

## Don't Mention the War



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The Jews are in big trouble. In a catastrophic collapse, they have gone from being unveiled on the global stage as the nation chosen to receive God's commandments, to worshipping idols in the form of the Golden Calf. Moshe (Moses), in an attempt to defend them, ascends Mount Sinai to quite literally plead for their lives. At first, he seems to do a sterling job; "God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness... forgiving sin..." (Shemot 34:6-7). So far so good.

And then, Moshe utters a phrase which surely must derail the whole thing: "If I have gained Your favour... let my Lord go in our midst, because this is a stiff-necked people" (ibid. v.9). Stiff-necked?! Not two chapters ago, God listed this as the very reason He intended to destroy the Jewish nation! "This is a stiff-necked people, now... I will destroy them" (ibid. 32:9-10).

As John Cleese so famously said, "Don't mention the war". Why does Moshe describe them in this way, let alone point to it as the very reason God should forgive the Jewish people?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) in his commentary to the Chumash brings the most beautiful explanation: he says it is precisely

the Jewish nation's stubbornness that makes them so special. It's true, Moshe says to God, that their stubbornness got them into this mess, and will likely cause them to stumble again in the future. However, this stubbornness, maybe better translated in this case as 'loyalty', is a trait that makes them incredible. On a bad day Jews can be inflexible - but they can also be faithful, committed and fiercely devoted. This 'stiff-neckedness' will see them make mistakes and support some awful football teams, but they're a nation that doesn't know how to quit. See past their stubbornness, says Moshe, and realise that this nation will "follow [You] into the desert, into a bare land' (Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 2:2) and be Yours forever.

## Parasha Quiz

Delete one letter from each pair to reveal words related to the parasha. The first letter is given to you. Here is an example. One letter is deleted from each pair to read 'TRIBE': **T R I B S N E**

1. C AF LM GF
2. S HZ DA BE IB AR NT
3. C EP JN CK UZ ST
4. T AJ BD LT OE TS SN
5. F OU NR FG NI VC EI

