



In light of God's commanded cherubs on top of the ark, what was so corrupt in the Jews' creation of another gold figure, the calf?

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# JewishTimes

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## Weekly Parsha

# Vayakhel

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: On the first day of the first month you shall erect Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting.” (Shemot 40:1-2)

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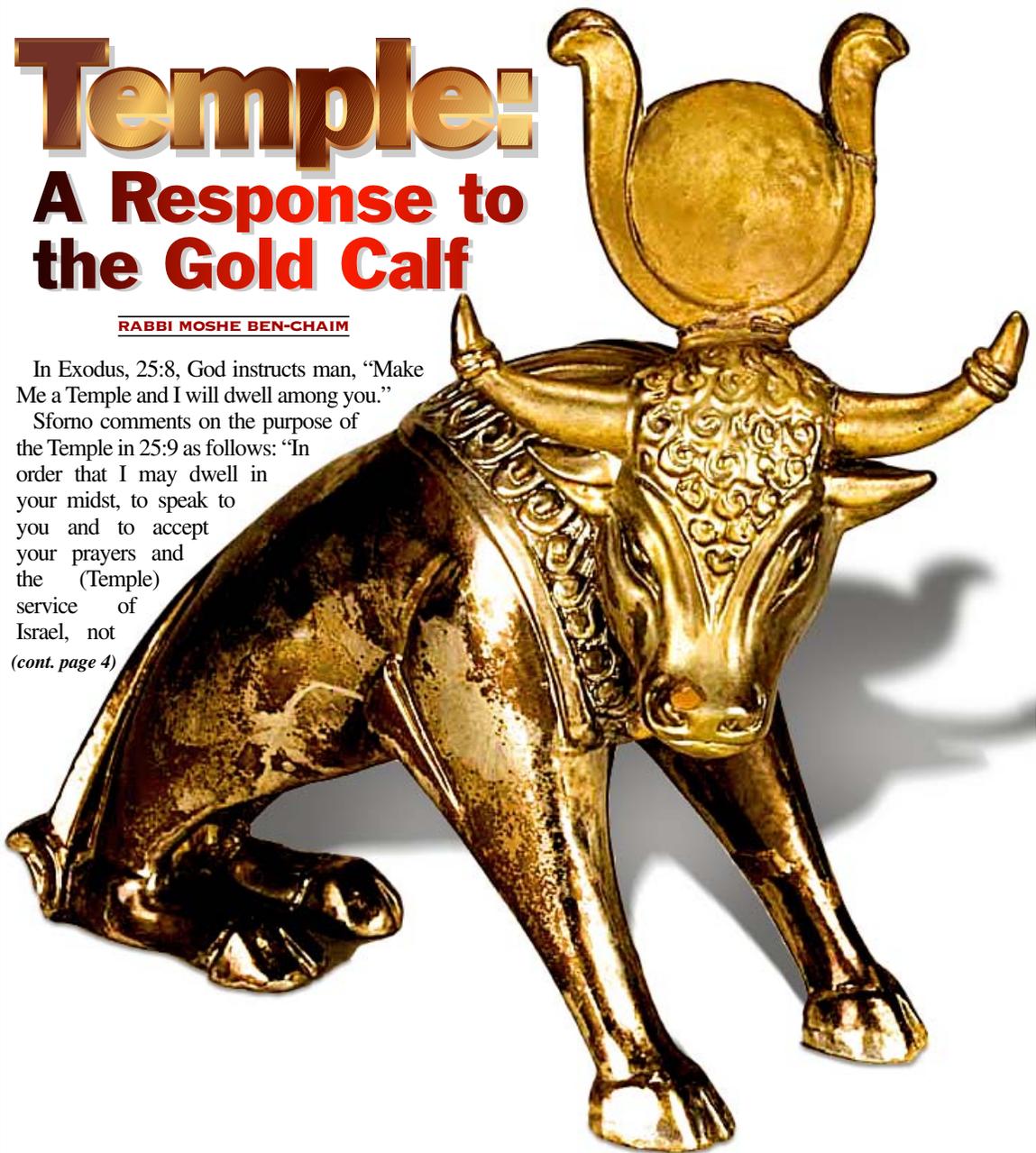
# Temple: A Response to the Gold Calf

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Exodus, 25:8, God instructs man, “Make Me a Temple and I will dwell among you.”

Sforno comments on the purpose of the Temple in 25:9 as follows: “In order that I may dwell in your midst, to speak to you and to accept your prayers and the (Temple) service of Israel, not

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(Vayakhel cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Bnai Yisrael were commanded to construct a sanctuary that would accompany them in the wilderness. The Chumash provides a detailed description of this sanctuary and its contents. In the above passage, Moshe is commanded to assemble and erect the completed sanctuary. The passage employs two terms in referring to this sanctuary. It is referred to it as Mishcan – Tabernacle – and as Ohel Moed – Tent of Meeting. What is the difference between these two terms? Both seem to refer to the single sanctuary! Why are both terms needed?

**“And Moshe erected the Tabernacle, and laid its sockets, and set up its planks, and put in its bars, and reared up its pillars. And he spread the tent over the Tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as Hashem commanded Moshe.”** (Shemot 40:18-19)

This pasuk describes Moshe's activities in erecting the sanctuary. It is clear from this passage that the sanctuary includes three coverings. The Mishcan is composed of a series of curtains. These curtains are spread over a skeletal structure of boards. The curtains create a ceiling or covering over the area within the boards and extend over most of the outer area of the boards. The result is a box-like structure of curtains supported by the skeletal boards. Over the Mishcan is spread a second series of curtains. Our passage refers to this second set of curtains as a tent. These curtains cover the entire surface of the Mishcan. Finally, a third covering is placed over the roof of the tent curtains. According to some opinions, this covering is composed of two layers. Therefore, three layers of coverings are suspended over the inner area of the sanctuary. The curtains of the Mishcan are the inner surface, or ceiling. Lying atop this ceiling are the curtains of the tent. These curtains are covered by a third covering of a single or double layer.

Each of the layers has its own name. The innermost layer is the Mishcan. The middle layer is referred to as the tent. The outer layer is referred to as a covering. What is the significance of these three terms? All three of the terms seem applicable to each layer. The innermost layer is part of the Mishcan. It

creates a tent over the inner area, and it covers this area. The same can be said regarding the middle and outer layers. Yet, the Torah never interchanges these names. The inner layer is always referred to a Mishcan. The middle is the tent. The outer layer is the covering.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno deals with this question. Before we consider his explanation some background information is helpful. The inner curtains are woven. The design of the weave is intricate. Shapes of cherubs are interwoven into the fabric. These cherubs are visible on both sides of the curtains.

Sforno explains that the inner curtains of the sanctuary are referred to as Mishcan because they are designed to surround with cherubs the aron, shulchan and menorah – the ark, table, and candelabra.[1] He further explains that the middle layer of curtains is described as a tent because their purpose is to create a tent over the inner curtains. However, the inner curtains are not referred to as a tent. This is because their purpose is not to serve as a tent. Their purpose is solely to impose the figures of the cherubs above and surrounding the aron, shulchan, and menorah.[2]

In these comments, Sforno is explaining the meaning of the term Mishcan and tent. Sforno is proposing that these two terms have very different meanings. The term 'tent' refers to a structure designed to create an inner space. It demarks the inner space, separates it, and shields it from the surrounding. The term 'Mishcan' refers to walls and a ceiling that are not designed to create a space. Instead, they are designed to create a specific appearance or environment within a space.

An analogy will be helpful. Consider a house. A house has outer walls and a roof. These outer walls and the roof are designed to separate the space within from the outside and to protect this space from the elements outside. These outer walls may be made of brick, stone, wood, or some other substance. The roof will be composed of shingle, tile or some other substance. The substance will be selected to correspond with the design and function of the outer walls and roof. They will not be composed of plaster or wood paneling. These materials are not appropriate for the function of these outer walls and roof. But plaster is

(continued on next page)

appropriate for the inner walls and ceiling. The inner walls and ceiling are not designed to protect the space from the outside. They create the living area within. Their appearance, form, and texture should complement this space and give it character. In fact, we use different terms to refer to the overhead surfaces on the outside and inside. The outside surface is a roof; the inner surface is a ceiling. These two terms communicate their different functions. Although we do not have different terms to refer to the inner and outer walls, these two surfaces are distinguished in function and design in the same manner as a roof and ceiling.

Sforno is suggesting that the inner Mishcan curtains are designed to surround with cherubs the essential components of the sanctuary. They provide character and environment. In other words, they create an environment of surrounding cherubs within which the aron, shulchan, and menorah are placed. The middle layer of curtains – the tent – is designed to separate and protect the inner space from the outer area.

In order to fully appreciate the meaning of these comments, it is important to visualize an outcome of the design of the sanctuary. The inner curtains – the Mishcan – include the cherub figures. However, these figures are only visible to an observer standing inside the sanctuary and looking overhead. The figures woven into the curtains that hung down to form walls are not visible from the inside or outside of the sanctuary. On the inside, they are obscured by the boards that hold up the curtains. On the outside, they are completely covered by the tent curtains that descend over them. It seems odd that the essential feature of the Mishcan curtains – the cherubs – are only visible to a person inside looking up!

Sforno is suggesting that although these cherubs are not readily visible from within or without, they nonetheless are the essential feature of the environment of the Mishcan. They create an environment of surrounding cherubs. Their effect-- or the creation of this environment -- is not dependent on their visibility. Their existence as figures woven into the fabric of the curtains creates the required environment.

Now, we can understand the term used to refer to the outer curtains. These curtains are placed atop the roof of the tent. They are referred to as a covering. The term 'covering' has a very literal meaning in our context. These curtains are not designed to create a



space or to create an environment. They serve as a covering to protect the surface of the middle tent curtains.

Based on Sforno's comments, we can appreciate the lack of interchangeability of the terms 'Mishcan', 'tent', and 'covering'. The inner Mishcan curtains cannot be referred to as a tent. They are not designed to create an inner space and separate and protect the inner space from the outer area. Neither are these curtains a covering. The middle curtains are a tent. They do not create the inner environ-

ment. They are not a covering. The outermost covering of curtains is not a tent. Also, they do not create an inner space and they do not create an environment.

**“And you shall make the planks for the Mishcan of acacia wood, upright.” (Shemot 26:15)**

As noted above, the Mishcan curtains are supported by a skeletal structure of planks. Our passage explains that these planks are to be placed upright. Each plank is placed immediately adjacent to its neighbor. In this manner a continuous surface is created. The commentaries explain that the planks must be upright. They cannot be positioned horizontally upon one another.[3] This is an interesting requirement. It would seem that whether placed upright to create a continual surface or placed horizontally upon one another, the same outcome is achieved. Why must the planks be placed in an upright position?

According to Sforno, we can understand this requirement. These planks are not intended to create an inner wall. The inner wall of the Mishcan is the curtains of the Mishcan. The sole function of these planks is to support the curtains. In other words, the planks support the curtains; the curtains do not cover and adorn the planks. The positioning of the planks communicates their function. Horizontally placed planks placed atop one another creates the impression of an inner wall. Such an inner wall contradicts the function of the Mishcan curtains. It is these curtains that create the inner environment of the Mishcan. The upright position of the planks contributes to communicating their purpose – the support of the Mishcan curtains.

Now, our original question is easily answered. The terms Mishcan and Ohel Moed both refer to the sanctuary. However, these terms refer to different aspects of the structure. Mishcan is the innermost structure. The innermost curtains create this structure. Ohel Moed – tent of meeting – refers to the middle curtains that create the tent within, where the Mishcan is situated. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 26:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 26:7.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 26:15.

# Temple: A Response to the Gold Calf

as the matter was prior to the Golden Calf, as was stated, (Exod. 20:21) "In every place that you mention My name, I will come to you and bless you." Sforno says that prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the statement in Yisro, "In every place that you mention My name..." teaches that God's relationship to man was that anyone, anywhere, would have his prayers recognized by God. But subsequent to the Golden Calf, a new system was demanded, "In order that I may dwell in your midst, to speak to you and to accept your prayers and the (Temple) service of Israel..."

Sforno teaches a startling concept; the Temple may have had no objective need, but was a concession in response to the Golden Calf. If the Jews hadn't sinned with that Calf, the structure of Temple, the ark, the menorah and all the vessels might not have been commanded, according to Sforno. "Make Me a Temple and I will dwell among you" teaches that after the Calf, without the Temple, God will not dwell with us. One might suggest this is an impossible theory, as the Temple appears in the Torah before the sin of the Calf. But Rashi addresses this in Exodus 31:18, "There is no chronology in the Torah; the Golden Calf preceded the command of the work of the Temple by many days..." Rashi again makes mention (Deut. 10:1) that it was only on Moses' descent from Mount Sinai did God first command him on the work of the Tabernacle. It was at the time of his descent that the Jews had already sinned with the Golden Calf.

What was the precise sin of the Golden Calf, and how does the institution of the Tabernacle and Temple rectify the problem? Sforno also teaches that prior to the Calf, one's prayer was readily noticed by God, afterwards it was not. This needs an explanation.

A few other relationships are seen between the sin of the Calf and the Temple/Tabernacle, which supports Sforno's explanation. Those who sinned with the Calf were not allowed to serve in the Temple. For this reason, the entire tribe of the



Levites who abstained from the sin of the calf merited Temple service. One might suggest a simple explanation; idolaters are prohibited to officiate in God's service. But perhaps there is more to this command. Additionally, no gold was used in the service of the Holy of Holies, due to the reason that "the accused cannot be come the defender". That is, the accused - the gold (representative of the Gold Calf) cannot be part of man's service seeking atonement. One does not mention his gravest sins when seeking pardon for his offenses. Similarly, the Torah teaches that the High Priest's garb including gold must not be worn when entering the Holy of Holies. Prior to entering, he must change into his white garments. Again we see a tie between Temple law and the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Torah teaches that the Jews gave their jewelry for the creation of the Calf, (Exod., 32:3) "And they removed, all the people, the rings of gold, that were in their ears, and they brought it to Aaron." We also learn that the Tabernacle was created from the peoples' donation of Terumah, "...from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take my Terumah". Is there any parallel between these two acts of giving, that the Torah wished to record both?

Another verse in response to the sin of the Calf reads "And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the 'Tent of Meeting', and it would be that anyone seeking God would, go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp." (Exodus 33:7) This verse teaches that prior to the sin, God communicated with Moses within the camp. But after the sin, this close relationship could no longer be. Moses therefore demonstrated this by his removal of his tent to outside the camp of the nation. What may we learn from this act of moving the tent? Isn't it clearly stated that whoever sought God would exit the camp? So God was still found. What purpose is there in distancing the Tent of Meeting from the people?

To clarify, Sforno is not suggesting that without the sin of the Golden Calf, there would be no institution of sacrifice. Sacrifice dates back to the first men. Adam, his children, Noach, Abraham and so many others sacrificed long before the Golden Calf. To clarify, Sforno is suggesting that the institution of Temple alone is due to the sin of the Calf, but he agrees that sacrifice always existed. So our main question is how the Temple addresses the problem of the Golden Calf sin.

How do we begin to answer this main question? The first step would be to understand the sin. We should look for an expression of the sin exhibited by the sinners. This would make for accurate analysis. God's own words describing the Jews' precise flaw would provide an even better clue. Fortunately in this case, we have both.(1) The mixed multitude said about the Calf, (Exod. 32:4) "These are your gods Israel, who took you up from Egypt." Later, after the giving of the tablets to Moses, God says to him concerning the Jews' worship of the Calf, (Exod. 32:8)"They have turned quickly from the path which I have commanded them, they made for themselves a molten calf, and they prostrated to it and sacrificed to it and they said, 'These are your gods Israel, who took you up from Egypt.'" God purposefully repeated this statement in His Torah, "These are

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your gods Israel, who took you up from Egypt.” I believe this is to point us to the Jews’ precise error.

### The Sin

God is teaching us that the Jews’ sin was due to their wish to relate to God in some tangible form. Ramban and Or Hachaim dismiss the notion that the Jews thought the Calf to be God. Ramban said, “no fool would say the gold that was in their ears is what brought them up out of Egypt.” (Exod. 32:4) Ramban explains that the Jews did not say the Calf was God, but that this Calf was some force of God.<sup>(2)</sup> Or Hachaim says on “they turned aside”, that they violated “you shall not make intermediaries.” Both Ramban and Or Hachaim agree that the Jews admitted to God’s existence, and that this Calf was not viewed by the Jews as God. The Jews’ error was their belief that the Golden Calf was related to forces which effect reality.

Consider the Jews’ words when they felt Moses was no longer returning, “...Moses, the man, who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has happened to him.” Why did they mention Moses “the man”? This statement too points to the Jews’ inability to relate to God as He is, above the physical, “metaphysical”. They became attached to the “man” of Moses. When they miscalculated Moses’ stay on Mt. Sinai, they were confronted with a false belief that Moses was gone. They feared not having some tangible leader, so they created the Golden Calf and said this was responsible some how for their exodus. They desired something physical to relate to. This is not tolerated in Judaism, and many have been killed (Samuel I, 6:19(3)) because of their projection of physical qualities onto God. Judaism demands above all else that we do not project any physical nature onto God, (Deut. 4:15) “And guard yourselves exceedingly for your lives, for you did not see any form on the day God spoke to you on Horeb (Sinai) from amidst flames.” The Torah stresses how fundamental it is to know that God is not physical. We saw no physical objects when we heard God speak to us on Sinai.

Maimonides third principle of his 13 Principles reads:

“Principle III. The Denial of Corporeality in Connection with God.

This is to accept that this Oneness that we have mentioned above (2) is not a body and has no strength in the body, and has no shape or image or relationship to a body or parts thereof. This is why the Sages of blessed memory said with regards to

heaven there is no sitting, nor standing, no awakeness, nor tiredness. This is all to say that He does not partake of any physical actions or qualities. And if He were to be a body then He would be like any other body and would not be God. And all that is written in the holy books regarding descriptions of God, they are all anthropomorphic. Thus said our great Rabbis of blessed memory The Torah spoke in man’s language (i.e. using human terms so that man would have some understanding). And the Rabbis have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third pillar and is attested to by the verse “For you saw no image” meaning that you did not see an image or any form when you stood at Sinai because as we have just said He has no body nor power of the body.”

### Temple: Response to Sin

Perhaps now we may answer how the Temple addresses the sin of the Golden Calf. The Temple had many unique qualities and vessels. But most central was the fact that it was constructed of two rooms; a Holies, and a Holy of Holies. In this second room, no man was allowed to enter, save the high priest on Yom Kippur, and even then, only with smoking incense, a veil. Sinai too was accompanied by smoke and darkness. God created His “appearance” as cloud. In all cases, we are taught that there is an impenetrable veil - cloud - between God and man. “For man cannot know me when alive.” (Exod. 33:20) Man must accept his shortcomings, his inability to know God. We have but five senses of perception. All that cannot be perceived through these senses is completely out of our range of knowledge. In a dark room, vision does not function, as vision requires light. God is not physical: similarly, He cannot be perceived by human sensation, which requires physical stimulation.

The sin of the Golden Calf was man’s futile attempt to grasp what man cannot grasp. When man assumes there is a sensory connection between God and the physical, man forfeits his right to existence. His existence is worthless, as all he knows or learned in his life, to him, stems from an imagined physical god, not the true metaphysical God. His knowledge is completely inaccurate. His life is wasted due to his incorrect notions of God. He deserves death. Therefore, those who worshiped the Calf were killed, just as those who looked into the Ark when it was returned by the Philistines.(Samuel I, 6:19) In both cases, man assumed something physical in connection with God. In truth, the underlying flaw is man’s overestimation in his own knowledge. In both cases the sinners felt all must be within their grasp, including

God. They could not accept human inability.

We mentioned that the Temple has two rooms, one of which is off limits. The Temple attempts to teach man through man’s distance from a certain room, that man must admit complete ignorance about the nature of God’s existence. Even more, man must not even try to approach any understanding of God’s existence - it is impossible for our minds to apprehend, and is “off limits”. We cannot know Him. A location, the Holy of Holies, coupled with the command never to enter, opposes man’s assumption that God is approachable, and teaches that in fact, we cannot fathom God’s existence. What we do know concerning God, as Maimonides explains, is what He is not. We can only have negative knowledge of God. That is, we know He is not physical, He has no emotions, He occupies no place, He is not “in” this world, etc. The Rabbis say, “He is the place of the world, and the world is not His place.” This means that God is the “place” or source of the world, but He occupies no place. He is not physical.

Prior to the sin, the people had not demonstrated a false notion of God. Therefore, as Sforno states, in any place they called to God, He responded. This is because they were calling on the true God. However, subsequent to their sin, they corrupted their view of God, and He therefore would not answer. They did not call to “Him”, but to an imagined idea of a false god. An imagination cannot answer someone’s call. Moses’ removal of his Tent of Meeting was a demonstration that there was a separation between God and the people after the sin of the Golden Calf.

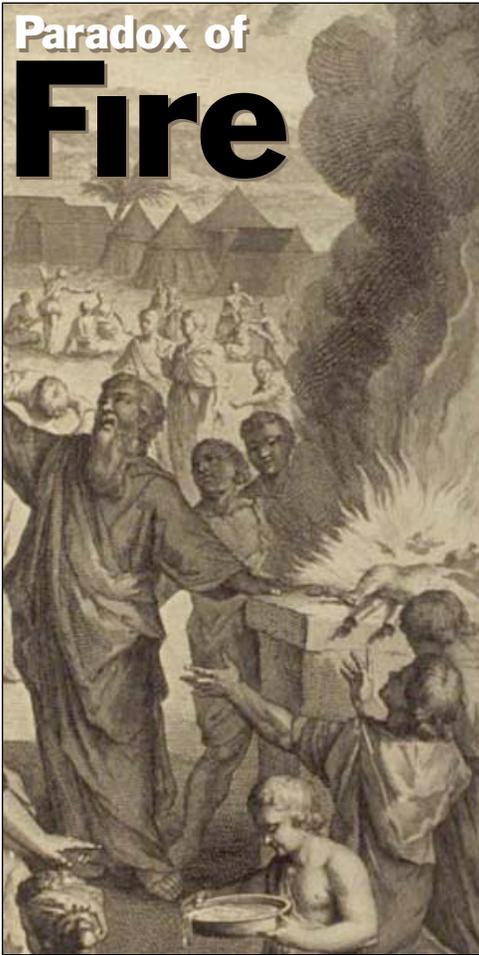
Perhaps we can also answer why the Temple was constructed from free donations. Such an act demonstrates that the donor is not attached to the precious metals, gems, and materials, but he gives freely. In fact, his focus on physical property is replaced by an act of following a Divine command, to build a Temple to God. Such a donation enables man to remove his grip on the physical, which the sinners could not accomplish. Man is also perfected by this display of following God’s commands, not man’s own fantasies. ■

(1) But even the Jews’ sin is recorded by God’s divine words, so in fact, both are God’s clues for our study.

(2) Either notion is a corruption in our view of God, and is prohibited.

(3) The Jews looked into the ark upon its return from the Philistines. This demonstrated their belief that there is something to be seen in relationship to God. They harbored a notion that God is connected with the physical. A large amount of Jews were punished there with death by God’s hand.

## Paradox of Fire



**RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN**

After Moses sternly warns the Jewish people to refrain from forbidden labors on the Sabbath, he singles out one of these labors for special mention (35:3). “Do not light a fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day.”

Why is the prohibition against lighting a fire (hav’arah) extracted from the collective mention of the 39 forbidden labors?

The Talmud (Shabbos 70a) cites two views. According to one, it is meant to be a paradigm to show that each individual labor is considered its own distinct violation (hav’arah lechalek yatzah). According the other view, the differentiation of labors is derived elsewhere. The prohibition against lighting a fire sets it apart from the other labors and downgrades it from being a capital offense (hav’arah lelav yatzah).

What are the underlying principles of this dispute?

Let us first consider the view that hav’arah lechalek yatzah. Why would ignition be singled out as the paradigm for a self-standing forbidden labor? Is it because ignition is the archetypal labor? If this is so, then it would be diametrically opposed to the view that lelav yatzah that sees ignition as less severe and hence somehow inferior to other labors. This is highly unlikely, since the Talmud eschews sevaros hafuchos, diametrically opposed views; a dispute is more likely to center over shades of gray than black and white.

According Rabbeinu Bachya and other commentators, the forbidden labors mirror the creative activities by which God created the universe, so to speak. Accordingly, our cessation from labor on the Sabbath is a potent reminder that God rested from creation on the seventh day. Elsewhere, however, the Midrash states fire was first created by Adam at the conclusion of the first Sabbath, one day after he himself was created. Ignition, then, is the one forbidden labor representing an activity specific to mankind that does not reflect any of God’s acts in creation.

At the conclusion of Creation, the Torah records (Genesis 2:3), “And He sanctified [the Sabbath], because He ceased from all His labors that God created to do.” Our sages comment that the verb “to do” (laasos) refers to the work God left unfinished for mankind to complete. Man, through his moral choices, may become a partner in creation by causing it to resonate with the knowledge of God; it is within his power to unleash or actualize the potential of creation. Ignition, which is essentially the release of the potential energy locked in the chemical bonds of matter, is the labor most closely associated with the specific purpose and creative power of mankind.

We can now discern, as did the Sages of the Talmud, two singular and parallel properties in the forbidden labor of ignition. On the one hand, it represents the teleological aim of all the acts of creation. As such, it is the archetypal labor; the first view sees it as representative of all the other labors (lechalek yatzah). On the other hand, it is the one labor that, according to the Midrash, does not reflect God’s handiwork; it is rather man’s specific labor. From this perspective, it is inferior to the other labors; the second view considers its particular mention as an indication that it alone is not a capital offense (lelav yatzah).

### **Pekudei: Monotonous Repetition**

Eighteen times in this parashah, the Torah assures us that “the people of Israel did everything God commanded Moses, so did they do.” What is the purpose of this repetitive emphasis on obedience? Why we have thought otherwise?

This parashah also raises questions about the divine “literary style” of the Author. Parashas Terumah and Parashas Vayakhel already describe the plan of the construction of the Mishkan in painstaking detail. Why then was it necessary to repeat all the details with regard to the actual construction and installation in Parashas Pekudei? Why wasn’t it enough to write that everything was done according to plan?

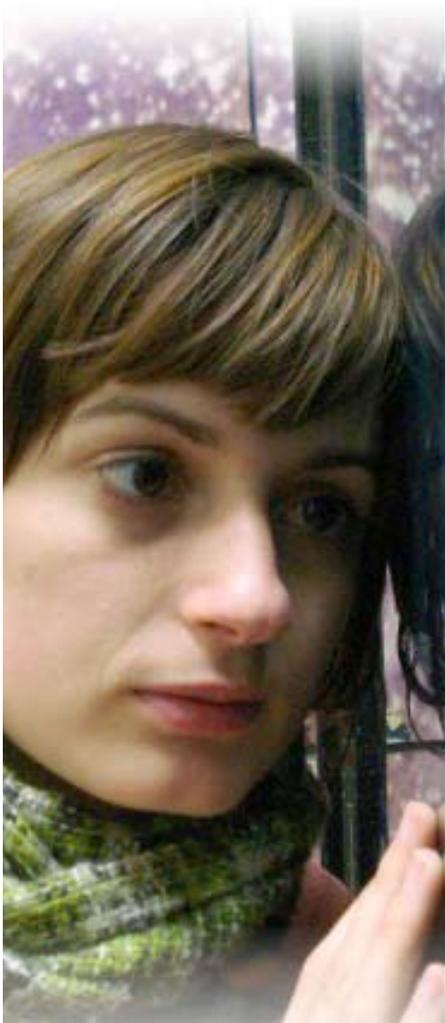
The same questions arise in Parashas Naso (Numbers 7:11 ff) regarding the sacrifices of the tribal princes following the construction of the Mishkan. On twelve successive days, one after the other of the tribal princes brought their offerings, all of which were identical, yet the Torah expends seventy-eight verses to describe them twelve times. Why the monotonous repetition? Why didn’t the Torah simply describe the first day’s offering and then tell us that all the rest were identical?

It is the nature of a human being to want to feel special and outstanding, especially in an enterprise of eternal significance. It would have been natural for anyone bringing an offering or donation to the Mishkan to seek some individual expression, to do something that distinctly identified him as the donor and set him apart.

Nonetheless, as the eighteen repetitive verses demonstrated, the Jewish people disregarded their own inclinations and followed God’s command faithfully. They were not trying to mold their religious worship to their own desires and personalities, but rather, they were clinging to the divine instruction. The tribal princes as well sought no expression of their own individuality in their offerings, as the seventy-eight repetitive verses demonstrated.

The Torah, in its inimitable style, allows us to experience a bit of the greatness of these people. If we are already impatient with the repetitiveness after a few minutes reading these verses, we can well imagine the feelings of those whose obedient acts allowed for no creativity or expression of their individuality. And they still complied wholeheartedly and joyously with the divine will. ■

# Self- afflicted wounds



**And those of us who see others afflicting themselves in any manner, it's up to us to help them acknowledge and correct their problems.**

In this sensual life, our attention naturally focusses on the external world, and competing with others. That becomes our only relaiity. Unfortunately, this obscures us from contemplating ourselves, our errors in judgment, and how we act on our unchecked, emotional tendencies and distorted views. Ignoring the inner world, we often ruin or impede what could be a happy life. If however, we are objective, and disregard our egos, we will find faults with ourselves.

And if corrected, we will no longer be our own worst enemy. If the Jews who witnessed the 10 Plagues, the Red Sea, and other miracles could sin with the Gold Calf, certainly we can, and do make errors...and some are very severe. If you see your life is not fulfilling, or is full of problems, seek a wise person to help you determine if what you seek is truly worthwhile, and if it is, ask him/her to help you uncover your errors that halt your progress. King Solomon was one of the wisest men, he said "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you". This should be our response when our flaws are uncovered. So if you are unhappy with any aspect of your life, waste no time: invite the analysis of a wise counselor or Rabbi, don't be defensive, and literally "love" the constructive advice you receive...and act.