

In his hands are the "two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of G-d."¹ The biblical commentator Rashi, noting the distinctive Hebrew spelling of "tablets," comments that both were of equal proportions.

There are two common attitudes toward religion, neither representing the outlook of Torah. Ethereal religion concerns itself with abstractions like the essence of G-d and the nature of evil. It thrives in the rarefied atmosphere of the seminar on theology and philosophy. Man is little involved in its processes. The mundane world of business, for example, has little place in this religion and faces neither challenge nor guidance from its conclusions. The two worlds are separate. The philosopher and businessman operate independently.

For others religion is a code of etiquette, a set of maxims on how to get along with people and be a nice guy. Be honest, give charity, don't kill, these represent religion. ("I'm a good Jew. I give charity.") This religion, even in its finer forms, exists primarily in terms of men -- G-d need not enter the picture. Here are opposing views of religion: one looks to G-d and disdains the "materialistic" world; the other is so concerned with men and society that it forgets G-d.

Now let's see the Ten Commandments. The first five are: "I am the L-rd," which is the positive statement of G-d and Providence; the prohibition of idolatry; taking His Name in vain; the Shabbat; honouring parents. There seems to be a pattern, the stress on man's relations with G-d. The next five, on the second tablet, concern murder, robbery, adultery, false witness, covetousness. All these affect man-to-man relationships.

Rashi declares both equal. The good Jew is "good" toward G-d and men, or else he is half a Jew, so to speak. He will keep the Shabbat, have honest scales, wear *tefillin*, pay employees promptly, observe the laws of Kosher, give charity -- because each of these is a Torah commandment. All are equally important.

Live & Laugh

How can you tell if someone is half Catholic and half Jewish? When he goes to confession, he takes a lawyer with him.

What's Nu?!

Chosson Kallah Mazal Tov

Ilan Wiesenbacher & Lori Wachenheimer

Justin Suttner & Lara Freidus

Calendar

Parshas Parah

- ◆ Shacharis 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Smorgasbord fof Shiurim**
- ◆ Mincha: 5:45 pm
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 6:53 pm

Young Jewish Joburg (20's & 30's)

FRIDAY NIGHT DINNER

with Harry Sideropoulos

Producer, Actor, Singer, Comedian.

Friday Night 24 March

Sydenham Community Centre

R220 | www.yjj.co.za/events

LADIES PESACH SHIUR

with Rebbetzin Estee Stern

Sunday 26 March 9am

Sydenham Community Centre

Coffee, tea & refreshments

SYDENHAM SHUL'S

"JERUSALEM 50!" ISRAEL TOUR

18-25 May 2017

32 people are signed up.

We have room for a few more.

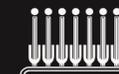
Speak to Rabbi Goldman or Louis Gorsky in Shul or on 083 310 6140.

- ◆ The **Scottish Leader Signature** whiskey at Shul is sponsored by **Distell** & available for purchase at **Norman Goodfellows**.
- ◆ **Nathan Fine** of I.deal Furnishers at Midway Mall, Bramley Gardens wishes all congregants a Good Shabbos. Call 011 887 5456/082 854 5706. **Furniture, Bedding & Appliances.**
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- ◆ Please take Good Shabbos Sydenham home if you will only carry it within the Eiruv.



Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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Parshas Ki Sisa

20 Adar 5777

Heresy Cloaked in Piety

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

How did the Jews who had just weeks earlier personally experienced the Revelation at Sinai and the Ten Commandments justify their demand for an idolatrous golden calf?

Well, on the face of it, it did seem as if it might have been a genuine expression of a need for leadership. What was their argument? *Make for us gods who will lead us because this man Moses who took us out of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him* (Exodus 32). Moshe was still up on the mountain, appeared to be late in returning, and they feared he wasn't coming back at all. The people's demand for a visible, tangible leader to replace Moses appeared reasonable. Arguably, it seemed to be a sincere call for religious guidance and for a means of better identifying with the One G-d.

But where did it end? Not only in blatant idolatry but also in adultery and even murder. The verse reads *Vayokumu litzachek - And they arose to revel*. Commentary interprets the word *litzachek - revel* as depraved merry-making which included wild orgies of unbridled immorality and the killing of Hur, son of Miriam, who tried to stop them.

Here we find a profound message as relevant today as in days of old. It sometimes occurs that people make demands cloaked in piety or religious fervor. But, beneath the surface lies a selfish desire and sinister motivations. Often, people ask for G-d when what they really want is sin!

Where was G-d during the Holocaust? This most

disturbing question may be asked in a variety of ways. It could be out of a genuine desire to understand the most challenging philosophical issue of the day. On the other hand, it might also be asked almost flippantly as a convenient excuse for one's own religious inadequacies.

A good test of where the question is coming from is this. If I gave you a watertight answer for the question of G-d and the Holocaust (assuming I had one), would you begin living a G-dly life? Would you start putting on Tefillin today? Will you be in Shul tomorrow? If not, then the fact that you don't do so now cannot be attributed to your having a gripe with G-d. Either you weren't raised with that important tradition or you aren't sure how to do it, or perhaps you just couldn't be bothered and are using the Holocaust as a convenient rationalisation.

Do you know how expensive it is to keep Kosher? Again, this may be a passionate cry of religious zeal, or perhaps a real concern to make Kashrut more accessible to the masses. Unfortunately, it might also be a cheap excuse for someone who has no intention of keeping kosher at any price.

I once heard a story about three Jewish apostates in Russia of old. They met for drinks in the local tavern and were discussing the reasons why each of them left the faith. One says being a Christian opened new doors for him in business. The next said he fell in love with the Squire's daughter and had to convert to marry her. The third says he had philosophical difficulties with the Torah and Talmud and was inspired by the theological doctrines of Christianity. Whereupon the other two turned on him and told him in no uncertain terms that he

was bluffing. "That story you can tell the Goyim. Us, however, you cannot fool. Tell us the truth."

Let us be honest. Why blame our own inadequacies on a mysteriously inexplicable G-d or on a Judaism we find fault with? Why say we are looking for G-d when we are really looking for the path of least resistance? Let us not abuse that which is holy for purposes of self-justification.

Even if we are not prepared to live a holy life, at least let us be honest.

Parsha Pointers

*Ki Sisa: Artscroll Chumash pg 484;
Living Torah pg 441*

The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given regarding the making of the Sanctuary's water-basin, anointing oil and incense. "Wise hearted" artisans Betzalel and Ahaliav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat.

When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a Golden Calf and worship it. G-d proposes to destroy the errant nation, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the Tablets of the Testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the Tablets, destroys the Golden Calf and has the primary culprits put to death. He then returns to G-d to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written."

G-d forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first G-d proposes to send His angel along with them, but Moses insists that G-d Himself accompany His people to the Promised Land.

Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends the mountain, where G-d reinscribes the covenant on these Second Tablets. On the mountain Moses is also granted a vision of the divine Thirteen Attributes of

Mercy. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with G-d and to teach His laws to the people.

Who's a Cheapskate?

By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum

Some people are cheap, penny-pinching their way through life. They eat stale, expired food, and on the rare occasion that they eat out, they don't leave tips. They huddle under layers throughout the winter, glaring in defiance at the central heating unit, and perspire their way through the summer, too miserly to install air conditioning. They don't spend on themselves, and they definitely don't give to charity.

Other people give generously when asked and are equally lavish when spending on themselves. They dispense cash with largesse and are always ready to indulge in an extra luxury or two. Money is there for spending, and life is meant to be lived large.

But it's a rare individual who sacrifices his own creature comforts to better provide for the needs of others, who holds back on his own spending so that there will be more left over to give away. Imagine the strength of character needed to put everyone else first and yourself last. That's generosity! The Torah describes the construction of the Kiyor, the copper basin which was used by the *kohanim* (priests) to wash their hands and feet when entering the Temple. The raw materials for the Kiyor were donated by the Jewish women, who gave up their own valuable mirrors for the cause.

Almost immediately thereafter, we read about the most shocking sin in history, when, just weeks after receiving the Torah on Sinai, the people constructed and worshiped a golden calf: "And they stripped themselves of the golden earrings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took [them] from their hand[s], fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into a molten calf, upon which they said: 'These are your gods,

O Israel.'"

However, it should be noted that the women did not sin. They remained faithful to G-d and Moses. They refused to contribute their jewellery and, even when threatened, remained true to their faith. When Moses finally returned, the sinners were punished, while the women were rewarded for their faithfulness in the face of temptation and violence.

But how can we really be assured that the women's motives were so pure? Maybe they refused to give up their gold because they just wanted to keep it for themselves.

Perhaps that's why the Torah prefaces the story of the golden calf with the description of the Kiyor. The women weren't cheap, they were wise. They were willing to give up their own cherished possessions for a truly G-dly purpose, but unwilling to invest in evil.

And that's why they were rewarded.

This is the attitude we should strive to inculcate in our children. There is nothing wrong with spending money for the useful things in life, and a person should aspire to serve G-d lavishly. Paying for a quality Jewish education, buying kosher food, and supporting synagogues and worthy institutions might be expensive, but they're worth it.

It is only when it comes to the empty-headed frivolities of life that we should hesitate. Are we wasting our money? Do we need it? Would we be any worse off if we waited till we indulged? It's not that we are too cheap to spend; rather, we recognize the true value of money and life, and we're saving towards the investments that last forever.

Good As Gold

By Rabbi Yanki Tauber

A recent *New York Times* article examined what Americans are doing with their money these days. One family installed palm trees on their Hamptons property which they fly to Florida each winter (the palm trees, not the property). A woman hired a "personal secretary" to tend to her hairdresser appointments, and then hired an assistant to the secretary. "It's like cats," she explained. "You need two of them so that they can keep

each other company while you're away."

A similar problem plagued the Children of Israel more than 33 centuries ago. They had drained Egypt of its wealth, and then the Red Sea spewed out the jewels that had adorned the drowned Egyptians. So they, too, had too much gold. But back then, people had a more direct approach to things. Instead of devising all these ingenious ways of saying, "Hey, look! I have more money than I know what to do with! But don't worry! I'll keep on doing my darnest to have even more!", they cast a calf of pure gold, put it up on a pedestal, and worshipped it.

How did G-d address the gold-sickness of His newly chosen people? He didn't abolish gold. He didn't even take away theirs. He told them to use their gold to build Him a Sanctuary.

Compulsive overeating is a horrible disease: it's unhealthy, it can even kill you. But the urge to eat is not only healthy---it's vital to life itself.

The same is true of every negative phenomenon. There is nothing intrinsically bad in G-d's world: every evil is a perverted good, every psychosis a healthy instinct gone awry.

So before we get all riled up over that woman with the two secretaries, let us try to understand the tendency of humans to splurge, flaunt and luxuriate in their wealth. We understand why we need food; we understand why we need shelter; but why do we crave gold?

In essence, the craving for gold is a yearning for transcendence. It is man saying: I am not content to merely exist and subsist; I want to exalt in life, I want to touch its magnificence and sublimity.

Of course, flying your palm trees to Miami each winter is not sublime. It's pathetic. It is a gross distortion of the most noble strivings of the human soul. The answer, however, is not to squelch these strivings, but to purge them of their negative expressions. Use your yearning for gold to make a home for G-d.

Two Equal Tablets

By Rabbi Zalman Posner

Moses comes down from Sinai forty days after G-d proclaimed the Ten Commandments.

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