

*u'pakaditi*, fully, and how we continue to exhibit a faithlessness akin to the manner exhibited with the creation of the Golden Calf, it is necessary that we try to understand the actual sin, so that we may clearly observe its present mutation.

It is understood that the nation that followed the lead of the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, in constructing the *eigel ha'zahav* was misled in error and incognizant of the gravity of its sin. That was the beginning. As in all sin, once the breach has been made, the follow-up becomes justifiable in the eyes of the sinner, for he has found excuses for his malevolent behavior. The people sought tangibility in their service, something or someone corporeal to which they could relate. Not everyone is capable – especially following 210 years of Egyptian slavery, culture and idolatry – to establish mental focus on a Supreme Being, a monotheistic G-d, whom they cannot see or hear. It is a process which they were circumventing. They did not realize that there are no shortcuts in achieving spiritual ascendance.

We do not require images, be they temples made of mortar and steel, to define our worship. Hashem is a personal G-d Who can be reached from wherever we may find ourselves. The use of an image in order to foster awareness is outrageous to us. The *shul* -- or any religious edifice for that matter -- exists for the pure utilitarian purpose of service as a place of assembly.

We may ask, why then did Hashem command us to construct the *Mishkan* which was to serve to atone for the *eigel*? If image is wrong, if it reeks of paganism, what is there about the *Mishkan* and the *Keruvim*, which were images, that is different? This question is asked in the *Kuzari*, and the answer defines Torah Judaism. He writes: "Their only sin was in their use of an image and making use of a choice of symbol entirely on their own, without first being told to do so by a *tzivui* Hashem, a command from G-d."

The *Mishkan* teaches us (and this is one manner in which it atones for the sin of the *eigel*) that we may relate to Hashem only as He defines, not as we want. We do not worship Hashem according to our intellect, whim or fancy. We serve Him obediently in the manner that He commands us. We do not serve Hashem in a manner that makes us feel "good", "close to Him". We serve at His pleasure and dictate. Thus, the *Keruvim*, which are images, are not only permissible, they are critical to the construction of the *Mishkan* – because Hashem has so commanded. Perhaps this is why the *Keruvim* are fashioned from the same ingot of gold as the *Kapores*, Cover of the *Aron*. This teaches that such an image is part and parcel of the *Mishkan*, because it is Hashem's command. When man acts of his own volition, in response to his own intelligence, it is an *eigel*.

Anyone reading these lines understands that we are alluding to one of the major issues plaguing our people: religious pluralism. There is only one way to serve Hashem, as dictated by Him and interpreted by our Sages. Anything less than complete obedience to the word of G-d is self-worship as defined by the *eigel ha'zahav*. Interestingly, the

worshippers of the Golden Calf had no qualms concerning defiling themselves through their profligate behavior. They "served" Hashem by debauching themselves before an idol. As long as we ascribe to similar forms of the self-worship evinced by the *eigel hazahav*, we will be relegated to suffer the consequences of our actions – or inactions!

## Va'ani Tefillah

הרוצה בתשובה

### HaRotzeh b'seshuvah – Who desires repentance.

We say in *Tefillas Neilah*, the closing prayer of *Yom Kippur*, *He'chafotz echpatz mos rasha...ha'lo b'shuvo midrachav v'chayah*, "Do I desire at all the death of the wicked man? Is it not rather his return from his ways that he may live?" (*Yechezkel* 18:23) Hashem indicates that *teshuvah* is His priority, using the word *cheifetz* to express His desire for *teshuvah*. Yet we conclude the blessing, expressing His desire as/ *rotzeh (b'seshuvah)*. What is the difference between *cheifetz* and *rotzeh* and their individual application to the *pasuk*?

*Horav Moshe Leib Shachar* distinguishes between *cheifetz* and *rotzeh*. *Cheifetz* is the desire for the object or individual endeavor – specifically, with no ulterior motive. *Rotzeh* is to want something as the result of ulterior reasoning. Thus, *rotzeh* can likely change, since reasons change, while *cheifetz* does not change, since it is not bound by ulterior reason. *Teshuvah* is not a constant situation; it applies only when a person sins. Thus, the blessing concludes, *rotzeh b'seshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is not an end to itself. It is a necessary process for the sinner to undergo- but only a sinner. Had there been no sin, there would not have been a reason for *teshuvah's* creation. Thus, *Melech chafetz ba'chaim*, "a King Who desires life." Hashem wants life due to life's value. Life in its own right is significant. Hashem does not desire (*cheifetz*) the death of the wicked. He absolutely wants life – not death. He wants *teshuvah (rotzeh)* as an ulterior to punishment. No sin – no *teshuvah*; hence, *ratzon*.

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## Parashas Ki Sisa

תשע"ז

פרשת כי תשא

זה יתנו כל העבר על הפקודים מחצית השקל בשקל הקדש

**This shall they give – everyone who passes through the census – a half-shekel of the sacred shekel. (30:13)**

Why was *Klal Yisrael* commanded to contribute a half-shekel coin? Would it have been so difficult to give a whole shekel? This question has been treated extensively by the various commentators. The gist of their commentary focuses on the need for each individual Jew to view himself as a mere half. No Jew is whole, alone and in and of himself. *Horav Yoshiyahu Pinto, Shlita*, offers a powerful insight into the half-shekel requirement. He explains that a Jew should view every occurrence, every circumstance, every issue that he faces, as being only half of the story. Another side to the story always exists. Whatever he might be going through right now is only part of a larger picture. With *emunah* and *bitachon*, faith and trust, in Hashem, he will understand the "rest of the story".

Numerous stories and parables have received written and oral expression, which emphasize this verity. I have selected a classic culled from the *Kisvei*, writings, of *Horav Chaim Vital, zl*, which he redacted from his revered *Rebbe*, the holy *Arizal*. A story of this caliber from such a source increases its authenticity and should enrich and ennoble our *emunah*.

Yosef was a young married man who, together with his younger brother, would visit their widowed mother after *shul* on Friday night. They entered the house to notice their mother reading a *Tehillim* that had belonged to their father, who had passed away two years earlier. When their mother looked up from the *sefer*, they noticed that her eyes were damp from crying. Yosef looked at her and said, "Imma, two years have passed since our father left us. Why are you still crying? It is enough! *Imma*, it is time to move on. Hashem made a decision. We must abide by it." Their mother rose from her chair and said, "Yosef, you are right, but I cannot forget. I cannot stop crying. I miss him so much. I will make a special attempt especially for you to put a smile on my face and live with joy."

They spent some time together and bid one another *Gutt Shabbos*. The mother retired to bed in a much better mood than she had been in some time. Soon she began dreaming of an exquisite garden filled with the most beautiful, fragrant flowers. As she stood there in awe, an old man with a long, white beard appeared and asked if she wanted to see her late husband. "Certainly," she said, and she followed him to a clearing where a large group of (what appeared to be) righteous men were listening intently to a *shiur*, lecture, being rendered by a young man. She looked closely and was shocked to see that the young *rebbe* was none other than

her late husband.

"My husband, why did you leave me at such a young age? How are you able to teach Torah to the righteous ones in *Gan Eden*?"

"Let me explain to you," he began. "The world in which you live is but a place where *gilgulim*, transmigrated souls, are sent to complete the spiritual repair of their lives. The real world is up here. During my first sojourn in life, I was a great Torah scholar. Because of my overriding desire to learn Torah, I refused to marry and raise a family. It would be too time-consuming. When I came here I was told that I had failed to fulfill the first *mitzvah* of the Torah. Thus, I was compelled to return to marry and have a family – but only long enough to set my sons straight on the path of Torah. Once this was achieved, I was called back."

"Why does our son not have good fortune in his business ventures?" she asked. "Do you remember that Yosef was involved in a *din Torah*, litigation, with another Jew? Well, although he won, the other fellow was very angry and was about to take revenge against Yosef. My prayers on Yosef's behalf succeeded in sparing him, but at the expense of his financial success. The decree against him will have reached its designated time in one more year, when his ventures will take an about-face."

"Why does our son, David, have such difficulty in finding his appropriate match?" she asked. "His *zivug*, match, is presently only thirteen years old. She will move to your city in five years, at which time they will 'meet' and become engaged."

"One last question: Why did our youngest die at the age of three at the hands of a gentile alcoholic? This was such a tragedy for us. Why?" she asked.

"Our youngest son was the *gilgul* of a great *tzaddik* who, at birth was kidnapped from his parents and raised by gentiles. Later on, he was redeemed and grew up to be a Torah luminary. Those few years during which he had nursed from a gentile, however, prevented his soul from ascending to its rightful position in *Gan Eden*. It was necessary for it to return in the body of our son, to nurse from a righteous woman, for which position you were chosen."

"But why did his death have to come through such tragic circumstances?" she asked. "Our son was destined to die at a young age regardless," he explained. "A great decree against our community was decreed in Heaven which would have annihilated it. Our son's *neshamah* was chosen to serve as atonement, thereby averting disaster for our community." He concluded his dialogue, saying to his wife, "You must move on. An appropriate match has been proposed for you. You should marry him, and you will be blessed with a happy, long life. Your suffering is over." She woke up from her dream with a

new, refreshed feeling, understanding that it was truly time to move on. This is not an isolated incident, but one, which occurs constantly to each and every one of us. We just require greater insight and belief in order to confront the challenges of life.

ךך את שבתותי תשמרו

**However, you must observe My Shabbosas. (31:13)**

*Tishmoru* is written in the plural, implying that the exhortation to observe *Shabbos* is being spoken to a group. The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, commented, "It is not enough that you and your household observe *Shabbos*. You must see to it that other Jews also observe *Shabbos*." Thus, it is not a singular command. Rarely do we find the Torah instructing us not only to personally observe, but also, to see to it that our observance influences others. I write this specifically because our observance, our valuing *Shabbos*, our sensitivity to this *mitzvah* is the only way the alienated Jew will ever come to appreciate *Shabbos*. When he sees how much it means to us: externally, our changed demeanor both in the way we dress and the way we act; and internally, our being at peace with ourselves, with our family, suffused by the glow and warmth of *Shabbos*, then it will imbue him with second thoughts.

*Shabbos* attests to Hashem as the Creator of the world. As He "worked" for the Six Creation days, He "rested" on the Seventh day. We are to emulate the Creator. *Shabbos* is an eternal sign between Hashem and His People. To profane *Shabbos* is to deny the sign, to eschew the bond created by this relationship. *Sforno* observes, regarding the admonition not to build the *Mishkan* on *Shabbos*, *Ach es Shabsoasai tishmoru, ki os he Beini u'beinchem*, "However, you must observe My *Shabbosas*, for it is a sign between Me and you," that if we damage, undermine and ultimately destroy the *ose*, sign, of *Shabbos*, there will be no reason for Hashem's Divine Presence to rest among the Jewish People. In other words, one primary contingency in building the *Mishkan* is that *Shabbos* be respected and observed. If there is no *Shabbos* – then there is no need for the *Mishkan*. The two go hand in hand with one another.

The sacred nature of the *Mishkan* applies as well to the *Bais HaMikdash*. Therefore, the imperative that *Shabbos* be observed as a contingency for warranting Hashem's Divine Presence holds true as well for the *Bais HaMikdash*. Our *Batei Mikdash* are gone, with a mere reminder of those glorious days and that magnificent edifice -- the *Kosel Maaravi*. Should we not accord the remnant of what is left of the *Bais HaMikdash* with equal respect? Hashem's Presence is inextricably bound up with *shemiras Shabbos*, Sabbath observance. It is, therefore, perplexing and hypocritical that those who long ago eliminated *Shabbos* from their religious preferences would battle for their own form of ritual observance, which is inconsistent with *halachah*. Why bother? Why is *Shabbos* any less of an important ritual? A building is a holy place only as long as that edifice serves as a repository for holiness. One cannot sever their religious relationship with Hashem, the Source of Holiness, and expect the *kedushah* to be available for him.

לדעת כי אני ד' מקדשכם

**To know that I am Hashem, Who makes you holy. (31:13)**

*Chazal (Shabbos 11:B)* teach, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'I

have a good (very special) gift in My treasury (where I keep My precious treasures). It is called *Shabbos*. I wish to give it to *Klal Yisrael*. Go and inform them.'" *Shabbos* is a precious treasure that Hashem saved especially for His children. We must learn to appreciate the unique nature of this gift, and, above all, how much it means to Hashem. The *Tzaddik, Horav Avraham, zl, m'Porisav* related in the name of the *Chidushei HaRim*, the meaning of, *Leich v'hadiam*, "Go and inform them" (which Hashem said to Moshe). *Leich* implies to go in the future. This means, says the *Gerer Rebbe*, that every *Erev Shabbos*, Moshe *Rabbeinu* himself goes to every Jew and informs him that *Shabbos* is coming. This implies that regardless of a Jew's geographical position – both physical and spiritual – the distance notwithstanding – Moshe will notify him that *Shabbos* is arriving. Thus, every Jew is able to sense the *kedushah*, holiness, of *Shabbos* when it arrives. Anyone who has ever reached out to an unaffiliated Jew and invited him for *Shabbos* will notice a certain sense of calm, a spiritual uplifting which overcomes him when he experiences his first *Shabbos*. This applies to every Jew, every *Shabbos*, everywhere.

The *Bais Avraham m'Slonim* once visited Teveriah. On *Shabbos* morning, after *davening*, he sat at the table together with his *Chassidim*. They had recited *Kiddush*, and potato *kugel* was brought out to the table. The *Rebbe* (as is customary) divided the *kugel* and gave *shirayim*, small portions, to each *chasid*. They began to grab for the *kugel*, which annoyed the *Rebbe*. He related the following story (in way of conveying a lesson to them).

The holy *Horav Shmelke, zl, m'Nikolsburg*, was well-known for his generosity. He would give everything that he had to the poor. As a result, he was the primary address to which to turn for those in need. One day, a man who was obviously a victim of abject poverty stood by his door with his hand out, begging for alms. The *Rebbe* was beside himself, since he did not have a cent in his house. Suddenly, he reminded himself that his wife kept her jewelry hidden beneath the mattress in her room. He went there and removed a gold ring set with a beautiful diamond. When he brought the ring to the poor man, the fellow began to dance with glee and left.

The *Rebbetzin* was coming up the walk and noticed this poor man who was all smiles, and she began to wonder what could her revered husband have given him. They had nothing at home. When she discovered what *Rav Shmelke* had done, she screamed, "That ring is worth three hundred rubles. The poor man has no idea what you just gave him! He will go and sell it for a few pennies!"

Immediately, *Rav Shmelke* ran out and searched for the man. When he caught up with him, he said, "I just wanted you to know that the ring that I gave you is worth hundreds of rubles. Do not sell yourself short." (Obviously, there is an important lesson concerning *tzedakah*, charity, to be derived from here, but that is not the focus of this thesis.)

That *Shabbos*, *Rav Shmelke* related the incident to his *Chassidim*. In summation he said, "This is what Hashem told Moshe, 'I have a special gift for you in My treasury and *Shabbos* is its name. I wish to give it to *Klal Yisrael*. Go and inform them.' What is meant by, 'Go inform them'? Hashem was teaching Moshe to see to it that the Jewish People understand the extraordinary significance of *Shabbos*. They should learn to appreciate its value – not to give it away for a piece of *kugel*! There is much more to *Shabbos* than

*Kiddush* with its many palate-friendly foods. *Shabbos* is a holy day reserved for achieving spiritual ascendancy, for taking stock of our lives and charting a course for spiritual success in the following week. It certainly is not about *kugel*!"

ידא העם כי בשש משה לרדת מן ההר ויקהל העם על אהרן ויאמרו אליו קום עשה לנו אלהים

**The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, "Rise up, make for us gods!" (32:1)**

One error, one simple mistake was all that was needed to precipitate *Klal Yisrael's* tragic rebellion, their egregious demonstration of infidelity-- the construction of the Golden Calf. How did a people who had recently received the Torah under circumstances that were unreal become so faithless, almost overnight? It was all due to a mistake, an error in judgment. They thought that Moshe was to have been back, but they erred. Once they exhibited fear, *Satan* was certain that he had ensnared them. They were putty in his hands. He seized the opportunity and created an illusion of a deceased Moshe being carried in Heaven. This is all that was needed to break their resolve. I could understand this, had this not occurred after they had witnessed the greatest Revelation in history. After being privy to hearing the *Shechinah* and seeing such an unparalleled display of Heavenly-orchestrated miracles and wonders, they should have maintained their faith. An error, regardless of its magnitude, should not have been able to sway them.

In his commentary, *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*, quotes *Horav Moshe, zl, m'Kobrin*, who says, "A moment of *yishuv ha'daas*, serenity, calm/relaxation, is worth more than all of the money in the world." The ability to have a settled mind, to think rationally concerning the issues confronting a person, is invaluable. First and foremost, it is difficult to serve Hashem unless one's mind is tranquil and at peace. Anxiety undermines the ability to cogitate properly before Whom one stands. Without serenity, one is hard-pressed to maintain *middos tovos*, proper character traits, or success in Torah study. Furthermore, it is only when one is at peace that he may properly introspect and clarify what is truly important to him in life and the steps he must take to achieve success.

Obviously, today's society with its advanced technology does not lend itself to *yishuv ha'daas*. Life is fast-paced, and we are weighed down with obligations; the drive to earn a living sits heavily on all of us. Is it any wonder that one who, despite all of these impediments, is able to achieve a sense of quietude; has a treasure of greater value than material wealth?

Having said this, let us return to our question: How did the Jewish people, who had just received the Torah, fall under the nefarious influence of the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, to rebel against Hashem, who had just-and continued-to do so much for them? The *Lelover Rebbe (Horav Biderman)* quotes an insightful observation from the *Nesivos Shalom*, which I feel explains much of the failure of our People to stand resolute upon being confronted throughout history with the challenge of anti-Semitism. This insight explains why many (following the French Revolution) absconded and fell prey to the malevolent *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, which laid the groundwork for the scourge

of the German Reform movement.

In *Megillas Esther (9:24)*, we find that Haman *ha'rasha*, the wicked, sought *l'humam u'l'abdham*, "to confuse and to destroy them (the Jews)." The *Nesivos Shalom* explains that Haman knew quite well that he could not obliterate the Jewish People when they had *yishuv ha'daas*. When they were calm and relaxed, they were a formidable enemy whom he could not touch. Therefore, his first attempt was *l'humam*, to confuse and frighten them with his evil decrees. Then – and only then – once they were not in control of their minds, when they were not thinking rationally due to the external pressure – could he effectively try to annihilate them.

One final note. The *Lelover* cites *Chazal (Bereishis 61)*, who compare the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, aka the *Satan*, to a fly. A fly disturbs a person's serenity and peace of mind by flying into their faces and buzzing in their ears. This, too, is the *yetzer hora's* goal – to disturb our peace of mind, to agitate and create anxiety, so that we are unable to properly think.

Furthermore, flies also tend to feed on open wounds. They carry filth and disease, transmitting the germs to the wound, causing an infection, which can be debilitating. The *yetzer hora* follows a similar pattern. Once a person sins, the *yetzer hora's* goal is to see to it that the person does not repent of his sin. The *Chassidic* Masters teach, "The *yetzer hora* is not concerned with the sin – it is the accompanying melancholy that he generates that is important. Thus, the *yetzer hora* is like a fly that steals peace of mind from a person."

The Jewish nation was not a candidate for rebelling against Hashem until the *yetzer hora* confused them with a vision of Moshe's death. This brought on fear and depression. True, they were on a spiritual high, but such a high works only when the person is at ease with himself, when he is calm and serene. Once depression and melancholy set in he is fodder in the hands of the *yetzer hora* – as evinced by the *cheit ha'eigel*. Their *aveirah*, transgression, was the result of a loss of serenity, leading to an inability to think cogently.

ךך רד כי שחת עמך אשר העלית מארץ מצרים...עשו להם עגל מסכה

**Go! Go down! For your people that you brought up from the land of Egypt has become corrupt ...They hand made themselves a molten calf. (32:7,8)**

The idyllic relationship that had emerged between Hashem and *Bnei Yisrael* when we overwhelmingly accepted the Torah at *Har Sinai* changed with the sin of the Golden Calf. After the *chet ha'eigel* – nothing has been the same. Had Moshe *Rabbeinu* not intervened, it would have been – deservedly – all over. Indeed, the sin continues to dog us to this very day since, in variations, we have yet to comprehend the repeat performances we have in some way presented. *U'b'yom pakdi u'pokadeti aleihem chatasam*, "And on the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them" (ibid. 32:34). The sin of the Golden Calf cannot be completely expunged, because it left an indelible taint on the People, a spiritual malfeasance affecting the entire nation. It has not left us, as the errors in faith, which precipitated the Golden Calf, continue to plague us.

In order to understand the concept of *u'b'yom pakdi*