



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Ki Tissa

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ישיבת מעלות

פרשת כי תשא

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How A Little Calf Changed Us All

The Chet Ha'egel has left its imprint on Klal Yisrael throughout the generations. Rashi¹ explains that when Hashem agreed not to destroy Bnei Yisrael after the Egel, He also said that whenever He repays them for their sins, He will also pay them partially for the Chet Ha'egel.

How did Klal Yisrael change as a result of the Egel Ha'zahav? Harav Kook zt"l writes² that before the Chet Ha'egel the Nations of the World had a natural awe for Bnei Yisrael. If Bnei Yisrael had not worshiped the Egel Ha'zahav, the nations living in Eretz Yisrael would not have waged war against them when they entered the land. Rather they would have peacefully handed the land over to Bnei Yisrael, as will be when the Mashiach arrives. This is because after Matan Torah, Hashem's name and presence was visibly seen on Bnei Yisrael. But, after the Chet Ha'egel this entire process was delayed thousands of years. At the end of this period, the entire world will once again see Hashem's name upon Klal Yisrael, and the world will be fixed through peace and love.

How is it that the Chet Ha'egel caused Am Yisrael to have to struggle among the Nations, and not gain their respect? Chazal in the Midrash³ explain the Chet Ha'egel, based on the following psukim from Sefer Tehillim⁴: "I (Hashem) said 'You (Bnei Yisrael) are angelic, sons of The Exalted One.' But like men you are to die and like princes you shall fall." Bnei Yisrael were sons of The Exalted One when they stood at Har Sinai. Hashem said to the Angel of Death that his domain was over the Nations of the World, yet Bnei Yisrael he cannot touch. Just as Hashem lives forever so too, His children Bnei Yisrael live forever. Yet when Bnei Yisrael denounced Hashem and they proclaimed about the Egel Ha'zahav that "These are your gods, Yisrael, who have taken you out of Mitzrayim", Hashem responded by saying "like men you are to die and like princes you shall fall."

Before the Chet Ha'egel Bnei Yisrael were higher than the level of mankind. In the Cuzari⁵ Rabi Yehuda Halevi divides all of creation into five different categories: inert (stones, soil), vegetation, living creatures (animals), speaking

¹ Shemot 32, 34

² Orot Hamilchama 4, p.14

³ Shemot Rabba 32, 7

⁴ Tehillim 82, 6-7

⁵ Mamar Rishon 31-43

creatures (mankind), and Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael in their essence are different from the rest of creation, yet this is when they are living in the proper way set out for them and when they are fulfilling their destiny. When living like this they are called “angelic” and as a result, the Angel of Death cannot touch them. The Gemara in Masechet Sanhedrin⁶ says the following in the name of Rami bar Chama: Dangerous animals do not attack people unless the people seem to them as animals. Animals are instinctively afraid of humans. They are able to sense that man is created betzelem Elokim, in the image of Hashem, and therefore they know to give humans the respect that they deserve. Although, when a person does not act as if he is created betzelem Elokim, the animals are able to sense that, and they see the person as if he is another animal.

The same relationship is true with regard to Am Yisrael and the Nations of the World. The Nations understand that Klal Yisrael is exalted above them, and they make it possible for Klal Yisrael to fulfill their destiny. Yet when Klal Yisrael does not live up to its goals, the Nations of the world look at them as if they are “one of us”, and not anything special. And if so, the Nations are able to wage war against Am Yisrael.

If not for the Chet Ha’egel, Am Yisrael would have fulfilled their destiny, and the Nations of the World would have instinctively known that Eretz Yisrael is solely for Am Yisrael. As a result there would have been no battles or disputes over the land, and the Nations would have understood the importance of Am Yisrael reaching their destiny. Yet, as seen from this week’s parasha, Am Yisrael worshiped the Egel Ha’zahav and they were temporarily demoted from their status. This is what Hashem said to them: At Matan Torah you were on the level to be higher than the other Nations, yet you sinned at the Egel Ha’zahav, and therefore you shall die like other humans. Therefore you are exposed to death, and you are exposed to the nations of the world, and in order to retain what is yours, you must fight.

These words of Chazal help to put into perspective the current relationship between Am Yisrael and the Nations, and how to properly approach them. The main battle over Eretz Yisrael is not a battle fought with weapons or force. Rather, Am Yisrael must concentrate their efforts into reinstalling the natural awe that the Nations had towards them. This must be done by revealing the special level that Klal Yisrael is on, and seeing how this is manifested in everyday life. Am Yisrael is not a nation like all the other nations, and only by living our Godly essence will the Nations understand that the name of Hashem is called upon us.

⁶ Sanhedrin 38, 2