

וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם

And on the day that I will make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them. (32:34)

Simply put, Hashem agreed to Moshe Rabbeinu's entreaty not to punish the entire nation at that time. He declared, however, that whenever they would sin in the future, they would sustain an added punishment to make up for what they did not receive for the Golden Calf. Horav Henach, zl, m'Alexander renders this pasuk homiletically. He cites the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 4:2, "Hasten to perform even a light commandment, and flee from the sin, for one commandment leads to another commandment, and one sin leads to another sin." Two questions are presented by the Rebbe: First, what is the meaning of ho'veirah, "the" sin, written with the hay ha'yediah, demonstrative hay. Is the Tanna referring to a specific sin? Second, what does the Tanna mean when he says to run from sin, because one sin leads to another sin? What about the first sin? Is the only reason to distance ourselves from this sin to avoid what it might lead to? Is sin not destructive in its own right? Every indiscretion creates spiritual blemishes that impact the entire universe. Are we to ignore that?

The Alexander Rebbe explains that "the" aveirah is a reference to a specific form of sin, one that the yetzer hora, evil inclination, would have us believe is not really a sin. It is an aveirah lishmah, a sin for the sake of Heaven. In the Talmud Nazir 23b, Chazal say, "A transgression committed for the sake of Heaven is of greater merit than a mitzvah performed for ulterior motives." This is "the" aveirah. Chazal are teaching us that even an aveirah lishmah, a sin performed to promote a mitzvah, will lead to another sin. There is no escaping the ramifications of sin.

The yetzer hora works his guile this way. We are "convinced" that even though a certain activity is considered sinful, since it catalyzes a mitzvah, it becomes "kosher." What we do not realize is that a sin is still a sin and its effect is harmful. It will lead to other instances of sin.

In the Talmud Avodah Zarah 4b, Chazal say, "Klal Yisrael made the Golden Calf only in order to give an opening of the mouth, i.e. encouragement, for penitents." Rashi explains that the people were men of strong character and, under normal circumstances, would not have deferred to their yetzer hora. It was, however, a gezeiras haMelech, Divine decree, that they fall into the clutches of the evil inclination, so that others would derive from the incident that one can sin and, after he performs teshuvah, repents, will be forgiven and accepted back by Hashem. In other words, the sin of the Golden Calf paralleled an aveirah lishmah, so others would learn of the efficacy of teshuvah. They would no longer have an excuse not to repent.

Returning now to the original pasuk, of "U'b'yom pakdi, ufakaditi aleihem chatasam. Hashem is saying that, in the future, when Klal Yisrael sins, He will forgive them, since the cause of all ensuing sins was the Golden Calf, and that sin was an aveirah lishmah. This does not mitigate the actual sin, only its

after effect. Thus, the pasuk is interpreted as meritorious for the Jewish nation. Although Klal Yisrael sinned for the purpose of conveying a message, it was still a sin which catalyzed negative growth. Hashem, however, will remember the source of that negativity and forgive Klal Yisrael.

Va'ani Tefillah

Romemos Keil – רוממות קל בגרום וחרב פפיות בידם
bigeronam, v'cherev pifios b'yadam.

The lofty praises of G-d are in their throats, and a double-edged sword is in their hand.

Why are the lofty praises in their throats? Should they not be on their lips? I think this addresses the old issue of paying "lip service" to a given entity. When we offer praise, it should be real; it should emanate from the heart, from within our innermost emotions. It should be truthful. Lofty praises that are simply "on the lips" are no indication of sincerity. It must be bigeronam, in their throats, denoting that the praise is an expression from within. The Chebiner Rav, Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, zl, explains the pasuk homiletically. There are those who present themselves as being concerned about the romemos Keil, the loftiness of Hashem. They act with kanaus, zealously, as if they are acting solely for the glory of the Almighty. In truth, these individuals are chameleons who really represent chereiv pifios, a double-edged sword. They are not out to praise G-d; they are interested in instigating trouble, destroying lives, all in the name of G-d. They might deceive people, but they cannot delude Hashem. Perhaps that is the allegory of the double-edged sword. They attempt to hurt others, but, in the end, will succeed only in bringing misfortune upon themselves.

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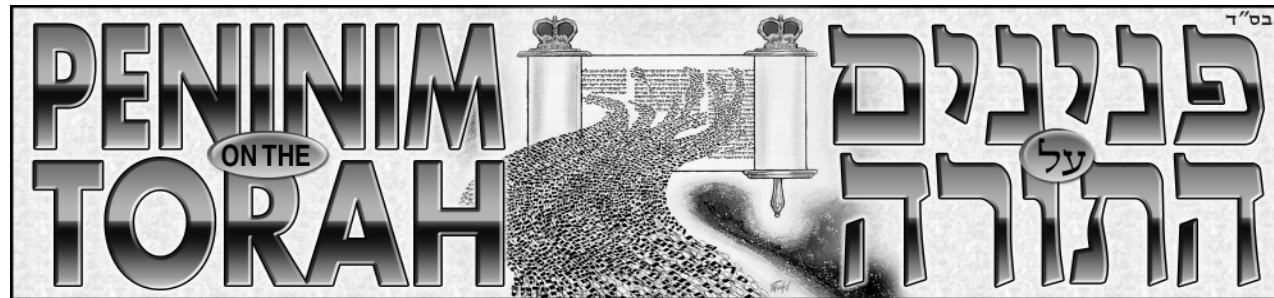
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Parashas Ki Sissa

תש"ע

פרשת כי תשא

TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

אנה אלוהיך ישראל אשר העליך מארץ מצרים

This is your god, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Egypt. (32:4)

The entire Golden Calf debacle seems unreal – unless one consults with the various commentaries which offer meaning to the tragic sin whose consequences plague us to this very day. The actions of the perpetrators beg elucidation. How could they think that the molten image which they had just fashioned from the jewelry, which – up until a short while ago – they had been wearing, took them out of Egypt, split the Red Sea, drowned the Egyptians and wrought all of the accompanying miracles? If they really believed this travesty, then they were irresponsible lunatics who could not be held responsible for their actions. So, why were they punished?

The most popular response is that of the Kuzari, who explains that they erred in believing that Moshe Rabbeinu had died. He was the individual upon whom Hashem had rested His Shechinah, Divine Presence, and only through Moshe were they able to traverse the wilderness. Now that he was gone, they sought another medium upon which Hashem would rest His Presence. Thus, the Golden Calf was created to safeguard their relationship with Hashem.

Veritably, this concept almost makes sense. Indeed, shortly after the incident of the Golden Calf, Hashem instructed them to build the Mishkan which would serve as a place for the Shechinah to repose in this world. The Keruvim were images of children that were part of the Kapores, Cover, of the Aron, whose existence was to facilitate hashroas HaShechinah, the Divine Presence's reposing among Klal Yisrael. Was this that much different from a Golden Calf which, in their mistaken belief, would likewise serve the Shechinah?

The difference is in the command. The Mishkan and the Keruvim were the products of a command from Hashem. They were based upon His directives to the People, something which Hashem wanted. The eigel ha'zahav, Golden Calf, was their own creation, a concretized figment of their imagination. Clearly, they knew that it was their own concoction and, thus, they did not attribute any deistic powers to it. This was not your run of the mill, quotidian act of idol worship. It was the result of serious deliberation and circumspection. Their error was in not asking – or not wanting to seek – the advice of Aharon HaKohen, who, together with Chur, comprised the spiritual

leadership at the time. They refused to ask, and they even went so far as to kill Chur when he attempted to put a stop to their foolishness. After that, it was no longer foolishness: it was murder and rebellion against Hashem.

Now that we have established that the sin of the Golden Calf was a sign of Klal Yisrael's lack of fidelity to their spiritual leadership, we understand the kapparah, atonement, selected as penance for them. Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, is a mitzvah which is paradigmatic of those mitzvos which are chukim, defy human rationale. The reason behind these mitzvos not only eludes our limited minds, but the entire mitzvah of Parah Adumah goes one step further: it is paradoxical. Every aspect of its rules is based on chumros, stringencies in halachah, except in one area which is a kula, leniency.

The Parah Adumah is treated as an extreme level of kedushah, holiness. Its purity, and everything involved in its preparation must be maintained with the loftiest and most stringent standards of ritual purity. The reason for all of this rigorous, almost extreme, adherence to the laws of ritual purity is explained by Chazal as a safeguard against laxity concerning the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. Why would one even dream of being lax in observance of this mitzvah? In the Talmud Yoma 2A, Chazal explain that since there is one major kula, leniency, allowed in this mitzvah, people might think that this is the direction in which one should lean in carrying out the mitzvah. Thus, in an effort to dispel this idea, they decided to be stringent in every other aspect of Parah Adumah.

The kula concerned the Kohen who prepared the Parah Adumah. According to halachah, an individual who is tamei must immerse himself in a mikveh and then have haareiv shemesh, wait overnight until the following day, before he is considered tahor. Parah Adumah does not require haareiv shemesh, allowing the Kohen to proceed with the ritual immediately following his immersion in a mikveh (t'vul yom). The Tzedukim, renegade deniers of the Oral Law, took major issue with this kula, and went out of their way not to comply, specifically attempting to wait overnight before preparing the Parah Adumah.

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, opines that the Tzedukim's opposition to this leniency concerning the Parah Adumah goes to the very crux of the sin of the Golden Calf and the Parah Adumah's role in atoning for it. The Saducees fought virulently against the Sages, specifically

contending in the realm of the *Parah Adumah*, which was a *mitzvah* most of whose intricacies were based upon interpretation of *Chazal*. It was this *mitzvah*, which demanded total subjugation of oneself to the Written and Oral Laws, that could atone for a sin that occurred because the perpetrators did not seek guidance from their spiritual leadership prior to taking action. The Golden Calf represented a rift with *emunas chachamim*, faith in their spiritual leadership, and *Parah Adumah* is founded specifically on the trust one must maintain in the *chachamim*. This is why the *Tzedukim* sought every possible way to undermine this *mitzvah*, which characterized everything that they sought to extirpate: *emunas chachamim*.

Rav Nebentzhal takes this idea to the next level. We are taught that when *Klal Yisrael* stood at *Har Sinai* and declared acceptance of the Torah with the immortalized words, *Naaseh v'nishmah*, "We will do and we will listen," the *zhamas ha'cheit*, spiritual filth associated with the sin of Adam *Ha'Rishon*, ceased. With the *etyo shel cheit ha'eigel*, influence of the sin of the Golden Calf, this spiritual filth returned to plague the nation. What about *Kabolas HaTorah*, accepting the Torah, that cleansed them of the spiritual defilement that had beleaguered them for thousands of years? Further, what about the Golden Calf caused it to recur?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that Adam *Ha'Rishon's* transgression revolved around the same miscued observation that was manifest thousands of years later by the perpetrators of the Golden Calf. Adam wanted to serve Hashem amid challenge, to sanctify His Name by triumphing over adversity. He felt that serving Hashem from the idyllic confines of *Gan Eden* was not sufficient. He wanted to do more, to exert himself. Therefore, he ate of the forbidden fruit, thereby suffusing within himself the good and the bad in such a manner that discerning between them would take great effort. This was a noble gesture, perhaps even commendable, but Adam erred in not asking Hashem if this was His *ratzon*, will. If one wants to cause *nachas ruach*, pleasure, for the Creator, he had better find out if this is what Hashem desires. Adam was driven by a passion for spiritual conquest – for all the right reasons. He made one misjudgment: He did not ask. We should not rely on our own cognition to make such a monumental decision.

When *Klal Yisrael* in unison declared, "We will do and we will listen," they collectively intimated that they were abrogating their personal thought process in order to rely completely on Hashem. We will no longer determine if a command is practical or sensible before we accept it. No! If it is Hashem's command we accept, and we will act! This expression of solidarity with Hashem's will bypassing their individual wills was able to wipe away the spiritual taint that resulted from Adam's failure to consult with Hashem prior to eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge. Regrettably, this Arcadian relationship did not last. Once again, they allowed their emotions to reign and prevail over their minds. With passion and fervor, they decided to create a replacement for Moshe – without consulting the *gedolei ha'dor*, the leaders of the generation, and listen to what *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah, has to say.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to explain exactly what *daas Torah* means, since it played such a pivotal role in the sin of the Golden Calf, a sin which continues to haunt us, because we have yet to ameliorate its cause. *Daas Torah* is a concept through which observant Jews seek the input of the rabbinic scholars on everything from Jewish law to life in general. We believe that the tremendous wisdom of Biblical,

Talmudic, Aggadic and ethical teachings that the Torah scholar amasses during a lifetime of devotion to Torah studies hones his mind, as he internalizes the values and refinement of character that the Torah imparts. Such an individual is eminently qualified to render an authentic, expert Torah perspective on matters pertaining to Jewish interests.

Additionally, one whose thought process has been acuminated by a life of Torah study has developed a cognition which enables him to perceive pure truth. *Daas Torah* is an opinion borne from Torah thought that has not been subject to the secular line of thinking, which is much more subjective and prone to self-absorption. Thus, observant Jews who adhere to *emunas chachamim* seek out the views of prominent Torah scholars – not only in areas of Torah law, but in every aspect of life.

In his, "A Fire In His Soul," *Rabbi Amos Bunim* writes about his father, the well-known American *shtadlan*, intercessor, *R' Irving Bunim*. His relationship with *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, laid the groundwork for his involvement in the establishment of *Beth Medrash Govoha* and the many other Torah organizations which *Rav Aharon* dominated. In the post World War II era, American Jews had become accustomed to a spiritual leadership who were often deficient in their Torah scholarship. To them, a gifted rabbi was one who had stage presence, oratorical talent, prolific writing ability and connections with the rich and famous.

In contrast, they viewed European rabbis as being withdrawn, archaic, incapable of dealing with the new-world order and surely unable to render decisions concerning contemporary issues. Let the old rabbis deal with divorces, marriages, kashrus. Keep them away from political issues and policy decisions.

Rav Aharon Kotler, together with *R' Irving Bunim*, thoroughly altered this stereotypical opinion, which was probably generated by those who had the most to lose. *Rav Aharon* successfully asserted the principle of Torah dominance in all phases of Jewish life. Without fear, he uprooted all concepts that had become an ingrained part of the personality of the American Jew.

Let me close with one thought that is often purposely ignored. When we allude to "all phases of Jewish life," it is a general term to any area of human endeavor in which a Jew is involved. There is no such thing as "Jewish life" and "non-Jewish life." If a Jew is involved, it becomes "Jewish life." We are guided by a different set of rules, and we answer to a Higher authority. Thus, whatever we "touch" becomes "Jewish."

לך רד כי שחח עמך...סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתם

Go, descend – for your people have become corrupt...They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them. (32:7,8)

The *Midrash* records a fascinating dialogue that took place between Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Hashem following the sin of the Golden Calf. Our quintessential leader found himself in the position of defending his nascent nation before the Heavenly Tribunal, presided upon by Hashem *Yisborach*. What can one say in front of such a Judge and Jury? Hashem was about to replace the Jewish nation and start over. Moshe contended, "So they made an *eigel*, Golden Calf. In truth, the *eigel* could help out with some of the Heavenly work." "How could the *eigel* help Me?" asked Hashem. Moshe replied, "Hashem will cause the sun to shine; the *eigel* can do the moon. Hashem will do the stars; the

eigel can do the constellations, etc."

Hashem said to Moshe, "You are erring just as they: You know that the *eigel* is man-made and, thus, it is nothing. It has no power whatsoever." Moshe responded like the dedicated defense lawyer that he was, "So, if the *eigel* is nothing – they have done nothing! Why then are You angry with them? They have not made anything substantial. They have created a totally meaningless, worthless calf of gold. Why punish them?"

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, adds a little flavor to Moshe's remarks. "Hashem," pleaded Moshe, "let them worship the *eigel*, and they will soon realize that it is nothing! When they become aware that they have exchanged the Source of all life for a worthless image, they will quickly come to their senses." This is how the *eigel* would "aid" Hashem. When the Jews would realize their folly, they would return to Hashem.

The *Talmud* in *Shabbos* 104A teaches us, "One who comes to be purified, 'we' help him. One who comes to contaminate himself, 'we' help him." *Rav Zaitchik* quotes his *rebbe*, **Horav Shmuel Weintraub, zl**, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Novaradok in Pinsk-Karlin, who asks why we would come to the aid of one who is looking to destroy himself spiritually. Why should "we" make it easier for him to ruin his life by spiritually defiling himself? It should be sufficient that we turn our backs on him, but to go so far as to come to his aid seems a bit incongruous to our mission as Jews.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that essentially helping him to achieve ritual contamination quicker is a form of Divine assistance. Otherwise, it might take years of searching through every *tumah*, source of spiritual impurity, before he descends to rock bottom. Then and only then, will it hit him between the eyes, and he will awaken from his slumber. If he does not receive any "outside" assistance, however, it might be years before he performs *teshuvah*, repents. Thus, the free-fall that we notice, which some sinners do, is Hashem's gift to the sinner. The sooner he bottoms out and realizes that he has nowhere to go but "up," the quicker he will come to his senses. One cannot repent until he first acknowledges his sin. For some, that means hitting bottom. The quicker we come to terms with the idea that Hashem is always helping us, the sooner we will return to His welcome embrace.

וירא את העגל ומחלת ויחר אף משה וישלך מידו את הלחות

And he (Moshe) saw the calf and the dances, and Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands. (32:19)

It seems from the *pasuk* that the sight of the Golden Calf alone did not spur Moshe *Rabbeinu* to shatter the *Luchos*. It was the accompanying *mecholos*, dancing, that swayed him. *Sforno* explains that the dancing indicated that the Jewish People had not acted reluctantly; theirs was not an act of desperation. They thoroughly were enjoying themselves! There was no justification for such an act of treason. Indeed, the singing and dancing, the frivolity that reigned during this rebellion, made the entire debacle much more deleterious. Damage control was no longer an option.

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, explains why the unabashed joy and dancing played a pivotal role in Moshe's breaking the *Luchos*: "Shlomo *HaMelech* says in *Shir HaShirim* 7:14, *Hadudaim nasnu reiach*. "The violets emit a fragrance." Since *Shir HaShirim* is a dialogue between the Jewish People and Hashem, this *pasuk* is interpreted by *Chazal* as *Klal Yisrael's*

way of articulating its attributes. In this case, *Rava* says the *pasuk* refers to the young men of *Klal Yisrael* who have not tasted the flavor of sin. The commentators offer a variety of explanations to explain the meaning of "not tasting the flavor of sin." The **Bais Yisrael, zl**, addresses the idea of sin from a practical perspective. *Chazal* should have said, "They have not sinned!" What is the meaning of not tasting the "flavor" of sin? What "flavor" does sin have?

The *Gerrer Rebbe* explains that even when these young men fall into the grip of the *yetzer hora* and act sinfully, it is without pleasure; it is without "flavor." There is no *geshmak*, satisfaction in performing the sin. They are bothered by their crude behavior, their lapse in judgment. They sinned, but the sin is lacking. It is missing "flavor." After all is said and done, they feel bad. *Chazal* are praising the young men who, even when they sin, do not enjoy it.

The *Rebbe*, **Rav Zushe, zl**, *mi'Anipole* made a similar comment concerning the *pasuk* in *Bamidbar* 23:21, "He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov and saw no perversity in *Yisrael*, Hashem his G-d was with him." The *Rebbe* said, "Never has a complete *malach*, angel, been created as the result of the sin of a Jew." This is a reference to the prosecuting angel, created from one's sinful behavior, that will proffer charges against him. The reason for this is that a Jew does not commit a sin with *shleimus*, perfection. His sin is not consummate. There is always something missing: a little regret, a slight sense of remorse. A Jew's sin is not a "feel good" affair. Therefore, "He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov," because Hashem is always with him. Even when the Jew sins, Hashem is with him.

This is why a Jew so readily performs *teshuvah*. Buried deep within the Jewish psyche is an inextricable bond with Hashem. It is a bond that will not be severed. A Jew can always return; he can always repent, because he never has really left.

When Moshe descended the mountain and saw the Golden Calf, he still had room to conjecture that the sin was lacking in substance. The people were acting under pressure. They were anxious and afraid. However, when Moshe saw the frivolity that accompanied this worship – the singing, the dancing and debauchery that ensued- he saw a sin in full "dress." This was idol worship. Thus, he made a judgment call: these people were not worthy of receiving the *Luchos*.

I have the distinct privilege of working with Jews who, for the most part, have no clue concerning their Jewish pedigree, what it means and the responsibilities that result from this noble lineage. These are individuals incarcerated for various crimes against humanity. Some are young, while others have been in the system for decades. While their crimes and motivations vary, they all have one thing in common: *teshuvah*. As soon as they have access to a pair of *Tefillin*, a transliterated *Siddur*, an English *Chumash*, any and all *divrei Torah*, they become passionate about their heritage that had heretofore eluded them. What happened? How did individuals who had been part of a secular society, with its bankrupt code of morality, suddenly transform? The answer is that they are Jewish. *Lo hibit aven b'Yaakov*, "He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov," because Hashem is always with him. He never lets go of our hand, regardless of how far we have strayed. He never has, and He never will. We just have to be willing to return home.