

Kol Rina

An Independent Minyan

Parashat Ki Tisa – Shabbat Parah

March 14, 2020 *** Adar 18, 5780

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Today's Portions

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Parasha in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2833/jewish/Ki-Tisa-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given regarding the making of the Sanctuary's water basin, anointing oil and incense. "Wise-hearted" artisans Betzalel and Aholiav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat.

When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a golden calf and worship it. G-d proposes to destroy the errant nation, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the tablets, destroys the golden calf, and has the primary culprits put to death. He then returns to G-d to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written."

G-d forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first G-d proposes to send His angel along with them, but Moses insists that G-d Himself accompany His people to the promised land.

Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends the mountain, where G-d reinscribes the covenant on these second tablets. On the mountain, Moses is also granted a vision of the divine thirteen attributes of mercy. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with G-d and to teach His laws to the people.

Parah in A nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/73199/jewish/Parah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

In preparation for the upcoming festival of Passover, when every Jew had to be in a state of ritual purity, the section of Parah (Numbers 19) is added to the weekly reading this week. Parah relates the laws of the Red Heifer with which a person contaminated by contact with a dead body was purified.

Haftarah for Shabbat Parah in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 36:16 - 36:38

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/655981/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's special haftarah mentions the "purifying waters" that G-d will sprinkle upon us with the coming of Moshiach. This follows the theme of this week's additional Torah reading — the purifying qualities of the "Red Heifer."

The prophet Ezekiel transmits G-d's message: The Israelites have defiled the Holy Land with their idol-worship and immoral ways. As a result, they will be sent into exile. "And

they came to the nations where they came, and they profaned My Holy Name, inasmuch as it was said of them, 'These are the people of G-d, and they have come out of His land.'" So G-d will take them out of their exile — but not by virtue of the Israelites' merits: "Not for your sake do I do this, O house of Israel, but for My Holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations."

G-d will bring the Israelites back to the Holy Land and purify them with the waters of the Red Heifer. The people will feel ashamed of their actions, and after they will have undergone the process of purification and repentance, G-d will rebuild the country and bestow upon it prosperity and bounty.

"I will resettle the cities, and the ruins shall be built up. And the desolate land shall be worked, instead of its lying desolate in the sight of all that pass by. And they shall say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden, and the cities that were destroyed and desolate and pulled down have become settled as fortified [cities].'"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Moses Annuls a Vow (Ki Tissa 5780) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

<http://rabbisacks.org/ki-tissa-5780/>

Kol Nidre, the prayer said at the beginning of Yom Kippur, is an enigma wrapped in a mystery, perhaps the strangest text ever to capture the religious imagination. First, it is not a prayer at all. It is not even a confession. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. It is written in Aramaic. It does not mention God. It is not part of the service. It does not require a synagogue. And it was disapproved of, or at least questioned, by generations of halachic authorities.

The first time we hear of Kol Nidre, in the eighth century, it is already being opposed by Rav Natronai Gaon, the first of many Sages throughout the centuries who found it problematic. In his view, one cannot annul the vows of an entire congregation this way. Even if one could, one should not, since it may lead people to treat vows lightly. Besides which, there has already been an annulment of vows ten days earlier, on the morning before Rosh Hashanah. This is mentioned explicitly in the Talmud (Nedarim 23b). There is no mention of an annulment on Yom Kippur.

Rabbeinu Tam, Rashi's grandson, was particularly insistent in arguing that the kind of annulment Kol Nidre represents cannot be retroactive. It cannot apply to vows already taken. It can only be a pre-emptive qualification of vows in the future. Accordingly he insisted on changing its wording, so that Kol Nidre refers not to vows from last year to this, but from this year to next.

However, perhaps because of this, Kol Nidre created hostility on the part of non-Jews, who said it showed that Jews did not feel bound to honour their promises since they vitiated them on the holiest night of the year. In vain it was repeatedly emphasised that Kol Nidre applies only to vows between us and God, not those between us and our fellow humans. Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some places until the eighteenth century, in lawsuits with non-Jews, Jews were forced to take a special oath, More Judaica, because of this concern.

So there were communal and halachic reasons not to say Kol Nidre, yet it survived all the doubts and misgivings. It remains the quintessential expression of the awe and solemnity of the day. Its undiminished power defies all obvious explanations. Somehow it seems to point to something larger than itself, whether in Jewish history or the inner heartbeat of the Jewish soul.

Several historians have argued that it acquired its pathos from the phenomenon of forced conversions, whether to Christianity or Islam, that occurred in several places in the Middle Ages, most notably Spain and Portugal in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Jews would be offered the choice: convert or suffer persecution. Sometimes it was: convert or be expelled. At times it was even: convert or die. Some Jews did convert. They

were known in Hebrew as anusim (people who acted under coercion). In Spanish they were known as conversos, or contemptuously as marranos (swine).

Many of them remained Jews in secret, and once a year on the night of Yom Kippur they would make their way in secret to the synagogue to seek release from the vows they had taken to adopt to another faith, on the compelling grounds that they had no other choice. For them, coming to the synagogue was like coming home, the root meaning of teshuvah.

There are obvious problems with this hypothesis. Firstly, Kol Nidre was in existence several centuries before the era of forced conversions. So historian Joseph S. Bloch suggested that Kol Nidre may have originated in the much earlier Christian persecution of Jews in Visigoth Spain, when in 613 Sisebur issued a decree that all Jews should either convert or be expelled, anticipating the Spanish expulsion of 1492. Even so, it is unlikely that conversos would have taken the risk of being discovered practising Judaism. Had they done so during the centuries in which the Inquisition was in force they would have risked torture, trial and death. Moreover, the text of Kol Nidre makes no reference, however oblique, to conversion, return, identity, or atonement. It is simply an annulment of vows.

So the theories as they stand do not satisfy.

However it may be that Kol Nidre has a different significance altogether, one that has its origin in a remarkable rabbinic interpretation of this week's parsha. The connection between it and Yom Kippur is this: less than six weeks after the great revelation at Mount Sinai, the Israelites committed what seemed to be the unforgivable sin of making a Golden Calf. Moses prayed repeatedly for forgiveness on their behalf and eventually secured it, descending from Mount Sinai on the Tenth of Tishrei with a new set of tablets to replace those he had smashed in anger at their sin. The tenth of Tishrei subsequently became Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, in memory of that moment when the Israelites saw Moses with the new tablets and knew they had been forgiven.

Moses' prayers, as recorded in the Torah, are daring. But the Midrash makes them more audacious still. The text introducing Moses' prayer begins with the Hebrew words, Vayechal Moshe (Ex. 32:11). Normally these are translated as "Moses besought, implored, entreated, pleaded, or attempted to pacify" God. However the same verb is used in the context of annulling or breaking a vow (Num. 30:3). On this basis the Sages advanced a truly remarkable interpretation:

[Vayechal Moshe means] "Moses absolved God of His vow." When the Israelites made the Golden Calf, Moses sought to persuade God to forgive them, but God said, "I have already taken an oath that Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be punished (Ex. 22:19). I cannot retract what I have said." Moses replied, "Lord of the universe, You have given me the power to annul oaths, for You taught me that one who takes an oath cannot break their word but a scholar can absolve them. I hereby absolve You of Your vow" (abridged from Exodus Rabbah 43:4).

According to the Sages the original act of Divine forgiveness on which Yom Kippur is based came about through the annulment of a vow, when Moses annulled the vow of God. The Sages understood the verse, "Then the Lord relented from the evil He had spoken of doing to His people" (Ex. 32:14) to mean that God expressed regret for the vow He had taken – a precondition for a vow to be annulled.

Why would God regret His determination to punish the people for their sin? On this, another Midrash offers an equally radical answer. The opening word of Psalm 61 is la-menatzeach. When this word appears in Psalms it usually means, "To the conductor, or choirmaster." However the Sages interpreted it to mean, "To the Victor," meaning God, and added this stunning commentary:

To the Victor who sought to be defeated, as it is said (Isaiah 57:16), "I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of Me—the very people I have created." Do not read it thus, but, "I will accuse in order to be

defeated.” How so? Thus said the Holy One, blessed be He, “When I win, I lose, and when I lose I gain. I defeated the generation of the Flood, but did I not lose thereby, for I destroyed My own creation, as it says (Gen. 7:23), “Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out.” The same happened with the generation of the Tower of Babel and the people of Sodom. But in the days of Moshe who defeated Me (by persuading Me to forgive the Israelites whom I had sworn to destroy), I gained for I did not destroy Israel.[1] God wants His forgiveness to override His justice, because strict justice hurts humanity, and humanity is God’s creation and carries His image. That is why He regretted His vow and allowed Moses to annul it. That is why Kol Nidre has the power it has. For it recalls the Israelites’ worst sin, the Golden Calf, and their forgiveness, completed when Moses descended the mountain with the new tablets on the 10th of Tishrei, the anniversary of which is Yom Kippur. The forgiveness was the result of Moses’ daring prayer, understood by the Sages as an act of annulment of vows. Hence Kol Nidre, a formula for the annulment of vows.

The power of Kol Nidre has less to do with forced conversions than with a recollection of the moment, described in our parsha, when Moses stood in prayer before God and achieved forgiveness for the people: the first time the whole people was forgiven despite the gravity of their sin. During Musaf on Yom Kippur we describe in detail the second Yom Kippur: the service of the High Priest, Aharon, as described in Vayikra 16. But on Kol Nidre we recall the first Yom Kippur when Moses annulled the Almighty’s vow, letting His compassion override His justice, the basis of all Divine forgiveness.

I believe we must always strive to fulfil our promises. If we fail to keep our word, eventually we lose our freedom. But given the choice between justice and forgiveness, choose forgiveness. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are liberated from a past we regret, to build a better future. [1] Pesikta Rabbati (Ish Shalom), 9.

[Does God Get Carried Away?: A Case of Inner-Biblical Midrash by Jeremy Tabick](http://www.jtsa.edu/does-god-get-carried-away-a-case-of-inner-biblical-midrash)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/does-god-get-carried-away-a-case-of-inner-biblical-midrash>

What does it mean to be El kana, “a jealous / zealous God”?

This phrase appears in the Second Commandment:

You shall not bow down to [other gods] and you shall not worship them, for I am YHVH your God, El Kana, one who takes note of the sin of parents upon children, upon third and fourth [generations], to those who hate Me. But I am one who does love to the thousandth [generation], to those who love me and to those who keep My commandments. (Exod. 20:5-6/Deut. 5:9-10)

I have left kana untranslated because the word is inherently ambiguous: it means something like either jealous or zealous or some combination. The Second Commandment plays into this ambiguity by using the phrase El Kana as the hinge between these two related but distinct concepts:

1. Israelites can’t worship other gods (“you shall not bow down to them etc.” = jealous of other gods),
2. God will punish and reward disproportionately, i.e. on the perpetrators’ descendants as well (“one who takes note . . . one who does love etc.” = zealous, whose emotions take over).

This description of God as zealous, is problematic. Do we really believe that God lets God’s emotions obscure God’s better judgment? This is even more troubling when combined with the notion that God rewards or punishes disproportionately; it can seem like a grotesquely unjust theological position to take. In the words of Abraham, “Can the judge of the whole world not do justice?!” (Gen. 18:25). Why does God not punish and reward people fairly?

However, El Kana is repeated in our parashah, in Exodus 34, and a close reading suggests that Exodus 34 was aware of the earlier use of this phrase in the Second Commandment and deliberately rereads it in a subversive way, limiting its meaning and application into obscurity.

Exodus 34 directly quotes the Second Commandment in this passage and attaches several explanatory notes (direct quotations are italicized below). As we shall see, one of these explanatory notes completely changes the meaning of kana from its original sense in the Ten Commandments:

YHVH passed by before him and declared, “YHVH, YHVH, a merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger, full of love and truth, one who guards love to the thousandth [generation], lifting off transgression, guilt and sin, but [God] will surely not make innocent [i.e. will not avoid giving punishment], one who takes note of the sin of parents upon children and on children’s children, upon third and fourth [generations].” (vv.6-7, emphasis added)

For you shall not bow down to another God, for YHVH’s name is Kana, He is El Kana. (v.14)

Exodus 34 splits up these two concepts (jealous and zealous) and applies El Kana to only one of them. When discussing God’s disproportionate rewards and punishments, it emphasizes God’s compassion and mercy. Then, later, when the text discusses worshipping other gods, only then does it bring in El Kana. In other words, Exodus 34 is aware of the reading that you might have had of the Second Commandment that God lets God’s emotions lead God’s actions and specifically counters it: God is jealous according to the later passage, but not zealous.

Similarly, the Midrash can say:

“El Kana”[i]—[God says:] I rule over kinah, kinah does not rule over Me.

“[Similarly:] I rule over slumber and slumber does not rule over Me, as it is said,

‘See God neither slumbers, nor sleeps—Guardian of Israel!’ (Psalm 121:4).”

(Mekhilta Derabbi Yishma’el, 20:5)

Just as God never sleeps, this audacious midrash on the Second Commandment makes the claim that God is never overtaken by emotions. To the contrary—God has complete control of God’s emotions. It may seem shocking that this midrash reads the verse exactly opposite to the way it must have been intended, but it is aided by the fact that Exodus 34 already made this interpretative move when it separated God’s kinah from the concept of God’s disproportionality.

But that is not all Exodus 34 did. The disproportionality in reward and punishment in the Second Commandment is presented as something that God does: One of the things that God does is be zealous and lavishly reward those who love God, as well as punish those who hate God. In contrast, Exodus 34 presents something that God is. God is merciful and compassionate, God doesn’t just “do love”—God “guards love,” suggesting that God is always looking for ways to bestow love.

Furthermore: in the Second Commandment, God’s reward or punishment is binary—either you receive love (if you love God) or punishment (if you hate God). But in Exodus 34, love and punishment are both handed out to everyone. Imagine you are being punished for any sins committed by your parents and grandparents, as this text suggests. Now weigh into this that you are also being rewarded for the merit of your ancestors to the thousandth degree. Surely the effect of this is to totally overwhelm the punishment with love!

Subtly, by making only a few additions, Exodus 34 totally subverts the message of the Second Commandment in two ways:

1.it removes from God’s kinah any notion that it might refer to God being overwhelmed by God’s emotions and rewarding or punishing beyond what is appropriate;

2.it completely wipes out the two-generation punishment in a swath of mercy and compassion owing to the merit of a thousand preceding generations.

This teaches us how we can read the same words and, with some light additions and recontextualization, totally reimagine what they might be saying to us. This is what it means for the Torah to be the word of God, to be ever-relevant. Exodus 34 believed fully

in a God called Kana, but not in the way that the Second Commandment intended!

(Jeremy Tabick is a PhD candidate in Rabbinic Literature at JTS)

Parashat Ki Tisa 5780 by Cantor Sandy Horowitz

<https://ajrsem.org/teachings/divreitorah/>

In Parashat Ki Tisa Aaron has been left in charge of the Israelites while Moses is meeting with God atop Mount Sinai. As the brother of Moses, Aaron is a likely choice to be given the responsibility of interim-leader. Given what happens however, one might wonder if he was the right person for the job.

Time passes, Moses doesn't return, God is silent, the Israelites become anxious. In Exodus 32:1 we read, "The people gathered against Aaron and said to him, come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses... we do not know what has happened to him." Aaron immediately complies. He doesn't try to convince the people that Moses will be back soon, or encourage them to keep faith with God. Rather, he asks for the gold from the jewelry of their wives and daughters, and uses it to create an idol in the form of a golden calf. This might be seen as a sell-out moment by Aaron.

Rashi defends Aaron's actions however, saying that the request for jewelry was intended as a delay tactic, in hopes that Moses would soon return.

The creation of the calf-god does seem to appease the people, as they respond with approval, "This is your god oh Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." (Ex 32:4). For them to invoke God's greatest accomplishment – bringing the people out of Egypt – and ascribe that to the golden idol is certainly provocative. Yet Aaron remains silent. Instead, he builds an altar before the calf, and declares that the next day will be a festival for God. Rashi interprets this as an additional attempt to delay the people from actually worshipping the newly-formed idol.

Adding to Rashi's defense, it may be that Aaron is deliberately being careful not to provoke the people; he wants to avoid a major revolt which he wouldn't be able to handle, and which would not serve Moses well. So, he goes along with their demands in the hope that Moses will return in time to deal with the situation himself.

There is another aspect to Aaron's response. For he is a man of action, not words. We recall the attack by Amalek in Exodus Chapter 17, when Moses went to the top of a hill to stand with arms held high as Joshua led the Israelites in battle. Aaron and Hur went with Moses; when he became tired, they placed a stone for him to sit, and when his hands became tired as he held them high, Aaron and Hur held them up for him. No words were spoken, only quiet acts of necessity and kindness.

And yet, one would expect Aaron to also be a man of words; after all, God had appointed him as Moses' spokesman when Moses was first chosen by God to demand Israelite freedom from Pharaoh. We read in Chapter 4 as God speaks to Moses regarding Aaron: "And you shall speak to him, and put words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth, and with his mouth."

Here however, neither God nor Moses is on hand to tell Aaron what to say, and perhaps this is why he doesn't argue, or negotiate, or even plead with the Israelites. When left alone to deal with an unruly and anxious people, his response is to act rather than speak. For this is his personal strength.

And it works. By creating an idol for the people to worship, he calms their fears. With the absence of both their divine and their human leader, Aaron seems to recognize the peoples' need for a tangible substitute. He will soon be anointed as the high priest who will receive the Israelites' tabernacle offerings as physical manifestations of their faith. He understands the value and the necessity of relating to that which is unseen by means of material expression.

Aaron was left on his own to deal with a predictably difficult situation. Rather than try to emulate God and Moses by using verbal communication, he chose to take action, which showed him to be a leader in his own right. God seems to approve, for when Moses

returns and the people are punished for their idolatrous actions, Aaron is spared. Perhaps we can learn this from Aaron: when faced with situations that challenge us, may we seek to address them not by emulating others whose strengths we might admire but not possess, but rather by invoking our own unique personal qualities and strengths. (Cantor Sandy Horowitz (AJR '14) is an independent cantor and tutor.)

[Ki Tissa 5780 by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt](https://mailchi.mp/4ad80baf66bb/weekly-davar-ki-sissa-2020?e=e0f2ca6c0d)

<https://mailchi.mp/4ad80baf66bb/weekly-davar-ki-sissa-2020?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

This week, we begin with a census of the Jewish nation. Each person, rich or poor, had to give a half shekel for upkeep of the Tabernacle. And they counted how much money they had received and multiplied by two.

The portion includes the building of the washstand in the Tabernacle, the making of the incense and anointing oil and the appointment of craftsmen and architects. But all this is only a prelude to the feature presentation: the story of The Golden Calf. The Jewish people, having heard God speak to them at Mt. Sinai only 40 days previously, decide to build an idol!! How this could be possible is a difficult question that I have dealt with in previous years. I'm happy to send you something if you are interested.

The famous story of the Golden Calf. We modern human beings wonder and perhaps scoff at how it was possible? How did the primitive mind work that it could build and worship a calf?

But are we all that different?

The Rabbis explain the thought process behind the Golden Calf. Moses was the conduit through which the Nation communicated with God. He had been on the mountain for forty days and they started to believe he was never coming back. So, they needed to find a new and quick fix conduit – and the calf fitted the bill.

In other words, it was not so much the calf as it was their desire to put some distance between themselves and God.

And don't we do the same?

The coronavirus is unique for those of my generation and below. It is something that is actually beyond human control. When it comes to illness, we like to put our trust in doctors, in science. It makes us feel safer, more in control of our destinies. But in this instance, we human beings are lost. We have no cure, no vaccination. There is not much we can do. Patients are advised to stay at home because the health system has nothing to offer. That's a new situation.

So yes, we'll look to put our trust in handwashing, in antibacterial gel, in governments, in warm weather, in research for a vaccine, in China's statistics.....almost anything, except where this is all pointing – and that is to God himself.

So, are we that different? They felt uncomfortable with the idea of God, so they built a calf. We feel uncomfortable with the idea of God, so we look elsewhere to our salvation also.

I'm not saying that we should not follow government advice and do ALL that we can to prevent the spread of this disease. Of course, we should. But, that should be alongside looking towards where true hope lies. And trusting that times of crisis are an opportunity to reconnect to something deeper and more lasting, standing on more solid ground. It might be ground that we do not control, but the spiritual is the most solid ground of all, providing hope for humanity in this world..... and beyond.

[Radiance and the Oral Law: Ki Tisa 5780 by Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin](https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-parshat-ki-tisa-5780/)

<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-parshat-ki-tisa-5780/>

Efrat, Israel – “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Two Tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord” (Exodus 34:29)

What is the significance of the dazzling radiance of Moses's face and why did it not attain this shining glow until he received the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur? And, perhaps the most difficult question of all, why did Moses break the first tablets? Yes, he was bitterly

disappointed, perhaps even angry, at the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf only 40 days after God's first Revelation on Shavuot; however, these tablets were "the work of God and they were the writing of God." How could the holiest human being take the holiest object on earth and smash it to smithereens? Was he not adding to Israel's sin, pouring salt on the wounds of the Almighty (as it were)? My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, taught that Moses emerges from our portion of Ki Tisa not only as the greatest prophet of the generations but also as the exalted rebbe of Klal Yisrael (All of Israel), as Moshe Rabeinu; Moses the teacher and master of all the generations. This unique transformation of his personality took place on Yom Kippur; it is the sobriquet of Rebbe which occasions the rays of splendor which shone forth from his countenance. The midrash on the first verse of the Book of Leviticus, "And [God] called out to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting..." provides a remarkable insight. The biblical word for "called out" in this text is *vayiker*, a word which suggests a mere chance encounter rather than an actual summoning or calling out of the Divine; indeed, our Masoretic text places a small letter 'alef' at the end of the word. The midrash explains that it was Moses's modesty which insisted upon an almost accidental meeting (*veyikra*) rather than a direct summons.

However, when God completed the writing down of the Five Books, there was a small amount of ink left over from that small 'alef'; the Almighty lovingly placed the surplus of sacred ink on Moses's forehead, which accounts for the glorious splendor which emanated from his face.

Allow me to add to this midrash on the basis of the teaching of Rabbi Soloveitchik. The essence of the Second Tablets included the Oral Law, the human input of the great Torah Sages throughout the generations which had been absent from the first tablets. Hence Chapter 34 of our portion opens with God's command to Moses, "Hew for yourself two stone tablets" – you, Moses, and not Me, God; the first tablets were hewn by God and the commandments were engraved by God, whereas the second tablets were hewn by the human being Moses and the commands were engraved by him. The chapter concludes: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Write for yourself these words for on the basis of these words [the Oral Law, the hermeneutic principles and the interpretations of the rabbis of each generation] have I established an [eternal] covenant with Israel.'" Rabbi Soloveitchik maintains that during the 40 days from the beginning of the month of Elul to Yom Kippur, Moses relearned the 613 commandments with the many possibilities of the Oral Law; Moses's active intellect became the "receiver" for the active intellect of the Divine, having received all of the manifold potential possibilities of the future developments of Torah throughout the generations. This is the meaning of the Talmudic adage that "Every authentic scholar ('*talmid vatik*') who presents a novel teaching is merely recycling Torah from Sinai."

In this manner, Moses's personality became totally identified and intertwined with Torah, a sacred combination of the Divine words and the interpretations of Moses. Moses became a living 'Sefer Torah', a "ministering vessel" (*kli sharet*) which can never lose its sanctity.

The Beit Halevi (Rav Yosef Dov Baer Halevi Soloveitchik, the great-grandfather of my teacher) maintains that the special radiance which emanated from Moses's countenance originated from the concentrated sanctity of Moses's identity with the many aspects of the Oral Torah which his own generation was not yet ready to hear, but which Moses kept within himself, for later generations. Whenever the inner world of the individual is more than it appears to be on the surface, that inner radiance becomes increasingly pronounced and externally manifest. Moses's radiant glow was Oral Torah dependent, not at all germane to the first tablets, which contained only the Written Law; the glow expressed the radiance and love which would suffuse the manifold interpretations which were beneath the surface, but would emerge throughout the future generations of oral interpretations to come!

Why did Moses break the first tablets? Moses understood that there was a desperate need for a second set of tablets, born of God's consummate love and unconditional forgiveness, with an Oral Law which would empower the nation to be God's partners in the developing Torah. But God had threatened to destroy the nation. Moses breaks the first tablets as a message to God: Just as the tablets are considered to be "ministering vessels" which never lose their sanctity even if broken, so are the Jewish People, Knesset Yisrael, teachers and students of Torah, "ministering vessels," who will never lose their sanctity, even if God attempts to break them! The Jewish nation, repositories of the oral teachings, are the heirs to the eternal sanctity of Moses their Rebbe. (Rabbi Riskin is the founder and Chancellor Emeritus and Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone)

Ki Tissa: Tablets and Fragments by Rabbi Shlomo Brown

<https://ots.org.il/parshat-ki-tissa-tablets-and-fragments/>

Did Moses break the tablets because he was shocked by the Golden Calf, or was it premeditated?

"As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain." (Exodus 32:19)

This is how the Torah recapitulates Moses' greatness:

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom Hashem singled out, face to face, for the various signs and miracles that Hashem sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, and for all the mighty hand and awesome power that Moses displayed before the eyes of all of Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

Rashi offers the following commentary on these verses:

Before the eyes of all of Israel — This refers to the fact that his heart inspired him to shatter the Tablets before their eyes, as it is said, "And I broke them before your eyes", and the opinion of the Holy One, blessed be He, regarding this action agreed with his opinion, as it is stated that God said of the Tablets, "Which you have broken" – You have done well by having broken them. In other words, the "mighty hand" is the same hand that shattered the tablets. Moses broke the tablets of his own initiative, and the Holy One, Blessed Be He concurred with Moses' choice and the breaking of the tablets in hindsight. The breaking of the tablets, a dramatic event by all accounts, is described in this week's Parasha and in Parashat Ekev. In this Parasha, it is unclear whether this was an act that followed forethought and planning, but the description in the Book of Deuteronomy (chapter 9, verses 16-17) leaves no room for doubt:

I saw how you had sinned against Hashem your God: you had made yourselves a molten calf; you had been quick to stray from the path that Hashem had enjoined upon you. Thereupon I gripped the two tablets and flung them away with both my hands, smashing them before your eyes.

Moses saw the calf, whereupon he grabbed the tablets and hurled them, shattering them in full view of the entire nation of Israel. Thus, it turns out that Moses thought before he acted. He understood that by shattering the tablets as the people looked on, he had brought about the right tikkun, or rectification, of the Sin of the Golden Calf. How come? In the first article of his book, Sefer Hakuzari, Rabbi Judah Halevi explains what had caused the Sin of the Golden Calf:

In those days, all of the nations had worshipped graven images... Similarly, the masses wouldn't accept any Torah if it wasn't somehow associated, in their minds, with a tangible image that they could focus on. The people of Israel were promised that something would descend to them from their Heavenly Father, something they would see, something they could focus their gaze on. Indeed, Moses ascended the mountain, expecting to receive etched tablets that he would take back down to the people. They had only asked that they would always have something tangible, which could be worshipped, something they could hint to when referring to the wonders of their G-d from their book.

According to Rabbi Judah Halevi, one of the main factors behind this sin was the tablets themselves. The Children of Israel had anxiously awaited their arrival, because they needed a tangible object they could look to when worshipping Hashem. When they realized that Moses wasn't coming back when he had said he would, they turned to Aaron and asked him to create something to substitute for the tablets. In other words, the Sin of the Golden Calf was not idol-worship per se, rather a transgression against the prohibition of creating idols. According to this explanation, one of the main causes of this sin was the importance that the Children of Israel attached to the tablets, and with that in mind, it's obvious why Moses had broken them. This wasn't an act driven by rage. It was well-calculated. Rather than being a punishment, it was an educational act of the highest degree, which aimed to convey a message – the content of the tablets is what's important, not the tablets themselves.

It's rather easy for us to find modern-day parallels involving great evil driven by good intentions, but "alas, for those that are gone and are no more to be found", those with hands as mighty as Moses', which can break the tablets, and by doing so, produce about a major rectification. *(Rabbi Shlomo Brown is the Executive Director of Midreshet Lindenbaum of Ohr Torah Stone)*

Yahrtzeits

Bob Woog remembers his uncle Ralph David Fertig on Tues March 17 (Adar II 21).

Lisa Vernon remembers her friend Abner Herbst on Wed March 18 (Adar II 22).

Sarah McNamara remembers her father Edward K. Zuckerman (Yisrael ben Hananya Leib) on Wed March 18 (Adar 22)

Bobbi Ostrowsky remembers her father Buddy Edelman (Yisroel ben Leb) on Wed March 18 (Adar 22).

Lenny Levin remembers his brother Joseph Levin on Thurs Mar 19 (Adar II 23).

Linda Chandross remembers her father Daniel Glick on Thurs March 9 (Adar 23).