

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Ki Sisa 5770

*Mazal Tov to Alissa and Daniel Chambre on the birth of a baby boy.
Mazal Tov to grandparents Sima & Herman Hertzberg and all the
extended family.*

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LINKED :: Rabbi Berel Wein

At first glance the messages of Parshat Zachor – last week’s parsha – and Parshat Parah – this week’s parsha – seem to be unconnected. Parshat Zachor deals with the age old enemy of the Jewish people, Amalek. In every generation Amalek assumes different guises but he is always there threatening the very existence of Israel and the Jewish people. His threat is real and very palpable.

Amalek minces no words in declaring his goal – the annihilation of Jews. Parshat Parah deals with a completely esoteric spiritual matter – the laws and rituals of the purification of people who became tamei – ritually impure and are therefore restricted from participating in certain human activities and Temple worship and sacrifices.

Now these two subjects, Amalek and ritual purification seemingly have no real connection one to another. They are merely part of the preparation for Purim in the case of Parshat Zachor and the preparation for Pesach as far as Parshat Parah is concerned. But people must be aware that there are no mere coincidences in Jewish life and lore.

The Torah itself and Jewish tradition and custom are so multilayered that everything contained therein requires study, analysis and additional insight. Studying the Torah makes one realize that every subject and custom is truly interlinked one with another at its deepest level.

Superficial understanding of Torah and Judaism is dangerous. It leads to wrong conclusions and false theories about the Torah and Jewish values. Just as in modern medicine the physician relies upon CT scans and MRI images to make a correct diagnosis, so too does the Jew have to search for the underlying principles that unite the Torah and Jewish life and make it an indivisible whole.

I think that the common thread between Parshat Zachor and Parshat Parah lies in the irrationality of the elements of both parshiyot. The hatred of Israel by Amalek over the millennia defies any rational explanation. Why should Norway and Sweden hate Israel so? Why do the Arabs not see peace as being to their advantage and a chance to bring a better life to their millions? Why the hatred and incitement and the refusal to see things as they are and not as they somehow would wish them to be?

It is by now clear that all of the peace making efforts here in the Middle East over the past many decades have made one basic error. These efforts are founded on the basis of rationality and practicality. They deal with a reality that can be rationally explained and thus confronted, compromised and eventually solved. But the Amalek conundrum is an irrational one. It is not given to explanation or reasoning.

From the first unprovoked and unnecessary and costly attack of Amalek on the Jews in the desert of Sinai through the Holocaust and now the terrible threats and words of Ahmadinejad it is all simply insanity and irrationality. But, that is the reality of an irrational world. And the Torah wishes us to realize that there are many things that are beyond our rational abilities to control. And the Torah tells us to remember this lesson at all times.

Parshat Parah is also based upon an irrationality. The Talmud pointed out that the ritual laws regarding purity and impurity, the power of the ashes of the red heifer to contaminate the pure and purify the impure at one and the same time, are all irrational. We have no explanation for them. They are the exception to the otherwise generally rational and well reasoned structure of Torah life and ritual.

The Torah purposely introduces into the structure of Judaism an element that is beyond ordinary human comprehension. It does with the intent to impress us with the fact that Torah and its attendant halachic principles are

not always capable of being fully comprehended by human minds and opinions. There is always an area of faith that is beyond our reach and understanding.

The Torah points out our human limitations and that the finite can never quite reach an understanding of the Infinite. Rationality is, as it must be, the basis for human actions and behavior. However part of rationality is the realization that there is much that exists beyond our powers of rational thought. And the Torah emphasizes this by teaching us Parshat Parah.

It also does so by linking Parshat Parah to Parshat Zachor which preceded it as examples of the underlying irrationalities that govern our world, society and even our faith and beliefs. Thus do these disparate parshiyot become linked in purpose and thought.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: KI TISA :: Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the most persistent and troubling questions regarding the event of the Golden Calf, as recorded in this week’s parsha, is: “How could Aharon have done what he did?” Did he not realize the consequences of his action to himself and his family, as well as to the people of Israel generally? After all Aharon is to be the paradigm of Jewish priestly leadership for all generations to come.

And yet the Torah records for us that Aharon rose from this debacle, albeit at a tragic and heavy price to him and his family, and became revered as the ultimate High Priest of Israel. In this, he resembles the story of Yehudah, who also inexplicably falls into strange and unacceptable behavior and yet arises from his situation to become the leader of the tribes of Israel and the founder of the royal house of Jerusalem.

The Torah seems to emphasize to us the recuperative powers of these individuals as examples for us, while dealing with their negative actions and consequent punishments in a more indirect fashion. The Torah excuses no sins and gives no one a free pass on one’s negative behavior.

Yet, all of the champions of Israel have baggage associated with their stories and descriptions of character as portrayed in the Torah. Yet, even accounting for human frailty, the question begs itself as to the causes of Aharon’s behavior regarding the construction of the Golden Calf. And, over the ages, the commentators to the Torah have wrestled with and attempted to solve this problem.

I suspect that it was Aharon’s great and unconditional love for the Jewish people that drove him to cooperate in the construction of the Golden Calf. Moshe’s love for Israel was also unbounded and unconditional but Aharon was incapable of Moshe’s tough love approach. He therefore sought to mitigate the evil act that he felt was inevitably coming and tried to soften its eventual consequences.

He was willing to provide Israel with the excuse – “Look, Aharon was with us and he participated in the Golden Calf, so it was not entirely our fault, and it could not have been that bad.” There is a concept in Judaism called aveirah lishmah – a sin committed knowingly but for a higher purpose, for the sake of Heaven itself, so to speak.

A sin committed for the sake of the eventual salvation of the Jewish people from destruction is still a sin - but it has a moral content to it that allows the sinner to rise and recover after participating in that sin. Aharon’s love of Israel, in this case misplaced and exaggerated, was nevertheless the cause of his redemption and of his becoming the High Priest of Israel for all history.

Such an insight aids in understanding the complexities of personality and circumstance that this week’s parsha occasions. It is beyond human abilities to make such reckonings and judgments. However the Torah does allow us a glimpse as to how Heaven deals with such issues and we should be most grateful for having that insight brought to our knowledge and

attention.
Shabat shalom

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Overview

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Bezalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the tablets and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

Insights

Give Me a Break

“And on the seventh day, a Shabbat of Shabbatot” (31:15)

There are two kinds of rest. The first kind of rest is a rest from weariness, a chance to recharge your batteries, to enable yourself to continue to work. For no one can work indefinitely. Everyone needs a break. The second kind of rest comes at the end of a project. The last brushstroke of a painting. The final sentence of a novel. The last brick in a new home. Then you take a step back and look at your work. You feel the satisfaction of completion. It's finished. It's done. A time to rest and enjoy the fruits of your labors.

"You shall labor for six days and do all your work". How can you do all your work in six days? Can you build an entire house in six days? The Torah teaches us that when Shabbat comes, even though you're halfway through your project you should think of it as though it was finished completely. In other words, on Shabbat you should picture yourself as experiencing the sense of rest and satisfaction that comes after a good job well done, and not that you're just taking a break. In a sense, this is what G-d did when the world was six days old. He looked at the Creation and saw that it was finished, the greatest building project ever, the Heavens and the earth were completed. Our rest on Shabbat is a commemoration of that rest.

This is the essential difference between our Shabbat and the secular idea of a 'day of rest'. The secular world understands the day of rest as a break so that you can return to the week revitalized and refreshed. It's a only a break. Shabbat, on the other hand, is not just pushing the pause button on life. It's the creation of a feeling that everything in one's life is complete. There's nothing left to do — except sit back and enjoy the fruits of one's labor.

•Sources: Based on Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L'Torah Ulamo'adim

Labor Of Love

“The children of Yisrael shall keep the Shabbat...throughout their generations” (31:16)

After a person leaves this world, his soul experiences a state of confusion. If, in his lifetime, he enmeshed himself in the physical world, so even after death his soul still looks for those same physical pleasures. However, lacking a body to experience the material dimension, his soul frantically rushes from one side of the world to the other in a vain search for the physical. On the other hand, if a person spends his life in a quest for the spiritual, and only uses the physical world to elevate his neshama (soul), then, after he passes from the physical world his soul recognizes the next world, which is entirely spiritual, and rushes to embrace it. The phrase “throughout their generations” in this verse can also be translated “as their dwelling place”. When a person keeps Shabbat he spiritualizes himself and, at the same time, creates a dwelling place for himself in the next world — ‘the world which is entirely Shabbat’. When he goes to the next world he will find a familiar dwelling — Shabbat will be home for his soul.

•Source: Adapted from the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh
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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Ki Tisa

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 zuhamas 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."

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.

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.

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'by'om 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.

Romemos Keil 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.

I'zechar nishmas our husband, father, grandfather HaRav Daniel ben HaRav Avraham Aryeh Leib Schur, Horav Doniel Schur Z"L niftar 21 Adar 5766 t.n.tz.v.h. Sponsored by his wife, sons, daughters and all his family

Rav Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Sisa (torah.org)

Why Did Moshe Need A Visual Image of The Half-Shekel Coin?

This week's parsha contains the mitzvah to donate the half-shekel coin: "This shall be given by everyone who passes through the counting, from twenty years old and up, a half shekel from the holy shekel coin, the shekel weighing twenty geirah, a half shekel as gift to Hashem." [Shmos 30:13-14] Rashi cites a Medrash that G-d showed Moshe the appearance of a coin made from fire weighing a half shekel and told him "This is what they shall give."

Rashi actually abbreviates the Medrash. The Medrash itself mentions that Moshe had difficulty envisioning what exactly the half-shekel coin looked like and G-d therefore showed him a heavenly vision of exactly the way it appears. The commentators are bothered - why was it so difficult for Moshe to envision the appearance of this half-shekel coin?

The Gemara has a similar narration concerning the Menorah. The Menorah has very intricate detail and geometric configuration. We can understand how Moshe might not have been able to picture what the Menorah looked like until he was shown an example of a fiery Menorah in a vision. Likewise, the Talmud says that Hashem had to show Moshe examples of the reptiles and insects (sheratzim) mentioned in Parshas Shmini. That statement can also be understood. But what is so hard to envision about a

coin? Why did G-d have to show Moshe a coin made out of fire?

I will share one answer to this question based on Derush [homiletic interpretation] and another answer based on Pshat [simple interpretation].

This homiletic interpretation is offered by many. I saw it most recently in the Oznaim LaTorah. Moshe Rabbeinu had difficulty understanding how money could serve as an atonement (kaparah). Money is the root of most evil. However, Hashem speaks of the half-shekel donation being 'kesef hakipurim' [the money of atonement]. Moshe wanted to know how that can happen. How could something that is the cause of so much evil and trouble serve to bring man closer to His Maker?

Therefore, G-d showed him a coin made out of fire. Is fire good or bad? Fire can be the most destructive thing in the world. It can kill. It can decimate. On the other hand, where would we be without fire? We would freeze in the winter. We would not be able to prepare our food. The world would not be able to exist without fire.

We see that there are things in this world that can bring tremendous good and at the same time can bring tremendous evil. They can bring tremendous improvement and tremendous destruction. The point of showing Moshe the coin made out of fire was to equate money with fire. Money, too, can be destructive or constructive, depending upon how it is used.

An interpretation that is more straightforward and closer to the 'pshat' is offered by Rav Simcha Zissel, the Rosh Yeshiva from Chevron, zt"l: Moshe Rabbeinu understood that there are things in this world that are called "Cheftzah shel mitzvah" [items with which Mitzvos are performed]. Some things are natural products (e.g. -- lulav, esrog, haddasim, aravos). Other things are "manufactured" (e.g. -- cow-hide upon which is written certain words may be made into a Sefer Torah, Tefillin, or Mezuzah). Although the latter are man-made products, the intent of the scribe in creating them may make them holy and allow them to become a "Cheftzah shel mitzvah". Moshe did not have trouble understanding this.

However, Moshe could not understand how it is possible to do a mitzvah with a coin that is minted for commercial purposes. How is this piece of metal, which is minted by secular authorities able to become a "Cheftzah shel mitzvah"? Therefore, Hashem showed him the coin of fire and thereby informed him that in fact even such an item could be sanctified and used for achieving atonement, as long as it is GIVEN for the sake of a mitzvah.

Where Is Mordechai Alluded To In Chumash?

The Gemarah in Chullin [139b] expounds on the pasuk discussing the recipe for making the ketores [incense] used on the Mizbayach HaPineemee [inner Altar]: Where is there an illusion to the personage of Mordechai in the Torah (Chumash)? It is found in this pasuk -- "Take for yourself spices, Mor Deror..." [Shmos 30:23]. The Aramaic targum [translation] of the words Mor Deror is "Mor dechya" (which when put together becomes Mordechai). What do Chazal mean by this exegesis?

The Chasam Sofer suggests an interesting explanation: The Rambam explains in Hilchos Klei HaMikdash that the spice which the Torah calls Mor Deror is musk. This is the opinion of Rabbeinu Yona as well. In Tractate Brachos, Rabbeinu Yonah explains how we obtain the musk ingredient. There is a certain animal that grows a boil on its neck, which is filled with blood. When the boil dries out, the blood turns into a powder like substance, which is musk. This is used in the ketores and is critical for providing it with its pleasant aroma. Some Rishonim question the Rambam and Rabbeinu Yona: How can we take a substance that originated in an impure source (blood of a non Kosher animal) and use it in the ketores in the Bais HaMikdash [Temple]? The Rabbeinu Yona answers that the powder like musk is a "new substance" (panim chadashos ba-u l'kan) and is disassociated from the original blood of the non-kosher animal.

Mordechai's lineage is traced in the Megillah. He is identified as Mordechai the son of Yair, the son of Shimi, the son of Kish [Eshter 2:5]. Who was Shimi? This is none other than Shimi ben Geirah, arch-enemy of Dovid HaMelech [King David]. He called the King an adulterer and a murderer. Shimi was a traitor who cursed Dovid HaMelech when he was down and out. The righteous Mordechai was the grandson of Shimi. How can such a Tzadik come from such a wicked person?

The answer is that a person can disregard his lineage and make himself into a great person. Where do we find such a precedent as Mordechai in the Torah? Namely, where do we find that in spite of one's ancestry, he can prove himself and be the leader of a generation? We find that phenomenon in the musk (Mor Deror = More Dechya) used in the ketores. Its origin stemmed from the blood of a non-kosher animal and yet it was a key ingredient in the ketores burned on the Mizbayach HaPineemee.

Did Moshe Not Believe What G-d Told Him?

Parshas Ki Sisa contains one of the most tragic events in all of Chumash -- the sin of the Golden Calf. Chazal say that the reason why the Jews sinned here was only to demonstrate the path of repentance to the masses (of future generations). In this narrative, we learn the theme of how to do Teshuva.

The Nesivos Shalom (the Slonimer Rebbe) asks an interesting question. G-d told Moshe "Go, descend -- for your nation that you have brought up from Egypt has degenerated. They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf; prostrated themselves to it and sacrificed to it, and they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.'" [Shmos 32:7-8] Moshe descends, sees the people dancing around the Calf and then breaks the Luchos with the Ten Commandments.

The Slonimer Rebbe asks -- why did Moshe wait until he saw for himself that the Jewish people were worshipping an idol? G-d already told him what they were doing. What more testimony did Moshe need? Did he not believe G-d that he had to witness their crime with his own eyes before taking the action of breaking the Luchos?

The Slonimer Rebbe answers that Moshe Rabbeinu's action teaches us something that is really the key to Teshuva. Most of the time, when a person sins, there is something called guilt. Guilt is the first step to repentance. As long as one feels bad about what he has done, there is the strong hope that he will amend his ways in the future. "One who does a sin and is embarrassed by it, G-d will forgive him". [Brachos 12b]

Moshe believed G-d that the Jews made an idol and thereby sinned grievously, but he was hoping that at least they had remorse for their actions. That would have allowed them to take the next steps towards repentance. It was only when Moshe descended from the mountain top and saw them dancing ecstatically around the Golden Calf that he realized that they had no pangs of guilt or any second thoughts about what they had done. Then he knew that drastic measures were called for and it was only at that point that decided to break the Luchos containing the Ten Commandments.

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Parshas Ki Sisa: Masked Emotions By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Matzav.com)

In what is probably the most anti-climactic event in Jewish history, the nation that was about to receive the Torah from Moshe turns away from the will of Hashem. After 40 days they begin to worry that Moshe will never return and they panic. They create a new leader for themselves -- The Golden Calf.

The Torah describes the scene in Exodus 32:6: "The people offered (the calf) peace offerings and they sat down to eat and drink and they got up to revel."

Hashem immediately commands Moshe to descend Mount Sinai in order to admonish his corrupt nation. As Moshe comes down the mountain he hears tumultuous shouts emanating from the people who were celebrating their new found deity. His student, Yehoshua, also hears the sounds and declares (Exodus 32:17) "the sound of battle is in the camp." Moshe listens and amends the theory. He tells Yehoshua, "It is not the sound of victory, nor the sound of defeat: I hear the sound of distress." When Moshe sees the Golden Calf he breaks the Tablets and restores order, sanity, and the belief in Hashem.

What is strange about the episode is the contrast of the sounds made and the sounds heard. If the Jewish People reveled and celebrated then why did Yehoshua hear sounds of war and how did Moshe hear sounds of distress? They should both have heard the sound of celebration and festivity.

Rav Chaim of Sanz had a custom: he would test the local children on a monthly basis. The children would recite orally from the Mishnah or Talmud and Rav Chaim would reward them generously with sweets and money. Once a group of secular

Jews decided to dupe Rav Chaim. They taught a Talmudic selection to a gentile child and reviewed it with him until he knew it perfectly. They dressed him like a Chasidic child and had him stand in line with all the other children to be tested.

The rabbi listened to the young boy intently. The other children were puzzled: they did not remember this boy from their cheder, yet they were amazed at the remarkable fluency he displayed in reciting his piece. Rav Chaim was not impressed at all. He turned to the young man and said, "please tell your father that there are better ways to earn a few coins!" With that he dismissed the child.

The secularists were shocked. "How did the Rabbi know?" Their curiosity forced them to approach Rav Chaim. Rav Chaim smiled as he answered them. "There are two ways to say the Gemorah. One is filled with spirituality. The child's body is swaying and filled with the emotion of Torah. The other is just repetitive rote. This young man lacked the fire and the true joy that the Jewish children have when learning Torah. I knew he was not one of ours."

The Jews got up to revel around the golden calf. Moshe and Yehoshua however knew the difference between true joy — simcha — and confusion. The Jews revel were in essence distressed but it was masked with drinks and noise makers. True joy is coupled with a certainty and a sense of direction; something lacking for those Jews celebrating the idol. The Jews may have gotten up to celebrate, but it was no celebration. It may have looked like a party to the untrained eye, but Moshe knew the true sound of joy. It did not exist with the Golden Calf. True joy is the harmony of spirituality and contentment. Superficial sounds of euphoria and celebration are heard by those with true insight as sounds of battle and distress.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion Ki Tissa: A Lesson in Leadership

Moses was on top of Mount Sinai, experiencing divine revelation on a level beyond the grasp of ordinary prophets. At the foot of the mountain, however, the people began to worry. Not knowing why Moses was taking so long, not understanding how he could live without food and water for forty days, they felt abandoned and leaderless. They demanded that Aaron make them a golden calf, and they worshipped it.

God's response was immediate - He banished Moses from Mount Sinai.

"Leave! Go down! The people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt." (Ex. 32:7)

It seems unfair. The people sin, and Moses is kicked off the mountain?

A Suitable Leader

In order for a leader to succeed, he must be appreciated and valued by his followers. The leader may possess a soul greatly elevated above the people, but it is crucial that the people should be able to relate to and learn from their leader.

At Mount Sinai, the Jewish people were on a lofty spiritual level. As a result, Moses was able to attain a supreme level of prophecy and revelation on top of the mountain. But after they sinned with the golden calf, Moses would no longer be a suitable leader were he to retain his spiritual attainments. It was necessary for Moses

to 'step down,' to lower himself, in order to continue serving as their guide and leader.

This idea is clearly expressed by the Talmud (Berachot 32a):

"What does it mean, 'Go down'? God told Moses, 'Go down from your greatness. I only gave you pre-eminence for the sake of the Jewish people. Now they have sinned - why should you be elevated?' Immediately, Moses' [spiritual] strength left him."

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 160-161. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 142-143.)

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Ohr Somayach :: TalmuDigest :: Sanhedrin 23 - 29

For the week ending 6 March 2010 / 19 Adar I 5770

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Pleading for the Defendant • Sanhedrin 29a

If someone admits to owing money to another, but when it comes to later paying that debt he claims that he was only fooling when he made that admission, he is believed. If he fails to offer this excuse in making his refusal, the court does not offer it on his behalf.

When it comes to a case involving capital punishment, however, if the court is capable of presenting an argument on behalf of the defendant which he has not put forth, it is obligated to do so. The exception to this rule is when the person on trial is accused of being a *maisit* – one who attempted to persuade another Jew to worship idols.

The source for such a severe attitude towards the evil persuader, says Rabbi Chama bar Chanina, is the Torah command "You shall not have pity on him nor shall you cover up for him." (Devarim 13:9)

Another source mentioned in the name of Rabbi Yonatan is that of G-d convicting the primeval serpent for persuading Chava to eat from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. There was certainly a plea that could have been made on behalf of that *maisit* and it was not made. What could have been said in the serpent's defense? "Is one supposed to heed the word of the master or that of the disciple?" – the rationale given as to why when one sins as an agent for another it is he who bears responsibility for the crime rather than the one who sent him to do so.

Tosefot asks why then cannot every *maisit* get away by arguing that his victim had no business ignoring the command of his Heavenly Master? His answer is that only the serpent could have possibly been acquitted with such a claim because he had never been commanded to desist from evil persuasion and was judged only because of the tragedy he caused. The *maisit*, however, has been commanded to refrain from such evil persuasion and is convicted for the attempt itself.

What the Sages Say

"How do we know that whoever adds to the words of G-d only detracts from them? Although G-d's command was to refrain from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Chava added that He also prohibited touching the tree and this led to the serpent tricking her."

•The Sage Chizkiah - Sanhedrin 29a

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