

# JewishTimes

VOL. XV NO. 5 — FEB. 19, 2016

**A SNAKE THAT  
SWALLOWED  
MOSES?**

**DOES GOD  
NEED A  
TEMPLE?**

**THE  
PRIEST'S  
GARMENTS**

**PUNISHMENTS:  
THE GOLD  
CALF**



**LEFT:** ONE OF THE 2  
TABLETS OF THE 10  
COMMANDMENTS.  
SAPPHIRE BRICKS  
CONTAINING A TEXT  
MIRACULOUSLY  
EMBEDDED AND SEEN  
FROM BOTH SIDES.  
WHY WAS THIS MIRA-  
CLE NECESSARY?  
WHAT LESSON DID IT  
TEACH? AND WHAT  
SYSTEM OF KNOWL-  
EDGE HAS BEEN  
DETECTED?

## **GOD'S CODED MESSAGES**

**BEYOND COMMANDS  
A CODE IS FOUND**

FROM THE NEW BOOK, "SECRETS OF THE BIBLE"



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## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## Moses swallowed by a snake?

**Reader:** My daughter Chana asked me about the midrash that Tzipora knew the issue was the bris when the pasuk said "Hashem sought to kill Moses." The midrash says a snake swallowed Moses head-first up to the place of his bris, and then swallowed him again feet-first to the place of his bris. Chana wants to know the idea of that midrash. We started with the idea that a snake usually hints to the yetzer hara. That's as far as we could get.

**Rabbi:** Rashi and Ibn Ezra state that Moses erred in his decision to travel before performing bris milah on his son. Perhaps this decision (a mental activity: head) which led to Moses' travel (legs) was hinted to in some ailment that attacked Moses' head first, then his legs (the snake first swallowing his head, and then afterwards, his legs). Simultaneously, the ailment reached the place of his bris to underline the issue. Moses was thereby taught that his decision about travel was flawed. And as Chana and you suggested, the flaw stemmed from the instinctual, illustrated in midrashim as a snake. ■

# GOD'S CODED MESSAGES

BEYOND COMMANDS  
A CODE IS FOUND

FROM THE NEW BOOK, "SECRETS OF THE BIBLE"

**T**he last sections in Exodus focus on the Tabernacle, the Temple. At the center of the Temple is the Ark that houses the 10 Commandments. It is therefore crucial to understand the message of these tablets, if we are to grasp the essence of Temple. Do these tablets contain mere commands alone, or is there something deeper?

At the conclusion of his lengthy commentary[1], Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia Gaon stating that the 10 Commandments are the main categories for the remaining Torah commands. Perhaps this categorization explains the need for the 10 Commandments: as God desired that the Jewish nation would view all post-Sinaitic commands as Divine, validation was required that future commands did not stem from Moses' own thinking.

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That proof would be that the future commands fit into a framework already given by God: the 10 Commandments. That Moses did not deviate from God, and that he presented only God's words and not his own fabrications, God created a separate miracle that Moses' face shone literal beams of light. Such a miracle displayed God's endorsement of Moses as he taught the remaining laws through their wilderness travels. All post-Sinaitic commands are God's commands, not something Moses developed on his own.

It is also appropriate that we reiterate the miraculous letters forming the 10 Commandments. Torah states they were seen from both sides of these translucent sapphire bricks. This means that the letters formed naturally inside the sapphire as it formed over

time since creation. The letters were not subsequently carved into the surface of the sapphire, which would not attest to anything more than human craft. For letters to form within the sapphire's grain is impossible, unless it was God's will. Thus, the tablets' writing, and the tablets themselves displayed divine creation. Let us now return to the tablets' words...

The 10 Commandments teach not only important concepts, but they also prioritize the commands. Ibn Ezra explains our relationship with God is based more on our thoughts than on our actions. However, regarding man, our actions are more vital than our thoughts: bodily harm is of greater concern than our speech or thoughts. It is for this reason that in the 10 Commandments, the first five commands which

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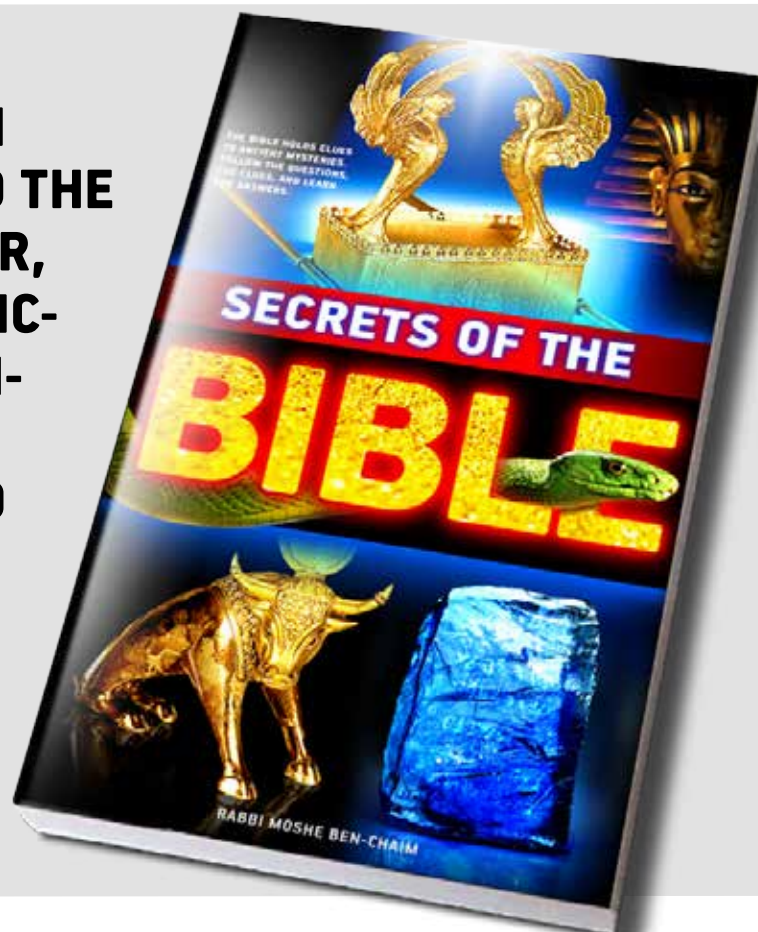
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### THE FIRST TABLET OF THE 10 COMMANDMENTS: LAWS BETWEEN MAN AND GOD:

1. Know God Exists(T)
2. Do Not Commit Idolatry(T)
3. Don't Use God's Name in Vain(S)
4. Keep the Sabbath(A)
5. Honor Your Parents(A)

### THE SECOND TABLET OF THE 10 COMMANDMENTS: LAWS BETWEEN MAN AND MAN:

6. Do Not Kill(A)
7. Do Not Commit Adultery(A)
8. Do No Kidnap(A)
9. Do Not Swear Falsely(S)
10. Do Not Desire a Friend's Wife(T)

deal with man's relationship with God commence with laws governing thought, then speech and finally with action. The order is reversed with the second set of commands, which commences with laws governing action, then speech, and finally thought (see the table at left where T=Thought, S=Speech, and A=Action).

All of man's actions fall into one of these three categories: thought, speech and action. When we say that man's primary relationship with God is via thought, this is because God is not physical. Thus, our relationship with Him cannot be a physical relationship. We relate to God with our thoughts and convictions, and therefore our knowledge of Him is most vital. This explains why the first command – the most vital command – is knowledge of God. From here, the remaining 4 commands decrease in their importance, although they are all fundamentals. However, human relationships are primarily physical. Therefore, the worst crimes are those when bodily harm occurs. Murder is therefore in position 1 of the second Tablet. What one thinks regarding others is of the least importance and therefore, not desiring a friend's wife is last in the second Tablet.

We understand the need for the 10 Commandments as an outline for all Torah laws, as suggested above. However, what consideration demanded such categorization, that the 10 Commandments be separated into two groups; that laws between man and God should precede and laws between man and man; and that each group be ordered by priority? Clearly, God did not simply present Moses with laws. He also gave a precise system. What that

system is can be uncovered by answering these questions.

In general, what is the purpose of categories? If one assumes the law to dress in one's finest clothes for the Sabbath is for self-aggrandizement, he misses the purpose of that law. But if he realizes this law targets a greater respect for the Sabbath, he is now on the path to understand the true purpose. Dressing with one's best clothes on Sabbath intends to generate the greatest respect for the day. Then one must categorize or define the essence of the Sabbath. If one thinks it is merely a day to rest, he again focuses on the self, and not God. But if he understands that the Sabbath intends to recall creation, then one is on the path to recognize the Creator, the true purpose of the Sabbath. Additionally, when one sees that the observance of the Sabbath is placed in the first tablet – laws between man and God – this enhances his appreciation that Sabbath is about God. Thus, proper categorization offers us greater truths.

Defining a framework of 10 commands is the highest level of categorization. Separating between laws that apply to God and to man is another categorization. Prioritizing those two sets of laws is a third category.

To possess the highest level of knowledge concerning any law, one must first know the law's objective: simple performance is clearly inadequate. One must discern if a law targets greater knowledge of God, or if it addresses insecurities through superstitious and idolatrous acts, seeking to secure one's future. Meaning, does the law at hand fall under command #1 or #2 in the set of laws between man and God? Knowing the proper category also

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better directs our studies. If I misconstrue that laws prohibiting alien religious practice exist simply to prevent intermarriage, I forfeit its true purpose. Intermarriage is a social phenomenon. When in fact, laws against alien practices ultimately intend to teach us that God is one. Ideas concerning God are more vital than ideas about man. This explains why laws between man and God precede laws between man and man. As our purpose in life is not primarily social but to engage our intellect and study God, intermarriage is not as vital as idolatry. Furthermore, our social or physical existence is temporary while our souls endure eternally, again displaying how our eternal relationship with God outweighs our temporary relationship with man. And even while alive, many hours of our day we might be isolated from others, while we are never isolated from God.

We now appreciate why laws between man and God precede laws between man and man. We also understand why 10 categories of laws were given, since categorization is vital to arriving at greater knowledge. But why were the 10 Commandments given in a hierarchical order, as quoted by Ibn Ezra above?

Knowledge is built on prerequisite understanding. The simplest example is that without understanding words, we cannot understand a sentence. Without sentences, we cannot understand a story. Similarly, without understanding what God is, command #1, we cannot grasp the prohibition of using God's name in vain, command #3. We must first grasp the gravity of the existence of a First Cause for all existences, before we can appreciate the

respect due to Him. Thus, the commands are not ordered by importance alone, but this order of importance relates to a logical prioritization.

### THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OFFER MANY VITAL LESSONS:

- 1) They validate all post-Sinaitic laws as Divine in origin.**
- 2) Two tablets convey the distinction between two areas of knowledge: truths concerning God, and social laws that serve only to secure societies, so we can all study God.**
- 3) These 10 categories intend to direct us to apply categorization in our studies, so we might attain most accurate truths.**
- 4) The prioritization of one law before the following law teaches that knowledge is a building process: more fundamental knowledge is the foundation for other areas.**

So crucial to acquiring truth, we witness this pattern of study in our greatest thinkers. Maimonides commences his Mishneh Torah with "Fundamentals", and Aristotle commences with his "Categories." God granted man intelligence. He designed our minds to work in a certain manner. He then gave us His Torah, initially with the 10 Commandments, as a tool bearing a design that not only imparts facts, but by its very design, represents the system of acquiring knowledge. ■

[1] Exod. 20:1, just before commencing his commentary on 20:3.



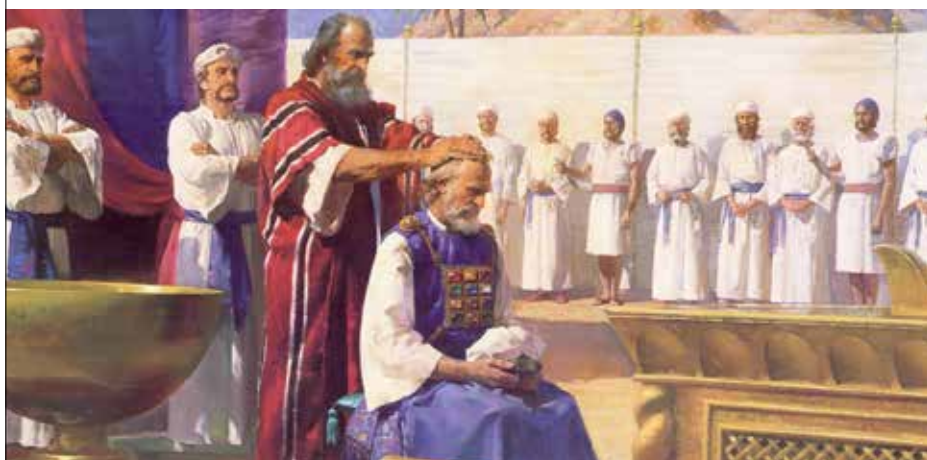


PARSHA

# Assuming the Proper Attitude

TITZAVEH

Rabbi Reuven Mann



**T**his week's parsha, Tetzaveh, continues describing the construction of the Mishkan (Sanctuary). More important than the physical objects were the people chosen to perform its Services. The Divine worship could not be executed by anyone, no matter how righteous or learned.

Hashem Himself determined that there would be an elite group, the Kohanim, (priests) who were designated to guard the Temple and administer its rituals. This honor was bestowed on Aaron and his descendants as their exclusive privilege. The Torah clearly spells out the consequences of a violation of this injunction: "And the stranger who draws near shall die."

This applies to anyone who is not a Kohein, even Moshe Rabbenu. He actually did perform the Service during the Mishkan's eight days of dedication. However, after that point, Aaron and his sons took over, and even the greatest

prophet could not usurp a Kohein.

Our parsha elucidates the special vestments that were prepared for the Kohanim. The ordinary Kohein had an ensemble consisting of four garments, while the Kohein Gadol (Chief Priest) had eight. These were more than just ordinary "uniforms." The Kohein was prohibited from serving without his specific attire.

These garments reflected the true essence of man, his wisdom, purity, and humility. Before entering to serve, the Kohein had to remove his ordinary garments and don his priestly ones. In my opinion, this signifies that he had to undergo a mental and psychological transformation before embarking on his spiritual task.

In the course of an ordinary day, our mental state is constantly changing. We can go from moments of intense and serious concentration to those of lightheartedness and joviality. When the Kohein dressed in his special clothing, he

assumed an attitude of absolute seriousness and concentration on the ideals associated with his spiritual mission. In this vein, it should also be noted that a Kohein who had imbibed alcoholic beverages was prohibited from performing the Divine service.

I believe there is a lesson for all of us in the requirement of priestly garments. There is no question that our behavior is affected by many factors, including our attire. No one is perfect. We all make mistakes and even act foolishly from time to time. The Rabbis say that a person only sins because a spirit of silliness has taken hold of him.

We need to be cognizant that there is a time for "letting our hair down" and a time for sobriety. Before we embark on serious endeavors, we should carefully examine our state of mind and make the necessary "adjustments."

There are times when we act carelessly or say stupid things and suffer the consequences. Looking back, we realize that we entered the situation with a frivolous attitude that was not in line with the gravity of the situation. We need to assess the character of the interaction we are about to confront and assume the appropriate attitude and mental state.

This applies to a professional or social encounter. Many monetary losses, fractured relationships, and vehicular mishaps could have been avoided, had the principals involved been at their mental and emotional "best."

In this, we should emulate the Kohanim. Before we visit our "miniature Sanctuary," the synagogue, we should don the proper attire and be aware that we are about to enter into the presence of Hashem for sincere and heartfelt prayer.

What about socializing? There is a time and place for that, as well. Once the prayers are completed and the kiddush is presented, that is the time to engage in friendly banter. Judaism believes that you can have the spiritual and the social, as long as you approach each situation with the proper orientation. May we merit to do so.

Shabbat shalom. ■

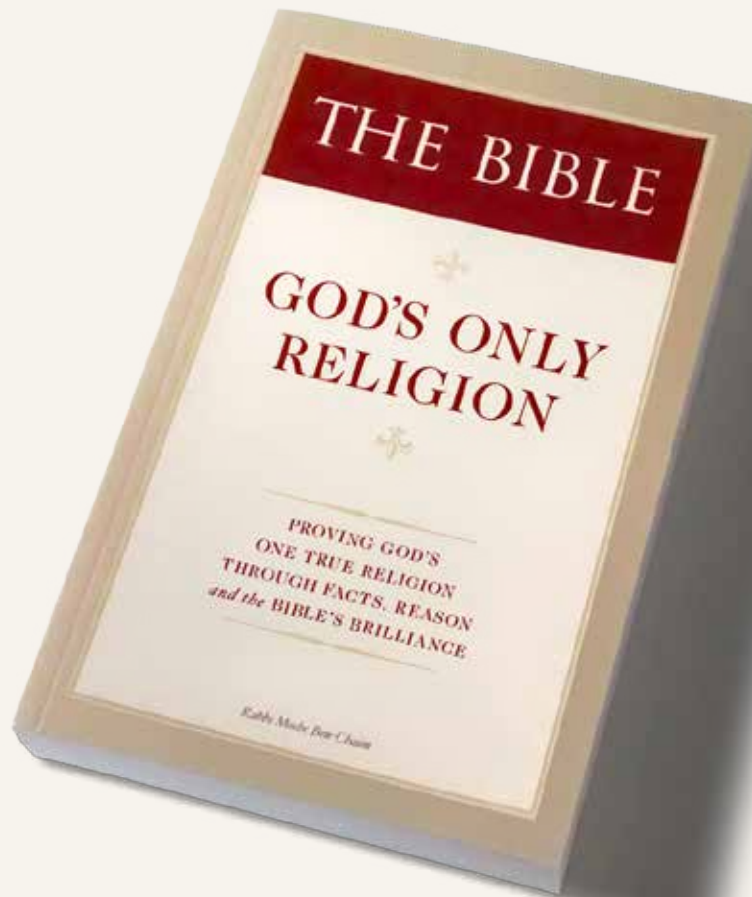


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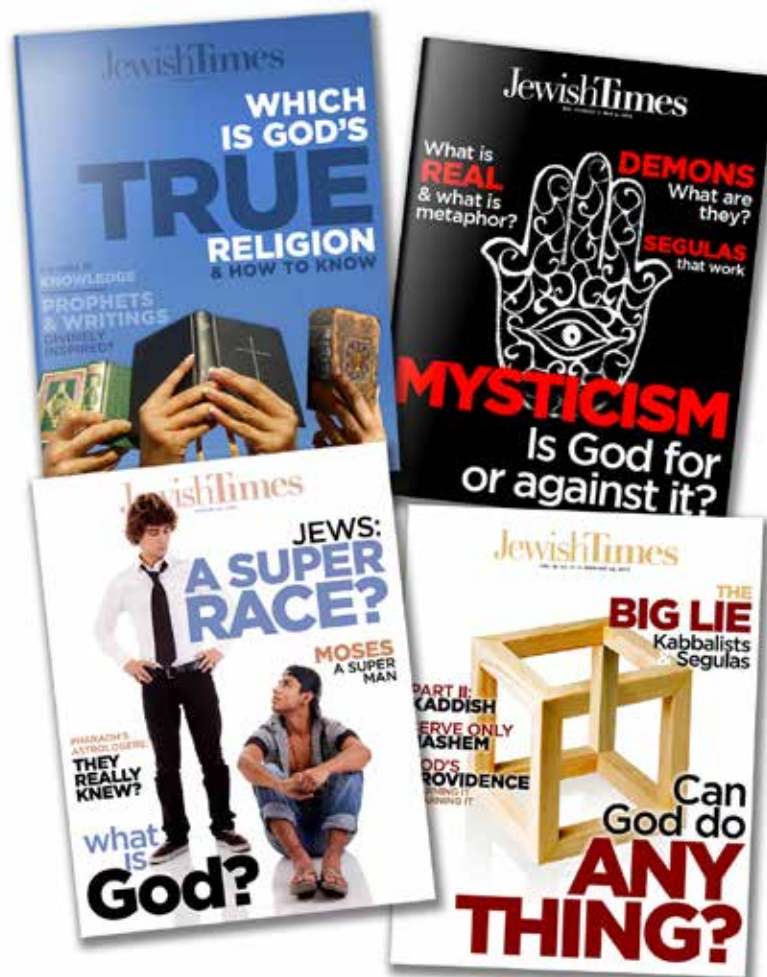
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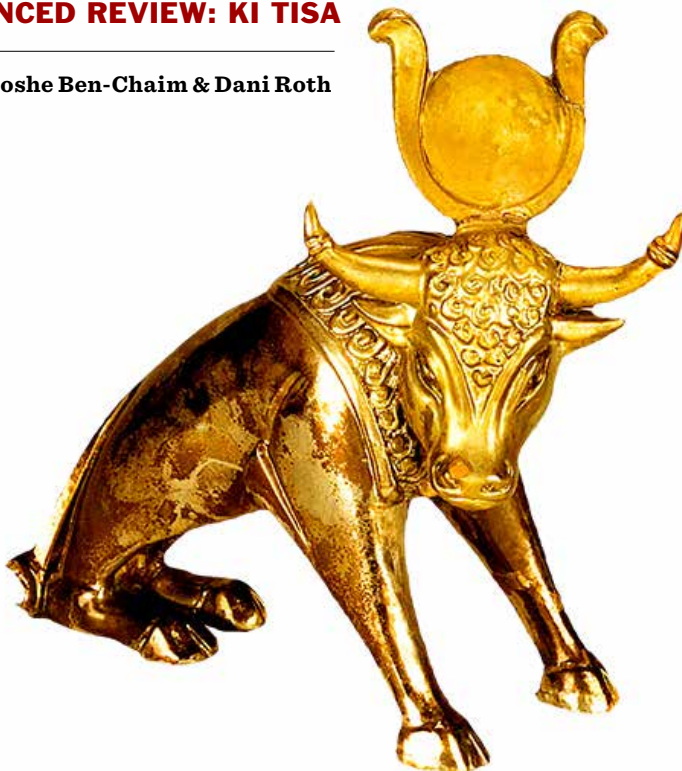
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**PARSHA**

# Punishment: The Gold Calf

**ADVANCED REVIEW: KI TISA**

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim & Dani Roth**



**T**hose who worshipped the Gold Calf could no longer remain part of the Jewish nation, which follows the one God. Violators were killed in one of three manners. If the worshipper was forewarned and had witnesses, death was by the sword. If there were witnesses but no warning, a lesser crime, one died by a plague. And if one was not warned against worship, nor was he or she witnessed worshipping, the method of death was by drinking a mixture of the pulverized Gold Calf and water.[1] Those who sinned would die through this drink; those who did not sin were unharmed.

The Torah does not communicate it, but apparently, Moses knew God wished to reveal the Gold Calf worshippers through this drink. But is this not a strange method? Additionally, why did Moses melt the Gold Calf before grinding it? He could have immediately ground it, as we see his ultimate

intention was to have the Jews drink the gold-dust/water mixture. My close friend and Torah study partner (chavrusa) Dani Roth asked as follows: If Moses sought to expose the Gold Calf as a powerless idol, won't the punishment of death coming through drinking particles of the Calf actually make it appear that the Calf has powers? A great question indeed. Dani and I arrived at the following conclusions.

Melting disfigures the Calf into an amorphous lump of metal. Moses did this first, as he wished to expose the deified Calf as nothing more than a material substance all would agree is unworthy of worship, as it possesses no powers. Forming a calf from a clearly powerless lump of gold cannot grant it powers. Moses' reducing the calf back to a mere lump of metal teaches this lesson. The Jews who worshipped the Calf, did so due to its

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form; they projected imagined powers onto the gold once it was formed into the god of Egypt, a calf. However, the Gold Calf was unveiled as a lie, for it could not defend itself against Moses' melting. Moses' intent was to help the Jews see past their projections, and abandon their belief before they would be punished with death. This way they died as one who repented. This explains why Moses first melted the Calf before grinding it.

Moses had ground the Calf into gold dust, mixed it with water, and demanded the Jews drink the mixture.[2] This does not validate the Gold Calf as possessing any power: God was the one who killed the sinners. Rashi teaches that Moses intended to test the Jews for whom there were no witnesses of their suspected idol worship. If affected by the mixture, this exposed them as idolaters. Apparently, Moses felt many Jews attempted to conceal their idol worship. Rashi teaches that Moses was testing the Jews, just as the waters test the suspected wife (the Sotah). What is this parallel? If a wife was warned by her husband not to be with another man, and she violated his warning, but does not confess her sin, the husband may have the priest give the wife a special

drink. If she did not confess her sin, the drink would kill her. But let us focus on why the wife would not confess. This is because she feels she could keep hidden from her husband the illicit relationship with the other man. The drink would unveil reality, and that she cannot keep this hidden from God. In connection with the Gold Calf too, the Jews are similarly unfaithful: in this case, unfaithful to God. The Jews did not wish to confess their Gold Calf worship unseen by Moses while he was atop Mt. Sinai. Moses therefore forced the Jews to drink, teaching them that what is on their "insides" (their sinful defection from God) cannot be hidden from God. The mixture entering their bodies is a metaphor for an "inner" truth becoming revealed. It ends up there were 2 sins: 1) worshipping the Calf, and 2) denying God's knowledge of their sin. Just as the waters enter the insides of man's body, God "enters" the insides of man's thoughts.

Denying their sin, the Jews wished to maintain their attachment to the Calf. Not admitting a sin is due to the sinner's failure to view his error: he wishes to remain with his sinful belief. This means he believes the

Calf to be a valid object of worship.

Moses desired to help the Jews repent by forcing them to realize that only God knows man's thoughts; not a golden idol. The distinction between those who died from the drink from those who did not, was a clear proof that something other than the Gold Calf controls nature, and more, this Being knows man's thoughts.

In the end, the Gold Calf could not defend itself from being melted, it was exposed as simply metal, and worshipping it met with death, not success. The Jews' esteem for the Calf was a grave error. They ultimately had to answer to the one true Power, the only Being man is to worship, since God alone is the only being who knows man's thoughts, and can answer our prayers. The Jews drank a mixture that distinguished a sinner from an innocent person, teaching this sublime lesson of one Deity that lives, and possesses knowledge of man; enabling Him to reward man or to punish him. ■

[1] Rashi, Exod. 32:20

[2] Exod. 32:20



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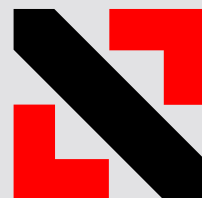
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# Leading Up to the Temple

TITZAVEH

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

**A**s we are aware, many of the Torah portions in the second half of the Book of Shemot deal with the construction of the Tabernacle, the blueprint for the future Temple in the Land of Israel. One of the central ideas in the Tabernacle concerns the manifestation of God's presence, the Shechinah. This is an extremely deep metaphysical idea, and its understanding is beyond the purview of this article. However, as the Torah reiterates this concept of God's dwelling among the Jewish people, it is critical we attempt to grasp the basic significance of this concept. In this week's Torah portion, a debate between two of the foremost commentaries offers an insight into this area of God and His relationship with the Jewish people.

The bulk of chapter 29 deals with the various commandments regarding future sacrifices. The last verses shift themes a bit, discussing the uniqueness that emerges with the building of the Tabernacle/Temple:

*"I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel and I will be their God. They will know that I, the Lord, am their God, Who brought them out of the land of Egypt in order that I may dwell in their midst; I am the Lord, their God (Shemot 29:45-46)."*

The final verse, which expands on the idea of God's "dwelling" among the Jews, appears to establish some type of causal relationship. The exodus from Egypt and the idea of God's presence among the Jews are tied to each other. The question, though, is how.

Ramban takes up this very issue, first citing Rashi. He writes as follows: "[God took the Jews out of Egypt] on the condition

to dwell in their midst." Ramban is bothered by the literal consideration of the exodus as being conditional as such a grammatical method has no precedent in the Torah. Therefore, he offers his own interpretation of the above:

*"It is plausible that [the Torah] is saying 'And they will know, when I dwell in their midst, that I am Hashem their God who took them out of Egypt', for they will know My glory and will believe that it was I who brought them forth from the land of Egypt."*

In explaining the position of Rashi, Ramban elucidates that through the awareness of the presence of God, the Jewish people will believe that God took them out of Egypt. Therefore, the purpose of the construction of the Temple will be the awareness of this idea.

Ramban, though, endorses the view of Ibn Ezra:

*"[the verse means] that I brought them out of the land of Egypt only in order that I dwell in their midst....if so, there is a large secret (sod), since the simple explanation is the presence of God among the Jews is a need for the average person (bedyot), not the need for He who is above..."*

Ramban is therefore suggesting that, in fact, the Temple serves the "need of God".

It is clear according to this opinion that the objective in taking the Jews out of Egypt was to build this Tabernacle/Temple, "allowing" for the presence of God to exist among the people.

The debate, then, between Ramban and Rashi is as follows: Rashi maintains that the objective of the Temple is to reinforce the belief that God took the Jews out of Egypt.

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Ramban believes that the objective of the exodus was to build the Temple.

There are a number of difficulties with each of these opinions. Concerning Rashi, one could ask how the Temple, and with it God's presence, serves as a mechanism to believe God took the Jews out of Egypt. Furthermore, why is this objective not achieved through the commandment to recall the exodus on a daily basis? Turning to Ramban, we are faced with an extremely cryptic final line, referencing the idea of God "needing" this Temple. Of course, such a suggestion, if taken literally, borders on heresy. To imagine God needing something implies He is lacking, and subject to change. However, Ramban does use the above words – how then do we make sense of what he is suggesting?

To help grasp the above debate, we need to realize that when the Tabernacle/Temple was operational, there were clear indicators of the Divine Presence. Whether it be the plume of smoke above the Tabernacle, or the various miracles that were in constant effect within the Temple, it would appear the hashgacha, or Divine Presence, was on full display, so to speak. Therefore, the Temple in some sense served as the vehicle for the expression of the Divine Presence. Understanding this mechanism helps elucidate the debate. According to Ramban, the objective of the exodus was to build the Tabernacle/-

Temple, and this somehow served the "needs" of God. It could be that he is referencing the concept of the unique role the Jews play in this world. On one level, the giving of the Torah carved out the unique nation of Jews. However, we were also given a mission – to be the "light unto the nations". This means setting the proper example through our adherence to the Torah, leading the way for the rest of the world to come to the realization of the Supreme kingship of God. The building of the Temple, and with it evidence of the constant presence of God, served to help bring about this objective. The Jewish people were given the mission of sanctifying the name of God in the world. The Temple would be the medium to assist in bringing this about. This could very well be what Ramban is referring to with the "need of God". A key element to God's plan is the universal recognition of His Kingship. The building of the Temple facilitates this end.

Rashi, however, sees the building of the Temple as a benefit to the Jewish people, rather than a vehicle to sanctifying God to the world. The benefit, as mentioned above, is somehow tied to the reinforced belief that God took us out of Egypt. How does the existence of the Temple, which reflects the reality of the presence of God, bring about this result? An analogy can help explain this idea. All of us have parents. As soon as we

are born, our parent acquires the actual identity of father or mother. The very term is created through the birth of a child, and the unique relationship is thereby consecrated. As the child grows, the relationship between parent and child grows with it, manifesting in a myriad of different ways. However, whenever one says "Mom" or "Dad", they are referring to that very moment when the relationship first came into existence. The same can be said of the idea being presented here concerning the Temple and our belief in God taking us out of Egypt. We are commanded to recall the exodus daily, a constant reminder of where we came from and how God took us to where we are. However, the idea of the Temple is to "just" recognize God, through His manifestation to us. The first time God revealed Himself, via the Divine Presence, to the Jewish people as a nation, was at the time of the exodus. Our relationship with God as a people was created at that very moment. This relationship has grown and evolved, through such events as the giving of the Torah. However, it is critical to always clearly understand the inception of this relationship, the moment where the hashgacha was initiated on a national scale. Therefore, the Temple serves this objective quite nicely.

May we merit the building of the Temple, and the subsequent manifestation of God's presence. ■



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