



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Ki Tisa

HAMELECH

A Perplexing Question

Each year we arrive at Parashat Ki Tisa and we wonder: How could it have happened? A nation which experienced *Maamad Har Sinai* and *Matan Torah*; how could they so soon stumble and stoop so low to idolatry?

On the Rise

Klal Yisroel at *Har Sinai* achieved a phenomenal level of *achdut* – brotherhood and unity (Rashi to Shemot 19:2). Just standing there at the foot of *Har Sinai* enabled them to finally be cleansed of the spiritual filth with which the serpent in the Garden of Eden had contaminated mankind (Gm. Shabbat 146a). Once that filth was removed, we were in a position to receive prophecy (Alshich to Shemot 19:2).

A Glimpse of *Matan Torah*

Amazing things happened at that revelation. The *pasuk* itself tells us that the people saw sounds (Shemot 20:15). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches that each word uttered by Hakadosh Baruch Hu at *Maamad Har Sinai* sent our souls soaring out of our physical bodies. So how could we handle the next word? *Tehiyat Hameitim*, no less! Hashem took some of that *tal* (dew) which He has designated for *Tehiyat Hameitim*, and used it to revive us so that we could endure and experience the revelation (Gm. Shabbat 88b).

Additionally, each word sent us flying 12 *mil* backwards (approx. 9 miles or 12 km). How did we return to our places? Hashem sent angels to bring us back! This was quite a remarkable experience, totally unmatched in the history of mankind.

How Do You Feel?

Do you want to know what else? Everyone was perfectly healthy at *Kabbalat HaTorah*! The Medrash brings sources that no one was blind, deaf, mute, lame nor senile. No one had even the slightest headache or toothache. They were miraculously healed from every last illness, blemish and injury.

Coronated and Angelic

Furthermore, Rabbi Simai teaches: When Yisrael said "*Naaseh*" before "*Nishma*," 600,000 ministering angels descended from Heaven. Each angel tied two crowns upon the head of each Jew, one for "*Naaseh*" and one for "*Nishma*."

Rabbi Elazar says: When Yisrael put "*Naaseh*" before "*Nishma*," a Heavenly Voice proclaimed, "who revealed to My children this secret which angels employ?!" (Gm. Shabbat 88a)

So How Did it Happen?

Now that we have delineated a few sources of the great levels which Yisrael achieved at *Matan*



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Torah, the question is intensified. How is it that a mere forty days after this grand event, they could come to worship a golden calf?!

After all is said and done, the uncomfortable answer is that, be what as it may, they were still human. As “nearly” angelic as they may have been, they still had weaknesses and frailties. As the saying goes, “You can never be too careful.”

In Avot (2:5) we are taught, “Do not trust yourself until your death.” For as long as a person is alive, he is being challenged. There is an evil force in the world which was assigned a task to test mankind. The greater the man, the greater the test. People must rid themselves of the self-assuring, “it couldn’t possibly happen to me” syndrome.

One devastating example are the victims of modern technology. This is a most disturbing topic. Some people consider themselves to be observant Jews, but allow themselves the liberty of owning and using gadgets which expose them to the worst atrocities the world has to offer. These people become addicted to their pocket-size, hand-held dictator, which enraptures them and holds them captivated and captive. Once caught, escape is nearly impossible, and only with likely, irrevocable damage.

These people just can’t let go. They stare at their little machine for hours on end, scrolling up and down, back and forth, pushing buttons, clicking,

in search of more and more, never achieving, always looking. They are annoyed at any distraction from their new obsession, including desired and deserved attention from the closest of family members. They are busy finding out more and more about things which are really none of their business, simultaneously neglecting in full that which is totally their business and responsibility. They dare not be disturbed by a child or spouse, and household harmony and healthy relationships have become a thing of the past.

Unfiltered editions spew forth filth of the ugliest sort, advertisements and “news” with real-to-life closeups of violence and indecency. Unharnessed curiosity gets the better of them and they just can’t help themselves. They stare and stare until they slowly, then rapidly, lose all of their own human dignity. They become subhuman and no longer have a care or concern in life. They cease to care about life itself. They can be driving on a highway at a very high speed, and allow themselves to set their eyes on their tiny screens, instead of the road ahead, endangering their own lives, those of their passengers and those of all pedestrians, drivers and passengers in the vicinity. They can hear the faintest beep or murmur and suddenly they become convinced that it’s a “must-look.” Countless horrifying auto accidents have already occurred due to this and still people fail to learn the lesson.



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What Can Be Done?

Our Eternal Torah has all the answers. Preventive medicine is the most effective. Never trust yourself. In our *parashah* we see that the greatest nation on earth experienced a year of witnessing supernatural miracles. Following that, they were given an unparalleled prophetic revelation. Hashem's Oneness and Supremacy was made so clear to them.

Nonetheless, just forty days passed, and they committed the grave sin of idolatry. This just goes to show you that you can never trust yourself. You must always be on guard. Only a fool takes risks. Man, by nature, is prone to sin. He is called "Adam" because of his "earthly" nature, which escorts him until his last day.

The Ten Commandments

Thus, we find the ten commandments exhorting us not to murder, not to kidnap, not to commit adultery nor idolatry. You would have expected people of such stature to be spoken to on a higher level, about more lofty concepts. This speech seems more appropriate to be given in a prison ward for top criminals.

The Torah is telling us something; that we always have to be on guard, no matter how great you are. Yochanan the High Priest served in that function for eighty years! He must have been close to one hundred years old, having entered and exited the Holy of Holies more than anyone

else in history. Nonetheless, when he allowed himself the liberty of exposure to concepts of foreign culture, he succumbed to heresy and left the fold. He became a heretic, no less. It all started from taking it easy, permitting himself to read some shady writings.

"Fire!"

We would be surprised if we read of Gedolei HaDor caught committing grave sins of indecency. Baruch Hashem, we do not have them on record, because Hashem protected them at the last minute.

For example, the pious Rav Amram heard of Jewish female captives. He amassed the funds to pay their ransom and hosted them in his attic in the meantime. Before retiring for the evening, he made sure that the ladder to the attic was put on the side, out of the way. It was a very heavy ladder which normally took ten able-bodied men to move around.

And then, late at night, through the opening to the attic, the becoming appearance of one of the young maidens radiated and aroused the pious Rav Amram to do the impossible. Overcome with uncontrollable passion, he singlehandedly repositioned the ladder, his evil inclination urging him to sin.

Somehow, halfway up the ladder, his better side put up a fight. He spread his feet apart, bringing his ascent to a halt. Frozen in place, he began to shout, "Fire! Fire!"



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His screaming brought the desired result. His students came running to extinguish the flames. Upon seeing their mentor and realizing that he was referring to the fiery passion of the evil inclination, they remarked, "Our teacher, you have embarrassed us."

Rav Amram responded, "Better that you should be embarrassed of Rav Amram in this world and not in the next." I.e., it was well worth my shouting, for had I not screamed for help, who knows what my next step would have been, etc. (Kidushin 81a)

Two Cents

Well, perhaps you never heard of Rav Amram before. But I am sure that you heard of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva. Their names are all over the Mishna and Talmud. They are two of the Greatest Sages who ever lived.

Rabbi Meir laughed at those who sinned in matters of indecency. Satan wanted to show him that he was not immune to this type of behavior. So Satan appeared before him like a most attractive female on the other side of a river. With no bridge or ferryboat around, Rabbi Meir began to cross, holding onto a thin taut rope, walking upon a narrow plank. Halfway across, Satan left him alone, saying, "Had they not announced in Heaven, 'Beware of Rabbi Meir and his Torah,' I would have made you into two cents!"

A similar story is told of Rabbi Akiva. He, too, mocked those who stumbled in areas of indecent behavior. Satan appeared to him in female form, atop a palm tree, which is most difficult to climb. Rabbi Akiva, overcome with passion, began climbing the palm tree. Halfway up, Satan left him alone, saying, "Had they not announced in Heaven, 'Beware of Rabbi Akiva and his Torah,' I would have made you into two cents." (ibid.)

Satan was teaching the Great Sages a great lesson: You can never trust yourself. You must always be on guard. Do your utmost to stay far away from any possible lure.

Let us not go into the gory details. Most of us today are familiar with heart-rending incidents of religious Jews of varying ages who sadly left the fold due to exposure to unseemly sights, usually beginning with those on these all-new products of modern technology. Instead of just shaking our heads and saying, "How sad;" let us do something about it. Let us do what we can to encourage ourselves, our close ones and all our brethren, once and for all, to close the door on all possible exposure to gruesome sights. Let us follow the admonitions of our Gedolei Yisrael who beg of us to use only kosher phones and properly filtered internet (when absolutely necessary). Those who heed their call seek peaceful lives.

Fondly,
Mordechai Malka