

# *Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*<sup>1</sup>

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS:     **Torah Ki Tisa:**                     **Exodus 32:1-35**  
                  **Haftarah:**                               **I Kings 18:17-24**  
                  **B'rit Chadasha:**                   **I Corinthians 8:8-9**

*... he cast the tablets out of his hands, and broke them ....*  
[Exodus 32:19b]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 119:153-159;

This Week's Amidah prayer focus is the *Avot*, the *Prayer of the Fathers*

*Vayikahel ha-am al-Aharon vayomru elav* – and the people gathered themselves together before Aharon and said to him ... *kum aseh-lanu elohim asher yelchu l'faneinu* - come/arise and make/form/shape for us elohim that will travel before our faces ....  
Exodus 32:1a.

Spring has turned to summer in the desert. The heat, the sand fleas, and the dust storms are getting more and more intense every day. Everyone is irritable. Selfishness is raising its ugly head – and taking its usual ugly toll. Fleshly urges, appetites, and lusts are spiking. Bad attitudes are manifesting. Vain imaginations are flying. Tongues are wagging. Ethnocentric, ideological, political, and economic class tensions are flaring. Deep psychological wounds left over from the physical, verbal, and emotional abuse we endured while enslaved in Egypt are resurfacing. Unresolved abandonment/betrayal issues are triggering. And the only thing any human being other than you, Moshe, seem to be able to offer us are ‘*moral principles*’ birthed out of the human pseudo-intellect (*i.e.* ‘demonic wisdom’) on the one hand, and *pagan-influenced forms of religious gathering protocols* that are long on smoke and mirrors, high on hype, and full of fleshly emotion but short on either substance or staying power on the other hand. We have had no fresh revelation to inspire us in what seems like forever. Oh, Moshe - where have you gone? We have not heard from you in over a month now. We miss having a leader who actually knows the Holy One personally and communes with Him face-to-Face every day. We miss having a real visionary to keep us enthused, focused, disciplined, and aligned with the *Am Segulah*, *Mamleket Kohanim*, and *Goy Kadosh* elements of our King's ‘Great Nation’ blueprint. Your people – the flock you have been called to shepherd - are getting restless. Our souls cry out for living water - and you are the only one we know who traffics in that commodity.

Aharon and Chur were left in charge, and they are nice guys – but they have zero

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vision, zero inspiration, and zero spiritual ‘it’ factor. The Holy One does not seem as close to them as He does to Moshe. From Moshe’s mouth the Torah sounded like *a refreshing, awe-inspiring river of living waters*; from Aharon and Chur’s lips the same words sound like a cold, lifeless *backwash of sin and death*. In Moshe’s absence, distraction, deception, misinformation, speculation, and vain imagination have been allowed to rush in and fill the revelation/inspiration void. Everyone in the camp seems to have reverted to just doing whatever seems right in his own eyes. Moshe, where are you when your people need you most?

### ***Meanwhile, Back on the Mountaintop***

Unbeknownst to anyone in the camp, Moshe is living the ultimate dream. He has been taken up into, and is being given a guided tour of, the *Beauty Realm* of the Heavens. The Holy One is showing him what He wants us to spend the rest of our time at Sinai building for Him. Forgive the prophet if not once since he got the call to ascend into the glory cloud has he given the slightest thought to what was going on in the camp below. He left Aharon and Chur in charge; surely they can keep a lid on things for a few days ... right?

Alas, any illusions Moshe had about Aharon and Chur’s leadership abilities are about to be shattered. The inspiring symphony of other-worldly worship in the courts and chambers of the Great King is about to be drowned out by the clanging gong of earthbound souls wallowing in their own filth. Revelation downloads from Heaven are about to take a backseat to the base physical urges, fleshly appetites, hyperventilating emotions, and vain, pseudo-intellectual imaginations of mortal men trying their hand at the heady mind-games of theology and sociology. Do you know what that means? It means that it is ‘golden calf’ time.

### ***There’s Gonna Be Heartache Tonight***

“*Make/form/shape gods for us*”, the people who insisted on gathering/congregating on their own accord demanded of Aharon. “*Give us some kind of physical image we can actually see with our eyes, and in front of which we can put on airs of piety and engage in flesh-appealing religious-looking stuff like we saw people doing back in Egypt*”, we implored. *Oy veh!* After everything the Holy One has done for us, are we really going to go dumpster-diving down in this wormhole? After experiencing all the signs and wonders that resulted in the Exodus; after walking dry-shod through the waters that the Holy One parted for us; after hearing the Creator of the Universe’s Wonderful Voice speak the Ten Essential Words of Bridal Identity over us – are we really going to design our own form of religion, set our own agenda, and just make up stuff on the fly like the pagans do? Yes, that is exactly what we are going to do. In every generation. In every community. In every assembly. This is something we just have to get out of our system. This is what we look like at our worst, when we still have a form of

godliness but have lost the inspiration of the Holy One's Presence and Persona. Call it spring fever. Call it the summertime blues. Call it temporary insanity. Call it burn out. Call it rebellion. But whatever you call it, get ready for the heartache that inevitably follows.

First our camp will be rocked by Aharon's revisiting *the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. Then every household among us will be traumatized by Moshe's real-life re-enactment of *the bloody massacre Ya'akov's ten eldest sons wrought upon the men of Shechem*.

Ever faithful to His Covenant with Avraham, the Holy One will make sure we get through this crisis as a nation. He will do what He does so well, taking whatever mess we give Him, and working all things together for good. He will make sure that we and the people we are called to serve actually wind up being better for this experience in the long run. The Holy One, being eternal and omniscient, knows that this is the ultimate result of absolutely everything that ever happens in the world that offends or hurts someone. We, however, being mortal and hypersensitive to the pseudo-intellectual opinion and fleshly emotion manipulation power of each 'moment' we live, do not have a clue. We think the pain or pleasure of the moment is all there is. We forget that we are part of something much greater than our pseudo-intellect can conceive or our fleshly emotions can comprehend. The Holy One knows better. He has Redeemer's Eyes, with 'far-beyond-the-immediate-crises' lenses. He knows that the growth that is going to come about in us, as progenitors of a great counter-culture movement that will span millennia, will be well worth any trauma we experience – or cause. He knows that the intense shock, pain, suffering, and bereavement those who wind up being in the wrong place at the wrong time over the next few days of earth time is just an unfortunate but necessary cost of raising up a covenant nation out of a bunch of people who have never known any way other than sensuality, sentimentality, and the idolatry of abstract thought, symbol, image, and ritual.

***The Inclination of the Fallen Human Heart to Favor that Which is Visible, Sensual, and Temporal Over that Which is Unseen, Spiritual, and Eternal***

Life in this age consists of a collection of moments. Most of the moments are quite mundane. Others are *pregnant with potential* – either for *extreme growth* or for *epic disaster*. While we could always benefit from the counsel of a Good Shepherd/Brilliant Rabbi/Wonderful Counselor, we especially need such guidance in approaching and navigating through life's *pregnant-with-potential moments*. Such moments – which could change the course of many more lives than our own - call for calmness, for patience, for wisdom, for vision, for clarity, and for gravitas. Alas, such moments usually slip up on us unawares and catch us by surprise. They also seem to come with a good bit of 'counsel of the ungodly' whispering in our

ear, telling us to do something that seems reasonable at the time – but which will result in disaster. If only Messiah would come in the flesh! If only the Holy One would send an angel to stand with us in such moments and say: *“Tread softly now. Choose your next words very, very carefully! Even watch your facial expressions! Lives and destinies, and very possibly the fate of generations and bloodlines – not to mention the future of all of your important relationships - hinge on your next word and deed. Ask yourself: what would the Holy One have you do?”* Oh wait, we don’t need an angel in such moments, do we? That is what the Torah is for, isn’t it? Torah teaches us how to think, and see and approach situations, like He does. But alas, there is a *learning curve* – and we are all in it!

Aharon is just beginning the climb the arc of the learning curve. So, for that matter, is Moshe. And so, Dear Reader, are you and I. So what are we to do? The writer of Hebrews says of Messiah: ***Though He was a son, He learned sh’ma-ing by the things He endured.*** Hebrews 5:8. Ah, yes - *sh’ma-ing!* *Sh’ma-ing* the Words of our Creator-King – that’s the ticket! That is the only way to successfully navigate through the many ‘fruit of the tree of knowledge’ moments that we face.

### ***Meanwhile, Up On Top of the Mountain, in the “Beauty Realm”***

Is Moshe ‘up for this’? He has been in the manifest presence of the Holy One, hanging out with Perfection in the Beauty Realm, for forty days and nights. Has he forgotten how to dwell among mortals? Can he handle the re-entry? Will he provide the calm, wise, steady counsel we need? Or will he

The Holy One does not intend to send Moshe back to *ha-olam hazeh* – *i.e.* the temporal, current world/age of vanity - empty-handed. He has entrusted a very, very valuable gift from His Beauty Realm to Moshe, that the prophet is to take with him and deliver to us. Hence the last line we read in yesterday’s aliyah was:

***Vayiten el-Moshe kechaloto l’daber ito b’har Sinai -***

*And he entrusted to Moshe the complete download/discourse He had released on Mount Sinai,*

***shnei luchot ha-edut luchot even ktuvim b’etzba Elohim***

*two tablets of testimony, tablets of stone - inscriptions by the finger of God.*

[Exodus 31:18]

How will Moshe handle this precious, precious gift? Will he be a good steward of it? Will he deliver it in the attitude of love and the spirit of wisdom in which it was given? Is he ready to make the transition between the Immaculate Beauty Realm of our Bridegroom-King and the messy, emotionally draining train wreck of human interaction and social activity? Is he going to be able to ‘stick the landing’? Are we? Well, let’s just say *‘not quite yet.* Sometimes we have to learn life’s most important lessons the hard way - by failing miserably ... and being allowed to suffer the consequences.

***What Exactly Are You Bringing to Your Sphere of Influence –  
and With What Attitude are You Carrying and Delivering it?  
How Do You Walk, Emote, Speak, Behave When Your Cargo  
Is the Most Precious of all of the Creator’s Gifts to Man – the Torah?***

Can you imagine being entrusted to carry, and share with the world, the *very words* of the Creator of the Universe, inscribed in precious earthly stone by His own ‘finger’! Can you imagine the intricacy and power of the calligraphy that must have been on those stone tablets! After all, the Writer Who inscribed the words of Torah on them was the Artist Who sculpted, painted, shaded, and animated the universe! This Scribe knows how to instill the same level of breathtaking beauty into every tiny snowflake as He does in the grandest of mountain ranges. It is He Who both paints the desert floor with spring flowers and carefully arranges the galaxies, the constellations, and meteor showers of the Heavens. We are all called to carry these precious gifts to the people and places of our assigned spheres of influence. Are we mindful of the responsibility that goes with that privilege? Are we faithful to both the spirit and the letter of the Great Gift?

Consider the nature and essence of *the beautiful words* the Holy One inscribed on the tablets. Do you see them as ‘laws’, ‘rules’, or ‘commands’- or as the *sweet song of love and hope* they are? The Creator’s masterful declarations on the subject of *‘how to live a joyous, fruitful life, and bring life, health, and peace to the world,* are supposed to be delivered as the ultimate *ode to joy*. Those words are brimming with light, overflowing with energy, and pulsing with hope for the redemption of all families, households, and bloodlines of humankind. Not one of the words on these tablets came from either the mind or the pen of a man. Not one had passed through either an interpretation or a translation by a fallen, self-interest conflicted, pseudointellectually poisoned human brain. These words constituted 100% pure, original, eternal, unadulterated truth – in the Holiest language and most beautiful calligraphy that ever existed! Now THAT was a gift! That was a Bridegroom-King’s extravagant, personal, intimate gift to His Beloved Betrothed Bride. What is Moshe going to do with it? And, much more importantly ... what are you going to do with it, Dear One?

***What Is That In Your Hand?  
And Is What is in Your Heart Consistent With It?***

Back in Exodus 24, before Moshe’s recent forty-day encounter began, the Holy One had beckoned the prophet with these words:

***Come up to Me on the mountain and be in My Presence; and I will give you tablets of stone,  
and the Torah and mitzvot that I have written that you are to teach them."***

[Exodus 24:12]

Did you catch that, Beloved? The Torah had already been written on the tablets by the Finger of God long before Moshe ever climbed the mountain. Did you realize that? The Torah is eternal – and unchanging. Before Moshe was, the Torah was. Before Avraham was, the Torah was. Before Adam was, for that matter, the Torah was. It is *of Heavenly essence*, not earthly. It is the description of Messiah, and the lifestyle of men who walk with and serve Messiah. That is why it is so precious. That is why it must be carried with such honor. That is why it is deserving of such respectful treatment. And that is why it must always be handled, and delivered to its intended recipients with *shalom* and joy, with patience and long-suffering, with gentleness, kindness, goodness, humility and self-control, and – most importantly - with the utmost tender loving care.

Now let us move on to another matter. Did you hear the Holy One say anything to Moshe about THROWING the precious tablets down in anger?

### ***What Meaneth These Tablets – and the Words They Contain?***

Do you understand what the tablets the Holy One brought Moshe up to the Heavenly Courts to give to him *mean* for the future of the relationship between the Holy One and mankind? Do you realize that what is inscribed on those tablets is the physical description of the lifestyle that is supposed to result from the Divinely ordained union of the eternal Messiah made flesh with His Betrothed Bride?

This presents us with a *totally new paradigm*. Never before in Torah has the Hand of the Holy One been described as *writing* anything. The Holy One has now revealed Himself to be the ultimate *Creative Writer* as well as the *ultimate Creator*. Out of the rock formations of earth that He created with His *spoken Words* He has lovingly forged two tablets of stone on which to inscribe *WRITTEN WORDS* that can never be erased. And what has He inscribed on those two tablets? In Exodus 24:12 He called the content by two names – He called it His ***torah*** [literally, His *teaching* or *instruction*], and He called it His *mitzvot* [literally, His *words of joinder*].

We will learn more about the descriptive names He uses with regard to the content of the tablets of stone later. For right now we can simply rest assured that these tablets contain *Formative Words* that our Divine Bridegroom intends for us to internalize, treasure, and conform to – wonderful, creative, prophetic Words of Life emanating directly from the passions of His Divine Heart, which reflect the infinite wisdom of His Divine Mind, and which release over our souls a new dimension of the irresistible force of His Divine Will.

What does this ‘new thing’ He has released from Heaven mean for planet Earth? For His Creation at Large? For God-man relations? What effects are these tablets

intended to have upon the future of the species called *man*? The idea of having tablets inscribed by the finger of God in our midst is truly awe-inspiring. But why has He chosen to give these treasures to us *right now*? What pray tell does the gift of these tablets have to do with the Betrothal relationship that has become the focus of the narrative of the Book of Exodus?

Could it be that these *tablets of the testimony* are released at this point in the narrative because they are designed by the Holy One to serve more or less like a *shitre eyrusin* – *i.e.* the document that a Betrothed Bridegroom gives to His betrothed Bride in order to seal the betrothal covenant and make it irrevocable? Could it be that what the Divine Bridegroom has done is to send Moshe back to His Beloved Redeemed Community with nothing short of a *love letter written in His own Hand*. Could it be that the Divine Lover has entrusted into the care of a mortal man ‘tablets of testimony’ upon which He has declared for all time exactly how He sees – and *has for that matter always seen and furthermore will always see* - the people encamped at the base of the mountain to whom He has committed His troth?

Oh how passionately He loves us! Oh what stunning beauty He sees in us! Oh what glorious plans He has for us! Oh what wonderful things He believes we are capable of when we become One with Him! Oh what an awe-inspiring destiny He has stored up for us when we fully and finally yield to His love.

But wait ... isn't the Holy One omniscient? Does He not *declare from the end from the beginning*, and *proclaim from ancient times the things that will come to pass in the future*? **Isaiah 46:10**. Didn't He know, before He even spoke the words, much less inscribed them on these tablets with His own ‘Finger’, what the Ones for whom He wrote them were going to do in the Camp? Yes, of course He did.

### ***Important Lessons For Us From the Hebrew Verb Kalah***

As we have discussed, the last verse of yesterday's aliyah told us that the Holy One ‘*completed*’ or ‘*finished*’ speaking with Moshe. That, plus the entrustment of the tablets, ended the ‘*Mish'kan Discourse*’. The Hebrew verb phrase the Holy One used to introduce the change in prophetic flow was *kechaloto l'daber ito*. The Hebrew verb at the root of this phrase is *kalah*<sup>2</sup>. Your understanding of the essence of this Hebrew verb will be critically important later, for this verb will be repeated five more times in this parsha, at **Exodus 32:10** [English Bibles there mistranslate it as ‘consume’], at **Exodus 32:12** [same], at **Exodus 33:12** [same], and at **Exodus 34:33** [translated by English Bibles, as in this verse, as ‘finished speaking’].

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<sup>2</sup> *Kalah* is *kaf, lamed, hey*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #3615.

So what kind of action, with what kind of goal, does the Hebrew verb *kalah* really describe? First, note the context of this usage. We all know, from reading the Torah before, that the Holy One is not through, finished, or done, talking to Moshe at Sinai. In just a few days hence Moshe will climb back up the mountain, and spend another 40 days and 40 nights basking in wave after wave of Divine Speech. So, whatever the verb *kalah* means in this situation, one thing we can most definitely know it does not mean is bringing something to a permanent or final end, as the English phrase ‘finished’ seems to imply to our finity-obsessed, linear-thinking Western minds. If the Holy One meant that He was through, finished, or done talking to Moshe, He would not have invited him back up the mountain<sup>3</sup> for another round of revelation.

So ... what DOES the Hebrew verb *kalah* mean? Let’s begin our analysis of this important verb by resorting to the law of first usage. The first usage of the verb *kalah* in Torah is found very early - in Genesis 2:1. There, the verb *kalah* is used to describe what the Holy One did to His Creation in the six days of Creation week. Our English Bibles say: “*Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.*” *Finished* – really? They did not cease to exist. They certainly were not ‘destroyed’. The Holy One did not wad them up, throw them away, and start over. He did not make an end of them – or any of them. He simply brought them to the point of *viability* and *functionality*. He had prepared it to the point it was ready for enjoyment. He had adorned it for presentation. Everything He created on the six days continued to exist, in fact it *grew*, and *expanded*, and *continues to do so today*. When Torah tells us that the Holy One *kalah*-ed the physical worlds He created, it did not – could not - mean that He *destroyed* those works or *consumed* or *rejected* or *injured* or *turned His back on* them. What He did in relation to those works was to bring them forward into the next phase of their grand destiny.

Would you like another example to prove the point? See also Exodus 39:32, where the verb *kalah* is used to describe the readying of the *Mish’kan* for service. Our English Bibles say the *avodah* of the Tabernacle was ‘finished’. But that is not even close to true, is it? The *avodah* of the Tabernacle was not ‘finished’; it was, instead, just beginning a new and greater phase, with greatly increased impact. And that pretty much sets in stone what the Hebrew verb *kalah* is all about. To *kalah* something clearly means to *fully prepare someone or something for viability and function; to get someone or something ready for its next phase – one involving meaningful use or enjoyment*. Much more on that later in this shiur. For the

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<sup>3</sup> See Exodus 34:1-2: “*And the Holy One said to Moshe, “Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain.”*”

meantime, however, please note that what the Hebrew verb *kalah* does NOT – *can* not – mean, is to *destroy*, or to *consume*, or to *reject*, or to *injure*. It does not, and cannot, mean to turn one’s back and walk away from someone or something in anger or wrath.

### ***Meanwhile, Back at the Camp ...***

The time has come at last for Moshe to share the Beauty Realm revelations that he has been receiving with the mixed multitude who recently followed him out of Egypt. Oh, how excited they will be about the ‘*Mish’kan*’ project! Oh, how they will cherish the *luchot ha-edut/shitre eyrusin the Holy One has so lovingly offering them!*

Careful, Moshe – do not get too far ahead of yourself! There are some *unpleasant surprises* in store for you back at the camp. Things have gone *terribly wrong* in your absence. How? It was just a few weeks ago that under the Chuppah formed by the Radiant Cloud and with Heaven and Earth serving as witnesses the Holy One betrothed to Him forever the rag-tag throng of slaves He had rescued from Egyptian bondage. In a stunning mountaintop ceremony the Creator of the Universe pledged His troth to us, prophetically declaring us to be unto Him a *mam’leket kohanim* [*kingdom of priests*], a *goy kadosh* [holy nation], and an *am segulah* [special-treasure people]. We in turn pledged our troth right back to our Divine Bridegroom – declaring *with one voice* concerning the Words He had spoken over us on the mountain: ‘*na’aseh v’nish’ma*’ - *i.e. We will make the words You have spoken over us a reality, and we will continually listen for, hear, pay attention to, and focus on Your words, and will allow ourselves to be transformed by them from the inside out until we become what they declare we are. What high hopes and great aspirations we all had. Alas, how naïve and easily distracted we all were.*

### ***Scandal! Betrayal! Disgrace! Disaster!***

With the Chuppah of betrothal still in place on the Mount however, we the betrothed Bride-to-be are about to caught committing a flagrant act of adultery. In Hebrew literature the disgusting event we will read about is known simply as *Chet Ha-Egel* [the Calf-sin]. Most English-speakers know it as the sin of the ‘golden calf’. Whatever the episode is called however it is unquestionably *one of the darkest moments in history*. For you see, it was with the very gold the Holy One had caused the Egyptians to shower upon us the night we left Egypt – the courtship gift the Holy One gave us when He redeemed us from our Egyptian master’s house of bondage – that we made a calf of gold, bowed and worshipped before it, and engaged in disgusting acts of debauchery in front of it. And we did all this with Aharon – or someone - declaring over us: *This is your god, Yisra'el, that brought you up out of the land of Mitzrayim!*

Who has ever heard of a betrothal beginning with the chosen Bride-to-Be committing the *worst act of infidelity imaginable* – right under her Bridegroom’s *chuppah*? To our critical, judgmental minds, it is absurd – nay, unthinkable. It is to us an unforgiveable *scandal* – an unsalvageable *disgrace* – a disqualifying travesty. What could *possibly* account for our ancestors’ sudden and stunning descent into *senseless* and *hideous debauchery*? How can this be forgiven? How will the covenant the Holy One cut with Avraham survive this? What does this mean for the long-term?

### ***Idle Hands and Short Attention Spans ...***

The aliyah containing the narrative of the sin of the Golden Calf begins as follows:

***Vayar ha-am ki-voshesh Moshe laredet min ha-har***

*When the people saw that Moshe delayed coming down from the mountain,*

***vayikahel ha-am***

*the people gathered themselves together...*

Moshe *delayed coming down*? What is *that* supposed to mean? Who established a timetable for and imposed a deadline upon what the Bridegroom and the Friend of the Bridegroom were doing on the mountain? Who determined that the appropriate response to this season of prophetic disconnection was to *call a public meeting*? Did not the people have enough to do in their own households, studying and teaching their children the implications of the Glorious Words the Holy One spoke in the hearing of each one of them individually at Sinai? Who decided that the emphasis should now shift to ‘community’?

Whose brainchild was – and is - the ‘*meeting mentality*’, which says that if God does not do *what we want* in our lives *when we want it done*, what we need to do is *establish our own timetable, devise our own meeting schedule, prepare our own agenda*, and try to make happen in our flesh something that we can deceive ourselves into believing is spiritual? This was clearly not a *sh’ma*-response to the Holy One. But *gather together* the people did. Torah says they gathered together not unto HIM – but unto a man. They gathered together unto *Aharon*.

The people of the Holy One gathering ourselves *on our own initiative* – without a call from the Divine Voice we are supposed to *sh’ma* - is never a good idea. And for us, gathering together *unto a man* is always *lo tov*. Some call it ‘*community for the sake of community*’. It always leads to someone saying something that makes the enemy of our souls cackle with delight. In this case, Torah tells us that what the people said when they ‘gathered unto’ Aharon was:

***kum aseh-lanu elohim asher yelchu lefaneinu***

*Arise! Make/fashion/shape/mold for us gods, which will go before our faces!*

When will we realize that men who allow themselves to be put on pedestals and exalted will always eventually wind up reducing the Holy One to images we can conceive with our own minds, and will always cause us to focus our attention and affection on things we can see with our physical eyes.

Why did the people clamor for a ‘leader’? They said – and Aharon did not in any wise protest – as follows:

***Ki-zeh Moshe***

*As for this Moshe,*

***ha-ish asher he'eilanu me'erezt Mitzrayim***

*the man who brought us up out of the land of Mitzrayim,*

***lo yadanu meh-hayah lo***

*we don't understand what has happened to him.*

[Exodus 32:1]

The people *did not understand what happened to Moshe*? Aharon let them say such a thing without argument? I thought the Holy One made what had happened to Moshe perfectly clear in Exodus 24:12 when He told Moshe: ***Come up to me on the mountain, and stay here, and I will give you the tables of stone on which I have written the torah and the mitzvot that you are to teach to them.***

What part of that Divine instruction for living has suddenly become unclear? Why did the people suddenly clamor for Aharon to make them “gods” which they could “set before their faces”? It appears at first glance that what the people wanted was a *visible representation of something divine with which they could connect in a tangible, sensual way*. But WAIT, my flesh wants to argue – those people already HAD exactly that, did they not? Did they not have the *Sh'kinah*! Did not the dense supernatural yet very physical Cloud of Divine Matter still hover over their camp every day from sunrise to sunset? Did not a spectacular fire bathe them in a warm supernatural glow all through the night?

How could a people who lived in the shadow of the glorious Presence of the Holy One Himself possibly prefer a dumb, blind, lifeless image cast by their own hand, made up of materials of earth to the infinite and wonderful True God whose Voice they had all heard and seen on the Mountain just a few weeks previously? How, oh *how on earth*, could this *be*? Alas, herein lies a very sad truth. The truth is that there is something about fallen man that will always if given a choice choose a *god* he can mold himself according to his own tastes. Such a “god”, you see, man can *manipulate* and *control*. To such a “god”, man is not in any meaningful way *accountable*. Such a “god” is always easier to serve than the Holy One – for the Holy One is a God Whom we absolutely *cannot* ever manipulate or control, and a God to Whom we are indebted for every breath of life, and to Whom we are accountable for every thought, every attitude, every opinion, every word we speak,

every reaction, and every deed. A handmade “god” is therefore to the baser instincts of man much more palatable than the true God – He *who is Who He Is* and *Who Does What He Does whether we like it – or understand it - or not*. A calf-god is, after all, a *much more convenient* god. A calf-god can be served any way we want, any time we want, if we want. A calf-god lets US look good, lets US run the show and lets US get the glory. A calf-god lets US hold meetings that are all about us and what we like and call it ‘worship’, and form tax-exempt corporations and call them ‘ministries’. A calf-god *does not call upon us to fulfill our potential, does not confront us over lukewarmness or complacency – and does not discipline us when we neglect our calling or forsake our destiny*.

No wonder the former slaves at Sinai wanted a calf-god. No wonder most people on earth still do today.

### ***The Calf-god Lives!***

The sad truth of the matter is that the *egel* invented and worshipped by our ancestors is regrettably still very much alive and well today. Alas, the calf-god can still be found in the secret recesses of your soul and mine – the place where our heart and our flesh pine for a visible representation of the One we worship. And alas, the Calf-god gets resurrected and placed back in the center of our lives each time we reduce the Holy One to an image we can carry with us or place before our faces, and to which we say: “*This is your god, Yisra'el, which brought you up out of the land of Mitzrayim!*”

What was the genesis, or seed, from which the calf-god came forth? It was the people’s cry for something tangible, visible, physical, to relate to as God. “***Arise! Make/fashion for us gods, which shall go before our faces!***” our ancestors said.

### ***Aharon’s First Leadership Challenge – You Only Had One Job!***

When Moshe left camp to ascend the mountain and receive tablets of stone from the Holy One to present to the Redeemed Community his instructions to the elders of the people were: *Wait here for us ... until we come back to you. Aharon and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them. Exodus 24:14*. We know because we have been reading the chronicles of Moshe’s *magical mystery tour* that the Holy One sees and has planned *great things* for Aharon. But the appointed time of the Holy One for Aharon to walk in those great things had *not yet come*. Indeed, the time for Aharon to walk in great things will not come until after the ***Mish’kan*** is completed and is ready to be inaugurated. So what is happening at the beginning of today’s aliyah is that months prior to the appointed time for the Holy One to call Aharon to *arise* a gaggle of other voices do so. It is, of course, a *test of the Serpentine kind*. It is a test designed to see if Aharon will *sh’ma* the Holy One and His Voice alone – or if Aharon will cave to the cravings of the flesh – his own and

that of his fellow men - and *sh'ma* the ‘voice of another’.

Aharon – like most of us - falls for the ‘voice of another’, hook, line and sinker. Rather than wait for the voice of the Holy One to be the voice that calls him to ‘Arise!’ to greatness, Aharon *sh'mas* instead the voice of men with their own agendas and ideas, both of which were *clearly* at odds with – indeed diametrically opposed to - the Holy One’s revealed Word. Aharon – like most of us – was convinced he was ready for his *moment*. The people wanted – needed - him, so *this must be it*. And so, without consulting the Divine Bridegroom or considering His revealed Word Aharon said to the men who called him to ‘arise’: ***Take off the golden rings that are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them to me.***

### ***A Beit-El Experience This Most Definitely is NOT***

Let us take a close look at Aharon’s response before moving on any further. Realizing of course that we were not there, did not have to stand face-to-face with the crowd that approached him, and are therefore necessarily ‘arm-chair quarterbacking’, and further acknowledging that hindsight is always 20/20, does it seem to anyone out there but me that there were some other responses that Aharon could have made? The first thing the people said to Aharon was: ***“Arise, make/fashion us gods, which will go before our faces ....”*** What if he had instead said something like:

*Hold on a minute, brothers.*

*Did not the Holy One speak to us, in the hearing of all of us and our children, saying: **“Make no image of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath?”***<sup>4</sup>

Alas, that is not what came out of either Aharon’s heart or his mouth. And so the people said: ***“... as for this Moshe, the man who brought us up out of the land of Mitzrayim, we don't know what has become of him ...”*** What if in response to this statement Aharon had said something:

*Now hold on here! It really was not Moshe who brought us up out of the land of Mitzrayim—  
Do you not remember? The first words the Holy One spoke to us,  
in the hearing of all of us and our children, were that **“I am the Holy One your God,  
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”***<sup>5</sup>

### ***Learning From A Dear Brother’s Unfortunate Mistakes***

I do not want to be unfair to Aharon. But what we are talking about now is not really what Aharon did or did not do, is it? That is done and over. It cannot be changed. What we are really talking about now is how you and I, if placed in a similar situation, might respond more effectively. I sincerely hope that if any

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<sup>4</sup> Exodus 20:4.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 20:2

remotely similar suggestion was ever made to me or to you our first response would be to say: “*But ... what does the Torah say!*”

As aforesaid, please understand that my point is not to condemn or make fun of or criticize Aharon. My hope is simply that we should *learn from Aharon’s failures*. My point is that we absolutely must if we are to fulfill our destiny commit to becoming a *sh’ma* people. Majority opinion – or even the counsel of the elders – simply cannot *ever* be allowed to distract us or lure us away from that which the Holy One has given as our sure anchor, as our eternal standard of truth, and as our prophetic declaration of who we are to be, how we are to think and speak, and what we are – and are not – to do. This is a lesson Aharon *had to learn the hard way*. When confronted with a restless crowd looking to him for answers Aharon did not speak the words we would have willed him to speak. He did not focus on the Instructions for Living that had been spoken in his Presence by the Holy One or the life lessons he had seen demonstrated over and over since the plague narrative began. Aharon apparently did not even *consider*, much less *consult*, the Torah. He did not even consult his duly appointed co-custodian Hur. Aharon acted *completely on his own*. Here is how Torah records what happened as a result: *All the people took off the golden rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aharon. He received what they handed him, fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it a molten calf; and they said, This is your god, Yisra'el that brought you up out of the land of Mitzrayim.*” Exodus 32:3-4.

### ‘Recalculating’

At this point, when the ‘*this is your god*’ declaration issued forth from the people’s lips in relation to a molded calf image, one would think that Aharon, even as caught up in his ‘moment’ of glory as he was at the time, would have to realize that things had gotten completely out of hand. I mean, at this point the people had gone far beyond crediting Moshe for bringing out of Egypt. Now they had – unbelievably – attributed the wondrous deeds of the Holy One to – a *chunk of metal* which they, with their own eyes, saw Aharon fashion from gold they had until recently worn in their filthy, dust-coated earlobes! This was sheer and utter nonsense. But what does Aharon do? Read it for yourselves:

*When Aharon saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf ...  
and Aharon made a proclamation, and said,*

***Chag l'Adonai machar!*** [i.e. “a feast to the Holy One tomorrow!”]

[Exodus 32:5 (a)]

Did we read that right? Did Aharon really *BUILD AN ALTAR IN FRONT OF THE CALF*? Did he really follow this up by proclaiming the next day to be a *chag* – unto *the Holy One*? I am afraid we read the text correctly. Now do you remember what we have been saying about a season of ‘*prophetic disconnect*’?

Aharon's '*Chag l'Adonai machar*' proclamation reminds me a little bit of Pharaoh's response to Moshe's question of when Pharaoh wanted Moshe to pray that the Holy One remove the swamp creatures [traditionally *frogs*] from Egypt. Pharaoh replied: "*Tomorrow*". In other words, Pharaoh was saying '*one more night with the frogs* is no big deal!' Aharon is now similarly faced with the biggest crisis the Community in his charge has yet experienced. It is literally falling apart at the seams on his watch. Even in the war with the Ameleki the people had maintained both faith in the Holy One and allegiance to each other. But *no more*. And all Aharon can do is say in this situation is *Chag l'Adonai machar* - "*A feast to the Holy One tomorrow?*"

Another option would have been to say: "*Excuse, me, I think we need to discuss this with the Holy One!*" Or perhaps: "*Maybe we ought to reconsider this whole calf thing in light of Torah!*" But no. Unfortunately, there was no recalculating. "*Just – tomorrow we will have a party. Oh, Aharon. Oh, Israel. Oh, Beloved. The crisis will not wait until tomorrow. The crisis is now. The time for prayer is now. The time for recalculating is now. The time for consulting – and returning to - the ways of the Holy One as described for us in Torah is now. The time to sh'ma the Holy One is now. Even one more night of dallying with this calf-god worship system deception is simply UNACCEPTABLE!!*"

### ***The Idolatry Of Declaring Our Own Holy Days***

Please note that Aharon's proclamation promised a feast "*l'Adonai*" – i.e. *unto the Holy One*. But this was blatant nonsense. The feast that was held was not by any means a feast 'unto the Holy One'<sup>6</sup>. It was a feast *unto the calf-idol*. Aharon decided to use the 'now' moment in which recalculating and sh'ma-ing was the order of the day to throw a *party in honor of the idol* he had made. And in a classic *lipstick-on-a-pig* moment he tried to make the whole mess he had created seem spiritual by *changing the Holy One's calendar and declaring a chag* [i.e. a festival/feast] *where the Holy One had not declared a chag*. It will not work. Men declaring their own holy days is never going to work. Like the *strange-fire chagim* [festivals] that were instituted and/or formally adopted by Constantine and the Nicean Council centuries later – festivals that have come to be called 'Easter' and 'Christmas' respectively – the *chag* [festival] declared by Aharon is also going to turn out to be '*to the Holy One*' in *name only*. The guest of honor at Aharon's *chag* is not really the Holy One, of course – it is a golden calf conjured up by man in his own mind according to his own will, and for his own purposes.

Here is how Torah records the '*festival to the Holy One that most definitely wasn't to the Holy One at all*': *They rose up early on the next day and offered burnt offerings, and*

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<sup>6</sup> Not to suggest that men should declare when a feast to the Holy One should be held anyway. The timing of the Holy One's Holy Days is His decision, not man's.

*brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.*  
Exodus 32:6.

### ***What Were the Holy One's Instructions? Does Anyone Remember?***

Before Moshe ever took his first step up the mountain – indeed before the Holy One called Avram out of Ur of the Chaldees, much less before any descendant of Yisrael took his or her first step out of Egypt – the Holy One knew full well what would happen at this juncture. He knew ... *and He called Avram anyway*. He knew ... and yet He nurtured and blessed, and *put up with, Yitzchak and Ya'akov and Y'hudah and Yosef* and the whole lot of them [us] anyway. He knew ... and yet He *delivered them [us] from Egypt*. He knew ... and yet *He betrothed Himself to them [us] forever*. He knew ... and yet *He called Moshe up the mountain so He could give to them [us] tablets of stone* on which He personally engraved every prophetic, creative word He spoke over them [us] on Sinai.

The stunning fact is that the Holy One was not one bit surprised by what the people requested, or by what Aharon said and did in response – or by the disgusting debauchery and blatant idolatry in which we indulged ourselves - all in the name of a *chag l'Adonai* a festival to the Holy One]. The shocking truth is that the Holy One knew before He called us and betrothed Himself to us that before the season changed we would turn around and dishonor Him. He *knew*. And He *loved us anyway*. He *knew*, and He *chose us as His am segulah regardless*. He knew ... and yet He did not intervene at any step in the process – though He obviously could have – to discourage us from doing the disgusting things we were apparently, for whatever reason, absolutely hell-bent on doing. He knew we had to get this garbage out of our system.

Oh *what manner of love* this is. Oh *what a wonder* our Divine Bridegroom is. Oh *what a God* we have! And so even as Moshe is reveling in the blissful afterglow of 40 days and nights in the Presence of the Creator of the Universe and basking in the joy of receiving the *luchot ha-edut* [tablets of the testimony] on behalf of mankind, the Holy One taps him on the shoulder as it were and says:

***Go, get down; for your people, who you brought up out of the land of Mitzrayim, have corrupted themselves! They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I instructed them. They have made themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, Yisra'el, that brought you up out of the land of Mitzrayim.'***

What a rude 'reality check' for Moshe. But wait - there was more! The Holy One then noted to Moshe that He had observed the people and found them to be ***am-k'sheh-oref*** [i.e. a stiff-necked people]. The Holy One then made a statement to Moshe in Hebrew that is somewhat difficult to translate into English. Here is what the Holy One stated in Hebrew, and my best effort at translating it:

***V'atah hanichah li***

*Now therefore let me yanach [i.e. rest, be quieted]*

***veyichar-api vahem***

*that my ap [nose, nostril] may yachar [burn (usually with anger)] concerning them,*

***va'achalem***

*and that I may kalah [most English Bibles say 'consume'] them ...*

***ve'e'eseh otcha l'goy gadol***

*and I will build/shape of you for a great nation.*

Did the Holy One really just threaten to CONSUME the people to whom He has just pledged His Troth forever? Did He really just say He was going to start all over on this 'chosen people' strategy - with Moshe now playing the father-of-our-people role instead of Avraham? Do not be too quick to jump to those conclusions. Too many generations of English-speakers have done just that. But the Holy One did not in this statement to Moshe, threaten Israel with either extinction or replacement. He promised to *kalah* the people Moshe brought forth out of Egypt – not destroy them. So let's remind ourselves once again what it means to *kalah*.

***What Is the Holy One Really Saying?***

As we have discussed, the Hebrew verb *kalah*<sup>7</sup> does not mean either consume or destroy – or anything similar. It does not mean to put a violent end to anyone or anything. Our English translations are simply – and glaringly - wrong. Remember, the first Biblical usage of the Hebrew verb *kalah* is in Genesis 2:1, where we are told:

***V'yeichulu ha-shamayim v'ha-aretz v'chol-tzeiva'am***

*Heaven and earth, and all their components, were [thus] completed.*

The first word in that Hebrew sentence, *v'yeicheilu*, is a past-tense form of the Hebrew verb *kalah*. Looking at that usage will tell you what action the verb describes. Even our English translations of the Torah do not suggest *kalah* means 'consume' or 'destroy' in that instance. Our English Bibles there translate this verb phrase as meaning to complete – i.e. to bring to full stature so that they can stand alone; i.e. to bring into a new phase, consisting of viability and functionality. See also a very similar usage in Genesis 2:2 [the Holy One *completed* - again, the Hebrew verb is *kalah* – His work of creating]. He did not consume or destroy His work – He brought it to a state of fullness of functionality so it could stand alone without His completely controlling it anymore. See also Genesis 6:16, where Noach was told to *complete* - again a form of the Hebrew verb *kalah* - the window of the ark. Consider also Genesis 17:22, where the text of Torah tells us that the Holy One *completed* - again, a form of the Hebrew verb *kalah* - a conversation with Avraham.

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<sup>7</sup> *Kalah* is spelled *kaf, lamed, hey*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #3615, and is pronounced *kaw-law*'.

There are far too many usages of the verb *kalah* in Torah that illustrate this same point for me to need to repeat them all here. Suffice it to say that *kalah* simply does not mean anything close to *consume* or *destroy* - as our English translations of Exodus 32 suggest. What the Holy One told Moshe He had in mind to do to the people encamped at the base of the mountain was therefore not to consume or destroy them. What He told Moshe He had in mind for them was to immediately bring them into a new phase – where they would have to learn to be viable and functional on their own, without His continued use of Moshe as an intermediary through the ‘Friend of the Bridegroom’ communication system the people had requested back in Exodus 20.

*Kalah* is after all, when transformed into a noun, the Hebrew word used to describe a *bride*. It literally means to *make ready for use or enjoyment; to complete to an extent it can begin to function according to its designed purpose*. Think it through. By saying that He would *kalah* the people the Holy One was simply saying that He was considering concluding the Betrothal phase of the relationship – where the people relied upon friends of the Bride like Aharon to advise them – early, and moving them right into the Marriage phase where He Himself would be their Counselor and Advisor?

The Holy One did not intend to consume, or destroy, or bring a violent end to, His people. That is simply not in His Nature. It was not consistent with His Purpose, His Promises, and His Plans. He always sees the end from the beginning. He knew He could ‘fix’ this mess. He just knew Moshe – the intermediary the people had chosen to perform the ‘Friend of the Bridegroom’ function - had some serious character flaws and blind spots that stood in His way. He intended to turn this horrible situation into good for them – and through appropriate disciplines/judgments with a redemptive purpose to make them ‘complete’ – *i.e.* ready to bring into a higher phase, stop drinking Moshe’s milk, and start to function in their intended roles as His kingdom of priests and holy nation.

As a Bridegroom the Holy One told Moshe that He would do what was necessary to make Israel complete – *kalah* – *as His pure, spotless Bride, a fitting companion, and a light to the World*. His Heart was moved with emotion – and He wanted passionately to *by-pass the intermediation of Moshe that B’nei Yisrael had requested and speak directly to His Beloved*. “*If I can only talk to her face-to-Face ....*”, He was saying.

Yes the English text says that the Holy One’s wrath burned against Israel. But even if that was an accurate translation, what exactly do you think the ‘burning wrath’ of the most Benevolent Being in the Universe looks like? Are you perhaps confusing the Holy One’s wrath with the self-obsessed, wounded rage of a fallen

man? Do not fall into that trap, Beloved. The Holy One's wrath is *not by any means like man's anger*. The Holy One's wrath is always *carefully measured*. It is always hedged in and counseled by wisdom and understanding on one side and by mercy and kindness on the other.

Alas, Moshe had not learned this yet. Moshe's had only known the anger of men – particularly his own anger. In his history, anger was *horribly destructive*. In his life anger had resulted in his murder of a taskmaster. He was not over the human anger problem yet, either, as in a fit of anger he is, just a few hours hence, going to throw the tablets of Divine Writing down on the ground, break them to pieces, grind them into dust, make the people drink them, and then order all-out civil war in the camp.

No, the Holy One's wrath is not like Moshe's rage. The Holy One's wrath is not like the anger of any man. The Holy One's wrath is an outgrowth of and a necessary component of his commitment to the COVENANT-relationship He established with Creation, with Adam, with Noach, with Avraham, with Israel, and with us. The Holy One's wrath is not designed to destroy or injure those to whom He has pledged His troth. His wrath is instead brilliantly and effectively designed to *start a chain reaction of redemption*. His wrath is always redemptive. His wrath always brings about perfectly measured *discipline*. If this discipline is received, the result is *teshuvah [a returning to covenant]*. If *teshuvah* is sincere, the results are 1. *restoration*, 2. *healing* and 3. *growth*. This is how the Holy One brings us into *maturity*, connects us to our *destiny*, and empowers us to *fulfill our glorious assigned purpose in His Grand Redemptive Plan* for mankind and Creation. This is how he *kalah's* us. His wrath and His discipline are essential to the process.

This is precisely the process described over and over again in the Psalms – for example, read Psalms 38 through 43 as a unit. So get to know the *sin-wrath-teshuvah-redemption* process *well*. It is going to be a *recurring theme* of the Holy One's plan for your life – and for mine. It is the process the Holy One uses to mold a *shameless harlot* into a *pure, spotless Bride*.

### ***A Great Nation!***

After telling Moshe that He will *kalah* the people encamped at Sinai [*i.e.* bring them to stand-alone status], the Holy One says: ***v'e'eseh ot'cha l'goy gadol*** – *i.e.* and I will *build/shape* of you for a great nation. Amazingly, some actually interpret this as the Holy One declaring His intention to replace Israel with a new nation birthed from the loins of Moshe. From a Hebraic standpoint, however, this is simply an impossible stretch of the words used in the text. The Holy One has just said He is going to *kalah* – *i.e.* complete/bring to completion and full functioning – B'nei Yisrael ... *despite* her sin. All that ***v'e'eseh ot'cha l'goy gadol*** really means is that in her completed state Israel will be *taught/trained/disciplined* by Moshe. Consider

what that means. Moshe was, at the first, certainly no prize catch. He started out as a murderer and fugitive from justice. He resisted the Holy One's calling violently when it came, making every excuse he could think of. He fussed and fumed at the Holy One when things did not go the way he thought they should. He even refused to circumcise his own sons, and incurred the Holy One's wrath in a way similar to the way Israel just had. Our KJVs tell us the Holy One would have killed Moshe, but for the intervention of Tzipporah at the last possible moment. But as our aliyah opens Moshe is standing in the Holy One's Presence, hanging on His every word, ready to do whatever the Holy One says. He has not been completed yet, as we shall soon see, but he is definitely a work in process.

Be assured that the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven will no more abandon Israel than He abandoned Moshe. He will continue to employ with Moshe the same *sin-wrath-teshuvah-redemption* process that the Hebrew verb *kalah* so beautifully expresses. In fact I believe Moshe was not arguing with the Holy One or trying to convince Him of anything; he was merely *marveling at the Holy One's grace* when he spoke in verses 11-13 of the reasons the Holy One would not destroy Israel despite her sin.

After Moshe concludes his declaration of the reasons the Holy One would not destroy Israel but would instead *kalah* her we find these words in Torah:

***V'yinachem Adonai al ha-ra'ah***

*The Holy One nacham-ed [our English Bibles say repented] of the ra'ah*

***asher diber l'asot l'amo***

*He had spoken concerning His people.*

Again I find I must suggest consideration of a radical departure from the traditional English interpretation. The Hebrew word *vinachem* which our English Bibles translate 'repented' or 'changed his mind' in this passage does not I do not believe mean anything of the sort. The Holy One *did not* – does not – repent/change His mind. The Creator of the Universe, the omnipotent, omniscient, immortal and all wise God, *simply does not do such things*. Such things are inconsistent with the Holy One's nature. With the Holy One – unlike with man - there is *no shadow of turning*. The English translations that imply – or boldly state – a 'repentance' or a 'change of mind' must, I believe, be questioned. So let us look at what the Hebrew text of Torah tells us, and view this passage *Hebraically* instead of traditionally. The first thing we should note is that the Hebrew verb *nacham* – the Hebrew verb that forms the verb root of *vinachem* - does not mean or imply repentance or changing. *Nacham*<sup>8</sup> is *nun, chet, mem sofit*, meaning to pant or groan. It sometimes

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<sup>8</sup> Nacham is Strong's Hebrew word #5162.

means to *have compassion*, to *give comfort*<sup>9</sup>, or *be consoled*<sup>10</sup>. The proper translation of the verse would, therefore, according to this Hebraic usage be that the Holy One consoled Himself – or was comforted – concerning His people, and their future – because He knew that the judgments/disciplines He planned for His Bride would be redemptive, and recreative, in effect – and would *kalah* – *complete* – her, instead of destroy her.

### ***Moshe's Return – The Angry Vigilante Persona Resurfaces***

Moshe was fine with all this as long as He was in the Holy One's Presence. The tough part was yet to come. He had to walk right into the middle of the debauchery. He had to deal with very ugly reality in real time. He did not handle the transition very well at all. Neither would you – or I – Beloved. Here is how Torah records Moshe's re-entry into earth's atmosphere:

*It happened, as soon as he came near to the camp,  
that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moshe's anger grew hot,  
and he threw the tablets out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mountain.  
He took the calf they had made, burnt it with fire,  
ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the children of Yisra'el drink of it.*

And then Moshe made a beeline for Aharon - whom he had left 'in charge'.

There is a vast difference between the Beauty Realm of the Holy One and the attitudes, opinions, and practices of fallen men. Transitioning from one realm to the other requires much maturity, much patience, much forbearance, and much grace. He will not find any of those things in himself. But he will find them. He will find them in the cleft of a rock. And so, Dear One, must we.

### ***Aharon's Moments 'On the Carpet'***

What happens next is absolutely *surreal*. Moshe asked Aharon:

*What did these people do to you that you have brought a great sin on them?"  
Aharon said, "Don't let the anger of my lord grow hot.  
You know the people - that they are set on evil.  
For they said to me, 'Make us gods, which shall go before us;  
for as for this Moshe, the man who brought us up out of the land of Mitzrayim,  
we don't know what has become of him.'  
I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them take it off:'  
so they gave it me; and I threw it into the fire ...  
vayetze ha-egel hazeh [i.e. and out came this calf.]"*

Hmmmmn. “*The people are set on evil?*” “*And out came this calf?*” Aharon, is that *the best you can do?*

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<sup>9</sup> See Genesis 5:9.

<sup>10</sup> See Genesis 24:67: Rivkah's presence in Sarah's tent consoled Yitzchak after his mother died.

Would **you** have given Aharon another chance? Or would you have *cast him aside forever* like yesterday's garbage – a *hopeless failure, totally unfit to fill the exalted position of High Priest*? Remember, we are only looking at a 'snapshot' of Aharon. We are seeing him in his absolute WORST moment. Is that the way you look at people? Is that the basis on which you develop opinions of them? If it is, I certainly hope you never see me at my worst moment! We are all ugly and unlovable when viewed through that prism. Thank Heaven it is *not the Holy One's way*. The Holy One does not render judgments based on snapshots. He chooses to review a long-running videotape of our lives – not a paparazzi's *decoupage* of still shots showing what we look like at our worst. Oh the unfathomable grace of our Divine Bridegroom!

### ***Flashback to the Egyptian Taskmaster Incident – Moshe Rushes Headlong Into Holy War Once Again!***

Based upon what he has seen with his own eyes and heard with his own ears Moshe has all his flesh can take. He is ready to declare holy war. He is about to go *postal*. But ... did the Holy One *tell Moshe to jump into the ancient equivalent of Rambo-Terminator mode*? Or was that a decision he made on his own? I know you probably *think you know* the answer to that question. But does the text of Torah support what you think you know? Let me explain what I mean. By now we have hopefully learned the Torah 'formula' for differentiating between the instructions of the Holy One and the fleshly actions of men taken on their own initiative and attributed to the Holy One strictly for justification. If the Holy One speaks a thing, directing Moshe to bring it to pass, He introduces the statement with the classic formula ***Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor*** [*And the Holy One spoke to Moshe saying: ...*] See e.g. Exodus 30:11, Exodus 31:1,12, Exodus 32:7, Exodus 34:1, 27, among a myriad other passages in Torah.

You will look in vain for this classic formula in the passage that describes the drastic and bloody actions Moshe took and called upon others to take next. We are so accustomed to the narrative however that most of us automatically *assume* Moshe was acting out the Holy One's will in directing the slaughter by the sword of 3,000 people. But look more closely. Did the Holy One say for Moshe to raise up a militia and go through the camp to kill sinners? Where is the telltale '***Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor***' intro that cues us in that the Holy One is really speaking? It is nowhere to be seen. All we have is Moshe's self-serving declaration '*Thus says the Holy One ...*'

What are we to make of this? Is it possible that Moshe acted *without Divine directive*? Is it possible that we are seeing Moshe in his *worst possible moment* too? Is it possible that what Moshe is doing as he '*goes postal*' is rendering a human judgment based upon *the sight of his eyes* and the *hearing of his ears*, rather

than with the Holy One's 'justice'? Is it possible that Moshe's declaration of holy war in the Name of the Holy One was an action that he took *on his own initiative*? Is it possible he reverted, in his human anger, to the Moshe who slew the Egyptian taskmaster in a fit of rage? Is it possible that he presumed to act on behalf of the Holy One and invoked the Name of the Holy One in vain in order to justify his actions? That is something you will have to decide as you read the narrative.

*When Moshe saw that the people had broken loose ... Moshe stood in the gate of the camp, and said, **mi l'Adonai elay vaye'asfu** - i.e. who is for the Holy One? Let him come to me!" All the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him, and he [i.e. Moshe] said to them,*

***Koh-amar Adonai Elohei Yisra'el***

*"Thus says the Holy One, the God of Yisra'el,*

***simu ish charbo al-yereicho ivru***

*'Every man put his sword on his thigh,*

***vashuvu misha'ar l'sha'ar b'machaneh***

*and go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp,*

***v'hirgu ish-et-achiv v'ish et-rei'ehu v'ish et-krovo***

*and every man kill his brother, his companion/friend, and his neighbor."*

According to whose word does Torah tell us the sons of Levi engaged in this violence – violence reminiscent of Levi and Sh'mon's indiscriminate slaughter of the innocent as well as the guilty at Shechem? Was this slaughter conducted 'according to the word of *the Holy One*'? Or was it conducted 'according to the word of *Moshe*'? Torah tells us plainly: *The sons of Levi did **kid'var Moshe*** [i.e. according to the word of Moshe], *and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.*

Torah tells us that the actions taken by the sons of Levi that day were '**kid'var Moshe**' – i.e. 'according to the word of Moshe'. If the writer of Torah is to be believed, then, the Holy One was not the One who directed the slaughter of 3,000 people after all. *What does this teach us?* This reminds us once again that *every action we take as the Holy One's people needs to be a sh'ma response to the word of the Holy One*, consistent with His announced Covenantal commitments and promises. Whenever any *man* – even one we respect - speaks a word we are required to *judge that word carefully* before acting upon it. Just because a man hears from the Holy One on some matters does not mean that every word out of his mouth is God-breathed.

You see, every man or woman the Holy One raises up is given *some area of special revelation*. As long as he/she sticks to that special area of revelation, and as long as he/she speaks concerning that area *only what he/she has heard from on high*, we can and should listen to him/her. But when that same man/woman *leaves* the area of revelation the Holy One has given to him/her, we are not to follow

him/her. That is part of the *sh'ma*-testing process. The Holy One allows voices – even voices we trust – to say things – *sometimes using His Name* – that He never said. That is where deception comes from. That is why Torah understanding is so critical. Yeshua said: ***“My sheep know my voice; the voice of a stranger they will not follow.”*** We must know His voice – Torah – inside and out, in order that we do not follow a stranger – even one we have trusted before.

This does not mean we should ridicule a man or woman for ‘missing it’. We should not disrespect him/her simply for getting into error. But it does mean we should NOT do what he/she says, no matter how he/she rails at us, or how self-righteously or eloquently he/she accuses us of error, deception, or rebellion. We must learn, when what even our ‘leaders’ say does not line up with Torah, to stay where we are until we hear directly from the Holy One. Only the voice of the Bridegroom – the Voice that spoke Torah, and will never speak contrary to it – is to be *sh'ma*-ed.

### ***Moshe’s Intercession – Flashback to Avraham & Sodom***

After the killing, when the smoke began to clear as it were, Moshe takes another tact altogether. ***“You have sinned a great sin,”*** he said to the people.

***“Now I will go up to the Holy One. Perhaps there is an atonement for your sin.”***

*So Moshe returned to the Holy One, and said,*

***“Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made themselves gods of gold.***

***Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin — and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written.”***

What transpired in Moshe’s heart and spirit over night? What transformed him from a Rambo-Terminator vigilante attitude to an Avrahamic-style intercessor? Someday I hope to ask Moshe about that face-to-face. But for now I will deal with the Holy One’s response to Moshe’s ‘intercession’.

### ***The Holy One’s Response to Moshe’s Intercession***

Torah tells us that when Moshe finished his intercession on the day after the civil war he brought about, the Holy One said to him: ***Mi asher chata-li emcheinu misifri*** [i.e. *whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.*]

***Now go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you.***

***Behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless ...***

***uveyom pok’di ufakadeti aleihem chatatam***

***In the day appointed, I will visit them regarding their sin.”***

***V’yigof Adonai -ha-am***

***And the Holy One struck the people because they made the calf that Aharon made.***

The Holy One did not as is often taught acquit the people of the sin of the golden calf in response to Moshe’s intercession. To the contrary He *refused to back off the*

*judgment He had planned one bit* – because He knew the judgment He had planned was actually for the fledgling nation’s *good* —not her harm. To have caved in to Moshe’s passionate request for pure forgiveness would have been the worst thing the Holy One could have done. It would not have been consistent with the covenant He made with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya’akov. It would not have been conduct befitting a Bridegroom who has sworn to *kalah* - complete - His Bride.

Intercession is a wonderful thing. But do not think that through intercession you are ever going to change the Holy One’s mind. Even if that were possible – which it is not – changing the Holy One’s mind would be the absolute worst thing you could ever do. The reality is that He is *right*. The reality is that He is *always right*. And the reality is that He *cares much, much more about people and sees every person and each situation with a much, much better perspective, than you ever will*.

So pray, and intercede, and plead with the Holy One for everything you believe is needed. Pray according to both your wisdom and your heart-felt desires. Pray with passion and conviction. But make sure that when all is said and done your prayer ends with “*Not my will, but Yours, be done.*”

We are the *Bride*. He is the *Bridegroom*. We are to intercede as He leads us – but then we are to *sh’ma*. His voice is the One that matters, and His Word is the Force that brings forth all good in the earth.

### ***Questions For Today’s Study***

1. List all the things the Redeemed Community did unto the golden calf Aharon made for them. List the provisions of the Betrothal covenant they violated.
2. Before seeing the sin the people have committed with his own eyes, in Exodus 32:11-13, Moshe undertook to speak with the Holy One as follows:

*Holy One, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, that you have brought forth out of the land of Mitzrayim with great power and with a mighty hand?*

*Why should the Mitzrim speak, saying, 'He brought them forth for evil to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the surface of the eretz?'*

*Turn from your fierce wrath, and repent of this **ra** [calamity] in regard to your people.*

*Remember Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisra'el, your servants,*

*to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them,*

***'I will multiply your seed as the stars of the sky, and all this land that I have spoken of I will give to your seed, and they will inherit it forever.'***

[A] What conversation led to this speech, and Who initiated it?

[B] What exactly did the Holy One tell Moshe had occurred in the camp in his absence, and what exactly did the Holy One tell Moshe to do in light of that?

[C] The last part of Moshe's first speech on the subject consists of a quote from an earlier part of Torah. Find the book, chapter, and verse which Moshe quoted to the Holy One and describe the context in which the Holy One made the statement Moshe quotes.

[D] This is the first of two intercessory prayers of Moshe concerning this incident. The second intercession – after Moshe lost his temper, threw down the tablets of testimony, and ordered the slaughter of 3,000 members of the camp - is found in Exodus 32:31-32:

*Moshe returned to the Holy One, and said,  
"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin and have made themselves gods of gold.  
Yet now, if you will, forgive their sin—  
and if not, please blot me out of your book which you have written."*

How did the Holy One respond to what Moshe said – with pure forgiveness and unconditional love, or with judgment? [Note: Do not be superficial in your answer - read ahead, if necessary; what did the Holy One really do?]

**3.** We learned last week that Aharon had been chosen by the Holy One to serve in the *Mish'kan* as its high priest. This week, we learn that Aharon is directly involved in the sin of the golden calf.

[A] Make a list of each of the things Aharon did in connection with the calf incident.

[B] Who did Moshe blame for the incident?

[C] As you know, Aharon was not disqualified from the position of high priest even though he was directly involved in the sin of the golden calf. What does that say to you about the Holy One and about His reasons for appointing people to positions where they can bless others?

[D] Would the Holy One receive more glory if his high priest (or any other leader) was known to be imperfect and prone to failure or if his high priest was seemingly perfect? Explain your answer.

[E] Why did the Holy One give the people of Israel a *high priest* anyway?

**4.** Worshipping the golden calf had consequences.

[A] What effect did the golden calf incident, with its feast, have on the people? See Exodus 32:25 [The Amplified Bible's interpretation is particularly interesting].

[B] What drastic step did Moshe call for in his anger over the incident?

[C] What parallels do you see between the civil war in the camp of the Redeemed after the sin of the golden calf and the destruction of Shechem?

**5.** List in order all the events that Torah tells us occurred on the day after the golden calf incident.

**6.** In the Haftarah reading for today Eliyahu confronts *Ach'av* [Ahab], who along

with his wife has sponsored the pollution of the worship of the Holy One, forsaking the mitzvot of Torah, and replacing Torah observance with the worship of the ba'als of Kana'an. Eliyahu challenges the prophets of ba'al to a "duel" on Mount Carmel. We will see *Who is God, and who is not.*

*Call you on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Holy One;  
and the God who answers by fire, let him be God.  
All the people answered, "It is well spoken."*

[A] What did Eliyahu [Elijah] say was the sin of the house of Israel?

[B] What question/challenge did Eliyahu ask the people of Israel?

7. In today's apostolic Scripture reading Shaul addresses a controversy that has arisen in the largely pagan city of Corinth. "*Now concerning things sacrificed to idols ...*," he begins: ... *food will not commend us to the Holy One. For neither, if we don't eat, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better. But be careful that by no means does this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak.* I Corinthians 8:1, 8-9.

[A] Is Shaul talking about *kosher food* versus *non-kosher edible matter* - or is he talking about *kosher food which someone has offered to an idol*?

[B] What, according to Shaul, is the spiritual effect upon an individual of eating food which has been sacrificed to idols?

[C] Most of our food has not been officially "sacrificed to idols". So what truths can we draw from Shaul's teaching about food that has been?

[D] In what ways could we, today, through doing something other than eating food sacrificed to idols, create a "stumbling block" for a "weak" brother?

[E] In Strong's, look up the word translated as "weak" in verse 9. Write the Greek word and its meaning. What would be the corresponding Hebraic concept?

*May you receive mercy and not judgment. And may you always remember the Lamb.*

### ***The Rabbi's son***

### ***Meditation for Today's Study***

Psalm 119:153-159 [Resh]

*Consider my affliction, and deliver me, for I don't forget your Torah.  
Plead my cause, and redeem me! Revive me according to your promise.*

*Salvation is far from the wicked, for they don't seek your statutes.  
Great are your tender mercies, HOLY ONE.  
Revive me according to your ordinances.*

*Many are my persecutors and my adversaries. I haven't swerved from your testimonies.  
I look at the faithless with loathing, because they don't observe your word.*

*Consider how I love your precepts.  
Revive me, HOLY ONE, according to your lovingkindness:*