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## Weekly Parsha

## Weekly Parsha



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Houston	5:54	Phoenix	5:57
Jerusalem	5:09	Pittsburgh	5:39
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Los Angeles	5:20	Sydney	7:27
London	5:01	Tokyo	5:07
Miami	5:57	Toronto	5:33
Montreal	5:06	Washington DC	5:29

## Weekly Parsha

# Ki Tisa

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And *Bnai Yisrael* will observe the *Shabbat* to perform the *Shabbat* for their generation as an eternal covenant. Between Me and *Bnai Yisrael* it is an eternal sign that Hashem created the heavens and earth in six days and on the seventh

(continued on next page)

# BEYOND *the* Gold Calf

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

Much of this week's parsha centers around the incident of the Gold Calf, with the commentaries spending a great deal of time elucidating the more difficult concepts surrounding this event, as well as the lessons learned. Obviously, this marked a turning point for the nation and the enormity of what occurred as well as its repercussions make it easy to get caught up in the major plot. However, as in many instances, it is sometimes the smallest detail, a simple phrase that offers incredible insight into a pivotal moment.

With the completion of the Gold Calf, the Torah tells us (Shemos 32:6):

"They arose early the next morning, and offered burnt-offerings and brought peace-offerings. The people then sat down to eat and drink, and got up to amuse themselves."

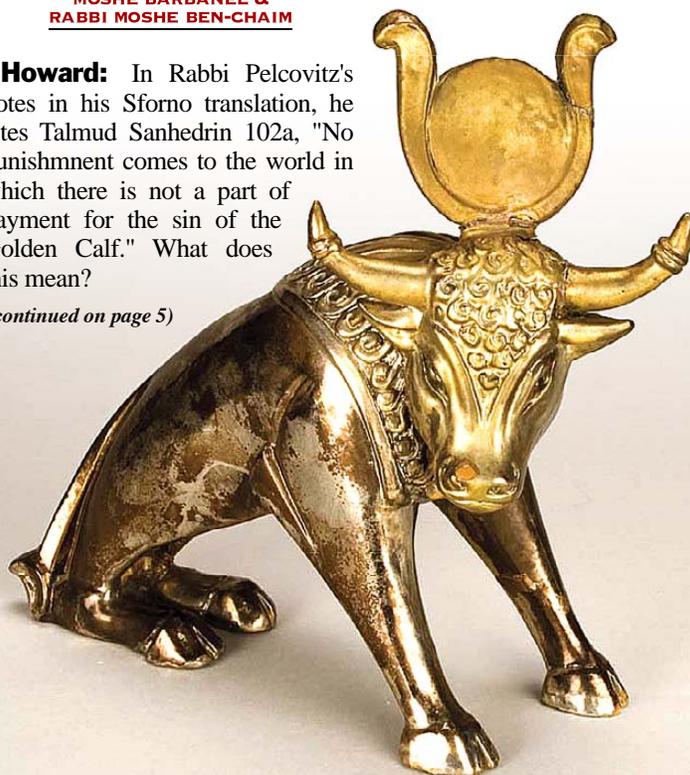
(continued on page 4)

# We Pay *for* Their Sin?

MOSHE BARBANEL &  
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Howard:** In Rabbi Pelcovitz's notes in his Sferno translation, he cites Talmud Sanhedrin 102a, "No punishment comes to the world in which there is not a part of payment for the sin of the Golden Calf." What does this mean?

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(Ki Tisa cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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day He ceased and He rested. (Shemot 31:16-17)

### The Shabbat morning Amidah's reference to Shabbat

Parshat Ki Tisa reviews again the commandment of the Shabbat. The above passages are the final two passages of this section of pesukim. They were selected by our Sages for inclusion in the Shabbat morning Amidah. There are two ideas expressed in these passages:

- Shabbat commemorates that Hashem created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day.
- Through observance of Shabbat, we fulfill a covenant between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael.

It is interesting that our Sages selected these two passages for inclusion in the Shabbat morning Amidah. In selecting these passages, the Sages skipped over a prior set of passages that are the Torah's initial commandment regarding Shabbat. These prior passages are in the Decalogue – the Aseret HaDibrot. In the Decalogue, Hashem commanded Bnai Yisrael to observe the Shabbat.

*Remember the day of the Shabbat to sanctify it. Six days you should labor and perform all of*

*your work. And the seventh day is Shabbat to Hashem your G-d. Do not perform any work – you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maid servant, and your convert in your gates. For in six days Hashem made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all within them. And He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, Hashem blessed the Shabbat day and sanctified it. (Shemot 20:8-11)*

The message of these passages is similar to the message of the pesukim in our parasha. Shabbat was given to us in order to commemorate the creation of the universe from the void. Why did the Sages pass over the Decalogue's passages in favor of those in our parasha?

If we consider the sentences in the Shabbat morning Amidah that precede the Torah passages, the Sages choice of pesukim is even more perplexing.

*Moshe will rejoice with his gift-portion. For a trusted servant You called him. A crown of glory You gave when he stood before You on Mount Sinai. Two stone tablets he brought down in his hand. And written in them is observance of Shabbat and similarly it is written in Your Torah. (Shabbat morning Amidah)*

This introduction emphasizes that the commandment to observe Shabbat was inscribed by Hashem upon the Tablets of the Decalogue given to Moshe. We would expect these introductory remarks to be followed by the recitation of the Decalogue's commandment to observe Shabbat. But instead, after noting the inclusion of Shabbat upon the Tablets, we are directed – almost apologetically – to the passages in our parasha![1]

The commentary Iyun Tefilah explains that although the Sages are noting the centrality of Shabbat through emphasizing its inclusion in the Decalogue, their selection of passages from the

Torah for inclusion in the morning Amidah was dictated by the message following these pesukim.



*And Hashem our G-d did not give it to the nations of the land. Our King did not give it as a portion to those who serve false gods. Neither do the uncircumcised dwell in*

*its rest. Rather, to Your nation Israel You gave it in love – to the descendants of Yaakov that You selected. (Shabbat morning Amidah)*

### The exclusivity of the relationship between Shabbat and Bnai Yisrael

The message of these sentences from the Amidah is that although the message of Shabbat is universal – that the universe and all within it are the creations of Hashem – the observance of Shabbat is given exclusively to Bnai Yisrael. The passages from our parasha are the perfect segue into this message. These pesukim focus upon the exclusive relationship between Bnai Yisrael and Shabbat. Shabbat was given to us alone as an expression of our covenantal relationship with Hashem. The passages in the Decalogue do not make reference to this exclusivity. [2]

The exclusivity of this relationship between Bnai Yisrael and Shabbat is not merely an abstraction. It is expressed in specific form in

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halacha. The Talmud explains that it is prohibited for a non-Jew to observe Shabbat.[3] There are a number of reasons for this restriction. But one reason is the message expressed by the passages in our parasha. Shabbat is given exclusively to Bnai Yisrael. By adopting Shabbat observance, the non-Jew lays claim to a legacy given exclusively to Bnai Yisrael.

### The difference between Taryag and the Seven mitzvot given to the rest of humankind

But why was Shabbat given only to Bnai Yisrael? Its message is universal and relevant to all humankind. Possibly part of the answer lies in a fundamental difference between the system of mitzvot given to Bnai Yisrael and the system assigned to the rest of humanity. The Torah tells us that Hashem provided humankind with two sets of mitzvot. The Torah and its 613 commandments – the Taryag Mitzvot – were revealed to Bnai Yisrael at Sinai. For the rest of humanity – the descendants of Noach – Hashem provided seven general mitzvot. This system is comprised of six prohibitions and one positive commandment. The prohibitions are against stealing, murder, idolatry, blasphemy, removing and eating the limb of an animal that has not first been slaughtered, and various forms of incest and adultery. The positive commandment is to establish a judicial system. These mitzvot have a very specific focus and function. Their observance assures the existence of a functional, meaningful society. The society that results from these laws is just; it promotes monotheism, and its members accept some limits upon their pursuit of pleasure and gratification.

However, the Torah includes an entire additional class of mitzvot. These mitzvot are often referred to as Chukot (plural of Chok) or Divine decrees. The Torah often provides an explanation for Chukot. In general, these explanations share a common theme. The Chok is designed to communicate or reinforce some fundamental message or attitude. For example, one of the central themes of the Torah is our redemption by Hashem from Egypt. This theme is communicated and reinforced through a number of mitzvot. Among these mitzvot is the celebration of Pesach with all of its various aspects. The mitzvah of mezuzah is another example of a Chok designed to communicate and reinforce a specific message. We are required to place a mezuzah on the doorway in order to remind ourselves of the commandments. Chukot are designed to educate us, refine our habits, and to encourage the integration of the fundamental truths of the Torah into our outlook. Shabbat is another of the Chukot of the Torah. It



is designed as a regular reminder of Hashem's creation of the universe and all that exists within it.

The system of commandments that Hashem assigned to the descendants of Noach does not include commandments that are designed to educate and promote ideas and attitudes. Consequently, it is understandable that the non-Jew is excluded from observing Shabbat. In other words, although the message of Shabbat is universal, this entire class and type of educational commandments is limited to the system of Taryag Mitzvot and is not included in the seven laws provided to the rest of humanity.

### Chukot are an innovation of the Torah

The Chukot of the Torah — mitzvot with an educational aim, is one of the Torah's greatest innovations. It communicates that the Torah is not merely a set of behavioral expectations. Instead, it addresses every aspect of our lives – our homes, our work, our interpersonal relationships, and even our most inner convictions, perceptions and attitudes. The Chukot are designed to impact our world view, to refine our behaviors, and to integrate fundamental Torah truths into the innermost aspects of our thinking.

We must open our minds and respond to and embrace the messages communicated through the Chukot of the Torah. If we restrict our observance of the Torah to guiding our actions but do not embrace it as a personal perspective and

world view, it loses much of its meaning and purpose. But when Torah extends beyond informing our behaviors and enters into the entirety of our lives and our very thinking, then it transforms us. We become enlightened and our innermost thoughts and feeling reflect the truths of Torah. ■

[1] Avudraham notes that the Sages reluctance to insert the pesukim from the Decalogue into the Amidah may reflect the same concern that led the Sages to object to the recitation of the Decalogue within the daily prayers. The Sages feared that this practice would lend credence to a frivolous claim of the Torah's detractors. These detractors claimed that the Decalogue is the only authentic revelation and that the remainder of the Torah is not a revealed law. (Tractate Berachot 12a and Commentary of Rashi). Perhaps, this same concern led the Sages to acknowledge that the mitzvah of Shabbat is included in the Decalogue but in demonstrating that Shabbat observance is a Torah level commandment, the Sages selected a set of pesukim that are not from the Decalogue. In this manner, they not only avoided giving undue preference to the Decalogue, but they also affirmed that there is no distinction between the binding nature of these passages and those in the Decalogue as all passages in the Torah are revealed truth.

[2] Rav Aryeh Lev Gorden, Siddur Avodas HaLev, Commentary Iyud Tefilah.

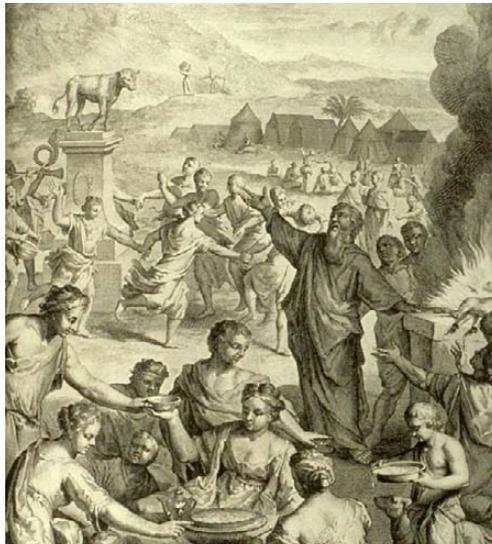
[3] Tractate Sanhedrin 58b.

The story now turns to God's communication to Moshe (ibid 7-8):

*"God spoke to Moshe, "Go down, for your people have become corrupt (shichais amcha) those whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt. They have departed quickly from the way that I commanded them, they have made for themselves a molten calf. They have prostrated themselves to it and offered sacrifices to it, and have said, 'These, Yisrael, are your gods who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.'"*

The Ramban focus is on the meaning of "shichais amcha"; however, prior to delving into his commentary on this verse, it is important to have a little background regarding his comments on the initial fabrication of the Calf. As we all know, the Torah presents Aharon as the facilitator for the creation of this calf. The Ramban (5) explains that Aaron's plan was actually a well thought out approach that might avert the potential disaster. His intent was that Bnai Yisrael, when offering sacrifices and other acts of worship, would ultimately direct these actions towards God. His hope was that Moshe would return, get rid of the Gold Calf, and the worship would then be exclusively directed to God. His plan actually was somewhat successful. Initially, the Torah tells us (ibid 6) that Bnai Yisrael "offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings," but the object of worship is not clear and is therefore not necessarily problematic. When God criticizes the nation, He explains that they "prostrated themselves to it and offered sacrifices to it." The distinction demonstrates that the entire nation was not involved in this sin, reflecting Aharon's influence. Nonetheless, a significant number of Bnai Yisrael were involved in this idolatry.

At first glance, the Ramban's analysis of "shichais amcha" is very cryptic. He explains that God told Moshe of two evils committed by Bnai Yisrael. The first is the "shichais amcha", which alludes to some type of destructive outcome to befall the Jewish people. Precedents for this explanation are found in both Yechezkel (9:1) and Yirmiyahu (41:25), where the term "hashchasa" clearly means obliteration. Of course, Bnai Yisrael were not completely wiped out due to their sin, so what exactly is this destruction? The Ramban clarifies that Chazal referred to hashchasa as "mekatzetz benetiyos", which literally means cutting off the saplings (more on this later). He then explains that the second evil committed was the actual sacrifices performed and overall worship of the Gold Calf, the idolatry mentioned above. He finally points out a further differentiation between the destruction concept and the idolatry. The first evil, the shichais amcha,



was only known by God, revealed to Moshe through prophecy. The second, which involved the actual sacrificing and worshipping, was essentially public knowledge.

The Ramban's citation of "mekatzetz benetiyos" has its source in an episode with an individual one would think completely removed from the event at hand. The Talmud (Chagigah 14b-15a) relates the famous yet extremely obscure story of the four individuals who entered the "pardes", or garden. The Talmud then describes how the time in the pardes had different effects on each of the entrants. For example, we learn that Ben Azzai died, while R' Akiva exited unscathed. One of these four was Elisha ben Avuya, known as Acher, who was "mekatzetz benetiyos" while in the pardes. Clearly this story is metaphorical, and requires some elucidation. However, as it relates to our issue, one must ask why the Ramban is making reference to this when discussing the "destruction" that emerged as a result of the sin of the Gold Calf?

The Ramban, in numerous places, offers one of the most compelling explanations regarding the incident with the pardes and the effect it had on Acher. The visit to the pardes is not to be taken as a literal stroll through the garden. Instead, it refers to an intellectual pursuit of abstract metaphysical ideas, an engagement in areas of yediyas Hashem – knowledge of God – beyond the scope of the average person. The Ramban warns (Hilchos Yesodai HaTorah 4:13) that one must be on a high level before entering into this realm of study. In the Moreh Nevuchim (1:32), he expands on this, writing that Acher was someone who "exceeded his intellectual power." It was this that ultimately led to his downfall, which the Talmud implies was his distortion in the most basic fundamental ideas about God (i.e. – God being non-physical). This led to his being outcast from Bnai Yisrael, forever

defined as a heretic (this area requires much more analysis, not for the scope of this article).

Why then is Acher described as destroying these saplings, and how does this apply to Bnai Yisrael? One interpretation is that the destruction here refers to the corrupt view of God that emerged from the incident with the Gold Calf, analogous to the error manifest with Acher. God was explaining to Moshe the nature of the sin, which was their corruption of knowledge of God, and this was only something He could know of. However, there might an additional explanation, one that uses what would seem to be an unimportant detail. It is interesting that Chazal choose the destruction of these young shoots, rather than, say, the cutting of the trunk of a mature tree (more representative of the destruction of a fundamental idea). Acher, prior to his downfall, was a burgeoning talmid chacham, Torah scholar. His pursuit into the pardes revealed a severe overestimation of the self, leading to his heresy. His growth as a talmid chacham ceased the moment he entered into the pardes, an area of knowledge he was not ready for. His flaw resulted in the complete destruction of his potential, his definition as a talmid chacham obliterated, and the effect on his soul terminal.

This point might play a crucial role in the analogy offered by the Ramban. God was pointing out to Moshe more than just the mindset of Bnai Yisrael at the time of the Gold Calf. He was explaining to Moshe that their relationship to God had now changed permanently. In other words, He revealed to Moshe the extent of the effect this grave sin had on their souls. Their growth was now stunted as a result of this act, something that they would never recover from. How their relationship to God changed is something only within God's realm of knowledge. This could be the two evils being discussed with Moshe. First, God was telling Moshe the "hashchasa", the uprooting of a fundamental principle and its severe effect on the nation as a whole. The second evil referred to the expression of the idolatrous mindset, something Moshe would be able to assess and deal with accordingly.

When all was said and done, the sin of the Gold Calf is clearly a crucial moment in the history of the Jewish people. The mindset of the nation at the time of this grievous deed serves as a lesson for us for eternity. Yet underneath this evil lies a deeper misfortune – the permanent change in the relationship between God and Bnai Yisrael. Based on the above interpretation, the Ramban is helping us focus on this idea, a further understanding of the breadth of the sin. These two words become a window into the tragedy. ■

**Rabbi:** Let's read the complete Talmudic quote (Talmud Sanhedrin 102a):

*"Rabbi Isaac said, 'No punishment comes to the world in which there is not a fraction(1) of payment for the sin of the Golden Calf, as it says, 'And now go, take this people to where I will tell you; behold My angel goes before you. And on the day of My remembrance, I will remember their sin upon them.' (Exod. 32:34)*

A number of questions arise:

1) Exodus 32:35 states that God plagued the Jews who created the Calf. If so, what need is there for a perpetual punishment?

2) What is this idea of meting out a "fraction" of the Golden Calf sin? Why not mete out a greater measure, if it is warranted?

3) Rabbi Isaac suggests that future generations will pay the price for the Jews in the desert. But is this just? The Torah states "Each man in his own sin will be punished". (Deut. 24:16)

4) Furthermore, how is this sin different than others, in that it requires a "perpetual" punishment, while other sins do not?

5) We might also ask why God will not punish us for the Golden Calf, without it being joined to another sin. If in fact our punishment was not meted out in full when the Calf was first created, God can continue punishing us until the full measure is served, "without joining" it to another sin's punishment! But it appears this is not the case, as God says "And on the day of My remembrance, I will remember their sin upon them." We must explain what demands the punishment of the Golden Calf to be joined to other punishments.

6) What exactly was the unique nature of the sin in building the Golden Calf?

Rabbi Isaac says "No punishment comes to the world in which there is not a fraction of payment for the sin of the Golden Calf". Rabbi Isaac is saying one of two possibilities:

A) he is using this sin to underscore a sinful element in human nature, that has always existed;

B) he is teaching that this Golden Calf sin damaged man from that point forward.

I find it quite difficult to explain how a sin committed by others I never met, thousands of years before me, can corrupt me and require that "I" be punished. Based on this reasoning, I reject "B" and believe that "A" to be correct. If this is so, then even without the Golden Calf sin, there is part of human nature (pronounced to a high degree in the Golden Calf) which requires punishment, or correction, throughout time. My friend Moshe Barbanel suggested as follows:

*"Somehow the emotion that led us to sin with Golden Calf still affects man(2). That same false concept still plagues man, throughout time. We need to examine more carefully what transpired leading up to that post Sinai transgression. Then, Bnai Israel experienced a life-changing event: God "revealed Himself". I remember a friend telling me, "If God just came down and levitated this spoon I would accept that an all-powerful being existed". One time in history this actually occurred...not only to one person but to an entire nation. In fact, not only does Judaism accept revelation at Mount Sinai, but so does Christianity and Islam. But despite this awesome event, not 40 days later, the Jews and gentiles became so insecure at Moshe's absence that they forced Aaron to build them an idol. Truly amazing. (Yet most commentators indicate that it was not pure idolatry because only a small number were put the death by Moshe and the tribe of Levi.)*

*God prepared Bnai Israel for this event with over a year of education. With that education administered by the best teacher ever known: Moshe. The Jews witnessed the 10 Plagues. Each plague was designed to teach both Egyptian and Jew true ideas of God and His awesome power. Chazal state that each plague attacked different Egyptian idolatries. Sforno divides the 10 Plagues into three distinct groups with the final plague being a punishment. God required in the final plague that Bnai Israel overcome their fear of their masters and their masters' idolatry by putting aside a sheep – worshipped by Egyptians – and slaughtering that false God. Obviously this was for their perfection. They must of have suffered some type of malaise in this area. They witnessed God split the Red Sea for them. In the desert God continued to educate them. Even Revelation required massive preparation on them. Yet after all this they faltered. They looked too much towards Moshe and when he tarried for a short time (a miscalculation on their part) they became insecure. They could not relate to a non-physical God. Somehow, when man finds himself at certain cross roads, his knowledge of the Almighty becomes insecure. This allows him to falter just as the great generation did who were educated."*

I believe Moshe's answer to be right on target. Additionally, his answer addresses all of our questions.

Moshe Barbanel is saying that the sin of the Golden Calf – to a degree unmatched by other sins – embodies a particular human corruption. This corruption is primary to all sins, thereby explaining why "ALL future punishments will include a portion of punishment for the Golden Calf", or rather, for that corruption embodied in the Calf. In truth, even if the Golden Calf was never created, man always possessed that corruption. What is this corruption?

Rabbi Isaac intends to focus us on a truth concerning sin in general. To sin, man must be so overly attached to the physical world that he rejects truth and wisdom, and disobeys his Creator. This attachment was seen most acutely in the Jews after having witnessed Revelation. Right then and there, as Moshe Barbanel writes, it was truly amazing that they were capable of disobeying the Grand Orchestrator of that event, in building an idol. They could not relate to a non-physical God. They actually said to Aaron, "And Moshe the "man" who took us up from Egypt, we know now what has become of him". (Exod. 32:1) Here, the Jews confessed their attachment to Moshe the "man". So they sinned to satisfy their need for a tangible replacement. (God directs us to understand their precise sin by including the word "man")

God says, "And on the day of My remembrance, I will remember their sin upon them". He means to say that this very corruption of physical attachment is present in all sins. It is the primary culprit that leads man to sin, throughout all time. Thus, it always requires punishment, or corrective measures. We see this corruption in the heretical view "pantheism" – that God literally and geographically permeates all matter. This is man's downfall: he forces the non-physical God into his subjective physical terms. Man feels that all must fit into his tangible universe. He cannot grow intellectually and humbly accept that there is, that which he cannot fathom. So man sinfully views God on his own terms and makes Him into a dimensional being. But in this very verse, God also says He will send an angel. Why mention this here? Perhaps this intimates this very sin, expressed in their inability to have God Himself "go" with them. They are not on the level to relate to the intangible God. And God says so by sending a messenger.

At the precise moment when the Jewish nation heard a "voice of words, and saw no form" (Deut. 4:12) they denied that truth and longed for some form. That event of Revelation offered the Jews the greatest opportunity, but they faltered gravely. Now let us answer our questions with this insight.

(continued on next page)

1) If God plagued the Jews who created the Calf, what need is there for a perpetual punishment?

Answer: God punishes all generations, as we all share in this "germ" of that sin...we aren't punished for the sin per se.

2) What is this idea of meting out a "fraction" of the Golden Calf sin? Why not mete out a greater measure?

Answer: This means that man's physical attachment is "partially" the blame of sin. But to sin, man must also corrupt his thinking, commit denial, etc.

3) Rabbi Isaac suggests that future generations will pay the price for the Jews in the desert. But is this just? The Torah states "Each man in his own sin will be punished".

Answer: As we said, God punishes all generations, as we all share in this "germ" of that sin

4) Furthermore, how is this sin different than others, in that it requires a "perpetual" punishment, while other sins do not?

Answer: This attachment was seen most acutely in the Jews, after having witnesses Revelation and despite this, creating a tangible object to replace Moshe. The gentiles were those who said "This is your god".

5) Why will God not punish us "for the Golden Calf", without it being joined to another sin?

Answer: Because we are not being punished for the Calf, but for following the underlying emotion responsible for the Calf, present in all sins.

6) What exactly was the unique nature of the sin in building the Golden Calf?

Answer: Man's inability to abandon his physical attachments and forcing his definition of God to conform to the physical realm.

Thank you to Howard for this question, and to Moshe Barbanel for the answer. ■

(1) Literally, "a 24th part of an overweight of a litra".

(2) But this emotion predated the Golden Calf sin. Rabbi Isaac merely points to this sin as the case par excellence that embodies a certain corruption in man. This corruption is the attachment to the physical. Whereas other causes of sin might be lustful urges, ignorance, anger, etc., the sin of the Golden Calf is primary a sin of tangibility.

## GOLDEN CALF: Good or Bad?

RABBI ARI GINSBERG

This week's parsha, Ki Sisa, depicts one of the largest blunders in Jewish history, the worship of the Gold Calf. This transgression and its effects were so horrendous that it threatened the very existence of the nation of Israel. However, Moshe Rabeinu displayed his leadership in begging Hashem for mercy, and thereby saved klal yisroel from imminent destruction. Many integral lessons and concepts are gleaned from the dialogue between Moshe and Hashem regarding the fate of klal yisroel. One seemingly peculiar exchange between Moshe and Hashem presents Moshe threatening Hashem in order to procure the salvation of the nation. What right did Moshe have to approach Hashem in a threatening manner? Isn't it disrespectful to communicate with Hashem in an aggressive way?

The aforementioned exchange between Moshe and Hashem occurred the day after the tribe of Levi had exacted justice on many of those who had worshipped the Gold Calf (Shemos 32:32-33). Moshe says to Hashem, "And now you can bear the burden of their (Bnei Yisroel) sin, and if not, erase me from the book you have written." Hashem responds, "he who has sinned toward Me, is the individual I will erase from My book." What is the "book" that Moshe and Hashem are referring to in their conversation? Rashi on these pesukim explains that the "book" refers to the Torah, and Moshe is thereby asking Hashem to erase his name from the Torah. However, many of the other commentators (Ramban, Sforno, Chizkuni) say that the "book" which is referenced, is the book of life. Moshe was therefore asking Hashem to take his life in the event of the destruction of klal yisroel. Thus, Moshe was demonstrating his love and dedication to the nation by tying his fate with the fate of the people. The Sforno gives a slightly different and very insightful understanding of the back and forth depicted in these pesukim.

According to the Sforno, Moshe was asking Hashem to transfer some of his personal merits from his book of life, in order to cancel out the severity of judgment and punishment applied to klal yisroel. Hashem retorts that each person is rewarded and punished for their personal deeds, and furthermore, a positive act cannot replace a transgression. Therefore, Moshe's request to

swap his good deeds for their bad deeds was denied. The perception of reward and punishment presented by Moshe would appear to be foolish at first glance. To say that a righteous person could transfer his deeds to some supremely evil individual would create many uncomfortable and obviously unjust situations. Could a righteous person transfer their merits to Hitler, Haman, Nevuchadnezzar...in order to cancel out their deserved punishment? What then was Moshe's request?

Perhaps Moshe's perspective of the sin of the Gold Calf was somewhat different than a typically negative viewpoint. Moshe recognized that his own perfection and closeness to Hashem was elevated due to the event of the Gold Calf. He was able to learn about Hashem's attributes, perceive Hashem on the highest possible level of mankind, and live on the level of an angel in the presence of Hashem as a result of klal yisroel's need for a savior. Therefore, Moshe viewed the sin of the Gold Calf as a catalyst for his own perfection, as well as a means of providing the world with valuable knowledge about Hashem. As such, he believed that the Jewish people should be judged in a different light because of the good that had emerged from the event of the Gold Calf. Hashem however responds that reward and punishment is based on an internal evaluation of the person's soul, and not a recounting of their actions, or the positive effects of those actions. This method of judgment is unique to Hashem, in that no human is able to assess the internal state of another. Only Hashem is capable of looking at each person and realizing the effects of sin and good deeds on the soul.

The transgression of worshipping the Gold Calf leads to an understanding of reward and punishment on a deeper level. The Sforno points out that the exchange between Moshe and Hashem was a conversation about the nature of reward and punishment. Moshe's initial perspective was that nature of an action could potentially be viewed differently as a result of its outcome. However, Moshe was shown that actions are merely a reflection of the person's internal framework. This aspect of man is what is judged and given either a reward or punishment. ■

## Parshas KI TISA

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

*Written by a student*



*the*

# GOLDEN CALF



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 miscalculation, 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.

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

*(continued on next page)*

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. ■

#### Editor's Notes

(1) Magic is explained as slight of hand by Saadia Gaon. Judaism accepts there are no other powers but God alone.



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*Parshas*  
MISHPATIM

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

*“Super”  
Miracle*



NO FOOD

OR

WATER



Mishpatim concluded with recounting Moses' 40-day communion on Sinai without eating or drinking. Ibn Ezra states that this miracle surpassed all others prior. What is the superiority of this miracle? There were other amazing events, such as the sea splitting, the pillars of cloud and fire, the manna and of course, the Ten Plagues. How does Moses' not eating or drinking surpass all others?

Examining all other miracles, we find very remarkable occurrences that cannot be duplicated: water turned into blood, life forms engulfed Egypt, water is parted, food miraculously appears on the ground for 40 years, and fire mixes with ice. Yet, not in one of these do we find an inherent contradiction. That is, all of these miracles – although we know not how they were created – possessed no conflicting properties. Even fire can coexist with frozen substances for a while. Once blood took the place of the Nile, it was simply blood. There were no conflicting laws in the "transition" to blood. In fact, the fish died as they should when immersed in blood. Once the various life forms entered Egypt, they followed laws that were not conflicting. There was no conflict with God's delivery of locusts by wind. Darkness, frogs, beasts, boils and even death of the firstborns were inexplicable, but possessed nothing in themselves that were conflicting. Manna is a perfect food that produced no human waste, following natural principles. And we are also told that it was through wind that the sea parted. An extreme case of natural forces, but no conflict of properties. Even the seabed was dried via wind, which follows natural laws of dehydration.

But for a human organism where food fuels its systems of respiration, blood circulation, and digestion, to go without food; and yet these systems still operated...this is a conflict! All of these systems functioned in Moses, despite the lack of fuel they each required: food and water. Perhaps this is the element Ibn Ezra saw as unique.

Having come thus far, we must ask that if this is so, what demanded such a miracle in connection with Moses' communion with God on Sinai? The one idea that occurs to me is that this event embodies the objective of creation. Earth appears to exist for man's benefit. For he alone perceives the Creator. To underline this primary objective, the greatest miracle is performed when the greatest man is approaching God's wisdom. This was Moses on Sinai. At this level, God relates to man in a degree that surpasses all others. The greater the miracle, the greater the level of the one receiving that miracle. A wise Rabbi once lectured on the difference between Moses' miracles and those performed for Elijah. Moses, being supreme, endured 40 days and nights with no food, while Elijah required a meal at the beginning to sustain him.

But there is more...this miracle has a design. The design is that a man in pursuit of wisdom is not in need of the physical world. This underlines another idea, that man is primarily intellectual. This is our truest nature, as our soul is what survives this physical existence. The soul requires no sustenance other than God's wisdom. This substantiates the belief in the Afterlife. ■

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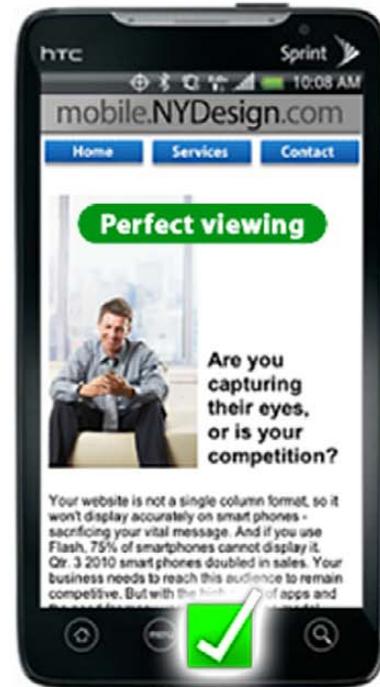
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