

**The Or HaChayim, Rav Hirsch,  
the Golden Calf,  
Ben Avraham & *B'ruch Shekivanti***

Yonason Noach Ben Avraham  
Minneapolis, MN

**PLEASE NOTE:** The footnotes to this paper are as important as the main text. Please read these footnotes to get a complete understanding of the points being offered.

**Shemos 32, the Chapter of the Golden Calf (paraphrased and annotated):**

“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. And Aaron said to them, Take off the golden ear rings, which are in the ears<sup>1</sup> of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them to me .. and they

<sup>1</sup> **Hints to another *Chiddush*:**

a) Only the first two commandments (dealing with *avodah zarah/shittuf*) were **heard** directly from HaShem, and not from HaShem THROUGH Moshe. Thus, in my opinion, the first two commandments are qualitatively different from the other 611 commandments. There is a Rashi that verifies this concept, that something heard directly from the Source is superior in authenticity that that which one hears through a messenger.

b) Whenever the phrases, “*Listen to the voice of the Lord,*” or “*listen to Me,*” or “*listen to His voice,*” or “*obedient to His voice,*” or “*listen to My voice,*” are utilized, it is my opinion that *Tanakh* is specifically referring to those first two commandments heard directly from His Mouth. It must be understood by the reader that it is NOT my opinion that the *passukim* containing these phrases are *not* referring to all 613 commandments, but rather it is my opinion, and the opinion of HaShem’s Torah, that to disavow *avodah zarah* is tantamount to keeping the entire Torah, and to ascribe any authenticity to *avodah zarah* is tantamount to desecrating the entire Torah, thus the *chiddush*. Please consider this *chiddush* when evaluating the following *passukim*:

**Shemos 15:26.** ...If you will **diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God**, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will **give ear to His commandments**, and keep all his statutes....

**Vayikra 26:14.** But if you will not listen to Me, and will not do all these commandments....

**Devarim 15:5.** Only if you carefully listen to the voice of the Lord your God, to take care to do all these commandments which I command you this day....

**Devarim 28:2.** And all these blessings shall come on you, and overtake you, if you shall listen to the voice of the Lord your God....

**Devarim 28:2.** And all these blessings shall come on you, and overtake you, if you shall listen to the voice of the Lord your God....

**Devarim 30:10.** If you shall listen to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the Torah, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.

**Tehillim 81:11-13.** **I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt;** open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. **But my people would not listen to My Voice;** and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, and they walked in their own counsels.

Thus, when Aaron asked for gold to make the requested idol, he did not ask them to go to their donkeys which were burdened with gold (there is a Midrash that states this), but rather he hinted to their

said, These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt ... And the Lord said to Moses, Go down; for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; They have turned aside quickly from the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, These are your gods, O Israel, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt ... And Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why does Your anger burn hot against Your people, whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? ... For they said to me, 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....”

**Ben Avraham** – During my years of studying the Sin of the Golden Calf (approximately 15 years of learning about this tragic episode in *Yiddisha* history) I slowly formulated a *p'shat* that differed from that of Rashi without being contradictory to Rashi's understanding. About four or five years ago, I began to offer my understanding to various *Yidden*, and almost without exception I was told that my *p'shat* was wrong. [Yes, yes, yes, I'm known by many to be a pain in the “*unmentionable*”, and I've been told it's my attitude<sup>2</sup> when offering my views that stands in the way of the listener hearing what it is that I'm trying to get across – but truth triumphs even my

---

error by requesting the gold from their ears. Because they had not listened to Moshe's admonishment (as understood by Rashi, Or HaChayim, Rav Hirsch, et al) in Shemos 16:6, and because they had not listened to HaShem Who had made Moshe's admonishment part of His first commandment, heard by all Israel at Mt. Sinai, but rather had followed “their stubborn hearts,” and “walked in their own counsels,” and gave voice to a *hashkafah sheker* that credited Moshe as the one who had “taken them out of Egypt,” Aaron requested the gold from their ears – as if to say, “Listen to what it is you are asking for! You want Moshe so badly, you think so highly of Moshe that you would commission an idol of gold to replace him, yet you have not even paid attention to what it is that he has been trying to pound into your thick skulls – Moshe and I are nothing – HaShem is everything! But you're not LISTENING! So clean the gold out from your ears, and think about what it is that you are asking me to do!”

<sup>2</sup> **IMPORTANT COMMENT:** Those readers who know me, and who have “lost patience with me,” need to ask themselves how much of the blame lies with me, and how much with themselves. My frustration with *Yidden* who failed to even give “the time of day” to my *chiddushim* – especially now that so many of these *chiddushim* have been verified by the Sages of Israel's past – may now be viewed as somewhat justifiable. But for those *Yidden* – many of them Rabbis who I am supposed to look to as examples, and whom I am supposed to respect – who dismissed my views without even considering them, they should – perhaps – ask themselves, “If Yonason Noach Ben Avraham is not the *Yid* I know he could be, if Yonason Noach Ben Avraham has not shown the respect to the Rabbis that he should, am I at least partially to blame?” I, Yonason Noach Ben Avraham accept blame, maybe even most of the blame, but I do not accept all of the blame!

**It might be of interest to those who have “lost patience with me,” that I recently had a telephone conversation with the executive director of a *tzeddakah* organization that was collecting money for Purim. After I donated, I asked this *Yid* if he would allow me to use him as a “test case,” for some of my conclusions, seeing that he did not know me from Adam. He said yes, and then I proceeded to explain my concepts of *Moshe Mishugas* and *Mashiach Mishugas* to him. He asked a few questions, but mostly he listened – for almost 25 minutes. And at the end he asked, “Have you written any of this down?” as if he wanted to be able to study my assertions more carefully. He actually listened, and was basically convinced about the validity of my *hashkafos* – and there was no yelling involved! He never told me “I am nothing.” He never told me to “Leave him alone and never call him again.” He never tried to offer apologetics, but rather considered my points and – seemingly – agreed with my conclusions. Image that, Ben Avraham can be reasonable – but (it seems) only when dealing with reasonable people who are willing to listen not to himut rather to the understandings of some of our most revered Sages who have turned almost every one of his *chiddushim* into *b'ruch shekivantis*.**

impatience with *Yidden* who are as stiff-necked about their understanding as I am about mine!] At the time that I began to “shop my *p’shat* around,” the only major commentary I had learned was Rashi, and my *chiddush* was based upon his commentary, as well as the hermeneutical principle that “Written Torah interprets Written Torah/ Scripture interprets Scripture.” [This method is very similar to that which I used to debunk *Yoshkianity*, and which set me on the path to HaShem and His Torah!] But instead of rehashing my understanding (which can be gleaned from the paraphrase/annotation above), I offer the views of the Or HaChayim and Rav Hirsh, two sages who have made my *chiddush* into a *b’ruch shekivanti*.

**Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:1** – “אשר ילכו לפנינו, ‘who shall walk before us, etc.’ The word לפנינו was chosen very carefully. They reasoned as follows: Seeing that G-d Himself Who has taken us out of Egypt is invisible and dwells in the Celestial Regions, they were afraid that if they would encounter some evil force in the desert without some visible symbol which reassured them that G-d did indeed watch over them they might lose faith ... The people who initiated the golden calf did not deny for a single moment either the primacy of G-d or the fact that He had made heaven and earth. They merely wanted a go-between them and G-d ... Possibly, they became victims of a serious sin when they described Moshe as the Power which had taken them out of Egypt, i.e. אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים. They meant to say that even when they came out of Egypt, G-d had employed a go-between and that this proved that there was nothing inherently wrong in having a go-between themselves and G-d. The fact that they referred to the go-between as אלהים, a deity, may be understood in the same sense as when G-d had told Moshe in *Shemos* 7:1: ‘here I have made you אלהים (i.e. in G-d’s stead) for Pharaoh.’ Obviously, the people committed a grave error, as I have explained on *Shemos* 20:4<sup>3</sup>.”

**Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:4** – “... אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים, ויאמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים.’ At first glance the foolishness of this statement is so colossal that one cannot perceive of anyone taking it seriously ... We are therefore forced to conclude that the makers (initiators) of this golden calf did not mean for the Israelites to worship and prostrate themselves to anyone but The One Who had truly taken them out of Egypt; the statement [which brought you up from the land of Egypt] only prepared the ground for making a deity out of the calf ... Possibly, they used the expression העלוך ‘they brought you up,’ to hint that there was a “power” on earth which equals the Power in the heavens, G-d forbid; by making such a statement they insulted G-d in many different ways and this is why G-d reacted so violently....”

<sup>3</sup> **A synopsis of the Or HaChayim, Shemos 20:4** – The Or HaChayim understand the prohibition of “*not making a graven image for yourself*” as applicable to a situation where when one accepts HaShem, but because HaShem is not palpable, he desires a symbol as a go-between themselves and HaShem. Thus writes the Or HaChayim: “Most of the idol worshippers have fallen victim to this error. Originally they knew very well that they did not bow down in front of a deity but only in front of one of one of G-d’s servants whom they had decided to adopt as a symbol ... [On the “jealous nature of G-d,” the Or HaChayim continues:] “You know that Israel’s status vis-à-vis G-d is like that of a bride to her husband. This theme has been developed at length by Shlomo in his *Shiur HaShiurim*. If Israel were to make some other deities for themselves, even while they do not deny G-d or rebel against His commandments, seeing that He is the Supreme G-d, the ‘husband’ would still be entitled to become jealous. Imagine the wife of a king who falls in love with one of his servants and who would display this affection by paying extra attention to the requirements of this servant. Would the king not become jealous when he observes this...?”

**Ben Avraham** – This understanding of the Or HaChayim dovetails nicely with the Rashi explaining that when Moshe destroyed the *Luchos* he was symbolically tearing-up the *kesubah* between G-d and *Klal Israel*.

*Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:7* – "...G-d listed three sins [of Klal Yisroel to Moshe while Moshe was still on the mountain]:

- 1) 'they made a golden calf for themselves'
- 2) 'they prostrated themselves before it and they offered sacrifices to it'
- 3) 'they **proclaimed**: "these are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you out of Egypt"'

"Israel had therefore sinned in thought, **in speech**, and in deed."

*Or HaChayim, Shemos 32:8* – "סרו מהר מן הדרך, 'they have quickly departed from the path, etc.' The meaning of these words is clear in view of the statement in Chullin 4, that if someone acknowledges even passively that there is some substance to idolatry, he is considered as having denied the entire Torah. This is why G-d said: 'which I have commanded them,' i.e. 'all that I have commanded them.' ... It is also possible that the wording reflects – as I have written previously – that the Israelites retained their full faith in G-d and only saw in the golden calf one of His many manifestations. In view of all this, G-d had to make clear that He had never commanded something of this nature, i.e. Israel was not allowed to employ intermediaries in their worship of Him and that what had happened represented a complete departure from the way G-d had instructed them to relate to Him ... Why did G-d tell Moshe about the Israelites **sinning by speech**, i.e. by acknowledging the deity of the calf with their lips, only after He had already told Moshe that they had worshipped it by offering sacrifices to it? The order should have been reversed. According to *Shemos Rabbah* 42:6, it was the mixed multitude who made the calf ... As to what the Israelites themselves were guilty of, G-d said, 'the mixed multitude made the golden calf for themselves, but the Israelites did not protest. Next the mixed multitude prostrated themselves before the calf and offered sacrifices to it, and the Israelites again did not protest.' Failure to protest this time was already a sin of much graver dimension than not having protested the mere making of the calf. 'When the mixed multitude declared (addressing Israel this time) "these are your gods, O Israel, [which brought you out from the land of Egypt]," and the Israelites even now did not protest, this was the culmination of their sin.'

"According to the plain meaning of the verse there is a different reason [from that which is given in the *Midrash*]. G-d did not tell Moshe earlier about the Israelites having said, 'these are your gods, O Israel, [which brought you out from the land of Egypt],' (though sin by speech is not generally as severe as sin by deed) because in this case the sin committed by their lips was exceptionally severe. It [the statement, 'these are your gods, O Israel,'] was reinforced by the words, 'who have taken you out of Egypt.' **Crediting the inert calf with what G-d had done for Israel made the sin absolutely intolerable**. The perversion of history for all future generations implied by this utterance made it worse than sacrificing to the calf and prostrating oneself in front of it ... Inasmuch as the words were addressed by the mixed multitude **to the Israelites**, and not by the Israelites themselves, they were relatively harmless, as long as the Israelites did not respond to the invitation to worship the calf ... It became clear only **after** the Israelites participated in the sacrifices to the calf that their active participation must have started already at an earlier stage – namely when they were invited to pay obeisance to the calf as their redeemer."

*Or HaChayim, Shemos 34:18* – "את חג המצות תשמור, 'you are to observe the festival of unleavened bread.' ... G-d instructed us concerning the observance of all the festivals. The reason may be that all the major festivals are rooted in the Exodus experience of the Jewish people. Inasmuch as the sin of the golden calf elevated that idol to the redeemer which took the Israelites out of Egypt, all festivals are a reminder of the Exodus."

\* \* \* \* \*

**Rav Hirsch, Shemos 32:1** – “...לפנינו כי זה משה האיש וגו'” – The purpose – אשר ילכו לפנינו – and the reason – כי זה משה האיש – show clearly that this was not a case of idolatry in the usual sense, not a betrayal of G-d. **What the people wanted was meant to take the place of Moshe**, not to take the place of G-d ... It is a delusion to think that man *can* make for himself a god – i.e., that he can set before himself an image, an asset, a power, an institution, a man, as his own highest ideal, and that this thing that he has chosen to worship will then be invested with Divine power by the Highest Power Who rules the world.

“...Those who said to Aaron, ‘Arise, make us gods who shall go before us; for this man Moshe, who brought us out of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him,’ were **caught up in a delusion of idolatrous subjectivism**. They saw Moshe not as an instrument of G-d’s Will, chosen by G-d and sent on G-d’s initiative, but as a human being who, on his own, had surpassed ordinary human nature and become godlike ... In their eyes, it was not G-d Who had brought them out of Egypt through the agency of Moshe, but Moshe who had caused G-d to perform this work of deliverance ... They considered the personality of Moshe, a man who was close to G-d, as the vital link in their connection with G-d. Only as long as he was alive could they be certain of G-d’s protection.”

**Rav Hirsch, Shemos 32:2-4 [IMPORTANT HASKAFICALLY!]** – “If we recall that the people’s first wish was to have another ‘Moshe,’ it becomes clear that they regarded the freshly made animal image as being in the same relation to the G-dhead as was Moshe’s relation to G-d ... In their eyes, this calf was like a reborn Moshe, a reborn intermediary, and they placed it in direct association with G-d, by saying in the plural, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ Thus they expressed the false notion of the divinity of this intermediary, as though it were the decisive factor on which the acts of G-d Himself depended. They were משתף שם שמים ודבר אחר (associating partners with the Name of Heaven through words about this *other*<sup>4</sup>), as our Sages put it. It would have been the same sin to have prostrated themselves before Moshe, the living human being, and proclaimed about him, אלה אלהיך ישראל, אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים.”

**Rav Hirsch, Shemos 32:7** – “...עמך אשר העלית. These words are spoken in the sense that they were used by the erring people. They expressed **the very root of the people’s sin**, which was: they considered themselves not only G-d’s people, but also Moshe’s people, and they considered Moshe a necessary intermediary, without whom they would it have been redeemed.

**Ben Avraham** – Based upon the above comments from the Or HaChayim and Rav Hirsch, I feel confident in re-proclaiming that the use of the words, “Moshe took us out of Egypt,” are not only inaccurate, but expressed the very *Hashkafah Sheker* that precipitated the Sin of the Golden Calf. Thus, in my opinion, those who have told me over the past few years that words don’t really matter – as long as we all know what we really mean – have been shown that words really do matter, and that they can lead to dreadful consequences. And that lesson, once learned, and applied to my other “area of concern,” – well, as we have done before, I want the reader to “do the math!”

4

See **Rav Hirsch, Shemos 22:17-19**.