

# GET IT DIRECT

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In this week's parashah, we read of the making of the Golden Calf. Many commentaries agree that the Golden Calf never was meant as an idol to be worshiped. Rather, writes R' Avraham Yitzchak Kilav shlita (formerly an instructor at Yeshivat Merkaz Ha'rav and Chief Judge of the Yerushalayim rabbinical court), it was meant to be a conduit for Hashem's goodness to flow to mankind. He explains:

The Prophets write that the image of a shor / ox appears on G-d's Throne. What does this mean; indeed, what does it mean that G-d has a "Throne"? Hashem's "Throne" refers to the fact that He manages the world, just as a human king sitting on the throne governs his kingdom. However, Hashem does not generally interact directly with His world, i.e., He does not randomly distribute His goodness to the world. Instead, there must be worthy recipients to act as conduits. Even if the worthy recipients are few--even if there is only one--Hashem's goodness can enter our world through them.

Naturally, Bnei Yisrael recognized that the world was sustained to a great degree through Moshe Rabbeinu's merit. Thus, when Moshe seemingly went missing, Bnei Yisrael felt the need to replace him with a new conduit for Hashem's goodness. Having seen the image of a shor on Hashem's "Throne," they believed that that would be a fitting conduit for Hashem's goodness. As noted, Hashem's "Throne" refers to the fact that He manages the world. The image of the shor on the "Throne" reflects the goodness that comes through working the land; thus, they thought that a conduit in the form of a shor would bring Hashem's goodness to them. However, this too was a sin, because the Jewish People do not need tangible images to connect to, and receive goodness from, Hashem. (Avnei Bareket)

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***"Hashem spoke to Moshe, 'Go, descend -- for your people that you brought up from Egypt has become corrupt'." (32:7)***

R' Uri Sherki shlita (rabbi and educator in Yerushalayim) writes: In the introduction to his work Mesilat

Yesharim, R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (Ramchal; 1707-1746) declares that his goal is not to teach the reader anything new; only to remind him of what he already knows. If a person does not actively engage in studying and practicing the steps toward spiritual growth described in Mesilat Yesharim, Ramchal continues, he will not even notice all the opportunities for growth that he has missed, for matters of piety, fear and love of G-d, and purity of the heart are not inborn in a person.

Ramchal appears to contradict himself, writes R' Sherki. Does a person already know the things Ramchal wants to teach, or are they foreign to him?

R' Sherki explains: Merely possessing information does not affect a person the same way he is affected when he truly grasps and understands it. Ramchal means that he is not teaching the reader information that he does not already possess; nevertheless, without effort, the reader will not "own" that information and, therefore, will miss out on opportunities for growth. The ability to apply what one knows is not inborn.

This, concludes R' Sherki, explains a series of events in our Parashah. When Hashem told Moshe in our verse that the nation had sinned, Moshe did not break the Luchot. Only later (verse 19), "as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain." Why did Moshe not break the Luchot when he first heard of the Golden Calf, but he did when he saw it? The answer is the lesson that Ramchal teaches above: Moshe knew that Bnei Yisrael had sinned, but a seeing it made it a different reality. (Shiurim B'mesilat Yesharim p.18)

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***"You will see My back, but My face may not be seen." (33:23)***

R' Yitzchak of Volozhin z"l (1780-1849) explains: G-d's "face" refers to His thoughts, while His "back" refers to His actions, for just as the face precedes the back, so thoughts precede actions. One can only see G-d's actions and try his best to understand G-d through them. No one, not even Moshe Rabbeinu, can fathom G-d's thoughts.

The same parallel, writes R' Yitzchak, is behind the statement of the Sage Rabbi Yehuda Ha'nasi, "The reason that I am sharper than my friends is because I saw Rabbi Meir's back. Had I seen his face, I would have been sharper still." He meant: I grew from seeing Rabbi Meir's actions, but, had I been privy to his thoughts, I would have grown even more. (Introduction to his father's Nefesh Ha'Chaim)

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***"Beware of what I command you today . . ." (34:11)***

The verses that follow repeat a series of laws that were taught in Parashat Mishpatim, which we read only three weeks ago. Why?

R' Chaim Kanievsky shlita (Bnei Brak, Israel) explains: The Gemara (Eruvin 54a) teaches that, if not for Moshe's breaking the Luchot, one would never forget his Torah learning. Therefore, in our parashah, after the breaking of the Luchot, the Torah teaches the importance of review as an aid to memory. (Ta'ama D'kra)

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## Pesach

R' Yosef Chaim David Azulai z"l (Chida; 1724-1806) writes: Commentaries have said that the Four Cups of wine at the Pesach Seder allude to the "Four Expressions of Redemption" (Shmot 6:6-7): "I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from serving them; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments; I shall take you to Me for a people." Why, however, are four expressions of redemption necessary? Why isn't one enough?

Chida answers: These four expressions allude to four separate stages of the unfolding Exodus: (1) The Plagues began one year before the Exodus, and surely that resulted in some lightening of Bnei Yisrael's enslavement. (2) Six months later, in the month of Tishrei, the enslavement ended entirely. (3) In Nissan, they were redeemed. Nevertheless, they were not entirely free, because another king could have captured them and enslaved them. That is why Hashem split the sea, which (4) demonstrated His special relationship with Bnei Yisrael and frightened all of the nations of the world. [This highlights the audacity of Amalek, the one nation that was not intimidated.]

This, concludes Chida, is the meaning of the above verses: "I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt" alludes to lightening their enslavement. "I shall rescue you from serving them" refers to ending the slavery. "I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments" hints at the actual Exodus. Lastly, "I shall take you to Me for a people" refers to Hashem's demonstrating that we are His people, and no one else's.

The Gemara (Pesachim 109b) records the following statement by the Sage Ravina: "The Rabbis established four cups of wine, and each is a separate Mitzvah." In the light of the above explanation, writes Chida, i.e., that each cup represents a separate aspect of the redemption, we understand why each cup is a separate Mitzvah. (Petach Einayim)

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## A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

***"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Master Hashem, the Elokim of Israel."***  
**(34:23)**

R' Yehoshua Yosef Hakohen Feinberg z"l (19<sup>th</sup> century rabbi of Mard, Poland) asks: During the reigns of Kings Shaul and David, before the Bet Hamikdash was built, the Mishkan was located in one place (first, Nov; later, Givon) while the Aron / Ark was in a different place (first, Kiryat Yearim; later

Yerushalayim). To which of those locations did the Mitzvah of Aliyah La'regel / ascending for the festival dictate that Jews go – to the place of the Aron or to the place of the Mishkan?

It appears, writes R' Feinberg, that the Mitzvah is to go to the place of the Mishkan. The primary fulfillment of Aliyah La'regel is through offering sacrifices, and that has to be at the place where the Mizbei'ach / Altar is located, i.e., the Mishkan. On the other hand, R' Feinberg notes, before the Bet Ha'mikdash was built, sacrifices could have been offered anywhere. Nevertheless, we see that G-d-fearing, meticulous people brought their sacrifices to the Mishkan. Thus, we read (Melachim I 3:4), "The King [Shlomo] went to Givon to sacrifice there, for that was the great Bamah / Altar." [This was before Shlomo built the Temple.] Why didn't King Shlomo offer sacrifices in Yerushalayim, where he lived and where the Aron was? This proves that the primary place for offering sacrifices was in the Mishkan. While we read that King David offered sacrifices in Yerushalayim rather than traveling to Givon, it is clear from the verses that he was ill and weak at that time. Overall, the Mishkan seems to take precedence over the Aron.

In reality, R' Feinberg concludes, the above might not answer our original question. Some commentaries state that there were two Aronot / Arks, one for the second set of Luchot and the other holding the broken remains of the first set of Luchot. Thus, there may have been an Aron in the Mishkan the entire time, even though the "main" Aron was elsewhere. Also, even if there were not two Aronot, a Midrash records that, when the Plishtim captured the Aron in battle, the future King Shaul wrested the Luchot from them. Thus, the Aron in Kiryat Ye'arim and Yerushalayim may have been empty, while the Luchot themselves may have been in the same place as the Mishkan. (Ezrat Kohanim)