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AHARON HAKOHEIN AND YAROVAM BEN NEVAT by Tani Greengart ('18)

Parashat Ki Tisa contains the famous story of Bnei Yisrael creating an Eigel HaZahav (golden calf) at the base of Har Sinai. The entire story is difficult to explain, but perhaps the most perplexing part of it is the role of Aharon HaKohein. According to an explicit reading of the Torah, it is Aharon, the brother of Moshe Rabbeinu and future Kohein Gadol of Bnei Yisrael, who is approached by the people to make an idol, who tells the people to bring gold, who builds an altar for the idol, and who creates a festival the next day. After the fact, Moshe criticizes Aharon for his actions, but it does not appear that Aharon is ever punished for them.

Is Aharon forgiven for his role in the Eigel? If he is, why? And if he is not forgiven, why is he not punished?

In order to answer this question, we will examine an analogous situation to that of Aharon: the dilemma of King Yarovam ben Nevat when he splits the northern kingdom of Yisrael from the southern kingdom of Yehudah. At first glance, Yarovam does not seem at all analogous to Aharon, as Yarovam is regarded as one of the worst Jews ever (see Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:2). Yet we shall see that at the beginning of his kingship, Yarovam shares some remarkable traits with Aharon.

Yarovam ben Nevat has a unique character arc in Sefer Melachim. King Shlomo, impressed by Yarovam's work ethic, appoints him over all the forced labor of Shevet Yosef. Then Yarovam rebels against Shlomo under unclear circumstances and is chosen by God to replace the Davidic dynasty as king of Israel (Melachim I 11:26-39). After Shlomo dies, Yarovam demands that Shlomo's son Rechavam lower taxes, but when Rechavam refuses, Yarovam takes control of the northern ten Shevatim, creates his own priests and holiday (Melachim I 12:2-33), and becomes one of the worst kings Yisrael ever had.

In order to compare Yarovam to Aharon, it is essential to first understand why Yarovam rebels against Shlomo and what merit he has to be chosen by God as king in the first place.

The Navi tells us precious little about the reason for Yarovam's rebellion against Shlomo, only that Yarovam rebels because Shlomo builds the "Millo, closing the breaches of the City of David" (Melachim I 11:27). The Gemara (Sanhedrin 101b) explains that the Millo is a section of the wall of the City of David

that Shlomo builds in order to decrease the number of entrances to the City, allowing his wife, the princess of Egypt, to charge an entry toll.

Why does this bother Yarovam so much? Perhaps the answer stems from Yarovam's job as manager of the forced labor of Shevet Yosef. Since Shlomo's forced laborers consist primarily of non-Israelites that Bnei Yisrael were unable to eradicate from the land (9:21), a major source of Yarovam's workers would be the city of Gezer, which is located in the land of Yosef and is populated by Canaanites whom Shevet Yosef was unable to wipe out but was able to enslave (see Yehoshua 16:10). Or at least it was populated by Canaanites, until the Egyptian princess comes along. As a dowry to Shlomo on behalf of his daughter, the Pharaoh of Egypt conquers Gezer, kills all the Canaanites that live there, and sets the city ablaze (Melachim I 9:16).

Shlomo may see this as a favor, but to Yarovam ben Nevat, it is a disaster on two accounts. First, many of his workers are now dead. And second, it shows how vulnerable his land is to attack. From Yarovam's point of view, Shlomo needs to rebuild Gezer as quickly as possible. But Shlomo takes his sweet time, using forced labor to build the Beit HaMikdash, royal palace, and wall of Yerushalayim, and to fortify the cities of Chatzor and Megido, before finally rebuilding Gezer (9:15). But the most infuriating thing that Shlomo builds before rebuilding Gezer is the Millo, built with forced labor for the sole purpose of helping the daughter of the man who destroyed Gezer in the first place.

Along the same lines, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 101b) notes that the reason Yarovam merits the throne is that he criticizes Shlomo for prioritizing his Egyptian wife's desires over the people's need for easy access to the City of David and the Beit HaMikdash within.

It is now clear who Yarovam is before his rise to royalty—he is a self-made man who was born into obscurity with no father but rises to prosperity through hard work. He becomes a popular leader who seems to have plenty of economic and political knowledge and a strong sense of right and wrong. This is exactly the type of man who *should* be Shlomo HaMelech's successor, and the prophet Achiyah HaShiloni anoints Yarovam as such.

It now seems much more sensible to draw a comparison between Yarovam ben Nevat and Aharon HaKohen. Both men are popular leaders who protest to the ruling power (Pharaoh for Aharon; Rechavam for Yarovam) because their people are subjected to too much forced labor. And both men are put in difficult situations where they are forced to choose between following Halachah and maintaining peace in the nation.

Aharon's situation occurs when Bnei Yisrael, having lost faith that Moshe will return from Har Sinai, approach Aharon and demand that he create a replacement god for them. According to the Midrash, Bnei Yisrael get so out of control that

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they murder Chur, Aharon's right-hand man, when he refuses to acquiesce to their demands (VaYikra Rabbah 10:3).

Yarovam's situation is not identical, but it shares some striking similarities. The ten northern tribes lose faith in the leadership of Rechavam and approach Yarovam to replace Rechavam as their king. The northern tribes get so out of control that they murder Adoram, Rechavam's tax collector (Melachim I 12:18). Yarovam feels that if he does not drastically differentiate his kingdom from that of Rechavam, he will be the next one killed (Melachim I 12:27).

At this point, I believe that Yarovam, recognizing the dire nature of his situation, looks to the Chamishah Chumshei Torah for a precedent—and he finds one. Following the paradigm set forth by Aharon, Yarovam builds golden calves for the people to worship, referring to them as “your god, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt” (Melachim I 12:28)—a verbatim quote of what Bnei Yisrael said about the original Eigel HaZahav (Shemot 32:4). Yarovam brings the incense-offering himself on his altar (Melachim I 13:1), just as Aharon once did in the Mishkan. He declares a new holiday (Melachim I 12:32), just as Aharon did by the Eigel (Shemot 32:5). Yarovam even names his sons Nadav and Aviyah (see Melachim I 14:20 and 14:1), names nearly identical to those of Aharon's first two sons, Nadav and Avihu.¹

But Yarovam goes too far. In his paranoia, he doesn't realize the differences between Aharon's situation and his own, and he doesn't recognize the subtle ways Aharon tried to delay the people as long as he could. Aharon was forced by the people's demands to create an idol, and if he refused, he would have been killed like Chur. Yarovam is also dealing with an angry mass of people, but they are angry at Rechavam, not at him, and nobody even suggests worshipping idols before Yarovam decides to build them. To delay the people, Aharon asked them for gold, assuming that they would be reluctant to give it, and he called the festival for the following day in the hope that the fervor would die down. Yarovam shows no such hesitation. These are the first mistakes of Yarovam, beginning his downward spiral.

But the true difference between Aharon and Yarovam is what happens next, when they are confronted about their sins. When Moshe accuses Aharon of bringing sin upon the people, Aharon explains the situation and honestly recounts his role in the Eigel. Aharon accepts responsibility for doing what he did, and he is therefore remembered as one of the greatest Jews ever. Yarovam is a completely different story. When a man of God confronts Yarovam, saying that his non-Levite priests will be killed and his altar broken as a result of his sin, Yarovam lashes out, commanding that the man be seized (Melachim I 13:4). Yarovam does not explain the situation, nor does he recount what he did. He takes no responsibility for his actions and is therefore not forgiven for them.

This sad irony of Yarovam is highlighted in the last story in Tanach about him. Aviyah ben Rechavam, king of Yehudah, stands on a mountain and denounces Yarovam by pointing out one specific fact: “You banished the Kohanim, sons of Aharon, and the Leviyim ... but we have not abandoned Hashem, and the Kohanim, sons of Aharon, and the Leviyim serve” (Divrei HaYamim II 13:9-10). Perhaps Aviyah chooses this specific insult because he understands the irony—Yarovam tried so hard to emulate Aharon HaKohein, but because of his inability to admit his own wrongdoing, he ends up exiling Aharon's own descendants.

We can learn a powerful lesson from Yarovam ben Nevat and Aharon HaKohein. Hashem is willing to forgive one-time sins, especially sins that result from difficult situations, because even the greatest people are not perfect. But what separates good people like Aharon from chronic sinners like Yarovam is the ability to accept responsibility for one's actions, to put those actions in the rearview mirror, and to continue to live life as it is meant to be lived.

“Kiyemu VeKibelu”: PURIM AS A RECTIFICATION OF THE CHEIT HA'EIGEL

by Shmuel Ross ('18)

While the holiday of Purim has four Mitzvot HaYom, namely Keriat HaMegillah, Mishteh, Mishlo'ach Manot, and Matanot Le'Evyonim, the main theme of the day is Kabbalat HaTorah (the acceptance of the Torah). The Gemara (Shabbat 88a) explains that at Ma'amad Har Sinai, Hashem held the mountain over the Jewish people and told them that if they didn't accept the Torah, they'd be killed on the spot. The Gemara continues that BneiYisrael reaccepted the Torah willingly during the time of Achashverosh, based on the phrase “Kiyemu VeKibelu,” “They upheld and they accepted” (Esther 9:27).

This Gemara can give us a better understanding of the account of Cheit HaEigel found in Parashat Ki Tisa. After the ten Makkot, Keriat Yam Suf, and Matan Torah, how could BneiYisrael commit such an abominable sin? Perhaps it was because the original acceptance of the Torah was forced upon them. Since this wasn't a genuine acceptance, once the moment passed, Bnei Yisrael returned to their lowly, idolatrous ways which they had practiced in Egypt. Therefore, a later generation of the Jewish people needed to reaccept the Torah in order to amend the original Kabbalat HaTorah.

A much stronger connection exists between the two events, and it further elaborates how the events of Purim rectified both Matan Torah and the events that followed it. The Pasuk in Ki Tisa explains that the reason for the Cheit HaEigel was due to Moshe's “delaying” on Har Sinai: “VaYar Ha'am Ki Vosheish Moshe LaRedet Min HaHar” “When the nation saw that Moshe was late in coming down from the mountain” (Shemot 32:1). Bnei Yisrael were unaware of Moshe's whereabouts. Consequently, a group of people approached Aharon and asked him to create new “gods” to replace Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah recounts the details of the construction of the Eigel HaZahav, along with

¹I am indebted to Rabbi Neil Winkler for pointing out this specific connection as well as for introducing me to the general patterns of similarity between Yarovam and Aharon.

BneiYisrael's subsequent sin of dancing, eating, drinking, and offering Korbanot around it.

As the Pesukim explain, it was the delay of Moshe Rabbeinu that caused the episode of the Cheit HaEigel. (Whether Moshe was actually delayed, or the nation merely became impatient is a separate discussion.) Clearly, when action is delayed, unfortunate events occur. The converse motif is found in Megillat Esther. Once Mordechai heard about Haman's evil decree, he explained to Esther that if she did not act as soon as possible, she, her family, and the entire Jewish nation would be murdered. Esther jumped into action immediately and eventually sabotaged Haman's plan, thus saving the Jewish people. While Moshe Rabbeinu's delay led to the nation's spiritual downfall, Mordechai and Esther's awareness and Zerizut (agility) saved the entire nation from destruction. It also resulted in the new and improved Kabbalat HaTorah.

While the Cheit HaEigel undid the original Kabbalat HaTorah, the holiday of Purim accomplished the exact opposite. Moshe's perceived delayed behavior is contrasted to Mordechai and Esther's swift action in a time of desperate need. The Rama (ShulchanAruch O.C. 695) explains that unlike the food and wine in which BneiYisrael indulged during the Cheit HaEigel, Bnei Yisrael drink wine and enjoy food at the Purim Seudah LeSheim Shamayim (for the sake of heaven). The Rama also writes that prior to the Seudah, one should learn Torah to actualize the theme of the day: the re-acceptance of the Torah. In a sense, the Talmud Torah corrects the sins of our ancestors who failed to truly accept and internalize the Torah's ideals and values.

SURPRISE! GUESS WHAT, I AM NOT JEWISH, SAID THE ROOMMATE! PART TWO

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Introduction

Quite a number of years ago, I received a call from a single woman who told me that a former roommate informed her as she was leaving the shared apartment for the last time, that she was not a Jew. She explained that she was a conversion candidate and posed as an observant Jew in order to learn how to live as a Jew. The woman who called now had to deal with a host of Halachic issues, especially the Kashrut standards of her and her two remaining apartment mates residence. In our last issue, we set forth why it was necessary to Kasher almost all of the cooking utensils in the apartment. This week we shall deal with the question of whether she should inform the local rabbinate of the former roommate's deceitful behavior.

The Severe Prohibition of Lashon HaRa

The Rambam (Hilchot De'ot 7:1-6), outlines three general categories of prohibited speech: Rechilut (telling stories about another even if they are true and contain nothing negative), Lashon HaRa (spreading true negative facts about others), and Motzi Shem Ra (spreading false negative information). In order to emphasize the severity of gossiping about others, he writes, "It is a severe sin and causes the destruction of many lives." He

proceeds to cite a passage from the Gemara (Arachin 16b) that equates one who speaks Lashon HaRa with one who rejects the existence of God. The Gemara further compares Lashon HaRa to murder, adultery, and idolatry combined.

Elsewhere, the Gemara indicates just how restrictive the prohibition of Lashon HaRa can be (Yoma 4b). It rules that if someone shares information with a friend, the friend may not repeat it without receiving express permission to do so. As a source for this principle, the Gemara refers to the manner in which God spoke to Moshe in the opening verse of VaYikra, "Hashem spoke to [Moshe] from the Tent of Meeting to say (Leimor)² [to the children of Israel]." We see that God explicitly authorized Moshe to repeat what He had told him, implying that, absent this authorization, Moshe would have been forbidden to tell the nation what he heard from Hashem.³

Moreover, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 31a) teaches that a judge who informs a litigant that he voted against the majority opinion when a Beit Din (rabbinic court) issues a split decision, violates the prohibition of Rechilut. The Gemara adds that Rabi Ami once expelled a student from the Beit Midrash (religious study hall) for revealing a secret twenty-two years after it occurred.

Unfairly Harming a Shidduch

A prime area of concern for Lashon HaRa is in the context of Shidduchim (potential marriage partners). In some cases, revealing a flaw to someone's prospective spouse or parents-in-law clearly constitutes Lashon HaRa. Dayan Weisz (Teshuvot Minchat Yitzchak 6:139) forbids someone from telling his friend that a prospective groom for the friend's daughter committed a grave sin in his youth. Dayan Weisz explains that, as far as was known, the young man had never repeated his sin and instead devoted his time to Torah study, so his past sin did not reflect traits or habits that remained with him and might negatively impact his marriage.⁴

Certainly, one may not exaggerate minor flaws in a manner that unnecessarily harms a Shidduch. The Chafetz Chaim (in a section added to Hilchot Isurei Rechilut 9) decries the fact that people often tell a young woman's family about her prospective groom's personality in a manner that depicts him in an unfairly negative light. Specifically, the Chafetz Chaim comments that people routinely describe young men as simpletons or fools simply

²The word *Leimor* could also be translated as "saying," but here the Gemara interprets it as "to say."

³We have followed the Maharsha's explanation of this derivation (*Yoma* 4b s.v. *Shehu*). Also see Rashi (*Yoma* 4b s.v. *Shehu*), who offers a different explanation. For a summary of the need for permission to repeat what one heard from another person, see Rav Michael Taubes's *The Practical Torah* (pp. 212-213)

⁴Dayan Weisz restricts his ruling to a situation of a **one-time** sin, which has not affected the groom's basic character. In the same responsum, he also discusses whether to reveal that a prospective groom **repeatedly** sinned if he has since repented, as well as what to do when the friend does not know if the groom has repented.



because they lack the sharpness to outsmart sly individuals. Such a portrayal sometimes causes a young woman's family to reject a particular candidate, even though his "foolishness" reflects admirable honesty, and he might in fact possess other intellectual gifts. Those who talk about such a person as a fool, thus focus on an extremely minor shortcoming, which should not affect the Shidduch, and exaggerate it to the point where it prevents a potentially wonderful husband from finding a wife.

"Do Not Stand Idly By"

Despite the severity of speaking Lashon HaRa, one is sometimes permitted or even obligated to reveal others' flaws. The Rambam (Hilchot Rotzeiach 1:14) writes: *"Whoever can save another individual [from an assailant] and fails to do so violates the Torah's prohibition, 'Lo Ta'amod Al Dam Rei'echa', 'Do not stand idly by while your brother's blood is being shed' (VaYikra 19:16). Similarly, if one sees someone drowning in the sea or sees that robbers are attacking him or a wild animal is pouncing on him, and one can save him... but fails to do so... one violates this prohibition."*

The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 426:1) cites this passage from the Rambam almost verbatim. Consequently one must balance the prohibitions of Rechilut and standing by idly, by not revealing insignificant flaws while also not remaining silent about major flaws. The Netziv (Ha'ameik Davar, VaYikra 19:16) explains that Hashem placed the prohibitions of Rechilut and standing by idly in the same verse in order to clarify when one should not speak Rechilut. Their juxtaposition indicates that despite the prohibition to gossip, one nevertheless may not remain silent about information that can save another person from danger.⁵

The Chafetz Chaim's Guidelines for When Lashon HaRa is Permitted

In accordance with the above passages from the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, the Chafetz Chaim (ibid.) rules that one must reveal a serious flaws to those who might be negatively impacted. However, he cautions that one must first determine that the flaw in question warrants revelation (ibid., Be'er Mayim Chaim 8). In a number of places, the Chafetz Chaim lists several criteria for judging whether one may divulge information (Hilchot Isurei Rechilut 9 and Hilchot Lashon HaRa 10:2). Based on his criteria, one should examine six points before revealing any questionable information:

- 1) Is one certain that the information is completely true?
- 2) Is the flaw so significant that the parties involved must hear about it?
- 3) Does one intend to reveal the information purely to help those who must hear about it, or do malicious or vengeful desires taint one's motivation?
- 4) Will the information likely affect those who hear it? If they will most probably ignore the news anyway, then one may not reveal it.
- 5) Is one presenting the information accurately? One may not exaggerate the information at all.

⁵This insight is also attributed to the Netziv's grandfather-in-law, Rav Chaim of Volozhin (cited in *Teshuvot VeHanhagot* 1:879).

6) Does any alternative exist to achieve the desired goal without revealing the information?

Application to the Conversion Candidate

In addition to the insensitivity shown by the conversion candidate to her apartment mates, she had a Jewish boyfriend about whom she did not inform the Beit Din. I concluded that since this woman exhibited considerable disrespect towards the Beit Din and the three women, it is both appropriate and necessary for the women to inform the Beit Din about the conversion candidate's behavior in regards to the roommates and about the boyfriend. The Beit Din, in turn, would then shoulder the responsibility to process this information and decide how to proceed in this case. I cautioned the women, though, that their report to the Beit Din should not be done out of revenge for the mistreatment they received at the hand of this woman (consistent with the aforementioned guidelines of the Chafetz Chaim), but solely for the sake of the integrity of the conversion process.

Conclusion

Lashon HaRa is a very serious matter. Experience indeed teaches that, as taught in Mishlei (18:21,) *Mavet VeChaim BeYad HaLashon* - life and death are in the hand of the tongue. Nonetheless, in certain limited circumstances Lashon HaRa is warranted and mandated. Moreover, conversion candidates are to be treated with utmost flexibility, sensitivity and kindness as modeled by Hillel (Shabbat 31a). However, *"Eizehu Mechubad? HaMechabeid Et HaBeriyot"*, *"Who is respected? Those who respect others"* (Avot 4:1). The machinations and manipulations of this particular candidate could not and should not, in my opinion, be ignored. It was a rare situation where Lashon HaRa was necessary. It is hoped that the Beit Din effectively addressed these concerns with this woman, and that she took the words to heart to become a valued and contributing member of our people.

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