

Once a little girl asked me, "Rabbi, how come all calendars are sad?". I looked at her and I said, "I didn't know that calendars were sad". She said, "Yes, they are sad because their days are numbered". It's true that all of us eventually are going to die. The tragedy is not that we die but that some of us never live. We never make the best use out of our life. It is, though, terribly tragic when a person's life is cut off even before he has begun to live. When a young person is for no reason shot, it's a terrible thing. One of the most destructive concepts today is the idea that there is no objective morality, that we are all free to do what makes us feel good. The Ten Commandments were given on stone to teach us that it's the outside that makes the impression, that puts us on the right path, not the subjective inside forces about how we feel about something.

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In the Torah portion, Ki Sissa, we learn how the Jewish people worshipped the Golden Calf when Moshe delayed from coming down from the mountain. The people are people of little faith. They cannot wait. They are very impatient. They wanted to realize their fantasies. The Torah says "and the people saw Ki Bosheish Moshe" that Moshe delayed. Bosheish in Hebrew is the same word as shame. It was a shame that Moshe was not here. It's a shame that they could not enjoy the good things of life right now. They did not want to postpone gratifying their senses. Unfortunately, in our day and age we have similar problems. People talk all the time about things feeling good. They do not want to deny themselves anything. To them morality is determined solely by how they feel about something. They do not believe anymore in objective morality. They just believe in their subjective feelings. If something feels good it must be good. This is a tragedy.

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"Rabbi", someone asked me a little while ago, "you are always talking about relationships and the importance of relationships. Don't you believe that relationships can, also, be stifling, and that they can also hinder a person and harm him? Don't you think it is sometimes better that a person have no relationships than the types of relationships that we see around us so many times? After all, there is so much hate and ugliness in these relationships. We see so many people who just love to give it to their spouses or children or others. Wouldn't they be better off if they did not have these types of relationships?"

✓ In the Kedusha^h which we say at least twice a day, when we repeat the Shmoneh Esre^h, we speak about G-d's holiness. Holiness really means otherness. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." G-d is separate. He is different. He is not like us. He is unique, and we remind ourselves at least twice a day in the Kedusha^h about the fact that G-d is holy, other from us. However, Judaism is not a religion which just stresses G-d's transcendence, his otherness. We also, in the same Kedusha^h, speak about the glory of G-d emanating from His abode and how the Lord reigns forever in our lives and in the lives of all human beings. G-d is completely other, but He is, also, completely accessible. We believe that He is in each of us. That's what our soul is, the piece of G-d that is in each of us. G-d is close to us. We can talk to Him at any time and we know that He will listen. He may not do what we want, but He will do what is ultimately good for us and for all mankind. G-d is completely unique and special, yet He has a bond with each of us, a special bond. G-d does not have a body like us nor a mind like ours, but He has a close special bond with each of us which we can feel.

We, in Judaism, have never been troubled by the problem of "if G-d is omniscient, if He knows everything, how can we have free will?". We have never been bothered by that problem, as Maimonides said, because G-d's mind is different from ours. G-d exists on a different level of being, and it is possible for Him to know everything, and for us to still have free will. G-d's mind is different from ours. This can best be explained by the fact that if we are on one side of the mountain, we cannot see the other side.

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However, if we are on the top of a mountain, we can see both sides. To G-d, everything is possible, even things which are not possible for us. G-d and man intersect only in that we have a common morality. G-d expects us to live by His standards which He has given us and by which He tells us He, too, ultimately abides. That, of course, is the basic Jewish belief, that the Judge of all the world does do justice, and that ultimately His justice will be seen.

Our relationship to G-d is the paradigm for all human relationships. Each human being is unique and special. In order for a human relationship to endure, that relationship must recognize the uniqueness and specialness and otherness of each of the parties. G-d has a bond with each of us even though He is unique and special, and we, too, have bonds with each other only if we, too, recognize that each of us is unique and special. The reason many relationships fail is because the parties in these relationships fail to recognize that both parties in the relationship are unique and special. One party should not be a carbon copy, a mere mirror image of the other. Each of us ^{has} ~~have~~ our own special ways and needs and each of us must be accommodated.

In the Torah portion, Ki Sisso, we have many of these ideas spelled out. The Jewish people sin with the sin of the golden calf. They fail to recognize that G-d is unique and special. They try to make Him an object of their own fantasies. They try to make G-d a projection of their own desires. G-d was to become an object. They no longer wanted a relationship with G-d. They wanted a relationship with their fantasies. Moshe prays for the people and G-d eventually forgives them. Moshe then asks that G-d reestablish His presence with the Jewish people. It is not enough just for G-d to forgive them. Moshe wants G-d's presence to be with them, too. Negative relationships are not relationships. Anonymity or the proximity of others do not constitute relationships. An act, a presence, a loving concern, a bond is required. "If Your presence does not go with me, do not bring me up from here, for how shall I know if I have found favor in ^Your eyes, I and Your people? Is it not that when You will go with us?"

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Also this thing that you spoke
G-d says, "All right, I will show you My glory. I will ^{do} be with you." Then He tells Moshe to stand in the cleft of a rock while His glory will pass by. G-d's hand will shield ^{Moshe} him and ^{he} Moshe will only see G-d's back but not His face. This incident, the Rabbis explain, dramatically demonstrates that we cannot know G-d directly, that we can only know Him by what He does, by looking, so to speak, at His footprints in human history, and by recognizing Him in our soul. We know G-d by following His path, by doing good just as He does good, by being merciful just as He is merciful, by striving to cling to Him, by doing deeds of loving kindness.

This is really true of all relationships. It is impossible to know the essence of another human being. There is an impenetrable essence in each of us that no one can ever fathom. Every human being ultimately remains alone, but we can establish bonds and relationships with others by doing deeds of kindness, by sharing, by being concerned. We can only establish relationships with each other, though, if we learn to appreciate and to recognize each other's deeds, accomplishments, talents, feelings, etc. In order for a relationship to be successful, a relationship must respect the other party's uniqueness and specialness. It is easy to rip a person apart. It is easy to pick at another's faults. No one is perfect. In a marriage, it is easy to attack. It is easy to provoke your partner, but a marriage relationship, to last, must not violate certain parameters. It must never destroy the essence of an individual. If it does, that individual will be left nothing more than a cowering rag, and even the domineering, tyrannical partner will not be happy. He or she will quickly become bored with his or her rage.

It is our uniqueness which makes the world great. A symphony is composed of many different instruments. Each of these instruments must play with their own sound. If they do not, then the music will turn into cacophony. Of course, each piece in the orchestra must respect each other and play its part, but it must play it with its own sound and character. When every instrument of the orchestra plays in harmony, beautiful music ensues. When, however, instruments are broken or try to drown out other instruments,

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the total music is harmed and it becomes almost nonexistent.

This, too, is true in the life of nations. The Jewish people have a special relationship to G-d. This is not an exclusive relationship. G-d has relationships with all peoples. Unfortunately, the nations of the world hate the Jews because of this relationship. Whether we Jews will admit it or not, Hitler claimed that Jews' greatest crime was that they gave the world a conscience. The nations of the world do not want us to be special and unique, to have our own song, and they always seek to destroy us. That is the story of Purim. Haman could not stand to see a people with its own laws and customs even though it was not harming anyone. He wanted to destroy them. He was even willing to pay a fortune to destroy them. This is the same today. The word, Zionist, has become a dirty word. A man who is ugly and sinister in the world, and even in certain circles of this country, is called a Zionist. In the U.N., Israel is condemned as a Zionist Nazi State. The Russians claimed that the Jews in Babi Yar were killed by the Zionists and Nazis. How ludicrous! How sad!

We believe that everyone should have a bond with everyone else and that everybody should be allowed to be special and unique. ^{These are} ~~That~~ the only true kinds of relationships there are. Other relationships are false. Moshe, when he went up to receive the second set of Ten Commandments, had to hew out the two tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were written ^{by} himself. This was different than with the first Ten Commandments when G-d had hewed out the stones. The first set of the Ten Commandments were given among thunder and lightning, the second set with silence but after Moshe received the second Ten Commandments his face glowed. He had worked hard, but he had established a relationship with G-d. The first Ten Commandments were just given to him.

In order for relationships to succeed, for a face to glow, we must recognize each other's uniqueness and also work hard to make sure that the bond between us is a bond expressed in deeds of loving, caring concern. Let us hope that the world, too, will allow the Jew to be himself and will not demand that we be just like everybody else

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before they will establish bonds of friendship with us. I hope and pray that the day will come when all mankind's faces will glow from the happiness, joy, which comes from having relationships expressed in loving deeds ~~and~~ which respect every individual's and group's uniqueness.

21.
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In this week's Torah portion we learn about the worshipping of the golden calf. What was really so bad about worshipping the golden calf? It could not be because there was an image involved, because there was even an image in the Holy of Holies, in the Temple in the cherubim who the Rabbis say were children. There were lions and eagles on the curtains of the Tabernacle. What was so bad about the golden calf? Also, the Rabbis say that the purification rites associated with the Red Heifer, or calf, or cow, in effect purified or made up for the sin of the golden calf. It seems that it was not the golden calf that was itself wrong, but the relationship of the people to it. In the Kedusha we say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. His glory fills the whole world." G-d is holy different from us. That's what the words mean but at the same time, G-d is close. We can speak to Him. We have a bond with Him, the bond of Mitzvahs. When we relate to G-d we have to realize that He is holy other than us. He is not the product of our fantasies. Each of us has a piece of G-d in us and when we relate to other human beings we must relate to them as unique creatures not as products of our fantasies. The trouble with the golden calf is that the people worshipped their fantasies. They were worshipping the product of their own imaginations. Unfortunately, this is true with our relationship with people, too. Many times we cannot have good relationships with people because we do not recognize that they are unique and special. We treat them as our fantasies. This is why so many marriages break up. Also, so many people are afraid of being unique and different. In our society there is a great deal of pressure to be the same. If you have special talents you should hide them. This is wrong. We should be proud that we are unique. This is also the same about being Jewish. It means being different and many people are afraid of being different, but they should not be because each of us is different and each of us should recognize the right of every person to be different and unique. We each have a relationship with each other based on kindness, the same type of bond that G-d has with us, the bond of Mitzvahs. The golden calf was an episode of the people failing to appreciate G-d's uniqueness and being in love with their fantasies. The Rabbis say that the Pura Aduma was an antidote to this because normally when a person became ritually unclean he could immerse himself

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in a mikvah and become clean. However, if he came into contact with human death he, himself, could not purify himself alone. True, he still had to go into a mikvah, but he also had to be sprinkled with the ashes of the Red Heifer. He could not do it himself. He needed a relationship with others. Otherwise life itself becomes overwhelming. Our fantasies end up by depressing us. They do not make life full. They, in effect, push life out. The sin of the golden calf was that the people worshipped their fantasies instead of having real relationships. That reminds me of the story of a man who tried to convince his friend to live with him. He said, "Oh, I will not feel comfortable." The man said, "No, you should feel it is your house. I want you to know it is your house." The man decided to live with him. Since he felt it was his house, the next day he sold it. This, of course, is what happens to many people. They fall in love with their fantasies and do not have any real relationship with G-d or with each other and, therefore, miss a lot in life.

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In this week's Torah portion we learn how when the people saw that Moshe delayed coming down from the mountain they made a golden calf and worshipped it, and G-d saw this and became very angry and He told Moshe Rabbeinu "Hanichole, leave Me alone and I will destroy this people and make a new people from you". Moshe then answers, "Do not do it" and he gives three reasons why He should not destroy the Jewish people. "First, You brought them out of Egypt; second, what will the Egyptians say; and, third, remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". The Rabbis learn that since G-d said, "Hanichole, leave Me alone" Moshe was able to argue with G-d. What does this mean that G-d gets angry and argues and wants us to change His mind? I thought that G-d was perfect. G-d here, of course, is just teaching us how we are supposed to behave, how we are supposed to order our relationships. G-d, by telling Moshe to leave Him alone, was actually telling him to interfere. When a spouse tells the other, "Leave me alone, I don't care what you do" you sure as heck better not do it. We have to know what people mean not just what they say. It is very important to read each other's feelings not just their words. But what kind of arguments did Moshe use against G-d? G-d knew all these arguments. Again, these were just to teach us. When Moshe said, "Remember, You took them out of Egypt" he was pointing out that they were not perfect. After all, they were just slaves. How could He expect them to act perfectly? We have to remember that we all make mistakes. In dealing with people you have to realize that people do make mistakes and you have to act accordingly. Second, when he said, "What will the Egyptians say?" he was saying, "G-d, why are You so strict on them? They are at least trying to do the right thing. The Egyptians worship idols all the time. The Egyptians do not even try." It is usually the case that we criticize harder those people who are trying. People who work for the community or are trying to raise money for the community and are working hard for good causes are always the butt of our criticism. They are at least trying. Sure, they make mistakes, but they are trying. And the third argument, "Remember the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". The Jewish people make mistakes but they have solid values they are working toward. They are not trying to do bad things. They are trying to achieve the ideals of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many times they make mistakes, but they are trying. Unfortunately, in our human relationships we have a tendency

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to look at not what people really mean but at what they say. We also have a tendency to criticize heavily those people who are trying, those people who are working. This is wrong because it discourages people from working and it ends up in bitterness. We should all remember what G-d is telling us here when He let Moshe present these arguments to Him, that we are not all perfect but we should at least give credit to those people who try.

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In the Torah portion, Ki Sisso, we have many different things that seem to be just thrown together. The Parsha is composed of many disparate elements. We first learn about how every individual from 20 years and up had to give half a shekel to the Temple. We then learn about how the laver was constructed between the altar and the sanctuary. We then learn about how the spices were made and the different parts of the Tabernacle, and we learn some of the rules about Shabbos, and then we learn about the sin of the golden calf. What do all these things have in common? After all, "Ain Mukdam Um Uchor B'Torah", "there is no chronological order in the Torah". The paragraphs of the Torah have been put together for a reason. They just do not follow a chronological order. It seems to me that there is an underlying theme which runs through this Torah portion and that is that nobody is independent, that each of us need each other. This, of course, flies in the face of the modern notion in the West, especially in this country, that everybody should be totally independent, that the happiest and the best man or woman is the person who is unfettered and unbound and who can do anything he wants any time he wants. Each of us should try to be a superman. In fact, the heroes of our culture act this way. The James Bond movies continue to draw millions. Even the Superman movies draw well. Each of us are taught that we should not need anybody. We should stand on our own. Many times the most dependent people try to act the most independent. The people who are most dependent try to pretend that they are not dependent at all, sort of the same way that a superiority complex comes from people who really feel inferior. We learn that the Jewish people built a golden calf because Moshe tarried on the mountain. It says, "and the people saw that Moshe delayed to come down from the mountain". The word, though, for "delayed", "Boshaish", also has another meaning. It means "to be ashamed". The people were ashamed that they were dependent upon Moshe. They did not want to depend upon anyone. They wanted to create their own gods because they were ashamed that they had to depend upon Moshe. They now pretended that they did not need anyone or anything. That's why G-d could no longer look at them as His People because they did not want a relationship with G-d. They wanted to create their own gods from

themselves. G-d, for His own reasons, has limited Himself. G-d has made part of the perfection of this world dependent upon man. G-d did not have to do that, but He has done it. G-d has said, "I need you and you need Me." We have a mutual relationship. The people did not want to have a relationship anymore. G-d is dependent upon man in this world to make His name known and to help Him perfect it. We are junior partners with G-d, but still partners. That's why, contrary to all expectations, the survivors of the Holocaust are, by and large, much more religious than other Jews. They do not blame the Holocaust on G-d. They blame it on man. Williamsburg is filled with survivors of the Holocaust as is Mea Sharim in Israel. Almost every synagogue in the United States, whether it is orthodox, conservative, or reform, has leaders which were touched by the Holocaust. G-d and man need each other. This is, of course, a paradigm for the marriage relationship. A man and a woman need each other. The Rabbis explain that Eve was not created from Adam's rib, although there is a story that says that the first thing that Eve did when Adam came home was to count his ribs, but, according to the Rabbis, originally man was split in two. The word "Selah" in Hebrew also means "side". Man and woman by themselves are not complete. They need each other to become complete. No one is doing anyone any favors when they get married, not like they used to say in the West where the man was doing a favor marrying the woman, or now as they say in women's lib, a woman is doing a man a favor by marrying him. A man and a woman both need each other. That's what I believe love is. Love is, of course, based on sexual attraction, but that's not enough. If it were there would be no brothels. Love is also based on emotional need. The man and the woman emotionally need each other. Based upon my many years of marriage counseling, I can say that men and women, by and large, do not have the same needs. A man needs to feel important. This does not mean that the wife always has to go, "Yes, sir." Sometimes the way a man feels important is by running around the woman doing everything she says. A woman, on the other hand, must be made to feel secure, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and even financially. No one does anyone any favors when they get married. They both need each other and if they do not go into a marriage feeling they need each other, then the marriage is in trouble. That's why,

too, in the beginning of the Sedra we learn about giving half a shekel not a whole shekel, how we learn about the laver. The Kohen did not wash himself. The Levites washed him. The Tabernacle, too, was to demonstrate the need that man and G-d have for each other. It is mutuality of need which makes a marriage work. I am reminded of the story of a woman who came to a lawyer and said she wanted a divorce. The lawyer asked her, "Do you have any grounds?" She said, "Yes, three-quarters of an acre." He then asked her, "Do you have a grudge?" She said, "No, but I have a lovely carport." He then asked her, "Does your husband beat you up?" She said, "No, I get up an hour before him every morning." He then said, "Why do you want a divorce?" She answered, "Because I cannot carry on an intelligent conversation with him." I hope that all young couples especially will be able to carry on an intelligent conversation, but, more important, that they will always realize that they need each other and that neither of them is doing the other a favor by marrying them.

