

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאוד

### PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

#### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Ki Sisa

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

#### WHEN YOU GIVE, YOU GET

##### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*"Each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem." (30:12)*

The Baal HaTurim notes that the word "ונתנו - shall give" is a palindrome, meaning that it can be read the same way forwards as backwards. He writes, "This is to teach you that whatever someone gives to *tzedakah* will eventually come back to him and he will not lose out in any way."

Presumably, this concept is taken from the verse in Mishlei (19:17), "One who is gracious to the poor is considered to have lent money to Hashem, and He will pay him back for his kindness" (see also Beitza 15b and Kesuvos 66b). Yet, despite these reassurances, it is still very difficult to actually part with our "hard-earned money" to help someone we do not even know.

So how do we overcome this challenge? One should always bear in mind that Hashem is responsible for our wealth, and as we saw above, He will never let us lose out because of this great *mitzvah*. Furthermore, the Gemara (Yoma 75a) explains that while the Jewish People were journeying through the desert, each family received exactly the right amount of *manna* necessary for them. The lesson, says Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe, Parshas Beshalach), is applicable to all generations: If Hashem gives someone more wealth than they reasonably need, it must be that the surplus is meant for others.

It is up to us to make an account of all that Hashem has given us, both in terms of financial and physical possessions, as well as our talents and skills. Then we must ask, "Why was I given these gifts? What can I do with them? And how can I use what I have been given to help others?"

(Rav Shimon Shkop would often encourage his students to "give *ma'aser*" from their talents and knowledge by sharing it with others, and he promised them that just as giving *tzedakah* comes with a promise of economic enrichment, so too when one gives of his time to help others, he receives great spiritual benefits.)

#### OUR PAIN IS HIS PAIN

##### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem..." (30:12)*

If a person wants to pray for the Jewish people when they suffer for the lack of some need, he needs to elevate the Jewish people. This means that he has to say that their distress is not solely of concern to the Jewish people, but it is also of concern to G-d, since He is our Father. As the Talmud (Chagigah 15b) teaches, "When a person suffers, the *Shechinah* suffers as well." Accordingly, when a person views the distress of the Jewish nation as G-d's distress, he elevates the Jewish people to G-d. As a result, G-d will alleviate the suffering of the *Shechinah* and thereby, they will also be delivered from their distress.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse "When you will take a census (תשא את ראש) the Children of Israel," which can be read, "when you want to elevate the Children of Israel." This should be done "according to their numbers" (לפקדיהם), which can be read, "according to their lack," as in the verse "Dovid's place was empty (וויפקד)" (I Shmuel 20:25). Thus, the verse can be read, "When the Jewish people are lacking G-d's goodness, then you should elevate them." The verse goes on to describe how to elevate them: "Every man shall give to G-d an atonement for his soul." That is, the person's soul belongs to G-d, and the person's pain is also G-d's pain.

#### HEARTFELT CHARITY

##### Kotzker Rebbe

*"When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem..." (30:12)*

Moshe wanted to know how a coin could be an atonement for the soul. Hashem told Moshe that if a coin is given away with happiness, then it is for atonement, for when one gives charity with enthusiasm, he is giving with a full heart.

## THE HALF-SHEKEL

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem...” (30:12)*

It is forbidden to take a census (literally, “head count”) of the Jews. Take a half-shekel per person and count the *shekalim*. (Rashi)

Why should we count the Jews with *shekalim* and then give charity to avoid the plague that arises from counting people? Wouldn't it be better not to count the people and avoid the danger altogether?

However, the count serves an important purpose. Each Jew is able to serve G-d according to his own capabilities and limitations. The count implies a *tzimtzum* (constriction) of the desire for G-dliness burning within each person, in order to help each Jew marshal his energies to serve G-d in a measured fashion. The count is effected through the *Shekel* (שקל), which is similar to a *mishkal* (משקל, scale) upon which each item is carefully weighed and delineated. Then it can attain perfection. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 406)

It is forbidden to take a census (literally, “head count”) of the Jews. Take a half-shekel per person and count the *shekalim*. (Rashi)

It is forbidden to count Jews because a census indicates that there are “many,” which implies differences. When people are not counted, unity reigns. The way to “count” Jews is through the giving of charity - for example, the donation of the half-shekel to the Tabernacle. Giving charity elevates the Jews to the transcendental intellect, for at its root, they are all united. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 197a)

In unity, there is blessing and truth; in multiplicity, falsehood and curse can arise. The Torah forbids the counting of Jews (which emphasizes their separateness) lest one open the door to falsehood or curses. Instead, Moshe took a census by collecting a half-shekel from each Jew. Since it unites rich and poor, charity represents unity, blessing and truth. (ibid., V, p. 97a)

The initial letters of the words *Rosh Bnei Yisrael* (ראש בני ישראל, the head of the Jewish people) spell Rabbi (רבי, teacher). This indicates that the Jews require a qualified teacher to transmit G-d's message.

The giving of the half-shekel was a means of “counting the heads” of Israel (i.e., a “head count” or census). The Torah uses the word *rosh* (head) to denote that each person is different, having his own boundaries of knowledge and intellect which must be developed and nurtured. “Half” a shekel was given per head to indicate that each person can attain great knowledge but must never venture beyond his limitations. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 338)

The Hebrew word *lifkod* (לפקד, to count) also indicates a “lack,” as in *lo nifkad* (לא נפקד, no one was missing) (see Rashi on Bamidbar 31:49). Counting Jews (i.e., taking a census) represents a “lack.” However, the giving of the half-shekel - i.e., charity - advances a person to a higher level, beyond that which is lacking. Charity represents a “spirit of life,” drawing life and vitality into whatever is “lacking” to complete and perfect it. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 272)

Giving charity effects forgiveness much as a fast does. The purpose of a fast is to subjugate and negate the will of the body in favor of the will of the soul. In the same way, the communal sacrifices - which were funded by the giving of charity in the form of the *shekalim* - represent the idea that a person erroneously heeded his body's desires and must now negate those animalistic tendencies by rededicating himself to G-d.

Thus, the charity given for the Tabernacle and the act of fasting lead to the same goal. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 8a)

*Ki sisa es rosh* (when you count the heads) literally means “when you raise up the head.” The word *rosh* (head) is singular, referring specifically to “the head” - i.e., to the *tzaddik* who is the head and leader of the Jewish people.

In order to raise up and elevate the true leader of the Jews, you must give charity. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 5b)

## SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem...” (30:12)*

The *parashah* begins by counting the people with a half-shekel donation per eligible person as a way to elevate the people and achieve atonement for their sins (30:12).

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig asks, how can the mere half-shekel donation be considered so significant that it elevates those that give and forgives their sins? (Commentaries say that it is forgiveness for the Golden Calf, one of the biggest sins committed.)

Rabbi Zweig offers a beautiful perspective. The giving of the half-shekel converted the Jewish people from a “corporation,” with clear independent leadership, to a partnership where everyone is an equal owner.

With this perspective, we can appreciate that it's not the amount that is significant but the transformative gesture that is significant in that it makes everyone equally responsible for each other and personally invested in each other's successes. Accepting equal responsibility for each other is a vital step in becoming a unified people and an enduring nation.

## CROWNING HASHEM

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*“When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem...” (30:12)*

The idiom for “take a census” (תשא את ראש) literally means “lift up the head.” The Zohar teaches (2:79b) regarding the verse (Shemos 19:3), “Moshe ascended to G-d, and G-d called to him,” that all the ascents that a person experiences should be directed toward G-d, in order to crown G-d as King.

This is alluded to in the verse “When you will take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers.” The word for “numbers” (פקודה) also denotes “sovereignty,” as in the verse, “The king commanded (ויפקד)...” (Esther 2:3).

Our verse thus continues, “Every man shall give to G-d an atonement for his soul,” implying that all of one’s ascents should be directed only toward G-d to crown Him as King.

## RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*“When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem...” (30:12)*

The *parashah* begins with the words כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל, which, when translated, literally mean, “When you lift up the heads of the Children of Israel.”

This *parashah* contains the gravest of all the sins that the *Bnei Yisrael* committed during their stay in the desert - the *chet ha’eigel* - so how is it appropriate to talk about the Jewish People “raising their heads” in such a *parashah*?

The four main topics in the *parashah* are:

1. Shabbos
2. The *Mishkan*
3. The *machatzis ha’shekel*
4. The sin of the golden calf

Are these four random topics that happen to be mentioned together in one *parashah*, or are they grouped to deliver a particular message?

Rav Shimon Biton suggests that by arranging these topics together and starting the *parashah* with the words כי תשא, the Torah addresses two fundamental questions that everyone needs to ask himself regarding their direction in life.

The first question is: How can we take care to guard against falling into the seductive trap and warm embrace of the *yetzer hara*?

Second, if we do fall prey to the machinations of the *yetzer hara*, how should we react to avoid falling further? How do we extricate ourselves?

In answering the second question, the way to encourage the sinner to avoid further mistakes is not by rebuking or chastising him, but by emphasizing his greatness as a child of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. Specifically in a *parashah* that deals with the greatest fall, we need to begin with כי תשא - raising up!

In answer to the first question, of how to avoid becoming entangled with the *yetzer hara* in the first place, the Torah gives us three answers by grouping three topics together in our *parashah*:

1. *Machatzis ha’shekel* - I am only half of the world, and other people complete it. In essence, everyone is one part of the same whole. I would not purposely damage my hand, saying that it is only part of my body; likewise, I will not do anything to hurt another Jew, as we are all part of the same whole.

That is the foundation of all *mitzvos bein adam l’chaveiro*, and when the *yetzer hara* tries to tempt us to transgress any *mitzvos* between man and man, we need to remember the half-shekel and realize that hurting and damaging someone else ultimately pains and harms me.

2. *Mishkan* - the sanctity of space. Every person should ensure that they are in an environment that is conducive to spiritual growth. Our surroundings will play an essential role in pushing us onwards or holding us back.

3. Shabbos - the sanctity of time. Time is our most precious commodity, and we need to use it constructively by engaging in pursuits that encourage spiritual growth and *mitzvah* observance. If we are busy doing good, then we guarantee that there is no time to listen to the *yetzer hara*, and we will stay away from sin.

So, the three topics of *machatzis ha’shekel*, *Mishkan*, and Shabbos remind us of:

- The *mitzvos* between man and man
- The need to find a positive environment
- The need to keep busy with spiritual pursuits

The *parashah* then concludes with *chet ha’eigel* and comes full circle from where it began.

If the three topics teach us how to avoid sin, what happens if the *yetzer hara* entices us and we fall and sin?

The answer is כי תשא - we need to raise up the sinner.

After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe taught that the way to help people out of the vice-like grip of the *yetzer hara* is to elevate them by reminding them of their innate greatness. The way to help the people out of the mistake of the *chet ha’eigel* was כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל - remind them who they are, from whom they descend, and the glorious future that awaits them.

## **GIVING WITH PRIDE**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*“When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem...” (30:12)*

Why did the Torah choose to describe the taking of a census with the strange expression, when you raise the head? Even more puzzling is the teaching of the Sages (Bava Basra 10b): Moshe said before Hashem, “With what will the pride of Israel be uplifted?” To this Hashem replied, “With תשא - With raising up,” meaning that the pride (literally, horn) of the Jews can best be elevated by giving charity. Why did Hashem express His answer with this part of the verse when seemingly He was referring to the ending, “every man shall give an atonement for his soul,” a much clearer reference to *tzedakah*?

To resolve these problems, we can say that this verse intends to teach us a lesson in the giving of *tzedakah*, that the Torah expects us to give in a manner and quantity that will enable us to “raise our head,” to take pride in our giving. In practical terms, this means that we should make a bona fide effort to give as much *tzedakah* as our means allow, not just the minimum that will fulfill our obligation. Only if we give in this fashion will the glory of Israel be uplifted, whereas anything less than the full amount we are honestly capable of, while it is still a *mitzvah*, will not serve to “raise our heads,” to elevate the pride of the Jewish people. Many non-Jews also give charity; in order to be a source of pride, our giving must somehow be distinguished from theirs. The only way to do that is to give to the fullest of our ability, and to give not condescendingly but in a way that respects the honor of the recipient.

We can suggest another reason for the Torah’s use of an expression of “raising up” for the census taking. Certain people try to excuse themselves for neglecting their studies or being lax in doing *mitzvos* with the claim that since they are on such a low level - unable to learn properly, inadequate in the *mitzvos* they do - it would be presumptuous of them to even attempt these things. Objectively, of course, this humility is nothing other than a ploy of the *yetzer hara*, a (unfortunately) usually successful attempt to keep people ignorant and devoid of *mitzvos*.

To counter this strategy, the Torah comes and tells us, “Lift up your head and be counted along with everyone else! You count as one person, one Jew, no less than the biggest *tzaddik* and the biggest *talmid chacham*. Therefore, just like anyone else, you are expected to do as much as you are capable of - no less and no more. Don’t be so humble as to think your abilities are less than they are.” From this we can understand that all we need to grow in Torah and *mitzvos* is a willingness to work and a burning desire to improve ourselves. With these alone, we can become as great, in accordance with our nature and abilities, as the greatest scholars and *tzaddikim*.

Thus, when Hashem wished to count the Jews, He did it in a way that would make each person feel uplifted by the counting and would make him see himself as equal in number even to Moshe.

Each of us must therefore undertake to work in Torah and *mitzvos* to reach the level of the *tzaddikim*, for everything depends on us alone.

## **WILLING TO SACRIFICE**

### **Alshich HaKadosh**

*“When you take a census of the Children of Israel, according to their numbers, each man shall give an atonement for his soul to Hashem...” (30:12)*

An alternative rendering of this passage is: “And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, ‘When you appoint the head of the Children of Israel...’”

Hashem said to Moshe: When you appoint a leader and head of the Jews, choose only someone willing to sacrifice himself as a ransom for his people if need be.

## **POTENTIALS OF WEALTH**

### **Reb Elimelech Lizhensk**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

Rabbi Meir said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, drew forth a coin of fire from beneath the Throne of Glory and showed it to Moshe, saying, ‘In this manner shall they give it.’" (Midrash Tanchuma)

In spending money, one must remember that a coin is like a fire. Fire can burn and destroy, but if it is put to proper use it can give warmth and do much good.

The same is true of the coin. If it is spent for good causes, such as charity and free loans to the deserving needy, it can be of enormous benefit to mankind, but if it is squandered for evil purposes it can cause ruin and damage like a fire allowed to burn untended.

## **SPLITTING THE RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

The commandment to give a *machatzis ha’shekel* was in order “to make an atonement for your souls,” to atone for the sins of the Jewish people.

The amount was therefore set at precisely half a coin, to show that the Almighty Himself is responsible for the other half. Had He not created the *yetzer hara* to tempt us in the first place, we would never have transgressed!

## THE SHEKEL EFFECT

### Reb Noson of Breslov

“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty *geirah*.” (30:13)

There were three things that Moshe found difficult to understand until G-d showed him images made out of fire: the New Moon, the *Menorah*, and the half-shekel. (cf. Bamidbar Rabbah 15:9)

Admittedly, it is difficult to visualize the exact moment at which the New Moon appears. The structure of the *Menorah* was also very elaborate and would be difficult to visualize. But what was so difficult about the half-shekel, a known unit of currency, that stymied Moshe?

The half-shekel would be given by each Jew to pay for the communal sacrifices in the Tabernacle and also to effect forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. This sin was an extremely brazen act, committed at a time when the Jews had only recently left Egypt and had witnessed so many miracles, culminating in the Revelation at Sinai.

Due to the great wealth they had amassed during the Exodus, the Jews became arrogant and sinned; Moshe did not understand: If wealth leads to arrogance and brazenness, shouldn't we distance ourselves from wealth completely? How could wealth, the force that brought us to sin, now be used for charity to effect forgiveness for that sin?!

G-d answered by showing Moshe that wealth has a positive side, too: its power can be channeled into the building of the Tabernacle, the bringing of sacrifices, and gaining forgiveness. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 27a-28a)

By himself, each Jew is lacking [he is only half]. He must join with others to increase holiness. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 104)

*Shekel* (שקל) shares the same root as *lishkol* (לשקל, to weigh). One must weigh his words and deeds in order to act properly in any situation. Giving charity helps a person attain the proper balance (see Likutey Moharan I, 2:4). (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 105a)

Every year before Purim, as we give a symbolic half-shekel to charity in remembrance of the half-shekel that was given in the days of the Tabernacle, we draw upon ourselves the sanctity of the Tabernacle. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 203a)

The word *Geirah* (גרה) has the same numerical value as *Yitzchak* (יצחק), who represents judgment. Giving the *geirah* to charity nullifies the judgments. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 104)

## UNITED STRENGTH

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel...” (30:13)

Instead of counting people to establish the Nation's census, each person was instructed to provide a *machatzis ha'shekel* (half-shekel), which was counted and then used toward the expenses of the *Mishkan* (Shemos 30:16).

Why did the coin specifically need to be a half coin? If the purpose was merely to serve as a means of counting the Jewish People, any coin should have been sufficient!

Perhaps the message is that when a group comes together, especially when it is contributing toward the spiritual upkeep and development of their community, each member must approach his role with humility, knowing that however capable he personally may be, his strengths and talents are not complete without the strengths and talents of others.

With this understanding, the Malbim writes that even a wealthy person should be humbled by the fact that he cannot fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* without a poor person to receive his charity. Therefore, to instill this message in the hearts of the Nation, each person had to specifically represent himself with a half-shekel. (The Malbim writes that possessing such appreciation will serve as a tremendous merit for protection and success.)

Such an understanding builds a respectful, strong, and united community, the benefit of which can be demonstrated in the following parable:

A man on his deathbed gathered his children together. He asked the youngest to reach under his bed and take out a bundle of sticks bound in a rope. He then instructed his sons to try to break the sticks in two, but none of them were successful.

“Now, untie the rope,” said the father.

The bundle was untied, and twelve sticks were counted, one for each child.

“Now,” said the father, “everyone take a stick and break it.”

Everyone took a stick, some smaller or thinner and some bigger or fatter, and on the count of three, they all broke their stick with ease.

“This is what I wanted you to see,” exclaimed the father, “no matter how big or strong the stick is, it can be easily broken, but when the sticks are bound together as one unit, it cannot. So too, my dear children, however strong or successful or wealthy or clever you are, unless you bind yourselves together, you remain vulnerable and weak. But once you are all bound together, your individual weaknesses will not be exploited, and you will become an unbreakable unit. And this is what I beg of you, my dear children.”

## **PARTS OF A WHOLE**

### **Rabbi Solomon B. Shapiro**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

The half shekel is representative of Jewish society. No one person is an island unto himself, whole and complete. Each one of us is but a part of a larger entity, a *shul*, a neighborhood, an organization.

Giving a half shekel teaches us that isolating oneself from society is not the Jewish way.

## **COMPLETING OUR SOULS**

### **Reb Chanoch Henoch of Alexander**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

The Jewish People are commanded to give a *machatzis ha’shekel* - half a shekel, toward the *Mishkan*. Why not a whole shekel?

The word shekel has the same numerical value (430) as “nefesh” - soul. This alludes to the concept that every Jew is given only half his soul - his *neshamah* - from Heaven and the other half is his responsibility to create through his Torah, *mitzvos* and acts of *chesed*. By doing so, he melds his soul into one finished and perfect specimen.

## **POWER OF WEALTH**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

Rashi comments that the word “*zeh* - this,” teaches us that Hashem showed Moshe, in an image of fire, what the coin should look like.

Rav Yisrael Meir Druck (Eish Tamid) asks why Hashem used fire to portray the image of the half of the shekel.

Among the suggestions offered by Rav Druck is that fire can have either a positive effect or a destructive effect depending on how it is used. The same is true with money. Money can help one achieve some great things while at the same time it can cause one to descend to the depths of depravity. It is for this reason that Hashem chose fire as the means to illustrate what the coin should look like.

Based on Rav Druck’s explanation, the Torah is teaching us how careful and calculated we must all be in our approach to materialism.

On the one hand, it can serve as a powerful and positive influence on ourselves and the world around us. On the other hand, we must be vigilant and careful in order to ensure that it is being used in the right way!

## **FIERY REPENTANCE**

### **Yid HaKadosh**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

When a flame is burning, it does not remain still. The flame gets bigger and bigger. So it is with a person who does repentance with fervor: It is like the flame that does not rest. The letters of *shekel* (שקל, coin) can represent *shachbecha* (“while you rest”), *kumecha* (“when you rise up”), *lechtech* (“when you walk”) - the desire should constantly burn until there is true repentance.

## **UNITING HALVES**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“This they should give, everyone who passes among the counted, the half-shekel of the holy shekel. A shekel is equivalent to twenty geirah.” (30:13)*

The half-shekel was an expression of Jewish unity - rich and poor alike gave the same amount. Everyone gave only half a shekel in order to teach us that we can only achieve unity when we all recognize that we are just halves. To be a complete shekel, we must unite with our fellow.

Similarly, we are also only “half” in our relationship with G-d. The ten powers of the soul - our intellect and emotions - parallel the ten powers that G-d used in creating the world and continues to use in order to constantly re-create it. When we channel all ten powers of our soul - every nuance of our being - toward uniting with G-d and fulfilling our Divine mission, we align our soul-powers with G-d’s attributes. Our ten becomes twenty - a holy shekel. (Sefer HaSichot 5752, vol. 2, pp. 440-441) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **HUMBLE AND PROUD**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half of the shekel - to give the portion of Hashem, to atone for your souls.” (30:15)*

The “wealthy” should not think they have attained a greater level of G-dly knowledge, and the “poor” should not think they lack the capability to acquire this knowledge. Each can contribute to the building of the Tabernacle, the Temple of G-d, the holy intellect.

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*Shekel* (שקל) comes from the same root as *mishkal* (משקל, scale), which has weights on each side and must be perfectly balanced in the middle. This symbolizes the choice between brazenness and humility. The wealthy must not have arrogance, and the poor must not feel humiliated by false modesty despite their difficulties in life. The scale shows that brazenness and false modesty are the same blemish. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 90a)

## **PROPER BALANCE**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*“The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half of the shekel...” (30:15)*

The Torah instructs us in the *mitzvah* of *machatzis ha’shekel* - the requirement that each person twenty years and over give a half of a shekel to the *Mishkan*. One may not give more or less.

The Noam Elimelech shares an incredible insight based on this *pasuk*. He explains that the Torah is not only referring to the contribution of the *machatzis ha’shekel*. Rather, the Torah is also teaching us that a person who is affluent in *mitzvos* should not see himself as great, and a person lacking *mitzvos* should not see himself as lowly. Instead, each type of person should continue to push themselves in a direction of growth and *yiras Hashem*.

The Noam Elimelech is highlighting a powerful message. As we progress through life, we can’t allow ourselves to become too overconfident or too insecure. We have to remember to stay the course and keep plugging away, especially when it comes to our *avodas Hashem*. If we keep this in mind, we are sure to guarantee that our relationship with Hashem will continue to grow and flourish!

## **KINGDOM OF KOHANIM**

### **Rabbi Efreim Goldberg**

*“You shall make a laver of copper...” (30:18)*

Every morning, right when we wake up, we are required to wash our hands. According to one opinion, we wash because our hands might have touched something that necessitates washing for cleanliness. The Rashba, however, in one of his responsa (1:191), gives a different explanation. He writes that each morning, we are to acknowledge that we have been created to serve and bring honor to Hashem, and so “we must bring upon ourselves His sanctity, and wash our hands like a *kohen* who washes.”

According to the Rashba, each morning, we are like a *kohen* preparing to enter the *Beis HaMikdash*. As G-d proclaimed before *Matan Torah* (Shemos 19:6), ואתם תהיו מלכות כהנים - we are to become a “kingdom of *kohanim*.” Every one of us is a *kohen*. The world is our “*Mishkan*,” and our “*avodah*” is קידוש שם שמיים, to bring glory to G-d through our conduct. The obligation of נטילת ידיים in the morning applies to each and every one of us, not only to rabbis, not only to *kollel* students, and not only to the outstanding *tzaddikim*.

Each person is a *kohen*, and each morning, when we open our eyes and get out of bed, we prepare to serve G-d in the “*Mikdash*” - in *shul*, in the office, at home, in the gym, in the mall, on the highway, on the bus, at a *simcha*, wherever we are. At all times, we must see ourselves as *kohanim* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, charged with the role of serving Him and bringing glory to His Name.

## **SPACED RUNGS**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: ‘You shall make a laver of copper...’” (30:17-18)*

A Jew ascends the ladder of spirituality by performing *mitzvos*. The *mitzvos* correspond to the rungs of the ladder. Just as each rung leads to another, so too, each *mitzvah* performance leads to another. As our Sages (Avos 4:2) teach: “The reward for a *mitzvah* is another *mitzvah*.”

However, just as a ladder requires space between its rungs, so too, there must be levels between the *mitzvos*, for the *mitzvos* are crucial to our spiritual growth.

These levels are alluded to in the oft-repeated and seemingly redundant phrase “G-d spoke to Moshe, saying.” (See Likutey Moharan II, 59)

[Rabbi Chaim Kramer elaborates: The reiteration of this phrase, which interrupts the listing of commandments, alludes to those levels between the performance of *mitzvos*.

It appears that Rebbe Nachman means that a person must evaluate his performance of the *mitzvos* - Did he do his best? Was he sincere? How much effort did he put in? and so on - and assess his ability to approach the next *mitzvah* with an improved recognition of G-d.]

## **FREE FROM IMPURITIES**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“Now, you must take for yourself choice spices: five hundred shekel-weights of pure myrrh...” (30:23)*

One of the ingredients in the oil of holy anointing was *Mar dror* (pure myrrh) which was free of impurities.

Targum Onkelos translates this phrase as *Meira Dachya*, which is similar in sound to *Mordechai*, the *tzaddik* who figures prominently in the Purim story.

One who attaches himself to the *tzaddik* and his teachings - a man “free of impurities” - gains freedom from his materialistic burdens. (See Likutey Moharan I, 10:8)

## **ANOINTING THE MIND**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“Of it you shall make oil of sacred anointment...” (30:25)*

“Oil” refers to the intellect. A person must “anoint” his intellect with holiness. When he draws holiness into his intellect, he can continuously expand his mind. (See Likutey Moharan I, 4:10 and 54:1)

## **SPICE OF UNITY**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Take for yourself spices of nataf, shecheilet and galbanum - spices and pure frankincense...’” (30:34)*

The *ketores* (incense-offering) was made from eleven spices, ten of which had fragrant aromas and one, *galbanum*, which had a foul smell. The fact that *galbanum* had to be included in the *ketores* teaches us that we must include even sinners in our prayers. (Kerisus 6b)

The ten sweet-smelling spices also represent the Ten Types of Song (see Pesachim 117a), the height of joy. Yet even these are considered incomplete unless we learn how to blend in even a foul-smelling spice - i.e., to bind ourselves together with sinners and thereby elevate them to G-d. One who does so merits true prayer. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 2b)

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The Ten Types of Song (see Pesachim 117a) correspond to the ten sweet-smelling spices. If one experiences moments of sadness or depression (symbolized by the *galbanum*), he must grab hold of them and bring them into joy, thereby transforming depression into joy.

This also explains why the *ketores* (incense-offering) effects forgiveness for slander. The nature of slander is to separate between people. By bringing different types of spices together, the *ketores* show how we can heal dissension and increase unity among people. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 312)

## **DISCOVERING OUR MISSION**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*"See, I have called by name Betzalel the son of Uri, the son of Chur, from the tribe of Yehudah. I have endowed him with a divine spirit: with wisdom, insight, knowledge, and with [skill] in every craft. (31:2-3)*

The Torah tells us that due to his deep wisdom, Betzalel was chosen to build everything contained in the *Mishkan*. Linguistically, the verse says that Hashem had "called" (past tense) Betzalel for this task instead of saying "I am calling" (present tense). This suggests, explains Rav Moshe Feinstein (Megged Givos Olam, vol. 1, p. 97), that Betzalel had already been tasked with this mission. However, this is the Torah's first reference to Betzalel; if so, when was he previously "called" to take on this monumental mission?

Rav Moshe answers by pointing out the very next verse: "I have filled him with a G-dly spirit: with wisdom, insight, knowledge, and with [skill] in every craft." From the very fact that Hashem gave Betzalel such unique talents, writes Rav Moshe, it must be that he was destined for this role. Essentially, therefore, his "calling" came from the talents that Hashem had given him, for if a person is blessed with talents or gifts, it means that Hashem has entrusted him with a responsibility to use them in an appropriate way. (This also answers why Hashem told Moshe to "see," for when Moshe saw Betzalel's abilities, it was clear that he was destined for the task at hand.)

In fact, Rav Yisrael Salanter took this message so seriously that when he once formulated an ingenious approach to answer a contradiction in the words of the Rambam, instead of being delighted at the brilliance of his resolution, he became disheartened. He said, "If I am able to come up with such a pleasing solution, it must be that I have been granted a great deal of natural ability. In Heaven, they don't give such things as gifts, rather, they give it as means to serve Hashem, and perhaps I am not using my talents to the fullest."

While we might not have the exemplary talents as Betzalel or Rav Yisrael Salanter, each of us does possess unique skills and attributes with which to serve Hashem. These qualities should not be considered as mere gifts but as a designation of responsibility, for as we have seen from the message above, when we discover our talents, we have discovered our mission.

## **PURE MOTIVES**

### **Sichos Tzaddikim**

*"See, I have called by name Betzalel the son of Uri, the son of Chur, from the tribe of Yehudah. I have endowed him with a divine spirit: with wisdom, insight, knowledge, and with [skill] in every craft; to devise skillful works in gold, silver, and copper." (31:2-4)*

Since *machshavos* ("skillful works") may be rendered literally as "thoughts" or "intentions," this passage can be construed to imply that Betzalel knew the intentions of everyone who contributed gifts for the *Mishkan's* building, and he devised a use for each gift - from the feed for the cattle drawing the wagons to the Holy of Holies itself - in accordance with the purity of the donor's intentions in making the gift.

Thus, gifts entirely untainted by ulterior motivations such as pride or ambition on the part of their donor would be placed into the most sacred vessels of the Sanctuary.

## **SHAPING THE INTELLECT**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"And into the heart of all who are wise of heart I have put wisdom, and they shall do all that I have commanded you." (31:6)*

G-d places wisdom within the "understanding" of the heart. Although the mind - which corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Chokhmah* (Wisdom) - contains all the information that a person needs, that information must be processed through the heart - which corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Binah* (Understanding).

When one's heart gives the proper shape to his intellect, expressing it in good thoughts, words and deeds, his intellect can bear proper fruit. (See Likutey Moharan I, 49:1)

## **SHABBOS AND THE TZADDIK**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

We can say that the Torah alludes here to a different idea. If all the Jewish people would observe Shabbos properly, that would be ideal. However, since regrettably many do not observe Shabbos properly, the Torah gives us the following assurance:

The *tzaddikim* of every generation do keep Shabbos properly, giving pleasure to G-d. Moreover, the *tzaddik* himself is referred to as “Shabbos,” as is known (Zohar 2:94b). This is why the verse tells us, “Only observe My Shabbosos,” alluding to the situation when the Shabbos observers are in the minority - since the word “only” is limiting. The verse commands, “Observe My Shabbosos,” which literally reads: “My Shabbosos, you will guard.” Taking the word for “My Shabbosos” as the subject rather than the object of the verb “you will guard,” this phrase can be read, “My Shabbosos will guard you” indicating that through the *tzaddikim*, who are called “Shabbos,” the Jewish people are safeguarded from harm. In the merit of the Shabbos observance of the righteous, the rest of the Jewish people are shielded and protected.

This is because, as the verse continues, “it is a sign between Me and you.” The *tzaddik* is also referred to as a “sign” (Zohar 1:266a). The *tzaddik* is a sign and serves as an indication of the bond that exists between the Jewish people and G-d, so that all “know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you,” meaning that through *tzaddikim* the holiness of G-d is publicized. The righteous bring enlightenment to the world, informing humanity of G-d’s holiness. By the *tzaddikim* serving as such a sign, the Jewish people are elevated and protected against harmful influences. Since *tzaddikim* observe Shabbos properly, G-d considers it as if all the Jewish people observe Shabbos properly.

Thus, allegorically, this verse can be read, “[Even if] only [some of you observe Shabbos properly,] the *tzaddikim* [who are called ‘Shabbos’] will safeguard you, for [the *tzaddik*] is a sign [of the bond] between Me and you, making it known that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.”

## **JOYFUL FOR THEIR JOY**

### **Gerrer Rebbe**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

In the Amidah (silent prayer) of Sabbath morning, we say: “Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion.” When Moshe discovered that Israel appreciated the gift of Shabbos and the Holy Days, he was joyful.

## **SANCTIFIED BY SHABBOS**

### **Shem MiShmuel**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

The Hebrew word *ach* (“only”) may be construed as excluding Shabbos from the days on which the work of the *Mishkan* may be done. (Rashi)

The Ramban asks: If the expression *ach* implies a narrowing qualification, it would have to set limits to the sanctity of Shabbos, but isn’t this passage intended to magnify the importance of Shabbos by indicating that one may not even work on the *Mishkan’s* construction on Shabbos?

He answers as follows: The Torah frequently employs the expression *ach* to indicate a modification of what has been said before (as in “let them be married to whom they think best; but only into the family of their father’s tribe shall they be married” - Bamidbar 36:6; or in “Rise up, go with them, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall do” - Bamidbar 22:20).

In this passage, too, *ach* denotes a modification of what has gone before, i.e., that the Sanctuary that has been discussed in detail in the passages immediately preceding will indeed be a true dwelling place of the Holy Presence “but only if you shall keep My Shabbosos.” This implies that “if you will not keep My Shabbos, all the work will have been done in vain.” Hence, if Shabbos observance is an essential prerequisite for the *Mishkan’s* sanctity, it stands to reason that Shabbos takes precedence over the work connected with the *Mishkan’s* construction, and no such work may be done on Shabbos.

## **GIFTED WITH SHABBOS**

### **Nikolsberger Rebbe**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

Hashem did not give Shabbos as a *mitzvah* to observe, but as a gift from His treasure chest.

## **EASY PICKINGS**

### **Lenchener Rebbe**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

While Shabbos gives us rest, it is also the easiest *mitzvah* to perform. Once Shabbos arrives Friday at sunset, the performance of the *mitzvah* has begun. It stays every moment and does not leave for even one second until the next night.

## **GIFT OF SHABBOS**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

G-d wanted to give all the Jewish people a portion in the World to Come. Therefore, He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* so they could earn it by studying the Torah and observing the commandments (Makkos 23b).

Now, G-d wished to give the Jewish people a foretaste of the reward they would receive in the World to Come, and so He gave them Shabbos. The delight experienced on Shabbos is akin to the bliss experienced in the World to Come (Berachos 57b). On Shabbos, everyone can discern this spiritual pleasure.

However, the reward for a *mitzvah* is not given in this world (Kiddushin 39b), so how is it possible for a person to experience the bliss of Shabbos if Shabbos bliss is a taste of the reward for our observance of the *mitzvos*?

For this reason, G-d cleverly gave Shabbos to the Jewish people not as a reward but as a gift. Although the reward for *mitzvos* is not given in this world, G-d can give a gift in this lowly world, allowing those who perform His will by observing Shabbos to experience a delight that approximates the bliss experienced in the World to Come.

This is the deeper meaning of the phrase “Only observe My Shabbosos,” which we can interpret to mean, “I cannot give you the reward for observing Shabbos in this world, but by observing Shabbos, you will have a taste of the spiritual pleasure that awaits you as your reward, and this will serve as a sign - an indication - regarding the reward you will receive in the World to Come.”

That is what the verse means when it says, “It is a sign... to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you,” implying that “through observing Shabbos, you will know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you, thereby preparing you for the eternal world, the world that is a continuous experience of the heightened Divine consciousness of Shabbos” (see Tamid 7:4, Rosh Hashana 31a).

This is what G-d commanded Moshe here. He told Moshe to inform the Jewish people not about the *mitzvah* of Shabbos itself, but about this precious gift - what they will be able to grasp on Shabbos, that is, a taste of the spiritual bliss of the World to Come.

For Moshe had already informed them about all the *mitzvos*. Here, however, he explained to them the virtue they would attain by observing this *mitzvah*, that is, the pleasure they would experience on Shabbos, so that the Jewish people would better appreciate the reward awaiting them in the future.

## **SANCTIFIED WORK**

### **Gerrer Rebbe**

*“You shall speak to the Children of Israel, saying, ‘Only observe My Shabbosos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you.’” (31:13)*

For the construction of the Tabernacle, the Talmud (Shabbos 73) lists thirty-nine tasks that were needed, representing various forms of labor. We learn from this that just as all the tasks were dedicated for the Tabernacle, so too our weekday activities should emphasize Shabbos, and therefore all work will have a sanctity.

## **JUST ONE SHABBOS**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations.” (31:16)*

The Talmud states, “If the Jewish people were to observe two Shabbosim, they would immediately be redeemed” (Shabbos 118b). When a person observes Shabbos properly and correctly, he receives vitality and spiritual sustenance from that Shabbos for the entire week that follows, enabling him to serve G-d that week (Zohar 1:75b). And when a person serves G-d the entire week, it becomes easier for him to observe the following Shabbos properly. And so the cycle continues.

On this basis we can solve an apparent contradiction. In the Talmud Yerushalmi, it says, “If the Jewish people were to keep a single Shabbos, they would immediately be redeemed” (Yerushalmi Taanis 1:1). Yet in the Talmud Bavli, it says two Shabbosim, as cited above.

Of principal importance is the observance of a single Shabbos. When a person observes even a single Shabbos properly, then the following week he will serve G-d with a pure heart, and as a result it will be easy for him to observe the second Shabbos properly.

Consequently, of foremost importance is to properly observe a single Shabbos. Through observing a single Shabbos correctly, the observance of the second Shabbos is facilitated, and likewise the subsequent Shabbos, and so on.

This idea is alluded to in the verse “The Children of Israel shall observe Shabbos,” implying that they should keep a single Shabbos, in order “to make Shabbos,” alluding to the second Shabbos, which implies that the next Shabbos will be observed much more easily. This is the deeper interpretation of the passage as a whole: “The Children of Israel shall observe Shabbos to make Shabbos.”

## **EAGER FOR SHABBOS**

### **Ohr HaChaim**

*“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations.” (31:16)*

The word *v’shamru* should not be translated as, “And they shall guard,” but rather as, “And they shall anticipate.” This is from the description of Yaakov Avinu with regard to the dreams of his son Yosef: *V’aviv shamar es ha’davar* - “And his father [anxiously] awaited the fulfillment of the thing [Yosef’s dreams]” (Bereishis 37:11).

Similarly, every Jew should not simply guard the sanctity of Shabbos, but rather he should anticipate it. One should not enter the holy Shabbos complacently, or consider it a burden, but rather await it with great eagerness, as one would await the arrival of a most revered guest.

## **NEVER TOO LATE**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations.” (31:16)*

The Torah juxtaposes the mention of Shabbos with the account of the golden calf. In the merit of Shabbos, there is always hope. Even if a person commits the worst sin - even if he worships idolatry - he can repent and be forgiven. (Likutey Halakhos III, p. 38a)

## **ENHANCING SHABBOS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations.” (31:16)*

The phraseology of this verse implies that there are two dimensions of Shabbat: one that we are intended to “guard” (or “protect”) and another that we are intended to “establish” (or “make”).

Shabbat is intrinsically holy, inasmuch as G-d sanctified it when He created the world (Bereishis 2:3). Our task with respect to this intrinsic holiness is simply to “protect” it, that is, be careful not to counteract or sabotage it. This we do by not performing forbidden types of work, and, more subtly, by aligning our demeanor with the holy character of the day.

Beyond this, however, we can also infuse additional holiness into Shabbat, over and above its own, intrinsic holiness. We do this by studying the Torah, praying, or performing acts of kindness to a greater extent or more intensely than usual.

In this way, we also “make” Shabbat holier than it is in and of itself. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5700, p. 81 ff) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **SHABBOS DWELLING**

### **Yalkut Reuveni**

*“The Children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations.” (31:16)*

*Le’dorosam* (“throughout their generations”) is spelled without the vav. Hence, it may be read *le’dirosam* (“throughout their dwelling places”).

When Shabbos enters and the dwelling place of the Jewish home is ready to receive it, if the Shabbos table is set and the lights have been kindled, the *Shechinah* says: “I will dwell here with you.”

## **MARK OF SHABBOS**

### **Chofetz Chaim**

*“It shall be a sign between Me and the Children of Israel forever...” (31:17)*

The Shabbos is the sign, the identifying mark, of a Jew. Just as the sign on the door of a home indicates who lives inside, so too, Shabbos is a sign marking the place where a Jew dwells. Likewise, a shop that is closed on Shabbos is marked as a Jewish enterprise.

## **SEEING THEIR BEST**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“When G-d finished speaking with Moshe on Har Sinai, He gave him the two Tablets of the Testimony.” (31:18)*

G-d gave Moshe the tablets on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of his stay on the mountain. But the people had already made the Golden Calf on the 39<sup>th</sup> day! In other words, even after the people had committed this most heinous sin, G-d continued to teach the Torah to Moshe, and even gave him the tablets in order to transmit the Torah to all the Jewish people.

Similarly, we should always see people in their best light, encouraging them to study the Torah and fulfill G-d’s commandments even if their actions seem to contradict G-d’s wishes. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 11, pp. 179-180) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **STAFF OF TORAH**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“When G-d finished speaking with Moshe on Har Sinai, He gave him the two Tablets of the Testimony.” (31:18)*

The Tablets measured six handbreadths long by six handbreadths wide. (Bava Basra 14a)

The Tablets correspond to the letter vav (ו), which has the numerical value of six and which is shaped like a staff. The Torah that a person studies is like a staff which he can use to beat his evil inclination and drive it away. (See Likutey Moharan I, 1:7)

## STRAIGHT TO THE SOURCE

### Rebbe Nachman

*“And the people saw that Moshe was delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aharon and said to him, ‘Come, make us a god who shall go before us. For we don’t know what happened to this man Moshe who took us out of the land of Egypt.’” (32:1)*

The Jews erred in thinking that they needed an intermediary between themselves and G-d.

They received *manna* directly from Heaven; their water came from a rock that accompanied them on their journeys; the Clouds of Glory cleaned their clothes; and even more, they attained an open revelation of G-d. Yet they mistakenly continued to think that they needed an intermediary - and now that Moshe had failed to return from the mountaintop, they sought a god, or “authority.”

Similarly, some people believe that G-d must work through natural means. They think that a sick person can be healed only if he takes medicine, and that someone can earn a living only through natural means. None of this is really necessary. If G-d wants, He can provide healing and livelihood even without these means.

We must not view these intermediaries as inherently important, but pray to G-d directly to fulfill all our needs. (See Likutey Moharan I, 62:6)

## NEVER GIVE UP

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*“And the people saw that Moshe was delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aharon and said to him, ‘Come, make us a god who shall go before us. For we don’t know what happened to this man Moshe who took us out of the land of Egypt.’” (32:1)*

The Torah (32:1-35) highlights one of the most infamous episodes in all of the Torah, that of the Golden Calf. Many have tried to understand how it could be possible that the Jewish people, just weeks after having received the Torah, were dancing around an idol.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar) suggests an explanation based on the Gemara in Shabbos (89a). The Gemara records that the Satan approached *Klal Yisrael* on what they thought was the 40<sup>th</sup> day. They were wondering why Moshe had not yet descended from *Har Sinai*. After a back-and-forth discussion, the Satan presented an image of Moshe in a coffin, claiming that Moshe had died and would not be returning. When *Bnei Yisrael* saw that image, they immediately approached Aharon with the idea of constructing the *eigel*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that when *Klal Yisrael* thought that their leader Moshe had died, they felt lost and hopeless. It is possible that a person could have just experienced prophecy, when having received the Torah, and then when experiencing despair, fall as low as dancing around an idol, just a few short weeks later.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz is teaching us a very important lesson. Giving up cannot and should not be part of our vocabulary. While we all must confront difficult situations and challenges throughout our lives, we must constantly forge ahead. With this approach in mind, we can use the obstacles that we are presented with as opportunities to strengthen ourselves and our relationship with Hashem!

## FINDING THE TZADDIK

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“And the people saw that Moshe was delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aharon and said to him, ‘Come, make us a god who shall go before us. For we don’t know what happened to this man Moshe who took us out of the land of Egypt.’” (32:1)*

At Sinai, the Jews merited to a holy spirit. They had already witnessed many miracles - the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Sea - and had just merited the Revelation and the Giving of the Torah. How could it be that after witnessing all these miracles, they made a golden calf and worshipped it as a god? Moreover, if that generation of spiritually - aware Jews could make a golden calf after receiving the Torah, how can the Torah influence the drives and desires of lesser generations?

G-d did not create the world for angels but for human beings, in order to give man a forum for exercising his free will. Opposing man are the forces of evil, which continually seek ways to deflect each person from G-d. The main means of concealing G-d from a person is by concealing the *tzaddikim* who can teach him about G-d. Therefore, we find that the people made the golden calf because “Moshe was delayed... we do not know what happened to him.” When the *tzaddik* is concealed, G-d is concealed. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 122a)

The same applies to each generation, as the verse states: “Go... to the judge of that time” (Devarim 17:9; see Rashi). Each leading *tzaddik* in his time is compared to Moshe. Today, the fact that the Jews have already received the Torah gives them the merit and ability to find the *tzaddik* in each generation who will draw them close to G-d. Thus, it is written, “They will believe in you, too, forever” (Shemos 19:9). In every generation, they will merit to faith and belief in the *tzaddik*. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 244)

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The main blemish of the golden calf can be traced to the mixed multitude veering away from Moshe’s leadership: “For we don’t know what happened to this man Moshe.” Had they remained steadfast in their faith in Moshe, they would have asked Aharon, Chur, and/or Yehoshua to teach them how to continue in the path that Moshe had revealed. Instead, they rejected the *tzaddik*. This ultimately led to idolatry. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 243a)

We see that the power of the mixed multitude lies in their ability to arouse questions and doubts about the true *tzaddikim*, the true leaders. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 248)

## **SELFLESS LEADER**

### **Rabbi Jeremy Finn**

*“They arose early the next day and offered up olah-offerings and brought peace-offerings; the people sat to eat and drink...” (32:6)*

When Moshe descended from the mountain after being told by Hashem that the people have sinned, he is greeted by the sight of the people dancing around a golden calf, rejoicing and declaring, אלה אלקיך ישראל.

The Klausenberger Rebbe notes that at this very instant, we see the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rashi tells us that the Satan had shown the *Bnei Yisrael* a vision of a dead Moshe being carried to heaven. Believing that Moshe was dead, the people sought to replace him with a golden calf.

Moshe could have poured scorn on their actions by saying, “If you thought I was dead, why was it that you were rejoicing around the golden calf? Surely if you thought I was gone, the atmosphere while building the calf would have been sad and subdued. If you really felt that I was not going to return, you would have sat *shivah*, and mourned for a year, and yet what I see before me is more akin to a party than a wake!”

However, not only did Moshe refrain from rebuking them in this way, but when he returned to הקב"ה, he said that if You intend to destroy *Bnei Yisrael*, then, מחני נא מספרך, אשר כתבת - “Erase me from Your book that You have written!”

Even in the face of their seemingly ambivalent attitude toward Moshe’s death, his one objective is to intercede with ה' on their behalf.

Here we see genuine leadership and the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The test of leadership is whether the leader acts purely and totally in the best interest of the people, leaving aside any element of self-interest or self-promotion.

Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us that whenever we find ourselves in a position of leadership - be it as parents, grandparents, teachers, or professionals - it is vital to always remember that the focus must be on the people we lead and their needs. We must never emphasize ourselves and how we can benefit from such a position.

The people may hurt us, upset us, even belittle us, but the focus needs to remain what is in the best interest of those people and how we best serve that interest.

Another important lesson along the same lines is that when the people gave the excuse that they had built the *eigel* because they thought that Moshe was dead, it was clear that this was not true. If it were true, they would not be dancing.

Why did they offer this as an excuse if it was obviously false?

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The Jews had just received the Torah from G-d Himself and had collectively attained a level of ruach ha’kodesh (Divine inspiration). How was it possible to fall so quickly and precipitously into idol worship?

The Jews’ error lay in thinking that Moshe was gone. We learn from this episode never to become lax in our spiritual vigilance. No matter what level we have attained, we must continually strive towards higher levels. These levels are revealed through the *tzaddik*, who surpassed our plateau long ago.

By continually reaching out to the *tzaddik’s* influence and teachings, to the level of Divine inspiration which he has attained, we will not err and think we have already “made it.” No, we will always seek greater heights.

But if we become lax and do not seek the *tzaddik* or his guidance, we can fall dismally. We can even make a golden calf, notwithstanding the awesome spiritual achievements we have previously attained. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 214a)

## **TOOL OF RENEWAL**

### **Reb Meir of Premishlan**

*“He took it from their hands, and he fashioned it with a tool, and made it into a molten calf...” (32:4)*

When a person repents, a new person is created as though a new child is born. *Cheret*, “tool,” represents *charatah*, “regret.” In having regret (*charata*) to the point of repentance, one fashions a tool (*cheret*) to become a new person.

## **REACHING NEW HEIGHTS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“They arose early the next day and offered up olah-offerings and brought peace-offerings; the people sat to eat and drink...” (32:6)*

How could the people who witnessed G-d’s miracles and experienced His revelation at *Har Sinai* commit such a blatant transgression so soon afterward? True, only a small percentage of the people worshipped the Calf, but even this is hard to imagine.

The sages of the Talmud therefore teach us that indeed, the Jews at that point were incapable of sinning. In order to enable the people to rise to the heights of spiritual achievement only attainable through repentance, G-d “forced” the entire incident upon them.

In this light, we can all focus on our past misdeeds as opportunities through which we can scale spiritual heights that we could not rise to otherwise. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 412-413) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

Here we see the power of the *yetzer hara*.

The *yetzer hara* can convince us that our actions are permissible and sometimes even commendable when the truth is clearly the opposite, and this truth is sometimes made evident by our actions.

We need to be continually and honestly evaluating our actions. Is what I am about to do advisable, permitted, and positive? Or am I being deluded into thinking so, due to some weakness that has been exploited by the *yetzer hara*?

Am I truly in need of an intermediary now that Moshe Rabbeinu has seemingly died, or do I just want to serve *avodah zarah*? It is one or the other; there is no maybe.

May Hashem grant us the ability to make such an evaluation, to be honest about our intentions, and in that way, our actions will be permitted, positive, and pure.

## **DEPENDENT ON THE PEOPLE**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*"G-d told Moshe, 'Go down, for your people whom you took out of the land of Egypt have become corrupt.'" (32:7)*

G-d had raised Moshe to a high spiritual level for the sake of the Jewish people. Since now they had descended from their level, he, too, had to "go down" spiritually. (Rashi)

The *tzaddik's* ability to attain great spiritual levels and Torah insights is dependent on the nation. (See Likutey Moharan I, 49:7)

## **PROPER PROCRASTINATION**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*"They have strayed quickly from the way I have commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it, and sacrificed to it..." (32:8)*

The fact that the Jewish people sinned with the *Eigel Ha'zahav* is something that we are suffering from until this very day, since the magnitude of this action is so great, and the ramifications are extremely far-reaching. Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz shlit'a explains this tremendous atrocity by zeroing in on one small word: *maher* (quickly). Everyone is human and has free will; therefore, it follows that we all err at times. It is true that *Bnei Yisrael* made a terrible mistake, but the fact that they fell so fast is an even greater tragedy.

When we are faced with a *nisayon*, a decision needs to be made quickly! We must take a stand and fight against the *yetzer hara*. Just putting up a fight will allow us to slow down the evil influences that surround us.

We may even "borrow" a tactic that our greatest enemy uses to make us sin...

Amalek uses the concept of *machar* (tomorrow) to make us push off doing *mitzvos*. The *pasuk* states: *V'tzei hilachem ba'Amalek machar* (Shemos 17:9). Moshe was telling them, "Go out and fight Amalek with the power of 'machar.'"

Amalek / the *yetzer hara* tells us, "Of course you should learn Torah and do *mitzvos*, but not now, tomorrow!" This idea can be turned around and utilized to fight against the Amalek inside us that tries to make us sin.

The difference between *מהר* (quickly) and *מחר* (tomorrow) is a little tiny piece of a letter that symbolizes that tiny second it takes for one to fall and begin a long, slippery descent to the lowest of the low.

We must jump quickly to do the will of Hashem, but when something is wrong or even questionable, we must say, "Let me wait till tomorrow. Let me think it through." Surely, by then we will have the time to gather our strength to overcome and emerge victorious from even the most difficult test!

## **STIFF-NECKED STRENGTH**

### **Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner (Izhbitzer)**

*"Hashem said to Moshe, 'I have seen this people and behold! It is a stiff-necked people.'" (32:9)*

This is a statement of praise, as mentioned in the Midrash Rabbah. The fact that they are a stiff-necked people allows them to withstand the persecutions of exile.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"Moshe pleaded before Hashem, his G-d, and said, 'Why, Hashem, should Your anger burn against Your people, whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand?'" (32:11)*

Parashas Ki Sisa recounts the Jews' creation of the Golden Calf, one of the worst sins we've ever committed, as well as Moshe's negotiations with G-d in seeking atonement. The Torah describes G-d's complaints to Moshe in four *pesukim* (32:7-10) and then Moshe's response in three *pesukim* (32:11-13), which seemed compelling. Moshe's response to G-d started with "Why are You angry at Your nation?" (32:11). Didn't Moshe know why G-d was angry? How was this a productive defense?

Rabbi David Forman explains that there are two elements to Moshe's response that were effective. Rather than use the word "*madua*" (contraction of *מה ידוע*, "what is known"), which is focused on the past, Moshe uses "*I'mah*" (literally means "for what purpose"), which is a forward-looking question. Moshe also made a subtle adjustment to G-d's complaint, thereby shifting the ownership. In response to G-d's initial direction, "Go down because *your* nation acted corruptly," Moshe asked, "Why are *You* angry at Your nation?"

Moshe understood that getting over something upsetting requires taking responsibility and requires planning ahead. Once the focus is on the future, moving past difficult situations becomes possible and may even end up strengthening relationships, as this incident did for those that survived it.

When we focus on our future rather than the past, we own the life we choose and give ourselves a chance to live fully and freely.

## PROPER PRAYERS

### Rebbe Nachman

*“Moshe pleaded before Hashem, his G-d, and said, ‘Why, Hashem, should Your anger burn against Your people, whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand?’” (32:11)*

*Va’yechal* (וַיַּחַל, he pleaded) is similar to *Chalah* (חלה, activated).

Through proper prayer, one activates the merits of the Patriarchs, which protect the Jews and enhance the sanctity of the Holy Land. (See Likutey Moharan I, 55:8)

When praying to G-d on behalf of others, the *tzaddik* minimizes the gravity of their sin. When he rebukes others, however, he explicates the seriousness of their wrongdoing. (See Likutey Moharan I, 22:1)

## TIME TO PRAISE, TIME TO REBUKE

### Reb Naftali of Ropshitz

*“Moshe turned and descended from the mountain, with the two Tablets of the Testimony in his hands, Tablets inscribed on both of their surfaces; they were inscribed on one side and on that side.” (32:15)*

This is a lesson for our leaders. While Moshe was with Hashem, he was constantly praising the Jews. However, when he came down from the mountain, he admonished them.

This shows that a leader should praise his people to others, but when he is talking to them in person, he can enumerate their transgressions.

## PERMANENTLY ENGRAVED

### Sefas Emes

*“The Tablets are the work of G-d, and the script was the script of G-d, etched on the Tablets.” (32:16)*

The writing of the Ten Commandments on stone became indelibly inscribed in the hearts of the people forever. That is why it is “the work of G-d.”

## WRITTEN IN STONE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“The Tablets are the work of G-d, and the script was the script of G-d, etched on the Tablets.” (32:16)*

Something that is written can be erased or scraped off. When it is engraved, however, there is no way of separating the writing from the stone. The medium has become one with the message.

This teaches us two things: Firstly, when we study the Torah, we should be so lost in it that all that exists for us is the Torah itself; the medium, the message, and the recipient of the message all merge to become one.

Secondly, the Torah is part of us; once G-d restored the tablets that Moshe shattered, we can never completely lose touch with the Torah. The sands of time may cover the engraving, or the temptations of the world may make it hard to decipher; yet our connection can never be revoked. (Likutey Sichot, vol. 1, p. 37) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## LOVE-FILLED JEALOUSY

### Rabbi Ari Ciment

*“Then he took the calf they had made and burned it in fire; he ground it to fine powder and scattered it upon the surface of the water, and gave [it to] the Children of Israel to drink.” (32:20)*

Rabbi Elazar HaKapar says: Jealousy, lust, and honor remove man from the world. (Avos 4:28)

1. Are these three different elements or perhaps not?
2. The *pasuk* (Shemos 32:20) states, “Then he took the calf they had made, burned it in fire, ground it to fine powder, scattered [it] upon the surface of the water, and gave [it to] the Children of Israel to drink.”

What is the purpose of Moshe making *Bnei Yisrael* drink the fine golden powder remnants of the Golden Calf?

The image immediately conjured up is the *sotah* woman. In fact, Rashi says: “He intended to test them like women suspected of adultery.” To perhaps mysteriously further this connection, just a few *pesukim* later it says, *וירא משה את העם כי פרעה הוא כי פרעה אהרן לשמצה בקמיהם* - “And Moshe saw the people that they were exposed, for Aharon had exposed them to be disgraced before their adversaries.” Rashi again seems troubled by this unusual word and explains that *פרע* means “uncovered.” Their shame and disgrace was revealed, as in “and he shall uncover (ופרט) the woman’s head” (Bamidbar 5:18).

Again, this reference is to a *sotah* woman. The question is then what the purpose of connecting the waywardness of *Bnei Yisrael* by the Golden Calf with the episode of the *sotah*, suspected adulteress?

A *sotah* is a woman suspected of adultery who undergoes the ordeal of bitter water. The wife would have to drink a specific potion administered by the *Kohen*. If she was guilty, then the potion would “make [her] belly to swell, and [her] thigh to fall away” (ibid., 5:22). If the woman was unharmed by the bitter water, the rules regard her as innocent of the accusation. But the Torah adds an interesting detail: “And if the woman is not defiled, but clean, then she shall be cleared, and shall conceive seed.” The Gemara (*Sotah* 26a) derives from this *pasuk* that even if she was previously unable to conceive, she will now conceive and give birth to a male.

But an obvious question arises: Why would the suspected adulteress wife ever want to have children with the husband who almost killed her? After all, he made her drink the bitter water as he suspected her of wrongdoing!

Perhaps an answer is that jealousy trumps apathy. When it says in *Avos*, “הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם,” one explanation may be: “What is jealousy? It is about lust (התאוה) and about respect (והכבוד).” There are essentially two ways jealousy manifests itself:

1. When a person lusts something that they cannot have
2. When a person feels disrespected

Either way, one is only jealous about something or someone that he cares about! In this manner, it is better to have feelings of jealousy toward a spouse than not to feel anything at all.

If a man’s wife was having an affair, and the man did not care, it truly shows that he has no feelings whatsoever for her. It may be that the outcome of the *sotah* event is actually paradoxically good for the accused lady, because she feels a renewed connection with her husband. The “jealous” husband cared enough to be jealous.

The connection of the *sotah* woman to the Golden Calf is certainly attributed to the fact that, like a suspected adulteress, *Bnei Yisrael* cheated with an idol.

But we know that not all of *Bnei Yisrael* actually actively sinned, and so why would the remainder of *Bnei Yisrael* want to follow a G-d who nearly annihilated them “out of a jealous rage”?

It may very well be that this act of jealousy by G-d actually furthered our connection to G-d. After all, G-d loved and cared about *Bnei Yisrael* enough to be jealous!

Takeaway Messages: There are at least two connections to the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf and the *sotah*, suspected adulterous wife.

First, they drank a concoction like the lady drinks the potion. Second, the terminology of פרע - *uncovered* is only used again by the *sotah*!

Jealousy manifests itself by lusting after something you cannot have (התאוה) and/or about feeling disrespected (והכבוד); so הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד might therefore not be three disparate ideas. Either way, one is not jealous about something that he or she does not care about!

Just like a man is jealous of a suspected adulterous wife, G-d was “jealous” of His straying nation. Why would an exonerated lady who drank the bitter water want to resume a relationship with her husband? Why would the exonerated *Bnei Yisrael* want to follow a G-d who almost annihilated them? Because jealousy is better than apathy! Jealousy means you care enough to be jealous. G-d loved us even after a chunk of the nation built a Golden Calf! What is worse than jealousy? Not caring enough to be jealous.

## **WILLING TO RISK IT ALL**

### **Chiddushei HaRim**

“And Moshe stood at the gate of the camp and said, ‘Whoever is for Hashem, [come] to me!’ and all of the *Leviim* gathered to him.” (32:26)

There were many Israelites who did not participate in the sin of the golden calf. The reason the *Leviim* were singled out was because they were ready to give their lives to fight against idolatry. Others were either neutral or not willing to get involved.

## **SHATTERING THE LUCHOS**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

“And Moshe stood at the gate of the camp and said, ‘Whoever is for Hashem, [come] to me!’ and all of the *Leviim* gathered to him.” (32:26)

Moshe had to effect forgiveness for the Jews after they made the golden calf. He realized that unless he entered the depths of sin, he could not elevate from there the souls that had fallen. By breaking the Tablets, Moshe demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice himself completely for his people. He was willing to sacrifice everything he had worked to attain in order to effect forgiveness even for those Jews who were most distant from G-d.

We find that this act of self-sacrifice was so great that G-d thanked him for it, saying: “The first Tablets that you shattered” (Shemos 34:1). Our Sages read *Asher shibarta* (אשר שברת, that you shattered) as *yashir kochakha she’shibarta* (יישר כחך ששברת, you should have more strength now that you shattered them) (Shabbos 87a).

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Were the Tablets not broken, the Torah would never be forgotten. (Eruvin 54a)

By breaking the Tablets, Moshe showed that a person who commits a grave error should not think that all is lost. Instead, he should forget his wrongful past and begin anew. The breaking of the Tablets signifies forgetting the past and getting on with our lives. Were we to remember every bad thing that we did or that happened to us, we would never be able to move forward. Since the Tablets were broken, we are able to forget and move on with our lives. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 230; ibid., I, p. 480)

## **HOLY ZEAL**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*“And Moshe stood at the gate of the camp and said, ‘Whoever is for Hashem, [come] to me!’ and all of the Leviim gathered to him.” (32:26)*

The tribe of Levi, who rushed forth to defend the honor of Hashem were told subsequently by Moshe to kill anyone who was guilty of serving the Golden Calf, even if they were a close relative. Without hesitation, they all went and fulfilled Moshe’s words, leaving around three thousand men dead (Shemos 32:27-28).

This tremendous zeal to fulfill Moshe’s words is somewhat understandable to us. After all, Hashem spoke “face to face” with Moshe, and so when it was Moshe who was telling the *Leviim* to kill everyone involved in the sin, they knew that it was one hundred percent the will of Hashem and in turn they acted with great joy to fulfill His will.

Today, we do not have Moshe telling us what to do and how to live our lives. We do not have Prophets around to direct us at every turn, and we do not even have the possibility to ask the gedolim of our generation every little question we may have. If so, is life just a “guessing game” where we hope that we are fulfilling Hashem’s will but in reality we can never be sure?

The Toras Avraham answers that Hashem gave the post-prophecy generation a wonderful gift - the ability and inner clarity to determine the correct path for each of us to take once we make an honest *cheshbon ha’nefesh*, personal accounting of our lives.

But even when we make a decision, we need to constantly ask ourselves, am I heading in the right direction or am I only doing this because it was the right decision all that time ago? In essence, this is the message of the Ramchal’s opening words of the Mesillas Yesharim:

*“The foundation of saintliness and the root of complete service [of Hashem] is man’s [ability to] evaluate and validate what his obligation is in the world and towards what he needs to direct his vision and aspiration in everything that he is working on all the days of his life.”*

This approach was firmly taken by the Chofetz Chaim during the twenty five years that it took to write the acclaimed Mishnah Berurah. It was during those years that he suffered many personal tragedies including the loss of children and immense poverty. One day, after returning home to witness his bare house and hungry family, he banged on the table and declared “Satan, Satan, you won’t stop me! The world needs the Mishnah Berurah!”

Despite all of the challenges, when he could have looked at everything that was befalling him as a “Heavenly sign” to stop what he was doing, the Chofetz Chaim decided what his obligation was at that time and did not let anything stop him from achieving his service to Hashem.

And now, over one hundred years later, the entire Ashkenazi world relies almost exclusively on the teachings of the Mishnah Berurah which came about because the Chofetz Chaim decided that this is what he had to do for the Jewish People.

## **TRUE REGRET**

### **Rabbi Yechezkel Taub of Kuzmir**

*“Moshe went back to Hashem, and said, ‘I implore! This people have sinned a great sin.’” (32:31)*

If Moshe intended to pray to G-d in order to obtain forgiveness for the Jews, why did he stress the enormity of their sin?

He did this in order to emphasize their repentance. The basic prerequisite for true repentance is the acknowledgement of the full extent of one’s sin. People who are truly repentant seek neither excuses nor extenuating circumstances for their conduct but are contrite and filled with remorse.

Adam’s repentance for his sin in the Garden of Eden was of no avail because he claimed as an excuse “the woman whom You gave to be with me” (Bereishis 3:12).

Moshe, desiring to have his people’s repentance accepted by G-d, said: “Oh, this people have sinned a great sin - They freely admit that they were guilty of a terrible sin. They neither seek excuses for their behavior nor attempt to justify it. They are filled with remorse and authentically repent of their sin.

For this reason, O G-d, they are deserving of Your forgiveness.”

## **RECALLING OUR FAITH**

### **Reb Shmuel Shmayeh Ostrovitzer**

*“Moshe went back to Hashem, and said, ‘I implore! This people have sinned a great sin.’” (32:31)*

The word “this” is unnecessary. What Moshe was saying was that the people who transgressed were the same people who at the crossing of the Yam Suf said, “This is my G-d, and I will praise Him.” It was “this” same people who had sinned.

## **HUMBLE LEADER**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“Yet now, if You will forgive their sin. But if not, erase me, I pray You, from Your book that You have written.” (32:32)*

A humble Torah scholar can gain forgiveness for the sins of his people. Im ayin (if not) can also be translated as “if nothingness,” indicating total humility. Here Moshe is saying: Please forgive the Jews if I am completely humble. Otherwise, do away with me, lest I grow haughty.

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Moshe made the ultimate sacrifice of offering himself before G-d in order to save every Jew. Even though the people sinned, he never dissociated himself from them, but always bound himself to them in order to draw them close to G-d. (See Likutei Moharan II, 82)

G-d's Name is associated with the Jewish nation (Yerushalmi, Taanis 2:6). Moshe prayed to G-d to forgive the Jews for His Name's sake, because if the Jews were to suffer, then G-d, through His association with us, would also suffer.

## **PLEADING FOR THE PEOPLE**

### **Kli Yakar**

*"Yet now, if You will forgive their sin. But if not, erase me, I pray You, from Your book that You have written."* (32:32)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "Yet now, whether or not You will forgive their sin, erase me, I pray You, from Your book..."

Moshe said to G-d: In either case, "erase me, I pray You, from Your book." If You are willing to forgive them if they have someone to suffer for their sins, I am willing to serve as their instrument of atonement. And if You are not willing to forgive them, what use is my life? I have nothing left for which to live.

## **TRUE FREEDOM**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Moshe said to G-d, 'Look: You say to me, 'Take this people onward,' but You have not told me whom You will send with me. You said, 'I have granted you recognition by name, and you also have found favor in My eyes.'"* (33:12)

The Ten Commandments were engraved upon the tablets. Our sages point out that the word "engraved" (*charut*) is related to the word "free" (*cherut*). Based on this relation, they assert that true freedom is possible only by observing the Torah's rules (Bamidbar Rabbah 10:8; Kallah Rabbati 8; Avot d'Rabbi Natan). But, given its great number of prescriptions and proscriptions, the Torah would seem to be more restrictive than liberating.

The explanation lies in the fact that we are constantly torn between our animal and G-dly natures, each one pulling us in its own direction. Since our Divine nature will never relent, we can be truly free only when our Divine spirit is fully victorious. Our animal nature, once it is refined, realizes that submitting to the Torah's directions is in fact its true desire; its natural state is to be guided and governed by spirituality.

Thus, the Torah's restrictions on our animal nature in fact liberate us, enabling us to actualize our full, Divine potential for spiritual growth and expression. (Based on Igrot Kodesh, vol. 1, pp. 19-20) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **DENYING THE ILLUSION**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"He said, 'My face shall go, and I shall provide you rest.'" (33:14)*

By virtue of our Divine soul, we are all inherently and irrevocably bound to G-d, and are incapable of denying that bond - or even wanting to deny it.

We can go against G-d's will only when our mind is overtaken by the illusion that ignoring this bond is somehow advantageous (Sotah 3a). But even then, deep down, we remain faithful to our intrinsic bond with G-d. (Tanya, Chapter 24)

We know that the illusion is a ruse. We are always able and ready to renew and reinstate our relationship with G-d. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, p. 407) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **SELF-SACRIFICE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"He said, 'My face shall go, and I shall provide you rest.'" (33:14)*

Moshe asked G-d to omit his name from the Torah if He would refuse to forgive the Jews. Moshe was willing to sacrifice his connection with the Torah for the sake of his people - all of his people, even those who worshipped the Golden Calf.

We can all emulate Moshe's self-sacrifice for the Jewish people. It is not sufficient to simply fulfill the commandment to "love your fellow as yourself"; we must be ready to sacrifice even that which we hold most dear for the benefit of the Jewish people in general and for every single Jew in particular - no matter how far away he may seem at that moment from G-d and His Torah. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, pp. 175-177) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **RECEIVING BY GIVING**

### **Rabbi Elimelech Biderman**

*"He replied, 'I shall cause all My goodness to pass before you, and I shall proclaim the Divine Name before you. I will show favor when I choose to show favor, and I will show mercy when I choose to show mercy.'" (33:19)*

The Avodas Yisrael zy"ta taught, based on this *pasuk*, that sometimes Hashem causes a poor person to make his way to you just so that you have the opportunity to show him mercy and be gracious with him; and it will be with that particular merit that Hashem will show you mercy and be gracious with you (i.e., He can now give you from His endless source of blessing and goodness, *middah k'neged middah*, measure for a measure.)

You may think that you are doing the poor person a favor, but the reality is that Hashem is setting you up to receive incredible blessing and goodness from Him.

## **KNOWING HASHEM**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“He replied, ‘I shall cause all My goodness to pass before you, and I shall proclaim the Divine Name before you. I will show favor when I choose to show favor, and I will show mercy when I choose to show mercy.’” (33:19)*

By “My goodness,” G-d meant the Divine intellect, the reasons behind His behavior. G-d’s intellect is too sublime for human intellect to grasp, but we may gain an inkling of it by carefully observing G-d’s behavior and learning from it.

This is why G-d revealed to Moshe the thirteen attributes of Divine mercy (which He refers to in this verse as His “goodness”): by understanding something of G-d’s mercy as it is manifest in the world, we can eventually understand something of G-d’s thoughts, and thereby fulfill the commandment to know Him. Knowing G-d at least to some small degree then helps us act as His true agents on earth, as Dovid HaMelech enjoined his son Shlomo (Divrei HaYamim 28:9), “Know the G-d of your father, so you may serve Him wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, for G-d examines everyone’s heart and understands everyone’s thoughts. If you seek Him, He will make Himself accessible to you.” (Maggid Devarav LeYaakov 176; Ohr Torah 118) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **THE OMNIPRESENT**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“And Hashem said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand upon the rock.’” (33:21)*

G-d is the Place of the World, but He Himself has no place (i.e., G-d is beyond spatiality). (Rashi)

Someone who has a heart that experiences G-dliness will never say that a particular place is not for him. For when one is with G-d, he too, transcends space, and he can find and experience G-dliness everywhere.

## **WHEN TO STAND TALL**

### **Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin**

*“And Hashem said, ‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand upon the rock. When My glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of the rock and I shall cover you with My palm until I have passed.’” (33:21-22)*

Thus did G-d instruct the leader of the Jews: “Behold, there is a place by Me”; there comes a time at which My honor is at stake. Then “you shall stand upon the rock,” tall and erect and firm as a rock to defend the honor of G-d. But “when My glory has passed by,” when that moment has passed and the issue under debate is purely personal and of secondary importance, then you shall stand “in the cleft of the rock,” hidden and humble.

## **STAYING WITHIN OUR LIMITS**

### **Rebbe Nachman**

*“When My glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of the rock and I shall cover you with My palm until I have passed.” (33:22)*

A person requires limits on his search for G-dliness so he will not go beyond his capabilities.

Although Moshe attained the highest perception of G-d that a man can reach in this world, he too, required limits regarding that perception. Thus, G-d placed him in a crevice. (See Likutey Moharan II, 5:7)

For the same reason, G-d placed His hand over Moshe. Otherwise, G-d’s awesome light would have overwhelmed him. (See *ibid.*, II, 82)

## **ALWAYS FOR THE BEST**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“Then I shall remove My palm, and you will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” (33:23)*

After a profound conversation between G-d and Moshe, in which G-d forgives the people for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe asks to see G-d’s honor (33:18).

G-d responds that it’s not possible; however, “You will see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (33:23). What does it mean to see G-d’s back?

The Chasam Sofer suggests that while it is often beyond us to understand why things are happening while they’re happening, we can sometimes appreciate events of the past in hindsight.

The Gemara (Berachos 7a) explains that G-d showed Moshe the knot of the back of G-d’s *tefillin*, representing the unbreakable *keshet* (connection) between G-d and His people, reinforcing our trust in G-d that whatever happens is for our ultimate benefit.

## **CLEAR IN RETROSPECT**

### **Chasam Sofer**

*“Then I shall remove My palm, and you will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” (33:23)*

An alternative rendering of this passage is: “...and you may see [My ways] afterwards, but [they] may not be seen before.”

Frequently, we don’t understand the purpose of historical events or other events during our lives. Only after the passing of time do these events, and Providence’s purpose in bringing them to pass become clear to us.

Thus, says the *pasuk*, “You may see My back” - only after the occurrence do we realize what Providence had in store for us - “but My face may not be seen,” for at first it is impossible to know.

## **BINDING KNOT**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Then I shall remove My palm, and you will see My back, but My face may not be seen.” (33:23)*

By His “back,” G-d meant, allegorically, the knot of His head-*tefillin*.

Our connection to G-d can be envisioned metaphorically as a multi-stranded cord tied to us on one end and to Him on the other. When we sin, we sever one of the strings that compose that cord.

In order to repent, we have to strengthen our commitment to G-d’s will specifically with regard to how we just went against it. We have to tie a knot precisely where the string was severed. Joining two pieces of a severed string with a knot creates a stronger connection between the two pieces than existed before they were severed. (Igeret HaTeshuvah, Chapter 9)

This is why, when describing the process of repentance, G-d showed Moshe specifically the knot of the *tefillin*. *Tefillin* expresses our connection to G-d, and the knot teaches us that when it is necessary to repair that connection, we do so by strengthening our observance and our awareness that G-d is present in all facets of our lives.

By strengthening our connection to G-d, we hasten the advent of the messianic Redemption, when G-d’s presence will be openly revealed - and it will no longer be necessary to remind ourselves of its reality. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, pp. 236-237) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **DRINKING RESPONSIBLY**

### **Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin**

*“Carve out for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will write upon these tablets the words which were on the first tablets that you broke.” (34:1)*

The Rebbe came to his *beis medrash* (house of study) unexpectedly and found a few students drinking whiskey.

Embarrassed, one of the students explained that the Koretzer Rebbe said that when Chasidim sit in a group and drink, it is the same as if they were studying Torah.

“That may be true,” said the Ruzhiner, “with one difference. It is written: ‘When you carve out (*p’sal*) two tablets’ then it is holy. But it also is written: ‘Do not make yourself an idol (*pessel*)’ (Shemos 24:4), for it now becomes unholy. They are the same letters, but with a different meaning.”

“When Chasidim sit and drink to bring a sense of unity and love for each other to strengthen their service to Hashem, then it is holy. However, if one drinks in the middle of the day for one’s own gratification, then it is ‘Do not make for yourself an idol.’ It is better to learn Torah.” (V. Cohen)

## **MADE FOR MAN**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*“Carve out for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will write upon these tablets the words which were on the first tablets that you broke.” (34:1)*

Why did Moshe have to hew the second Tablets himself before Hashem wrote on them, while the first Tablets were made completely by Hashem, both the carving and the inscription?

To answer this, we must first understand exactly why the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, causing the destruction of the first Tablets and necessitating new ones. They believed that since the first Tablets, which contained the essence of the Torah they had been given at Mount Sinai, were totally Hashem’s work, it would be impossible for humans by themselves to understand the depths of Torah without the help of supernatural powers. Therefore, they made the image of an ox, as it is engraved on the Heavenly Chariot (cf. Yechezkel 1:10), in the belief that by serving it they could come closer to Hashem and achieve a deeper understanding of his Torah. As long as Moshe was with them, they relied on him to teach them Torah and bring them closer to Hashem. Now that they thought he was dead, however, they felt driven to look for other forces to fill the void he left, and so they made the Calf.

The truth is, however, that the Torah was intended for mortals to understand directly with their own powers, without resorting to supernatural intermediaries, and it is in our hands to achieve the most lofty levels of Torah solely with our own powers. Thus, Hashem wanted the second Tablets to be as much as possible the work of the mortal Moshe, to show the people that they too could achieve everything that was in their own power to achieve.

If we would only make the effort, Hashem will help us understand His holy Torah and to reach the highest levels it holds for us. In Malachi (3:22), the prophet called the Torah *תורת משה*, the Torah of Moshe, the Torah that was given through a human and intended for humans to fathom through their own resources.

## **AVAILABLE CONNECTION**

### **Rabbi Aryeh Dachs**

*“Carve out for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will write upon these tablets the words which were on the first tablets that you broke.” (34:1)*

The Sin of the Golden Calf, the *eigel* described in Ki Sisa, is a stain that forever marks our national experience. Yet, there is a happy ending: through sincere prayer and *teshuvah*, the rift caused by the sin is mended and the relationship between the Creator and the Jewish People is ultimately restored. The ending highlights the everlasting bond the nation of Israel has with the Almighty.

The return of the Jewish People begins with Moshe dramatically shattering the *Luchos*, the Tablets. After the nation is forgiven, Hashem directs Moshe to create a new set of *Luchos*.

The verse tells us they were to be “*ka’rishonim*,” just like the first ones. However, there is a notable difference. While the first set was inscribed by the hand of G-d, by the second *Luchos*, Moshe was commanded “*p’sal lecha*,” to personally hew the second set, with his own hand.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, in his work *Dibros Moshe*, explains that the reason the Jewish People resorted to concocting the Golden Calf in the first place was because they felt they could not possibly connect to Hashem on their own.

The *Luchos* were created by G-d Himself; this gave the impression that the Torah was too holy to be accessed directly by mere flesh and blood. They assumed that to become close to Hashem and to connect to the Torah, they needed Moshe to guide them. When Moshe did not return, they created the Golden Calf as a medium to replace Moshe.

Their intent was for the Golden Calf to help them get closer to Hashem. Therefore, to dispel this notion, it was integral for the second *Luchos* to be inscribed by a mortal. This drove home the message that the Torah was given specifically to *b’nei adam*, mortal man.

Rav Moshe explains that this is what the prophet Malachi means when he refers to the Torah as *Toras Moshe*, the Torah of Moshe. The Torah is designed for man and is therefore directly accessible.

It is essential for us to understand that the Torah and Hashem are otherworldly, holy beyond our comprehension. However, the lesson taught by Rav Moshe is that too much emphasis on these ideas can be harmful. Rather, let’s emphasize our ability to access and connect to Hashem, despite our limitations.

## **MODESTY AND DESIRE**

### **Rabbi Dovid Hoffman**

*“Carve out for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will write upon these tablets the words which were on the first tablets that you broke.” (34:1)*

Moshe descended the mountain to the sound of merry-making in the camp of Israel. Upon seeing the Golden Calf and the manner in which the people were serving it, Moshe threw down the *Luchos* in anger and shattered them into pieces.

After he dealt with the idolaters, Hashem told him to prepare a second set of *Luchos* like the first set, and to ascend the mountain again, alone, with these stones. The Midrash Tanchuma (Ki Sisa 31) contrasts these instructions to those regarding the first *Luchos*, which were given before the entire nation amidst thunder, lightning, and smoke on *Har Sinai*.

The midrash points out that because the first *Luchos* were given with great publicity, they were affected by an *ayin hara* and had no permanence. Even though it was Hashem Who brought about all this publicity, a negative “eye” was still attached to it. The lesson culled from this midrash is: Nothing can be more successful than that which is done modestly.

However, this midrash can be understood on a deeper level. The famed Kotzker Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel Morgenstern zt’l, explains that because the first *Luchos* had been given with such great fanfare and publicity, they acquired their holiness much more directly from the Almighty. On the other hand, the second set of *Luchos* was given to the Jewish people modestly, to the extent that it had to be sought out by the people; these *Luchos* could not be effective unless the people actually wanted them.

We see from here that only that which is acquired by one’s wishes and desires, combined with his efforts, can attain permanence. That which comes without effort has much less chance of continuity.

## **EQUIVALENCE AND COMPASSION**

### **Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

*“Hashem passed before him and proclaimed: Hashem, Hashem, benevolent G-d, who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.” (34:6)*

Rashi remarks that this verse teaches us that G-d enwrapped Himself in a tallis like the cantor leading congregational prayers. My master and teacher, R’ Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, taught that the thirteen hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is expounded correspond to these thirteen attributes of mercy. The first principle, that of deriving a minor principle from a major principle [קל וחמר, *kal vachomer*, literally, “light and heavy”] corresponds to the Divine Name Kel.

The second attribute, that of “compassionate,” corresponds to the principle of how identical phrases in different verses indicate similarity in the detail of a law [גזרה שווה, *gezeirah shavah*, literally, “a decree of equivalence”]. This principle relates to the trait of compassion because, as a general rule, when a rich person has compassion for a pauper, the rich person must empathize with the pain and distress of the pauper in order to arouse his mercy for him. In this way, he puts himself on equal footing with the poor person, and the rich person is able to show mercy for the pauper, having placed himself on an equal standing with him.

G-d, as it were, does the same thing. As the verse says, “I am with him in his distress” (Tehillim 91:15). That is why the trait of “compassionate” is comparable to the hermeneutical principle of *gezeirah shavah*, which implies equivalence, as just explained.

## CONNECTING THROUGH EMULATING

### Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

*“Hashem passed before him and proclaimed: Hashem, Hashem, benevolent G-d, who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth, preserving loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet He does not completely clear [of sin]. He visits the iniquity of parents on children and children’s children, to the third and fourth generations.” (34:6-7)*

The mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, had a public scuffle with the press. The part that struck me at the time was when the mayor claimed, “My role as mayor is being interpreted through the prisms of your reality and not mine.” That is, of course, a true statement. We always interpret stories and perspectives through our own reality. It is the only one we have. In an essay titled *Middos V’Deos*, Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, known as the Alter of Slabodka, (loosely translated as the Sage of Slabodka), addresses the idea of prisms and our perception.

After the Jewish nation devastatingly sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe reascended Mount Sinai to plead on behalf of the Jewish People. His mission was remarkably successful; at that time of graciousness, Moshe enjoyed a certain unprecedented intimacy with the Almighty. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the Torah (Shemos 33:13) tells us he asked Hashem, *“Hodi’eini na es derachecha v’aida’acha* - Please let me know Your ways, so that I may know You.” Hashem responded by teaching Moshe the thirteen attributes of G-d. As the verse states:

*“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed: Lord, Lord, benevolent G-d, who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth, preserving loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet He does not completely clear [of sin]. He visits the iniquity of parents on children and children’s children, to the third and fourth generations.” (Shemos 34:6-7)*

The Alter points out the link Moshe made between knowing Hashem and understanding Hashem’s ways, and the lesson we can take from the response, the thirteen attributes.

Knowing someone means we understand them. When we understand someone, we create a familiarity and an intimacy, which naturally deepens our relationship.

The better we understand someone, the better we know them and the better we can connect to them. Moshe understands that this principle carries over to our relationship with Hashem. Moshe seeks direction: He pleads with G-d to grant him the knowledge to understand His ways, whereby he can further deepen his connection. G-d responded by listing the honorable traits of mercy. The idea is that the best way to attain a deeper understanding of Hashem is by understanding His *middos*, His traits.

The Alter explains that understanding a trait of G-d is not an abstract piece of information; it is experienced. Only a compassionate person can really understand the trait of compassion. Therefore, when we transform ourselves into more compassionate people, we shift our view and understanding into a more similar prism to Hashem’s perspective. As we transform, we begin to gain a deeper understanding of Hashem. What follows is a natural, deeper connection to Hashem.

In a way, the process of deepening our understanding of G-d can be simpler than deepening our understanding of other people. To deepen our understanding of G-d we have the thirteen traits laid out before us. The prescription is already there.

The more we use the Torah to develop these essential traits, the more we understand Hashem. And the more we understand Hashem, the deeper our relationship will be with Him.

## ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*“Hashem passed before him and proclaimed: Hashem, Hashem, benevolent G-d, who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.” (34:6)*

When G-d revealed Himself to Moshe, He taught him the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion. The main attribute is *Erekh Apayim* (Slow to Anger). One who has patience can outlast everything that seeks to overwhelm him, mitigating decrees and drawing lovingkindness and forgiveness so that he can enter into the service of G-d. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 126-128)

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G-d’s Holy Name *YHVH* represents *chessed* (kindness). G-d did not create man and then leave him to fare for himself in this world. Rather, in His great kindness, He gave man the Torah and the ability to draw close to Him.

But what happens if a person distances himself from G-d through sin? Therefore, it is written, “G-d, G-d” - meaning, “I am G-d before man sins, and I am G-d [even] after he sins.”

The latter level represents a much greater degree of *chessed* and therefore greater perfection, since G-d still has compassion for the sinner and will even transform his sins into good deeds if he repents before Him. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 466)

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The Thirteen Attributes of Compassion contain the attribute of Slow to Anger for the wicked as well as for the righteous, because G-d always seeks to judge everyone favorably. Thus, “He guards Lovingkindness for thousands” - even though a person has sinned thousands of times and made thousands of blemishes, G-d can and will forgive him (if he repents). (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 1b)

## **HASHEM'S KINDNESS**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Preserving loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet He does not completely clear [of sin]. He visits the iniquity of parents on children and children's children, to the third and fourth generations." (34:7)*

G-d articulated these same two ideas in the Ten Commandments (Shemos 20:5-6) but in reverse order: "I am G-d... who remembers the premeditated sins of the fathers... and who shows kindness for two-thousand generations." Furthermore, in the Ten Commandments G-d says that He "shows kindness," while in this passage He says that He "preserves kindness."

We can explain these differences by noting that G-d demonstrates two types of kindness:

The first is the kindness that He shows toward someone who has done something wrong. Such a person needs G-d's kindness in order to rectify his misdeeds. This is the type of kindness referred to in the Ten Commandments, in which G-d describes Himself as "showing kindness" after the "sins of the fathers."

The kindness referred to here, in contrast, is that which G-d shows us simply because He loves us. This kindness is mentioned *before* any mention of sin. Therefore, G-d describes Himself here as "preserving," i.e., storing up His kindness for use at all times and under all circumstances. (Torah Ohr 69c) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **THE SPARK WITHIN THE SIN**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"Preserving loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet He does not completely clear [of sin]. He visits the iniquity of parents on children and children's children, to the third and fourth generations." (34:7)*

The Hebrew word for "forgive" (נָשָׂא) used in this verse literally means "carry" or "lift." Based on this, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism, taught that G-d elevates the spark of holiness in the misdeed. Nothing, not even a sin, can exist unless it contains a spark of holiness. When a person repents, G-d elevates the Divine spark in his misdeed and returns it to its Divine source.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad branch of Chasidism, explained this idea as follows: It is indeed impossible to elevate a sinful act; such an act is evil, and the only proper treatment for it is to renounce it. In contrast, the power of desire vested in the act is not evil, for it is possible to utilize this power to desire good as well as evil. When we repent properly, we divest our power of desire of its veneer of evil and restore it to its holy source. (Likutei Torah 4:61d) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **STUBBORN PERSEVERANCE**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*"He said, 'If I have found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, may my L-rd go in our midst, for this is a stiff-necked people. Pardon our premeditated sins and our unintentional sins, and take us as Your own possession.'" (34:9)*

After the Jewish People construct the Golden Calf, Moshe implores G-d on their behalf to reconsider their annihilation. In his final argument, Moshe asserts the fact that they are "a stiff-necked people" (34:9), the very same rationale G-d had previously used to support His intention to destroy the people (32:9). Why would Moshe use the people's stubborn nature as an argument for their preservation when it was an unfavorable characteristic in G-d's eyes?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks quotes Rabbi Yitzchak Nisselbaum's poignant suggestion that stubbornness is the very tendency that will serve both G-d and His people well in the future. While stubbornness on its own may not be a positive attribute, we can see how concrete manifestations of this attribute, such as being stubbornly loyal or stubbornly unified, can be admirable. We survive and persevere not despite our stubbornness but because of it; it is that very quality that makes us great.

## **POSITIVELY STIFF-NECKED**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*"He said, 'If I have found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, may my L-rd go in our midst, for this is a stiff-necked people. Pardon our iniquity and our unintentional sins, and take us as Your own possession.'" (34:9)*

Literally, this reads, "for this is a stiff-necked people." In other words, Moshe was pleading for G-d to forgive us *because* we are stiff-necked!

In the verse's literal sense, then, "stiff-necked" refers to our stubborn idealism, which our sages defined as our innate qualities of compassion, shyness, and charity. Indeed, it is this idealism, which compels us to act in accordance with these qualities beyond the call of duty, that makes us worthy of G-d's forgiveness. (Sefer HaSichot 5700, p. 176) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **SUPPLY AND DEMAND**

### **Dubno Maggid**

*"He said, 'If I have found favor in Your eyes, my L-rd, may my L-rd go in our midst, for this is a stiff-necked people. Pardon our iniquity and our unintentional sins, and take us as Your own possession.'" (34:9)*

This passage can be explained with a parable: A peddler was standing on a broad and elegant avenue selling wooden spoons. He remained there all day, hawking his wares, but didn't make a penny. Arriving home late at night with an empty wallet he told his sad tale to a friend.

The friend demanded, “Didn’t you know that the people on that avenue use only silver spoons? They’re rich. They don’t need your wooden spoons. Why not go to the street of the shoemakers? That’s where you’ll make some sales.”

Similarly, Moshe spoke to G-d after G-d had shown him all the Divine attributes that He had “in stock” (mercy and grace, slowness to anger, readiness to forgive iniquity and transgression, and so forth - *pesukim* 6 and 7). Moshe said: “Let Hashem go in the midst of us” - the people. The angels in Heaven do not sin. They do not need Your Divine attributes. It is only our world here below that is in need of them, for Israel “is a stiff-necked people.” Hence, O G-d, “pardon our iniquity and our sin.”

## THROUGH THICK AND THIN

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“He said, ‘My face shall go, and I shall provide you rest.’ He said to Him, ‘If Your Presence does not go, do not bring us onward from here.’” (33:14-15)*

In the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d informs Moshe that He will no longer accompany the Jews into the land and will send an angel instead (33:2). When the people hear this news, they mourn the deterioration of their relationship with G-d (33:4).

Moshe subsequently asks G-d to reveal His glory, to which G-d seems to acquiesce (though we are not told why), proclaiming “My Presence will go” (33:14). Why, then, in the very next *pasuk* is Moshe retorting that if G-d’s Presence does not join us, he will not move the people from where they currently are (33:15)? How are we to understand these negotiations?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that Moshe argues in favor of the people’s need to experience closeness to a merciful and patient G-d instead of a mighty and jealous One.

With this perspective, we can begin to understand the underlying psychology in their dialogue: When G-d realizes that the people are saddened by His decision not to dwell among them, He appreciates the underlying love that still exists within us and agrees to reveal His glory. When G-d offers to accompany just Moshe to Israel, Moshe petitions G-d to accompany all of the people, not Moshe alone.

It is the Jewish People’s relentless pursuit of a closer relationship with G-d that subdued His anger and helped create the new thirteen attributes of mercy, representing the new merciful G-d that would govern our future relationship with Him.

Underneath it all is a love story between G-d and His people, fighting through challenges and never giving up on each other.

## SHABBOS PREP

### Kozaitzer Rebbe

*“For a six-day period you may work, and on the seventh day you shall rest; you shall rest from plowing and harvesting.” (34:21)*

The Hebrew word for plowing is *charish*, חרש. The ח stands for חמישי (Thursday), the ר stands for רביעי (Wednesday), and the ש stands for שישי (Friday). This tells us that Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday should be used as days to prepare for Shabbos.

## WORRY-FREE SPEACH

### Reb Elazar HaLevi Horowitz

*“For a six-day period you may work, and on the seventh day you shall rest; you shall rest from plowing and harvesting.” (34:21)*

The words *tishbot* (“you shall rest”), *charish* (“plowing”), and *katzir* (“harvesting”) teach us that on Shabbos one must not talk about subjects that are of a weekday nature. If we must discuss them, then it should be done in the shortest possible way (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 307).

By changing the vowels of the words - *charish* becoming *charash* (“to be quiet”) and *katzir* becoming *katzet* (“short”) - the *pasuk* suggests that one should be quiet and short in words, so that “*tishbot*” - you may rest.

## HOLIDAY SEASON

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“You must observe the Festival of Shavuot, the first produce of the wheat harvest, and [Sukkot,] the Festival of the Ingathering at the turn of the year.” (34:22)*

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jews are once again instructed to observe Shavuot, referred to as “the festival of the ingathering, at the turn of the year” (34:22).

If there is a specific date previously assigned to celebrate Shavuot (Devarim 16:9), why does the Torah now refer to it in more vague terms of its season?

Oznayim LaTorah proposes that there is a benefit to considering holidays on a more macro level, prompting us to think beyond the specific requirements of a particular holiday. By stepping back and associating a given holiday with an entire season, it has staying power, and we are more likely to incorporate it into our lives.

Stepping back gives us valuable space and perspective for our own introspection and makes room to be able to take others into account, thereby elevating the holidays’ effect on us and those around us.

## **SPIRITUAL INGATHERING**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“You must observe the Festival of Shavuot, the first produce of the wheat harvest, and [Sukkot,] the Festival of the Ingathering at the turn of the year.” (34:22)*

During the High Holy Days, which precede the festival of Sukkot, we make many resolutions. Making resolutions is a cause for great happiness and joy, because it reflects both our faith that we can make ourselves better and our faith that G-d will help us do so. Nonetheless, the somber mood of stock-taking and self-scrutiny that pervades the High Holidays prevents us from feeling the optimistic joy openly.

On Sukkot, however, after the time for stock-taking has passed and we can focus on implementing our heartfelt resolutions, we are able to “ripen” and “gather in” the “seeds” that we “sowed” by making these resolutions.

Thus, since the inner feelings of the soul become revealed and attain their true fulfillment on Sukkot, Sukkot is the most joyful of the holidays. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5747, pp. 162-163) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **ENLIGHTENING THE NIGHT**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“He was there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water. He wrote on the Tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (34:28)*

We are taught (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Sisa 36) that while Moshe was on Mount Sinai, he knew that it was daytime if G-d was teaching him the Written Torah (i.e., the Five Books of Moshe), and that it was nighttime if G-d was teaching him the Oral Torah (i.e., the explanation of the Written Torah, which has since also been written down - as the Talmud, the Midrash, the Zohar, and so on).

The Written Torah is compared to daytime since it is G-d’s explicit word; as such, we experience it as a brilliant revelation of G-d’s presence “shining” to us. In contrast, the Oral Torah is the record of the sages’ exploration of the meaning and implications of the Written Torah. The light of G-d’s presence is hidden within it; it is therefore compared to night.

On the other hand, the meaning of the Written Torah is accessible to us only through the Oral Torah. Without the Oral Torah, the Written Torah is virtually incomprehensible.

G-d established this dichotomy of Written and Oral Torah in order to enable us to ascend the ladder of Divine consciousness through the study of the Oral Torah, using our minds to decode the Divine brilliance of the Written Torah. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 8-15) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **INCREASED EFFORT**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*“He was there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water. He wrote on the Tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (34:28)*

Why did Moshe have to spend an additional forty days on the Mount just to receive the second Tablets? He already learned the entire Torah the first forty days.

The reason, we suggest, is that although he had learned the entire Torah once, that was before the sin of the Golden Calf, when the people were still in a state of purity and holiness after receiving the Torah. Now, however, as a result of their fall from that lofty level, their leader needed not only to review everything he had learned, but to relearn it with greater intensity and force in order to have the power to lead a generation that had sinned.

Perhaps this is the Torah’s intent in saying that Noach was a *tzaddik* even in his lowly generations, since it requires much more effort to be a leader and an influence in a generation of sinners.

## **DIVINE NOURISHMENT**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“He was there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water. He wrote on the Tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (34:28)*

Just as the physical food we eat nourishes our bodies, the Torah that we study and internalize nourishes our Divine soul.

Thus, although Moshe did not consume physical food during each of the forty-day periods that he was atop Har Sinai, he most certainly consumed “spiritual” food, as he spent the entire time learning the Torah directly from G-d.

Referring to Moshe on Har Sinai, it is said in the Tehillim (78:25), “A [mortal] man ate the bread of the angels.” The angels subsist on whatever G-d allows them to comprehend about Him; they internalize this comprehension, and it fuels their existence. Moreover, their delight in this comprehension inspires them to Divine ecstasy, which they express by constantly singing songs of praise to G-d. When Moshe was on Har Sinai, he too subsisted on his comprehension of Divinity and the delight accompanying this comprehension.

Similarly, we can taste something of this spiritual nourishment and delight whenever we study the Torah, provided that we approach it as did Moshe, constantly aware that we are “hearing” it directly from G-d. (Ohr HaTorah, Shemos, vol. 6, pp. 2159-2160) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **SHINING HUMILITY**

### **Rabbi Shlomo Ressler**

*“And it was when Moshe descended from Har Sinai – with the two Tablets of the Testimony in the hand of Moshe as he descended from the mountain – Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant when He had spoken to him.” (34:29)*

As Moshe descends *Har Sinai* with the second set of tablets, he is unaware of the radiance emanating from his face (34:29). The Midrash explains that after Moshe finished transcribing the Torah, the residual ink left on his quill accidentally touched his face and caused it to shine.

Why would there have been extra ink? How would extra ink manifest itself as Moshe’s shining face?

Ohr HaChaim suggests that when Moshe got to the *pasuk*, “And Moshe was the most humble man ever,” he found himself unable to spell עניו (humble) and left out the *yud*. The ink not used for that *yud* is the extra ink that anecdotally got on Moshe’s face.

This explanation highlights an ironic correlation: Moshe’s humility is in fact what caused his face to shine.

## **ACCORDING TO THE EFFORT**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“And it was when Moshe descended from Har Sinai – with the two Tablets of the Testimony in the hand of Moshe as he descended from the mountain – Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant when He had spoken to him.” (34:29)*

G-d Himself chiseled the first set of tablets out of the rocks on *Har Sinai*, whereas the second tablets were chiseled by Moshe. Nevertheless, it was specifically after receiving the second set of tablets, rather than the first set, that Moshe’s face shone.

This is because when something is given to us from G-d without our having worked to earn it, it does not penetrate our very being. It is thus no accident that the first tablets were broken, whereas the second set never were. When we work for something, it can remain with us permanently; something that is received unearned can be more easily lost.

Because Moshe chiseled the second tablets himself, their holiness could penetrate his physical body, and therefore his face shone.

Similarly, the effort we expend in studying the Torah and fulfilling G-d’s commandments refines even our physical bodies. If we exert ourselves to the point that the Torah penetrates us, our faces glow. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, p. 179) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **MASKING HIS HUMILITY**

### **Rabbi Akiva Eiger**

*“Moshe finished speaking with them, and he put a veil on his face. When Moshe would come before Hashem to speak with Him, he would remove the veil until his departure; and then he would leave and tell the Children of Israel what he had been commanded.” (34:33-34)*

Moshe was the humblest of all men. But he was also the Jews’ leader and ruler. He therefore had to conceal his humility behind a veil of sternness and dignity.

But when he went “before Hashem to speak with Him,” Moshe removed the mask of majesty and stood humbly before G-d, revealing his true humility.

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