

<p>Moses Intercedes with God. (Exodus 32:11-14) When the people worship the Golden Calf, God is incensed. God said to Moses, וַיִּחַר־אַפִּי בָּהֶם - Let me be, הַגִּיחָה לִּי - that my anger may flare up against them, וְאַכְלֶם - and I may destroy them, וַאֲעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָהּ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל! - but you, I will make into a great nation! Moses understands immediately that he has to intercede, otherwise, God will destroy the people. So he has to figure out, on the spot, what will be the most effective way of calming God down, of getting God to relent. To us it seems so strange that God needs to be <i>calmed down</i>. We have been taught to think of God as <i>all-knowing</i> and <i>all-powerful</i>.</p>	<p>וַיִּתַּל מִנְּשָׁה אֶת־פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהָיו (לב:יא) Moshe soothed the face of God his God; (32:11a)</p> <p>But here, instead, God is <i>all-feeling</i>. Or, to put it another way, God so intensely desires connection to Israel, that his experience of betrayal is beyond measure. In the verse above, the word וַיִּתַּל means <i>to soothe</i>. Imagine then, that Moses is consoling God, getting God to change God's mind, as it were. If God were a person, Moses would be holding onto him, or standing bravely in front of him, saying: <i>You're angry. You've been betrayed. After all you've done for them, they have betrayed you</i></p>	<p><i>in this moment of idolatry. But God forbid, you can't let your anger guide you now otherwise you will destroy them.</i></p> <p>When Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel, the moment is loaded with urgency. Despite the noise of the whole people below, the text subtly wants us to focus only on God and Moses in this moment. Moses soothed the face of ה' אֱלֹהָיו - God his God, (not God <i>our</i> God, or God the God of <i>his</i> fathers, etc.) ie. God of Moses. But does God only belong to Moses?! God belongs to everyone! Only, in the urgency of this moment, the people are detached from God. Right now, God "belongs" exclusively to Moses. God's relationship with the people is broken. Moses is saying, God, right now this is between you and me.</p>
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<p>Moses' First Question. Moses has just been on the top of the mountain with God for forty days and nights. Though he still has a lot to learn about God, (and, in a very short while, he will beseech God, הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת־דְּרֹכֶיךָ וְאֵדְעָהּ - show me your ways and I will know you. (34:13)), it is fair to say that he has already learned a great deal about God's attributes. That is what is underlying his question when he now turns to God:</p>	<p>He knows God possesses <i>godliness</i> (for lack of a better word). In this intense moment, in which God threatens to destroy Israel and start the whole story over with <i>him as head of a new people</i>, Moses challenges God to be, <i>godly</i>.</p>	<p><i>half to death so that they could barely make out what you were saying. And then I went up the mountain to be alone with you. For forty days and nights. Did you not consider that my absence would throw them into a state of turmoil?</i></p>
<p>וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָה ה' יִחַרְהָ אֶפְסָה בְּעַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה: (לב:יא) and he said: Why, O God, should your anger flare up against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power, with a strong hand? (32:11b)</p>	<p>Why are you getting so angry, God? These are your people! You just freed them! What do you expect from them?!</p> <p><i>You took them out of Egypt in a night of terror. They went through the sea being chased by Pharaoh's army. They were starving. They were thirsty. They then had to fight a war. You then brought them to this mountain and scared them</i></p>	<p><i>Of course, what they did was foolish, and repugnant, but why would you expect them to follow your rules, especially about idolatry, when they barely know how to be free? All they know of you is your power. Now is not the time for your anger. Now is the moment for you to be godly. Show them that you are more than power, that you have compassion for them.</i></p>

<p>Moses' Second Question.</p> <p>לְמָה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם לְאֹמֶר בְּרָעָה הוֹצִיאָם לְהַרְגֵם אֲתֶם בְּהָרִים וְלַכְלֹתָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה שׁוּב מִתְרוֹן אֶפְסָה וְהִנַּחְתָּ עַל־הָרָעָה לְעַמֶּךָ: (לב:יב) Why should the Egyptians say, yes, say: With evil intent he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains, to destroy them from the face of the earth? Turn away from your flaming anger, relent of the evil [intended] against your people! (32:12)</p>	<p><i>You wanted your name to be known by the world, and you specifically wanted to show Pharaoh that you were God, that you were in control of the universe. Imagine what they are going to say when they find out that you took your people out of Egypt, and you subjected Egypt to all of that destruction, only to destroy your very own people in the desert! If you do this, you will undermine what it means to be God! You will destroy your reputation! Your great and holy name will always be associated with wanton cruelty and capricious destruction. Is that what you want God?! Who's going to want to have anything to do with you if one moment you rescue your people and the next moment you destroy them?</i></p>	<p><i>Even if you went on to make a new people through me, God forbid, why would I want to subject my descendants to the possibility of total annihilation because of the possibility that, if they somehow do something wrong they will set off your destructive anger?</i></p> <p><i>You need to turn away from your anger and be the God that I know you are. If you want your name, your reputation, to be known as a force for good in the world, as opposed to a force of bad, רָעָה - destruction, then you are going to need us, your people. Turn away from your flaming anger, I pray, and relent of all the evil that you want to mete out against us!</i></p>
<p><i>You made a point during the Exodus to demonstrate to Egypt that you were powerful.</i></p>		

<p>זָכַר לאברהם ליצחק ולישׂאל עבדיך אשר נשבעת להם בך ומדבר אלם ארה את-זרעכם ככוכבי השמים וקלה-ארץ הזאת אשר אמרתי אתו לזרעכם ונחלו לעלם: (לב:יג)</p>	<p>Recall Avraham, Yitzhak and Yisrael your servants, to whom you swore by yourself when you spoke to them: I will make your seed many as the stars of the heavens, and all this land which I have promised, I will give to your seed, that they may inherit [it] for the ages! (32:13)</p>	<p><i>Not only that, but you made a promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that you would make their descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and that you would give them a piece of land upon which they would live and constitute their nation. If you destroy them now, you will be breaking your promise. That's not good, God!</i></p>	<p>Moses' strategy works. By appealing to God's godliness, and then to God's reputation, and finally to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses is able to console God and get God to contain his anger. What sheer audacity! What courage! What leadership! He speaks in imperatives: שוב, והגתם, and זָכַר-Repent! Relent! Remember! (To God!) Having held back God's anger, Moses now turns towards the people. Moses acts with his own anger and destroys the tablets. But the people are saved. <small>(Better the tablets than the people.)</small></p>
		<p>וינחם ה עליהרעה אשר דבר לעשות לעמו: (לב:יד)</p>	<p>And God repented of the evil that he had spoken of doing to his people. (32:14)</p>



<p>וידבר ה אל-משה לך עלה מזה אתה והעם אשר העלית מארץ מצרים אלה-ארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לאמר לזרעך אתגנה: ושלחתי לפניך מלאך וגרשתי את-הכנעני האמורי והחתי והקנזי החוי והיבوسی: אל-ארץ זבת חלב ודבש כי לא אעלה בקרבך כי עמ-קשה-ערה אתה פואכלך בדרך: וישמע העם את-הדבר הרע הזה וימתו ולא-שמו איש עדין עליו: (שמות לג:א-ד)</p>	<p>God said to Moshe: Go, up from here, you and the people that you brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Avraham, to Yitzhak and to Yaakov, saying: I will give it to your seed. I will send a messenger before you and will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite, the Hivvite and the Yevusite—, to a land flowing with milk and honey. But: I will not go up in your midst, for a hard necked people are you, lest I destroy you on the way! [When] the people heard this evil word they mourned, and no man put on his ornaments [again]. (Exod. 33:1-4)</p>
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I will not go up in your midst. In the aftermath of Golden Calf catastrophe, God resets his relationship with Israel. Given that the people will always provoke God's destructive anger, God decides to withdraw his direct presence in their midst, and have a **messenger** lead them instead. God says this to Moses privately. But somehow, the people find out! Were they eavesdropping? Did they overhear Moses discussing this situation with Joshua? Or was their own intuition? Whatever way they found out, the very notion that God has decided to **not go up in their midst** put them in a state of trauma. They **mourn**. They **did not put on their ornaments**. According to the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation) it means **they put on clothes of mourning**, (another example of the prominence of **clothing** as a theme

throughout the exodus and beyond. Recall that upon leaving Egypt they asked the Egyptians for **clothing** (Exod. 12:35), that they took the unbaked dough for matzah and wrapped it in their **clothing** (12:34), that they laundered their **clothing** prior to the revelation at Sinai (19:10, 14) and that in Moses' farewell address he says that their **clothing** did not wear out during the entire 40-year journey (Deut. 8:4)).

Back to God threatening to not go up in their midst. Not only were the people deeply traumatized by this, but Moses himself, was also concerned. For him, not having God in Israel's midst during the journey would be nothing short of catastrophic. When God has Moses carve the second set of tablets, and then reveals to Moses his essential attributes of compassion and mercy, Moses

first bows low to God and then beseeches God to relent and to **go in our midst** (see below). He further asks God to **forgive** the people. And therein lies the message. Forgiveness is the prerequisite for **having God in our midst**. When God **forgives** the people for their great transgression, he will then be able to dwell in their midst. The worship of the Golden Calf was defiling. Only forgive-ness can remedy that pollution. It's not an accident that these words are found at the core of the **Selihot** services on Yom

<p>ויאמר אם-נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אדני ולד-נא אדני בקרבנו כי עמ-קשה-ערה הוא וסלחת לעוננו ולחטאתנו ויקח לנו: (שמות לד:ט)</p>	<p>and he said: Pray if I have found favor in your eyes, O my Lord, pray let my Lord go in our midst! Indeed, it is a hard necked people— so forgive our iniquity and our sin, and make-us-your-inheritance! (Exod. 34:9)</p>
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Kippur. Bottom line: only sincere repentance can elicit God's forgiveness so that God's presence can be restored in our midst. **Shabbat Shalom!**

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Carla and Bruce Herniter in honor of the engagement of their son, Ira Herniter to Hannah Birnbaum. Mazal Tov!