

“Why Should I Fast on Tisha B'av? I've Already Done T'shuvah for the Sin that Resulted in the Destruction of Both Temples!”

or

The Golden Calf: What precipitated it, what are its after-effects, and how we can finally do the t'shuvah shalaymah necessary to put The Calf behind us

A D'var Torah by Yonason Noach ben Avraham, Minneapolis, MN

Shemos 38:21. These are the numbers of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted at Moses' command; [this was] the work of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the Kohen.

Rashi, Shemos 38:21 -- These are the numbers In this Parasha, all the weights of the donations for the Mishkan were counted -[that] of silver, of gold, and of copper. And all its implements for all its work were [also] counted. **the Mishkan, the Mishkan** Heb. **הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִשְׁכָּן** [The word **מִשְׁכָּן** is written] twice. **This alludes to the Temple, which was taken as security (מִשְׁכָּן) by the two destructions, for Israel's iniquities [The Temples were taken as a collateral for Israel's sins. When Israel fully repents, the Third Temple will be built].** -[from Midrash Tanchuma 2, Exod. Rabbah 51:3] **the Mishkan of the Testimony** [The Mishkan] was testimony for Israel that the Holy One, blessed is He, forgave them for **the incident of the calf**, for He caused His Shechinah to rest among them [in the Mishkan]. -[from Midrash Tanchuma 2]

Shemos Rabbah 51:3 – Why is the word MISHKAN (TABERNACLE) mentioned twice? Because, said R. Samuel b. Martha, the Temple was twice taken as a pledge [Shemos Rabbah 31:10¹] on their [the Israelites'] account. This is what the men of the Great Synagogue

¹ **Shemos Rabbah 31:10** – But, said God, ‘nevertheless I have made a condition with them that if they sin, the Temple will be seized in pledge,’ for it says, And I will set My tabernacle (mishkani) among you (Lev. XXVI, 11). Do not read: ‘mishkani’ but mashkuni (My pledge). This is also what Balaam said: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! thy dwellings (mishkenotheka) O Israel! (Num. XXIV, 5). Two dwellings [are referred to]. When they are standing, they are called ‘tents’, but when they are destroyed, they are referred to as *mashkonotheke* (thy pledges). ‘It is not because,’ [says God], ‘I am in debt to the heathen nations that I have pledged My tabernacle to them, but it is your iniquities that have caused Me to hand over to them My sanctuary. Were this not the case, why was I then obliged to do this? [*Rashash emends: to whom then am I indebted?*] Does it not say, Thus saith the Lord: Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, wherewith I have put her away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were ye sold, and for your transgressions was your mother put away (Isa. L, 1). [*Cf. Shemos Rabbah 35:4.*] With Moses, too, did I make this condition concerning them; as it says, “If thou lend money to any of My people, even to the poor with thee, thou shalt not be to him as a creditor” (Ex. XXII, 24); but if you transgress these commands, I will hand over two pledges, as it says, If thou at all take thy neighbor's garment to pledge --*habol tahbol*” (ib. 25).’ [*This is apparently rendered: If thou cause thy friend's garment to be taken in pledge. ‘Thy friend's garment’ is understood to symbolize the Temple, while the repetition of the verb, habol tahbol, is taken as an allusion to the two Temples.--The whole rendering, of course, is symbolic only.*] Moses asked: ‘Shall they remain in pledge for ever?’ God replied: ‘No, only Until the sun appears’ (ib.), that is, **till the coming of the Messiah**; for it says, But unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings (Mal.III, 20).

Shemos Rabbah 35:4 – Another explanation of AND THOU SHALT MAKE THE BOARDS FOR THE TABERNACLE. Why does it say FOR THE TABERNACLE? Should it not rather have said ‘into a tabernacle’? [*Since the boards were not extraneous to but actually part of (in fact, almost the major part of) the Tabernacle.*] R. Hoshaya said: Because the sanctuary stands as a pledge, [*Reading: And thou shalt make the boards lemashkon (for a pledge) instead of lamshkan (for the tabernacle)*] so that if the enemies of Israel [*A euphemism.*] became deserving of destruction, it would be forfeit as a pledge. Moses said to God: ‘Will not the time come when Israel shall have neither Tabernacle nor Temple? What will

said: We have dealt very corruptly against Thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which Thou didst command Thy servant Moses (Neh. I, 7). The fact that it says ‘*habol habalnu*’ (‘we have dealt very corruptly’) proves that the Temple had been twice seized as a pledge, for the word ‘*habol*’ is used of a pledge, as it says, No man shall take the mill or the upper millstone to pledge--*yahbol* (Deut. XXIV, 6). This is why the verse states: THESE ARE THE ACCOUNTS OF THE TABERNACLE (MISHKAN), EVEN THE TABERNACLE (MISHKAN) OF THE TESTIMONY², the word MISHKAN being mentioned twice.

Shemos 32:34. Therefore now go, **lead** the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my Angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish I will punish their sin upon them.

Rashi, Shemos 32:34 – Behold My angel But not I. But on the day I make an accounting, etc. Now I have listened to you not to destroy them all at once, but **always, always, when I take an accounting of their sins, I will also account a little of this sin with the other sins.** [This means that] **no punishment befalls Israel in which there is not part of the punishment for the sin of the [golden] calf.** -[from Sanhedrin 102a]

Ben Avraham – Rashi (Shemos 38:21) quoting Midrash Tanchuma 2, states that with the construction of the Mishkan, and the fact that The Shechinah dwelt therein, that HaShem had forgiven Klal Yisroel for the Sin of the Golden Calf; yet here we see that the forgiveness must not have been complete since HaShem would punish Israel for her sins, and include in such punishment a bit of punishment for the Gold Calf. We suggest two understandings:

1) Since Klal Yisroel had climbed back up to the level of Adam before he sinned with the “forbidden fruit,” and because they had so frivolously frittered that level away with the Golden

happen with them then? ‘The divine reply was: ‘*I will then take one of their righteous men and retain him as a pledge on their behalf, in order that I may pardon all their sins.*’ Thus too it says, And He hath slain all that were pleasant to the eye (Lam. II, 4). [*I.e. the best of the people., because of the sins of the nation.*]

Ben Avraham – Could “one of their righteous men” be a reference to Mashiach Ben Yosef? And the phrase, “*all that were pleasant to the eye*” could refer both to the Shema (“do not follow after your eyes), as well as the section on idolatry in the *Navi Yishayahu* (44:13. ...and makes it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of man; that it may remain in the house.). Cf. **Devarim 4:16.** Lest you corrupt yourselves, and make you an engraved image, the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female.... Cf. **Tehillim 106:20.** Thus they changed their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats grass! **Yishayahu 51:12.** I, I myself, am he who comforts you; who are you, that you should be afraid of a man who shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass. **Michah 5:6.** And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people like dew from the Lord, like the showers upon the grass, that do not delay for man, nor wait for the sons of men. Tehillim 103:15. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field.

² **Shemos Rabbah 51:4** – What is the meaning of testimony? Said R. Simeon, son of R. Ishmael: It is a testimony to the whole world that there is forgiveness for Israel. [*For the Tabernacle was to serve as an atonement to Israel for having made the Golden Calf. For had He not forgiven them, He would not have caused His Shechinah to dwell in the Tabernacle.*]

Shemos Rabbah 48:6 – The fact is, however, that when they made the Calf, God said to Moses: ‘Now therefore let me alone... that I may consume them’ (Shemos 32:10), to which Moses replied ‘Test them by ordering them to erect a Tabernacle.’” In the account of that degradation, what do we read? Break off the golden rings, etc. (Shemos 32:2); thus what did they bring? Ear-rings. And when they built the Tabernacle they gave the same as free-will offerings, because it says, And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing-hearted, and brought nose-rings, and ear-rings, and signet-rings, and girdles, all jewels of gold (Shemos 35:22). **It was with ear-rings that they sinned and with ear-rings that they became reconciled [to God].**

Calf, HaShem sought to remind them when punishing them for subsequent sins of the level they had once attained.

2) Forgiveness is predicated upon *t'shuvah shalaymah*. If the nation kept faltering over the same “stumbling-block” how could HaShem not punish them for that continuing sin? And what is that sin? What was the Sin of the Golden Calf? What was the continuing sin? The over-emphasis/over-reliance on Moshe as an integral part of their relationship with HaShem. This was the lesson that Moshe tried so hard to teach them, and it was the lesson that they failed to grasp. And even today (as has been our understanding for most all of our time as a Yid) Jews over-emphasize the *Mashiach* – thus we still have not done the *t'shuvah shalaymah* necessary to fully atone for the Sin of the Golden Calf, and thus we are still being punished – bit-by-bit – for that sin and the human weakness that predicated it.

Sanhedrin 102a – [A] Tanna taught in the name of R. Jose: [That time was] a time predestined for punishment. [*On that occasion Ahijah prophesied the division of the kingdom as a punishment for Solomon's backsliding.*] In the time of their visitation they shall perish: [*Yirmiyahu 51:18*] a Tanna taught in the name of R. Jose: [In] a time predestined for punishment ... Nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them: [*Shemos 32:34*] a Tanna taught in R. Jose's name: [In] a time Predestined for punishment. [*The "day" referred to is the ninth of Ab. The spies returned from their ill-fated mission on that day; God's fiat that the whole of that generation should perish in the wilderness was promulgated on that day; and the destruction of the Temple took place likewise on the ninth of Ab.*]

R. Oshaia said: Until Jeroboam, Israel imbibed [a sinful disposition] from one calf; but from him onwards, from two or three calves. [*Until Jeroboam, only the one calf which Israel had made in the wilderness was responsible for their sinning. But he added the calves of Beth-El and Dan, thus furnishing more incentives to sin.*] R. Isaac said: No retribution whatsoever comes upon the world which does not contain a slight fraction [*Lit., 'a twenty-fourth part of the overweight of a litra.' By the overweight of a litra is meant the slight addition which is made to tip the scales in the direction of the weights. The general idea is that some small portion of all punishment is due to the sin of the golden calf.*] of the first calf [i.e., the molten calf in the wilderness], as it is written, nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. [*Shemos 32:34*]

Sotah 9a – R. Hinena b. Papa expounded: What means the text: **Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; praise is comely for the upright?** [*Tehillim 33:1*] Read not praise is na'wah [‘comely’], but praise is neweh [‘a habitation’]. This alludes to Moses and David over whose works [in erecting a Sanctuary] their enemies had no power. [I.e., the enemies of Israel did not profit by any of the materials when the Temple was destroyed.]

Ben Avraham – Regarding the *Tochachah Perakim* and the destruction of the Temples by the enemies of Israel who are HaShem’s tools of chastisement.

Shmuel Beis 7:14. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with such plagues as befall the sons of men.

Vayikra 26:40. They will then **confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers** their betrayal that they dealt Me, and that they also treated Me as happenstance.

Rashi, Vayikra 26:39 -- **because the iniquities of their fathers are still with them** If they hold onto the [evil] **practices** of their forefathers in their hands.-[*Sanh. 27b*] **they will rot away** Heb. מִמָּקוֹ, an expression of melting, and has the same meaning as מָסוּ, “they will melt.” Similar is, “their eyes will melt (תִּמְקַנְהוּ) in their sockets” (*Zech. 14:12*), and, “my bruises are... decayed (נִמְקְרוּ)” (*Ps. 38:6*).

Ben Avraham – “Practices” v. “*Hashkafos*”? Is this the exception to the rule, or is this because once Klal Yisroel does complete *t'shuvah* from the Sin of the Golden Calf, that the End

Times will be upon us? We have heard that the reason that the sins are visited on the third or fourth generations is because in most cases after four generations the descendants no longer consider themselves to be Jewish. Yet here we have a “problem area” that has infected nearly all of those who are the *frumest* of *Yidden*....

Viduy: the sins/practices of the fathers have an effect on their children.... IF their children continue in their ways...!

Ben Avraham – Regarding the Incident of the Golden Calf – *our position on what precipitated that incident (giving Moshe credit for taking them out of Egypt), and our belief that the reason that when we are punished for our sins, there is an amount of punishment for the Golden Calf included with that punishment (Rashi, Shemos 32:34), is because we still have not learned the lesson of the Golden Calf: We are NOT to rely on HaShem’s “messengers,” but rather on ONLY HaShem Himself* – we will look at the ArtScroll Stone Chumash commentary:

On the *passuk* (Shemos 32:1) “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, Arise, make us gods, which shall go before us; and as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what became of him,” the ArtScroll Commentary writes: “This reference to the requested god is in the plural, implying that they desired many gods (Rashi).

This is not to say that the people denied the omnipotence of HaShem, for the rest of the verse makes it clear that they wanted a replacement for Moses, whom they described as the one who had brought them up from Egypt. Since they obviously knew all along that Moses was not an independent redeemer, but the messenger of G-d, they could not possibly have thought that Moses would be replaced by a pantheon of deities to the exclusion of HaShem. Rather, they thought that G-d assigns powers and responsibilities to subordinate powers, as it were. In their view, Moses was one such power [others were the pillars of smoke and fire that led the nation (Ramban; R’ Bachya)]; now they wanted other such surrogates of G-d. This philosophy, known as *shittuf*, Partnership with G-d, is heretical, but it is not equivalent to idol worship (*Maharsha, Sanhedrin 63a*).”

Ben Avraham – We have had discussions with *Yidden* over the Rambam’s Thirteen Principles, and whether or not one is actually a heretic if one believes contrary to those Principles. We have heard statements such as, “Not all of our sages are in agreement over whether or not one is an *apikores* if one believes something that opposes one of the Rambam’s Principles.” These statements, to us, seem to be coming from those grasping for something in the dark. It seems that the argument is, as long as one is not an *apikores*, then one can have a false belief – what a comforting thought. The same seems to go with the Golden Calf: as long as it’s merely *shittuf*, and not outright *avodah zarah*, then we can look past it. Now, we are certain that some who read these words will object to them, but these are our observations.

On the *passuk* (Shemos 32:19) “And it came to pass, as soon as he came near to the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing; and Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands, and broke them beneath the mount.,” **R’ Yaakov Kamenetsky** [is quoted as writing,] “why Moses smashed the tablets only after seeing the people dancing around the idol. When he first heard that the Jews had made themselves a Golden Calf, he tried to give them the benefit of the doubt. A huge nation felt stranded in the Wilderness – what would they feed their children the very next morning? Without a leader and an intermediary to G-d, how would they survive? Surely, he thought, they made the idol only out of desperation and wished they had not been forced to do so. But when he saw them dancing, he realized that they had not done so reluctantly at all – they *enjoyed* their worship of the idol! Then he realized that there could be no justification for their deed and they did not deserve to have the Tablets.”

Ben Avraham – However, Yoma 52a states that Israel is so blessed that they do not need an intermediary.

Another ArtScroll footnote on Shemos 34:11-26 which includes, "Observe what I command you this day... you shall worship no other god; for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God... You shall make for yourself no molten gods" states: "The passage begins *Beware of what I command you today*, meaning that G-d was emphasizing that the people must not disregard everything that He had commanded them earlier by serving idols, as they had done by worshipping the *Eigel*. The passage concerning idolatry ends *You shall not make yourselves molten gods* (v. 17), which is an allusion to the molten Golden Calf, as if to emphasize that not even for "pure motives" – such as the need for a leader – dare they repeat their earlier catastrophic mistake (Ramban). [Our emphasis added.]

Ben Avraham – We have stated over and over again that the need for the Mashiach is potentially an on-going repeat of the need for Moshe, which led to the Sin of the Golden Calf, and this Ramban seems to be, at least on the surface, in agreement with our position.

Yet another ArtScroll footnote on *Shemos* 18-26 states, "**To avoid the future downfall**. Having exhorted the people to avoid idolatry or anything that could lead them in that direction, the Torah presents a list of commandments that can help prevent such disasters as the Golden Calf. These commandments include the pilgrimage festivals and other observances that are reminders of the Exodus from Egypt, the momentous event that proved that G-d created and controls the universe and, consequently, that there is no need or justification for seeking substitutes for Him or intermediaries to Him...

Ramban notes a similarity between this passage, which was in conjunction with the giving of the Second Tablets, and the one that followed the giving of the Ten Commandments (23:17). In both cases, the Torah first warned against idol worship, and then taught that a Jew's desire to serve G-d should be channeled into the Pilgrimage Festivals.

Sforno contends that this passage stresses the agricultural aspect of the festivals and the related commandments. The message is that the road to material success and prosperity is through service of G-d, not a frantic search for omens and intermediaries."

Ben Avraham – Again, the message from our sages is clear: Seek HaShem, not His "messengers," no matter how great they may be. Rely on HaShem, as He is our only King, Redeemer, and Savior, rather than on His "redeemers" of flesh and blood, as they themselves are without power.

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