

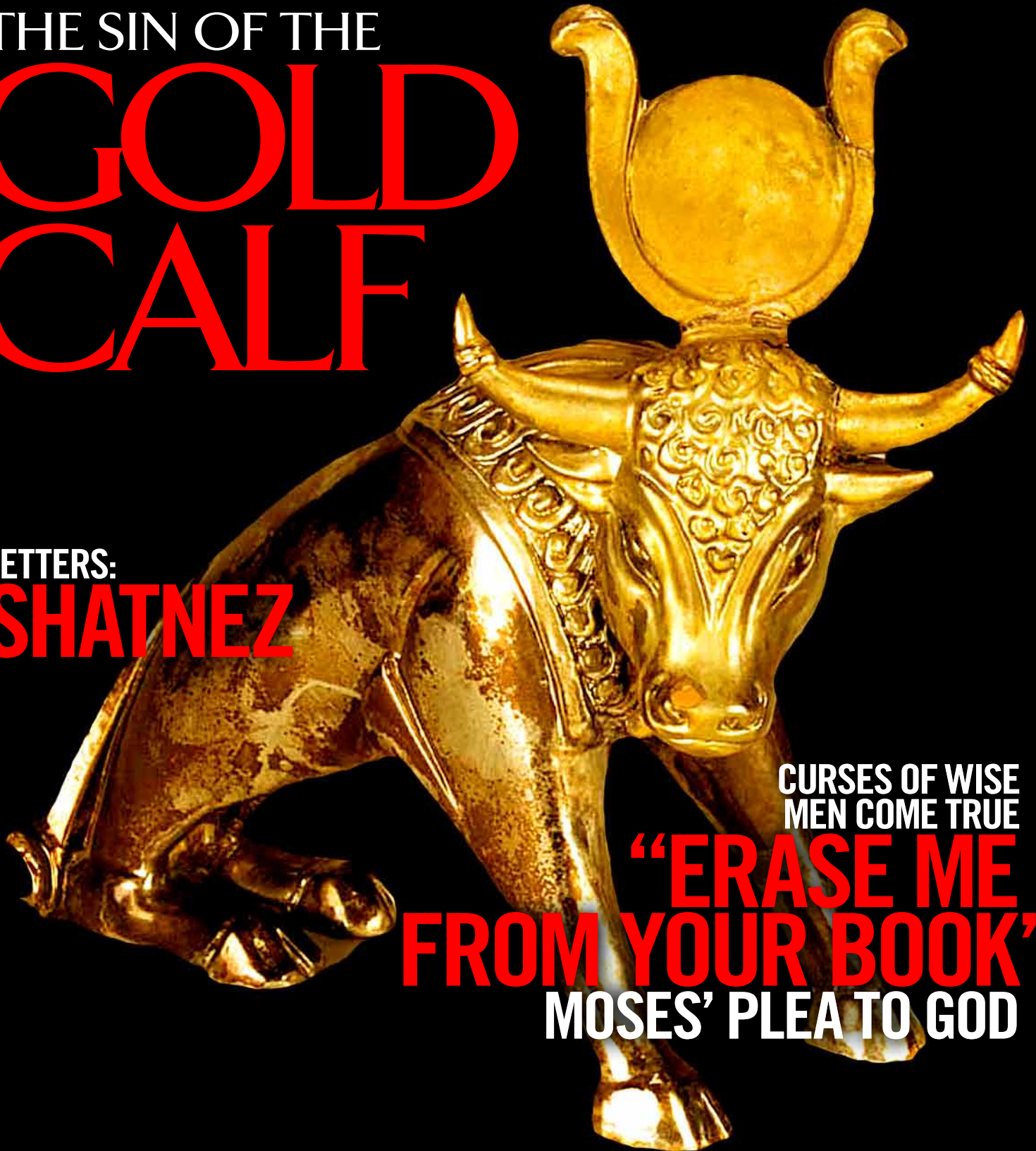
JewishTimes

VOL. XII NO. 9 — MARCH 1, 2013

THE SIN OF THE **GOLD CALF**

LETTERS:

SHATNEZ



CURSES OF WISE
MEN COME TRUE

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FROM YOUR BOOK”**

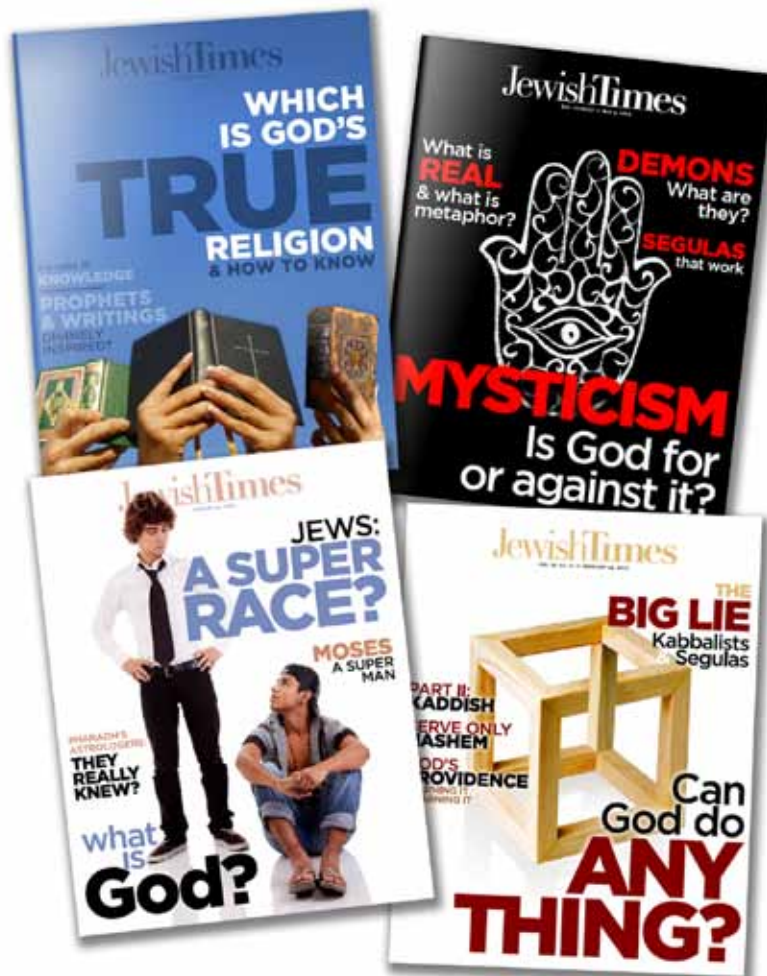
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LETTERS

Mixed Up

Reader: I was in contact with you previously on issues of emunah, I have a question for you. Regarding the Rabbinical claim for the giving of the Oral Law at Sinai, what if this is contradicted by the Prophets? For example, Ezek. 44:

17. "When they enter the gates of the inner court, they are to wear linen clothes; they must not wear any woolen garment while ministering at the gates of the inner court or inside the temple. 18. They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists. They must not wear anything that makes them perspire. 19. When

they go out into the outer court where the people are, they are to take off the clothes they have been ministering in and are to leave them in the sacred rooms, and put on other clothes, so that they do not consecrate the people by means of their garments'."

However, the Rabbis claim that the Cohen Gadol – the High Priest – wore Shatnez i.e., wool mixed with linen. This is even how some Chumashim "translate" the laws, e.g. the Stone Edition. What do you think?

Regards, Eddie (continued on page 10)



The Curse of Wise Men Comes True

Moshe Ben-Chaim & Moshe Abarbanel

"And now, lift their sin, and if not, erase me please from Your book that You wrote (Exod. 32:32)."

Moses says this to God, attempting to obtain a pardon for the Jews' Golden Calf sin. God responds to Moses, "Those who sinned against Me, I will erase from My book." Is God disagreeing with Moses? It would appear that He is.

The Elders of Tosafos said that Moses made a bargain of sorts:

"If you forgive me for breaking your tablets,

forgive them, for You are not one who is biased in judgment'. God responds: 'Whoever sinned against Me will I erase. They caused you to sin Moses, and the sin of the Tablets is theirs (not yours). You acted properly, as they were not fit to receive the Tablets.' Nonetheless, Moses' name was erased from the entire Parsha of Tetzaveh, for [the name] 'Moses' is not found there. This was done because 'the curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.'"

Of course we need to understand Moses' equation between his breaking the Ten Commandments, and the Jews' Golden Calf sin. But let us address the

main idea: "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition." Moses cursed himself, in suggesting his name be erased from the Torah if the Jews would not be forgiven. However, God seems to suggest that He will not uphold Moses' wish of erasure, as he says, "the sin was the Jews' as they caused you to sin, Moses." Our obvious question is, if that is so, and God says Moses did not sin, why then does God erase Moses name from the Torah, albeit the single Parsha of Tetzaveh?

God says this, "He who sins will I erase", and God did in fact erase Moses' name. How do we understand God's contradictory words: on the one hand He indemnifies Moses, saying the Jews caused him to break the Tablets. On the other hand, He erases Moses' name from Parshas Tetzaveh! I see only one possible answer: Moses' name deserved erasure. I do not mean that Moses sinned; there may be another reason why his name must be obscured. I will elaborate shortly. For now, let us line up the questions:

1) What is meant by "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition?"

2) Why was Moses' name erased from Tetzaveh, as opposed to nay other Parsha? Is it due to its coming immediately prior to the Parsha containing the Golden Calf?

3) What was Moses' sin?

4) How does erasing his name address the issue?

Hold on to these questions. Let us further investigate our principle.

King David's Curse

The Talmud cites another case where we apply an almost identical principle, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free." (Here it is made for "free", while Moses' curse was made "conditionally.") Talmud Makkos 11a records the episode when King David was digging out the Temple's foundation, the sea threatened to flood the Earth...a metaphor. King David inquired if it was permissible to write God's name on a chard to be tossed into the sea, so as to contain it. No person answered him.

(continued on next page)

He cursed with suffocation, anyone who knew an answer and remained silent. Achitophel then considered that since God's name may be erased from the Sotah's document to create marital harmony, certainly it could be erased in this case to save the world, and he instructed the King accordingly. King David did so, and all was saved. Nonetheless, later, when Achitophel saw his counsel to Avshalom was disregarded, he hung himself, dying precisely in line with King David's curse of suffocation. (Samuel II, 17:23) The Talmud teaches that although Achitophel heeded King David's threat, nonetheless, Achitophel seemingly died by the very curse of the king. We thereby support, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free." But what is this justice?

We must be careful. We have a tendency to evaluate a Talmudic portion, or any part of Torah, based on the first notion we imagine. We may think that King David possessed the ability to curse. After all, he was a king, and it appears on face value that his "curse" came true. But this is a superficial and false view of a curse, which is merely the opposite of a blessing. No man has the ability to alter nature or someone else's free will or fate, merely by uttering words, as with a curse or a blessing. It is the ignorant reading of stories like these, which spreads fallacy.

Let us approach this Talmudic portion, as would a scholar. King David was human. He possessed no greater capabilities than any other person. So how may we understand that his "curse came true"? Look at all the facts in the story...one stands out. Achitophel did not readily assist the king, not until King David made a threat. Why would Achitophel remain silent at first? It must be based on some reluctance to assist the king. We see later on as well, Achitophel counseled Avshalom (King David's son) on how to successfully rebel against his father, the king. A picture begins to emerge...Achitophel harbored some animosity towards King David, and this explains why he counseled the King's son on how to succeed over King David. David's need to threaten Achitophel shows Achitophel in the same light –

displaying Achitophel's animosity in the form of silence.

Let us explain the phenomenon: King David has no powers, yet Achitophel does in fact die the way the King cursed. How did this happen? The answer is, "observation." What do I mean? King David "observed" a negative trait in Achitophel. His "curse" that anyone who withholds information die, means that the king was pointing out that Achitophel possessed some negative trait, deserving of punishment. Again, all King David did was "observe and identify a flaw" – what we mean by a "curse". But the king's words cannot cause Achitophel's death. We even see that Achitophel hung himself...it was not David! So why does the Talmud attribute it to King David? The Talmud is merely agreeing with the king. When it says, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free" it teaches that when the "wise" say something, they are observing reality accurately. This is why the Talmudic principle only applies to the "wise". What they say – be it a curse or a blessing – is in fact an accurate observation, but it is not "causative." Thus, King David observed that Achitophel possessed a flaw, which he knew would cause him his own downfall. King David did not 'cause' Achitophel's death; Achitophel hung himself. But his death is euphemistically ascribed to the king, as if to say the king was right.

King David said, "Whoever remains 'silent' will suffocate." Why suffocation? It makes sense. Achitophel sinned by his mouth (throat) and King David knew that this type of life must cause his downfall. King David knew that a counselor (Achitophel) whose tools are his throat and mouth, and who is also deviant, would eventually, when using his mouth, suffer by it. (Anyone who is deviant who also functions in a specific capacity the majority of the time, will find his end connected with that function.)

King David may have assumed that Achitophel was too wise not to know this himself, and upon his own self-realization that he erred with his mouth, would kill himself in connection with it through hanging himself. Perhaps Achitophel suffered from a

certain amount of guilt regarding using his counseling abilities for evil, to destroy King David. Perhaps his animosity towards the king was because of his role as king – a coveted position to say the least. Radak states that Achitophel hung himself because he knew Avshalom would not succeed without his advice. Thereby, the king would discover Achitophel as a rebel, and would seek to kill him. Achitophel therefore saw the writing on the wall and preempted the king's decree. We conclude that King David's curse was merely an observation of what was probably inevitable. He knew that Achitophel's deviance used in counseling would bring him to his death. There is no causal relationship between man's words, and reality.

Moses' Curses

Now, how does this apply to our case of Moses and the Jews? Moses too cannot cause a change in nature or people, simply by uttering words. God alone controls all natural laws under His exclusive guidance. God's laws were fixed before Moses or any prophet entered the world's stage, so how can they change what God already completed? They cannot! However, we are forced to reconcile God's statement that the Jews sinned, and the fact that God did in fact erase Moses' name, which appears to be a fulfillment of "Whoever sinned against Me I will erase." Moses' name required erasure...but why?

In Exodus 32:1, the people first demand to create a god (Golden Calf), as "Moses the man" who took us out of Egypt is gone. Moses...the "man"? Why the extra word? Of course he is a "man". But the Torah is offering a spotlight on the issue...and a direction to the answer. The Torah is pointing out the precise flaw: the people were overly attached to Moses, the "man". What does this mean? Look at what they did: they created a very physical, Golden Calf. Meaning, they became so attached to Moses' presence, they could not tolerate his absence for even a few hours longer than his scheduled descent from Sinai. They panicked, and immediately desired some physical icon to act as their head.

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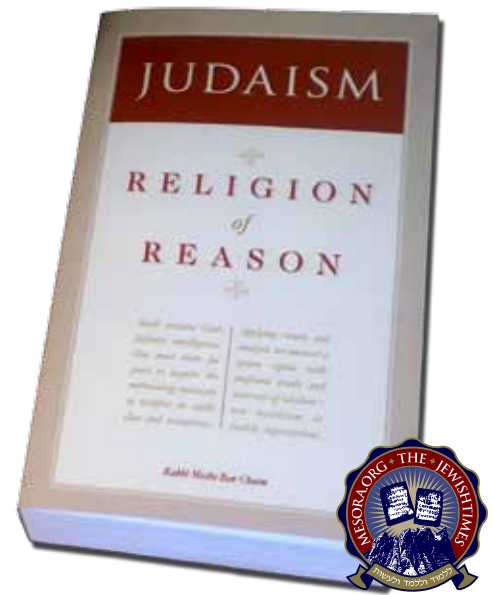
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REVIEWS



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Perhaps Moses felt in some way, that he contributed to their Golden Calf sin. Perhaps he was not clear on his words about his return; or maybe something else led them to such an act. We even learn that it was through Moses' prayer – a change in himself – that God pardoned the Jews. Meaning, the fate of the Jews was bound to Moses' level of perfection. Evidently, Moses too realized this. He asked specifically to be "erased", because he did not wish himself to act as a stumbling block for future generations. A righteous person, concerned with the welfare of future generations may use this logic so that his share in the nation's sins are not recorded. This explains Moses' specific request of "erasure". God replies, "Whoever sinned against Me, will I erase." It would seem that God agrees; Moses name had to be erased. God complied and erased Moses' name in one Parsha.

There may be another understanding. Perhaps the dialogue went as follows: "God, if you do not forgive the Jews, please erase my name so I do not act as a stumbling block to future generations." God replies, "Moses, I do not erase someone simply because they wish to shield others. That is not why I will erase someone. I erase someone who 'sins against Me'. It is for this type of sin alone that I erase someone."

Why Erasure?

Now that God erased Moses' name, we are taught that Moses sinned "against God" somehow. But a "sin" here does not mean a violation of some law, but that Moses – without guilt – was somehow connected to an error of the people. God said, "The people caused you to break the Tablets". God thereby indemnified Moses of breaking the Tablets, but not of some other matter. If we are careful with our reading, we do see that God adds two unnecessary words..."whomever sins AGAINST ME..." This teaches an entirely new idea: God will erase someone who not only sins, but sins "against Him". Perhaps this means that if a man becomes too central, he is sinning against God...he "obscures God". We see the people had an attachment to Moses, to the point, that they could not tolerate his absence for a few hours. And God's response is perfect: He obscured Moses. When God says "I will erase he who sins against Me", God means to say that He will remove from the Torah, that person who sins against God, he being one whose actions counter the focus of God. Perhaps, somehow Moses' existence obscured the Jews' focus from God, onto himself. But not that Moses did so himself. It may have been the Jews' overestimation of his persona. It seems this is so, as they could not be without Moses for too long. But

this does not mean it was the fault of Moses. God's use of the word "sin" may simply indicate Moses' somehow contributed to a negative state in the Jews. Similarly, Moses' grave was hidden from the Jews, so they could not outlet this sinful emotion after Moses dies.

We can resolve the contradiction found in the Elders of Tosafos: God indemnifies Moses of the Golden Calf sin. Yet, God erases Moses' name from one section, teaching that Moses somehow obscured God from the focus of the Jews, and therefore, the only remedy is to obscure Moses, allowing God to reemerge in "full view". This explains God's description of Moses as he who "sins against Me". But I do not mean a violation deserving of any punishment.

Thus, Moses own self-curse took hold, as he was correct that one who "sins" must in some way not harm future generations. So, inasmuch as God erased Moses' name, He shielded future generations, as was Moses' wish. So Moses' curse, "even for free" (he really did not sin with the Calf) still took hold, and he was erased. Thus, erasure of Moses' name is the correction required, as "name" represents one's 'identity', and it was Moses' very identity, which obscured God's.

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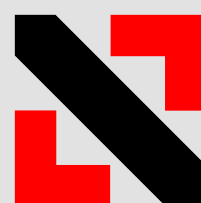
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We learn that God's will is that man is not elevated above Him. Many Jewish communities today make such a fuss over Rebbes and their blessings. Certainly we have proved that man has no powers. But from our study in this area, it would appear that overindulgence in man, any man...even Moses, obscures our focus on God and must be avoided as well. Nothing may steal man's attention away from God. This theory also explains why King David could not build the Temple: his popularity due to numerous, military victories would overshadow the Temple's status as "God's" Temple. There was nothing wrong with his bloodied hands, as he fought on behalf of God's fame, not his own. But when the people exalted him for his "tens of thousands", they bestowed fame upon King David, and this threatened to steal the focus away from God. This could not be tolerated. God gave the Temple's construction to King David's son...not as a penalty, but actually a deferred recognition of King David's zeal.

Our last question: Why did God erase Moses name from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parsha? Write in with your suggestions. ■

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Rabbi: Anyone – prophet or otherwise – who institutes a permanent change in Oral or Written Torah has violated God's words. This case however is in line with God's words: Shatnez is not prohibited in the priest's garments. Nor is it prohibited in Tzitzis. And this is not a violation, but part of the very laws of Shatnez.

For those who are unaware, wearing garments comprising both wool and linen is the Torah prohibition called "Shatnez".

I believe the answer to your question is the same as to why fringes - Tzitzis - may include both wool and linen without violating Shatnez. (Rambam, Hilchos Tzitzis; 3:6)

Our refrain from mixing wool and linen is how we remind ourselves of two elements, which we may not mix, that is, the emotions and the intellect. I heard from a Rabbi quoting Ibn Ezra who said that Shatnez recalls to mind those things, which are "planted in the heart" and should not be mixed. Separating these two parts of our makeup – our intellect and our emotions – we approach God. In other words, we guide our emotions - they do not guide us.

But, Shatnez is required only during those times and activities when we are not engaged in the commands of God which are inherently perfect, and perfecting. If however, priests find themselves servicing God in the Temple, there is no danger of the emotions and intellect running awry. This being the case, garments, and curtains in the Temple are not subject to this law. While in the Temple, our thoughts are engaged with God, and we have the "check system" already functioning. Shatnez is then redundant. Similarly, when donning the Tallis or Tzitzis, we have no concern for the mixture of wool and linen. We are involved in God's commands, and are thereby removed from the corrupting forces of the instinctual - the emotions. Here too, Shatnez would be unnecessary.

The Rabbis say, "Our own instincts and the idolaters target Shatnez with accusations against Judaism." As if to say, "This law seems so bizarre. What can possibly be corrupt about wearing these two materials? Judaism is unfounded."

Ramban states that the masses do not understand Shatnez, although they agree that crossbreeding has a purpose. But Ramban adds that although a "statute" (commonly misunderstood as bereft of reason), "every word of God's is tried". (Proverbs, 30:5) This means that all of God's commands contain reasons, including "chukim" or statutes.

"Shatnez" refers to the Torah law prohibiting the wearing of wool and linen together. There are many parameters: prohibitions relating to a single garment woven of both wool and linen; wearing wool garments over linen garments and vice versa; what material finishing processes qualify to violate this law; and many other issues. For brevity's sake, we will simply refer to "Shatnez" as all prohibited forms, without going into the Halachik distinctions.

We must note, that this law is not its own category. In the Torah, we find Shatnez mentioned twice, together with two other prohibitions: crossbreeding animals, and crossbreeding plants. Let us review the Torah's words on these three laws.

Lev. 19:19: *"My statutes you shall guard; your animals you shall not crossbreed mixed species; your field you shall not plant intermixed species; and a mixed garment Shatnez, do not wear."*

Deut. 22:9-11: *"You shall not plant your vineyard with a mixture, lest the growth of the seed which you plant and the produce of the vineyard become forbidden. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear Shatnez, wool and linen together."*

We learn from their repetition that these three laws are not joined coincidentally, and certainly from the Torah's joining all three laws in a single verse: they share a common thread. (We have a tradition from the Rabbis that individual verses contain related ideas. All concepts found in a single, Torah verses are joined somehow, thereby, explaining why they are found together in one verse.) It is not hard to

suggest how these three laws are related: in all three cases, one is prohibited from intermingling various species. However, I understand that I cannot crossbreed living things, as this is where reproduction of new species may occur. But regarding Shatnez, this case is the mixing of lifeless substances: the wool and linen are no longer attached to their life source. Why then must I not mix that which cannot regenerate new, crossbred species? Furthermore, where do we see that animal and vegetable can be interbred, even while living? (We will address Shatnez shortly)

Crossbreeding: Two Categories

From this general observation, we arrive at our first insight: the prohibition to crossbreed can take place in but two areas: animal and vegetable. This is because there are no other existences, which "reproduce". Ramban also points to this categorization. Ramban cites many reasons, which justify this prohibition. For one, crossbreeding destroys the pure species, creating a new one, which is Divinely unintended. Additionally, the new species' offspring cannot beget others. This is seen in the case of a mule; a species that is the result of crossbreeding, and cannot reproduce with other mules. This is also the case with vegetation. I suggest that perhaps this result of infertility is actually part of God's design of nature: He designed reproductive species in a way, that when crossbred, the offspring cannot reproduce, thereby underlining man's error. Had crossbred species' offspring been fertile, nothing in nature would indicate a flaw in crossbreeding. However, as the offspring cannot reproduce, this infertility points back to the original sin. Thus, God's system is not simply perfect in its normal function, but when abused, nature is designed to deliver a message to man regarding his precise abuse. Infertility of crossbred species teaches man that the Designer of nature does not wish crossbreeding: the act of intermingling in the fertilization process is signaled as an error, in the area of infertile offspring. I find this profound.

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Ramban states that one who crossbreeds also violates God's will that only certain species exists. God said in Genesis that each species should bring forth "liminayhu", "according to their own kind". This is a grave corruption, as man assumes he knows better than God. We understand the gravity Ramban places on violators.

Ramban also quotes Rabbis Simon and Chanina, who suggest a reason for the term "My statutes you shall guard", as referring to the very natural laws which govern life. These Rabbis state that "Chukos", "laws", refer to natural law. These laws are the actual causes, which continue to govern all species in their reproduction of similar offspring. The maple tree, for example, does not reproduce maple trees, of its own. There is a law guiding this phenomenon, non-existent in the substance of 'maple tree'. A law is of the metaphysical realm, which governs the latter. Similarly, what keeps rocks "solid" substances are God's, created laws. We learned in chemistry that the very same molecules found in liquids, might be found in solids: lava is a perfect example. However, the Master of the universe has decided when a molecule should form part of each. His laws determine this. We tend to view the physical world as the be all and end all of creation. But as we learn in the first two chapters of Genesis, God describes two aspects of Creation. The first act refers to the substance, while the second "creation" refers to the laws governing those creations. Crossbreeding, then, violates and corrupts these very natural laws. Therefore, there is sound reasoning why God includes in the laws of crossbreeding the introductory, and rarely used phrase, "My statutes you shall guard." For one who crossbreeds not only corrupts the physical species, but also creates new species, thereby, convoluting the laws of nature. (An example is the infertility of mules.) How does Shatnez fit into this? Shatnez doesn't lend itself to interbreeding. Why is it prohibited?

What is "Shatnez"?

Quoting Rashi, and disagreeing with him, Ramban identifies three words from which the conjunctive term "SHaTNeZ" is derived. Spelled in Hebrew, Shatnez is "SH", "T", and "NZ". "SH" refers to the word "Shua" – combed, "T" refers to the word "Tavui" – spun, and "NZ" refers to "NuZ" – twisted. Therefore, Shatnez refers to that which is combed, spun and twisted, meaning threads in a completed form. Ramban critiques Rashi, for according to him, only when all three processes are found, is there a prohibition. However, the Rabbis taught that if one does not complete all three processes, yet, the prohibition remains, as in a case where one takes two ropes, each one consisting exclusively of one material, tying them together. Ramban concludes: the three processes are "Scripturally" prohibited, but even in the case where all three are not found, a "Rabbinic" prohibition still exists.

Ramban offers the reasoning that Shatnez guards us from the other two prohibitions. It is a "fence" of sorts. By complying with the laws of Shatnez, we will be safeguarded. As we accustom ourselves to guard against mingling in clothing, and we will thereby be more sensitive to the mingling of species. Ramban then quotes Maimonides' reasoning as being sourced in idolatry. I will quote Maimonides here ("Guide to the Perplexed", Book III, Chap. 37):

"We have explained in our large work that it is prohibited to round the corners of the head, and to mar the corners of the beard, because it was the custom of idolatrous priests. For the same reason, the wearing of garments made of linen and wool is prohibited: the heathen priests adorned themselves with garments containing vegetable and animal material, whilst they held in their hand a seal made of a mineral. This you find written in their books."

We may ask why those idolaters developed the practice of mixing animal and vegetable, while also seizing minerals.

Perhaps they too recognized these categories, including animal and vegetable, substances we cannot live without, and sought in their foolishness to manipulate them, so as to better procure them. Although violating God's will, idolatry has rhyme and reason, as it is caused by the human psyche, which follows precise behavioral patterns. However, these behavioral patterns are deviant ones.

Shatnez: Recalling Man's Nature

On the subject of the psyche, a Rabbi once taught a remarkable idea on Shatnez, based on the words of Ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra taught that Shatnez is a "remembrance" law, as are other laws, such as the Sabbath, which is a "remembrance of the Egyptian Exodus." (Our freedom for Sabbath rest is due to God's redemption of the Jews.) Ibn Ezra states that Shatnez is a remembrance to those statutes "planted in the heart". This Rabbi asked, "What is planted in the heart, for which, we must have a remembrance via Shatnez? What is similar between Shatnez, and those things 'planted in the heart'?" He explained; "What are planted in man's heart are the intellect, and the emotions". "Heart" refers to both. We are commanded to "Love thy God with 'all' of your heart." This refers to the command that man must devote himself to God with all his heart, or "both" parts, i.e., the intellect and the emotions. I understand that the heart refers to both faculties, but where does Shatnez come in? The Rabbi said that Shatnez is a law prohibiting the mixture of two, diverse species, hinting to our need to prevent the mixture of our intellect and our emotions. This means to say, that man must be guided by intelligence, undiluted by his emotional desires. His choices in life must stem from rational thinking, not emotional impulses. Shatnez, then, is a command, which reminds man to keep his intellect free from his emotions. This is what Ibn Ezra hinted to by his own words, "and here I will hint to you a fundamental" which is "planted in the heart."

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Ibn Ezra's words about those things "planted in the heart" are found in his commentary on Abraham's perfections, that he adhered to God's "guards, commands, statutes and Torah." In that commentary (Gen. 26:5) Ibn Ezra says "statutes" refers to Shatnez. Now, as Abraham had no Torah as we do, his act of keeping God's "statutes", means that he possessed this perfection of guiding his life by intelligence, and not emotions, in contrast to the idolaters. In his other commentary, (Lev. 19:19) Ibn Ezra says an enigmatic statement, "Know; that which is complete, is very complete, therefore it is said regarding Abraham, 'and he guards My guards, My commands, My statutes and My Torah'." Rabbi Reuven Mann expounded, "That which is very 'complete' is one who is completely in line with his intelligence. He does not dilute his intelligence with his emotions." We now understand the teaching of Ibn Ezra.

Hints

Perhaps this is why Ibn Ezra made use of a subtle teaching, a "hint", as opposed to spelling out his idea: he wished to convey that Shatnez is essentially a "hinting" type of command. Thus, Ibn Ezra used the teaching mode of "hinting", which embellishes on the nature of Shatnez: it hints to something.

We may ask why must God give laws of such a nature, which only "hint" to an idea. Many others, like Mezuzah, are clearly understood, so their practice is clearly stated: we must contemplate God's existence and His oneness. Where is the need in the Torah system for laws, which "hint"?

I suggest as follows: a "hint" implies that the matter hinted to, is obscure. Most individuals do not readily see it. Otherwise, it can be taught outright, like Mezuzah. Shatnez hints to that which is obscure: man's nature. Freud once lectured on psychology, opening his discourse by admitting that his "subject", the human psyche, may not be laid out as a cadaver, concretely. He anticipated and sought to

defend his attendees' critique on his "un-evidenced" theories. The study of psychology has this one, great hurdle: it is not as "empirical" as is biology, for example. We may visually examine the human body, but the human psyche has no visuals – it is greatly abstract. This is the case with regards to Shatnez: it refers to man's "unseen" nature, and therefore must be alluded to, by ways of hints. The nature of man is not a matter readily 'seen', so Shatnez, the laws concerning it, allude to its obscurity by their very "hinting" nature.

The Exception

Why are Tzitzis and the Priest's garments not governed by the law of Shatnez? In these two areas, one may combine wool and linen. My theory is that since one is involved in God's will when fulfilling these two commands, Shatnez is superfluous. His very act of wearing Tzitzis or priestly garb is itself a manner of following his intellect, i.e., God's will. Shatnez in these cases would serve no purpose.

We understand according to Ramban, Maimonides and Ibn Ezra that crossbreeding has many flaws. We also understand that crossbreeding may only apply in the two categories of existences, which are living, i.e., animal and vegetable. I suggest that these two commands not to crossbreed animals or plants function on one level: addressing the intermingling within a single category, either animal with animal, or vegetable with vegetable. But Shatnez is a case where one may not mix these very, basic categories of animal with vegetable. Perhaps this supports the Rabbi I mentioned earlier: Shatnez's basic categories parallel two other basic categories which are greatly distant: intellect and emotion. ■

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■ KI TISA



THE SIN OF THE GOLD CALF

Rabbi Israel Chait

Transcribed by students

Moses ascended the mountain to have a rendezvous with God to learn first hand the teachings of the Torah and then to transmit them to the Jewish people. Instead Moses descended to a nation of idolaters rather than a people committed to accept a moral law based upon their intellectual conviction. The Torah explains the reason for this transformation. In Exodus 32:1, the Torah tells us that the people saw that Moses tarried from coming down the mountain and that this precipitated their desire to build a golden calf. Rashi explains that the nation miscalculated the day of Moses's descent. Moses advised the people that he would return in forty days. Moses was not counting his departure as day one. He meant forty complete days, thus his return would be on the forty first day, which is the seventeenth of Tammuz. Therefore their calculations were erroneous by one day. Rashi teaches us that as a result of this miscalculation, on the sixteenth of Tammuz, "Satan came and brought confusion to the world, and showed the Israelites a vision of thick darkness." This caused

them to say, "Moses is definitely dead" and it ignited their desire to serve other gods.

Upon analyzing this Rashi, two basic questions must be asked: What compels Rashi to utilize Satan as the vehicle for their confusion? Their mistake in determining Moses' return was based upon their erroneous calculations. This alone should have been sufficient justification for their concluding that Moses was dead and was not returning. Furthermore, Aaron devises different schemes to hinder their attempts to serve different Gods. Why didn't he simply advise them of their mistaken calculation? Aaron certainly was aware of the proper count or at the very least, recognized their mistake.

We must appreciate that the Israelites had recently been liberated from Egypt. In Egypt they were exposed to, and influenced by, the pagan practices of that society. Therefore, they still had an attraction to primitive ways and were still subject to the insecurities of the instinctual part of their personalities. The entire event of Moses ascend-

ing the mountain to speak to God, was to them, a mystical phenomenon. They were in great awe of this unique experience. Thus, when they saw the thick darkness, rather than attributing it to bad weather conditions, their emotions overwhelmed them. They had visions of Moses' failed mission; which image was bolstered by their miscalculation. The Satan, as Maimonides teaches us, is the same as the yetzer harah, man's evil inclinations. Their emotions, which were fostered by their insecurities and primitive proclivities, caused them to conjure these fantastic ominous visions. Chazal teach us that they saw an image of Moses in a coffin. This manifests that they were regressing into the depths of their imagination. They were so overwhelmed by the mystical, that Chazal felt compelled to point out this image, to demonstrate that their total perception of reality was distorted.

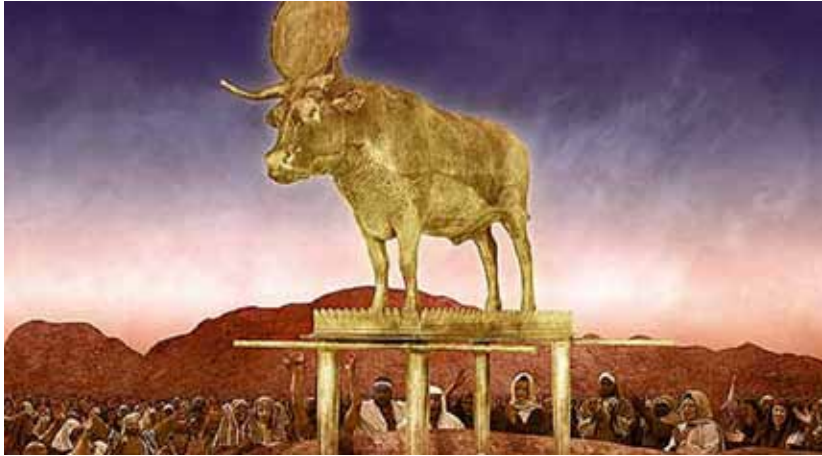
Upon their concluding that Moses had died, the Israelites expressed their desire to make many gods that would lead them. Their need for a god was simply a need for security to fill the void that Moses' ostensible departure created.

Rashi notes that they desired many gods. This again reflects the primitive emotion they possessed. They had desires for different gods, to cater to each of their diverse needs. Their basic insecurities and trepidations were expressed by their desire for different gods, that would satisfy all their personal whims and grant them a sense of security.

The insight the Torah affords us in delineating the story of the Golden Calf is extremely relevant. Modern man might think that these are pagan emotions to which he is not susceptible. However, one need only observe Christianity to recognize the strong hold the emotion for idol worship has, even today. They idolize a physical statue which represents a human being whom they view as God. Objectively, it may seem absurd, but yet its appeal attests to man's primitive desire for the security of the physical.

Chazal appreciated the strength of these emotions. Rabbi Akiva did not

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want to learn that the "Et" of "Et Hashem Elokecha teerah", as including Talmidei Chachamim because of this emotion. The deification of man is idol worship. Rabbi Yishmael argues and states that it includes the Talmid Chacham. The respect the Torah envisions for a scholar, is not for the individual per se, but rather the Chachma which he acquired. He is the embodiment of an individual who utilized his Tzelem Elokim for its true objective.

It would seem that Aaron also underestimated the strength of these emotions. Aaron recognized their clamor to create new gods as reflective of their primitive emotions. He recognized the futility in trying to demonstrate the error of their calculations. The nation was no longer operating under their intellectual faculty. The primitive behavioral patterns to which they were subject in Egypt, were exerting their influence over the nation. The mixed multitude that departed Egypt with them, provoked much of their regression. Rashi advises us that the Mixed Multitude (not descendants of Abraham) used their 'magic' to create the calf. In fact, they initiated this entire service and the Israelites followed. The Mixed Multitude had a greater yearning for the security of the physical as a means to relate to God. They therefore utilized the "magic" they learned in Egypt. Magic is not some supernatural force. It too requires a discipline, where one learns to switch the apparent relationship between cause and effect to which we are accustomed. It therefore is

fascinating because it distracts the observer who is amazed since it does not function in accordance with standard causal relationships.

Aaron took an active role in the making of the Golden Calf. However, the role Aaron played was really a result of careful analysis. In reality he did not try to facilitate its construction but rather attempted to hinder its completion. He analyzed the behavior of the Israelites and tried to deal with them based upon their state of mind. He recognized a step by step regression in their rational faculty as they came under the grip of this overwhelming emotion. Aaron's observations are expressed in a Midrash quoted by Rashi. Aaron observed several things. He saw the Israelites kill his nephew Chur, who tried to rebuke them. He observed and concluded that it would be better if the Israelites transgression was ascribed to him rather than to them. He also concluded that if they built the alter on their own, it would be finished immediately. He therefore undertook its construction hoping to tarry in his work, in order to delay them until Moses arrived. Aaron had recognized that their behavior patterns reflected the powerful sway of their emotions. The first thing the Israelites sought was a substitute leader. This reflected their need for the security of the physical. He requested their ornaments in an effort to appeal to their greed. This was essentially a delay tactic. He assumed that they would be reluctant because he thought that their greed would deter their actions.

However, the Torah teaches us "Vayit-parku" they readily removed all their jewelry. He thereby recognized and appreciated the overwhelming and dominating effect of these emotions as evidenced by the alacrity with which they responded to his request for their valuables. Thereafter, he observed that they killed Chur. This represented that they were no longer functioning with even a scintilla of rationality. They could not tolerate Chur's rebuke and their murderous actions evidenced their total identification with the calf. He thus observed and concluded that at best, he could only slow their progress. Any attempt by him to halt the construction of the calf would have been futile, and surely would have caused them to regress to the depth of their primitivism.

A precursory review of his actions would indicate that he was helping them. However a more scrupulous investigation as articulated, reveals his true intentions. He desired that their guilt be ascribed to him in order to assuage the guilty feelings they would experience upon Moses' return. If the Israelites felt absolute culpability because of their actions, their feelings of guilt would render them incapable of doing Teshuva.

God still finds fault with Aaron's action. Exodus 32:23 states, "And when Moses saw that the people were broken loose for Aaron had let them loose for a division among their enemies." This criticism is lodged against Aaron for one can not make compromises with idol worship. The emotion is so powerful that if one allows it to be expressed in his behavioral patterns, it will ultimately dominate his actions and destroy him. Moses upon his return took extremely drastic measures. He openly expressed outrage and threw the tablets to the ground and shattered them. He thereby gathered to his side the Levites, who killed three thousand men. Moses' extreme actions were purposeful to demonstrate that one can not compromise nor tolerate with the emotion for idolatry. The basic philosophy of Judaism is antithetical to these type of emotions. ■

No Compromise

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Ki Tisah, details one of the greatest tragedies in Jewish history, the sin of the Golden Calf. On a certain level we find this to be incomprehensible. The entire nation had just been gathered on Mt. Sinai where they witnessed unmistakably super natural phenomena and heard a voice from heaven proclaim, "I am the L-rd Thy God who took you out of Egypt from the House of Bondage." After this introduction Hashem explicitly warned them against any and all forms of idolatry. This is prohibited not only when a person abandons Hashem for an imaginary deity. Even if one retains belief in the Creator but worships another being alongside of Him, he is guilty of idolatry and subject to the death penalty. True worship of Hashem must be exclusive for "He is our G-d, there is no other." It is with a sense of shock and disbelief that we read of the incident of the Golden Calf. We are unable to understand how the Jews could regress into this corruption so quickly.

Of course it is not our business to judge others. It would be dangerous for us to indulge in a feeling of superiority. We certainly have enough sins on our own plate to be concerned about. The Rabbis advise, "Do not judge your friend until you have been in his place." We should pay careful attention to this sage advice and call it to mind whenever we are tempted to promote ourselves through the disgrace of others. The entire world was steeped in idolatry at the time of the Exodus. The Jews had been slaves to Egypt for a few hundred years. The worst aspect of this was their exposure to the primitive religious beliefs of the Egyptians. The purpose of the Passover Sacrifice was to cleanse them from primitive pagan beliefs and dedicate themselves to the worship of



the true G-d, the Creator of the Universe. However, deeply rooted, false religious beliefs are not easily eradicated. In a moment of great fear and danger they can resurface. It should also be remembered that they were accompanied by the "mixed multitude" i.e., a group of Egyptians who joined the Jewish people in order to share the benefits they believed would accrue to them. This group was more prone to backsliding and provoked the people to rebellion when the going got tough.

The cause of the sin was the "tardiness" of Moshe. When the people saw that he did not return when expected they panicked. Their entire sense of security was dependent on the "man Moshe who took us out of Egypt." The very fact that they attributed the Exodus to Moshe and not Hashem revealed something about their mindset. Not that they didn't believe in Hashem, but that their relationship to him was contingent on the "man Moshe." Now that this person was gone a substitute had to be found. This lack of self confidence and dependency on an intermediary was a carryover from their idolatrous days. All they really needed was guidance and instruction which Aaron was fully equipped to provide.

However, they turned to him not for teaching but to satisfy their yearning for an idol.

The behavior of Aaron is difficult to comprehend. He clearly understood the grave seriousness of their sinful demand. Why would Aaron who was at a level of prophecy second only to Moshe, acquiesce in this matter? All of the commentators reject the idea that he acted out of fear of the mob and assert that he would have sacrificed his life to avoid idolatry. Rather it is clear that Aaron sought to keep things under control and minimize the extent of the transgression. He did not want them to stray so far from Hashem that it would be impossible to return. He therefore constructed a golden calf which would "replace Moshe" as the vehicle through which Hashem would communicate with them. Aaron thought that the presence of the calf would quell their fears and enable them to worship G-d. Thus he proclaimed, "Tomorrow is a Festival unto Hashem." Aaron sought to work with them on their level catering a bit to their emotions and keeping them firmly committed to Hashem. Despite his great love and concern for the people we must conclude that he made a serious miscalculation. He did not realize that in the matter of idolatry there can be no compromise, that certain emotions cannot be gratified in "moderation." There are important lessons for us in this tragic story. Our purpose is not to fashion a god in our image but to direct all of our emotion and energy to following the will of Hashem as He has revealed it to us. We must uproot all traces of idolatry from our hearts and thus find favor with the Creator of the Universe.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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