

# WHEN GIVING IS TAKING

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This weeks parsha, Ki Sisa, deals with many diverse issues. Those that I'd like to touch upon are the giving of the machatzis hashekel, the half shekel coin, and one of the most difficult to understand occurrences of the Torah, the *Chait HaEgel*, the sin of the golden calf.

As Rashi (30:16) explains, there were three donations: 1) the *macahtzis hashekel* that was given by each member of Klal Yisroel for the *adanim*, the silver holders beneath the uprights of the *Mishkan*, 2) the *machatzis hashekel* given for the sacrifices, and 3) the donations given, each person according to his means, for the general construction of the Mishkan.

As we mentioned previously by the donations of Parshas Terumah, giving to a worthy cause is, in reality, the only way that a person actually 'takes' and acquires something eternal for himself.

Tzedakah, charity, is compared to planting. The seeds are placed under the ground, out of sight and seemingly gone. However, that which seems to be gone is, in fact, undergoing a germination process and is developing into something far greater than had been originally invested.

The Baal HaTurim shows how this concept is inherent in the Hebrew word for giving, *venasnu*. It is spelled *vuv, nun, suf, nun, vuv*. Whether it is read forward or backward the same word is spelled-giving! The true process is in fact the reverse of the way that it's perceived! The giving is really taking! No lack is created!

The Vilna Gaon illustrates how this eternity is inherent in the word machatzis. Machatzis is spelled *mem, ches, tzadi, yud, suf*. The middle letter, *tzadi*, is the first letter of, and stands for, tzedakah. The two letters closest to tzedakah, the 2nd and 4th letters, are *ches* and *yud*, spelling chai, life. The two letters furthest from tzedakah, the 1st and 5th letters, are *mem* and *suf*, spelling meis, death. The eternity that tzedakah brings!

The Chait HaEgel is certainly one of the more difficult parshiyos for us to understand. We often feel that if Hashem would only reveal Himself to us, just once, it would be so easy for us to be motivated. This is clearly disproven by the events of Har Sinai followed so quickly by the Chait HaEgel. The Beis HaLevi explains how it was possible for the '*dor ha'deah*', the generation with such clear knowledge, to have stumbled with such a sin.

Every mitzva contains in it aspects which allude to the deepest secrets of the universe and all of its spiritual realms. The fulfillment of a mitzva brings a degree of tikun, perfection, to each of these

multileveled realms.

Let's take the *mishkan* as an example. In order for it to accomplish its objective of bringing down and 'housing' the shechinah, even the most minute detail must be adhered to completely. Only through the meticulous adherence to every aspect of every vessel, garment and item of the mishkan could this end be achieved.

Imagine a person with the deepest knowledge of all of these realms and their interdependence with one another. A person who could, so to speak, work backwards. Instead of understanding the hidden from the mitzva, he, with his understanding of the universe, would perform acts which would bring this spiritual perfection to the world. He would make his own mitzvos.

As an expert architect would survey a completed building and recognize areas which are in need of correction, such a person, with his spiritual sensitivity, would view the world and perceive which acts would bring about spiritual balance and a move toward perfection.

Moshe was the medium between the heavens and the earth - our link to Hashem. He didn't come down from Har Sinai at the time we had (mis)calculated that he should. We felt cut off.

Disassociated. Unable to connect to Hashem. We needed to forge a bond- to create a place where the *shechinah* would rest and enable us to access Him. We needed to construct a *Mishkan*.

Who did we turn to? To the person with the clearest and deepest understanding of Hashem and the way that we could connect to Him. With Moshe seemingly out of the picture, we turned to Aharon HaCohen. Make for us an *egel*.

(We discussed, around the time of Chanuka, that the shor, the ox, is one of the faces on the *Ma'aseh HaMerkava*, the 'chariot' of Hashem. It refers to a more 'natural', a less miraculous means of existence. Bnei Yisroel felt that, with the absence of Moshe, we could no longer maintain such a high level of connection. We needed to create a bond at the stepped down level exemplified by the hard working, plow and plant, ox. Make for us an *egel*.)

Our apparently noble and lofty intentions were, in fact, gravely misdirected. It is true that our actions here on this physical world have a tremendous impact on all of the different realms, reaching up to Hashem Himself. However, that is only because Hashem commanded us to do them. The root of the word 'mitzva' is *tzivuy*, command. The power of a mitzva lies in the fact that we are doing the command of Hashem. Subjugating our will to His. If it is an act that our perception leads us to believe that it will have a certain effect, but we were not commanded to perform it, it descends from the towering realm of a mitzva to the lowly level of manipulation. Trying to subjugate His will to ours.

Torah means instruction. Toras Chaim - our instructions for life. Before the Torah was given, the Avos learned and understood, from the world, which mitzvos needed to be performed. Once the Torah was given we no longer had that free hand. It makes sense to try to figure something out on your own - unless it's a matter of life and death and it comes with a manual!

Mitzvos - commandments. The building blocks of the universe. Man answering to a higher calling. Realizing that his understanding, no matter how deep, is merely the tip of the iceberg. Probing to understand and fathom, yet standing in awe before that which he knows is beyond him. The more knowledgeable he becomes, the clearer the view of his ignorance. Not manipulative acts but, rather, fulfilling the will of our Creator. The sole way of accomplishing our mission.

It was this *aveira lishma*, a well intentioned mistake, which caused us to deviate from the path. What it led to and what resulted from it are felt by us to this very day.

The issue that immediately precedes the chait haegel is shabbos. The sin was precipitated by a need to transcend the mundane and connect to the higher realms. The egel was clearly a wrong choice... only the Kotel remains from the Beis HaMikdah, the House of Hashem.... how and where do we connect? Perhaps, shabbos is our answer.

The pasuk (31:16) states: "*Vesahmru bnei Yisroel es haShabbos*", and Bnei Yisroel should guard the shabbos. According to the Ohr HaChaim, this is commanding us to guard that extra spirituality, that *neshama yesairah*, that is given to us each shabbos. This neshama is called shabbos because it is a piece of the world that is described as *kulo shabbos*, total and absolute shabbos. Peace, happiness, tranquility. Distance yourselves from the mundane worries and bothers of the work week, or else that *neshama yesaira* will not find in you the environment that it inherently exists within. Guard that shabbos!

What will be gained by this guarding? "*La'asos es haShabbos ledorosom*", to fulfill the shabbos for all generations. 'Doros', which normally means generations, is written without a vuv, alluding to the alternative meaning of 'dirah', meaning, abode. The proper fulfillment of the mitzva of shabbos will turn 'shabbos', that realm of shabbos, into our 'dirah', our true dwelling. Shabbos is where we connect.

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