

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Ki Tisa

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Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

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The Fax of Life

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GOOD MORNING! Some thirty-five years ago I attended Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore and studied under Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, of blessed memory. Rabbi Weinberg, who was also my father's teacher, was an absolutely brilliant Talmudic scholar with an encyclopedic mind and a master of logic and both inductive and deductive reasoning. I would attend his Talmudic lectures and watch him build outright skyscrapers of logic – it is one of my fondest memories of my days in rabbinical school.

He was also the older brother of Rabbi Noah Weinberg, the founder of Aish HaTorah. Because his older brother was an expert in Jewish philosophy and thought, Rabbi Noah Weinberg would have his brother come during the summer to give a series of lectures to the students of Aish HaTorah. He would begin the lecture by asking what the students wanted to hear about and then, after receiving some consensus, he would deliver an "off the cuff" hour-long class on the subject.

Because the vast majority of the students at Aish HaTorah were relative newcomers to studying Judaism many of these lectures revolved around questions regarding Jewish philosophy and Judaism's core beliefs. I remember listening to one of his classes in which he discussed the authenticity of the Torah and he mentioned that the Torah could only have been written by God. He went on to explain that anyone who reads the Torah can see that, as a historical book, it is one long criticism of the Jewish people and all the mistakes they made.

In Genesis, the Torah relates the most unpleasant incidents in the lives of our venerated patriarchs and their children. We have stories of fratricidal intrigue, sons deceiving their fathers, marital relations that the Torah would later forbid, heads of tribes marrying Canaanite women, an incident involving a visit to a prostitute (which resulted in the birth of the Jewish line of royalty), the list goes on and on. Yet, the Torah relates each story – warts and all.

Rabbi Weinberg continued, "From an outsider's perspective, one would think that the Torah was written by a rabid antisemite. No human would cast the history of his people in so negative a light. The Torah could only have been given as the direct word of God."

We know that the general rule is that history is written by the victors and often only contains their view of events. The less pleasant stories are frequently whitewashed or erased. Missouri Senator George Graham Vest once said, "In all revolutions the vanquished are the ones that are guilty of treason, even by the historians. History is written by the victors and framed according to the prejudices and bias existing on their side." By the way, he was a former congressman for the Confederacy and in 1891 was still an advocate for the rights to secede from the union.

According to Rabbi Weinberg, the Torah itself is one of the greatest pieces of evidences of its authenticity, for no man would have ever written such a document.

In this week's Torah reading we have a discussion about the copper washstand, otherwise known as the *kiyor*. While in the desert this washstand stood at the entrance to the Tabernacle (the *Mishkan*, in Hebrew) and was used primarily to dispense water on the hands and feet of the priests serving in the Tabernacle. Later, when the Jewish people conquered the Land of Israel and built the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, they continued to use the *kiyor* to sanctify the priests prior to their service in the Temple.

The great Biblical commentator known as Rashi relates a fascinating incident pertaining to its creation (38:8): "The daughters of Israel had in their possession copper mirrors which they would look into when they would beautify themselves, even these mirrors they did not withhold from bringing for the contribution toward the *Mishkan*. But Moses rejected them because they were made for the evil inclination. The Holy One, Blessed is He, said: 'Accept them, for they are dearest to Me of all, for through them the women established legions (of people) in Egypt.'"

Here we have another example of how one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish people was flat out wrong and totally misunderstood how the Almighty would perceive the gifts of the copper mirrors for the building of the Tabernacle and its vessels. What is the background to this discussion?

Rashi details how the women used these mirrors to entice their husbands to procreate. In Egypt, the men would return home at night from their slave filthy and physically and emotionally exhausted. Their wives would stand next to them and hold up the mirror. They'd gaze into the mirror together and the women would ask, "who is more attractive, me or you?" In this way, they revived the spirits of their husbands and slowly but surely built a Jewish nation.

Presumably, Moses was loathe to accept these mirrors for they were used for the purpose of stimulating the evil inclination. Many commentaries question why Moshe was willing to accept all sorts of personal items from the women including "armbands, nose-rings, finger-rings, and chastity belts" (see 35:22) and yet he initially refused their mirrors.

Aside from the fact that most of those items were also used to make themselves more attractive, the chastity belts seem to be particularly inappropriate for use in the Tabernacle. “So why,” ask the commentators, “did Moses accept those items yet reject the mirrors?” (*Gur Aryeh* 35:22).

Perhaps as perplexing, where in the verses do the sages see that Moses had initially rejected the copper mirrors until the Almighty told him how precious they were in His eyes?

The sages are bothered by the language of the verse: “*The mirrors of those that congregated, the ones that congregated at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting*” (*Exodus* 38:8). When discussing all the other gifts to the Tabernacle the Torah repeatedly describes the donator with lofty language: “everyone who is generous of spirit moved him” or “generous heart.” Yet there is no such designation for those women who came to give their mirrors to the Tabernacle. Why not?

Remarkably, the gift of the mirrors was different from all the other donations to the Tabernacle. Every other item given was melted down to be used wherever it was needed. But the women came “en masse” to make a special request. They wanted to designate their mirrors to be a perpetual monument to what they had done in Egypt. They wanted the *kiyor*, which symbolizes purity and sanctification, to be created solely from their mirrors in recognition of their achievement and as an eternal tribute to it.

Moses had happily accepted all types of personal items as donations to the Tabernacle, even those items that were of a VERY personal nature. But he was loathe to set aside a specific vessel of the Tabernacle to be designated as a monument to something that he felt was a tool of the evil inclination.

He argued with the women and initially rejected their plea, which is why the Torah tells us that they congregated and even refers to it as “the mirrors of those that congregated.” This gathering was to protest Moses’ rejection and refusal to give them a lasting testament. The Almighty comes to their rescue and explains that not only was Moses wrong in his assessment of these mirrors, but that the mirrors were most precious to Him of all.

From here we see an extraordinary lesson. We cannot presume to know what God wants other than what He tells us He wants. Even Moses, the greatest of all the prophets that ever were or will be, totally missed the Almighty’s perspective in the story relating to the mirrors that the women wanted to gift to the Tabernacle.

We learn from Moses that we must remain humble and open to perspectives that are motivated by the quest for authentic service of the Almighty. Most importantly, we also have to be able to admit that we may have been wrong because no one has a monopoly on understanding what God truly wants from us, other than what is contained in the Holy Torah. The only true path for mankind is to follow God’s Torah and everything that is contained therein. In this way we can be guided to live the amazing life that God has prepared for us.

TORAH PORTION: Ki Tisa, Exodus 30:11 - 34:35

The Torah portion includes: instructions for taking a census (by each person donating a half *shekel*); instructions to make the washstand, anointing oil, and incense for the *Mishkan*, the Portable Sanctuary; appointing Betzalel and Oholiab to head up the architects and craftsmen for the *Mishkan*; a special commandment forbidding the building of the *Mishkan* on Shabbat (people might have thought that they would be allowed to violate the Shabbat to do a *mitzvah*). “The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal covenant for their generations.”

The Torah portion continues with the infamous story of the Golden Calf. The people wrongly calculated that Moses was late in coming down from Mt. Sinai and the people were already seeking a replacement for him by making the Golden Calf (there is a big lesson in patience for us here). Moses sees them dancing around the calf and in anger breaks the Two Tablets; he then punishes the 3,000 wrongdoers (about 0.1% of the 3 million people), pleads to God not to wipe out the people, requests to see the Divine Glory, and receives the second set of Tablets of the Ten Commandments.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 5:07 *Miami* 6:09 *Cape Town* 6:53 *Guatemala* 5:53 *Hong Kong* 6:13 *Honolulu* 6:21

Jo'Burg 6:11 *LA* 5:38 *London* 5:40 *Melbourne* 7:29 *Mexico* 6:26 *Moscow* 6:03 *New York* 5:39 *Singapore* 6:59 *Toronto* 5:59

“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”: Be yourself – everyone else is taken. — Oscar Wilde

Happy Birthday to our amazing mom

Shari Lombardi

Thanks for always putting your children first and being an example of what motherhood is supposed to be.

Daniel and Brittany - Poppy and Lou
Brian and Rachel
Brooke



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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