from the inside out: the Ark and other internal vessels, and then the structure (coverings, walls, courtyard, etc.). In Parshat Vayakhel the order is reversed, moving from the outside in.

2. In Parshat Terumah the Mishkan isn’t even called a Mishkan; it’s called a Mikdash (Shemot 24:8). The term Mishkan comes into use later, in Parshat Pekudei (ibid. 38:21)

The manifestation of God’s presence engendered by the Mishkan also shifts. In Tetzaveh, God says that through the Mishkan His presence will come to rest on the entire Israelite camp, and become a permanent fixture in their lives. (ibid. 29:43) In Pekudei, when the Mishkan is actually built, God’s presence is concentrated in the building itself and excludes every Jew. Even Moshe couldn’t

go inside initially. (ibid. 40:38)

Considering these differences, the results of the sin of the Calf start to come into focus. Before the sin, we were meant to build a Mikdash. The purpose of this building was to establish a point of contact with God via the Ark and other vessels and to sanctify (kdsh) the entire camp, elevating it to a new level of spiritual awareness. After the sin, the same building served as a Mishkan. The purpose of this building is its structure. It is a cordoned-off zone which

Limitless Leadership

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Kee Tisah, we read of the fateful sin of the people of Israel with the Golden Calf.

While the Torah states (Exodus 32:14), that G-d forgave the People of Israel for the sin of worshiping the Golden Calf, tradition maintains that the sin was not entirely forgiven. In fact, many commentators maintain that, after the sin of the scouts (spies), it was G-d's recollection of the sin of the Golden Calf that tipped the scale and resulted in the decree that the men of the generation of the Exodus would not be allowed to enter the land of Israel.

In Exodus 31:18, the Bible states that G-d gave Moses two "Tablets of Stone" inscribed by the finger of G-d to deliver to the People of Israel. However, when Moses delayed descending the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and demanded of him (Exodus 32:1), קום עשה לנו אלהים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ *"Get up and make for us a god that will go before us, for the man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him!"*

Perhaps as a stall tactic, Aaron tells the people to remove the rings of gold that were in the ears of their wives, their sons and their daughters, and to bring them to him. Upon collecting the precious jewels, Aaron binds them in a cloth, ignites them—and the jewels turn into a molten calf. The People of Israel brazenly call out to the calf (Exodus 32:4) אֵלֶּהָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, *"This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt."*

Again, perhaps stalling, Aaron builds an altar and announces plans for a festival on the following day. The next day, the people rise up early, offer sacrifices to the calf, eat and become intoxicated. When Moses descends with the two Tablets from the mountain and sees and hears the people reveling before the calf, he casts the Tablets down

houses God's presence (Shechinah) so that it can exist in proximity to the Israelite camp despite the fact that the camp itself is unworthy of God's presence.

The Mishkan, in both its forms, reflects God's love for us. Initially, as a Mikdash, it was meant to create the closest intimacy. In the end, as a Mishkan, it was a way of ensuring the relationship continued even when direct contact was impossible. We should follow God's example in our own relationships.

and shatters them at the foot of the mountain. He then takes the Golden Calf, burns it in fire, grinds the remains into fine powder, which he then sprinkles into water, and makes the people drink the water. At Moses' direction, the Levites then attack the leaders of this idolatrous action, killing about 3,000 men.

Moses begs G-d to forgive the people for the grievous sin that they had committed and presents G-d with an ultimatum. Boldly, Moses declares (Exodus 32:32): וְעַתָּה, אִם תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם, וְאִם אֵין מַחְנֵי נָא מִסַּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ, *"and now, if You G-d will forgive their sin, [good]. But, if not, erase me now from Your book, that You have written!"* Rejecting Moses' threat, the Al-mighty pronounces that only those who are sinful shall be erased. G-d then strikes the people with a plague apparently bent on destroying them. Moses, once again, pleads for G-d's forgiveness. The Al-mighty then tells Moses to carve out two new stone Tablets like the first ones. At that point, the Al-mighty pronounces His "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy," and grants forgiveness.

The Midrash relates that Moses was chosen to be the leader of Israel after G-d had watched Moses shepherd Jethro's flocks in Midian. On a particular occasion, one of the sheep had separated from the flock looking for water. After an arduous search, Moses finds the little lamb at the water hole. Moses lifts up the tired and thirsty animal and says, "Had I known that you were thirsty, I would have brought the water to you." Looking down from heaven, G-d says, "If this is the way Moses treats the animals, he is certainly qualified to be the shepherd of My people."

But the people of Israel are far different from gentle lambs. The freed slaves of Egypt are a people who had endured the tortures and beatings of their cruel Egyptian taskmasters. They are a people who for decades had

been exposed to the decadence of Egypt—orgies of blood and alcohol. They had been reduced to the 49th level of impurity and had become a “stiff-necked” people.

The gentle former-shepherd Moses now confronts this hardened and frustrated people, who haven't the slightest idea how to deal with freedom. They demand that their meals be served to them, and on time! They insist on having their meat and their bread. These recently-liberated slaves are not much into prayer or theology, and poor Moses is put to the test again and again.

Worse perhaps, is that Moses is entirely alone. Even Aaron appears to have defected to the other side. And yet, in this period of intense existential loneliness, Moses somehow summons the strength to defend the people “who are bent on evil,” before G-d's anger. Moses puts his own life on the line for Israel's sake, and proves persuasive enough to convince even G-d.

The Zohar, when comparing the merits of the various early Jewish leaders, notes that Noah did not intercede with G-d for his contemporaries when he was informed of their impending destruction. Abraham, however, repeatedly pleads on behalf of even the wicked people of Sodom. But, says the Zohar, Moses exceeded even Abraham, for Moses actually refused to budge until G-d had pardoned Israel. There was none who equaled Moses in his people's defense. He was indeed the “faithful Shepherd.”

The Midrashic interpretations portray Moses' defense of the Jewish people as even more self-effacing. Stating that Moses did not shatter the Tablets entirely out of anger and frustration, the Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 46:1, suggests that Moses really had a hidden agenda. When Moses breaks the Tablets, the Midrash quotes him as saying to the Al-mighty, “They sinned, and I sinned—after all, I broke the Tablets! If You forgive them, forgive me too. If You do not forgive them, do not forgive me, but rather erase me from the book that You have written.”

Despite all his heroic accomplishments—including the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the Red Sea, Moses' life had been most difficult. From the moment that he first intervened on behalf of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, the Israelites scorned and berated him, claiming that his intervention had only made life worse for them. Moses' pre-occupation with the Jewish people was total, almost to the point of breaking, and his lonely personal life is stark evidence of his total commitment to the People. Yet, Moses always rises to the occasion, and convinces G-d to forgive

His people. The life of Moses is clearly a paradigm of total selflessness.

While the Jewish people have been blessed with many extraordinary leaders over the centuries and millennia, no one has risen to the heights of Moses. This exceptional servant of the Al-mighty has been the most selfless and devoted servant of the Jewish people. It is his leadership and his love that still resonate with his people more than 3300 years after his death, and serves to encourage them, even today, to remain hopeful in the face of their many adversities and challenges.