

ה' אל רחום ותנון. These words are so familiar to us. But what do they mean? And who said them? When? Where? And why? **Background:** The people have committed the gravest sin. They worshipped the Golden Calf. God wanted to destroy them. Moses interceded, but then he descended from Mount Sinai and smashed the tablets. Violence ensues. ~3000 people are killed. Moses seeks atonement for the people. Then God said to Moses:

<p><i>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... to a land flowing with milk and honey.</i></p>		
<p>כי לא אעלה בקרבך כי עם קשה ערף אתה פן אלקה בדרך.</p>	<p>But: I will not go up in your midst, for a hard necked people are you, lest I destroy you on the way!</p>	<p>Comment: These words hit the people hard.</p>
<p>וישמע העם את הדבר הרע הזה ויתאבלו...</p>	<p>[When] the people heard this evil word they mourned...</p>	<p>Of course they mourned! God, who had rescued them from Egypt, with signs and wonders, was now saying, <i>I'm outta here! I'm done. I'm sending a messenger.</i> This was now also a problem for Moses. Moses understood that if God was in their midst, they might be destroyed; but if God was not in their midst, they might also not survive. Moses had to find a way to get God to agree to be in their midst. He also needed to ask God to forgive them. God has said that Moses <i>has found favor in His eyes</i>. But Moses needed <i>to know God's ways</i> in order to face the challenges ahead. Moses: <i>In order for me to serve as their leader, I need to understand You.</i> This is not so simple. In fact, this could be catastrophic for Moses since, <i>no one can see God and live</i>. God tells Moses to stand at a rock...</p>

<p><i>And, it shall be: when My Glory passes by, I will place you in the cleft of the rock and screen you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove My hand; you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.</i></p>	<p>Paraphrase: I'll show you a fraction of My essence and that will have to do. Because if I show you the entirety of my essence, you will be vaporized. Therefore, I will protect you in a way that can't be described.</p>
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Then God says:

<p><i>Carve yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you smashed.</i></p>	<p>Comment: God carved the tablets the first time. Now, God tells Moses to carve new ones. The original God-made tablets are gone forever. The second set will be a copy. The original record will always be lost to us. Analogy: Lincoln's reading copy of the Gettysburg Address is lost. All we have now are his copies.</p>
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Then God said to Moses:

<p><i>And be ready by the morning: go up in the morning to Mount Sinai,</i></p>	<p>Comment: Everything of importance happens in the morning. It would be the clearest time of day, and the time of maximum human alertness and readiness.</p>
<p>ונצבת לי שם על ראש ההר.</p>	<p>and station yourself for Me there, on top of the mountain.</p>

<p><i>No man is to go up with you, neither is any man to be seen on all the mountain, neither are sheep or oxen to graze in front of this mountain.</i></p>	<p>Comment: The mountain is a sterile zone. Unlike the first revelation, this time, the entire mountain is off limits. No other human being, or creature, will have this, or any fraction of this experience.</p>
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<p><i>So he carved two tablets of stone like the first ones. Moses started-early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as God had commanded him, and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. God came down in the cloud;</i></p>	<p>Comment: Moses, dutifully, does what God asks. But where is Moses when God's cloud comes down? Is he at the appointed station at the top of the mountain or is he still on his way up? Answer: Their movements are simultaneous to each other: God's cloud comes down while Moses comes up. Then...</p>
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<p>ויתיצב עמו שם</p>	<p>he stationed himself beside him there</p>	<p>Question: The text is not clear. Did God station Himself beside Moses, or did Moses station himself beside God, in the thick of the cloud?</p> <p>Answer: Moses finds his way to the rock at the top of the mountain, and stations himself next to God. We do not know how much time transpired here.</p>
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<p>ויקרא בשם ה'.</p>	<p>and called out the name of God.</p>	<p>Comment: Who called out to whom? It makes no sense to say that God called out in the name of God. The only other times that the expression- <i>ויקרא בשם ה'</i> occurs in the Torah, is when a person calls out God's name. Here it is reasonable to conclude that Moses is calling out God's name. Why? In order to get a response from God. And then...</p>
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<p>ויעבר ה' על פניו</p>	<p>And God passed before his face</p>	<p>Comment: With their moment in the cloud now concluding, Moses is in the cleft of the rock, shielded, and God is <i>passing before Moses' face</i>.</p>
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<p>ויקרא</p>	<p>and called out:</p>	<p>Again: Who called out to whom? God to Moses, or Moses to God? See below.</p>
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<p>ה' אל רחום ותנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת. נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע ותטאה</p>	<p>God, showing-mercy, showing-favor, long-suffering in anger, abundant in loyalty and faithfulness, keeping loyalty to the thousandth [generation], bearing iniquity,</p>
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<p>וְנִקְהָה לֹא וְנִקְהָה פָקֵד עֲוֹן אֲבוֹתָם עַל בְּנֵים וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנֵים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רְבֻעִים.</p>	<p>rebellion and sin, yet not clearing, clearing [the guilty], calling-to- account the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and upon sons' sons, to the third and fourth [generation]!</p>
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Question: If God is calling Moses, why would he be referring to Himself in the third person? Why wouldn't He say instead: *I am ה' God, merciful* etc.? After all, even the Ten Commandments begins with *I am ה' God!*

Answer: **Moses is saying these words about God, to God.** There are four cases where God calls an individual by doubling his name.¹ It makes no sense for God to be calling to Himself ה' ה'. This is the only place where a person urgently calls God in the exact same way that God urgently calls a person. That's the point. As for God and Moses, this moment is an inversion of the Burning Bush. There, God said, *Moses, Moses!* Here, Moses says, ה' ה'! There, God was getting Moses' attention. Here, Moses is getting God's attention. There, God was revealing Moses' character, and here, Moses is revealing God's character...to God! **Paraphrase:** ה' ה'! *When You passed before me, I learned Your true merciful essence.*

Quickly Moshe did homage on the ground, and bowed low, **Comment:** This is the moment we have been waiting for. Moses supplicates to God out of awe and respect, and now he makes the ultimate "ask":

<p>אִם נָא מִצְאֵתִי חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי</p>	<p>Pray if I have found favor in your eyes, O my Lord,</p>	<p>Paraphrase: After this moment, now that we have established our relationship, let me ask You-My Lord:</p>
<p>יְרַךְ נָא אֲדֹנָי בְּקִרְבֵנוּ</p>	<p>Pray, let my Lord go in our midst!</p>	<p>Please God! We need You with us! You must be in our midst! Otherwise we will die!</p>
<p>כִּי עַם קָשָׁה עֲרָף הוּא</p>	<p>Indeed, it is a hard necked people,</p>	<p>God, You and I know how difficult they are. But please be with us! We need You!</p>
<p>וְסַלְחָתְךָ לְעֹנֵבֵינוּ וְלִחַטְאֵתָנוּ וְיִגְדַלְתָּנוּ</p>	<p>so forgive our iniquity and our sin, and make-us-your-inheritance!</p>	<p>So forgive us, because if there is one thing that I know about You, and one thing that has just been confirmed to me, it is that</p>

You are forgiving. That is the essence of Your Being. Sure, You perform miracles, but the truest essence of Your being is that YOU ARE MERCIFUL. So I am appealing to Your essence: Forgive us. God's answer...

He said: Here, I cut a covenant **Paraphrase:** Okay. We will have an agreement. **Question:** But did He forgive them? **Answer:** Not explicitly yet. But it's going in that direction.

before all your people I will do wonders **Comment:** Sounds like yes, God will be with them in the end: *I will do wonders for your people, Moses.* **Question:** Why does God call them *your people*, not *My people*? Is there still some gap between them?

<p>אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִבְרָאוּ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הַגּוֹיִם...</p>	<p>such as have not been created in all the earth, among all the nations...</p>	<p>Paraphrase: I will do wonders that nobody has ever seen. There have already been plenty, and there's plenty on the way.</p>
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Comment: But the greatest wonder is not something like the splitting of the sea, or the daily manna. *It's the wonder of God's forgiveness.* There is no logical reason for God to forgive them. *But. He. Does.* The fact that God will resume His relationship with Israel, *and reside in their midst* after such a betrayal, is the greatest wonder of all! This is the core truth of the Torah: **God's relationship with Israel is eternal and unconditional.** **God:** *Sometimes you are indeed, a difficult people, but I do need you and I will not abandon you. And Moses has convinced Me that you need Me in your midst.*

<p>וְרָאָה כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה מִעֲשֶׂה ה' כִּי נִרְאָה הוּא...</p>	<p>Then shall all the people among whom You are, see the work of ה', how awe-inspiring it is...</p>	<p>Comment: God has just said that He will do wonders, and here we have Moses, breaking into that statement in the middle of the verse.</p>
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Paraphrase of Moses: YES! AMAZING! *You are with us! And the people in whose midst You are, will see You and Your wonders, and they will get to see You and know You. And they will be awed by that!*

<p>אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ.</p>	<p>which I do with You.</p>	<p>Paraphrase: Which I, Moses, do with You, God. I will be Your partner, God, in leading the people.</p>
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Comment: Moses himself is asserting, with confidence and audacity, his validation of God and their close bond.

To sum up: This is one of the pinnacle moments of the Bible. The rupture of the Golden Calf led to an impasse between God and the people. God says He won't go *in their midst*, putting them in a tailspin: having just demonstrated their brazenness, they now demonstrate their sincerity. Moses is caught in between. Having just sided with God at the Golden Calf, smashing the tablets, he now sides with the people and brings God back into their midst, with a new set of tablets. He knows that he is the only one who can lead them, but in order to do so, he must get God to disclose His essence to him. God agrees. In their encounter, Moses perceives God to be full of mercy and compassion. *The words that Moses recites will become etched into the soul of the Jewish people for all time, and now, we recite them when we need to be forgiven, to remind God of His mercy and compassion.*

We pray that God shield the hostages, on this, the 148th day of their captivity. May they be freed! Now!

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Philip and Heather Kibel to commemorate the 1st Yahrzeit of Philip's father, Ben Kibel, z'l.
עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי! **שַׁבַּת שְׁלוֹמִים!**
Shabbat Shalom! Am Yisrael Hay!

¹Abraham, Gen. 22:11; Jacob in Gen. 46:2; Moses, Exod. 3:4 and Samuel, 1 Sam. 3:10.