

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TISA

Haftarah: Melachim I 18:20-39

FEBRUARY 26-27, 2016 18 ADAR I 5776

DEDICATIONS: In Memory of Rabbi Eli B. Greenwald, Eliyahu Dov ben Gittel, 'A"H

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Editors Notes

Self Sacrifice: Moses and Noah in Contrast

Some of you commented on last week's article asking why I left out the most well-known reason given for the absence of Moses' name in last week's perasha. The rabbis teach us that this was in response to Moses' plea to G-d after the sin of the golden calf as we will read about this week. Hashem stated he would annihilate the Jewish people and produce a new nation from Moses. Moshe responds to Hashem, "And now, if You will, please pardon their sin, and if not, then please erase me from the book that You have written!" Considering that the Zohar tells us that when G-d created the world, he looked into the Torah to create it, we understand that Moses demand to be erased means not just being erased from the words of the Torah. Moshe is in essence saying that if Beney Yisrael are wiped out than he too must be wiped out and erased from human history and existence. The rabbis debate as to whether Moshe did the right thing and explain that although revokes his own threat, given the extraordinary power of Moses' words, Moshe's proclamation, "erase me from the book" had to be fulfilled in some fashion. Therefore, Moses' name does not appear in Parashat Tesaveh. We are left with a cautionary message that words are so powerful they create reality.

I think an even greater lesson is the dedication and self-sacrifice we see in Moses and ought to emulate ourselves.

A few weeks ago my aunt Evelyn Tawil passed away. Evelyn was my dad's sister and mention was made of growing up in the Bibi household where hospitality was always paramount. Rabbi Ozeri told over how in 1927 when my grandmother was only 23 and already the mother of four, her father in law, my great grandfather Joseph A. Bibi passed away. Esther and Reuben took in Reuben's mother and his brothers and for the most part adopted their nephew Nouri

Dayan who really became a sibling of the children. The story is told of the postman delivering a letter for an Ezra Dayan and my aunts telling him that there was no Dayan in the house. They all thought that Nouri, who would become Rabbi Ozeri's father in law, was their brother.

After returning from the Bet HaChaim, Shelly Jemal told me that she had her own similar story. When she was a young girl her parents moved to Japan with her sister where they lived for close to twenty years. Shelly remained in the States with her grandmother where there certainly was not only a generation gap, but a bit of a language gap as well. Aunt Evelyn was her neighbor and in those days of two family and attached homes, neighbors were more than neighbors. Evelyn became a second mother to Shelly. And I'm sure that Aunt Evelyn with four boys was thrilled to have such a beautiful and amazing daughter. Shelly told me how she relied on Evelyn for everything and how it was Evelyn who encouraged her to meet and was responsible for her marrying her husband, AJ.

This week we also saw the passing of Rabbi Eli Greenwald. He was a close friend of our family and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Ohel David and Shlomo in Manhattan Beach. Rabbi Greenwald was one of those very special rabbis who are completely dedicated to their congregations to a level of self-sacrifice as taught by Moses himself, not unlike my own Rabbi Abittan who was Rabbi Greenwald's classmate. Rabbi Greenwald has served as a principal of Ezra Academy Junior High School Yeshiva in Brooklyn, dean of Yeshiva of Manhattan Beach, both the first vice chairman and a long term member of New York City's Community Board 15, vice President of the Rabbinical Board of Flatbush, a member of the Sephardic Rabbinical Council as well as the Jewish chaplain at Jefferson Medical College Hospital in Philadelphia, Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn, and Greater New York Council Boy Scout Summer Camps. Rabbi Greenwald served the community for the past 54 years. Rabbi Yosef Bitton mentioned that some Synagogues are comprised of 60 families, some of 100 families and others of 300 or more families. Ohel David though, through the efforts of Rabbi Greenwald is comprised of one family, united in effort and purpose.

The quality of self-sacrifice and dedication of our parents and of our leaders is testament to the influence of Moses our leader and the example he set forth.

It's interesting that in contrast to the Moshe's behavior in the desert, we are told of Noah's behavior at the flood. The prophet Yeshayahu refers to the flood that destroyed the world in Noah's time as "Meh Noah" – "the waters of Noah" – as if to blame Noah for the devastating deluge. We see when Noah left the ark and saw the destruction; he prayed that G-d never destroy the world with a flood. Hashem heeded his prayer and every generation since owes their lives to Noah. Noah saved mankind going forward. But if it was possible for Noah to save the future generations, why not try to save his own? The Zohar explains that Noah bears responsibility for the flood, because when he heard about the impending catastrophe, he did not pray to G-d for mercy. He instead simply complied with G-d's instructions to build an ark to save himself, his family and the animals. He rescued himself without trying to rescue the people.

When the flood subsides, Noah sends out a raven. The raven returns and Noah sends a dove. Why the switch? We read every day in Psalms of G-d, who "gives food to the animals and to the young ravens who cry". It has been suggested that the raven fails to recognize it's young because their plumage is not as glossy and fiercely black as its own. The raven, a selfish creature, thus abandons its offspring because it does not care for what is not its own and therefore G-d must come to their rescue. Noah in sending out a raven is in some way telling G-d that G-d is like the raven abandoning his children. G-d though flings the raven right back telling Noah that it was Noah who by not praying for and encouraging his generation was the selfish one.

The students of the Arizal teach us that Moshe Rabbenu was sent back to fix the soul of Noah. The generation of the flood was reincarnated as the generation of the desert. Those same souls who were destroyed returned again. And Noah too returned. His soul was reincarnated in Moses. And where Noah failed the generation and saved himself, Moses was willing to wipe himself from human history and existence in order to save the generation. Moses is the tikun or the repair of Noah and that repair takes place when he utters the words, "Meheni Nah", please erase me. The Hid"ah, Haham Haim Yosef David Azulai, comments that the letters of the word "Meheni" ("erase me") also spell the words "Meh Noah," alluding to Moshe's role in rectifying Noah's mistake.

Furthermore, the letters Mem, Chet, Nun, Yud, Nun and Alef spell out the words Meheni Nah. Reverse those letters and we get Alef Nun Yud. Ani or I and Nun Chet, Noah followed by a Mem for Moshe. It's as if Moses is telling us that I am Noah and through these words I will repair his mistake.

What a lesson to all of us! We must learn from the example set for us by Moses our teacher to not forget the others in our generation. We cannot feel content saving ourselves without any distress for what occurs to others. Our responsibility is to do what we can to carry them with us onto the "ark" and aid them in whatever way possible so that they can pull themselves out of the "flood." This can't happen by preaching nor by pandering, but by setting an example in living lives that are just and filled with kindness and in always remembering that we are connected to each other and responsible for one another. We can't forget that we are in fact one big family.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Ki Tisa- The sin of the egel. Forgiveness and The 2nd Luchot

- 1- Mahasit hashekel. The Kiyor. The anointing oil. Parashat Ha'ketoret. Bezalel is designated to make the kelim. Shabbat.
- 2- The sin of the egel. The sinners are punished. Moshe prays for forgiveness (Moshe's 2nd 40 days on har Sinai). Hashem says he will only send an angel to be with Benei Israel.
- 3- Moshe requests that Hashem be with Benei Israel directly instead of an angel. Hashem agrees
- 4- Moshe asks Hashem hereniy nah et kevodecha ("show me your glory")
- 5- Moshe's 3rd 40 days on Har Sinai. Hashem tells Moshe to make a 2nd set of luchot. Hashem shows Moshe the 13 midot.
- 6- Hashem establishes a brit with us. The parsha goes on to repeat certain mitsvot from Parashat Mishpatim (Holidays, Pidyon, Bikurim).
- 7- Moshe comes down with the 2nd luchot. Moshe teaches the torah Benei Israel.

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

“On the day of reckoning, I will bring it into account.” (Shemot 32:34)

As a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem told Moshe Rabenu that He will destroy the Jewish nation. However, Moshe, through his prayers, was able to avert that disaster. Rashi explains the above pasuk in the following manner: “Now I have heeded you not to destroy them all at once, but always, whenever I shall make an accounting of Israel's sins against them, I will bring their sin to account against them. In other words, a bit of this sin along with the other sins.” According to Rashi, Hashem will remember and punish a little bit at a time.

There is another unique and amazing approach to this pasuk. The Gerrer Rebbe, the Beit Yisrael zt”l, often walked the streets of Jerusalem with his shamash, Rabbi Chanina Schiff zt”l. One day, as they were out walking, the quiet was disturbed by the Arab muezzin (the mugrahb) being aired through a loudspeaker in a mosque. The Beit Yisrael frowned and exclaimed to Reb Chanina, “Do you know what he is saying? He is reading a text intended to arouse the memory of the sin of the Golden Calf in order to bring upon Israel a measure of strict judgment.”

Then the Rebbe smiled, “Ha! They think that the recollection of that sin is a death knell of the Jewish people. But Hashem said that He will remember that sin for future times. The Arabs interpret it negatively, that Hashem has forsaken us and relinquished His unique connection to us as His chosen people! But the truth is just the opposite. Hashem promised Moshe Rabenu that He will never forget that sin and “on the day of reckoning I will bring it into account.”

“He pledged that whatever sin the Jews will do, He will take the sin of the Golden Calf into account and consider the fact that He pardoned them despite its severity. Hashem will compare any wrongdoing the Jews may do with the terrible sin of the Golden Calf. No sin can be more severe than that, and yet Hashem pardoned them. If He could forgive this sin, He could forgive any sin! Thus the remembrance of this sin arouses the greatest degree of mercy possible!

The only way to understand this unique approach is that it is based on the principle that Hashem's love for the Jewish people is unconditional and without end. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The Gemara tells us that the Evil Inclination (Yeser Hara) works in a slow, methodical manner. First he tells a person to transgress

something minor. When the person violated that minor transgression and got over it, the “Yeser hara” tries a more substantial act until ultimately, the person can be convinced to worship idols.

Here in the perashah, we see an exception to this rule. The Jewish people had accepted the Torah on Mount Sinai just 40 days ago and now they were dancing around a Golden Calf. How could they fall so quickly to do such a grave transgression? R' Hayim Shmuelevitz Z”l says that the Yeser Hara has to work slowly only when a person is in good spirits. If a person is depressed, however, then the Evil Inclination can get him to do the worst sin in the slightest amount of time. Here, the Jewish people thought that Moshe Rabenu had died, and got into a deep depression. Therefore, they were able to commit an act of idol worship without going through the slow process of deterioration.

We must always be vigilant of this principle and try our best to stay in good spirits. When things start getting us down, we should do whatever we can to bounce back into our regular self either by talking to others, listening to the right music or going places that will bring us more happiness. By maintaining our spirits properly, we can have both our physical and spiritual health in the best shape possible. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

SMALL ACTION – BIG RESULT

The Gemara quotes an ancient folk saying: “An opening in the roof the size of a small coin will result in a large area of sunlight on the floor” (Succah 22b).

Try an experiment. Take a board and drill a small hole in it the size of a dime. Then, in a dark room, beam a flashlight through the hole at a wall about twelve feet from the board. You will see that the small dime-sized beam expands to a large circle on the wall.

This ancient saying may be brought up to date when applied to space travel. The computer technicians on Earth monitor the journeys of rockets as they travel to their far-off destinations, and they make adjustments to the fraction of a degree. They know that a course which is off only slightly when close to Earth will produce a great deviation from the intended destination after the ship has traveled thousands of miles through outer space.

The moral lesson of these examples is that you should not limit your judgment of behavior based exclusively upon the present. As time goes by, a small deed will become magnified and result in a greatly exaggerated version of the seed planted today.

Someone who ignores negative behavior in a child (for example, if the child tells a lie or steals from another) will eventually see that act develop into a

negative behavior pattern that will be difficult to uproot once the child grows into a young adult.

When you do a small act of kindness, that act can change the course of the recipient's life and land him thousands of miles from where his original course might have deposited him were it not for the reaction to the kindness. If you make another feel positively about Torah Judaism – even in a small, nearly imperceptible way – you can be sure that the second person will grow many other positive feelings toward Hashem and His people.

As you prepare to launch an action, take a moment to consider where this rocket will land many years from now. Don't limit your actions to ones that will bring you instant gratification. It is important to blast off in a positive direction to hit a good target upon landing. (One Moment with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Our Marriage To The Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Ki-Tisa reiterates the command to observe the Shabbat, emphasizing the unique severity of Shabbat desecration, which is considered a capital offense of the highest level and punishable by court execution.

Shabbat is the most frequent of all Jewish holidays. There is a Halachic principle known as "Tadir Ve'she'eno Tadir Tadir Kodem," which means that when we have two Misvot to perform at the same time, we first perform the more frequent Misva. This rule demonstrates that the importance of a more frequent Misva exceeds that of a less frequent Misva. And the logic is clear: The Torah requires us to observe a law more frequently specifically because of its importance. Shabbat, then, is, without question, the most important of the Jewish holidays – even more important than Yom Kippur! – as evidenced by the fact that it is observed each and every week.

In fact, Shabbat is as important as our spouses. If we can consider for a few moments how important our spouses are to us, how vital a role they play in our lives and how much they mean to us, we can get a sense of the centrality of Shabbat observance in Jewish life.

The Zohar comments that at the time of creation, Shabbat, the seventh day, brought a complaint to God, so-to-speak. The other six days of the week each have a pair – Sunday and Monday form a pair, as do Tuesday and Wednesday, and Thursday and Friday. Shabbat is left as "the odd man out." God responded to Shabbat's complaint by explaining that Am Yisrael is its "pair." We are "married" to Shabbat;

our relationship to Shabbat is like that of a husband and wife.

This explains a number of intriguing passages in our liturgy and in the Talmud. For example, the Lecha Dodi hymn which we sing in the synagogue on Friday night describes Shabbat as a bride whom we go out to greet. The onset of Shabbat is the "wedding," when we "marry" Shabbat, and we therefore wear our finest clothing, and with singing and festivity, go to greet and welcome the "bride."

The Talmud, in Masechet Kiddushin, discusses the concept of "Shelihut" with regard to marriage, which means that a person can assign a Shaliah (messenger) to betroth a woman on his behalf. If a person assigns somebody else to give a girl in a different city an article of value for the purpose of betrothal, and she accepts it, they are betrothed – even if the bride and groom never met. However, the Gemara says, it is always preferable to perform a Misva – such as the Misva of marriage – personally, rather than through an agent. The Gemara gives as an example of this principle the stories of certain great Rabbis who made Shabbat preparations personally, rather than assigning this task to one of their many servants. Revealingly, the Gemara speaks of Shabbat preparations as an example relevant to the context of betrothal. Indeed, our preparation for Shabbat is like our engagement, when we are busy preparing for the great "wedding" between us and Shabbat.

This also explains why we sing "Eshet Hayil," a chapter in Mishle extolling the virtues of the "woman of valor," on Friday night. On one level, of course, we sing this chapter to give praise and express our gratitude and admiration for the woman of the house who worked so hard to make a beautiful Shabbat. But in addition, this chapter is sung in honor of the "bride", Shabbat, whom we "marry" on Friday night. For the same reason, the Talmud teaches that two angels escort a person home from the synagogue on Friday night. Kiddushin (betrothal) must be performed in the presence of two witnesses. As we "marry" Shabbat on Friday night, Hashem sends two angels to serve as witnesses to the act of "marriage." And this may also be why we recite Kiddush. Just as the wedding ceremony begins with the recitation of a special Beracha over a cup of wine, we begin Shabbat, too, with this ritual, as Shabbat is also a marriage – a marriage between the Jewish people and Shabbat.

On Shabbat, it is customary to extend to one another the greeting of "Shabbat Shalom." The foundation of marriage is "Shalom," peace and harmony between

husband and wife. Therefore, on Shabbat, we wish each other that our “marriage” to Shabbat should be peaceful and serene, just as we want our marriages to be.

What might we learn from this association between Shabbat and marriage?

In marriage, our spouse potentially serves as a source of great blessing, joy and gratification – but only if we ourselves are committed, loyal and devoted spouses. Marriage succeeds when it is a bilateral relationship of mutual sacrifice and unconditional giving. When we sacrifice for our spouses, we receive the great blessings and joy of marriage.

And this is precisely our relationship with Shabbat. In the Lecha Dodi hymn, we describe Shabbat as “Mekor Ha’beracha” – the source of blessing. Shabbat can be a source of blessing and prosperity, but only if we are a committed “spouse.” We must be loyal and devoted to Shabbat. If we spend the day sleeping, then we are not investing in the relationship. If we do not study and observe the laws and obligations of Shabbat, then we are not fulfilling our part of the relationship. Just as in marriage, the more we invest in the relationship, the more we will receive from the relationship. Let us, then, make a special effort each week to give Shabbat the attention, care and devotion it deserves, and we will then receive the incomparable blessings, joy and satisfaction that only Shabbat – and marriage – can provide.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
JUSTICE SCALIA**

Justice Antonin Scalia passed away last week. He served as an associate justice on the United States Supreme Court for the past thirty years. He was a brilliant jurist, an acerbic wit, a kind gentleman and a devout Roman Catholic. He was a strict constructionist of the American constitution, often stating that the simple language of the constitution should not be reinterpreted and twisted in order to render decisions that conform to current mores and political correctness.

He famously called opinions written by many of his liberal colleagues “haberdashery” or “applesauce.” He was a pugnacious questioner of those who appeared before the court and his sharp intellect and

brilliant analysis of constitutional issues impressed all, even those who consistently disagreed with him.

His written opinions were never expressed in legalese, were not obscure or obstinate, but were rather pieces of literature, witty and even poignant. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who was his ideological polar opposite, claimed him as her best friend on and off the bench of the court.

Scalia stated that he opposed or supported ideas and policies and not people or colleagues on the court. He was a deeply religious man who operated in the realm of separation of church and state, which is the bedrock of American constitutional democracy. He avoided unnecessary publicity both personal and familial.

He was relatively unknown in his lifetime in spite of his exalted and very exclusive position on the United States Supreme Court. He was a strong voice for tradition, morality and the old-fashioned value systems of America and was out of tune with much of the liberal policies and legislation that currently rule American society.

There are consequences to his passing for the Orthodox Jewish community in the United States. It is no secret that the current dominant culture in America is completely out of tune with Jewish tradition. The relaxation of all sexual mores and restraints, the atmosphere of violence that dominates American television and movies, the hedonistic goals of much of America’s youth, the obsession with personal technology and communication, all react negatively regarding the maintenance of a traditionally Jewish way of life and Torah observance.

And, while the culture is so prevalent that even publicly criticizing or opposing this ‘tsunami’ engulfing the country usually brings a negative response, yet Justice Scalia was a counter-culture bulwark. He had the courage and the bully pulpit to point out that this restructuring of America was in many ways unconstitutional and morally dangerous.

It is unlikely that there will be another voice as strategically placed and influential as was Justice Scalia. And that will certainly make it culturally, if not even legally, more difficult for an Orthodox Jewish society to maintain the gains made over the last half-century in America.

What happens in general society always profoundly affects the Jewish world, sometimes directly, but most times indirectly. But it surely affects our world even if most of us are consciously unaware or even

uncaring about what the outside non-Jewish political world is interested in or doing. And that type of head-in-the-sand attitude is very dangerous in the long run, as the twentieth century should have proven to us.

Popular American culture affects Israeli society as well. The Orthodox presence in Israeli society is larger and more politically potent than in the United States. But it is also certainly affected and influenced by the general society, which as I just pointed out is affected by the ruling culture in the United States. The shrinking world that the advances in technology have wrought has effectively destroyed any bulwarks of cultural isolation here in Israel as well. So what the American Supreme Court decides amazingly affects Bnei Brak also.

There is great importance to what happens and who sits on the American Supreme Court. The fact that our community may choose to ignore this fact, either out of belief that what happens in the general world is unimportant or a simple misunderstanding of the issues involved, is a great danger to our ability to retain a traditional Jewish life style in the Jewish state.

It is obvious that millions of Jews in Israel never heard of Justice Scalia. But he was an important defender of the moral values and timeless traditions of Jewish life, even though he was a non-Jew. Of course all of this requires a certain breadth of vision and worldview that an insular society almost by definition institutionally lacks. We have to hope and pray that somehow another champion of moral values will arise in American society

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Closeness of God

The more I study the Torah, the more conscious I become of the immense mystery of Exodus 33. This is the chapter set in the middle of the Golden Calf narrative, between chapter 32 describing the sin and its consequences, and chapter 34, God's revelation to Moses of the "Thirteen attributes of Mercy", the second set of tablets and the renewal of the covenant. It is, I believe, this mystery that frames the shape of Jewish spirituality.

What makes chapter 33 perplexing is, first, that it is not clear what it is about. What was Moses doing? In the previous chapter he had already prayed twice for the people to be forgiven. In chapter 34 he prays for forgiveness again. What then was he trying to achieve in chapter 33?

Second, Moses' requests are strange. He says,

"Show me now Your ways" and "Show me now Your glory" (33:13, 33:18). These seem more requests for metaphysical understanding or mystical experience than for forgiveness. They have to do with Moses as an individual, not with the people on whose behalf he was praying. This was a moment of national crisis. God was angry. The people were traumatised. The whole nation was in disarray. This was not the time for Moses to ask for a seminar in theology.

Third, more than once the narrative seems to be going backward in time. In verse 4, for example, it says "No man put on his ornaments", then in the next verse God says, "Now, then, remove your ornaments." In verse 14, God says, "My presence will go with you." In verse 15, Moses says, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not make us leave this place." In both cases, time seems to be reversed: the second sentence is responded to by the one before. The Torah is clearly drawing our attention to something, but what?

Add to this the mystery of the calf itself – was it or was it not an idol? The text states that the people said, "This, Israel, is your God who brought you out of Egypt" (32:4). But it also says that they sought the calf because they did not know what had happened to Moses. Were they seeking a replacement for him or God? What was their sin?

Surrounding it all is the larger mystery of the precise sequence of events involved in the long passages about the Mishkan, before and after the Golden Calf. What was the relationship between the Sanctuary and the Calf?

At the heart of the mystery is the odd and troubling detail of verses 7-11. This tells us that Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp. What has this to do with the subject at hand, namely the relationship between God and the people after the Golden Calf? In any case, it was surely the worst possible thing for Moses to do at that time under those circumstances. God had just announced that "I will not go in your midst" (33:3). At this, the people were deeply distressed. They "went into mourning" (33:4). For Moses, then, to leave the camp must have been doubly demoralising. At times of collective distress, a leader has to be close to the people, not distant.

There are many ways of reading this cryptic text, but it seems to me the most powerful and simple interpretation is this. Moses was making his most audacious prayer, so audacious that the Torah does not state it directly and explicitly. We have to reconstruct it from anomalies and clues within the text itself.

The previous chapter implied that the people panicked because of the absence of Moses, their leader. God himself implied as much when he said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt" (32:7). The suggestion is that Moses' absence or distance was the cause of the sin. He should have stayed closer to the people. Moses took the point. He did go down. He did punish the guilty. He did pray for God to forgive the people. That was the theme of chapter 32. But in chapter 33, having restored order to the people, Moses now began on an entirely new line of approach. He was, in effect, saying to God: what the people need is not for me to be close to them. I am just a human, here today, gone tomorrow. But You are eternal. You are their God. They need You to be close to them.

It was as if Moses was saying, "Until now, they have experienced You as a terrifying, elemental force, delivering plague after plague to the Egyptians, bringing the world's greatest empire to its knees, dividing the sea, overturning the very order of nature itself. At Mount Sinai, merely hearing Your voice, they were so overwhelmed that they said, if we continue to hear the voice, 'we will die' (Ex. 20:16)." The people needed, said Moses, to experience not the greatness of God but the closeness of God, not God heard in thunder and lightning at the top of the mountain but as a perpetual Presence in the valley below.

That is why Moses removed his tent and pitched it outside the camp, as if to say to God: it is not my presence the people need in their midst, but Yours. That is why Moses sought to understand the very nature of God Himself. Is it possible for God to be close to where people are? Can transcendence become immanence? Can the God who is vaster than the universe live within the universe in a predictable, comprehensible way, not just in the form of miraculous intervention?

To this, God replied in a highly structured way. First, He said, you cannot understand My ways. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy" (33:19). There is an element of divine justice that must always elude human comprehension. We cannot fully enter into the mind of another human being, how much less so the mind of the Creator Himself.

Second, "You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live" (33:20). Humans can at best "See My back." Even when God intervenes in history, we can see this only in retrospect, looking back. Steven Hawking was wrong.[1] Even if we decode every

scientific mystery, we still will not know the mind of God.

However, third, you can see My "glory". That is what Moses asked for once he realised that he could never know God's "ways" or see His "face". That is what God caused to pass by as Moses stood "in a cleft of the rock" (v. 22). We do not know at this stage, exactly what is meant by God's glory, but we discover this at the very end of the book of Exodus. Chapters 35-40 describe how the Israelites built the Mishkan. When it is finished and assembled we read this:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. (Ex. 40:34-35)

We now understand the entire drama set in motion by the making of the Golden Calf. Moses pleaded with God to come closer to the people, so that they would encounter Him not only at unrepeatable moments in the form of miracles but regularly, on a daily basis, and not only as a force that threatens to obliterate all it touches but as a Presence that can be sensed in the heart of the camp.

That is why God commanded Moses to instruct the people to build the Mishkan. It is what He meant when He said: "Let them make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell (ve-shakhanti) among them" (Ex. 25:8). It is from this verb that we get the word Mishkan, "Tabernacle" and the post-biblical word Shekhinah, meaning the Divine presence. A shakhen is a neighbour, one who lives next door. Applied to God it means "the Presence that is close." If this is so – it is, for example, the way Judah Halevi understood the text[2] – then the entire institution of the Mishkan was a Divine response to the sin of the Golden Calf, and an acceptance by God of Moses' plea that He come close to the people. We cannot see God's face; we cannot understand God's ways; but we can encounter God's glory whenever we build a home, on earth, for His presence.

That is the ongoing miracle of Jewish spirituality. No one before the birth of Judaism ever envisaged God in such abstract and awe-inspiring ways: God is more distant than the furthest star and more eternal than time itself. Yet no religion has ever felt God to be closer. In Tanakh the prophets argue with God. In the book of Psalms King David speaks to Him in terms of utmost intimacy. In the Talmud God listens to the debates between the sages and accepts their rulings even when they go against a heavenly voice. God's relationship with Israel, said the prophets, is like that

between a parent and a child, or between a husband and a wife. In The Song of Songs it is like that between two infatuated lovers. The Zohar, key text of Jewish mysticism, uses the most daring language of passion, as does Yedid nefesh, the poem attributed to the sixteenth century Tzefat kabbalist R. Elazar Azikri.

That is one of the striking differences between the synagogues and the cathedrals of the Middle Ages. In a cathedral you sense the vastness of God and the smallness of humankind. But in the Altneushul in Prague or the synagogues of the Ari and R. Joseph Karo in Tzefat, you sense the closeness of God and the potential greatness of humankind. Many nations worship God, but Jews are the only people to count themselves His close relatives ("My child, my firstborn, Israel" Ex. 4:22).

Between the lines of Exodus 33, if we listen attentively enough, we sense the emergence of one of the most distinctive and paradoxical features of Jewish spirituality. No religion has ever held God higher, but none has ever felt Him closer. That is what Moses sought and achieved in Exodus 33 in his most daring conversation with God.

[1] He famously said, at the end of A Brief History of Time, that if we were to reach a full scientific understanding of the cosmos, we would "know the mind of God."

[2] Judah Halevi, The Kuzari, 1: 97.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "And by what then will it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes?" (33:16)

Moshe Rabenu was the greatest man to ever walk the face of this earth. His greatness was dependant on the piety of Bnei Yisrael. When the sin of the Golden Calf is committed, Hashem orders Moshe to "Go down, for the People whom you have brought out of Egypt have become corrupt". Since the greatness of Bnei Yisrael was mitigated by committing a sin, so was Moshe's greatness lessened. His greatness is resulting from the elevated holiness of the Jewish Nation

Hashem tells Moshe, "And now let me alone and I shall destroy them" (32:10). Which means, "Don't let me alone" and continue to intercede on behalf of the people (Berachot 32A). Moshe is successful with his prayers and Hashem rescinds the decree. By this act of entreating for Israel, Moshe gained the highest excellence and achieved for himself and for his people more than ever before. The Golden Calf had been intended for this.

At this point, after pleading for the lives of his people and with his back to the wall, Moshe feels it is a moment for great opportunity. Moshe asks Hashem:

- 1) to rest His presence solely upon Israel, as it is said, "Is it not by Your going with us?"
 - 2) not to rest His presence upon the nations, as it is said, "And we should be set apart, I and Your people"
 - 3) that he be made known the ways of Hashem, as it is said, "Make known to me Your ways"
- And Hashem granted all three requests (Berachot 7A).

We can learn from Moshe that even though we may think that we are in low and weak position emotionally, financially or spiritually, this can be an excellent opportunity for us to shoot high and ask for what you need and count on Hashem (Bitachon). He is our loving Father who is just waiting and hoping and prodding us to call out and just ask.

R' Miller Z'L is teaching us a tremendous Mussar learned from Moshe Rabbenu.

Moshe was at the weakest position of his career, since the source of his greatness/power was Klal Yisrael. And now they had made the most terrible sin of the Egel/Golden Calf. Then, Hashem tells Moshe "Lech red"/get down from your greatness (Rashi).

Normally when we have challenges we can tend to lay low, or even hide under the covers. Moshe did the opposite; He asked Hashem for 3 very strong requests & was granted them all.

The problem IS the solution. When we understand that the source of our challenge is our Father in heaven & that He is sending us these tests because he wants to hear from us, in order that we get closer to Hashem! This is the solution.

The problem was that our connection was loose & Hashem sent us the problem which became the solution since it caused us to make our connection better by calling out to Hashem.

So the best opportunity to ask Hashem for all you need can be when you are down.

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