

**Home Weekly Parsha KI TISA**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

In this week's Torah reading we learn of the ingredients and mixture that created the incense offering in the Holy Temple. The list of ingredients and its formula are transmitted to us through the words of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. The ingredients and measurements were to be exact and any deviation from the established formula rendered the offering unacceptable.

The incense offering differs from all other Temple offerings because of the fact that it is ephemeral and physically nonexistent. It literally goes up in smoke. However, it leaves a fragrance that is so powerful that, as the Talmud explains, the animal kingdom as far away as Jericho was affected by this fragrance.

There are those who say that the miracle attributed to the Temple in the book of Avot, that no flies appeared on the temple grounds even though it was basically a meat slaughterhouse, was due to the wafting of the smoke that emanated from the incense offering on a daily basis. Be that as it may be, there is no doubt that the incense offering was meant to be a protective measure for the Jewish people.

We find later in the Bible that it was used to diffuse plagues that were brought upon the people because of their intransigence and sins. It nevertheless was a lethal offering, which if done improperly and/or without authorization, brought death upon those who practiced it. We see this from the story of the sons of Aaron and from the even greater tragedy of the destruction of Korach and his followers.

The incense offering was a purely spiritual event. It was smoke and air. It left a powerful fragrance, but though it could be appreciated and even internalized it could not be touched or felt by human hands. The service of God is often purely spiritual, characterized by love, devotion and faith. These are not traits that can be held in one's hands or subject to storage. The very vagueness of these necessary spiritual traits makes them difficult to define, let alone observe. And these spiritual traits need to be handled carefully and with proper judgment.

Too much faith can lead to poor decisions and a naïve view of life and religion. Not enough faith will only lead to pessimism and permanent disappointment. The same is true for all other spiritual traits – they are necessary for the correct service of God but they can be easily mishandled and misinterpreted. The Torah purposely defined its physical commandments. These definitions apply even to the spiritual commandments as well. The Torah gives forth a fragrance – a fragrance of goodness, kindness and a whiff of eternity.

Though we no longer have the ability to offer incense on a daily basis, we do have the ability to serve our Creator, in a spiritual sense, with our minds and hearts and souls. Though these may not be physically reflective to others, Heaven recognizes them clearly. It is our incense offering.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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**Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11 – 34:35)**  
**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel — “And God spoke unto Moses: Take sweet spices – nataf, shelet and helbena – these sweet spices with pure frankincense [levona], all of an equal weight” [Ex. 30:34].

Suddenly, I felt myself awakened during a flight by a rather startling question. Someone wanted to see my tzitzit (ritual fringes). Still half asleep, I partially unbuttoned my shirt, showing the aggressive inquisitor the tzitzit. I thought that perhaps he needed to borrow them. “Good,” he said, “come join us for the Shacharis (morning) minyan.” Somewhat confused, I asked him what my wearing or not wearing tzitzit had to do with my joining the minyan. “You know,” he said, “you can't pray with just any Jew.”

I was quite taken aback, to say the least. I reminded the zealot that the source for the requirement of ten people for a minyan was derived from God's statement to Moses, “How long must I suffer this evil congregation...?” [Num. 14:27]. And the evil congregation to which God is referring is the ten out of twelve scouts who did not want to conquer the Land of Israel.

Since the word “edah” (congregation) refers to ten scouts, we know that ten comprise a minyan. Now these ten scouts are considered to have committed one of the most grievous sins in the Torah in their refusal to leave the desert and inhabit the Land of Israel. If such individuals are the very source for a congregational quorum, how could someone be excluded simply if he doesn't wear tzitzit?

This issue finds a parallel in our weekly reading of Ki Tissa. One of the most unique aspects of the Sanctuary was the sweet-smelling spices of the incense burned on a special altar, whose inspiring fragrance permeated the House of God. In Parshat Ki Tissa, the Torah lists the different spices, and their names are strange to our modern ears. But stranger still is the Rabbinic commentary that one of those spices – specifically helbena – is hardly sweet smelling.

On the contrary, as Rashi writes, helbena “...is a malodorous spice which is known (to us as) gelbanah (galbanum). Scripture enumerates it among the spices of the incense to teach us that we should not look upon the inclusion of Jewish transgressors in our fasts and prayers as something insignificant in our eyes; indeed, they [the transgressors of Israel] must also be included amongst us” [Ex. 30:34].

Rashi is conveying a most significant insight. The community of Israel – Hebrew: tzibur – must consist of all types of Jews: righteous (the letter tzadi, for “tzaddikim”), intermediate (the letter bet for “beinonim”), and wicked (the letter reish for “resha'im”), just as the incense of the Sanctuary included spices of diverse fragrances.

Perhaps because we must learn to take responsibility for every member of the “family” no matter what their behavior; perhaps because what appears to us as wicked may in reality be more genuine spirituality; perhaps because no evil is without its redeeming feature or perhaps merely in order to remind us not to be judgmental towards other human beings, the message of the incense could not be clearer.

No Jew, even the most egregious sinner, dare be dismissed with mockery and derision from the congregation of Israel. Every Jew must be allowed to contribute, and only when every Jew is included does the sweet fragrance properly emerge.

In just under a month, as we sit at the Seder, we are instructed during the course of the proceedings to open the door for Elijah the prophet, forerunner of the Messiah. Certainly, opening the door for Elijah seems superfluous given Elijah's uncanny ability to visit every single Seder in the world. Anyone capable of accomplishing such a remarkable feat certainly would not be stopped by a closed door.

Rather, what message does this symbolic gesture convey? I believe that the opening of the door symbolizing the opening of our door to the fifth child, the child who has moved so far from the Jewish People that he is

not even at the Seder! We must go out to find him – whether is at a nightclub or a Far East ashram – and invite him to come back in.

No one, not the “wicked” child, and not the “invisible” child, is to be excluded from the seder, the commemoration of our first redemption. Parents and children must all join together in a loving and accepting reunion.

Permit me to conclude with the story on the plane with which I began. When it came time to pray, I choose to do so not with the self-selecting group of the righteous, but rather with those who had been rejected by the tzitzit-checking minyan gatherer, confident that they would be far more acceptable to the God of compassion and unconditional love to whom we pray!

Shabbat Shalom.

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**Anger: Its Uses and Abuses (Ki Tissa 5778)**  
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**  
**Covenant & Conversation, Judaism & Torah**

Comparing two of the most famous events in the Torah, we face what seems like a glaring contradiction. In this week’s parsha, Moses on the mountain is told by God to go down to the people. They have made a golden calf. Moses descends, holding in his hands the holiest object of all time, the two tablets carved and inscribed by God Himself.

As he reached the foot of the mountain, he saw the people dancing around the calf. In his anger, he threw down the tablets and broke them to pieces (Ex. 32:19). It was a public display of anger. Yet Moses was not criticised for this act, done entirely of his own accord.[1] Resh Lakish, commenting on the verse in which God commands Moses to carve a new set of tablets to replace the ones “which you broke” (Ex. 34:1), says that God was, in effect, giving His approval to Moses’ deed.[2]

The sages went further. The concluding verses of the Torah state, “No other prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, who knew the Lord face to face ...or in any of the mighty hand and awesome wonders Moses displayed in the sight of all Israel” (Deut. 34:10-12). On the phrase “mighty hand,” they said that it refers to the breaking of the tablets.[3] In other words, it is seen as one of his greatest acts of courage and leadership.

Many years later Moses was faced with another crisis. The people had arrived at Kadesh. There was no water. The people complained. Once again, Moses displayed anger. Told by God to speak to the rock, he struck it twice, and water gushed out. This time, however, instead of being praised for what he did, God said to him, “Because you did not trust in Me to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land I have given them” (Num. 20:12).

The difficulties in this passage are well-known. What was Moses’ sin? And was not the punishment disproportionate? My concern here, though, is simply with the comparison between the two events. In both cases, the people were running out of control. In both cases, Moses performed a gesture of anger. Why was one commended, the other condemned? Why was a show of anger appropriate in one case but not in the other? Is anger always wrong when shown by a leader, or is it sometimes necessary?

The answer is provided by Maimonides in his law code, the Mishneh Torah. In his Laws of Character, he tells us that in general we should follow the middle way in the emotional life. But there are two emotions about which Maimonides says that we should not follow the middle way, but should instead strive to eliminate them entirely from our emotional life: pride and anger. About anger he says this:

Anger is an extremely bad attribute, and one should distance oneself from it by going to the other extreme. One should train oneself not to get angry, even about something to which anger might be the appropriate response... The ancient sages said, “One who yields to anger is as if he had worshipped idols.” They also said, “Whoever yields to anger, if he is wise, his wisdom deserts him, and if he is a prophet, his prophecy leaves him.” And “The life of an irascible person is not a life.” Therefore they have instructed us to keep far from anger, training ourselves to stay calm even in the face of provocation. This is the right way.[4]

However he adds an important qualification:

If one wants to instil reverence in his children and family, or in public if he is the head of the community, and his desire is to show them his anger so as to bring them back to the good, he should appear to be angry with them so as to reprove them, but he must inwardly remain calm as if he were acting the part of an angry man, but in reality he is not angry at all.[5]

According to Maimonides, the emotion of anger is always the wrong response. We may not be able to help feeling it, but we should be aware that while it lasts we are in the grip of an emotion we cannot control. That is what makes anger so dangerous. It is, to use Daniel Kahneman’s terminology, thinking fast when we ought to be thinking slow.

What then are we to do? Maimonides, here and elsewhere, adopts a position that has been strikingly vindicated by neuroscientists’ discovery of the plasticity of the brain. Intensive training over a prolonged period rewires our neural circuitry. We can develop new patterns of response, initially through intense self-control, but eventually through habit. This is particularly hard to do in the case of anger, which is why we have to work so hard to eliminate it from our emotional repertoire.

But, says Maimonides, there is a fundamental difference between feeling anger and showing it. Sometimes it is necessary for a parent, teacher or leader to demonstrate anger – to look angry even if you aren’t. It has a shock effect. When someone in authority displays anger, the person or group it is directed against is in danger, and knows it. It is almost like administering an electric shock, and it is often effective in bringing a person or group to order. It is, though, a very high-risk strategy. There is a danger it will provoke an angry response, making the situation worse not better.[6] It is a weapon to be used only rarely, but sometimes it is the only way.

The key question then becomes: is this a moment when anger is called for or not? That calls for careful judgement. When people are dancing around an idol, anger is the right response. But when there is no water and the people are crying out in thirst, it is the wrong one.[7] Their need is real, even if they do not express it in the right way.

So, to summarise: we should never feel anger. But there are times when we should show it. These are few and far between, but they exist. I say this because of one of my own most life-changing experiences.

There was a time when I smoked a pipe. It was the wrong thing to do and I knew it. There is a mitzvah to take care of your health, and smoking harms you badly in multiple ways. Yet there is such a thing as addiction, and it can be very hard to cure even when you are fully aware of how badly you are injuring yourself and others. For years I tried to give it up, and repeatedly failed. Then someone I respected greatly became angry with me. It was a cool anger, but it felt like a slap in the face.

It cured me. The shock was so great that I stopped and never smoked again. The experience of being on the receiving end of someone’s anger changed my life. It may even have saved my life.

Supported by God's Spirit

Why did this miracle specifically relate to the Mem and the Samekh?

The letter Mem refers to water (mayim) - the first created substance: "God's spirit moved over the water" (Gen. 1:2). This primordial substance was supported by God's spirit, the basis of all reality. Divine will transcends all aspects of causality; it is the basis for the absolute freedom which the Torah gives the world.

In particular, this letter is the Final Mem (מ) - the Closed or Esoteric Mem - indicating the hidden spiritual source of the universe.

With regard to the letter Samekh: the word somekh means "to support." The universe is not bound by causal determinism, but is supported and sustained by God's will and His infinite light and good.

This is the essence of miracles in the world. They were revealed in the past, are revealed in the present, and will be revealed in the future, through the light of Torah and its message of freedom.

(Adapted from Ein Ayah, vol. IV, p. 249.)

See also: Ki Tissa: All For One

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**Parshas Ki Sisa - Rabbi Yissochor Frand  
Heavenly Omens vs. The Torah / Breaking the Glass and the Luchos**

Omens from Heaven Do Not Trump What the Law Demands

The pasuk in this week's parsha says, "The nation saw that Moshe delayed in descending from the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, 'Rise up, make for us gods who will go before us, for this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt — we do not know what became of him!'" [Shemos 32:1] The aveira [sin] of the Golden Calf has remained in the background of Jewish history for thousands of years. It seems inconceivable how it is possible that a people who only several weeks earlier had stood around Mount Sinai, heard the prohibition against idolatry, and said "We will observe and we will listen" (na'aseh v'nishma), could now worship a Golden Calf.

As we have said in previous years, and as all the classic commentaries point out — especially the Ramba"n — this was not real avoda zarah. They were merely looking for a figurehead to lead them, because they were under the impression that Moshe Rabbeinu had died.

Rashi cites a teaching of Chazal that Klal Yisrael's assumption that their leader was dead was not based merely on a figment of their imagination, but on what would be considered empirical evidence. Rashi says that even though the words "boshesh Moshe" seem to indicate that Moshe was delayed, they also made a specific calculation. Moshe told them that he would be back in forty days. According to their count, the forty days had elapsed, and Moshe Rabbeinu was not the type of person who came late. They were convinced that something must have happened to him. To compound that, Chazal say that the satan came and made the conditions appear as though the world was coming to an end. Moreover, according to the Medrash, the satan made it appear as if the coffin of Moshe Rabbeinu was floating in the air.

Thus, we have a combination of factors: (1) Moshe's delay in returning; (2) the confusing conditions that appeared in the world; (3) the people actually saw an image of Moshe's coffin floating. The people panicked. They came to Aharon, who first tried a delaying tactic. But finally, he threw a gold ingot into the fire, and out came a Golden Calf.

Put yourself in Aharon's position. He just threw in gold. He did not form it. He did not make it into the shape of a calf. A Golden Calf came out. Talk about a Heavenly omen! Is this not a sign from Heaven that there must be something to this? Not only that, but Chazal (according to one opinion), say that Aharon took the Shem Hashem (Name of G-d) and threw it into the fire together with the gold.

This was a difficult discovery. When you are a leader, you are often at the receiving end of people's anger. You learn to live with it and not let it depress or deflect you. However when someone who clearly cares for you, gets angry with you, not because he or she disagrees with you, but simply because they see you doing yourself harm, it can change your life in a way few other things can.

You come to see the point of Maimonides' distinction as well. Therapeutic anger, if we can call it that, is done not out of emotion but out of careful, deliberate judgment that this is what the situation calls for right now. The person who delivers the shock is not so much feeling anger as showing it. That is what makes it all the more shocking.

There are families and cultures where anger is used all too often. This is abusive and harmful. Anger is bad for the person who feels it and often for the one who receives it. But sometimes there are situations that demand it, where putting up with someone's bad behaviour is damaging, and where making excuses for it can become a form of co-dependency. Friends and family, intending no more than to be tolerant and kind, in effect make it easy for the person to stay addicted to bad habits, at a cost to his and others' happiness.

Maimonides on Moses teaches us that we should try to conquer our feelings of anger. But when we see someone or a group acting wrongly, we may have to show anger even if we don't feel it. People sometimes need that shock to help them change their lives.

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**Ki Tissa: The Luchos' Miraculous Letters  
Rav Kook Torah**

The Luchos - the stone tablets that Moses carried down from Mount Sinai - were truly remarkable. The Torah describes them as being "made by God" and "written with God's script" (Exod. 32:16). What was so unusual about the writing on the Luchos?

The letters on the Luchos were engraved on both sides. According to Talmudic tradition, this engraving went all the way through the stone, from one side to the other.

This tradition is especially amazing when taking into account that two Hebrew letters - the final Mem (מ) and the Samekh (ס) - have the topological shape of a donut. How did the holes inside these letters - holes fashioned in stone - not fall out?

"Rav Hisda noted: The Mem and the Samekh letters in the Luchos stood there miraculously" (Shabbat 104a).

Why were the Luchos accompanied by continual miracles? And is it significant that there were miracles specifically with the letters Mem and Samekh?

Freedom from Causality

What is the essence of a Divine miracle? Supernatural phenomena demonstrate that the world is not limited to a system of cause and effect. They reveal the Divine force that sustains all of reality, both material and spiritual, directly from the word of God, Creator of all.

This a fundamental tenet of Torah. We are free to act as we choose. We are not robots, acting out our lives as dictated by causal determinism, bound by the dictates of nature, genetics, and environment.

In particular, this quality of freedom is related to the Luchos, the symbol of the covenant of Torah at Sinai. The Sages noted that the word charut, describing the words engraved on the Luchos, can be read as cheirut - freedom. "The only free person," they taught, "is one who engages in the study of Torah" (Avot 6:2).

The Luchos announced to the world: just as my letters stand by God's will, unfettered by the laws of physics, so too, you are free to act as you choose. The entire universe is upheld by God's will.

If we put all these factors together, was it not only natural that Klal Yisrael should commit this aveira? When Moshe Rabbeinu pleads on behalf of the Jewish people, why doesn't he use all these "omens" and valid rationalizations as a defense? "What does Hashem want from these people? They thought I was dead, they saw the coffin, the Golden Calf miraculously emerged from the fire," etc., etc. And yet we see that despite all the things that Moshe Rabbeinu could have said, he did not use any of these excuses. Why not?

The answer is because it says in the Torah that we should not bow down to graven images. End of discussion. When the Torah states a prohibition black on white, we can have all the compelling excuses in the world, but the rules can never be broken: If it says in the Torah that something is assur [prohibited], then it is assur, despite all excuses and omens.

Sometimes in life there are extenuating circumstances, and there are situations with all sorts of signs. But the bottom line always is, "What does it say in the Torah?" "What does it say in Shulchan Aruch?" "What is the Will of G-d?" If it is clear that "This is what the Law demands," then the rest of the calculations have to be ignored. If the Torah says "Do not make for yourself a graven image" [Shemos 20:4] then that is the ultimate consideration.

Another Reason the Chosson Breaks a Glass Under the Chuppah:  
Zecher L'Shviras HaLuchos

There is a universal Jewish custom that the chosson breaks a glass under the chuppah at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony. The conventional reason is that this is zecher l'churban – a commemoration of the Temple's destruction. We say, "If I forget thee Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy." [Tehillim 137:5-6] Anytime we celebrate a simcha, we must remember the churban haBayis, and therefore no simcha is complete while the Bais HaMikdash and Yerushalayim remain desolate. Therefore, the chosson breaks the glass, "zecher l'churban."

One of the Geonim (I believe it is Rav Hai Gaon or Rav Sadiya Gaon) gives a different reason for breaking a glass under the chuppah: It is to remind us that Moshe Rabbeinu broke the luchos [tablets].

At first glance, this does not seem to make any sense. Why is it that a chosson or kallah under their chuppah need to remember that Moshe broke the luchos? What message is contained in that historical event that must be commemorated at every Jewish wedding? I believe it is because the breaking of the luchos, and more specifically, the strength it took for Moshe to take that action, represents one of the great keys for success in any marriage.

At the end of the Torah, when the Almighty records the epitaph of Moshe Rabbeinu, He writes, "And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel." [Devorim 34:12] Here the Almighty is giving Moshe's eulogy. What were his greatest accomplishments? Rashi elaborates on the points mentioned, one by one:

"And by all the strong hand": For he received with his hands the Torah engraved on the luchos.

"And for all the awesome power": The miracles and acts of might which took place in the great, awesome wilderness.

The crowning glory, the last item that the Almighty says about Moshe Rabbeinu is...

"Before the eyes of all Israel." Rashi interprets: That his heart inspired him to break the luchos before their eyes, as it says, "And I smashed them before your eyes."

Why was the breaking of the luchos Moshe's greatest act?

The answer is that it took tremendous strength of character for Moshe to break the luchos. It is the nature of humans that when we invest in something, and put our hearts and souls into something, it becomes so dear to us that we rarely, if ever, want to walk away from that accomplishment. That is the way we are. Once we become invested in an item or a project, we do not want to abandon it. The last thing a person ever wants to do is to admit that he was wrong, and to walk away from something in which he has invested a great deal of time and effort.

This explains why in different eras we have seen generals fighting wars despite the fact that it had already become obvious to everyone around them that the war was a losing endeavor. Yet they persisted in pursuing the battle. Why is that? Why is it that it took so long for the generals to realize that they were not fighting the Vietnam War in the way that it should be fought? Once they became invested in the war and in a particular strategy for victory, it became part of them. It was very difficult to say out loud, "Guess what? I made a mistake. It is time to walk away from this."

We do not need to look further than last week's Haftorah (Parshas Zachor) when Shaul HaMelech [King Saul] was instructed, in no uncertain terms, to kill out everyone from Amalek; men, women, and children — including animals. When Shaul came back from the battle, the first words out of his mouth were, "I have fulfilled the Word of G-d." [Samuel I 15:13]. When Shmuel asked him: "How can you say that? It is not true!" What does the King say again? "...Because I have hearkened to the Voice of Hashem..." [Samuel I 15:20] How can he say that? He was told explicitly what he was supposed to do, and now Shmuel calls him on the carpet for not following instructions, and yet he still claims to have "hearkened to the Voice of Hashem." The answer is, because he became invested in the project. It became him. It is hard for a person to say, "I am sorry. I made a mistake. You are right and I am wrong."

Moshe Rabbeinu spent literally forty days and forty nights on the mountain — drinking no water and consuming no food. He exhibited tremendous self-sacrifice to receive the luchos. But when he came down from the mountain and he saw Klal Yisrael dancing around the Golden Calf, he said "Guess what? This is not for them." He did not rationalize and he did not procrastinate. It was now necessary for these luchos to be broken. It took a tremendous amount of strength of character for Moshe to say "I'm walking away from this."

One of the most difficult things for a husband to do in a marriage — after having long argued a certain issue with his wife — is to walk away and say "You know, maybe she's right."

I deal with young men who get engaged and get married. Invariably, as long as they are going out and are getting engaged, they keep on saying to themselves, "We are literally two peas in a pod; we think the same way about everything. We have no disagreements, etc., etc." Then, two weeks after the marriage, he wants the window open she wants the window closed, and the list goes on and on as to how differently they view life. These are just the small things...

A marriage requires a person to sometimes say, "Guess what? You know, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe her way of looking at this is in fact the more correct way." That is very difficult. The prime example of this is Moshe Rabbeinu, who broke the luchos. In spite of the fact that he put his heart and soul into something, he was prepared to reverse course and write off his exertion and his investment.

This is why we break a glass under the chuppah. We break the glass to remind us that Moshe broke the luchos. It is the ultimate reminder that sometimes it is necessary to step back from deep investment in a certain project or position, and say, "Guess what? I am not right." In the case of marriage, this represents having the strength of character to say, "Maybe I am wrong, and she is right."

## **Don't Take Down the Sign!** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Times were very different then. When one of our books was torn, we didn't junk it. We took it to a little shop where a bookbinder rebound it. When our briefcase (we didn't have backpacks then) was falling apart, we didn't discard it. Instead, we took it to that same shop where the proprietor stitched it and fixed it.

The proprietor of the shop that my friends and I frequented, down on the Lower East side of Manhattan, was an old man named Yossel.

Looking back, I now realize that Yossel, who was arthritic physically and far from genial emotionally, was a Holocaust survivor who eked out a meager livelihood by binding books, fixing broken zippers, and repairing all sorts of every day tools and trinkets.

I remember once bringing some books to Yossel for rebinding and finding that the shop was closed. There was no sign on the door indicating that he was out to lunch, or that he had gone to pray, or when he would return.

So I came back to Yossel's shop several times that week, and then but occasionally for the next two or three months. His sign, advertising his services, was still suspended over his doorway. I had every reason to assume that he would eventually reopen.

Finally, one day I approached his shop, and saw that the sign over his door was taken down. Now I knew that Yossel was out of business.

This experience, hardly significant in its own right, took on a very profound meaning for me when I first heard an explanation, given by the great sage known as the Chofetz Chaim, of why the Torah calls the Sabbath a sign in this week's portion, Ki Tisa.

"The people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath... It shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel..." (Exodus 31:16-17)

The Chofetz Chaim explained that the Sabbath is like a sign on a shopkeeper's door. However far a Jew might stray, he is still connected to the Jewish people as long as he keeps the Sabbath in some manner. As long as there is a sign on the shopkeeper's door, he may one day return and reopen for business. But once the sign is removed, once Sabbath observance is totally abandoned, then even that tenuous connection is severed.

It occurs to me that just as there are all sorts of signs, and Yossel's makeshift shabby sign was certainly very different from signs on more luxurious stores, so too do Jews differ in the way in which they observe the Sabbath.

There are those who focus on every halachah involved in Sabbath observance. They are punctilious in following every rule contained in our code of laws.

There are others whose observance is a more spiritual one. They may keep the basic Sabbath laws in some fashion but find the joy of the Sabbath more personally rewarding. They enjoy the festive meals, and they heartily sing the Sabbath songs.

Still, others take delight in intellectual indulgences in celebration of the Sabbath. They study, they read, they converse, they teach.

Then there are those of a more mystical bent who use the Sabbath for introspection, meditation, and contemplation, and maybe even as an occasion to delve into the classics of Jewish mysticism.

For some the Sabbath is something entirely different. It is merely a day of rest, a physical respite from the toil and stress of a busy week.

Whatever your Sabbath is like, dear reader, as long as it is a special day for you in some way, the sign of Sabbath is suspended over your door. You are, at least potentially, a Sabbath observer, and that is a sign of your connection to God and to the Jewish people.

But there is a lesson here for all of us: None of us can say that our Sabbath observance is a perfect one. None of us is innocent of some minor halachic infraction. Certainly, none of us can say that our Sabbath is one of pure and untainted spirituality. We all have "a way to go".

Yet the vast majority of Jews whom I know, of whatever level of observance or denominational persuasion, have the sign of Sabbath on their shop door, in some manner or another.

As long as that sign hangs suspended over our doorway, we can confidently look forward to that day when each of us will celebrate a Sabbath worthy of the ultimate redemption of which our sages assure us. For they have said the geulah, the final redemption of our people, will come about when we fully observe two Sabbaths in succession.

Don't take down the sign!

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לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה