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פרשת כי תשא PARSHAT KI TISSA

DVAR TORAH MOSHE, THE WEALTHY TZADDIK

After G-d forgave the people for the sin of the golden calf, he told Moshe, "Fashion for yourself two [new] stone tablets," – "פסל לך שני לוחות אבנים" – The Sages, building on the verb "פסל" (fashion, carve out), say (Shemot Rabbah 46): "The remnants (פסולת) of the [precious] stones are yours. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Moshe has the right to the stones. When all of Israel was busy asking their Egyptian neighbors for silver and gold, Moshe was involved with taking the bones of Yosef out of Egypt. Moshe remained poor, but now I will give him the remnants of the precious stones and he will become rich.'"

The author of Ketoret Samim (quoted in Mayanah Shel Torah, by Harav Alexander Zushia Freedman, זצ"ל, 1897-1943) asks: Why did G-d not give Moshe his wealth immediately when the Jews left Egypt, but instead waited four months until the breaking of the tablets? His answer is that it only became important for Moshe to become wealthy after the sin of the golden calf. Why was this so?

When Moshe interceded on behalf of the people of Israel, his defense was that the silver and gold they were loaded with was too much of a temptation for Israel. The Egyptians gave them a massive amount of silver and gold before the Exodus, and Israel got even more from the spoils of the Egyptian army after the splitting of the Sea. After the sin of the Golden Calf Moshe said to G-d, "A lion does not roar after eating a container of straw but rather after eating a container of meat (Israel would not have sinned if You had not brought them so much wealth)" (Berachot 32a). Here, Moshe was acting as the defender of Israel and whether Moshe himself was wealthy or not was irrelevant, as long as he came up with a plausible defense.

However, in his position as the teacher of Israel Moshe was obligated to rebuke the people for their misuse of the gold that G-d gave them. Had he had remained poor, the People of Israel could have retorted, "Who are you to criticize us for misusing the gold? You never had such a temptation. Had you been rich, perhaps you also might have sinned." Rabbi Yochanan (Bava Batra 15b) notes a repetition in the words that open the Book of Ruth, "ויהי בימי שפוט השופטים", usually translated as "It came to pass in the days of the judges." He reads those words as saying: Israel is a nation that judges its judges. The Talmud has a colorful image for this reaction to rebuke. When one person tells another, "Remove the splinter from between your teeth," (You have something small that needs correction) the recipient of the rebuke responds, "Remove the beam of wood from between your eyes" (Who are you to rebuke me? You have a much bigger flaw yourself!). Israel could say to Moshe, "You're just as corrupt as us; you just weren't presented with the opportunity to express it."

Moshe himself had no interest in wealth (especially in the desert where all of Israel's needs were provided for), but now there was a need for him to be in a position to be able to give rebuke to the people of Israel. So G-d gave him wealth, the reward that was coming to him from four months earlier. Now that Moshe was wealthy the people were able to see that he was the same tzaddik he always was, even after becoming wealthy. Moshe's rebuke was extremely powerful; he became a role model, a wealthy tzaddik.

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SOURCE GUIDE: MOSHE'S DELAY

The episode of the Golden Calf opens with the nation seeing that Moshe's descent from the mountain was delayed. Rashi, based on Chazal's comments, explains the dynamic that led to the sin of the Golden Calf. Sources on those early moments of the sin illustrate how a problematic situation can degenerate into a serious moral and spiritual tragedy.

A. The Verses

Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai, and was to descend after forty days. But he didn't come when Israel expected him:

<p>1. Shemot 32:1 The nation saw that Moshe delayed in descending from the mountain, and they gathered around Aharon and said to him, "Get up, make us gods that will go before us. For this Moshe, the man who took us up from Egypt, we do not know what became of him.</p>	<p>שמות לב:א וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי בִשֵׁשׁ מִשָּׁה לָרְדַת מִן הַהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּמָה עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה הָיָה לוֹ.</p>
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B. Rashi's Explanation

Rashi explains why the nation thought Moshe was delayed:

<p>2. Rashi on Shemot 32:1 "That Moshe delayed" – בִּשֵׁשׁ should be explained as Targum Unkelos does, relating to delaying and lateness. It is similarly used in the expressions "His chariot is delayed" (Shoftim 5:28), and "They waited until it was very late" (Shoftim 3:25). For when Moshe ascended to the mountain he said to them: "At the end of forty days I am coming within the first six hours of the day." They thought that the day he ascended counted towards this number, whereas he had meant forty complete days, including a night and the following day. But the day he ascended did not include the previous night [and was not a complete day unit]. For he ascended on the seventh of Sivan, with forty days ending on [the very end of] the seventeenth.</p>	<p>רש"י על שמות לב:א כי בשש משה – כתרגומו, לשון איחור, וכן "בשש רכבו" (שופטים ה:כח), "ויחילו עד בוש" (שופטים ג:כה). כי כשעלה משה להר אמר להם לסוף ארבעים יום אני בא בתוך ו' שעות כסבורים הם שאותו יום שעלה מן המנין הוא והוא אמר להם שלימים מ' יום ולילו עמו ויום עלייתו אין לילו עמו שהרי בז' בסיון עלה נמצא יום מ' ב"ז בתמוז.</p>
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Moshe ascended midday of the 7th of Sivan, and the true count of forty complete days – each one a night followed by a day – would begin the night of the 8th and end at the end of the 17th of Tamuz, with Moshe to return midday of the 18th. But the nation, who mistakenly thought that the forty days would begin immediately when Moshe ascended and end after forty 24 hours periods at midday of the 17th of Tamuz, worried when he did not appear.

The Satan took advantage of their mistake:

<p>3. Rashi on Shemot 32:1 On the sixteenth the Satan came and confused the world and caused an image of darkness, gloom, and confusion, as if to say (to create the impression) that Moshe certainly died, for there is confusion in the world. He said to them, "Moshe died, for the sixth hour of the day (when Moshe said he would return) has come and he did not come," as it appears on Shabbat 89. It is impossible to say that it was a cloudy day and they were just mistaken about whether it was before or after midday – for in truth Moshe only came down on the following day, as it says, "They got up early the next morning and offered burnt offerings" (Shemot 32:6). "That should go before us" – They desired many gods. "For this Moshe, the man" – The Satan showed them an image of Moshe being carried through the air in the heavens.</p>	<p>רש"י על שמות לב:א בט"ז בא השטן וערכב את העולם והראה דמות חשך ואפילה וערכוביא לומר ודאי מת משה לכך בא ערכוביא לעולם אמר להם מת משה שכבר באו שש שעות ולא בא וכו' כדאית' במס' שבת (דף פט). וא"א לומר שלא טעו אלא ביום המעונן בין קודם חצות בין לאחר חצות, שהרי לא ירד משה עד יום המחרת שנאמר, "וישכימו ממחרת ויעלו עולות" (שמות לב:ו). "אשר ילכו לפנינו" – אלהות הרבה איוו להם. "כי זה משה האיש" – כמין דמות משה הראה להם השטן שנושאים אותו באויר רקיע השמים. "אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים" – והיה מורה</p>
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<p>"That took us up from the Land of Egypt" – And he would show us the way we should ascend. Now we have a need for gods to go before us.</p>	<p>לנו הדרך אשר נעלה בה. עתה צריכין אנו לאלהות אשר ילכו לפנינו.</p>
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Things didn't proceed as Israel expected them to. They were thrown off balance. The absence of Moshe caused a panic, and the forces of negativity – Satan – allowed their imagination to run wild. For 24 hours, Am Yisrael's defenses were down, and the story of the Golden Calf was able to unfold.

C. Alei Shur – Planning for the Unexpected

The nation's confusion and worry that touched off the Golden Calf episode illustrates the importance of a teaching that Harav Shlomo Wolbe, זצ"ל (1915-2005) develops in Alei Shur, a collection of his Mussar teachings.

Doing things in an orderly fashion, writes Rav Wolbe, reflects a strong will. This is behind a line in the first blessing of the Kriat Shema for Maariv:

<p>4. Siddur, Blessing of Kriat Shema for Maariv He orders the stars in their constellations in the heaven according to His Will.</p>	<p>סידור, ברכות קריאת שמע של מעריב ומסדר את הכוכבים במשמרותיהם ברקיע כרצונו.</p>
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Orderliness is necessary for service of Hashem and, in general, to accomplish our goals in life. But what happens when we organize and plan, but our plans are foiled by outside events that upset our equilibrium?

<p>4. Alei Shur II, pg. 322 The order we set for ourselves does not always last. There are events and urgent matters that push off our normal schedules. It is impossible to list them for they are many. They are also part of a person's life, that has fluctuations and many situations that take us out of our normal order (our plans and schedules). At these times a person is tested if he knows how to order himself. An orderly person will know how to order himself properly. He'll know what to do earlier and what later, and how to plan for what is expected. How wretched is a person who slips into the most important events of his life without order, without preparation, without control that comes with will and order!</p>	<p>עלי שור חלק ב' עמוד שכ"ב לא תמיד עומד לנו הסדר שקבענו לעצמנו. ישנם מאורעות וענינים דחופים הדוחים את הסדר הרגיל. לפורטם אי אפשר כי רבים הם, וגם זהו חלק מחיי האדם שיש בהם תנודות ומקרים רבים המוציאים אותנו מהסדר הרגיל. בתקופות אלו נבחן האדם אם אז הוא יודע לסדר עצמו. איש "מסודר" ידע לסדר את עצמו היטב: הוא ידע מה להקדים ומה לאחר, כיצד להתכונן למה שצפוי לו. מה עלוב האדם המתגלש לתוך מאורעות החשובים ביותר בחייו בלי סדר, בלי הכנה, בלי שליטה של רצון וסדר!</p>
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An orderly person has a backup plan when his original plans are thrown off. Armies have backup plans; hospitals have backup generators, and we need a backup plan for when our plans in Avodat Hashem, service of G-d, meet unexpected challenges.

Perhaps this was part of what touched off the sin of the Golden Calf. When the unexpected happened and Moshe did not return when they expected, the nation fell into a panic and got confused. When a problem came up the Satan played with our imagination, we imagined the worst, and fell into sin. The People of Israel had no backup plan for Moshe not coming down the mountain.

In this same vein, Harav Eliahu Dessler, זצ"ל (1892-1953), in Michtav Mei'Eliahu, teaches that ups and downs are a natural part of spiritual life. When people are on a spiritual high they have the illusion that it will last forever, and are then surprised and caught off-guard when a low point comes. He warns us to prepare for the downswing when we're on a high. Even in our service of Hashem we must plan for things not to go according to our plans.

AHARON, THE DEVOTED TEACHER

BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

Aharon's behavior in the episode of the Golden Calf is hard to fathom. When the people clamor for "gods that shall go before us" he orders them to give him gold. A Midrash says that Miriam's son Chur first tried to prevent the idolatry, but the mob killed him. Then they approached Aharon, who deliberated. "What should I do? They have killed Chur who was a Navi, a prophet. Now if they kill me, a Kohen, they will be immediately exiled." He could not allow the people to kill both a Navi and a Kohen.

Is Aharon merely rationalizing his fear of death? The Maharsha says that far more is happening here. The Kohen and the Navi together guide the people to connect with Hashem. If the people were to kill both, that would demonstrate irrefutably that they do not desire a relationship with Hashem, and their punishment would be irreversible.

A Navi is dedicated to the uncompromising pursuit of ideals. Aharon the Kohen loves peace and pursues peace, which always requires compromise. A Navi's focus is on what ought to be; while a Kohen toils for what can be.

Aharon reasoned: A people that has lost, has destroyed its vision of what ought to be can be rehabilitated, but only if it retains a vision of what can be.

How was Aharon to save them? The Midrash continues: This is like the story of the prince who, in his pride, took up a sword to kill the king. His teacher said to him, "Do not trouble yourself. Give it to me and I will stab him." But the king understood the teacher's motives: "Better to attach the offense to yourself than to my son."

The Golden Calf was a weapon, and in a supreme act of self-sacrifice Aharon incapacitated it by taking it into his own hands. "Better that the offense be attached to me and not to Israel." He provided leadership. He accepted the people as they were. He maintained hope.

Sin, both for the individual and for the nation, occurs when we lose our ideals, our vision. The path to teshuvah, repentance, begins only when we see, or are shown by the disciples of Aharon, that teshuvah is possible.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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at www.darchenoam.org & +972-2-651-1178
5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem

To dedicate a Shapell's Classic Daf Keshet contact
emuna@darchenoam.org

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by Rabbi Eliezer Kwass.

