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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: THE SHEKEL	1-3
TEMPLE	4-5
PARSHA: GOLD CALF	6-7
THOUGHT: SAVING LIVES	8

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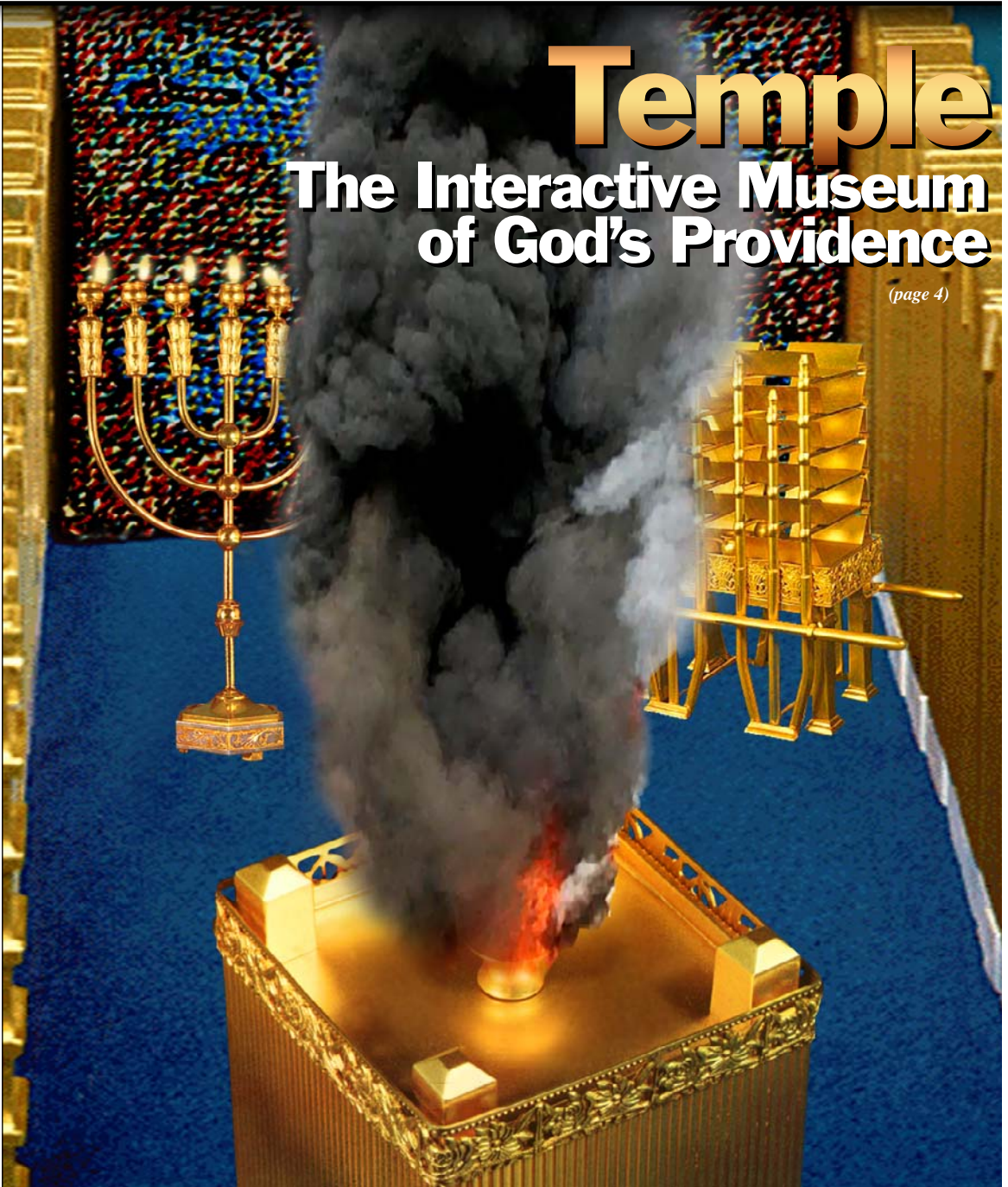
Weekly Parsha

Ki Tsa

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“This they shall give, everyone who goes through the counting: half a shekel according to the sacred shekel. Twenty gerahs equal one shekel; half of [such] a

(continued on next page)



Temple

The Interactive Museum of God's Providence

(page 4)

(Ki Tisa cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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shekel shall be an offering to Hashem." (Shemot 30:13)

In the opening passages of this week's parasha, Moshe is commanded to conduct a census of the nation. Moshe is provided specific directions for the conduction of the census. These instructions deal with two issues: who is to be counted and how to conduct the census. The census is to include all males over the age of twenty. The method is unusual. Moshe is instructed that he is not to directly count the people. Instead, he is to instruct each male over the age of twenty to contribute a half of a sacred shekel to the Mishcan – the Tabernacle. These coins will be counted and the sum of the coins will correspond with the number of males over the age of twenty.

Moshe is told to instruct each person to be included in the census to contribute a half of a sacred shekel. Nachmanides asks two interesting questions regarding this instruction. First, the instruction makes reference of a coin called a "shekel." The term "shekel" means "measurement." Why is the coin referred to by this name? Second, the amount to be contributed is half of a sacred shekel. What were these sacred shekel coins? What made them sacred?

Nachmanides addresses both issues. He begins with a key premise. He suggests that Moshe minted his own coin. He created the shekel. Why is the coin referred to as a "shekel" or "measure"? Moshe was scrupulous in his minting of this coin. He made sure that each coin contained exactly twenty gerahs of silver. The coin is referred to as a "shekel," or "measure," because each coin was a full measure of silver.

Why was the coin referred to as a sacred shekel? Nachmanides suggests that the coin was created to be used for various mitzvot. It was to be used for the redemption of the first born and the payment of various other amounts due to the Mishcan. Because of the coin's role in the fulfillment of mitzvot, it is referred to as the "sacred shekel".

Nachmanides notes the Sages refer to Ivrit – Hebrew – as the "sacred language." Why is Ivrit regarded as sacred? Nachmanides suggests that because Ivrit is the language in which the Torah, the Prophets, and other

sacred works are composed, it deserves to be referred to as sacred. These works are sacred. Ivrit is the language in which their messages are communicated. Therefore, Ivrit is a "sacred" language. Nachmanides also notes other reasons for referring to Ivrit as sacred.[1]

He notes that his position differs from that of Maimonides. Maimonides offers a rather surprising explanation of the term "sacred language". Maimonides explains that we should not erroneously assume that Ivrit is referred to as "sacred" as a result of the language's association with the Jewish people. Instead, the language is referred to as sacred because of an important characteristic. Classical Ivrit lacks terms for the sexual organs, the sexual act, and for human waste and feces – all

of which are referred to though euphemism. Maimonides reasons that the exclusion of terminology for these items and actions from the language elevates Ivrit. This characteristic is the basis of its sanctity.[2]

Maimonides' position seems somewhat prudish. It seems he is suggesting that it is improper to directly refer to the sexual organs and basic bodily functions. These references are proscribed and Ivrit is sacred because it accommodates this taboo!

This is not consistent with Maimonides' general treatment of sexual issues. He deals with sexual issues in a straightforward, unabashed manner.[3] It seems strange that he should endorse a seemingly pedantic attitude towards sexuality and basic bodily functions.

In order to understand Maimonides' position it is important to consider his comment more carefully. He explains that Ivrit is sacred because of the structure of the language. It employs euphemisms for references to the sexual organs, the sexual act and for bodily wastes. What does this structural characteristic tell us about the design and objective of the language? Apparently, although the language is remarkably precise and effective for the communication of ideas, it is ill-adapted for a discussion of sexuality, for example. In other words, the language facilitates the exchange of most ideas but hinders communication focused of sexuality.

Why is this characteristic significant? How does it "elevate" the language to sanctity?

(continued on next page)



(Ki Tisa continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

Although the Torah favors a healthy and balanced attitude towards sexuality, it discourages us from focusing our attention on the sexual. The Torah recognizes that sexuality is a basic component of human nature. It should not be repressed or associated with primitive and unhealthy taboos. But the Torah also recognizes that fascination with sexuality can become obsessive. It can dominate our thoughts and interests. A balance is required. We should not repress our human drive but we should not become obsessively fixated on the sexual. The structure of Ivrit reflects this balance. It is well-suited for the communication of ideas and this should be our focus – the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge. It is ill-suited for discussion of the sexual. This is an area in which we must maintain balance. It cannot become the focus of our attention.

This concept of balance is reflected in an interesting comment by Rabbaynu Bachya. Rabbaynu Bachya asks why we are commanded to provide half of a sacred shekel to the Mishcan. Why not provide a full shekel? There are many well-known answers to this question, but Rabbaynu Bachya's response is one of the most unique. He explains that the use of half of a shekel is intended to communicate a message: We cannot completely give ourselves over to the sacred. We must balance our devotion to the sacred with a devotion to the material world.

This seems to be a remarkable statement! Should we not wholly devote our lives to elevating ourselves to the highest possible spiritual level? Should we not make every effort to escape our attachment to the temporal, material world? Rabbaynu Bachya responds that this attitude is oversimplified; we are material creatures and we cannot neglect, ignore or deny the material element of our nature. If we attempt to focus exclusively on our spiritual needs and neglect our material needs and desires, then we will secure neither. We cannot elevate ourselves spiritually unless we adequately address our material and physical needs.

Rabbaynu Bachya suggests that this idea is reflected in the manner in which we are instructed to observe our festivals. Halachah requires that we apportion the day between spiritual and material endeavors. We are to spend half of the day in prayer, study and spiritual pursuits. The other half of the day is to be devoted to the festival meal and material indulgences.[4] It is strange that the festival – a sacred day – is to be used for material indulgences! Rabbaynu Bachya responds that the addressing of our material needs and desires does not detract from the spiritual element of the festival day. On the contrary, when our material needs and desires are addressed, we are better prepared to pursue spiritual ends.[5]

If we take seriously Rabbaynu Bachya's

comments, they have many important implications. Let us identify one of these. We must provide our children with an education that prepares them for adulthood and independence. We can only execute this responsibility by providing them with an education that will enable them to support themselves. If, as adults, our children cannot provide for their material needs, then they cannot be expected to achieve their spiritual potential. Of course, there is much more that can be said about this issue. But these comments are merely intended to identify one of the many practical implications of Rabbaynu Bachya's comments. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 30:13.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 8.

[3] See, for example, Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Essurai Beya 21:9.

[4] Mesechet Pesachim 68b.

[5] Rabbaynu Bachya, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 30:13.



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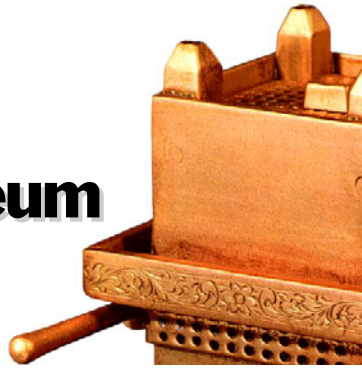
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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Temple

The Interactive Museum of God's Providence



Reading through the Torah sections describing the Temple, we must reflect on the Temple's design, and its uncanny parallels to certain miracles. Understanding the Temple's purpose will fuel our readings with greater interest, and even excitement.

Take for example a previous lesson. We cited Ramban's parallel of the golden Ark, to the golden flames at Sinai's summit, from where God gave the Ten Commands. Ramban stated that the golden Ark resembles the golden flames. We deduce that the Ark is to act as a constant replica of that event. Certainly, as the Ark houses the two sapphire Tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments, the parallel is more clearly drawn. It is obvious that the singular event of Revelation at Sinai was to act as a perpetual lesson, as God tells Moses, "Behold, I come to you in thick cloud in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they will believe forever". (Exod. 19:9) But Ramban hints to other parallels, which also must also have fundamental lessons as they are also permanently fixed in Temple worship. We took our own steps, and drew these parallels:

1. The external, copper animal altar parallels Egypt's animal deification: through slaughter we reject animal deification, in service of the one, true God.
2. The washing laver parallels Miriam's well.
3. The Incense Altar used to create cloud, parallels God's pillar of cloud.
4. The pillar of fire is paralleled by the Menora
5. The Manna is paralleled by the Table's Showbread.
6. The barrier roping of Sinai to would-be ascenders is paralleled by the Paroches curtain.
7. And Sinai ablaze is paralleled as we said, by the golden Ark.

The Jews encountered many miracles in Egypt, and en route to Sinai. Temple appears to possess parallels to those miracles. Those ancient miracles must therefore be understood, in order that we

might 1) fully appreciate why they required perpetuity in Temple, and 2) understand for what Temple stands.

As part of our study of these miracles, we must consider why certain miracles required Moses' involvement, such as raising his staff in connection with the 10 Plagues and the Red Sea, while others God performed without Moses' involvement, such as the Manna, and the pillars of cloud and fire. What might we learn from God's determination that Moses be involved, and be excluded? And it is quite intriguing that those very events where Moses was excluded, exactly parallel the vessels found in the Holies! (Numbers 3,4, and 5 above.) Let us first understand the significance of the miracles, and their counterparts in Temple.

Incense / Pillar of Cloud

Entry to the Tabernacle is met first with the Incense Altar and its fumes: the Incense Altar being closest to the Temple's opening. And we suggested the altar replicated God's pillar of cloud. But when do we first see the Divine pillar of cloud? Exod. 13:21 reads: "And God went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them, and at night in a pillar of fire to illuminate for them..." We understand that a cloud can travel before the Jews to lead them, but we don't understand the commencing words, "And God went before them". Clearly, God does not travel, and He is not "in" the cloud: being metaphysical, He cannot occupy space. We are forced to derive another idea from these words.

My understanding is that God intended the two pillars to display His "relationship" with us. Ramban on this verse says so clearly, as he quotes Moses' later plea that God not destroy the Jews after the spies rejected entrance to Israel. Moses pleaded that if God would kill the Jews for this sin, a catastrophe would follow: the ruin of God's reputation. Moses anticipated the response of the nations at God's destruction of the Jews: "God was incapable of bringing the Jews to the Promised Land, and He slaughtered them in the desert".

(Num. 14:16) And earlier, Moses said why the nations would conclude this: "For your clouds stand by them, and in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day, and in a pillar of fire by night". (ibid 14:14) Moses means to say that God's intimate relationship with the Jews is undeniably seen in the miracles of these pillars. This proves the Jews' fate is due to God. "And when You kill them", Moses says to God, "it will ruin your reputation." This substantiates the earlier verse "And God went before them by day in a pillar of cloud..."

We learn that with the two miraculous pillars, God demonstrated His constant providence over the Jews. But as we said in a previous article, cloud represents the veil that separates us from God: "...for man cannot know Me [God] while alive" as this week's parsha Ki Sisa teaches. (Exod. 33:20)

Manna / Table & Showbread

For what reason did God include a Sabbath law in the Manna? For example, laws governing ritual slaughter or affixing mezuzah contain no integral Sabbath prohibitions: we know not to perform these commands on the Sabbath, based on "Sabbath" prohibitions. But the Manna's very laws contained a prohibition not to collect it on the Sabbath. This could have been easily understood once laws prohibiting carrying on Sabbath were given, and need not be an additional "Manna" law. Why this superfluous law?

Furthermore, Manna miraculously doubled on Friday. All other days, whatever amount was collected of the Manna, naturally remained that amount unless diminished by household consumption. But when the Jews collected Manna on Friday, they found that it doubled its volume when they measured it at home. This was to cover their needs for both Friday and the Sabbath so they need not gather it on Saturday when it did not rain Manna. We must say that Sabbath is integral to Manna. The question is how? I believe the answer is as follows.

Knowledge of God as "Creator" gives us the conviction that since God created everything, He is in control of everything. And with Manna, God intended to raise the Jews to the level where they were reliant upon God for their very sustenance; "They shall need Me every day". (Ibn Ezra, Exod. 16:4) The lesson that God created everything – the Sabbath's message – plays a primary role in Manna. The Jews were forced each week to ponder why they could not collect the Manna, and why it miraculously doubled. They contemplated God as Creator, and also, as Provider. This is an essential lesson, one that even today's orthodox

(continued on next page)

(Temple continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

communities have yet to learn. People feel they risk their income if they give the proper 20% tzedaka, or if they work less and learn more as stated in Pirkei Avos. But both, tzedaka's optimum amount, and Pirkei Avos are rejected, lest Jews have less money...an error.

The realization that God "has many messengers" to sustain us, is not accepted. The forfeiture of time at the office is so difficult, and the need for security so strong, that the lesson of Manna was institutionalized in Temple, in the form of the Table displaying the twelve loaves of Showbread. Manna was even commanded to be placed in a jar for future viewing as evidence of God's abilities to provide. It would teach doubting Jews that just as God provided Manna, He can provide you with your necessary income. And in relation to tzedaka, again the Torah says, "And test Me with this". God promises to "open the storehouses of heaven (providence) and empty out a blessing more than enough". (Malachi 3:10)

Just as the Manna was presented daily encased in upper and lower layers of protective dew, so too the Table presented the Manna in a well-laid out presentation. This is to drive home the point of just how easy it was/is for God to provide the millions of Jews with their daily sustenance. We have no grounds for abandoning Torah study, just to earn more. Again, Pirkei Avos teaches that we are to minimize our work, and maximize our study. And God does not say to do so, if this will cause starvation. God's blessing in Malachi is secured for all those who dedicate themselves to true study. (See also Maimonides' last law in Shmitta and Yovale)

A further embellishment of the Sabbath in the Manna/Showbread, is seen in the law that the Menora was placed directly against the Table...a spatial parallel. Thereby, the idea of the Mesora – 7 branches indicating creation – imbued the onlooker with the idea of the Creator, as Menora literally shone upon the Table. In other words, our security in God's provided sustenance (Table/Showbread) is derived from the fact that God created all (Menora).

Why is this lesson of "God the Provider" so fundamental that God taught it through Manna, and in Temple through the Table and Showbread? It is because the perfection of man is based on his convictions, not only his theories. One who gives charity far surpasses one who praises it, but doesn't give. A human's convictions are only true when man acts upon them. And as it is God's wish that every person reach perfection, God deemed it essential that the one area of life most difficult – parting with our wealth – be institutionalized in the "Museum of God's Providence", the Temple. It is when man can part with his wealth and truly is convinced God will care for him, that man has reached the level God desires.



Menora / Pillar of Fire

Its seven branches clearly allude to the seven days of Genesis. Menora is integrally tied to the Incense Altar. As we said, man must accept that he has no knowledge of what God is. So both Menora activities of lighting and cleaning the ashes are joined with the services of fumigating an incense cloud: demonstrating conviction in our blindness. But although blind to "what" God is, we do know He is the Creator, and the source of our lives and sustenance.

We might summarize these lessons as follows: Menora defines our God as the God of Creation, the 7 branches parallel 7 days of Creation. The Table and Showbread teach us of God's omnipotence; that He is powerful enough to sustain us. And the Incense Altar conveys the idea as the verse said, that God "goes before us by day and night". God is cognizant of us, or omniscient.

We see these ideas are so vital, they form our High Holiday prayers of Malchios and Zichronos: God is king (omnipotent) and knows man's actions (omniscient). If you ponder for a moment, don't all God's action fall under one of these two headings? Yes, these two truths are the defining categories of all that man can know about God.

Menora is essential, as is Baruch Sh'Amar, our daily blessing's commencing prayer. We must always be reminded of the defining idea of God – Creator. But once we recognize this truth, we must also recognize the attributes of God, and they are that He is all powerful, and all knowing. Everything else will be subsumed under one of these two categories. Knowledge of God is essential...not just for the Jews who exited Egypt, but for all generations. Therefore, we have Temple for all time. Now we come to a final amazing idea...

God vs. Moses

Earlier, we noted a highly fundamental distinction. God performed many miracles: some with, and some without Moses' involvement. And we said it is quite intriguing that those very miracles where Moses was excluded, exactly parallel those vessels found in the Holies. God alone created the pillars of fire, cloud, and the Manna. And these parallel Menora, the Incense Altar, and the Table respectively. Why is this?

Perhaps, as Temple is to teach us of truths regarding God, there must not be any involvement of man in those miracles. So God did not instruct Moses to do any act to bring the pillars, or the Manna. These miracles relate fundamental ideas of God. Knowing truths about God requires no action: we must simply study until the idea resonates with complete clarity in our souls. But perhaps with regard to the 10 Plagues, the bitter waters of Marah, and the splitting of the sea when the Jews cried for their lives seeing Egypt race towards them, an example of the correct "human" reaction was required. Therefore, Moses was instructed by God to partake in all those miracles. The onlooker must recognize that a Moses is unaffected by these calamities, thereby teaching that those who are affected, should aspire to be as Moses.

A "model" (Moses) was required when it comes to teaching Egyptians that their "acts" of idolatry are false; that the Jews "cries" at the red sea were not warranted; and that the bitter waters were not intended to parch the Jews...but to instruct them that "God is their healer". The rule is that when man's "actions" are flawed, God sets up an example of the proper human response, using Moses. But when God wishes to imbue the Jews with correct "ideas about God", Moses must be absent. The focus is God alone, as the lesson is concerning God, not man.

Therefore, only those miracles aiming to teach us about God, are the miracles referred to in Temple...the "Museum of God's Providence". In such a place, reference to man is antithetical. ■

Gold *the* calf



RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

Moses ascended the mountain to have a rendezvous with God to learn first hand the teachings of the Torah and then to transmit them to the Jewish people. Instead Moses descended to a nation of idolaters rather than a people committed to accept a moral law based upon their intellectual conviction. The Torah explains the reason for this transformation. In Exodus 32:1, the Torah tells us that the people saw that Moses tarried from coming down the mountain and that this precipitated their desire to build a golden calf. Rashi explains that the nation miscalculated the day of Moses's descent. Moses advised the people that he would return in forty days. Moses was not counting his departure as day one. He meant forty complete days, thus his return would be on the forty first day, which is the seventeenth of Tammuz. Therefore their calculations were erroneous by one day. Rashi teaches us that as a result of this miscalcula-

tion, on the sixteenth of Tammuz, Satan came and brought confusion to the world, and showed the Israelites a vision of thick darkness. This caused them to say, "Moses is definitely dead", and it ignited their desire to serve other gods.

Upon analyzing this Rashi, two basic questions must be asked: What compels Rashi to utilize Satan as the vehicle for their confusion? Their mistake in determining Moses's return was based upon their erroneous calculations. This alone should have been sufficient justification for their concluding that Moses was dead and was not returning. Furthermore, Aaron devises different schemes to hinder their attempts to serve different God's. Why didn't he simply advise them of their mistaken calculation? Aaron certainly was aware of the proper count or at the very least recognized their mistake.

We must appreciate that the Israelites had recently been liberated from Egypt. In Egypt they were exposed to, and influenced by, the pagan practices of that society. Therefore, they still had an attraction to the primitive, and were still subject to the insecurities of the instinctual part of their personalities. The entire event of Moses ascending the mountain to speak to God was to them, a mystical phenomenon. They were in great awe of this unique experience. Thus, when they saw the thick darkness, rather than attributing it to bad weather conditions, their emotions overwhelmed them. They had visions of Moses' failed mission which image was bolstered by their miscalculation. The Satan, as Maimonides teaches us, is the same as the yetser harah, man's evil inclinations. Their emotions, which were fostered by their insecurities and primitive proclivities, caused them to conjure these fantastic ominous visions. Chazal teach us that they saw an image of Moses in a coffin. This manifests, that they were regressing into the depths of their imagination. They were so overwhelmed by the mystical, that Chazal felt compelled to point out this image, to demonstrate that their total perception of reality was distorted.

Upon their concluding that Moses had died, the Israelites expressed their desire to make many gods that would lead them. Their need for a god was simply a need for security to fill the void that Moses' ostensible departure created.

Rashi notes that they desired many gods. This again reflects the primitive emotion they possessed. They had desires for different gods, to cater to each of their diverse needs. Their basic insecurities and trepidation's were expressed by their desire for different gods, that would satisfy all their personal whims and grant them a sense of security.

The insight the Torah affords us in delineating the story of the Golden Calf is extremely relevant. Modern man might think that these are paganistic emotions to which he is not susceptible. However, one need only observe Christianity to recognize the strong hold the emotion for idol worship has, even today. They idolize a physical statue which represents a human being whom they view as God. Objectively, it may seem absurd, but yet its appeal attests to mans primitive desire for the security of the physical.

(continued on next page)

(Ki Tisa continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

Chazal appreciated the strength of these emotions. Rabbi Akiva did not want to learn that the "Et" of "Et Hashem Elokecha teerah", as including Talmidei Chachamim because of this emotion. The deification of man is idol worship. Rabbi Yishmael argues and states that is includes the Talmid Chacham. The respect the Torah envisions for a scholar, is not for the individual per se, but rather the Chachma which he acquired. He is the embodiment of an individual who utilized his Tzelem Elokim for its true objective.

It would seem that Aaron also underestimated the strength of these emotions. Aaron recognized their clamor to create new gods as reflective of their primitive emotions. He recognized the futility in trying to demonstrate the error of their calculations. The nation was no longer operating under their intellectual faculty. The primitive behavioral patterns to which they were subject in Egypt, were exerting their influence over the nation. The mixed multitude whom departed Egypt with them, provoked much of their regression. Rashi advises us that the Mixed Multitude (not descendants of Abraham) used their 'magic'(1) to create the calf. In fact, they initiated this entire service and the Israelites followed. The Mixed Multitude had a greater yearning for the security of the physical as a means to relate to God. They therefore utilized the magic they learned in Egypt. Magic is not some supernatural force. It too requires a discipline, where one learns to switch the apparent relationship between cause and effect to which we are accustomed. It therefore is fascinating because it distracts the observer who is amazed since it does not function in accordance with standard causal relationships.

Aaron took an active role in the making of the Golden Calf. However, the role Aaron played was really a result of careful analysis. In reality he did not try to facilitate its construction but rather attempted to hinder its completion. He analyzed the behavior of the Israelites and tried to deal with them based upon their state of mind. He recognized a step by step regression in their rational faculty as they became under the grip of this overwhelming emotion. Aaron's observations are expressed in a Midrash quoted by Rashi. Aaron observed several things. He saw the Israelites kill his nephew Chur, who tried to rebuke them. He observed and concluded that it would be better if the Israelites transgression was ascribed to him rather than to them. He also concluded that if they built the alter on their own, it would be finished immediately. He therefore undertook its



construction hoping to tarry in his work, in order to delay them until Moses arrived. Aaron had recognized that their behavior patterns reflected the powerful sway of their emotions. The first thing the Israelites sought was a substitute leader. This reflected their need for the security of the physical. He requested their ornaments in an effort to appeal to their greed. This was essentially a delay tactic. He assumed that they would be reluctant because he thought that their greed would deter their actions. However, the Torah teaches us "Vayitparku" they readily removed all their jewelry. He thereby recognized and appreciated the overwhelming and dominating effect of these emotions as evidenced by the alacrity with which they responded to his request for their valuables. Thereafter, he observed that they killed Hur. This represented that they were no longer functioning with even a scintilla of rationality. They could not tolerate Hur's rebuke and their murderous actions evidenced their total identification with the calf. He thus observed and concluded that at best, he could only slow their progress. Any attempt by him to have halted the construction of the calf would have been futile, and surely would have caused them to regress to the depth of their primitivism.

A precursory review of his actions would indicate that he was helping them, however a more scrupulous investigation as articulated, reveals his true intentions. He desired that their guilt be ascribed to him in order to assuage the guilty feelings they would experience upon Moses' return. If the Israelites felt absolute culpability because of their actions, their feelings of guilt would render them incapable of doing Teshuva.

God still finds fault with Aaron's action. Exodus 32:23 states, "And when Moses saw that the people were broken loose for Aaron had let them loose for a division among their enemies." This criticism is lodged against Aaron for one can not make compromises with idol worship. The emotion is so powerful that if one allows it to be expressed in his behavioral patterns, it will ultimately dominate his actions and destroy him. Moses upon his return took extremely drastic measures. He openly expressed outrage and threw the tablets to the ground and shattered them. He thereby gathered to his side the Levites, who killed three thousand men. Moses' extreme actions were purposeful to demonstrate that one can not compromise nor tolerate with the emotion for idolatry. The basic philosophy of Judaism is antithetical to these type of emotions. ■

Thought



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