

Let's Keep It Simple: Introduction “Two Analogies to Consider”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

Yonason Noach ben Avraham
Minneapolis, MN
ynbenavraham@aol.com
612-812-6946

“You are driving through a barren desert; there is no sign of life as far as the eye can see. Mile after mile, still no indication of anything but desolate wilderness on the horizon. You begin to wonder if the stretch of desert will ever end, then – almost unexpected as the landscape has been so unceasingly monotonous – you spy a tiny shoot of a tree peaking through the dry sand in the distance, and you know that this is a sign that there is more life in the offing. Your spirits brighten, and you look forward what is to come next.”¹

“You and your family are in dire straits. There never seems to be enough money to meet your needs. Clothing that might qualify as ‘hand-me-downs’ would be an up-grade for your children, and every time you start the car you cringe, wondering if it will come to life, or it will need further repairs. However, you have a distant relative who is aware of your situation, and he lets you know that a sizable check will soon be on its way – a check that will change your lives forever.

“Every day you wait for the mailman to make his rounds in hopes that the check will arrive. Every day, several times a day, you ask your wife and your children, ‘Has the mailman come yet, has anyone checked the mail?’ The hope becomes that then mailman will come, and the mailman is all that you and your family ever talk about. The distant relative is not mentioned. The better life that is in store is not discussed. The sole object of desire is the mailman. *‘I sure hope the mailman comes soon!’*”

Dear reader, please consider these two scenarios while reading the remainder of this piece. We will return to them later in these offerings of *Hashkafos HaEmes*.

¹ *Yasher Koach*, Rav Ya'akov Freedman of Flatbush, NY, for suggesting this analogy!

Let's Keep It Simple: Part I

“A ‘messenger’ shuns accepting any credit”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

The *passukim* (Bereshis 32:25-30) read “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man [an angel] with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, ‘Let me go, for the day breaks.’ And he said, ‘I will not let you go, except you bless me.’ And he said to him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Jacob.’ And he said, ‘Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed.’ And Jacob asked him, and said, ‘Tell me, I beg you, your name.’ And he said, ‘**Why is it that you ask after my name?**’ And he blessed him there.”

Rabbeinu Bachya Ben Asher on the *passuk* (*Bereshis 32:30*) reads למה זה תשאל לשמי, “why is this that you ask for my name?” He meant, “We do not have a fixed name; our names always change according to the mission we are sent on.” Another meaning of these words: “Why do you ask for a name seeing that we are not in the habit of revealing our names?” **The reason an angel does not like to reveal his name is so as not to appear to crown himself with the success of any mission he has been sent on. He does not want a human being to go around saying: “this and this angel has performed such and such a miracle.” He is a servant, a mere extension of his Master in Heaven and he is careful not to do something which could create the wrong impression.** This is the reason that the angel who had announced to Manoach and his wife that they would have a son resented being asked his name (*Shoftim* 13:18) saying that his name was פלאי, “something concealed.” This is the meaning of *Yishayahu* 43:7: לכוודי בראתיו - כל הנקרא בשמי - לכבודי בראתיו **My honor.**” This is also the thrust of David saying in *Tehillim* 29:1: **ascribe to the Lord, o divine beings, ascribe to the Lord, glory and strength.**”

The lesson here seems to be clear. An angel, sent by HaShem, wants us to be clear about Whom to credit with any good fortune that might occur. An angel certainly **does not want a human being to go around saying, ‘this and this angel performed such and such a miracle.’**”

Let's Keep It Simple: Part II

“The Meaning of ‘*Sheliach*’”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

Each morning, in *Birchas HaShachar*, we read *Yigdal*. Contained within this summarization of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles we read, “...**He will send our *Mashiach* to redeem...**” At the end of *Shacharis*, just after *Ashrei* and *Tehillim* 20, we read, “**A redeemer shall come to Zion...**”

Rabbeinu Bachya Ben Asher on the passuk (*Bereshis* 32:30) reads, “... **The reason an angel does not like to reveal his name is so as not to appear to crown himself with the success of any mission he has been sent on. He does not want a human being to go around saying: “this and this angel has performed such and such a miracle.” He is a servant, a mere extension of his Master in Heaven and he is careful not to do something which could create the wrong impression.**”

This author has heard, “**And as far as the *Mashiach* is concerned, HaShem will *send* His *sheliach*, the *Mashiach*, to redeem us,**” many times. What the speakers of this phrase seem to mean is that the *Mashiach* is “nothing more” than someone who HaShem will “send” in order to accomplish His prophesied Redemption. Thus, most *Yidden* seem believe that the *Mashiach* is someone “through whom” HaShem will redeem us, but this understanding is prone to misunderstanding.² One of this author's concerns is how one understands the term “*sheliach*.” Consider:

Rashi, Shemos 3:12 reads, “[Concerning] what you [Moshe] 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. “

If we understand *Rashi* correctly then we see that according to the “laws of nature,” a bush set aflame will be consumed, but this bush was not consumed. The “burning bush” was HaShem's symbol that, even though Moshe was correct, ‘Who was he to face down Pharaoh?’ that Moshe would not suffer the obvious ramifications of facing down a powerful leader by himself – because HaShem would be with him!

The first *B'rachah* of the *Shemoneh Esrei*: “...ומביא גואל...” He “brings,” as opposed to He “sends,” teaches us about the relationship between the Sender and he who is “sent.” In reality, because HaShem is Omni-Present and there is no place void of Him, it is only from our perspective (like as the perspective of Pharaoh) that either Moshe was, or the *Mashiach* will be, “sent.” Thus, so far, we have learned that any angel sent on a mission will not accept any credit for the success of the mission. We have learned that Moshe was sent on such a mission, and that his success was not dependent upon his own strength or ‘power,’ but rather because HaShem would be with him.

When contemplating the above, we also need to consider the full text in *Yigdal*, “**By the End of days He will send our *Mashiach*, to redeem those longing for His Final Salvation.**” in light of the *B'rachah Malchus Bais Dovid* in the *Shemoneh Esrei*, “...**and enhance his pride through Your Salvation, for we hope for Your Salvation all day long...**”

² Considering “*l'vado*” and/or “*shittuf*,” when properly understood, and that understanding is applied, indicate that HaShem ALONE will redeem us, and that He has or needs no “partners” to help Him in His mission

Let's Keep It Simple: Part III

“The Meaning of ‘Eved’”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

The *passuk* (*Shemos* 14:31) reads, “**And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses.**” This author has heard, “**And as far as the *Mashiach* is concerned, just as Moshe was His *eved* when we departed Egypt, *Mashiach* will be His *eved* when He ingathers us from the current exile.**” Another of this author’s concerns is how the term “*eved*” is understood.

Moshe was an *eved*, but –according to the *Ba'al Haggadah shel Pesach* – he was an *eved* who did not deserve to be included in the story of the Exodus from Egypt that we recite at each *Pesach Seder*. The Vilna Ga'on, in his commentary on the *Haggadah shel Pesach*, notes that to include Moshe in the narrative would have been a disservice to Moshe, as Moshe would have taken no credit, giving all credit to HaShem! Thus, it would seem, a correct understanding of an “*eved* HaShem” (at least as far as Moshe is concerned) is akin to a measuring cup in the hands of a baker. When one is enjoying the delicacies produced by the baker he does not express gratitude to the measuring cup, but instead heaps all of his thanks on the baker.

But how was Moshe viewed by those whom HaShem had taken out of Egypt? Was he seen as a mere “measuring cup,” or as something more? Consider the following Torah of Rav Hirsch regarding the incident of the Golden Calf:

Rav Hirsch (*Shemos* 32:2-4³) writes, “...[T]he cattle species ... is **the species of animal that serves man in his labors** ... Thus was the reason for Aaron’s choice of a calf: On one hand, he sought to satisfy the demands of the people who did not really seek another G-d but merely a new ‘Moshe.’ On the other hand, he sought to limit the sin within the bounds of this partial deflection. To this end, no other figure would have been as well suited as that of a bovine animal which does not represent a ruling power, but only a servile tool ... [B]y choosing ... not a bull but only a calf, Aaron gave expression to this servile tool in its weakest aspect.”

Inspired by the above Torah of Rav Hirsch, this author would like to suggest that we read further on in the Chapter of the Golden Calf and delve into one possible understanding. The *passuk* (*Shemos* 32:22-24) reads, “**And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 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 I said to them, Whoever has any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me; then I casted it into the fire, and there came out this calf.**” Thus Aaron told Moshe that all he did was toss the gold into the fire, and that the Golden Calf came out on its own.

The Gemara (*Makkos* 10b) teaches us that “***as a person wishes to go, so he is led.***” The people saw Moshe as more than a “measuring cup.” Rather they saw him as the type of animal that actually helps His Master, HaShem. When one plows a field to ready it for planting, and he attaches a plow to his cow, it is the cow that is doing the majority of the work, with the farmer merely guiding him along the way. This is how they viewed Moshe, as one such *eved* who actually did the “heavy lifting.”

A correct understanding would have seen Moshe as a mere meturgeman who communicated HaShem’s Words to us, but he (unfortunately) was seen as so much more.

³ *Shemos* 32:2-4 “**And Aaron said to them, Take off the golden ear rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them to me. And all the people took off the golden ear rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received them from their hand, and fashioned with a graving tool a molten calf; and they said, These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.**”

Let's Keep It Simple: Part IV

“The Crux of the Problem”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

When the subject of conversation turns to the *Geulah*, this *Yid*, this *ger* – almost without exception – hears his fellow *Yidden* talking about flesh and blood, the *Mashiach*, rather than their ONLY King, Redeemer and Savior, HaShem. When *Yidden* are confronted with monumental troubles, and they seek relief, almost without exception the phrase that concerns itself with that sought after relief contains the words, “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”

When will the Palestinian threat be alleviated? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will the Iranian nuclear threat be quashed? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will the world experience true peace? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will all *Yidden* keep the Torah? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will the Temple be rebuilt? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will all *Yidden* dwell peacefully in *Eretz Yisroel*? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will the *goyim* keep the *Shevah Mitzvos B'nei Noach*? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will the dead be resurrected? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will the world achieve *Tikkun HaOlam*? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”
 When will we experience true *simchah*? “**When *Mashiach* comes!**”

There is a phrase that this *Yid* has heard coming out of the mouths of many Rabbeim; as a Rav finishes a *d'rasha* he will often say, “...**Until the greatest *simchah*, with the coming of *Mashiach*, *A'mein*.**” The phrase ‘the greatest *simchah*,’ has to mean that there is no *simchah* greater than having a flesh and blood king sitting upon his earthly throne. Universal knowledge of HaShem would not be a greater *simchah*. All *Yidden* keeping HaShem’s Torah, all the non-*Yidden* keeping the Seven Laws of Noach would not be a greater *simchah*. World peace (*Yishayahu* 2:4 “...**and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war anymore,**”) would not be a greater *simchah*. The reader should have gotten the point by now.

The problem is that *Yidden* equate the redemption with the “messenger,” rather than with the One and ONLY True Source of that Redemption. And if *Yidden* didn’t focus on the *Mashiach*, then they wouldn’t be talking the *Mashiach*, as we all think what we say, and say what we think – almost without exception. This fixation with flesh and blood leaves this *ger* wondering if this is not a manifestation of another *passuk* from *Yishayahu* (29:13) “**And the Lord said, Since this people draw near Me, and with their mouth, and with their lips honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me...” [This author would apply the first two phrases to when most *Yidden* daven – their “words” seem to be directed toward HaShem – but (because most *Yidden* lack *kavanah* in their davening,) their hearts are far from Him.] When prompted by a multiple choice question, or when confronted over language that focuses on the “messenger” rather than The Sender, most *Yidden* will (begrudgingly) “get it right.” But this author’s goal is that we “get it right” without being prompted. Then this author will be convinced that HaShem is both in our hearts and minds, and this will be evidenced by what comes out of our mouths!**

What follows are teachings of our Sages that show the mistakes in *hashkafah* made by the Generation that came out of Egypt, and this author wonders if we have truly learned from those mistakes, or whether we are repeating them *b'shoge*.

Let's Keep It Simple: Part V(a) “Preparations for the Desert: Moshe’s Initial Instructions”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

Ramban, **Shemos 15:25**, reads, “***THERE HE MADE FOR THEM A STATUTE AND AN ORDINANCE, AND THERE HE TRIED THEM.***” “...But I wonder! (writes the Ramban) ...In line with the plain meaning of Scripture, when the Israelites began coming into (*Devarim 8:15*) *the great and dreadful wilderness ... thirsty ground where there [is] no water*, Moshe established customs for them concerning how to regulate their lives and affairs (*Shemos 16:35*) *until they come to a land inhabited ...* It may mean that Moshe instructed them in the ways of the wilderness, namely to be ready to suffer hunger and thirst and to pray to G-d, and not to murmur ... And Scripture says, *and there He tried [tested] them*, in order to inform us that he [Moshe, as instructed by HaShem] led them by such a road on which there was no water, and he brought them to a place where the waters were bitter in order to test them, even as Scripture says (*Devarim 8:3*), *And He afflicted you, and suffered you to experience hunger*, (*Devarim 8:16*) *that He might prove [test] you, to do you good at your latter end.*”

Here Moshe “Rabbeinu” instructs his students to Whom they should pray for any needed assistance in the desert.

Ramban, **Shemos 17:1**, reads, “***AND ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL JOURNEYED FROM THE WILDERNESS OF SIN, BY THEIR STAGES, ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF THE ETERNAL, AND THEY ENCAMPED IN REPHIDIM*** ... At the beginning of their arrival in that wilderness [of Sin], they complained for bread, and now they quarreled [with Moshe] over water, [as it is said] (*Shemos 17:1*), *and there was no water for the people to drink ...* (*Shemos 17:2*), *Wherefore did the people quarrel with Moshe ...* And Moshe said to them (*Shemos 17:2*), ‘*Why quarrel with me? Wherefore do you try [test] the Eternal?*’ This quarrel is to test G-d, where He can give you water (cf. *Tehillim 78:30*). If you will hold your peace and *let me alone, and instead pray to Him, perhaps He will answer you.*”

Even though Moshe had taught his students (Ramban, *Shemos 15:25*) to Whom they should turn with their needs, they seemingly disregarded his teaching, and turned to him, a being of “flesh and blood.”

Let's Keep It Simple: Part V(b) "Preparations for the Desert: Moshe's Initial Instructions"

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of "bite-sized" pieces

Or HaChayim, Shemos 16:6-7 – "...G-d now was anxious to demonstrate that He Who had taken them out of Egypt and crushed their enemies could also provide for them wherever they were. G-d intended to teach the Israelites a moral lesson, such as we find in *Yishayahu* 44:18 where the prophet scores the people for '*having besmeared their eyes so that they neither saw nor understood*.' G-d insisted that they would realize that He had taken them out of Egypt when they observed what would happen in the evening ... Alternatively, the meaning of the word, '*in the morning also*,' is that at that time the Israelites would have **another** opportunity to realize that it was **G-d (and not Moshe)** Who had taken them out of Egypt...."

Or HaChayim, Shemos 17:2, 3 – "The quarrel consisted of the people demanding that Moshe supply them with water; seeing that it was clear that Moshe was not in a position to supply them with water, the request was only the preamble to a quarrel. If the people had really wanted to ask Moshe for water they would have asked him to cry out to G-d just as their successors did forty years later in *Bamidbar* 21:7 when G-d had sent poisonous snakes against them. *In this instance they did not even ask Moshe to pray* after he had told them not to try G-d by quarreling with him [Moshe] ... When [Moshe] saw that the situation had become intolerable, he asked G-d: 'What shall I do for this people?' He meant 'How can I deflect the people's complaint from me personally and have them turn to You?' ... *I have been troubled by the thought that a people who had witnessed so many miracles in Egypt, at the sea, and in the desert did not turn in prayer to the G-d Who had performed all these miracles.*"

Rav Hirsch, Shemos 16:6-8 – "...'*Erev*:' this very evening you will recognize your error in ascribing the exodus from Egypt to us and not to G-d.

"Only in response to their complaint will they receive the evening bounty of quail, and this will show them that **G-d pays attention to every word.**

"...This evening you will merely get proof that G-d is your Leader, and that He hears your every word. But the morn will bring you a sight that will give you an imitation of the greatness of your G-d's glory....

"*'who are we'* In light of all this, how small and utterly insignificant is our part in shaping your destiny! Who are we that your should murmur against us ... We are merely G-d's instruments; **we ourselves are of no importance!**

"...[Y]ou shall also behold this truth: You stand directly under His providence. Moshe is not needed, not even as an intermediary; **Moshe and Aaron are of no importance whatsoever to the people.**

"Indeed, the entire success of Moshe's mission hinges on the people recognizing that the mission is wholly the work of G-d Himself, and not at all the work of man."

AGAIN: *"Indeed, the entire success of Moshe's mission hinges on the people recognizing that the mission is wholly the work of G-d Himself, and not at all the work of man."*

Our Sage's words speak for themselves.

Let's Keep It Simple: Part VI

“Moshe on ‘Who’ Took Us Out of Egypt”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

Shemos 16:2-3, 6 reads, “And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness; 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 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.”

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 ...”

Here Moshe “*Rabbeinu*” corrects his students over them crediting him and Aaron for taking them out of Egypt. During the entire forty years Moshe NEVER takes or accepts credit for the Exodus from Egypt, or for any of the miracles signs or wonders that HaShem has provided them – yet over and over again his students fail to heed the lesson so clearly taught to them.

Returning to the Sin of the Golden Calf, we read, (*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.”

Stone Chumash Commentary: אשר ילכו – **That will go [before us]**. This is not to say that the people denied the omnipotence of HaShem, for the rest of the verse makes clear that they wanted a replacement for Moses, whom they described as the one who had brought them up from Egypt. Since they obviously knew all along that Moses was not an independent redeemer, but the messenger of God, they could not possibly have thought that Moses would be replaced by a pantheon of deities to the exclusion of HaShem. Rather, they thought that God assigns powers and responsibilities to subordinate powers, as it were. In their view, Moses was one such power [others were the pillars of smoke and fire that led the nation (Ramban; R' Bachya)]; now they wanted other such surrogates of God. This philosophy, known as (שתוף), Partnership with God, is heretical, but it is not equivalent to idol worship (Maharsha to Sanhedrin 63a).

Even after Moshe “*Rabbeinu*” had corrected his students on Who had taken them out of Egypt (Rashi, Shemos 16:6), they repeated the mistake, giving Moshe the credit, and that error in *hashkafah* and *lashon* eventually led to the Golden Calf.

Bamidbar 21:5. And the people **spoke against God, and against Moses**, Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?

Rashi, Bamidbar 21:5 – **against God and against Moses They equated the servant with his Master. Why have you brought us up** Both of them [were considered] equal.

Saperstein Rashi Commentary – *Tanchuma* 19. This was an example of (Sanhedrin 63a), “Whoever **speaks** of G-d as if He has a partner is eliminated from the world (**Nachalas Yaakov**).

Even after all that transpired, in the previous offerings of Torah, the people STILL got it wrong, attributing some modicum of credit to Moshe for the Exodus from Egypt. “Whoever SPEAKS...,” clearly teaches us that ‘mere speech’ can cause one to transgress the prohibition of “attributing partners with HaShem.”

Let's Keep It Simple: Part VII(a) “Or HaChayim on ‘The Incident of the Golden Calf’”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:1 – “...The people who initiated the golden calf did not deny for a single moment either the primacy of G-d or the fact that He had made heaven and earth. They merely wanted a go-between them and G-d ... Possibly, **they became victims of a serious sin when they described Moshe as the Power which had taken them out of Egypt**, i.e. אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים. They meant to say that even when they came out of Egypt, G-d had employed a go-between and that this proved that there was nothing inherently wrong in having a go-between themselves and G-d. The fact that they referred to the go-between as אלהים, a deity, may be understood in the same sense as when G-d had told Moshe in *Shemos 7:1*: ‘here I have made you אלהים (i.e. in G-d’s stead) for Pharaoh.’ **Obviously, the people committed a grave error**, as I have explained on *Shemos 20:4*⁴.”

Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:4 – “...ויאמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים, They said: ‘these are your gods Israel which brought you up from the land of Egypt.’ At first glance the foolishness of this statement is so colossal that one cannot perceive of anyone taking it seriously ... We are therefore forced to conclude that the makers (initiators) of this golden calf did not mean for the Israelites to worship and prostrate themselves to anyone but The One Who had truly taken them out of Egypt; **the statement [which brought you up from the land of Egypt] only prepared the ground for making a deity out of the calf** ... Possibly, they used the expression העלוך ‘they brought you up,’ to hint that there was a “power” on earth which equals the Power in the heavens, G-d forbid; **by making such a statement** they insulted G-d in many different ways and this is why G-d reacted so violently....”

Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:7 – “...G-d listed three sins [of Klal Yisroel to Moshe while Moshe was still on the mountain]:

- 1) ‘they made a golden calf for themselves’
- 2) ‘they prostrated themselves before it and they offered sacrifices to it’
- 3) ‘they **proclaimed**: “these are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you out of Egypt”’

“Israel had therefore sinned in thought, **in speech**, and in deed.”

⁴ **A synopsis of the Or HaChayim, Shemos 20:4** – The Or HaChayim understand the prohibition of “*not making a graven image for yourself*” as applicable to a situation where when one accepts HaShem, but because HaShem is not palpable, he desires a symbol as a go-between themselves and HaShem. Thus writes the Or HaChayim: “Most of the idol worshippers have fallen victim to this error. Originally they knew very well that they did not bow down in front of a deity but only in front of one of one of G-d’s servants whom they had decided to adopt as a symbol ... [On the “jealous nature of G-d,” the Or HaChayim continues:] “You know that Israel’s status vis-à-vis G-d is like that of a bride to her husband. This theme has been developed at length by Shlomo in his *Shiur HaShiurim*. If Israel were to make some other deities for themselves, even while they do not deny G-d or rebel against His commandments, seeing that He is the Supreme G-d, the ‘husband’ would still be entitled to become jealous. Imagine the wife of a king who falls in love with one of his servants and who would display this affection by paying extra attention to the requirements of this servant. Would the king not become jealous when he observes this...?”

This understanding of the Or HaChayim dovetails nicely with the Rashi explaining that when Moshe destroyed the *Luchos* he was symbolically tearing-up the *kesubah* between G-d and *Klal Israel*.

Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:8 – “סרו מהר מן הדרך, ‘they have quickly departed from the path, etc.’ The meaning of these words is clear in view of the statement in Chullin 4, that **if someone acknowledges even passively that there is some substance to idolatry, he is considered as having denied the entire Torah**. This is why G-d said: ‘which I have commanded them,’ i.e. ‘all that I have commanded them.’ ... It is also possible that the wording reflects – as I have written previously – that the Israelites retained their full faith in G-d and only saw in the golden calf one of His many manifestations. In view of all this, G-d had to make clear that He had never commanded something of this nature, i.e. Israel was not allowed to employ intermediaries in their worship of Him and that what had happened represented a complete departure from the way G-d had instructed them to relate to Him ... Why did G-d tell Moshe about the Israelites **sinning by speech, i.e. by acknowledging the deity of the calf with their lips**, only after He had already told Moshe that they had worshipped it by offering sacrifices to it? The order should have been reversed. According to *Shemos Rabbah* 42:6, it was the mixed multitude who made the calf ... As to what the Israelites themselves were guilty of, G-d said, ‘the mixed multitude made the golden calf for themselves, but the Israelites did not protest. Next the mixed multitude prostrated themselves before the calf and offered sacrifices to it, and the Israelites again did not protest.’ Failure to protest this time was already a sin of much graver dimension than not having protested the mere making of the calf. ‘When the mixed multitude declared (addressing Israel this time) “these are your gods, O Israel, [which brought you out from the land of Egypt],” and the Israelites even now did not protest, this was the culmination of their sin.’

“According to the plain meaning of the verse there is a different reason [from that which is given in the *Midrash*]. G-d did not tell Moshe earlier about the Israelites having said, ‘these are your gods, O Israel, [which brought you out from the land of Egypt],’ (though sin by speech is not generally as severe as sin by deed) because in this case **the sin committed by their lips was exceptionally severe**. It [the statement, ‘these are your gods, O Israel,’] was reinforced by the words, ‘who have taken you out of Egypt.’ **Crediting the inert calf with what G-d had done for Israel made the sin absolutely intolerable**. The perversion of history for all future generations implied by this utterance made it worse than sacrificing to the calf and prostrating oneself in front of it ... Inasmuch as the words were addressed by the mixed multitude **to** the Israelites, and not by the Israelites themselves, they were relatively harmless, as long as the Israelites did not respond to the invitation to worship the calf ... It became clear only **after** the Israelites participated in the sacrifices to the calf that their active participation must have started already at an earlier stage – namely **when they were invited to pay obeisance to the calf as their redeemer**.”

Or HaChayim, Shemos 34:18 – “את הג המצות תשמור, ‘you are to observe the festival of unleavened bread.’ ... G-d instructed us concerning the observance of all the festivals. The reason may be that all the major festivals are rooted in the Exodus experience of the Jewish people. Inasmuch as **the sin of the golden calf elevated that idol to the redeemer which took the Israelites out of Egypt**, all festivals are a reminder of the Exodus.”

Let's Keep It Simple: Part VII(b)

“Rav Hirsch on ‘The Incident of the Golden Calf’”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

Rav Hirsch, Shemos 32:1 – “... עשר לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי זה משה האיש וגו'”. The purpose – אשר ילכו לפנינו – and the reason – כי זה משה האיש – show clearly that this was not a case of idolatry in the usual sense, not a betrayal of G-d. **What the people wanted was meant to take the place of Moshe**, not to take the place of G-d ... It is a delusion to think that man *can* make for himself a god – i.e., that he can set before himself an image, an asset, a power, an institution, a man, as his own highest ideal, and that this thing that he has chosen to worship will then be invested with Divine power by the Highest Power Who rules the world.

“...Those who said to Aaron, ‘Arise, make us gods who shall go before us; for this man Moshe, who brought us out of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him,’ were **caught up in a delusion of idolatrous subjectivism**. They saw Moshe not as an instrument of G-d’s Will, chosen by G-d and sent on G-d’s initiative, but as a human being who, on his own, had surpassed ordinary human nature and become godlike ... In their eyes, it was not G-d Who had brought them out of Egypt through the agency of Moshe, but Moshe who had caused G-d to perform this work of deliverance ... They considered the personality of Moshe, a man who was close to G-d, as the vital link in their connection with G-d. Only as long as he was alive could they be certain of G-d’s protection.”

Rav Hirsch, Shemos 32:2-4 [IMPORTANT HASKAFICALLY!] – “If we recall that the people’s first wish was to have another ‘Moshe,’ it becomes clear that they regarded the freshly made animal image as being in the same relation to the G-dhead as was Moshe’s relation to G-d ... In their eyes, this calf was like a reborn Moshe, a reborn intermediary, and they placed it in direct association with G-d, by saying in the plural, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ Thus they expressed the false notion of the divinity of this intermediary, as though it were the decisive factor on which the acts of G-d Himself depended. **They were משתף שם שמים ודבר אחר (associating partners with the Name of Heaven⁵), as our Sages put it** (Sanhedrin 63a). It would have been the same sin to have prostrated themselves before Moshe, the living human being, and proclaimed about him, **אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים**.”

Rav Hirsch, Shemos 32:7 – “... עמך אשר העלית. These words are spoken in the sense that they were used by the erring people. **They expressed the very root of the people’s sin, which was: they considered themselves not only G-d’s people, but also Moshe’s people**, and they considered Moshe a necessary intermediary, without whom they would it have been redeemed.

Based upon the above comments from the Or HaChayim and Rav Hirsch, this author feels confident in proclaiming that the use of the words, “Moshe took us out of Egypt,” (or any words that even approximate this sentiment) are not only inaccurate, but expressed the very *Hashkafah Sheker* that precipitated the Sin of the Golden Calf.

⁵

See **Rav Hirsch, Shemos 22:17-19**.

Let's Keep It Simple: Part VII(a)

“The Incident of the Golden Calf, Part II: Possible Objections”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

There are three different *passukim* (*Bamidbar* 13:30, *Devarim* 1:9, *Devarim* 32:48) which Rashi utilizes the same piece of Gemara [Sotah 35a] to explain. Then text of the Rashi from *Bamidbar* 13:30 reads, “**Caleb silenced** ... he silenced them all [the spies so that the people could what he was going to say] ... **to Moses** ... to hear what he would say about Moses. He cried out, “Is this the only thing the son of Amram has done to us?” Anyone listening might have thought that he intended to disparage him, and since there was [resentment] in their hearts against Moses because of the spies’ report, they all became silent so they could hear his defamation. But he said, “***Didn’t he split the sea for us, bring down the manna for us and cause the quails to fly down to us?***”[Sotah 35a]”

It has been suggested to this author that the above cited Rashis (as well as the Gemara upon which Rashi bases his comments) are justification for utilizing language that attributes the Exodus from Egypt and “miracles” to Moshe. However consider:

Excerpt from *Sha’arei Aaron* by Aaron Yeshiyah Rotter

Meshach Chachmah on Rashi, Bamidbar 13:30: “[Some explain that] because the people heard from Eldad and Madad⁶ that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would be the one to bring them into the land, and they saw that Moshe did not rebuke them [Eldad and Madad] for saying so, therefore they [the people] were afraid, “How is it possible to enter this fortified land, and to fight with Amalek (with whom they had already stumbled once), and the with giants without Moshe? Would they not all fall by the sword?” Therefore, Caleb silenced the people for attributing all of the wonders to Moshe⁷. On the contrary, he [Caleb] argued, the greatness of Moshe is dependent upon you. As we see that all the time that they were excommunicated in the desert, HaShem did not speak to Moshe. Therefore, he said, *Let’s go up on our own, without Moshe, because Moshe is not the reason that HaShem leads us in a miraculous way*. Rather, the Jewish nation itself is worthy of personal Divine Guidance, which is what Yehoshua said (*Yehoshua, Perek Gimmel*), “***With this you will know that the Living G-d is in your midst.***” Meaning that you should not think that Moshe was in your midst, and that he did all of the great things, but is was only G-d, Who lives forever, and not Moshe who has already died. But G-d lives forever, and He is able to drive out the nations before you.

This author has developed an understanding that reconciles Sotah 35a, the three Rashis, and the text of the *Meshach Chachmah*, but he would like his readers to tackle this one on their own. However, please take seriously the comments of the *Meshach Chachmah* and the correct attribution of the happenings to HaShem and HaShem ALONE (*L’vado!*).

⁶ It should be noted that a negative prophecy does not – necessarily – have to come true. *T’shuvah* by Moshe (or, in our estimation, *t’shuvah* by the people so that they would have a proper *hashkafah* regarding Moshe as a messenger ONLY) could (“might”) have allowed Moshe to enter the land....

⁷ “*Vayahas Caliev el Moshe*” – The words of our *passuk* fit perfectly with the *Meshach Chochmah*’s understanding, that Caleb is chastising the people for being too dependent upon Moshe, and for attributing the wondrous miracle to Moshe rather than to HaShem. “We don’t need Moshe. Our success is dependent upon HaShem.” Which is our *p’shat* exactly!

Let's Keep It Simple: Part VIII

“Did Moshe’s Students Learn the lesson?”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

The *passuk* (*Bamidbar* 20:12) reads, “And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not believe me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.” But what had Moshe failed to do? How had Moshe failed to “sanctify” HaShem? He had failed to ingrain in his students that he was a mere messenger, and that HaShem was the ONLY Source of their sustenance in the desert. When Miriam died, and the “Well of Miriam” no longer produced water, to whom did the people turn for water? Not to HaShem, but rather to Moshe. It must be understood that Moshe never took any credit for any of HaShem’s miracles, signs or wonders – but the lesson that he had tried to teach them in Shemos 15, reiterated to them in Shemos 17 (see the Ramban to these *passukim* quoted above) had gone unheeded.

This author is not the only *Yid* to come to such a conclusion:

A DIFFERENT RESOLUTION

An Excerpt from a *D’var Torah* by Rabbi Ari Kahn, *Aish HaTorah*

I would like to suggest a different resolution [to *Bamidbar* 20:12], based on several teachings of **Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk** in his commentary, “*Meshach Chachmah*.”

The *Meshach Chachmah* notes an apparent *non sequitur* in Deuteronomy. Moses delivers a soliloquy warning of the perils of idolatry, and he adds:

‘... And God was angry with me for your sakes and swore that I will not be allowed to cross the Jordan [River] and not be allowed to enter the land...’ (Devarim 4:21)

After this Moses returns to the topic at hand and continues to speak about idolatry.

‘But I must die in this land, I must not go over the Jordan; but you shall go over, and possess that good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make you an engraved image, or the likeness of an thing, which the Lord your God has forbidden you...’ (Devarim 4:22-25)

The *Meshach Chachmah* suggests that Moshe’s reference to the incident at *Mei Meriva*, and the resultant punishment, are in fact germane to the topic of idolatry.

The higher wisdom was concerned lest when the people enter the land they would treat him (Moses) as a deity. (Meshach Chachmah Devarim 4:15)

The reason that Moses was not permitted to enter the land was that this generation, raised in the desert and witness to miracles galore, ran the risk of seeing Moses as something more than human. Perhaps they would think that miracles came from Moses and not God. If we apply this approach to our passage, we find that after Moses hits the rock, God pronounces:

“... Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not lead this people to the land which I have given them.”

The problem, as stated, is that Moses and Aaron did not sanctify G-d sufficiently; rather, Moses and Aaron gave the impression that the miracle came from them. Surely this was not their intention, but it was the result of their actions. The purpose of Moses bringing water from the rock was to show one and all that God is the source of all miracles. The damage was done; now, they would be unable to lead “this people” – this particular generation – into the Promised Land.

Let's Keep It Simple: Part IX

“If the previous generation were angels ... we are donkeys”

Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces

The question has been asked of this author, “Where do you get the idea that *Yidden* credit the *Mashiach* with accomplishing these miraculous feats?” The answer is simple: The Rambam. Let’s read from *Hilchos Melachim* together, see what the Rambam writes, and then (hopefully) come to the realization of a correct understanding of the Rambam.

The Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim, Halachah 11:1*. In the future, The Messianic King will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, returning it to its initial sovereignty. He will build the Temple and ingather the dispersed of Israel.

In his days, all the statutes will return to their previous state. We will offer sacrifices, observe the Sabbatical and Jubilee years according to all the particulars mentioned in the Torah

Anyone who does not believe in him or does not wait for his coming denies not only the prophets, but the Torah and Moses our teacher. The Torah testifies to him as it states:

“G-d will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you. He will gather you..., Even if your dispersion is at the ends of the heavens... [G-d] will bring you...” (Devarim 30:3)

These explicit words of the Torah include all the statements made by all the prophets....

The Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Melachim, Halachah 11:4*. If a king will arise from the House of David who is learned in Torah and observant of the mitzvos, as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law, as David, his ancestor was, and will compel all of Israel to walk in [the way of the Torah] and reinforce the breaches [in its observance]; and fight the wars of G-d – defeating all the nations around him – we may, with assurance, consider him the Messiah (*B’chzkas Mashiach*).

If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Messiah (*Mashiach B’vada*).

He will then improve the entire world [motivating] all the nations to serve G-d together, as is written (*Zephaniah 3:9*): “I will make the peoples pure of speech that they will call upon the Name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose.”

If he did not succeed to this degree or he was killed, he is surely not [the redeemer] promised by the Torah. [Rather,] he should be considered as all the other proper and complete kings of the Davidic dynasty who died. G-d only caused him to arise in order to test the many, as was stated (*Daniel 11:35*): “and some of the wise men will stumble, to try them, to refine, and to clarify until the appointed time, because the time is set in the future.”

It would seem, based upon a “plain meaning” reading of the above texts from the Rambam, that the Rambam himself credits the *Mashiach* with “doing” things that *Tanakh* and the *Siddur* attribute to HaShem. Thus – seemingly – we have a *machlokes* that needs to be resolved. But is there really a *machlokes*, or has there been a lack of serious thought on the words of the Rambam that has left most *Yidden* attributing to a mere “messenger” things that HaShem Himself will accomplish?

First of all, look at the three *passukim* utilized by the Rambam in the above selection regarding the *Mashiach*. The *p’shat* of *Devarim 30:3* is that HaShem will ingather us, and just as HaShem took us out of Egypt Alone, so, too, will He ingather us Alone at the End of Days. The *p’shat* of *Zephaniah 3:9* is merely a reversal of what HaShem did to the nations when He jumbled their speech during the *hashkafah sheker* of the “Tower of Bavel” incident (*Bereshis 11:1-9*). And the prophecy of *Daniel 11:35*, that “some of the wise men will stumble” is exactly what this author claims has happened.

The Rambam has to be understood in light of *Iggeres Teiman*, his “Letter to the Yemenites” when a “*mashiach sheker*” was being “crowned” by his followers in Yemen. The Rambam’s letter basically

asks the question, “**What has he done? What makes you think that this is the *Mashiach*?**” The phrase “*In his days,*” is a clue as to how to understand the Rambam in the *Yad*. It is NOT that the *Mashiach* will ‘do’ these things, but rather that HaShem will do these things in “his days,” with the *Mashiach* as His *meturgeman*. The totality of Tanakh supports this understanding, and ALL of the *B'rachos* of the *Shemoneh Esrei* – in fact, the entire *Siddur* – point in the direction of HaShem, and not toward His End of Days messenger.

Let's Keep It Simple: Summation “Two Analogies to Consider [Again]” *Hashkafas Ben Avraham in a handful of “bite-sized” pieces*

“You and your family are in dire straits. There never seems to be enough money to meet your needs. Clothing that might qualify as ‘hand-me-downs’ would be an up-grade for your children, and every time you start the car you cringe, wondering if it will come to life, or it will need further repairs. However, you have a distant relative who is aware of your situation, and he lets you know that a sizable check will soon be on its way – a check that will change your lives forever.

“Every day you wait for the mailman to make his rounds in hopes that the check will arrive. Every day, several times a day, you ask your wife and your children, ‘Has the mailman come yet, has anyone checked the mail?’ The hope becomes that then mailman will come, and the mailman is all that you and your family ever talk about. The distant relative is not mentioned. The better life that is in store is not discussed. The sole object of desire is the mailman. *‘I sure hope the mailman comes soon!’*”

“You are driving through a barren desert; there is no sign of life as far as the eye can see. Mile after mile, still no indication of anything but desolate wilderness on the horizon. You begin to wonder if the stretch of desert will ever end, then – almost unexpected as the landscape has been so unceasingly monotonous – you spy a tiny shoot of a tree peaking through the dry sand in the distance, and you know that this is a sign that there is more life in the offing. Your spirits brighten, and you look forward what is to come next.”

The lesson we hope we have taught here is that the first analogy is the *hashkafah* of most *Yidden*. They are awaiting that “**greatest *simchah* with the coming of the mailman,**” and in doing so they are all but crowning flesh and blood when they should be awaiting their ONLY King, Redeemer and Savior, HaShem. This is all *b'shogeg*, but this does not make it any less problematic.

The second analogy is one of *emes*. The *Mashiach* will be merely a sign of better things to come. And anyone who desires viewing a sign, rather than passing it, enjoying the benefits it portends, and thanking the True Source of its Blessings, is similar to one who would drive his family to Disney Land, and upon seeing the highway sign indicating that the exit is approaching, turns to his family and says, “Well, there we go. We’re here. Now let’s go home.”

Yonason Noach ben Avraham
Minneapolis, MN
ynbenavraham@aol.com
612-812-6946