



Parshat Ki Tisa/Parah

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**This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Kevin and Amanda Wassermuhl  
in loving memory of Chana Raisa bat Tzvi z"l**

**This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Ricky and Dianna Zauderer and Family  
in memory of our dear mother and grandmother, Erika Zauderer z"l לע"נ אסתר בת חיים ז"ל**

## A New Perspective on Hashem

**Rabbi Adam Friedmann**

Bnei Yisrael are waiting for Moshe to descend from Har Sinai. It has been a long time and they become restless. It is important for us to consider things from their perspective. They were taken out of the only life they had ever known in Egypt and brought to the desert. The one guiding them through this precarious journey, and who provided their connection to Hashem, was Moshe. But then Moshe went up a mountain and into an ominous looking fire-cloud and (in a simple reading of the text) did not tell them when he was going to come back. Cast in this light, Bnei Yisrael's concern about whether Moshe was alive is understandable. Their reaction to Moshe's disappearance, however, was not.

### The Sin

What exactly is the sin of the golden calf? Rabbi Yehudah Halevi (Kuzari 1:97) argues that the sin is not idolatry. There is no worship of a foreign god present. The real sin is far more subtle, and emerges from the text itself. The people tell Aharon: "Come, make us a god (*elohim*) who shall go before us, for that man Moshe, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him." (Shemot 32:1)

The key here is their word *elohim*. According to the Kuzari, this is not a reference to a deity but rather to an authority or leader. The attempt is not to subvert Moshe and suddenly follow a new god, but to make another repre-

sentative of Hashem to replace Moshe. Bnei Yisrael's failing is that they independently create a new form of worship. Further, they create a tangible object of worship; they can't handle a reality in which they serve a Deity who is invisible and has no physical manifestation at all.

The result of this sin is a breach in the relationship forged at Har Sinai. Bnei Yisrael's actions indicate that they cannot handle being close to Hashem. The consequence is that Hashem withdraws Himself from the nation. The Tent of Meeting, where Hashem speaks to Moshe, is removed from the camp.

### The Restoration

At some point after this, Moshe prays to Hashem. He does not want the relationship to end. He pleads for a way for Bnei Yisrael to find favour in Hashem's eyes again. Hashem does not explain Himself to Moshe, but He does relent, agreeing to re-enter the camp. Moshe pushes further; he wants Bnei Yisrael to be Hashem's one and only, different from all other nations. Hashem grants this as well. Finally, Moshe asks to see Hashem Himself. At this point, Hashem declines. He agrees to appear to Moshe, but only to reveal what is "behind Him." Rashi (Shemot 33:23) interprets this to mean that Hashem shows Moshe the knot of His tefillin.

Apparently, at this point the relationship has been restored. Hashem agrees to dwell in the camp. Has anything

changed in this new reality? The key may lie in Moshe's vision of Hashem's back. Why show Moshe the tefillin knot? Rabbi Yaakov Medan suggests that Moshe was meant to understand that a knot in the back means there are tefillin in the front.

The Gemara (Berachot 6a) tells us that the text in Hashem's tefillin is focuses on the greatness of Bnei Yisrael. Hashem is telling Moshe that Bnei Yisrael are His one and only. But now a new way of having a relationship emerges. Hashem is there, but we have to find Him. Just like we infer from the tefillin knot that there is tefillin, we have to consider what He "leaves behind," such as His actions and the creation around us, and discover His presence on our own.

The result of this new paradigm is a remedy for the sin of the calf. When Hashem appears and overwhelms us we are unable to fathom it. We feel the need to create a tangible place holder. But when we search for Him in and through every experience, and find Him there, then our everyday lives become infused with His presence.

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### Summary

Our chapter begins with words of comfort, telling the Jews that their time of punishment is over and G-d is coming to save them. They are urged to speak soothingly to Jerusalem and announce that her punishment is over. (1-2)

Yeshayahu calls for the nations to prepare the way for G-d by making a straight path in the wilderness for the Jewish return to Israel, and removing all obstacles. The hills and valleys will be as though they were flat. Through this, the glory of G-d will be revealed for all to see. (3-5)

The prophet declares that all humanity is like grass that withers and fades away, unlike the word of G-d that stands forever. No one can be compared to G-d. G-d is like a shepherd who cares for His flock. Moreover, G-d is the Creator of the universe and knows all things. The people are warned against idolatry, reminding them that all idols are nothing and cannot be compared to the power and majesty of G-d. Yeshayahu emphasizes that G-d sits above the world and controls it entirely; the people should consider that power and wisdom, and hold on to it. (6-26)

The chapter concludes by saying that even if the people of Israel express their

doubts and complaints, they should still trust in G-d's power and wisdom. Those who trust in G-d will renew their strength and soar like eagles. (27-31)

### Insight

The book of Yeshayahu is often viewed as having two parts: Chapters 1-39 focus on the political and historical events of Yeshayahu's time, and Chapters 40-66 focus mostly on comforting the nation after the destruction of the Second Temple, long after Yeshayahu lived. Many have discussed the problems that rise from this sharp shift in the historical focus and style of writing.

In truth, the shift between these sections is not that clear. It may be argued that much of the "first part" deals with events of a vague and distant future (even though the figures are nations of Yeshayahu's day), as we saw in Chapters 13 to 35. Further, there is considerable shared language throughout the book, beginning to end. Also, the Dead Sea Scrolls edition of Yeshayahu contains the complete text; there are no extant manuscripts with just the first or second part.

Some have suggested that the book of Yeshayahu was actually written by two different prophets. [Rabbi Yuval Sher-](#)

[low was asked](#) how someone who believes in the authenticity of Tanach should approach the idea of two prophetic authors. He answered:

If one claims that the fact that there was a second Yeshayahu is because it is not possible for a prophet to stand up in the days of the First Temple and prophesy about the Second Temple - this is considered heresy. However, if one claims that there were two Yeshayahu's because G-d's way of directing the prophets is to make them prophesy only regarding their time and not about distant times - this is considered a true and solid faith.

Rabbi Sherlow does not deal with the question of why our Sages would have included the messages of two prophets in the same book, but it is worth noting that the book of Shemuel is comprised of the prophecies of Shemuel, Natan and Gad. (Bava Batra 15a)]

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## Siddur Insights: From Redemption to Prayer and Back Again

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

Just before beginning the Amidah prayer every morning, we recite the following paragraph:

Rock of Israel! Arise to the help of Israel. Deliver, as you promised, Judah and Israel. It is said [Isaiah 47:4]: "Our redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel." Blessed are you, Lord, who redeemed Israel. (Koren-Sacks translation)

The reason for this stems from the Talmud (Berachot 9b) which emphasizes the importance of juxtaposing *geulah* (redemption) with *tefillah* (prayer, specifically the Amidah). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes in his commentary on the *Siddur* that this is because "the act of prayer is ultimately a request for redemption, a plea for G-d to intervene in our lives and the life of our people." (emphasis in the original) This point is further emphasized by Rabbi Dov Zinger, who writes in the introduction to his book, *Tikon Tefillati*,

Prayer is an expression of the conversation of existence, it brings together a person's deepest desires and the desires concealed in all of existence, and gives words to the prayer of the world, the prayer of humankind.

In other words, prayer is our way of connecting our personal selves with the reality in which we find ourselves. Prayer is a way to centre ourselves and better understand how to move forward. As such, Rabbi Zinger continues, Prayer is "the service of the heart... the epicenter of all that happens and the way in which we serve G-d."

But simply connecting to Hashem merely as a concept is not

enough. As Rabbi Sacks writes in his commentary, based on the thought of Rabbi Yehuda Halevy,

[T]he god of the philosophers is a dimension of reality but not a personal presence, a shaper of history. One may meditate on such a being, but we cannot speak to him, lay our innermost thoughts before him, and place our fate in his hands. The G-d of the prophets - the G-d of redemption - is encountered in events, in history, in life.

We therefore must always remember that Hashem is a Being with whom we can have a real relationship, and who relates to us through the history of our people and in our own lives, as well. This is perhaps why we not only describe Hashem as a foundation (*tzur* - literally "rock") but also ask for Him to rise and help the people of Israel. Hashem may be our foundation, both theologically and philosophically, but He is not stationary. Being sure to connect our historic redemption as a people with our praise of Hashem is a way of emphasizing the real impact that Hashem had in the past and continues to have on His people, ensuring that such an understanding is never lost.

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**Biography**  
**Rav Betzael Stern**  
**Rabbi Josh Gutenburg**

Rabbi Betzael Stern was born in 1911, to a rabbinical family living in Slovakia. He was one of five boys, of whom only he and his younger brother survived the Holocaust. His younger brother, Moshe, moved to New York, and later became known as the Debreciner Rebbe.

Rabbi Stern lived in numerous countries during his lifetime. As a child, he studied in the Pressburg Yeshiva in Hungary. During the Holocaust he served as Rabbi of a community in Romania, where he survived together with the majority of the community. In 1948 he returned to Hungary, but soon afterwards he moved to Italy and opened a yeshiva. In the subsequent years he served as a Rosh Yeshiva in Israel and as head of batei din in both Melbourne and Vienna. In 1982, he returned to Israel where he once again served as a Rosh Yeshiva.

Rabbi Stern wrote a set of responsa, titled *B'tzel HaChochmah*, between the years of 1959 and 1986. In this six-volume set, he discusses a wide range of halachic issues. In one responsum (Vol. 4 No. 104) he discusses the appropriate time to recite Shema and observe Shabbat while aboard a spaceship. He suggests that despite making several revolutions around the world each day, one would only need to recite Shema twice every 24 hours, and to observe Shabbat one out of every seven Earth days. In another responsum (Vol. 3 No. 35) he discusses under what circumstances it is permissible to fly out of Israel after Yom Tov if the plane will land in a city which is observing the second day of Yom Tov.

Rabbi Stern died in Israel in 1989.

**Weekly Halachah: A Dropped Sefer Torah**  
**Rabbi Jared Anstandig**

In response to the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe threw the luchot to the ground (Shemot 32:19). In his final comment to the Torah, Rashi (Devarim 34:12) explains that Hashem was happy with this response. But in sharp contrast to Moshe's unique action in response to the people's sin, we treat our Sifrei Torah with intense reverence and respect. And so we ask – what are we supposed to do when a person accidentally drops a Sefer Torah?

The Talmud makes no explicit reference to this particular scenario, and likewise the Shulchan Aruch does not rule on it. It appears that the one of the earliest mainstream sources that discusses this is the Magen Avraham (44:5). The Magen Avraham, citing Mishpitei Shmuel, records an accepted communal practice (“nahagu haolam”) that one fasts over a fallen Sefer Torah.

What is unclear, however, is who exactly fasts - only the one who dropped the Sefer Torah, or even those who witnessed it? Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (Tzitz Eliezer 5:1:3) notes that while the Magen Avraham's language is unclear, Mishpitei Shmuel is unequivocal. The scenario discussed there is specifically about whether there is basis for **the one who dropped** the Sefer Torah to fast. Rabbi Waldenberg explains that this is understandable – the one who dropped the Torah showed a significant amount of negligence and therefore must repent for the disgrace caused to the Sefer Torah.

This notwithstanding, others believe that all those present are culpable. For instance, Imrei Eish (Orach Chaim, Siman 6) rules that **everyone present shares responsibility in ensuring the protection and care of the Sefer Torah**. As a result, all witnesses should fast.

Regarding normative practice, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg and Rabbi Eliezer Melamed (Likkutim 1 6:4) record that only the one who dropped the Sefer Torah should fast. Everyone else is exempt.

How long should this person fast? Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvot veHanhagot 3:169) records opinions ranging from a 40-day fast for the person who dropped the Sefer Torah to a three-day fast (fasting on the subsequent Monday, Thursday, and Monday). He concludes in favour of the three-day fast for the one who dropped the Sefer Torah. Rabbi Melamed rules even more leniently, requiring the dropper to fast for only one day. Additionally, since the person who dropped the Torah demonstrated a lack of reverence for the Torah, Rabbi Melamed writes that such a person should also increase the honour of Torah, by donating to Torah institutions and increasing the amount of Torah one learns.

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**Sefer haChinuch: First-Born Animals, Part 1**  
**By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

The Torah (Shemot 13) instructs us to bring our first-born male sheep, oxen and goats to a kohen; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah's 18<sup>th</sup> mitzvah. When we have a Beit haMikdash, the kohen brings part of the animal as a korban, and eats the rest; the animal may not be redeemed, as per Bamidbar 18:17. Sefer haChinuch counts the prohibition against redeeming an unblemished first-born animal as the Torah's 393<sup>rd</sup> mitzvah.

By performing this mitzvah, in which we take the first fruit of our efforts and dedicate it to Hashem, we demonstrate that we recognize that everything we possess ultimately comes from Hashem. Further, we commemorate Hashem's destruction of the Egyptian first-born and redemption of the Jews from Egypt.

This mitzvah applies even when there is no Beit haMikdash, biblically within Israel and rabbinically outside of Israel. Jewish ranchers tend to form partnerships with non-Jews as joint owners of their animals; a first-born animal owned in partnership with a non-Jew is not subject to the laws of the first-born animal.

The Torah also mandates that the owner of a donkey redeem its first-born male progeny by dedicating a lamb in its place, or by donating the lamb's monetary equivalent. Failure to do so means that the donkey's owner must instead end the baby donkey's life. Our sages wrote that the penalty of losing one's donkey is meant to encourage owners to fulfill the mitzvah of redeeming their donkeys. Sefer haChinuch counts the redemption and loss as the Torah's 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> mitzvot.

The Torah explains that this mitzvah, like the mitzvah of giving first-born sheep, oxen and goats to the kohen, is meant to remind us of our own redemption from Egypt. Rambam (Moreh haNevuchim) suggested that the Torah singled out donkeys because they are common beasts, and because their ability to carry burdens makes them indispensable.

*To be continued...*

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| After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Milevsky Bais Medrash) (men)   |  |
| After minchah, Idan Rakovsky, Halachah in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah  |  |
| <b>Sun. Mar. 12</b>  |  |
| 9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Hilchot Bishul, Clanton Park (men): Niddah  |  |
| <b>Mon. Mar. 13</b>  |  |
| 2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Into the Haggadah, ZOOM: <a href="http://tiny.cc/idanrak">http://tiny.cc/idanrak</a>  |  |
| 8:00 PM to 9:30 PM LEGAL ETHICS: THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THE LAWYER<br>Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, on ZOOM at <a href="http://tiny.cc/mtethics">http://tiny.cc/mtethics</a><br>Register: <a href="https://torontotorah.com/cpd/">https://torontotorah.com/cpd/</a> / Accredited for CPD / Laypeople welcome  |  |
| 8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Weekly Halachah, Shomrai Shabbos <i>not this week</i>  |  |
| <b>Tues. Mar. 14</b>   |  |
| 9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Tzidkat haTzaddik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)   |  |
| 1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon, ZOOM: <a href="http://tiny.cc/weeklymt">http://tiny.cc/weeklymt</a>  |  |
| 7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 18), ZOOM: <a href="http://tiny.cc/weeklymt">http://tiny.cc/weeklymt</a> (men)  |  |
| 8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Post-Shovavim Shiur (Semichat Chaver Chazarah), Clanton Park (men)   |  |
| 8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Women's Beit Midrash: Arvei Pesachim Shaarei Shomayim (university women)   |  |
| <b>Wed. Mar. 15</b>  |  |
| 9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of the Rav, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)   |  |
| 10 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Zecharyah: Hope & Armageddon, 1 of 3 ZOOM: <a href="http://tiny.cc/weeklymt">http://tiny.cc/weeklymt</a><br>Register: <a href="https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays">https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays</a> <i>There is a fee</i>  |  |
| 8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Into the Haggadah, Shaarei Tefillah   |  |
| 8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park  |  |
| <b>Thurs. Mar. 16</b>  |  |
| 1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 31), ZOOM: <a href="http://tiny.cc/weeklymt">http://tiny.cc/weeklymt</a> (women)  |  |
| 8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah (advanced), for location: <a href="mailto:ymann@torontotorah.com">ymann@torontotorah.com</a>   |  |
| 8:30 PM Idan Rakovsky, Sefer haChinuch, Shaarei Tefillah Beit Midrash Night (men)  |  |
| <b>Fri. Mar. 17</b>  |  |
| 9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)  |  |
| 10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 <i>advanced</i><br>In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <a href="http://tiny.cc/frishiur">http://tiny.cc/frishiur</a>   |  |
| <b>COMING UP!</b><br>Shabbat March 17-18<br><b>SHABBATON AT CLANTON PARK &amp; THE OR CHAIM MINYAN</b><br><b>THEME: LIBERTY</b><br><br>8:00 PM March 20<br><b>HAGGADAH NIGHT at BAYT (Gruda Bais Medrash)</b><br><b>Four 10-minute divrei torah for your Seder!</b><br><b>With Rabbi Yehuda Mann, Idan Rakovsky, Prielle Rakovsky, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner</b><br><br>8:00 PM March 27<br><b>HAGGADAH NIGHT at SHAAREI SHOMAYIM</b><br><b>Four 10-minute divrei torah for your Seder!</b><br><b>With Rabbi Jared Anstandig, Mrs. Sarit Anstandig, Rabbi Steven Gotlib, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner</b> |  |