

CLASS 65 - KI SISA - PARAH

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

CHET HaEGEL AND THE PARAH ADUMAH

"...speak to the Bnei Yisrael that they should take a purely red heifer, unblemished....." (Bamidbar 19:2)

"A parable: the child of a servant soils the king's palace. They say to her: let the mother come and clean up the mess. Similarly, let the heifer come and atone for the sin of the [golden] calf." (Rashi, ad. loc.)

"What is the connection between Parah Adumah, which purifies from the defilement of death - to atonement for the act of the golden calf? It can be answered: had they not sinned with the calf, they would have lived forever.....and therefore, death is the sin of the calf itself."

"For when they sinned, and made the calf cause and beginning, which it isn't, they now required an atonement, to demonstrate that the calf was not the cause and beginning, but rather, that there is a cause and beginning to the calf, which is the mother....and with this, 'the mother comes and cleans up the mess of her son'." (Gur Aryeh, ad. loc.)

1

Can it be that immediately after the awesome revelation at Sinai, the Bnai Yisroel could sink so quickly and proceed to worship a Golden Calf?

A careful analysis will reveal that actually, they sinned with pure intentions.

Aharon HaKohen was never asked to provide a new Creator. Rather, in the confusion that followed the disappearance of Moshe, the Bnei Yisrael asked for a leader who would direct them as Moshe had done; one who would insure that they could continue to serve Hashem.

Their only sin was in accepting too quickly the advice of the Erev Rav, trouble mongerers from Egypt, who were, and continue to be, a source of suffering throughout Jewish history.

It was the Erev Rav who worshipped the Golden Calf, not the Bnai Yisroel.

Perhaps, we should ask a different question: what was the gravity of this sin, and why do suffer still as a result? Why is death inflicted upon all future generations as a result of this one mistake? Why does every hardship include retribution for the sin of Egel HaZahav?

2

We read this week of the Red Heifer. The ashes of the Parah Adumah, when sprinkled upon one who had been defiled, served to cleanse the Bnai Yisroel from the stench of death. This mitzva is a Chok, and a true understanding of its workings is beyond the grasp of mortal man.

The sin of the Egel was establishing the calf as cause and beginning. Its atonement is the lesson that the Egel is not first cause, but rather, that the origin and source of life starts elsewhere, with its mother. This message, when studied properly, is the method by which the mother wipes clean its child's waste.

Let us explain.

Although all who worship Avoda Zara likewise acknowledge that the calf is not the progenitor of existence, their claim is that the calf does serve as the origin of man, and the basis of his life.

Understanding this perspective will shed light on the severity of their sin.

The sin of the Golden Calf parallels the original sin. In the garden of Eden, man was destined to live eternally, but when sin severed his connection to G-d, it was decreed that only death could repair his situation.

This status remained in effect until the Torah was given, and with the revelation at Sinai, man was restored to his original state.

But when man repeated his sin, death was decreed once more, a replica of the original folly.

Sin is no accident. Original sin is built into existence, and even the earth sins during the six days of creation. Hashem commands the earth to produce a tree whose taste was the same as its fruit, but the earth could not comply. Though punishment for this sin does not come immediately, when man subsequently sins on the sixth day of creation, G-d includes the curse of the earth in the punishment due to man.

The two sins, man eating from the Eitz HaDaas, and the earth producing fruit of its own, are one and the same.

Man takes for himself the fruit that the earth created as an independent entity. Were the earth to have followed G-d's directive, and would the fruit taste as the tree itself, all of earth's produce would be perceived as an outgrowth of the tree, connected to its source, and a product of creation. In that case, every item on earth would be submerged to the essence of life, the Divine will which sustains all of creation.

But an independent fruit with a taste of its own opens an alternative path, one that strays from the path of Hashem.

This clarifies the Maharal's comments, cited above, regarding the Egel HaZahav.

Man has created for himself his own beginning. He fails to recognize that his very lifeline is rooted to

Hashem. Though ready to acknowledge the Creator, he is seduced by the sweet-tasting fruit that catches his eye. He sees himself free to pursue an alternative path, and is swayed by the claim of the Erev Rav, who marshal physical evidence to support their substitute for Moshe Rabbeinu.

But, he fails to notice one small point.

The path he has chosen leads directly out of Gan Eden.

"Ain Misah B'Lo Chait"- "There is no death without sin" (Shabbos 55A). The life of man is his connection to the Divine plan. To the extent that he removes himself from that goal, allowing room for independent dabbling in temporal pleasures, he tears himself from the tree of life.

3

Sin is a form of death, as man distances himself from the world of his creator. To repair the damage and purify his soul he must renew his commitment to the G-d of Creation.

Much as a raging fire subsumes everything it touches, so too, the will of G-d subordinates all of creation as part of Itself.

All that remains is burnt ashes.

These are the ashes of the Parah Adumah that cleanse all impurity. The world is returned to its source - the Source of all life.

4

Still, we are left to explain one point. Why is this a Chok? Is the reason not clear?

How do we react to the voice of authority? Generally, our first instinct is to question - why should I listen to you? Underlying this need to understand before we act is the sense that that we alone are the true arbiters of right and wrong, and we will determine the future course of action.

Imagine now a different scenario: how do we respond to the request of a person to whom we are completely devoted? In this instance, rather than questioning the need for action, our first move is to demonstrate immediately our willingness to act and our total commitment to those who we admire.

The difference between the two is the degree to which we view ourselves to be capable of independent action. The man who is devoted to his parents, for instance, sees only the necessity to fulfill their every need. His personal opinion is an extraneous factor that can only divert him from total obedience. At times, to ask 'why?' would be disrespectful, for it posits that requests must first be weighed and considered, and only then will acquiescence be forthcoming.

While the Chet HaEgel demonstrates man's desire for a guide designed by man, one that would be separate and distinct from the agent of G-d, the Parah Adumah assumes that all of life is a function of Hashem's unified existence. For this reason, the Parah Adumah cleanses man from the defilement

of death, because the man who submerges his will to the Torah's directives lives forever in the garden of Eden.

This concept is difficult to relate to, much less incorporate into the fabric of our being. Hence, the appellation 'Chok'. Not that we cannot understand, but rather, that the ability to nullify our own sense of self lies beyond the reach of modern man.

Secular society refuses to idealize a situation that he views as a total loss of self, but the Torah Jew sees life from a different perspective.

Rather than wither away like spoiled fruit in the land of the dying, he seizes the opportunity for true fulfillment, planting himself for eternity in the Garden of Eden.

Have a good Shabbos.

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