

Shabbat Shalom, Moadim L'simcha and thank you for coming. Today on Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot, we read the story of the Golden Calf from Parshat Ki Tissa. Here is the story.

Moses goes up to mountain to receive the Torah, taking a long time. While he is gone, the people make a golden calf. God gets upset and wants to kill them all. Moses says to God: you shouldn't.

Moses heads down the mountain. He sees the calf and drops the tablets. He grinds the gold from the calf and makes the people drink it. He kills 3,000 people -- even though he told God not to kill them.

God thinks the people are stubborn and doesn't want to go with them to the land of milk and honey. Moses gives the message and the people are upset.

So, Moses goes to the tent to talk to God. Because there is a Cloud outside, the people know it's holy. They bow down

and leave Moses alone. Moses and God come to an agreement: God will go with them.

Moses says: let me see your Presence (by the way, no one really knows what “seeing God’s Presence” means.)

God says: go to the rock, stand near me, and my hand will cover you. When I lift my hand, you will see my back. But you won’t be able to see my face. With this, God seems to say: I will never be mean. I will shower the people with goodness and compassion.

That morning, God comes down in a cloud. Moses experiences a holy moment. His good feelings are so overwhelming that he shouts out loud all the good things he sees in God. God now agrees to come with the people to the land of milk and honey.

This might seem like a simple story. The Israelites sin. God gets mad. The people are punished. Moses talks to God. God calms down. But if you look more deeply at the

characters, you can learn a lot about different types of teshuva.

In this story, there are three key roles: the people and their teshuva; Moses and his work as a prophet; and God and what seems like God's body. To explore teshuva, I am going to relate each one to an important Jewish teaching.

At the beginning of each new year, Jews are asked to reflect on themselves, and fix any mistakes they've made. This is called: Teshuvah. The Hebrew word "Teshuvah" comes from the same root as "Shuvu," Return. To the prophets, Teshuvah means to return to God. For them, every step we take towards becoming a better person is a step towards God.

Teshuvah has four steps: (1) Acknowledging that we did wrong. (2) Feeling bad about it. (3) Seeking forgiveness and repairing the situation. (4) Not repeating the behaviour.

When I look at the list, I recognize that apologies are important. It's helpful to learn how to think about apology.

However, this list makes it look like Teshuvah happens in a straight line. When you look at the story of the Golden Calf, you can see that there is no straight line. Everyone in the story changes their mind, gets upset, apologizes and argues again, even while doing the first few steps.

In his book *The Prophets*, Abraham Joshua Heschel presented some thoughts about how prophets feel. Heschel says: a prophet is a person who is God's partner. When a prophet speaks, they don't just report "God says this!" The words also come from the prophet. I agree with Heschel. His ideas describe the relationship between Moses and God. At the beginning of the story, God treats Moses like a message taker. God expects Moses to tell the people that God is not going with them to the land of milk and honey. But Moses has a different opinion and even changes God's mind. Without Moses, the people might not have done Teshuvah.

When Moses sees God, the parasha says that God's hand protects Moses. This is just a figure of speech, based

on the kind of protection we understand. While we read about God's face, back and hands, this is not how Jewish people think of God. Instead of a body, I believe that God is something around us. We become aware of God by praying, and by telling stories. We don't think of God having human body parts, even though the Torah says: *We are created in the image of God*. The word "image" has different meanings. It might be that our mind or soul is like God's, not our body. The parasha shows that the Jewish people and God can have similar experiences. We can both make mistakes and fix them.

In grade 4, we learned how to make a proper apology. You have to acknowledge what you did wrong, and make sure the other person understands you mean it. I used to get annoyed with my little brother for not saying "sorry" the right way. Then I realized he was just a little kid, and we all have to learn how to apologize.

From the parasha, I learn that stories from the past and any

future things I might study have a deeper meaning. Things don't always happen in a straight line. Life isn't always perfect. Sometimes we have to take responsibility and sometimes we have to apologize.

To prepare for my bat mitzvah, I practiced the prayers. I learned my Torah portion. I wrote this Dvar Torah. These are things I've watched other people do my whole life. Now I'm taking more responsibility and doing these and other things myself. In school, I have more homework. I'm more committed to dance. I do more chores around the house.

I've also been working with my parents to choose charities to donate part of my bat mitzvah money to. They are: Free the Children and The Chance 2 Dance.

Free the children started when 12 year old Craig Keilburger read in the newspaper that 12 year old Iqbal

Masih a former child slave was murdered because he was standing up for human rights. Craig thought this was unfair, so with the help of his brother Marc and 11 classmates he started Free the Children. First they started out with trying to end poverty, and realized that more could be done, so then they created Adopt a village. Adopt a village provides access to education, clean water and sanitation, health care, food security, and alternative income to people in poverty. I would love it if you would join with me and support Free the Children, it would help so many people around the world and we will be able to say that we have made a change.

The Chance 2 Dance Foundation is giving underprivileged children in Canada a chance to dance. The Foundation provides funds for kids who are very poor and can't afford to attend dance classes. It also provides scholarships for talented dancers who have been accepted into professional or competitive programs. This is also a great charity to support because I know that if I couldn't

afford dance I would be very sad and this program is giving those sad people an opportunity to take part in something they love.

I would like to say thank you to Or shalom and the whole congregation for being very kind and supportive of me and my family. Thank you to Harriet for teaching me my Torah readings and practicing the whole service with me, and thank you to Rabbi Laura for helping me with this speech and getting a deeper understanding of the parasha. Without you two I would not be even close to ready for this day. Again another thank you to Harriet, Rabbi Laura, Rabbi Louis who taught me in the B'Nai Mitzvah class, Rabbi Hannah, Reb Hillel and Myrna for helping out with the service. I would like to thank my friends, classmates and dance friends for coming today. And a big thank you to my Oma, Far Far and Grampa for coming to celebrate with me,



it means a lot that you came and thank you for generously sponsoring the Kiddush lunch we are about to have. Thank you to my cousins, Aunts, Uncles and all the rest of my family for coming. Some of our family and friends who travelled far to be here today (Saskatchewan and California.)

Thank you for making the trip! Any family friends and everyone else who came, thank you!

And last but definitely not least, my parents and brother. Mom, Thank you for organizing this whole bat mitzvah (With the help of me of course). You did such an amazing job and I hope those big weights are now lifted off your shoulders (at least for another 4 years!) You have always been there if I needed someone to talk to, you come to all my dance competitions and performances, and support me in everything I do. My wish is that everyone will recognize how great a person you are. Love you!

Dad, even though you weren't part of the party planning committee you were a great help with my bat mitzvah. You organized who was leading what in the service, and learned a Torah portion in less than two weeks. I love how you are always willing to help me with any homework I have and enjoy when I show you my tap dances. Since I was little we always went out for lunch together or to the park and we said we were going out on a daddy daughter outing. I really enjoy all our daddy daughter outings and I'm always looking forward to more of them in the future. My wish for you is that everyone will acknowledge that you are a talented singer, and a funny, kind and caring Dad. I love you!

Lev, one thing everyone needs to know about you is that you can be annoying. That is only one of your characteristics though, you are loving, laughable, and passionate about everything you do.

You are really good at making me mad, for example stupid

things like not passing me the remote or being messy.

Even though we have our fights we also agree on some thing's like, jumping on Mom and Dad's bed or getting sugar highs on car rides (remember Seattle). I would like to say thank you Lev, for being here today, I know its hard sitting through the service but I appreciate it.

I would also like to thank my cat Delilah for getting her fur all over my clothes, cuddling up with me, having some great meow conversations with me, and literally always being there for us.

Meow and thank you for coming!!!