

Parashat Ki Tisa 5776, 2016:

Gold that Shines and Gold that Profanes

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

There is a famous *machloket* (argument) between Rashi (1040-1105) and the Ramban (1194-1270) as to whether the *Mishkan* (Portable Sanctuary) was created before or after the horrific incident found in our *parasha* of the *Chet Haegel Hazahav* (the Sin of the Golden Calf). Rashi strongly supported the exegetical principle, *ain mukdam umeuchar b'Torah* (there is no chronology in the Torah). As such, he maintained that the order of the *parshiot* in the Torah does not reflect their chronology. Therefore, he suggested that the *mitzvah* of building the Portable Sanctuary (*Sefer Shemot 25:8*) came after, and as a direct response to, the Sin of the Golden Calf – even though this commandment appears in an earlier *parasha*. According to this interpretation, the *Mishkan*'s purpose was to serve as a place of renewed spiritual encounter between G-d and man, and thereby rebuild the relationship that had been almost irrevocably destroyed. In stark contrast, the Ramban maintained *yaish mukdam umeuchar b'Torah* (there is chronology per se in the Torah). Therefore, according to his position, the commandment to build the *Mishkan* had nothing whatsoever to do with the *Egel Hazahav* (Golden Calf). This is the case, since in his view, the order of the *parshiot* does represent their chronological order. Thus, the

commandment to construct the *Mishkan* was like *tefillin* or *lulav* – a beautiful way to serve Hashem, rather than a Divine response to the Sin of the Golden Calf.

According to *Midrash Tanchuma* 19, the *Egel Hazahav* was a miraculous creation that came into being via the black arts of Egypt, i.e. via sorcery. Rashi quoted this notion in his commentary on *Sefer Shemot* 32:4:

a molten calf: As soon as they [the Jewish people] had cast it [i.e. the gold] into the fire of the crucible, the sorcerers of the mixed multitude who had gone up with them from Egypt came and made it [the Golden Calf] with sorcery. (This and all Rashi and Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining and brackets my own)

The origin of the Golden Calf was the polar opposite of that of the Menorah placed in the *Mishkan*. Both Rashi and the Ramban suggest that G-d, rather than man, was the creator of the Menorah. In *Sefer Shemot* 25:31 we read: “...The Menorah shall be made of hammered work; its base and its stem, its goblets, its knobs, and its flowers shall [all] be [one piece] with it.” The Hebrew word employed for “shall be made” is “*taiasah*,” a passive form of the verb, instead of an active form such as “and you shall make” (“*v’asita*”), as we find in the very beginning of our *pasuk*. Rashi formulated the significance of this grammatical change in the following manner:

the Menorah shall be made: By itself. Since Moses found difficulty with it [i.e., figuring out how to form the Menorah], the Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, “Cast the talent [equivalent to sixty-four pounds of gold] into the fire, and it will be made by itself.” Therefore, it is not written: *taaseh* but *taiasah*. -[*Midrash Tanchuma, Behaalotecha* III] (Underlining my own)

The Ramban closely followed Rashi’s explanation. Therefore, in his glosses on *Sefer Bamidbar* Parashat Behaalotecha, which discuss the daily lighting of the Menorah, he explained our phrase, “the Menorah shall be made,” as referring directly to Hashem: “[The Menorah] was created via the Holy One blessed be He – by itself.” Thus,

according to the Midrash, the creator of the Menorah was none other than the Creator Himself! Beyond a doubt, this is a truly amazing and profound statement.

We are now in a position to compare and contrast the creation of the Golden Calf with that of the Menorah. First the similarities:

1. They were both produced from gold.
2. They were both formed as a result of gold being placed into a fire.
3. Both objects were miraculous in that their very creation defied the laws of Nature.

Now the differences:

1. The Golden Calf was created through sorcery and consummate evil. As noted in cognate sources, its builders actively sought to return the Jewish people to hedonism and idol worship.
2. In contrast, the Menorah was fashioned in total purity and holiness by the Almighty as a remarkable act of *chane, v'chesed, v'rachamim* (favor, kindness, and mercy) – for the entire Jewish people.

I believe a fascinating and novel idea emerges if we adopt Rashi's position that the mitzvah of the *Mishkan* was a response to the *Chet Haegel*, and view it in light of our analysis regarding the creation of the Golden Calf and the Menorah. As we have seen, the *Egel Hazahav* was the epitome of idol worship and, therefore, the antithesis of everything good and holy that Hashem desires in this world. Moreover, it was created with sorcery – the ultimate tool, so to speak, of the *Yatzer Harah* (Evil Inclination). In short, the Golden Calf represented the nadir of our relationship with G-d, whereas the Menorah - one of the constitutive elements of the *Mishkan* – represented the strengthening of our relationship with the Holy One Blessed be He. Its function was to shed light throughout the Portable Sanctuary, enabling the *Kohanim* to operate with a newfound vision of hope and purpose.

I believe this is precisely why Hashem, rather than man, was its creator. Moreover, in my view, the Menorah was the ultimate counterbalance to the Golden Calf. How so? Just as the Torah's purpose is to bring spiritual light and meaning to the world, the Menorah brought physical and spiritual light to the Jewish people and, by extension, all mankind. As *Shlomo Hamelech* (King Solomon) taught us so long ago: “*Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah or*” (“For a commandment is a candle, and the Torah is light,” *Sefer Mishle* 6:23). Since Hashem created and gifted the Menorah to us, we may authentically view it as the ultimate symbol of reconciliation and rapprochement between Him and our people. At long last, we achieved complete *kapporah* (atonement) for the excesses of the *Chet Haegel*. Once again, our relationship became *shalame* (complete) and indivisible.

With G-d's help, may we witness the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) and once again be *zocheh* (merit) to witness the Menorah in all its glory, and feel Divine light shine upon us forevermore. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.