

# Tie Dye Aish

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**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

**W**itnessing the birth of a new idea is a little like watching the birth of a galaxy through the Hubble Space Telescope. We can witness just such an event in a famous rabbinical commentary to a key verse in this week's parsha.

The way to see it is to ask the question: what is the Hebrew word for freedom? Instinctively, we answer cherut. After all, we say that God brought us me-avdut le-cherut, "from slavery to freedom." We call Pesach, the Festival of freedom, zeman cherutenu. So it comes as a surprise to discover that not once does the Torah, or Tanakh as a whole, use the word cherut in the sense of freedom, and only once does it use the word, or at least the related word charut, in any sense whatever.

There are two biblical words for freedom. One is chofshi/chofesh, used in connection with the freeing of slaves (as in Ex. 21: 2). That too is the word used in Israel's national anthem, Hatikva, which speaks about "the two-thousand-year hope to be a free people [am chofshi] in our land."

The other is dror, used in connection with the Jubilee year, engraved on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia: "Proclaim liberty [dror] throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Lev. 25: 10). The same word appears in Isaiah's great words: "to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom [dror] for the captives" (Is. 61: 1).

However, the sages coined a new word. Here is the passage in which it occurs: It says, "The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved [charut] on the tablets" (Ex. 32:16). Read not charut, "engraved" but cherut, "freedom," for the only person who is truly free is one who occupies himself with Torah study. (Avot 6: 2).

The reference is to the first tablets given by God to Moses just before the sin of the golden calf. This is the only appearance in Tanakh of root ch-r-t (with a tav), but a related word, ch-r-t (with a tet) appears in the

story of the golden calf itself, when the Torah tells us that Aaron shaped it with a cheret, an "engraving tool." The Egyptian magicians are called chartumim, which may mean "engravers of hieroglyphics." So how did a word that means "engraved" come to mean "freedom"?

Besides which, why was a new term for freedom needed? If the Hebrew language already had two, why was a third necessary? And why this word - engraved? To answer these questions, let us engage in some conceptual archaeology.

Chofesh/chofshi is what a slave becomes when he or she goes free. It means that he can do what he likes. There is no one to order him around. The word is related to chafetz, "desire" and chapess, "seek". Chofesh is the freedom to pursue your desires. It is what philosophers call negative liberty. It means the absence of coercion.



Chofesh is fine for individual freedom. But it does not constitute collective freedom. A society in which everyone was free to do what they liked would not be a free society. It would be, at best, like the society we saw on the streets of London and Manchester in the summer of 2011, with people breaking shop windows, looting and assaulting strangers.

More likely it would be what failed states are today: a society without the rule of law, with no effective government, honest police, or independent courts. It would be what Hobbes called "the war of every man against every man" in which life would be "nasty, brutish and short." Something like this is referred to in the last verse of the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did that which was right in his own eyes."

A free society needs law. But law is a constraint on freedom. It forbids me to do something I might wish to do. How then are we to reconcile law and liberty? That is a question at the heart of Judaism - which is a religion of both law and liberty.

To answer this, the sages made an extraordinary leap of the imagination. Consider two forms of writing in ancient times. One is to use



TIE DYE AISH IS A PURIM NEWSLETTER THAT'S TIE DYE FOR! (C'MON, THAT WAS A GOOD ONE!) COULD BE IT'SWIRLDS APART FROM WHAT YOU USED TO BUT, DUDE, SERIOUSLY, HOW CAN YOU GO WRONG WITH A HIGHLY COLORIC PUB-LICATION SUCH AS THIS?



So how did I come up with this totally lame theme? Well, sheesh, you don't have get all huffy about that! Just cuz YOU can't hear all the voices in my head doesn't mean I can't enjoy the party in here.  
So, yea. No clue. But have a wonderfully groovy Purim anyway!

ink on parchment, another is to engrave words in stone. There is a marked difference between these two methods.

The ink and parchment are two different materials. The ink is external to the parchment. It is superimposed upon it, and it does not become part of the parchment. It remains distinct, and so it can be rubbed off and removed. But an engraving does not use some new substance. It is carved out of the stone itself. It becomes part of it, and cannot easily be obliterated.

Now consider these two ways of writing as metaphors for law. There is a law that is externally imposed. People keep it because they fear that if they do not, they will be caught and punished. But if there is no chance that they will be caught, they make break it, for the law has not changed their desires. That kind of law - imposed on us like ink on parchment - is a limitation of freedom.

But there can be a different kind of society in which people keep the law not because they fear they will be caught and punished, but because they know the law, they have studied it, they understand it, they have internalised it, and it has become part of who they are. They no longer desire to do what the law forbids because they now know it is wrong and they wrestle with their own temptations and desires. Such a law needs no police because it is based not on external force but on internal transformation through the process of education. The law is like writing engraved in stone.

Imagine such a society. You can walk in the streets without fear. You don't need high walls and alarms to keep your home safe. You can leave your car unlocked and still expect to find it there when you return.

People keep the law because they care about the common good. That is a free society.

Now imagine the other kind of society, which needs a heavy police presence, constant surveillance, neighbourhood watch schemes, security devices and personnel, and still people are afraid to walk alone at night. People think they are free because they have been taught that all morality is relative, and you can do what you like so long as you do not harm others. No one who has seen such a society can seriously believe it is free. Individuals may be free, but society as a whole has to be on constant guard because it is at constant risk. It is a society with little trust and much fear.

Hence the brilliant new concept that emerged in rabbinic Judaism: cherut, the freedom that comes to a society - of which Jews were called on to be pioneers - where people not only know the law but study it constantly until it is engraved on their hearts as the commandments were once engraved on stone. That is what the sages meant when they said, "Read not charut, engraved, but cherut, freedom, for the only person who is truly free is one who occupies himself with Torah study." In such a society you keep the law because you want to, because having studied the law you understand why it is there. In such a society there is no conflict between law and freedom.

Where did the sages get this idea from? I believe it came from their deep understanding of what Jeremiah meant when he spoke of the renewed covenant that would come into being once Jews returned after the Babylonian exile. The renewed covenant "will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt ... This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time - declares the Lord - I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts ..." (Jer. 31: 31-33).

Many centuries later Josephus recorded that this had actually happened. "Should anyone of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls."

To this day many still do not fully understand this revolutionary idea. People still think that a free society can be brought about simply by democratic elections and political structures. But democracy, as Alexis de Tocqueville said long ago, may simply turn out to be "the tyranny of the majority."

Freedom is born in the school and the House of Study. That is the freedom still pioneered by the people who, more than any other, have devoted their time to studying, understanding and internalising the law. What is the Jewish people? A nation of constitutional lawyers. Why?



Because only when the law is engraved on our souls can we achieve collective freedom without sacrificing individual freedom. That is cherut -- Judaism's great contribution to the idea and practice of liberty. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l* © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

*What does a nosey pepper do?  
Gets jalapeno business!*



**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd God spoke unto Moses: Take unto you sweet spices, stacte [nataf], onycha [shelet] and galbanum [helbena], these sweet spices with pure frankincense [levona], all of an equal weight." (Exodus 30:34) One of the most unique aspects of the Sanctuary, continued in the Holy Temples, was the sweet-smelling spices of the incense burned on a special altar and whose inspiring fragrance permeated the House of God. In the portion of Ki Tisa the Torah lists the different spices, and their names – in Hebrew or English – are strange to our modern ears. But stranger still is the Rabbinic commentary that one of those spices – specifically helbena – is hardly sweet smelling. On the contrary, as Rashi writes, helbena "...is a malodorous spice which is known [to us as] gelbanah [galbanum]. Scripture enumerates it among the spices of the incense to teach us that we shouldn't look upon the inclusion of Jewish transgressors in our fasts and prayers as something insignificant in our eyes; indeed, they [the transgressors of Israel] must also be included amongst us" (Rashi, ad loc.).

Rashi is conveying a most significant rabbinic insight. The community of Israel – in Hebrew a tzibur – must consist of all types of Jews: righteous (the letter tzadi for tzaddikim), intermediate (the letter bet for benonim), and wicked (the letter reish for resha'im), just as the incense of the Sanctuary included spices of unappetizing fragrance. Perhaps because we must learn to take responsibility for every member of the "family" no matter what their behavior, perhaps because what appears to us as wicked may in reality be more genuine spirituality, perhaps because no evil is without its redeeming feature or perhaps merely in order to remind us not to be judgmental towards other human beings, the message of the incense could not be clearer: no Jew, even the most egregious sinner, dare be dismissed with mockery and derision from the sacred congregation of Israel. Every Jew must be allowed to contribute, and only when every Jew is included does the sweet fragrance properly emerge.

We have already seen how the Torah portion of Ki Tisa contains another striking example of the significance of every single Jew in Israel in the aftermath of the great sin in the desert. We read that soon after the

revelation at Sinai, Moses' prolonged communion with the divine frightened the people into worshipping a golden calf. Our sages teach: "And God said to Moses, 'Go down' (Ex. 32:7). Interprets R. Elazar: God was commanding Moses to descend from his elevated position. 'The only reason I gave you greatness is because of Israel, and now that Israel has sinned, what do I need you for?'" (Berakhot 32a)

God is reminding Moses that God's covenant with Abraham was with every single Jew. No Jew dare be discounted; every Jew must be loved, taught, and at least given the opportunity to come closer to God and our traditions. Even the Jew who is serving idols must be spoken to, ministered to!

A month or so after this portion is read, the Seder itself becomes a living demonstration of the necessity to include rather than to exclude any Jew. Take note of the proverbial four children: the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child and the child who knows not what to ask. It is instructive that the wicked child is not defined by the compiler of the Haggada as one who eats non-kosher food or desecrates the Sabbath; the wicked child is rather the one who says "Of what value is this work for you?" Wickedness is defined as excluding oneself from the general Jewish community. And even if a person excludes herself – and is therefore called wicked – we dare not exclude her. Our Seder table must always be welcoming enough to include everyone, no matter who.

Indeed, towards the end of the Seder we are instructed to open the door for Elijah the prophet, forerunner of the Messiah. In the past I've commented that opening the door for Elijah seems superfluous given Elijah's uncanny ability to visit every single Seder in the world; anyone capable of accomplishing such a remarkable feat certainly would not be stopped by a closed door. One answer that I've proposed is that the opening of the door is not really for Elijah; it is rather a symbolic gesture of opening the door to the fifth child, the child who has moved so far from the Jewish people that he isn't even at the Seder! We must go out to find him – even if he is at a neighborhood dance club or a Far East ashram – and invite him to come back in.





And why is Elijah associated with this gesture toward the fifth child? The closing verse of the last prophet included in the canon, Malakhi, declares: “Behold I will send Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of God, and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...” (Malakhi 3:23). No one, not the “wicked” child, and not even the “invisible” child, is to be excluded from the Seder, the commemoration of our first redemption. Parents and children must all join together in a loving and accepting reunion.

There is a fascinating halakhic ramification of our desire to include rather than to exclude. The Talmud (Eruvin 69b) suggests that a public desecrater of the Sabbath is comparable to an idolater, whose wine cannot be drunk and who cannot be counted for a statutory quorum (minyan) for prayer. Does this mean that a Jew who does not observe the Sabbath laws and rituals forfeits his rights to belong to a proper Jewish congregation?

One of the towering Torah giants of nineteenth-century Germany, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, raises this very question in his collection of responsa, Mellamed Leho’il (Responsum 29), where he resoundingly rules that the Talmudic comparison no longer applies. He explains that during Talmudic times, when the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people was observant, and when a Jew was defined in terms of their Torah observance, any Jew who publicly desecrated the Sabbath was effectively testifying to their exclusion from the Jewish people. Therefore, in Talmudic times, a public Sabbath desecrator became the equivalent of an idolater; in effect, the perpetrator of such a public crime was excluding himself from the congregation of Israel and such a person was thereby relinquishing any rights to Jewish privileges. However, explains Rabbi Hoffman, when – sadly enough – the overwhelming majority of Jews are not observant (and today this is even truer than it was in nineteenth-century Germany), a Jew who publicly desecrates the Sabbath is not at all making a statement of exclusion from the peoplehood of Israel. On the contrary, the very fact that such a desecrator attends a synagogue (if only a few times a year) and is willing to partake in the service indicates a definite feeling of belonging and a will to belong to the historic community of Israel. Therefore, Rabbi Hoffman concludes, a Sabbath desecrator must not only be included in a minyan, but must be encouraged to become more involved.

**A Curious Postscript**

On a recent plane trip from New York to Israel, I felt myself awakened by a rather startling question. Someone wanted to see my tzitzit (ritual fringes). Still half asleep, I



opened my shirt, showing the aggressive questioner what he wanted. I thought that perhaps he needed to borrow them. “Good,” he said, “in that case please join us for a minyan for morning prayers.” Somewhat confused, I asked him what my wearing or not wearing tzitzit had to do with my joining the minyan. “You know,” he said, “you can’t pray with just any Jew. But chances are that a Jew who wears tzitzit also observes the Sabbath.”

I was quite taken aback, to say the least. I reminded the zealot that the source for the requirement of ten people for a minyan was derived from God’s statement to Moses, “How long must I suffer this evil congregation...?” (Num. 14:27). And the evil congregation to which God is referring is the ten out of twelve scouts who didn’t want to conquer the Land of Israel. Since the word “eda” (congregation) refers to ten scouts, we know that ten comprise a minyan. Now these ten scouts are considered to have committed one of the most grievous sins of the Bible by their refusal to leave the desert and inhabit Israel. If such individuals are the very source for a congregational quorum, how could someone be excluded if he doesn’t wear the ritual fringes?

I did not choose to pray with such a hand-picked group; I chose rather to pray with those who had been rejected by the tzitzit checking minyan gatherer, confident that they would be far more acceptable to the God of compassion and unconditional love to whom we pray! *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin’s book Shemot: Defining a Nation, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

*Why aren’t koalas actual bears?  
They don’t meet the koalafications!*



**RABBI BEREL WEIN**  
**Wein Online**

In this week’s Torah reading we learn of the ingredients and mixture that created the incense offering in the Holy Temple. The list of ingredients and its formula are transmitted to us through the words of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. The ingredients and measurements were to be exact and any deviation from the established formula rendered the offering unacceptable.

The incense offering differs from all other Temple offerings because of the fact that it is ephemeral and physically nonexistent. It literally goes up in smoke. However, it leaves a fragrance that is so powerful that, as the Talmud explains, the animal kingdom as far away as Jericho was affected by this fragrance.

There are those who say that the miracle attributed to the Temple in the book of Avot, that no flies appeared on the temple grounds even though



it was basically a meat slaughterhouse, was due to the wafting of the smoke that emanated from the incense offering on a daily basis. Be that as it may be, there is no doubt that the incense offering was meant to be a protective measure for the Jewish people. We find later in the Bible that it was used to diffuse plagues that were brought upon the people because of their intransigence and sins. It nevertheless was a lethal offering, which if done improperly and/or without authorization, brought death upon those who practiced it. We see this from the story of the sons of Aaron and from the even greater tragedy of the destruction of Korach and his followers.

The incense offering was a purely spiritual event. It was smoke and air. It left a powerful fragrance, but though it could be appreciated and even internalized it could not be touched or felt by human hands. The service of God is often purely spiritual, characterized by love, devotion and faith. These are not traits that can be held in one's hands or subject to storage. The very vagueness of these necessary spiritual traits makes them difficult to define, let alone observe. And these spiritual traits need to be handled carefully and with proper judgment.

Too much faith can lead to poor decisions and a naïve view of life and religion. Not enough faith will only lead to pessimism and permanent disappointment. The same is true for all other spiritual traits – they are necessary for the correct service of God but they can be easily mishandled and misinterpreted. The Torah purposely defined its physical commandments. These definitions apply even to the spiritual commandments as well. The Torah gives forth a fragrance – a fragrance of goodness, kindness and a whiff of eternity.

Though we no longer have the ability to offer incense on a daily basis, we do have the ability to serve our Creator, in a spiritual sense, with our minds and hearts and souls. Though these may not be physically reflective to others, Heaven recognizes them clearly. It is our incense offering. ©2025 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

*Why can't you give Elsa a balloon?  
Because she will Let it go!*



**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

One of the most extraordinary images in the Torah appears when Moses asks God, “Show me Your glory.” God responds that He cannot be seen by any human being. But, God tells Moses, “Stand in

the cleft of the rock,” and “you will see My back, but My face must not be seen” (Exodus 33: 17–23). What does this mean?

The Talmud maintains that Moses was asking God for an understanding of why there is evil in the world. This is an especially relevant question, coming as it does after the Jews experienced so much turmoil and upheaval after leaving Egypt. God responds that, as events unfold, they cannot be easily understood. Only after an event, often only many years later, can one comprehend what occurred. When God tells Moses, you can see Me from behind, He may be saying that events can only be understood in hindsight (see Berachot 7a).

Another possibility comes to mind. Perhaps Moses was asking God for proof of His existence. Moses may have felt that such a proof was needed by Am Yisrael after they rejected God by building the golden calf. But there is no such absolute proof. After all, if God is God, proof would limit Him. And so, God tells Moses, “You cannot see Me from the front.” There is no proof of My existence. Rather, one should concentrate on understanding the characteristics of God, the benevolence of God, the kindness of God. These characteristics, says Maimonides, are symbolized by God telling Moses He can be seen from the back (Maimonides, Yesodei Hatorah 1:10). Note a nearby text where Moses asks God to “show me now Your ways [derachecha]” (Exodus 33:13). The ways of God reflect God's characteristics.

Perhaps, too, when Moses asks God, let me see You from the front, God responds that deep humility is built into His essence. This may be the meaning of our text. God is saying, I don't want the honor of being seen from the front but rather modestly from the back. Not coincidentally, the second tablets were given, as the Beit Halevi points out, with much more humility than the first, reflecting the idea of seeing God's back rather than His front. The first were given amidst “thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and the sound of the shofar exceedingly loud” (19:16). The second, hewn by Moses, were given with no fanfare (34:1–5).

It may also be that God's “passing by” marked a moment of prayer. At that time, the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy are proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord is a God of mercy and supplication” (34:6, 7). These attributes form the core of the Selichot penitential service during which one stands before God at His mercy.

Prayer, unlike most everyday activities, is the most intimate of moments, when a human being stands as if “naked” before God – exposed, open, vulnerable. Ironically, it is precisely when one most powerfully feels God's presence that one feels His hiddenness. You





shall see Me from behind, God proclaims, but My face cannot be seen.

Could it be that the custom in Orthodox communities of the cantor leading the service with his back to the congregation emerges from our narrative? And could it be that we often close our eyes in the deepest moments of prayer because an intense love encounter transcends what one can physically see? It is a moment when we catch a glimpse of God's back.

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What do you get from a pampered cow? Spoiled milk!

**ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

**Prosecutor and Defender**

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

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

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

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

to atone for the gold which people had enthusiastically donated to make the Golden Calf. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

What do you call a man with no body & just a nose?  
Nobody nose!



**RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

**Migdal Ohr**

"And He gave to Moshe, when He finished speaking to him on Mount Sinai, two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of G-d. (Shmos 31:18) The Torah tells us that on the day Moshe completed his forty days on the mountain, Hashem gave him the two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. The reason it wasn't given before was because all the 613 commandments, which Moshe was given on Sinai in those forty days, are contained within the Ten Commandments. Until he'd learned all of them, it wasn't correct to give Moshe the tablets, as he wouldn't be able to appreciate their depth and what they represented.

The very next verse tells us that the Jews noticed Moshe was late in coming down, and they ganged up on Aharon, demanding that he make them a "god," for they didn't know what had happened to Moshe. The sin of the Golden Calf ensued, which almost spelled total disaster for the Jews, and we are still suffering from it today.

The original luchos, say Chazal, would have made it impossible for any of us to forget the Torah. There would have been a concrete (so-to-speak) proof that Hashem was with us, and the tablets would have outlived Moshe or any mortal, so they would be an eternal sign. Alas, it was not to be because (some of) the Jews were impatient and anxious.

Instead, the tablets were broken. So what do we have as proof that Hashem is in our midst? For that, we have to go back another verse or two. The pesukim just before mention of the tablets spoke of Shabbos. There, Hashem tells Moshe to convey to the Jews that building the Mishkan doesn't override Shabbos, because Shabbos is a perpetual sign between Hashem and the Jews that He is the G-d Who sanctifies us.

Now, the proof of Hashem's presence in our lives would not be the external, physical manifestation of the stone tablets. Rather, it would be something much more powerful. It would be an internal understanding, born of faith and working on our service of Hashem. We can only truly know Hashem from within our minds and hearts, and our job is to build that sanctuary





within ourselves, where Hashem can dwell eternally.

Had the Jews been able to wait, to not lose faith, by strengthening themselves and finding explanations for Moshe’s delay, they would have mastered the internalization of Hashem’s eternity and presence, and been able to have an external sign for all to see. Because they were not able to do this, Hashem left them no choice but to focus on Him, and use things like Shabbos to cement their relationship with Him. The second tablets were hewn by human hands, a sign that it was up to us.

At the time of Purim, we likewise put all our faith in Hashem, and He saved us. It all looked so natural, though, because Hashem entrusts us with making the connection that is permanent, and He will respond to that which we do.

*The students of R’ Chaim Brisker asked him to tell them, “Purim Torah,” a sort of whimsical, humorous Torah lecture, and he agreed. As the students gathered around, R’ Chaim began.*

*He quoted a Rambam, then compared it to a different quote from the Rambam which seemed to contradict it. For the next forty-five minutes, he wove a powerful shiur with proofs and sources from all over the Talmud, rebutted many of them, and finally ended with a single, brilliant explanation. The students were stunned by the intricacy of his lecture, but wondered about it. “Rebbi,” they said. “We asked you to say Purim Torah.”*

*“That was Purim Torah,” he smiled. “The second Rambam I quoted doesn’t exist!” © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

*What do you call an illegally parked frog?  
Toad!*

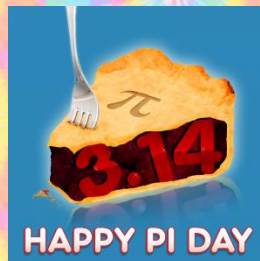


### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## **Moshe’s Conversation with Hashem**

**W**hile Moshe was still on the Mountain after receiving the Ten Commandments, Hashem utilized that opportunity to give Moshe the Oral tradition, a more detailed explanation of the laws known as the Torah She’b’al Peh. Moshe remained on the Mountain for forty days and nights to hear and learn each explanation of the laws. The people at the base of the Mountain became impatient and feared that Moshe had died from such close contact with Hashem. This led to the sin of the Golden Calf, which was fashioned to represent leadership to the people and not as a god. Only after it was completed did the people begin to look upon the Golden Calf as a direct symbol of Hashem. Hashem became angered and spoke to Moshe.

“Hashem spoke to Moshe: ‘Go, descend – for your nation that you have brought up from Egypt has degenerated. They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded



them; they have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it and sacrificed to it, and they said, “These are your gods, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.” Hashem said to Moshe, ‘I have seen this people, and behold! it is a stiff-necked people. And now, desist from Me! Let my anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation.’ Moshe pleaded before Hashem, his Elokim, 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? Why should Egypt say the following: “With evil intent did He take them out, to kill them in the mountains and to annihilate them from upon the face of the earth? Relent from Your burning anger and reconsider regarding the evil against Your nation. Remember for Avraham, for Yitzchak, and for Yisrael, Your servants, that You swore to them by Your very Self, and You told them, ‘I shall increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens, and this entire land of which I spoke, I shall give to your offspring and they shall have it as a heritage forever.’ And Hashem reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people.”

Hashem’s statement to Moshe that he should descend is covered by two Hebrew words, “lech (go) and reid (go down, descend).” The Ohr HaChaim indicates that the “double” word here is unnecessary, as Moshe was on the Mountain which meant that he could only “go” if he “descended.” When a superfluous word appears to occur in the Torah, it is important to understand that there is an additional message to be learned from this added word. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Hashem was telling Moshe that his lofty position was only necessary because of the lofty task of receiving the Torah and its elucidation through the Oral Law. Since the people had strayed from their close relationship with Hashem, Moshe’s lofty task was no longer possible. There was no longer a reason for his remaining on the Mountain.

In our daily prayers, we begin every Shemona Esrei, Silent Devotion, the major blessings at each time of prayer, with the words, “Hashem, open my lips so that my mouth may declare Your praise.” These words indicate that we are not arrogant enough to request from Hashem nor to choose the appropriate words without first clarifying in our own minds the purpose of our conversation with Hashem. Moshe, however, had a special relationship with Hashem and spoke with Him often face-to-face. In this case, however, Moshe was unsure whether the sin was so great that he did not have permission to speak with Hashem to save the people. Hashem, therefore, hinted to Moshe that he should speak up and even which arguments to use.

Hashem said to Moshe, “your nation that you have



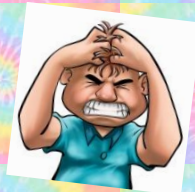
brought up from Egypt.” According to many, this was a reference to the Eirev Rav, people who were not part of the B’nei Yisrael but were given permission by Moshe to join the B’nei Yisrael and leave Egypt. Many say that the Eirev Rav were the people responsible for the Golden Calf. Moshe chose to alter that rebuke by saying to Hashem, “Your people, whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt.” Moshe was saying to Hashem that Hashem took these people out even had Moshe not asked Hashem for permission. When Hashem described the B’nei Yisrael as a “stiff-necked people,” Moshe countered with the argument that Hashem must have known this before He took them out of Egypt, yet He still saved them through His attribute of Mercy.

Hashem said to Moshe, “And now, desist from Me! Let my anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them.” Moshe immediately understood that this was a call from Hashem to argue for the sake of the B’nei Yisrael, much as Avraham argued with Hashem to save the people of Sodom. Hashem did not need permission from Moshe to “let His anger burn,” and Moshe understood that this was his invitation to speak on behalf of the people. Moshe replied to Hashem, “Why, Hashem, should Your anger burn against Your people?” Moshe was also prompted by Hashem with the words, “and I shall make you a great nation.” Moshe countered with the words, “Remember for Avraham, for Yitzchak, and for Yisrael, Your servants, that You swore to them by Your very Self, and You told them, ‘I shall increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens, and this entire land of which I spoke, I shall give to your offspring and they shall have it as a heritage forever.’” HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin indicates that Moshe was telling Hashem that the promises Hashem made to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael should be fulfilled before any promises that He would make with Moshe were fulfilled.

Each argument that Moshe used to save the people was a response to a statement from Hashem. This was not a game of one-upmanship or a battle of wits; it was an intentional direction of Moshe’s words by a merciful Hashem. That is why Moshe insists on using the name of Hashem which indicates His Mercy, rather than the name of Hashem which indicates His Justice. Moshe pointed out to Hashem that He took the B’nei Yisrael out of Egypt through His Mercy, knowing that they were not yet worthy.

Our goal should be improving ourselves and our actions to the level of greatness required to be judged by Justice while not depending on Mercy. May we rise to that level. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

*The past, present & future walked into a bar. It was tense!*



**RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

**Cross-Currents**

A famous palindromic word in the Torah is venasnu, in the second pasuk in the parsha. It means "and each man must give," in the context of contributing the machatzis hashekel, which the Torah describes as "monetary atonement for [the giver's] life" (Shemos, 30:12). The word reads the same forward and backward.

The Baal HaTurim sees that as a hint to the Gemara's contention that one should "tithe so that you will become wealthy" (Taanis, 9a), that giving charity will result in the giver's benefit.

The Vilna Gaon discerned a somewhat different message in the palindrome, namely, that life plays havoc with fortunes, and therefore giving tzedakah to others will merit others' supporting us or our descendants in our times of need. What goes around, in other words, comes around.

He cites the Gemara in Shabbos 151b: "Rabbi Chiya said to his wife: When a poor person comes to the house, be quick to give him bread so that they will be quick to give bread to your children. She said to him: Are you cursing your children?"

"He said to her: the yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael taught that galgal hu shechozer ba'olam -- it is a 'cycle that repeats in the world'."

In other words, wealth and destitution come and go, in individual lives and in family lines. Great fortunes are made and lost, and rags can lead to riches.

Media mogul and billionaire Oprah Winfrey was born into an impoverished family in Mississippi; she went to college on a scholarship.

Socialite Jocelyn Wildenstein, who inherited billions from her art dealer husband, died dependent on \$900 Social Security payments.

And those people's descendants might find themselves in entirely different statuses from their antecedents. Wealth recycles, something to remember when approached by a beggar. ©2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

**Poo-rim Samayach!**

