

PARSHAT KI-TISA

No matter how one explains the story of 'chet ha-egel' [the sin of the Golden Calf], we encounter a problem. If we understand (as the psukim seem to imply) that Bnei Yisrael truly believed that it was this 'golden calf' (and not God) who took them out of Egypt - then it is simply hard to fathom how an entire nation would reach such a senseless conclusion!

But if we claim (as many commentators do) that Aharon had good intentions, for he only intended for the 'egel' to be a physical representation of God (who took them out of Egypt) - then why is God so angered to the point that he wants to destroy the entire nation!

In this week's shiur, we look for the 'middle road' as we attempt to find a 'logical' explanation for the events as they unfold, based on our understanding of the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

INTRODUCTION

According to the popular Midrash, quoted by Rashi (see 32:1 'ba-shesh'), Bnei Yisrael's miscalculation of Moshe's return by one day led to the entire calamity of 'chet ha'egel'. However, when one examines the details of this story (as other commentators do), a very different picture emerges that provides a more 'logical' explanation for the people's request.

In the following shiur, we follow that direction, as we examine the events as they unfold in Parshat Kitisa in light of (and as a continuation of) the events that transpired at the end of Parshat Mishpatim (see 24:12-18).

Therefore, we begin our shiur by quoting the Torah's description of Moshe's original ascent to Har Sinai for forty days, noting how Moshe never provided the people with an exact date of his expected return:

"And God told Moshe, come up to Me on the mountain... then Moshe ascended God's Mountain. To the elders he said: **'Wait here** for us, **until we return** to you. Behold, Aharon and Chur are with you, should there be any problems, go to them..." (see 24:12-14).

Carefully note how Moshe had informed the elders that he was leaving 'until he returns', without specifying a date! Even though several psukim later Chumash tells us (i.e. the reader) that Moshe remained on the mountain for forty days (see 24:18), according to 'pshat', the people have no idea how long Moshe would be gone for.

[And most likely, neither did Moshe or Aharon. It is important to note that Rashi's interpretation carries a very deep message re: the nature of patience and sin, but it is not necessarily the simple pshat of these psukim.]

A LOGICAL CONCLUSION

Considering this was not the first time that Moshe had ascended Har Sinai to speak to God (see 19:3,20; 24:1,2); and in each previous ascent Moshe had never been gone for more than a day or two - Bnei Yisrael have ample reason to assume that this time he would not be gone much longer. After all, how long could it possibly take to receive the 'luchot, Torah, & mitzva' (see 24:12): a few days, a few weeks?

Days pass; weeks pass; yet Moshe does not return! Add to this the fact that the last time that Bnei Yisrael saw Moshe, he had entered a cloud-covered mountain consumed in fire (see 24:17-18), hence - the people's conclusion that Moshe was 'gone' was quite logical. After all, how much longer can they wait for?

Assuming that Moshe is not returning, Bnei Yisrael must do something - but what are their options?

* To remain stranded in the desert?

Of course not! They have waited for Moshe long enough.

* To return to Egypt?

"chas ve-shalom' / (of course not!). That would certainly be against God's wishes; and why should they return to slavery!

* To continue their journey to Eretz Canaan?

Why not! After all, was this not the purpose of Yetziat Mitzraim - to inherit the Promised Land (see 3:8,17 6:8)?

Furthermore, that is precisely what God had promised them numerous times, and most recently in Shmot 23:20?

This background helps us understand why Bnei Yisrael approached Aharon, whom Moshe had left in charge (see 24:13-15) and why their opening complaint focused on their desire for new leadership - to replace Moshe. Let's take a careful look now at the Torah's description of this event:

"When the people saw that Moshe was **so delayed** in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered on **Aharon** and said to him: Come make us an **elohim** that will **lead us** [towards the Promised Land] **because** Moshe, who took us out of the land of Egypt [and promised to take us to Eretz Canaan], we do not know what has happened to him" (32:1).

As your review this pasuk, note the phrase "elohim asher **yelchu** lefaneinu". In other words, note how the people do not request a new god, but rather an **elohim** [some-one /or thing] that that will 'walk in front', i.e. that will **lead** them [to the Promised Land].

To understand how 'logical' this request was, we need only conduct a quick comparison between this pasuk and God's earlier promise (in Parshat Mishpatim) that He would send a "**mal'ach**" to lead them and help them conquer the Land:

"Behold, I am sending a **mal'ach - lefanecha** [before you] - to guard you and **bring you to the place** that I have made ready..."

(see 23:20 / Note the Hebrew word '**lefanecha**!')

And two psukim later, God continues this promise:

"ki **yelech mal'achi lefanecha** - For My angel will **go before you**, and bring you to the Land..." (23:23)

[Note again - **lefanecha**, and the word **yelech**.]

Recall as well that this was the last promise that they had heard before Moshe ascended Har Sinai. When Bnei Yisrael first heard this promise, they most probably assumed that this **mal'ach** would be none other than Moshe himself. [Note how the **mal'ach** must be someone who commands them, leads them, while God's Name is in his midst (see 23:21-22, compare 19:9).]

Now that Moshe is presumed dead, the people simply demand that Aharon provide them with a replacement for (or possibly a **symbol** of) this **mal'ach**, in order that they can **continue** their journey to the Promised Land. Note once again:

"Come make us an **elohim** - asher **yelchu lefaneinu**!" (32:1) [Again, note **yelchu** & **lefaneinu**]

In fact, from a simple reading of the text, it appears as though Aharon actually agrees to this request:

"And Aharon said to them: Take off your gold... and bring them to me... He took it from them and cast in a mold and made it into a molten calf..." (32:2-4).

If our interpretation thus far is correct, then the people's statement (upon seeing this Golden Calf): "This is your god O' Israel - who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (32:4), does not need to imply that this Golden Calf actually took them out of Egypt. [After all, they had already stated in 32:1 that Moshe had taken them out of Egypt!] Rather, the people are simply stating their own perception - that this **egel** (which Aharon had just made) represents the God who had taken them out of Egypt and will hopefully now act as His **mal'ach** who will lead them on their journey to Eretz Canaan.

In other words, in Bnei Yisrael's eyes, the **egel** is not a **replacement** for God, rather a **representation** of His Presence! [See a similar explanation by Rav Yehuda HaLevi in Sefer HaKuzari I.77! See also Ibn Ezra & Ramban on Shmot 32:1]

This would also explain Aharon's ensuing actions: To assure that the **egel** is properly understood as a **representation** of God, Aharon calls for a celebration:

"And Aharon saw, and he built a **mizbeiach** in front of it, and Aharon called out and said: A celebration **for God** [note: be-shem **havaya**] tomorrow" (32:5).

Furthermore, this 'celebration' parallels the almost identical ceremony that took place at Har Sinai forty days earlier - when Bnei Yisrael declared 'na'aseh ve-nishma'. To verify this, we'll compare the Torah's description of these two ceremonies:

* In Parshat Mishpatim - after Moshe sets up 12 monuments:

"...and they **woke up early** in the morning, and they **built a mizbeiach** at the foot of the mountain and twelve monuments for the twelve tribes of Israel... and they offered **olot** and sacrificed **shlamim**" (24:4-5).

* In Parshat Ki-tisa - after Aharon forges the **egel**:

"...and they **woke up early** in the morning [after Aharon had **built a mizbeiach** in front of it /32:5], and they offered **olot** and sacrificed **shlamim**..." (32:6).

Note the obvious parallels: waking up in the morning, building a **mizbeiach** in front of a 'symbol' (representing their relationship with God), offering **olot & shlamim**, and 'eating and drinking' (compare 24:11 with 32:6).

Furthermore, recall how that ceremony included Moshe's reading of the 'divrei Hashem' - which most likely included the laws of Parshat Mishpatim - including God's promise to send a **mal'ach** to lead them (see 23:20-23). Hence, not only are these two events parallel, they both relate to Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of a **mal'ach** that will **lead** them to the land [asher **yelchu** lefaneinu!]

Finally, note how **both** ceremonies include a **mizbeiach** that is erected in **front** of a **symbol** representing God:

* In Parshat Mishpatim, the symbol is the twelve monuments, possibly representing God's fulfillment of brit avot.

* In Parshat Ki-tisa, the symbol is the **egel**, representing the **mal'ach** (which God had promised) that will lead them.

[Note, that this parallel actually continues in the **mishkan** itself! In front of the **mizbeiach** upon which Bnei Yisrael offer **olot & shlamim**, we find the **aron & keruvim** - that serve as symbol of God's covenant with Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Later, this very **aron** leads Bnei Yisrael through the desert towards the land (see Bamidbar 10:33) as well as in battle (see Bamidbar 10:35 & Yehoshua 6:6-10). This can also explain why the Torah refers to this calf as an 'egel **masecha**' (see 32:4) - implying a 'face covering', hiding the true face, but leaving a representation of what man can perceive.]

WHY 'DAVKA' AN EGEL?

Even though our interpretation thus far has shown how the **egel** can be understood as a symbol of God's Presence, we have yet to explain why specifically an **egel** is chosen as that representation. Chizkuni offers a ingenious explanation, based on yet another parallel to Ma'amad Har Sinai.

Recall that at the conclusion of the ceremony at Har Sinai (24:1-11), **Aharon**, Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders are permitted to 'see' God:

"And they saw **Elokei Yisrael** and - 'tachat **raglav**' - under His feet was like a shining sapphire..." (24:10)

Obviously, God does not have 'feet'! However, this description reflects a certain spiritual level. Moshe, for example, achieved the highest level - "panim be-panim" - face to face. In contrast, the seventy elders perceived 'tachat **raglav**' -(God's feet), reflecting a lower spiritual level.

[This may relate to the people's request for a more distanced relationship, where Moshe served as their intermediary (see 20:15-18 and Devarim 5:20-26).]

Although it is very difficult for us to comprehend the description of God in such physical terms, Chizkuni (on 32:4) notes that we find a very similar description of the **Shchina** in Sefer Yechezkel:

"And their feet were straight, and the bottom of their **feet** were similar to the feet of an **egel**..." (Yechezkel 1:7).

[See also the textual parallel of 'even sapir' / compare Yechezkel 1:26 with Shmot 24:10.]

[Alternately, one could suggest that an **egel** was chosen to represent the **parim** which were offered on Har Sinai during the ceremony when God informed them about the **mal'ach** (see 24:5/ note that an **egel** is a baby 'par').]

So if the people's original request was indeed 'legitimate', and Aharon's 'solution' a sincere attempt to make a representation of God - why does God become so angered? Why does He threaten to destroy the entire nation?

To answer this question, we must once again return to our parallel with Parshat Mishpatim.

A CONTRASTING PARALLEL

Despite the many parallels noted above, we find **one** additional phrase that is unique to the story of chet ha-egel, and creates (what we refer to as) a contrasting parallel. Note the final phrase of each narrative:

* At Har Sinai (in Parshat Mishpatim):

"... and they beheld God and they **ate and drank**" (24:11).

* At chet ha-egel (in Parshat Ki-tisa):

"they sat to **eat and drink** and they rose **letzachek**" (32:6).

[We call this a 'contrasting parallel'.]

It is not by chance that many commentators find in this word the key to understanding Bnei Yisrael's sin.

Even though the simple translation of 'letzachek' is laughing or frivolous behavior, Rashi raises the possibility that it may refer to licentiousness (or even murder / see Rashi 32:7 and Breishit 39:17). Certainly, Chazal understand this phrase to imply more than just 'dancing'. To Aharon's dismay, what began as a quiet ceremony turned into a 'wild party'. The celebration simply seems to have gotten 'out of hand'. [Soon we will explain why.]

To support this understanding of letzachek, let's 'jump ahead' to the Torah's account of Moshe's descent from Har Sinai (when he breaks the luchot), noting what Moshe and Yehoshua hear from the mountain.

First of all, note Yehoshua's initial reaction to the 'loud noise' that he hears:

"And Yehoshua heard the sound of the people - **be-rei'o** - screaming loudly, and said to Moshe: there are sounds of **war** in the camp. But Moshe answered - these are not the sounds of triumphant, nor are they the groans of the defeated, they are simply sounds [of wildness/ frivolity] that I hear" (32:17-18).

[Note Targum Unkelus of 'kol anot' in 32:18 - kol de-**mechaychin**, compare with Targum of letzachek in 32:6 of le-**chaycha**; clearly connecting the loud noises to the loud laughing of "va-yakumu letzachek"! Note also the word **be-rei'o** - from shoresh 'lehariya' - to make a sound like a **tru'a**, but the spelling is **r.a.a.h.** reflecting its negative context like the word 'ra'a' = bad or evil! Compare also with 32:22!]

The noise from this 'wild party' was so loud that it sounded to Yehoshua like a war was going on!

Note as well what provoked Moshe to actually break the tablets: "And he saw the **egel** and the **dancing** circles and became enraged" [va-yar et ha-egel u-**mecholot**...] (32:19).

Moshe was upset no less by the 'wild dancing' than by the **egel** itself! [See commentary of Seforno on this pasuk.]

With this in mind, let's return now to study the Torah's account of God's anger with chet ha-egel, as recorded earlier in chapter 32.

First of all, as you review 32:5-7, note how God only becomes angry (and tells Moshe to go down) on the day **after**

Aharon made the egel! Now if Bnei Yisrael's primary sin was making the egel, God should have told Moshe to go down on that very same day. The fact that God only tells him to go down on the **next** day, and only after we are told that - "va-yakumu letzachek" - supports our interpretation that this phrase describes the primary sin of chet ha-egel.

BACK TO OLD HABITS

What led to this calamity? What was this noise and 'wild party' all about? Even though it is based on 'circumstantial evidence', one could suggest the following explanation:

Even though the celebration around the egel initiated by Aharon began with good intentions (see 32:5 - 'chag I-Hashem'), for some reason, Bnei Yisrael's behavior at this party quickly became wild and out of control. Apparently, once the drinking, dancing, and music began, the nation impulsively reverted back to their old ways, regressing back to their Egyptian culture. [Even though this may not sound very logical, as most of us are aware, it is unfortunately human nature.]

To understand why, let's return to our discussion of Bnei Yisrael's spiritual level in Egypt, based on Yechezkel chapter 20, and as discussed in length in our shiurim on parshat Va'era and Beshalach:

Before the exodus, Bnei Yisrael were so immersed in Egyptian culture that God found it necessary to demand that they 'change their ways' in order to prepare for their redemption (see Yechezkel 20:5-9). Even though they did not heed this plea, God took them out of Egypt in the hope that the miracles of Yetziat Mitzraim, and their experiences on the way to Har Sinai would create a 'change of heart' (see TSC shiur on Parshat Beshalach). When they arrived at Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael's proclamation of na'aseh ve-nishma (see 19:3-8 & 24:7) showed God that they were finally ready to become God's special nation.

THE LAST STRAW

Unfortunately, the events at chet ha-egel forced God to change this perception. Bnei Yisrael's inexcusable behavior at this celebration reflected the sad fact that despite His numerous miracles, deep down, nothing had really changed. God became more than angered; He became utterly disappointed. All of God's efforts to 'train' His nation (since Yetziat Mitzrayim) seemed to have been in vain.

In summary, we have suggested that there were **two** stages in Bnei Yisrael's sin at **chet ha-egel**.

- * The first - making a physical representation of God - even though this was improper, it was understandable.
- * The second - the frivolous behavior after the eating and drinking at the conclusion of the ceremony - was inexcusable.

We will now show how these two stages are reflected in God's 'double statement' to Moshe (32:7-10) in the aftermath of this sin:

(1) - 32:7-8 / God's first statement:

"And **God spoke to Moshe**: Hurry down, for your people have acted basely ['ki shichet amcha']... they have turned astray from the way that I commanded them [see 20:20!] - they made an egel masecha [a representation of Me]...

(2) - 32:9-10 / God's second statement:

"And **God spoke to Moshe**: I see this nation, behold it is an 'am ksheh oref' [a **stiff necked people**]. Now, allow Me, and I will kindle My anger against them and I will destroy them and I will **make you** a great nation [instead]."

[Note, that "va-yomer Hashem el Moshe" is repeated **twice**, even though Moshe does not speak in between.]

God's first statement describes the act that began with good intentions but was nonetheless forbidden [see Shmot 20:20 - "lo ta'asun iti elohai kesef..."]. Although this sin requires rebuke and forgiveness (see 32:30), it was not severe enough to warrant the destruction of the entire Nation.

God's second statement is in reaction to 'va-yakumu letzachek', i.e. their frivolous behavior. Because of this

regression to Egyptian culture, God concludes that they are indeed a 'stiff-necked people' - **unable to change their ways**. Therefore, God concludes that He must destroy Bnei Yisrael, choosing Moshe to become His special nation instead.

Similarly, these two stages are found in the conversation between Moshe and Aharon in the aftermath of this event:

"And Moshe said to Aharon: What did this people do to you that **caused** you to bring upon them such a terrible sin?

... Aharon answered: You know this people - 'ki ve-ra hu' - their ways are evil" (32:21-22).

One could suggest that Aharon's conclusion is based on his previous experiences with Bnei Yisrael. It is clear, however, that Moshe understands that Aharon had no intention that this situation would get out of hand. After all, Aharon himself is not punished. In fact, he later becomes the Kohen Gadol [High Priest].

Once Aharon had explained to Moshe what transpired (32:22-24) in the **first** stage, Moshe already understood what happened in the **second** stage:

"And Moshe 'saw' the people - 'ki paru'a hu' - that they became wild (out of control), for Aharon had caused them to become wild [to the point of] their demise, **be-kameiheim** - when they **got up** [to dance/ possibly reflecting '**va-yakumu** letzachek'! [see 32:25].

Finally, the **two** levels that we later find in Bnei Yisrael's actual punishment may also reflect these two stages. First, the three thousand 'instigators' who incited this licentious behavior (stage 2) are killed. For that rebellious group, there is no room for forgiveness (32:26-29). However, on the second day, Moshe approaches God to beg forgiveness for the rest of the nation (see 32:30-32). Even though they had sinned, Moshe hopes to secure them a pardon - because their actions began with good intentions (stage 1).

Ultimately, Moshe will receive this pardon - but it won't be very simple.

DELAYED PUNISHMENT OR FORGIVENESS

Even though God had originally agreed to Moshe Rabeinu's first request not to totally destroy His nation (see "va-yechal Moshe... va-yinachem Hashem al ha-ra;a..." / 32:11-14), his next request for forgiveness in 32:31-32 clearly indicates that the execution of the 3000 'instigators' did not absolve the rest of the nation.

To our surprise, Moshe's second tefilla (in 32:30-32) does not achieve forgiveness! To prove this point, take a careful look at God's response to Moshe's second tefilla:

"And God told Moshe: He who has sinned to Me shall be punished. Now go **lead** the people to [the place] that I said [i.e. to Eretz Canaan], behold My angel will accompany you, and on the day that I will punish you, I will punish you" (32:34).

Note that God instructs Moshe to lead Bnei Yisrael to the Promised Land, thus fulfilling brit avot (as Moshe demanded in 32:13), but He still plans to later punish them for chet ha-egel, at the time that He finds fit. Note however, that even though brit avot will be fulfilled, brit Sinai remains 'broken'! To prove this, note how chapter 33 explains what God told Moshe in 32:34:

"And God said to Moshe - Set out from here, you and the people that you have brought out of Egypt to the Land that I swore to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov (brit avot)... but I **will not go in your midst** for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I destroy you on the journey" (see 33:1-3).

In contrast to God's original promise at Matan Torah that He will send a **mal'ach** with **His name** in their midst ['shmi be-kirbo' / see 23:20-23], now He emphatically states that He will no longer be with them - "ki **lo** a'aleh be-kirbecha" (33:3). Due to chet ha-egel, Bnei Yisrael are no longer worthy of the special relationship of **brit Sinai**.

This 'downgrade' is reflected in God's next commandment

that Bnei Yisrael must remove 'their jewelry' that they received on Har Sinai, undoubtedly the symbol of the high level they reached at **matan Torah** (see 33:5-6). Furthermore, Moshe must now move his own tent **away** from the camp, in order that God can remain in contact with Moshe (see 33:7).

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

A very strange predicament has arisen (that often goes unnoticed). Even though Bnei Yisrael will not be destroyed (thanks to brit avot), God instructs Moshe to continue on to Eretz Canaan **without** brit Sinai. [Imagine, a Jewish State without 'kedusha', several thousand years before Theodore Herzl!]

As unthinkable as this sounds, God's decision is very logical. Considering His conclusion that Bnei Yisrael are an 'am kshe oraf' - a stiff-necked people (see 32:9, 33:5), and hence will not change their ways, there appears to be no other solution. After all, should He keep His **Shchina** in their midst, Bnei Yisrael would not be able to survive.

Fortunately for Am Yisrael, Moshe Rabeinu is not willing to accept God's decision. As we will see, his next argument will set the stage for the declaration of God's **midot ha-rachamim**:

"And Moshe beseeched God: 'Look, you have instructed me to lead this people... but recognize that this nation is **Your** people!

God answered: I will lead [only] you. But Moshe insisted: "Im ein panecha holchim al ta'alenu mi-zeh" - Unless **Your presence will go with us**, do not make us leave this place. For how should it be known that Your people have gained Your favor unless You **go with us...**" (33:12-16)

[These psukim are quite difficult to translate, I recommend that you read the entire section inside.]

Note how Moshe demands that God keep His Presence [**Shchina**] with them, threatening a 'sit down strike' should God refuse. Most powerful is Moshe's demand that God recognize that they are His people - "u-re'eh ki amcha ha-goy ha-zeh" (see 33:13). God ['kivyachol'] now faces a most difficult predicament.

* On the one hand, He cannot allow His Shchina to return - for according to the terms of **brit Sinai** - this 'am ksheh oraf' could not survive His anger, and would eventually be killed.

* On the other hand, He cannot leave them in the desert (as Moshe now threatens), for **brit avot** must be fulfilled!

* But, He cannot take them to the land, for Moshe is not willing to lead them **unless** He returns His **Shchina**.

Something has to budge! But what will it be?

It is precisely here, in the resolution of this dilemma, where God's 13 **midot ha-rachamim** enter into the picture.

A NEW COVENANT

Let's take a look now at God's response to Moshe's request. Note that here is first time in Chumash where God introduces the concept of divine mercy:

"And God said to Moshe, 'I will also do this thing that you request... [to return His **Shchina** / Moshe then asked that God show His Glory -] then God answered: ' I will pass all my goodness before you, and I will proclaim **My name** before you, and **I will pardon** he whom I will pardon and **I will have mercy** on he to whom I give mercy (ve-chanoti et asher achon, ve-richamti et asher arachem)... (33:17-22).

In contrast to His original threat of immediate punishment should they sin (if God is in there midst), now God agrees to allow Bnei Yisrael a 'second chance' (should they sin). This divine promise sets the stage for the forging of a **new** covenant though which **brit Sinai** can be re-established, for it allows the Shchina to return without the necessity of immediate severe punishment.

Therefore, God instructs Moshe to ascend Har Sinai one more time, in a manner quite parallel to his first ascent to Har Sinai [but with significant minor differences], to receive the **second luchot** (see 34:1-5 and its parallel in 19:20-24).

As we should expect, the laws should and do remain the same. However, their **terms** must now be amended with God's

attributes of mercy. Hence, when Moshe now ascends Har Sinai, it is not necessary for God to repeat the **dibrot** themselves, for they remain the same. Instead, God will descend to proclaim an amendment to how He will act in this relationship - i.e. His attributes of mercy.

As God had promised in 33:19 (review that pasuk before continuing), a new covenant, reflecting this enhanced relationship, is now forged:

"And God came down in a cloud...& passed before him and proclaimed: ' Hashem, Hashem Kel rachum ve-chanun, erech apayim ve-rav chesed ve-emet, notzer chesed la-alafim" (34:5-8).

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE ATTRIBUTES

With this background, we can now better appreciate the words that God chose to describe His new **midot**. To do so, we must first quickly review God's **midot** as described at Ma'amad Har Sinai in parshat Yitro.

Recall that the **dibrot** included not only laws, but also describe **how** God will reward (or punish) those who obey (or disobey) His commandments. Let's review these 'original' attributes by noting them (in **bold**) as we quote the Commandments:

"I am the Lord your God...

You shall have no other gods besides Me...

Do not bow down to them or worship them, for I the Lord am a **Kel kana** - a **zealous** God

poked avon avot al banim – remembering the sin of parents upon their children... for those who reject Me [**le-son'ai**], but

oseh chesed - showing kindness... for those who love me and follow my laws - [**le-ohavai** u-leshomrei mitzvotai]" (see 20:2-6).

Note how the second Commandment includes three divine attributes:

- 1) **Kel kana** - a zealous God
- 2) **poked avon avot al banim** - **le-son'ai** harsh punishment for those who reject God
- 3) **oseh chesed la-alafim** - **le-ohavai** Kindness & reward for those who follow God.

Similarly, in the third Commandment, we find yet another **mida** [divine attribute]:

"Do not say in vain the **name** of God - ki **lo yenakeh Hashem** - for God will **not forgive** he who says His Name in vain" (20:7).

Let's add this fourth attribute to the above list:

- 4) **lo yenakeh Hashem** - He will not forgive

How should we consider these four attributes? At first glance, most of them seem to be quite harsh!

Even the **mida of oseh chesed** - Divine kindness, does not necessarily imply **mercy**. Carefully note in 20:6 that God promises this kindness **only** for those who **follow** Him, and hence not for any others. Most definitely, all four of these attributes are quite the opposite of mercy, they are **midot ha-din** - attributes of exacting retribution.

Although these **midot** have their 'down side', for they threaten immediate punishment for those who transgress (le-son'ai), they also have their 'up side', for they assure immediate reward for those who obey (le-ohavai). In other words, these **midot** describe a very intense relationship, quite similar to [and not by chance] to God's relationship with man in Gan Eden (see Breishit 2:16-17).

MORE MIDOT HA-DIN

Yet another example of this intense relationship, and another attribute as well, is found at the conclusion of the unit of laws in Parshat Mishpatim. Recall that immediately after the Ten Commandments, Moshe was summoned to Har Sinai to receive a special set of commandment to relay to Bnei Yisrael (see Shmot 20:15-19). At the conclusion of those laws, God makes the

following promise:

"Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and help bring you into the Promised Land. Be careful of him and obey him, Do not defy him - **for he shall not pardon your sins - "ki lo yisa le-fish'achem"**, since My Name is with him...

[On the other hand...]

"...should you obey Him and do all that I say - **I will help you defeat your enemies...** (see Shmot 23:20-24).

Once again, we find that God will exact punishment should Bnei Yisrael not follow His mitzvot and reward (i.e. assistance in conquering the Land) should they obey Him.

Finally, after chet ha-egel, we find that God intends to act precisely according to these attributes of **midat ha-din**:

"And God told Moshe, go down from the mountain for your people has sinned... they made a golden image... and now allow Me, and **I will kindle My anger** against them that I may destroy them -**ve-yichar api bahem...**" (see Shmot 32:7-10).

Here we find yet another divine attribute - **charon af Hashem** - God's instant anger.

Let's summarize these six attributes that we have found thus far. Later, this list will be very helpful when we compare these **midot** to God's **midot** in the second **luchot**.

- 1) **Kel kana**
- 2) **poked avon ... le-son'ai**
- 3) **oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
- 4) **lo yenakeh**
- 5) **lo yisa le-fish'achem...**
- 6) **charon af**

We will now show how these six examples of **midat ha-din** relate directly to the **new** attributes that God now declares. Note the obvious - and rather amazing - parallel that emerges:

FIRST LUCHOT

- 1) **Kel kana**
- 2) **poked avon...le-son'ai**
- 3) **oseh chesed la-alafim ... le-ohavai**
- 4) **lo yenakeh**
- 5) **lo yisa lefishiechem**
- 6) **charon af**

SECOND LUCHOT

- Kel rachum ve-chanun**
- poked avon avot al banim...**
- rav chesed ve-emet**
- notzer chesed la-alafim... ve-nakeh, lo yenakeh**
- nosei avon ve-fesha... erech apayim**

FROM DIN TO RACHAMIM

Each attribute from the original covenant switches from **midat ha-din** to **midat ha-rachamim**. [To appreciate this parallel, it is important to follow these psukim in the original Hebrew.]

Let's take now a closer look:

- A. **Hashem Kel rachum ve-chanun --> (1) Hashem Kel kana**
rachum ve-chanun based on 33:19 (see above)
a **merciful** God in contrast to a **zealous** God
- B. **Erech apayim --> (6) charon af**
slow to anger in contrast to **instant** anger
- C. **Rav chesed ve-emet --> (3) oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
abounding kindness for all, potentially even for the wicked [This may allow the possibility of 'rasha ve-tov lo'] in contrast to **exacting** kindness, and hence, limited exclusively to those who obey Him.
[Note that the mida of emet is now required, for this abounding kindness for all must be complemented by the attribute of truth to assure ultimate justice.]
- D. **Notzer chesed la-alafim --> (3) oseh chesed... le-ohavai**
He **stores** His kindness, so that even if it is not rewarded immediately, it is stored to be given at a later time.

[This may allow the possibility of 'tzadik ve-ra lo'] in contrast to **immediate** kindness and reward for those who follow Him.

- E. **Nosei avon ve-fesha... --> (5) lo yisa le-fish'achem ... forgiving** sin in contrast to **not forgiving** sin.
- F. **Ve-nakeh, lo yenakeh --> (4) lo yenakeh**
sometimes He will forgive, sometimes He may not.
[See Rashi, forgives those who perform teshuva.] in contrast to **never** forgiving.
- G. **Poked avon avot al banim...--> (2) poked avon le-son'ai**
He **withholds** punishment for up to four generations [in anticipation of teshuva / see Rashi] in contrast to **extending** punishment for up to four generations.
[Even though these two phrases are almost identical, their context forces us to interpret each pasuk differently. In the first luchot, all four generations are punished, in the second luchot, God may **hold back** punishment for four generations, allowing a chance for teshuva. See Rashi.]

These striking parallels demonstrate that each of the '13 midot' lies in direct contrast to the midot of the original covenant at Har Sinai.

This background can help us appreciate Moshe's immediate reaction to God's proclamation of these **midot**:

"And Moshe hastened to bow down and said: 'If I have indeed gained favor in Your eyes - **let Hashem go in our midst** - 'ki' = **even though** they are an **am ksheh oref** - a stiff necked people, and you shall pardon our sin..." (34:8-9)

God's proclamation that He will now act in a less strict manner enables Moshe to request that God now return His **Shchina** to the people **even though** they are an **am ksheh oref**. Note how this request stands in direct contrast to God's original threat that "he will not go up with them for they are a stiff necked people, less He smite them on their journey..." (see 33:3/ compare with 34:9)!

These Divine attributes of mercy now allow the Shchina to dwell within Yisrael even though they may not be worthy.

From a certain perspective, this entire sequence is quite understandable. For, on the one hand, to be worthy of God's presence, man must behave perfectly. However, man is still human. Although he may strive to perfection, he may often error or at times even sin. How then can man ever come close to God? Hence, to allow mortal man the potential to continue a relationship with God, a new set of rules is necessary - one that includes **midot ha-rachamim**.

The original terms of **brit Sinai**, although ideal, are not practical. In this manner, **midot ha-rachamim** allow **brit Sinai** to become achievable. These midot ha-rachamim reflect God's kindness that allows man to approach Him and develop a closer relationship without the necessity of immediate punishment for any transgression.

SELICHOT

This explanation adds extra meaning to our comprehension and appreciation of our recitation of the Selichot. Reciting the 13 **midot** comprises more than just a mystical formula. It is a constant reminder of the **conditions** of the covenant of the **second luchot**. God's attributes of mercy, as we have shown, **do not guarantee** automatic forgiveness, rather, they **enable the possibility** of forgiveness. As the pasuk stated, God will forgive only he whom He chooses ("et asher achon... ve-et asher arachem" / 33:19). To be worthy of that mercy, the individual must prove his sincerity to God, while accepting upon himself not to repeat his bad ways.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part One

1. It is not clear why Aharon does not insist that the people be patient and wait for Moshe. Note that, according to 24:14, the people are instructed to turn to Aharon **and** Chur, should a problem arise. Interestingly enough, Chur is never mentioned again.

Relate this to the Midrash that explains Aharon's behavior because Chur had told them to wait and was killed.

2. Note the use of the word 'shichet' in 32:7. In Devarim 4:16 we find a similar use of this shoresh in relation to making a physical representation of God with **good** intentions!

Read Devarim 4:9-24 carefully and note its connection to the events at chet ha-egel. Use this parallel to explain 4:21-23.

3. See the Rambam's first halacha in Hilchot Avoda Zara. Relate his explanation of the origin of Avoda Zara to the above shiur.

FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Part Two

A. As the new covenant allows for mercy, the perception of God becomes less clear. While the first covenant boasted a clear relationship of 'panim el panim' (face to face / 33:11), this new covenant, even to Moshe, is represented by a 'face to back' relationship:

"But, He said, you can not see my face ... Station yourself on the Rock as My Presence passes by ... you will see my back, but

My face must not be seen."["LoTuchal lir'ot **panai** - ki lo yir'ani ha-adam va-chai ... ve-ra'ita et **achorai** - u-**panai** lo yira'u.]
(33:20-23).

This new level has a clear advantage, midat ha-rachamim - however there is still a price to pay - the unclarity of Hashem's hashgacha. No longer is punishment immediate; however, reward may also suffer from delay. Hashem's hashgacha becomes more complex and now allows apparent situations of tzadik ve-ra lo-rasha ve-tov lo.

1. See Chazal's explanation of "hodi'eni na et drachecha" (33:13) How does this relate to our explanation?

2. As communication is clearer when talking face to face with someone as opposed to talking to someone with his back turned, attempt to explain the symbolism of the above psukim.

3. Why must Moshe Rabeinu also go down a level in his nevu'a?

B. The second luchot are carved by man, and not by God.

Attempt to relate this requirement based on the nature of the 13 **midot**.

Relate this to the mitzva for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan, which follows in parshat Vayakhel.

Compare this to the mitzva to begin building a **sukka** immediately after Yom Kippur, and in general, why the holiday of **Sukkot** follows Yom Kippur.

C. After God declares His 13 midot of Rachamim (34:6-9), He makes a promise (34:10), and then adds some commandments (34:11-26).

Are these commandments new, or are they a 'repeat' of mitzvot which were given earlier in Parshat Mishpatim?

[Relate especially to Shmot 23:9-33.]

If so, can you explain why they are being repeated?

[Hint: Which type of mitzvot from Parshat Mishpatim are not repeated?] Relate your answer to the events of chet ha-egel.

D. In the story of chet ha-egel, we find a classic example of a 'mila mancha', i.e. use of the verb 'lir'ot' - to see [r.a.h.].

Review chapters 32->34 in this week's parsha while paying attention to this word. 'See' for yourself if it points to a theme. As you read, pay careful attention to: 32:1, 32:5, 32:9, 32:19, 32:25, 33:10, 33:12-13!, 33:20-23, 34:10, 34:23-24!, 34:30, and 34:35. What does it mean when God 'sees'..., when man 'sees'..., and when man 'sees' (or is seen by) God? Relate also to the use of

this verb (r.a.h.) at Ma'amad Har Sinai, especially 20:15, 20:19. See also 19:21, 24:10, & Dvarim 5:21! Could you say that 'seeing is believing'?

If you had fun with that one, you can also try an easier one: the use of the word 'ra'a' [ev'il / reish.ayin.hey.] in 32:12-14. Relate to 32:17, 32:22, 32:25?, 33:4. Relate to Shmot 10:10; see Rashi, Ramban, Chizkuni, Rashbam.

E. Chazal explain that God's original intention was to create the world with his attribute of 'din' [judgement], but after realizing that it could not survive, He included (in His creation) the attribute of 'rachamim' [mercy] as well. [See Rashi Breishit 1:1 - 'bara Elokim...']

Relate this to the above shiur. Would you say that this Midrash reflects Sefer Shmot as well as Sefer Breishit.

F. Note 'kol tuvi' in 33:19. Relate this to "va-yar Elokim ki tov" mentioned after each stage of **creation** in Breishit chapter 1.

Can you relate this to the above question and above shiur?

See also Rambam Moreh Nevuchim I:54 / second paragraph.

[page 84 in Kapach edition Mosad Harav Kook]

G. Note 34:10 "hinei anochi koret brit..." & 34:29-30. Relate this to why we refer to midot ha-rachamim in selichot as 'brit shlosh esrei'.

H. Connect **Part I** of the above shiur to a similar concept of a mal'ach leading Bnei Yisrael, represented by a physical symbol - as in Bamidbar 10:33:"ve-aron brit Hashem noseia lifneihem derech shloshet yamim la-tur lahem menucha". See also Bmd. 10:35-36 & Yehoshua 6:6-11.