

## Moshe & the Golden Calf

How *Emunas Moshe*, rather than *Emunas HaShem*, led to this terrible error & Is the “Lesson” We Were Supposed to Learn Applicable to how We View the *Mashiach*?

Torah Thoughts by *Yonason Noach ben Avraham*

E-mail: [YNbenAvraham@aol.com](mailto:YNbenAvraham@aol.com)

Cellular: 612-812-6946

For those readers who are not familiar with whom the author of these Torah Thoughts is, we will give a brief introduction which should suffice to explain why the items contained herein are of concern to him. This author was born into a Christian family in 1958. He was raised Roman Catholic during the time when the Mass was still said in Latin. This author, at one time, could recite the entire Mass in Latin by heart. During his later teen years, this author began to question some of what Christianity expected him to believe. At that time, he came to the preliminary conclusion that Charles Darwin made more sense than Christian Theology, and he became an agnostic, bordering on being an atheist.

During his twenties, this author wanted to believe that there was a G-d Who created the world, and that there was meaning to life other than collecting material things, but each time he attempted to rejoin a Christina church – sometimes Protestant, sometime Catholic – he was eventually confronted with the same problems regarding Christian Theology<sup>1</sup>.

This author began to write short stories and novels in his spare time. He developed a spy novel, and decided to set the novel amidst the Arab/Israeli Conflict. He began studying Judaism and Islam not to “find G-d,” but rather to create believable characters through which to develop the plot of the novel. Along the way, the research led to several realizations on the part of this author:

- 1) The realization that there indeed was a G-d
- 2) The realization that Christianity was *na’arishkeit*
- 3) The realization that G-d actually revealed Himself to the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai
- 4) The realization that His Torah was the optimal way to serve Him

Thus the decision to convert to Torah Observant Judaism was the next logical step.

Further research led this author to realize the mistakes that Christians had made when “interpreting” Tanakh in order to fit their “lord and savior” into the text. In fact, the very word “Christianity” reveals that Christians worship their misinterpretation of the Messiah. “Christ” is the Anglicization of the Greek “*Christos*,” which is equivalent to the Hebrew *Mashiach*. When developing a greater understanding of the misinterpretations that the Christians had made, this author developed a certain sensitivity to many of the pitfalls that plagued *Klal Yisroel* – such as the over-emphasis on Moshe that led to the Incident of the Golden Calf – and he began to sense that a similar over-emphasis existed regarding our future king of flesh and blood, HaShem’s *Mashiach*. This author, through his learning, began to notice and develop certain themes dealing

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<sup>1</sup> **Some of the Christian Concepts this author had difficulty with included:**

- a) Believe in Jesus or spend eternity in a Lake of Fire (Hell)
- b) The doctrine that G-d had blinded the Jews to who Jesus was, thus the Jews could not have accepted him as their “Lord and Savior” even if they had desired to do so
- c) The doctrine of Predestination – that G-d, before He created anything, “predestined” who would believe in Jesus and thus go to heaven, and conversely, who would not believe in Jesus and thus spend the hereafter in that Lake of Fire

The reader should note that the above three doctrines are intertwined within Christian Theology.

with Moshe and Mashiach, and he began to test the waters of the Orthodox World with his “novel” understandings. These *chiddushim* included:

- a) The phrase, “Moshe took us out of Egypt,” which this author believes is not only inaccurate, but is also potentially misleading, was developed
- b) The phrase, “Moshe parted the *Yam Suf*,” was developed and found to also be inaccurate and potentially misleading
- c) The *hashkafah* of many Observant *Yidden*, that Moshe was invested by HaShem with certain powers that allowed him to perform the miracles associated with the Ten Plagues, was examined and determined to be so close to *Avak Avodah Zarah*, and it is deeply disturbing to this author that good, well-meaning Jews have this belief
- d) The phrases, “The *Mashiach* will ingather us, the *Mashiach* will defeat our enemies, the *Mashiach* will ... *et al*,” were researched and again were found to be inaccurate and misleading
- e) The concept of “*giving credit to He Whom the credit is due*,” was developed and found to be the only Torah True way to go when understanding any and all miraculous events associated with the Exodus from Egypt, as well as our ever approaching Geulah
- f) And, encapsulating the above areas of concern, the need for thought and language that is as clear and accurate as possible, leaving as little room for misinterpretation as humanly possible<sup>2</sup>.

All of these themes were recognized, examined and developed by this author, but there was one on-going problem: most *Yidden* did not share either the *hashkafos*, or the concern for these areas, that this author does. He was told many times that either he was wrong in his understandings of these Torah points, or that he was blowing these concerns out of proportion to their potential “danger.” However, further research has led this author to discover that many of his concerns – specifically regarding Moshe – were also concerns/interpretations of many of the Sages of Israel. We will look at some of these understandings of our sages, and try to interpolate whether or not their understandings/concerns are applicable to what we perceive is the common *hashkafah* regarding the *Mashiach*.

One of our *chiddushim*, regarding the Incident of the Golden Calf, is based upon the first and seventh *passukim* of the *perek* (Shemos 32:1, 7): “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, Arise, make us gods, which shall go before us; and as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what became of him... And the Lord said to Moses, Go down; for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.” We believe the statement that *Moshe had taken them out of Egypt* was a mistaken *hashkafah* which precipitated this almost incomprehensible incident, and when HaShem Who, in

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<sup>2</sup> **Ben Avraham** – We have heard the argument, many times, that if a phrase is found in the Torah (or in the Talmud), then that phrase can be said without fear of misleading a listener. We would suggest that not all Torah phrases are meant to be understood according to their literal meaning, such as:

- a) **Bereshis 1:26**. Let us make man in our image
- b) **Shemos 21:24**. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot...
- c) **Vayikra 24:19**. And if a man causes a blemish in his neighbor; as he has done, so shall it be done to him; 20. Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done back to him.

In fact, **Megillah 9a** contains a list of *passukim* which were altered when our Sages translated HaShem’s Torah into Greek so that King Ptolemy would not come to unintended/misleading understandings. So the argument that it was written that way in the *Shas*, at least to us, is not a valid counter-argument – at least not in all cases.

our understanding, factiously said to Moshe, *your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt*, He was pointing out to Moshe the falsehood of that *hashkafah*, as it was HaShem – not Moshe – Who had taken them out of Egypt. This understanding has been criticized by most Yidden we have shared it with, but is that criticism warranted?

The following is based upon ArtScroll's "A Daily Dose of Torah," *Parashas Ki Sisa*, Friday, pgs. 50 and 51 [emphasis/underlining added]:

On the *passuk* (*Shemos* 32:19) "***And it came to pass, as soon as he came near to the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands, and broke them beneath the mount,***" the *Meshech Chochmah* explains that the fundamental error in the people's thinking was that HaShem rules the world through intermediaries and that the road to Heaven is dependent upon tangible factors, which are invested with a force of their own. Thus, they viewed their leader Moshe as "the one who brought us out of Egypt," rather than the messenger designated by HaShem to speak to Pharaoh, who himself had no actual power to achieve any redemption. This is the central flaw, says the *Meshech Chochmah*, characterized in the words of HaShem to Moshe (*Shemos* 32:7) "***whom you brought out of the land of Egypt,***" which he [*Meshech Chochmah*] explains to mean, "***your nation has become corrupt by viewing you as the one who brought them out of Egypt.***"<sup>3</sup>

Once Moshe saw the dancing, it became clear to him that giving the Jews the *Luchos* would merely be exchanging one intermediary (the calf) for another (the *Luchos*), but would not address or rectify the deeply rooted misunderstanding that HaShem has or needs tangible agents that are invested with the power to bring about His will. The dramatic and unthinkable act of shattering the *Luchos* in front of the entire nation was a lesson that nothing, absolutely nothing, has any independent power except for HaShem Himself.

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<sup>3</sup> **Ben Avraham** – This misunderstanding, over **Who or who took us out of Egypt**, was addressed in *Shemos* 16:3: "And the people of Israel said to them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for you have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger," and was corrected by Moshe three *passukim* later, *Shemos* 16:6: "And Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, At evening, then you shall know that the Lord has brought you out from the land of Egypt." This understanding is not ours, but rather is voiced by **Rashi** (*Shemos* 16:6): "**you shall know that the Lord brought you out of the land of Egypt ...** Since you [the people of Israel] said to us [Moses and Aaron], "For you have brought us out" (verse 3), you shall know that we are not the ones who brought [you] out, but [it was] the Lord [Who] brought you out."

Moshe's correction of this misunderstanding, of Who or who took us out of Egypt, was then codified by HaShem in his Ten Commandments (*Shemos* 20:2, 3): "*I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*" Thus, in our opinion, the statement, "*Moshe took us out of Egypt,*" is contrary to the teachings of HaShem and His *navi*, Moshe, and should not be said – at least not said without extensive explaining so that the listener does not come to a misunderstanding similar to the one that occurred at the time of the Incident of the Golden Calf. [See *Avos* 1:11 and 2:4(5) about taking care with words, and not making vague statements.] We would suggest either:

a) "HaShem took us out of Egypt" (as is made clear by the text of the Hagaddah, which all but writes Moshe out of the story), or:

b) "Moshe was a *Navi* HaShem, and our human leader, at the time when HaShem took us out of Egypt" (thus emphasizing the role of Moshe as HaShem's messenger who himself had no power)

It was this lesson of "Who took us out of Egypt" – taught by Moshe, and codified by HaShem – that precipitated the Incident of the Golden Calf (*Shemos* 32:1): "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, Arise, make us gods, which shall go before us; and as for **this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what became of him.**" And with our understanding being in agreement with that of the *Meshech Chochmah*, we feel confident in this understanding.

Another of our *chiddushim* was that Moshe was wrongly seen as a necessary element of the Exodus from Egypt, and that Moshe's stature in the eyes of the *B'nei Yisroel* (as well as the Erev Rav) was blown out of proportion. This *Moshe Mishugas* was ever present during the Exodus from Egypt and the forty years in the wilderness, and was an integral factor in the Incident of the Golden Calf. We have been told by most *Yidden* we have shared our understanding with that Moshe was not over-emphasized, and that our conclusions are unwarranted. Is this view, that Moshe was not seen a "larger-than-life," really a true understanding?

The following is based upon ArtScroll's "A Daily Dose of Torah," *Parashas Shemos*, Shabbos, pgs. 48 and 51 [emphasis/underlining added]:

On the *passukim* (*Shemos* 5:22 – 6:1): "And Moses returned to the Lord, and said, Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why have you sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have you saved your people at all. And the Lord said to Moses, Now shall you see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land," R' Reuven Feinstein has the following insight:

[T]he key to understanding HaShem's reply lies in its opening words: "Now shall you see what I will do to Pharaoh." The Exodus from Egypt was more than a miraculous event and the fulfillment of HaShem's promise to Avraham; it was a clear proof to the Jews, to Egypt, and to the entire world that HaShem was the Master, in total control of the world<sup>4</sup>, and that He had

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<sup>4</sup> **Ben Avraham** – We have been told many times by well-meaning *Yidden* that HaShem either gave Moshe the "power" to perform the miracles associated with the Exodus from Egypt, or that He performed the miracles "through" Moshe. It is our understanding that Moshe was merely the messenger, and that it was HaShem, and HaShem Alone, Who performed the awesome miracles [See R' Aryeh Kaplan, "Handbook of Jewish Theology," Chapter on Prophets; Ramban, *Devarim* 34:10-12]. Our understanding is based, in part, on the purpose of the miracles, as stated in HaShem's Torah. Were the miracles done so that we may **know** that Moshe was an authentic Navi HaShem, or:

**Shemos 6:7.** And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

**Shemos 7:5.** And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt, and bring out the people of Israel from among them.

**Shemos 7:17.** Thus said the Lord, In this you shall know that I am the Lord; behold, I will strike with the rod that is in my hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.

**Shemos 8:6.** And he said, Tomorrow. And he said, Be it according to your word; that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God.

**Shemos 8:18.** And I will set apart in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth.

**Shemos 9:14.** For I will at this time send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants, and upon your people; that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.

**Shemos 9:29.** And Moses said to him, As soon as I am gone from the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; and the thunder shall cease, nor shall there be any more hail; that you may know that the earth is the Lord's.

**Shemos 10:2.** And that you may tell in the ears of your son, and of your grandson, what things I have done in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that you may know that I am the Lord.

**Shemos 11:7.** But against any of the people of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast; that you may know that the Lord does put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.

**Shemos 14:4.** And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honored over Pharaoh, and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord. And they did so... 18. And the Egyptians shall **know** that I am the Lord, when I have gotten honor over Pharaoh, over his chariots, and over his horsemen.

**Shemos 16:6.** And Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, At evening, then you shall know that the Lord has brought you out from the land of Egypt... 12. I have heard the murmurings of the

chosen the *Bnei Yisrael* as His special nation. [Indeed, the opening words of the Ten Commandments read: *I am HaShem, Your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt.*] It was for this reason that HaShem performed such spectacular miracles during the Exodus, including the Ten Plagues and the miracles at the Yam Suf. It was an absolutely essential component of the Exodus that the Jews, along with the rest of the world, be shown the true might and glory of HaShem.

But there was a difficulty. The messenger chosen to lead the Jews forth from Egypt was the righteous Moshe, the man whose level of prophecy would be unique, who served as the faithful shepherd of the nation at a level never again seen. It would be all too easy for the downtrodden Jews to seize upon Moshe as their savior, and give no thought at all to the One Who sent Moshe. If this were to happen, the Exodus would simply serve to catapult Moshe's status to near-Divine proportions, while doing nothing to strengthen the belief in HaShem that would be central to the acceptance of the Torah and the formation of the Jewish nation.

For this reason, says R' Reuven, it was necessary to prove to the Jews from the onset that Moshe was a messenger, and no more. He came to Pharaoh, made his request – and failed badly. Thus, it was made clear that the subsequent successes were not a result of his personal greatness, but a reflection of HaShem's will.

This is what HaShem told Moshe: Had you been blessed with immediate and total success, everyone would attribute it to you, and not to Me. But “now” that all have seen that you are but a fallible man, you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. It will be clear to all that the redemption that it to come is My doing, and My doing alone. That is the reason your initial efforts ended in failure.

The above are Torah Thoughts of **R' Reuven Feinstein**, son of Rav Moshe. The question we suggest needs to be asked is: “Are our words regarding Moshe (or regarding *Mashiach*) reflective of the lesson taught above?” If we attribute miracles to Moshe or *Mashiach*, are we not missing an essential lesson from HaShem's Torah?

Lastly, for now, we will look at our understanding of the last of the Forty-eight Ways (Pirkei Avos 6:6) which teaches “One who says something [over] in the name of the one who [originally] said it ... brings redemption to the world, as is stated (Esther 2:22): ‘And Esther informed the king in Mordechai's name.’” This lesson is also found in Megillah 15a, “Whoever says a thing in the name of its author, brings redemption to the world.” When we focused on this teaching, and devised our own *Kal Va'chomer*, “If one is obligated by Torah to give credit to a human teacher for a D'var Torah he is giving over at the Shabbos table, how much more so should we give credit to the King of kings for the things He has done, or will do – specifically the miracles associated with the Exodus from Egypt, as well as the miracles we will experience in our eve approaching Geulah.” We also noted that the source given was from *Megillas Esther* which, according to the Rambam, will be the only book of *Nach* that will be supreme in the End Times. We have mentioned this understanding to fellow Yidden, and – again – we have been told that attributing miraculous events to either Moshe or *Mashiach* is not misleading, and is in fact what actually happened, or will happen. However, even we did not go as far in our understanding of this last of the Forty-eight ways as the following teaching:

The following is based upon ArtScroll's “*A Daily Dose of Torah*,” *Parashas Shemos*, Tuesday, pgs. 20 and 21 [emphasis/underlining added]:

Moshe's *middah* of not wishing to take credit for himself made him qualified to act as the redeemer of *Klal Yisrael*. The Gemara (*Megillah* 15a) states: “Whoever says a thing in the name of its author, brings redemption to the world.” Maharal explains: This does not mean that the act

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people of Israel; speak to them, saying, At evening you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall **know** that I am the Lord your God.

*We question how if the lesson to be learned is that HaShem is the only “Power,” why He would give of His “Power” to Moshe, or make Moshe an integral part of the miracles.*

of attributing a quote to its proper source has a power to bring redemption. Rather, it means that one who is in the habit of giving credit where credit is due, rather than seeking credit for himself, is the type of person whom HaShem will employ to bring redemption. For when redemption is brought about by *someone who will not take credit for himself*, this creates a greater revelation of HaShem's glory, as all will realize Who is truly responsible.

**Our input:** IF the *Mashiach* will not take credit, IF the *Mashiach* will give total credit to HaShem, THEN who are we to give the *Mashiach* credit?

## Addendum, *Chol HaMoed Pesach, 5767*

The following Torah Thoughts are gleaned from the *sefer*, "***Festival of Freedom: Essays on Pesach and the Haggadah***," by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. The title of the essay we will be quoting (paraphrasing and commenting upon) from is, "***Moses and the Redemption***."

"...When G-d chose him, Moshe was very reluctant to accept the mission. He argued with the Almighty... [and] considered himself unqualified to be the leader of the people and to confront Pharaoh... ***Moshe said to G-d: Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?***" (Shemos 3:11) – who am I, that I am worthy of being the redeemer? G-d answered him: ***I shall accompany you***' (Shemos 3:12<sup>5</sup>). G-d promised Moshe that He would never desert him; He would participate in the implementation of the mission, and together they would enter Pharaoh's chambers... When Moshe addresses Pharaoh, G-d will be present; when he raises the staff, G-d will be with him. In effect, G-d says, *'Bo imadi el Par'oh*, Come along with Me to Pharaoh.'

"There is a *halakhic* principle involved here. The Halachah knows of two kinds of *shelichut*, two kinds of power of attorney... One type of *shelichut* is a purely formal-juridic assignment given to a person. The other type of *shelichut* is personalistic and experiential. The former is a purely practical institution, designed simply to perform legal transactions by proxy. Quite often, one cannot attend to business personally, and therefore the Halachah provides the opportunity to act through a proxy...

"The second kind of *shelichut* is personalistic... [this] *shelichut* is a merger of identity. One acting on behalf of the other in the other's presence.

"For example, we know that when a *kohen*, a priest in the Temple, offered a sacrifice, he acted as an agent of the person who brought the sacrifice. If the *kohen* is my agent, why do I have to travel from Upper Galilee to Jerusalem in order to be present at the offering of the sacrifice? It is because this kind of *shelichut* is not merely a formal relationship between the

<sup>5</sup> **Ben Avraham** – We hesitate to interrupt the flow of Rav Soloveitchik's argument, but we would like to include a supporting Rashi (*Shemos* 3:12):

**And He said, "For I will be with you..."** He [God] answered his former [question] first, and his latter [question] last. [Concerning] what you said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" This [mission] is not yours but Mine, "for I will be with you." And this vision which you have seen in the thorn bush, **is the sign for you that it was I Who sent you** And that you will succeed in My mission and that I am able to save you. Just as you saw the thorn bush performing My mission and not being harmed, so will you go on My mission and not be harmed.

Moshe thought he was the first kind of *sheli'ach* – one who has to rely upon his own faculties to perform the mission on which he was sent. But HaShem made it clear to Moshe that he was the second type of *sheliach*, and thus – since HaShem would be with him every step of the way, since the mission was HaShem's, not Moshe's – Moshe would eventually be successful. [See Rav Reuven Feinstein on *Shemos* 6:1, where Rav Feinstein offers an insight on why Moshe initially failed as HaShem's *sheliach*. We will be including excerpts from Rav Feinstein's understanding below.]

sender and his proxy, but rather a personalistic, experiential shelichut... [P]ersonalistic shelichut is performed only when the sender is present; in his absence, there is no shelichut.

“Similarly... The *chazzan* is the *shli'ah*, the representative, the plenipotentiary, the agent of the people. But the congregation must be present...

“The *shelichut* entrusted to a prophet belongs to the second category of personalistic shelichut. Man unites with G-d, cleaves to G-d, and loves G-d with a great passion... It is the personalistic *shelichut*, where there is union between Me and you. My thoughts will become your thoughts, My speech will break through you; therefore, Moshe, you are qualified because I am qualified...

“Let us analyze further... in order to gain insight into the role the Torah has assigned to the individual leader in history. History, Judaism says, cannot move or progress without the individual. G-d waits for man if there is something to be done. He does nothing until man initiates action. G-d waits for man, for a single person, to accept responsibility and initiate the process of *ge'ulah*, or redemption. It is strange. On one hand, G-d is the *Go'el Yisroel*, our redeemer and liberator; however, G-d wills man to become His *sheli'ach* in the drama of *ge'ulah*, the personalistic *sheli'ach* with whom G-d will walk. G-d will not desert him, but G-d alone does not want to take the initiative. The Jewish people have been waiting a long time for the *Mashiach* – a human being like us who will initiate the process of *ge'ulah*<sup>6</sup>.

“The Gemara (Sanhedrin 98b) tells us that Rabbi Hillel – not Hillel the Elder – said, ‘*Ein Mashiach le-Yisroel*, Israel has no Messiah.’ Instead, G-d Himself will liberate Israel; He will not use an agent. Indeed, why should we wait for a human being to liberate the Jewish people, redeem the land, and reconstruct the Temple? Why should the fulfillment of all the glorious prophetic promises depend upon a human being, who had a father and a mother, and not upon G-d Himself? Yet the Talmud considers this statement heretical<sup>7</sup>. ‘Rav Yosef said: May the Almighty forgive Rabbi Hillel for this.’ Rabbi Hillel did not deny the future redemption; he denied man’s role in it. According to *Chazal*, to deny the role of man in the future redemption is heresy: ‘May the Almighty forgive Rabbi Hillel.’

“G-d wants an individual great in knowledge, in morality, in prophecy, to be an participant in the drama of *ge'ulah*. G-d wills man to emerge as a great being through his acceptance of *shelichut*. Not the collective, but the individual, seizes the initiative. ‘*It came to pass in the course of those many days, that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage and their cry rose up to G-d ... and G-d saw their affliction, and G-d knew*’ (Shemos 2:23-25<sup>8</sup>). G-d was ready, the people were ready, the time had passed,

<sup>6</sup> **Ben Avraham** – We are acutely aware that the words of Rav Soloveitchik COULD be taken out of context in order to “prove” that we can force the *Ge'ulah*. Many (most) Lubavitchers believe that their Rebbe was/is the *Mashiach* – and they forced the issue by interpreting the Rambam so as to fit their Rebbe into the Rambam’s codification of Hilchos Melachim. However, if one reads Rav Soloveitchik’s words carefully, and in their entirety, he will see that G-d is not awaiting someone who has prepared himself to be the *Mashiach*. Rather, HaShem awaits *Klal Yisroel* to do *t'shuvah* (whether on their own, or because they are forced to do so because of chastisement of the nations), and then He will seek for Himself a man qualified to fill the role of the *Mashiach*. Rav Berel Wein discusses the *Lamed Vavniks*, the Thirty-six Righteous Individuals without whom the world would not exist. Rav Wein says, “If you think you’re one of the *Lamed Vavniks* – you’re not!” If this is true of the Thirty-six, how much more so is this true of the man whom HaShem will approach to be His *sheliach*, His *Mashiach*.

<sup>7</sup> Please take the time to read our *chiddush* on this piece of Gemara in the **Endnotes** at the end of this piece.

<sup>8</sup> **Ben Avraham** – Please note that the Children of Israel cried out to HaShem – they did not cry out for HaShem to send them a human redeemer (*Devarim* 26:6-7): “And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard slavery; And when we cried to the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression.” The fact that HaShem chooses to use a human *sheliach* in conjunction with His Redemption of Israel should not be the focus of

*ge'ulah* was possible, and G-d could have taken them out in a split second. But G-d had to wait for someone. Immediately, in the next verse, Moshe is mentioned: 'Now Moshe kept the flock of Yisro' (Shemos 3:1<sup>9</sup>).

"In every generation, there is a *sheli'ach* who is qualified to become the *Ish E-lokim*, the person with whom G-d walks, who speaks on G-d's behalf, through whom G-d speaks... Yet even though nothing happens in the absence of the *sheli'ach*, nevertheless, the *sheli'ach* is not recognized after he performs his mission.

"Let me qualify this statement. The individual deserves no praise as long his contribution consists of, or is translated into, political, economic, or military victory. However, if the share he contributes to the history of the people is of an intellectual nature, if he teaches the people and elevates them to new spiritual heights, if he is their mentor and teacher<sup>10</sup> – then his contribution is not only recorded but is glorified...

our attention. Rather, we need to recognize that HaShem is our ONLY King, Redeemer, and Savior; how He orchestrates His Redemptive Mission should be of secondary importance.

<sup>9</sup> **Shemos Rabbah 2:2** – NOW MOSES WAS KEEPING THE FLOCK... By what does He try him? By tending flocks. He tried David through sheep and found him to be a good shepherd, as it is said: *He chose David also His servant and took him from the sheepfolds* (Tehillim 77:70). Why 'from the sheepfolds', when the word is the same as *and the rain... was restrained?* (Bereshis 8:2). Because he used to stop the bigger sheep from going out before the smaller ones, and bring smaller ones out first, so that they should graze upon the tender grass, and afterwards he allowed the old sheep to feed from the ordinary grass, and lastly, he brought forth the young, lusty sheep to eat the tougher grass. Whereupon God said: '**He who knows how to look after sheep, bestowing upon each the care it deserves, shall come and tend my people,**' as it says, *From following the ewes that give suck He brought him, to be shepherd over Jacob His people* (Tehillim 78:71). Also Moses was tested by God through sheep. Our Rabbis said that when Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness, a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until it reached a shady place. When it reached the shady place, there appeared to view a pool of water and the kid stopped to drink. When Moses approached it, he said: 'I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be weary.' So he placed the kid on his shoulder and walked away. Thereupon God said: '**Because thou hast mercy in leading the flock of a mortal, thou wilt assuredly** (Lit. 'by thy life.') **tend my flock Israel.**' Hence NOW MOSES WAS KEEPING THE FLOCK.

**Shemos Rabbah 2:6** – AND MOSES SAID: I WILL TURN ASIDE NOW, AND SEE (Shemos 3:3). R. Johanan said, Moses took five steps then, as it is said: 'I will turn aside now, and see.' R. Simeon b. Lakish said: He simply turned his face to see, as it is said: And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see. When God saw this, [That he did not actually stop his work, but merely turned aside to see.] He said: This man is worthy to tend Israel. R. Isaac said: What is the meaning of: HE TURNED A SIDE (SAR) TO SEE? God said: This man is downcast (sar) and troubled at seeing Israel's affliction in Egypt, [Translating: 'and God saw that he was downcast (sar) in seeing (Israel's affliction).'] he is, accordingly, worthy of being their shepherd.' Immediately, 'God called unto him out of the midst of the bush.'

<sup>10</sup> **Ben Avraham** – **Question:** "Will the *Mashiach* be considered to be a greater teacher than *Moshe Rabbeinu*?" After all, Moshe – seemingly – failed to have his teachings see any significant longevity. The *passuk* says (Devarim 31:29): "For I know that after my death you will completely corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands." Yet we know that in *Yemos HaMashiach*, the entire world – both Jews and non-Jews – will attain universal knowledge of HaShem, and that all will be observant of His Torah [(*Yishayahu* 11:9.) "...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (*Yirmiyahu* 31:33) "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will no longer remember their sin.")] So do we dare say that *Moshe Rabbeinu* will be overshadowed by *Mashiach Rabbeinu*? Or will the "success" of the *Mashiach* come about because HaShem will change the rules of the game? Consider the *passuk* (Devarim 30:1-2, 6, 8) "And it shall come to pass, when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you shall call them to mind among all the nations, where the Lord your God has driven you, And shall return to

“G-d is the warrior, man is not. ‘G-d is a man of war’ (Shemos 15:3)... Man cannot act as the plenipotentiary of the Almighty as far as the military, political, or economic power is concerned. *Bo el par’oh* – G-d accompanies Moshe and joins him. The warnings and stern words were announced by the Almighty; the plagues were performed by the Almighty; He did everything. G-d acted, and brought along Moshe as a companion and friend...

“Once Moshe was present, G-d did everything. The Haggadah states clearly and unequivocally that ‘The Lord brought us forth out of Egypt’ (Devarim 26:8) – not through a *malakh*, not through a *seraph*, and not through a messenger, but by the Holy One, blessed be He, alone and in His glory.’ How can the Haggadah say ‘not through a messenger’ when the Almighty Himself said to Moshe, ‘Therefore, I shall send you to Pharaoh’ (Shemos 3:10)? Moshe... at the end of the forty years, stated clearly that G-d ‘sent a *malakh* and brought us out of Egypt’ (Bamidbar 20:16). (*Malakh* in this verse does not mean an angel but a plenipotentiary.) How, then, is it possible for the Haggadah to say ‘not through a *malakh*’?

“Of course, the answer is simple. There was a *sheli’ach*, but he belonged to the second category, not the first. Had the *sheli’ach* belonged to the first category, he would have deserved credit, because he did it all by himself. He was authorized by the Almighty, but the deeds were his own. Moshe, however, was a *sheli’ach* who served only as a companion for the Almighty. Such a *sheli’ach* does not deserve credit, so his name is not mentioned. Every miracle was performed by the Almighty...

“Note the paradox. On the one hand... Moshe... is the hero of Jewish history... On the other hand, when his assignment on the historical stage was done, the lights dimmed and he walked off in darkness. **On Pesach night, when we celebrate the exodus, Moshe is not the hero. The *ge’ulah* is credited to one account only – that of G-d.** *Bo el Par’oh*: come with Me; I cannot go without you – yet you will not get any credit. Moshe himself proclaims, in an act of self-effacement, ‘I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has H thrown into the sea’ (Shemos 15:1<sup>11</sup>). Moshe claims no credit.

“What, then, is Moshe’s role in Jewish history? Is he completely forgotten and erased? To the contrary... [although] he was not immortalized as a political hero or a strategist... [he] was immortalized as a teacher. We do not say Moshe *Go’aleinu*, or Moshe *Moshi’enu*, or Moshe *Meshi’chenu*; we say Moshe *Rabbeinu*. **Calling him Moshe Go’aleinu. Moshe our Redeemer, would be blasphemy.** Man cannot usurp G-d’s attributes of power. A man who calls himself powerful is nothing but an idiot. A malignant little cell kills the most powerful man, and nothing can stop it. It is ridiculous to speak of man as powerful.

“...Moshe’s name was eliminated from the pages of the Haggadah as if he never existed. But we are a grateful people; we feel very sorry for him on Pesach night... [The only time we find] the name of Moshe in the Haggadah... is not in the Haggadah proper but in a proof-text; ‘They believed in the Lord, and in His servant Moshe’ (Shemos 14:31)...

“...*Knesset Yisroel*... looks for Moshe on Passover night but will never find him.

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*the Lord your God, and shall obey his voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul... And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live... And you shall return and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all his commandments which I command you this day.”* Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that the longevity of the *Mashiach*’s teachings will be brought about by HaShem’s diminishment of the *Yetzer Hara*, rather than a teaching ability of His *sheli’ach* that is superior to Moshe Rabbeinu.

<sup>11</sup> **Ben Avraham** – When we have pointed to the Song at the Sea as evidence that all credit belongs to HaShem, as all credit is given to Him – an none to Moshe – in this song, we have been told by Rabbinic lifelong Yidden that our proof is lacking because Moshe himself was singing the song: “Of course Moshe is not going to sing a song about himself,” we have been told. Now Rav Soloveitchik comes and gives authentic Torah credence to our argument. Would the Rabbinic lifelong Yidden like to alter their responses, or are they going to continue their debasement of our arguments?

“On my bed at night” – this refers to the night of Egypt; “I sought him who my heart loves” – this refers to Moshe; “I sought him, but I found him not” (Shir HaShiurim Rabbah 3:1).

“Similarly, when, with G-d’s help, the Haggadah of our final redemption is written, the name of the *Mashiach* will not be mentioned either.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever’ – so let the redeemed of the Lord say” (Tehillim 107:1-2)... Why does it say ‘the redeemed of the Lord,’ and not [simply] ‘Israel’? It is as *Yishayhu* (35:10<sup>12</sup>) explains, ‘The redeemed of the Lord shall return’ – [they are] **not** [called] ‘the redeemed of *Eliyahu*,’ nor ‘*the redeemed of the Mashiach*,’ but ‘*the redeemed of the Lord*.’ Therefore, here too it says, ‘*the redeemed of the Lord*.’ (Midrash Tehillim, 107)...

“He is called *Moshe Rabbeinu* only in reference to Sinai, not in reference to *Ge’ulas Mitzrayim*. ‘I stood before the Lord and you ... to show you the word of the Lord (*Devarim* 5:5) – I am the mediator between G-d and the congregation, and I told you the word of G-d, so I deserve credit.”

**Ben Avraham** – We ask the simple question: “If calling Moshe, *Moshe Go’aleinu*, would be blasphemy – according to Rav Soloveitchik, who the Rav not also consider calling the *Mashiach*, *Mashiach Go’aleinu*, blasphemy as well?”

We will end with a *chiddush* on the Haftarah to *Parashas Vayikra*, taken from *Yishayahu HaNavi*, who said (*Yishayhu* 49:26) “...all flesh shall know that I the Lord am your Savior and

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<sup>12</sup> **Yishayahu 35:4.** Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, with a divine recompense; He will come and save you. 5. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. 7. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; the habitation of jackals shall become a pasture for cattle, an enclosure of reeds and rushes. 8. And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; and he shall be to them a guide, and fools shall not err in it. 9. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up on it, they shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there; 10. And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

**Rashi, Yishayahu 35:4 – to the hasty of heart** Who hurry the redemption and are troubled by its delay. [with] **vengeance He shall come** (lit., vengeance He shall come,) with vengeance He shall come. **the recompense of God** Upon the wicked ([mss.] upon your enemies) He shall come and save you.

**Rashi, Yishayahu 35:5 – the eyes of the blind shall be opened** Those who were blind, not to recognize (lit., from recognizing) their fear (sic) ([Warsaw:] this fear;) ([mss.] My fear) upon them. **and the ears of the deaf** Who did not hearken to the voice of the prophets until now, will be opened and unstopped, for I will give them a proper spirit to fear Me. He says this concerning Israel, whom he called blind and deaf, as the matter is stated (infra 42:18) “You deaf ones, hearken, etc.”

**Ben Avraham** – “*and the ears of the deaf*” we suggest might (possibly) refer to those who failed to recognize and comprehend the muted role of the *Mashiach* in the *Ge’ulah Emitas* as depicted in the words of the Navi’im, but eventually....

**Yishayahu 35:6 – Then the lame shall skip like a hart, etc.** Israel, who are now lame and weak. We find that he calls the weak with an expression of ‘lame,’ as the matter is stated (above 33:23): “The lame take the prey.” **shall sing in My salvation. the tongue of the mute** The tongue of Israel, who are among the nations as mutes, for they hear their scorn and do not respond. **for water has broken out in the desert** For **My salvation** shall cheer them up, and they shall blossom like a desert wasteland, which thirsts for water, and springs break out into it; i.e., for salvation shall sprout for the crushed ones.

your **Redeemer**, the mighty One of Jacob,” as well as (*Yishayahu* 49:7) “Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation loathes, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall prostrate themselves, **because of the Lord who is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.**”

**The Haftarah reads** (*Yishayahu* 44): “6. Thus says the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside Me there is no God. 7. And who is like Me? Let him declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the eternal people; and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them relate to themselves. 8. Fear not, neither be afraid; have not I told you from that time, and have declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God beside Me? Yes, there is no rock; I know not any. 9. They who make an engraved image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things do not profit; and their witnesses do not see, nor know; that they may be ashamed. 10. Who forms a god, or casts an engraved image that is good for nothing? 11. Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed; and the workmen, they are but men; let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. 12. The metal worker makes an axe, and works in the coals, and fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms; if he is hungry his strength fails; if he drinks no water he is faint. 13. The carpenter stretches out his rule; he marks it out with a pencil; he fits it with chisels, and he marks it out with the compass, and makes it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of man; that it may remain in the house. 14. He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak, which he strengthens for himself among the trees of the forest; he plants a forest tree, and the rain nourishes it. 15. Then shall it be for a man for fuel; for he will take of it, and warm himself; yes, he kindles it, and bakes bread; or, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes of it a carved idol, and falls down to it. 16. He burns half of it in the fire; with this half of it he eats meat; he roasts the roast, and is satisfied; yes, he warms himself, and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire; 17. And with what is left of it he makes a god, his carved image; he falls down to it, and worships it, and prays to it, and says, Save me, for you are my god! 18. They have not known nor understood; for he has shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. 19. And none considers in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned half of it in the fire; yes, also I have baked bread upon its embers; I have roasted meat, and eaten it; and **shall I make what is left of it an abomination?** Shall I fall down to worship a block of wood? 20. His ‘shepherd’ is but ashes, his mocking heart deceived him; he [his carved wooden idol] cannot even save himself; yet he does not say: ‘There is falsehood in my right hand.’ 21. Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for you are my servant; I have formed you; you are my servant; O Israel, you shall not be forgotten by me. 22. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins; return to me; for I have redeemed you. 23. Sing, O heavens; for the Lord has done it; shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it; for the Lord has **redeemed** Jacob, and **glorified Himself in Israel.**”

Our *chiddush* is on the twentieth *passuk* which reads: “His ‘shepherd’ is but ashes, his mocking heart deceived him; **he [his carved wooden idol] cannot even save himself**; yet he does not say: ‘There is falsehood in my right hand.’” The foolish idolater has cut down a tree, warmed himself with part of the wood, heated food for himself, and then carved an idol with the remainder. He bows do to his idol and says (v. 17), “Save me, for you are my god.” Yet he is too ignorant to realize that the “god” to whom he prays (v. 20) “cannot even save himself,” as when he grows cold again, the idolater can take his “god” and put him upon the fire in order to warm himself. Some “god” – a piece of wood that cannot even save himself.

However, our concern regarding how we perceive that the *Mashiach* is viewed in virtually the entire Jewish world contains a (*lehavdil*) frightening parallel to how the idolater views his carved wooden god. The very next *perek* of the *Navi Yishayahu* contains a *passuk* that was taken out of *Aleinu* in 1400 C.E. by the Christian Church. The *passuk* reads (*Yishayahu* 45:20): “...**they have no knowledge those who carry the wood of their carved idols, [for they**

*bow to vanity and emptiness]* **and pray to a god who cannot save.**” With the exception of those Lubavitchers who pray to their dead rebbe, we are not suggesting that *Yidden* believe that the *Mashiach* is divine (chas-v’ shalom); and we are not doubting the veracity of the 12<sup>th</sup> of the Rambam’s 13 Principles – that one day we will have a descendant of David ad Solomon, a “king of flesh and blood,” sitting upon the earthly throne of Israel. But what we are suggesting is that how the *Mashiach* is viewed by many/most Jews is out of line with his contribution to the End Times, especially when compared to the role played by HaShem.

The line from *Aleinu* reads: “For they bow to vanity and emptiness and pray to a god which cannot save.” In our estimation (and may HaShem forgive us if we are wrong), most *Yidden* pray to HaShem to send us:

- 1) A savior who cannot save himself<sup>13</sup>
- 2) A redeemer who cannot redeem himself<sup>14</sup>
- 3) A king whose main task will be to direct our attention to the King of kings<sup>15</sup>.

The joke goes like this: “Why did HaShem create non-Jews? Somebody has to pay retail.” The thrust of the joke is that *Yidden* bypass the middleman and go straight to the source for their purchases. What we are suggesting is that we recognize the *Mashiach* as a middleman who will be HaShem’s messenger, and nothing more. (See Rav Soloveitchik’s piece above, as well as Rav Reuven Feinstein’s piece.) If we expect the *Mashiach* to redeem us, to save us, are we not guilty (at least in the opinion of Rav Soloveitchik) of considering him to be *Mashiach Moshi’enu*, or *Mashiach Meshi’chenu*, which Rav Soloveitchik deems to be blasphemy?

Who is the True Redeemer if *Yisroel* in the End Times (*Yemos HaMashiach*)? The answer is found in the Shabbos davening (*HaChol Yoducha, Birchas Kriyas Shema*) “*O Shield of our salvation, be a stronghold for us. There is no comparison to You, there is nothing except for You, there is nothing without You, for who is like You? There is no comparison to You, HaShem, our G-d, in this world; and there will be nothing except for You, our King, in the life of the World to Come; there will be nothing without You, our Redeemer, in Messianic Days; and there will be none like You, our Savior, at the Resuscitation of the Dead.*”

Who is our only King, Redeemer, and Savior? Again the answer comes to us in Shabbos davening TWICE (*Neshmas Col Chai* and *Birchas Kriyas Shema*) “*U’Mebaladecha ain lanu Melech Go’el u’Moshiah*, and other than You, we have no king, redeemer or savior.”

The reader will be pleased to hear that this writer is exhausted with this subject, as well as with *Yidden* who refuse to have substantive discussions about this subject. If there is constructive criticism, fine. But if the mantra is going to be, “We don’t worship the *Mashiach*, but he is our king, redeemer and savior,” then we seem to be at an impasse. I feel that I have the Maharal of Prague, the Meshech Chochmah, Rav Yosef Bear Soloveitchik, and Rav Reuven Feinstein (whom I have shared most of the above with, and who is in agreement with me) on my side of the argument. Who wants to play “*Yiddish Hashkafa Trivia*”? [The “joke” being that these matters are NOT “*trivial*” in the least bit!]

<sup>13</sup> **Tehillim 20:7** “Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed...” (See Radak)

**Zechariah 9:9**. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, your king comes to you; he is just, and victorious; humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass.

**Rashi, Zechariah 9:9** – ... “**humble**” because he [the *Mashiach*] was just saved by HaShem.

<sup>14</sup> As a member of *Klal Yisroel*, will not the *Mashiach* himself need to be redeemed by HaShem?

<sup>15</sup> *Hilchos Melachim*, 4:10.