



# Ohr Yerushalayim News

י"ח אדר א' תשע"ו – כי תשא – 27th February 2016 - Volume 8 - Issue 33

## News This Week

**מזל טוב**  
Mazel Tov to Mr and Mrs Yoel Smus on the birth of a baby girl.

### The Evil Eye and Purim Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

When you take the sum of the Children of Israel according to their numbers, let each one give to G-d an atonement for his soul . . . Shemos 30:12

LAST WEEK THERE WAS a connection from the parshah to the story of Purim through the clothing of the Kohen Gadol. This week the connection to Purim is the mitzvah with which the parshah begins, Machtzis HaShekel, the half-shekel collected for each Jew for the census:

On the first of Adar they would make announcements concerning the shekalim. And why on the first of Adar? Because it was foreseen, known and revealed before the One Who Spoke and the world came into existence, that the wicked Haman would eventually come and weigh [10,000 silver] talents concerning the Jews. Therefore, [G-d] preempted him and said to Moshe that the shekalim of the Jewish people should come before the shekalim of Haman. (Meseches Sofrim, Ch. 21)

Understanding the connection between the two requires some background information.

We do not count Jews. It is an actual prohibition and in general, just good advice, because the Talmud states:

Blessing is not found in anything that has been already weighed or measured or numbered, but only in a thing hidden from sight. (Ta'anis 8b)

It has to do with Ayin HaRa, literally, the Evil Eye. Lest one think that Ayin HaRa is an imaginary threat, the Talmud states elsewhere:

Rav went up to a cemetery, performed certain charms, and then said: "Ninety-nine [have died] through an evil eye, and one through natural causes." (Bava Metzia 107a)

What exactly is the Evil Eye? It depends upon whom you ask. Some hold that it is nothing mystical, but just the jealousy of other people. According to tradition, every time a person feels pain Heaven takes note and investigates the origin of the suffering. If it is unduly caused then Divine judgment will punish the source of it as well.

For example, if a person flaunts his success, causing less fortunate people to suffer as a result, Heaven will judge the owner's worthiness to have such success. His apparent lack of appreciation of his good fortune can tip the scale against him and cause him to lose what he has.

If, on the other hand, the jealous person is jealous by nature, Heaven overlooks the source of his pain. In truth, the jealous person is the source of his own pain. He may be the one to undergo Divine judgment.

A more mystical approach to Ayin Hara is, that it doesn't have to involve the flaunting of one's success or even the jealousy of others. There is just

something about making things stand out:

No one shall ascend with you, neither shall anyone be seen anywhere on the mountain, neither shall the sheep and the cattle graze facing that mountain. (Shemos 34:3)

Since the first [tablets] were accompanied by loud noises, sounds, and with a multitude, the evil eye affected them. Thus, there is nothing better than modesty. (Rashi)

Counting something makes it stand out, and this goes against the purpose of Creation and arouses a negative energy which causes loss.

To appreciate why this is so one must first appreciate the purpose of Creation, which Moshe Rabbeinu summed it up in the following statement:

Now, Israel, what does G-d, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear G-d, your G-d . . . (Devarim 10:12)

The Talmud goes even further and says the following:

Rebi Chanina said in the name of Rebi Shimon bar Yochai: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, only has fear of G-d in His storehouse, as it says, 'Fear of G-d is His treasure' (Yeshayahu 33:6)." (Brochos 33b)

All that comes to a person is in the hands of The Holy One, Blessed is He. For example, whether he will be tall or short, poor or rich, wise or foolish, light or dark—all of this is determined by Heaven. Whether he will be righteous or evil, however, is not in the hands of Heaven, but in the hands of man. Two paths are placed before him, and he has to choose fear of G-d for himself. (Rashi)

Thus, fear of G-d is everything. Good people have it, bad people do not, as it says:

Avimelech summoned Avraham and said to him, "What have you done to us, and what have I sinned against you, that you have brought upon me and upon my kingdom a great sin? Deeds that are not done, you have done to me." Avimelech said to Avraham, "What did you see that you did this thing?"

## The Week Ahead

פרשת כי תשא	
Candle Lighting	5.24pm
Mincha	5.29pm
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.42am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Shiur	4.41pm
2nd Mincha	5.11pm
סעודה שלישית	following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	6.31pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	5.35pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

Avraham said, "I said, 'Surely there is no fear of G-d in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'" (Bereishis 20:11)

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d. (Devarim 25:18-19)

How was Avraham Avinu able to detect that Avimelech and his people lacked fear of G-d?

[Avraham answered Avimelech,] "When a guest comes to a city, do we ask him about eating and drinking, or do we ask him about his wife?" (Rashi, Bereishis 20:11)

When Avraham first came to Gerar, the people he met were more concerned about the availability of Sarah than the welfare of Avraham and his camp. When Avraham, fearing for his life, told them that Sarah was his sister, they immediately kidnapped her and brought her to Avimelech as a concubine. What was their priority in life?

The origin of this tendency is as old as man himself, as it says:

Now they were both naked, the man and his wife, but they were not ashamed. (Bereishis 2:25)

They did not know the way of modesty, to distinguish between good and evil, and even though knowledge was granted him to call [all the creatures] names, he was not imbued with the evil inclination until he ate of the tree, and the evil inclination entered into him, and he knew the difference between good and evil. (Rashi)

Thus, immodesty was the direct result of eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra, which, incidentally, the Talmud cites as the "source" of Haman in the Torah (Chullin 139b). Prior to the sin of eating from the tree, man was devoted to G-d and His purpose for Creation. After the sin, he became self-interested, which is really the basis of the yetzer hara, the evil inclination, and the opposite of fear of G-d.

Righteous people are selfless. Evil people are selfish. Most of humanity fluctuates between both extremes. The Jewish people are supposed to pursue the former while Amalek supports the latter, and is eternally at war with G-d and His people, for this reason. His approach to life is the antithesis of the purpose of Creation, and if he is rising to power it is a clear sign that the world around him supports him.

Immodesty means to stand out for the wrong reasons. It can be the result of improper dress, or it can be the result of simply being too noisy while in public. Immodest people distinguish themselves for the wrong reasons, reasons that go against G-d's mandate for Creation.

The mitzvah of Machtzis HaShekel taught and promoted an anti-Amalekian approach to life. It said, rich or poor, endowed or not, we are all the same before G-d. Personal givens may differ from person to person, but the opportunity to use free will to be the very best person one can be is equal among everyone.

When we learn and implement this lesson, we rectify ourselves and Creation. When we don't, we build golden calves and destroy ourselves and, in the end, the world. The message of this week's parshah and Purim is the same.

## A Matter of Choice

Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann (Torah.org)

In Parshas Ki Sisa, we read about one of the most tragic events in Jewish history; the sin of the Golden Calf. It is almost inconceivable how a nation could rise to such a pinnacle - to receive the Torah, the Word of Hashem on Har Sinai - and yet just forty days later, to take their gold, form with it a calf, and say, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (32:8)

But did the Jews indeed sin? Certainly a cursory reading of the pesukim indicates so. A plague broke out as a result of the golden calf (32:35). Furthermore, approximately 3,000 Jews were killed by the Levi'im, at the command of Moshe (32:28). And perhaps most tragically, Hashem declared (32:34), "And on the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin against them," namely, that whenever a Jew sins and is punished, he suffers a small portion of the punishment the Jews were to have received then (Rashi).

Yet there is an amazing Gemara which seems to indicate otherwise:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: The only reason the Jews sinned with the

Golden Calf was in order to provide an opening for ba'alei teshuva (repentants). As R' Yochanan said in the name of R' Shimon bar Yochai: David was not disposed to sin (with Bas Sheva), nor were the Jews disposed to sin (with the Golden Calf). So why did they sin? In order to teach the concept of teshuva (repentance)! [Avodah Zara 4b-5a]

Apparently, the Jews were "pushed" into sinning. On their own accord, this would not have happened; Hashem thrust this sin upon them in order to teach the important lesson of repentance; that no matter how far one has strayed - even if he has made himself a golden calf - he can still return.

Mefarshim (commentators), however, ask a perplexing question: If indeed the Jews on their own accord would not have sinned, were it not that the Master of the Universe "steered" them to do so, then in what way can their teshuva serve to teach us the concept of repentance? Their "teshuva" was accepted as a matter of course - after all they should really not have sinned in the first place! But when we sin by exercising our bechira, our free-will to do good or bad, who is to say that our repentance will be accepted?

Different answers are proposed to deal with this question (see Maharal, Michtav Me-Eliyahu, and others). Basically, they all agree that to some degree the Jews sinned as a matter of free-will - if not there could be no punishment and repercussions. What the Gemara means is that there was a sudden shift of events which made it very difficult - but not impossible - for the Jews to avoid sinning.

Ultimately, though, one can still question: Why teach the concept of teshuva by means of such a complex and coerced situation? Perhaps we could take a slightly different tack.

It is no secret that we live today in a society that tends to avoid blaming the individual for his own shortcomings. People, society says, are the product of their environment and circumstance - they can for the most part not be blamed for their actions. Joey shot his teacher because he was abused as a child. Michael steals because he grew up in an impoverished home. Robert is taking drugs because he has been rejected by his peers - this is his way of gaining acceptance. Given different environments and different circumstances, they might have turned out different...

The Torah sees things differently. True, environment and circumstance play a crucial role in character development. Parents and teachers must certainly do everything they can to provide a climate within which Torah values can thrive. But one always has the choice to do good or bad.

Bechira - free will - is the most basic tenet of the Torah. Without the choice between good and bad, man ceases to be distinct from the animals, who enjoy no such choice. We become products of our whims, ruled only by our own desires.

The importance of imparting this message to our youth can not be ignored. It is perhaps the most important concept they (we) will ever learn; that whatever the circumstances, the ultimate choice is in our hands. No one can be forced to do bad. And even when things have taken a turn for the worse, it's never too late, one can always return. No one is beyond repentance.

Perhaps this is precisely the message the Torah is trying to convey with the sin of the Golden Calf. It is true that the Golden Calf was largely a product of circumstance.

The Jews had been misled into believing Moshe had died. Different factors combined to make their avoidance of sin extremely difficult. The Gemara declares unequivocally that, "The Jews were not disposed to have sinned with the Golden Calf!" Yet, notwithstanding all the excuses, justifications, and circumstances, they are still held responsible for their actions.

"So why did they sin? In order to teach the concept of teshuva." The sin of the Golden Calf teaches us the most basic rule of repentance: Accepting responsibility for our actions and misdeeds. Accepting that every person has the freedom to do as they choose. We all know of great individuals that came from the lowliest of backgrounds. Society, peers, circumstance - they all wield great, yet not insurmountable influence over our lives. Ultimately the choice is ours.