

פרשת כי תשא

The reader is hereby warned: as I begin to write on this week's Parshas Ki Siso, I will raise an issue for which I do not think that I will have a solution. But, perhaps, you will. And if not, we are still involved in *limmud Torah*.

The issue, in general, is whether or not the status of Moshe Rabbenu Olov HaShalom was changed because of the sin of the Golden Calf.

The question that we are raising does not deal with the status of Israel after that sin. Sadly enough there is no room for any doubt. The Torah makes it very clear that the status of Israel was lowered at the time of the sin.

Even though HaKodosh Boruch Hu relented on the dire statements He made at first, other ramifications of the sin remained intact.

When first informing Moshe Rabbenu of the sin, Hashem said to him (Sh'mos Perek 32/Posuk 10):

וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וַיַּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאֶכְלֵם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל:

Now, leave Me be and My anger will be incensed against them and I will destroy them and I will make you into a great nation.

The prayers of Moshe Rabbenu were effective and so we read (ibid. Posuk 14):

וַיִּנָּחֵם ה' עַל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ:

Hashem retracted¹ from the bad that He spoke to do to His people.

¹ We will not deal with the philosophical/theological implications that may be understood or misunderstood in regards to Hashem 'relenting' or 'changing His mind' *kavayachol*.

We note Rashi's comment on the earlier verse we cited:

הַנִּיחָה לִּי - עֵדִיין לֹא שָׁמְעֵנוּ, שֶׁהִתְפַּלֵּל מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵיהֶם, וְהוּא אָמַר הַנִּיחָה לִּי, אֲלֵא כִּאֵן פָּתַח לוֹ פֶּתַח וְהוֹדִיעֵנו, שֶׁהִדְבֵּר תְּלוּי בּוֹ, שֶׁאִם יִתְפַּלֵּל עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא יִכְלֹם:

Leave Me be – We haven't yet heard that Moshe was praying for them, and Hashem says, 'Leave Me be?'

Even after removing the threat of annihilation, Hashem informed Moshe (ibid. Posuk 34):

וְעַתָּה לֵךְ נַחֵה אֶת הָעָם אֶל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ הִנֵּה מַלְאָכִי יֵלֵךְ לִפְנֵיךָ וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדָּי
וּפְקֻדְתִּי עֲלֵהֶם חֲטָאתָם:

Now you go and lead the people to which I spoke to you; behold My angel will go before you and on the day of My visitation of sin, I will visit their sin upon them.

Rashi comments on the first segment of this verse:

הנה מלאכי – ולא אני:

Behold My angel – But not Me.

That is, Hashem said that He would be less directly involved with Israel. His agent would lead them, not He Himself Yisborach.

In fact, that change of direct guidance was not only a punishment. It contained within it a type of positivity. We learn that from what Hashem subsequently said to Moshe (Perek 33/P'sukim 2-3):

וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ מַלְאָךְ וְגִרְשָׁתִי אֶת הַכְּנַעֲנִי הָאֹמְרִי וְהַחֲתִי וְהַפְּרָזִי הַחַי וְהַיְבוּסִי: אֵל
אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ כִּי לֹא אֶעֱלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ כִּי עִם קִשָּׁה עֵרַף אֶתָּה פֶּן אֶכְלָךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ:

Rather, Hashem gave Moshe an opening and let him know that the matter was dependent upon him – that if Moshe would daven for them, Hashem would not destroy them.

This verse, with the explanation of Rashi, can be viewed as a **בנין אב**, an archetype, for these types of questions that arise in many contexts. That is, Hashem knows 'in advance' the conditions under which He will impose His decrees.

See Mishneh Torah LaRambam Hilchos Teshuva Perek 5/Halachah 5 and Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Perek 2/Halachah 10.

See as well Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Perek 10/Halachah 4 for particular specification.

I Hashem will send before you an angel and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Emorites, the Chittites, the Prizites, the Chivites and the Jebusites. To a land flowing with milk and honey because I will not go up in your midst because you are a stiff-necked people; lest I destroy you on the way.

Rashi writes:

כי לא אעלה בקרבך - לכך אני אומר לך ושלחתי לפניך מלאך:

Because I will not go up in your midst – Therefore I Hashem say to you, ‘I will send an angel before you.’

כי עם קשה ערף אתה - וכששכינתי בקרבכם ואתם ממרים בי מרבה אני עליכם זעם:

Because you are a stiff-necked people – And when My Shechinah is in your midst and you rebel against Me, I become exceedingly angry.

Thus, the absence of direct Divine leadership was meant to ameliorate the possibility of particularly strong Divine anger against Israel.

However, Moshe was not satisfied by that adjustment of the Divine Presence and he said (Posuk 12):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' רְאֵה אֶתְּהָ אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי הָעַל אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה וְאֶתְּהָ לֹא הוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי וְאֶתְּהָ אָמַרְתָּ יְדַעְתִּיךָ בְּשֵׁם וְגַם מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינַי:

Moshe said to Hashem, ‘See, You say to me, “Take up this people’ but You did not inform me whom You will send with me; and you said [to me], ‘I Hashem know you by your name and you found favor in My eyes.’”

Rashi explains:

ראה אתה אומר אלי -ואשר אמרת לי הנה אנכי שולח מלאך, אין זו הודעה, שאין אני חפץ בה:

See You say to me – That which You said to me, ‘Behold I am sending an angel’, that is not an item of information because I do not desire it.

Hashem responded (Posuk 14):

וַיֹּאמֶר פָּנַי יֵלְכוּ וְהִנַּחְתִּי לָךְ:

Hashem said, 'My face will go and I will lead you'.

Rashi explains:

ויאמר פני ילכו - כתרגומו, לא אשלח עוד מלאך, אני בעצמי אלך:

Hashem said, 'My face will go' – the explanation is in accordance with Targum Onkelos.² 'I will not send another angel. I Myself will go.'

Thus, this decree was rescinded as well³.

However, two indelible ramifications remained unchanged.

First, as we read above:

וְעַתָּה לָךְ נָחָה אֶת הָעָם אֶל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ הִנֵּה מְלָאכִי יֵלֵךְ לְפָנֶיךָ וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדֵי וּפְקֻדְתִּי עֲלֵהֶם חֲטָאתָם:

Now you go and lead the people to which I spoke to you; behold My angel will go before you and on the day of My visitation of sin, I will visit their sin upon them.

Rashi writes:

וביום פקדי וגו' - עתה שמעתי אליך מלכלותם יחד, ותמיד תמיד כשאפקוד עליהם עונותיהם ופקדתי עליהם מעט מן העון הזה עם שאר העונות, ואין פורענות באה על ישראל שאין בה קצת מפרעון עון העגל:

On the day of My visitation etc. – I have now listened to you not to destroy them altogether. But always and forever, when I will visit upon them [punishments for] their other sins I will visit upon them a little from this sin

² Onkelos writes:

ואמר שכינתי תהך ואניח לך:

And He said, 'My Shechinah will go and I will lead you.

³ However, see the following verse and Rashi there.

[of the Golden Calf] with their other sins. There is no misfortune that comes upon Israel without a little of the punishment for the Golden Calf.

Of course, this declaration has a kindness as well. Were the full force of the sin of the Golden Calf to be brought upon Israel at once, the result would be annihilation, *chas v'shalom*. Therefore, by dividing the punishment throughout history, Israel can withstand and continue to exist.

Nonetheless, the implication is that the punishment deserved for the sin of the Golden Calf is almost infinite. With such a burden upon Israel, it is clear that they are in a different situation than they were prior to the sin.

An additional ramification is when we also read of Israel's actions when being informed of G-d's decision to distance Himself from Israel (Perek 33/Posuk 4):

וַיִּשְׁמַע הָעָם אֶת הַדְּבָר הַרָע הַזֶּה וַיִּתְאַבְּלוּ וְלֹא שָׁתוּ אִישׁ עֲדָיו עָלָיו:

The people heard this bad thing and they mourned; no one adorned himself with his jewellery.

Rashi explains what that jewellery was:

איש עדיו - כתרים שניתנו להם בחורב, כשאמרו (שמות כד/4) נעשה ונשמע:

A person with his jewellery –the crowns that were given to them at Chovrev [Sinai] when they said *na'aseh v'nishma'* – We will do and we will hear.

As a sign of their mourning, Israel removed their adornments because it is not appropriate to wear adornment during bereavement. Of course, the implication is that after the period of immediate grief, the adornments can be worn once again.

However, we read (P'sukim 5-6):

⁴ The entire verse reads:

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע:
Moshe took the Book of the Covenant and he read in the ears of the people and they said, 'All that Hashem has spoken we will do and we will hear'.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם עִם קִשָּׁה עֲרַף רִגְעֵי אֶחָד אֶעֱלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ
וְכָלִיתִיךָ וְעַתָּה הוֹרֵד עֲדִיךָ מֵעֲלֶיךָ וְאִדְעָה מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּךְ: וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת
עֲדָיִם מִהָר חוֹרֵב:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Speak to B'nei Yisroel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; in one moment I will go up in your midst and destroy you; now remove your adornments from upon you and I will know what I will do with you. B'nei Yisroel removed their adornment [that they received] from Mt. Chorev.

That status, too, did not change. The glory bestowed upon Israel at Sinai was taken away from them, at least partially⁵.

On the other hand, it does not seem like the status of Moshe Rabbenu was lessened because of the grievous sin of the *Eigel HaZahav*.

⁵ See the commentary of MaHarSha to Masseches Shabbos 88 a who explains that the two crowns were that of *Keser Malchus* and *Keser Kehuna* – royalty and priesthood.

Since there was royalty for a period of our history and functioning *Kehuna* in the Beis HaMikdosh for many centuries, the removal of the crowns, according to Maharsha at least, was not total.

Additionally, as the Gemara writes there, these crowns, will be restored:

אמר ריש לקיש: עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא להחזיר לנו, שנאמר (ישעיה לה/י) ופדויי ה' ישבון ובאו
ציון ברנה ושמחת עולם על ראשם - שמחה שמעולם על ראשם.

Reish Lakish said, 'In the future, Hashem will restore the crowns to us as it says, 'Those redeemed by G-d will return and they will come to Zion in happiness and eternal joy will be on their heads - a joy that in the past was on their heads.

It is difficult to explain this *derasha* from the translation of the verse. The word emphasized here is עולם which certainly refers to an unending time and thus is translated as 'forever'.

However, *olom* could mean that which was, such as in מעולם – from the past and that is how Reish Lakish teaches us in this interpretation. The first instance when this word with such a meaning is found in the Torah is in B'reishis Perek 6/Posuk 4.

On the contrary, as we saw above, Hashem wanted to glorify and aggrandize Moshe Rabbenu:

וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי וַיִּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאַכְלָם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל:

Now, leave Me be and My anger will be incensed against them and I will destroy them and I will make you into a great nation.

However, that statement seems to be tempered by an earlier one where we read (Perek 32/Posuk 7):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ רֵד כִּי שָׁחַת עַמְךָ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

Hashem spoke to Moshe, 'Go descend because your people whom you brought up from the Land of Egypt have corrupted.

Rashi writes:

לך רד - מגדולתך, לא נתתי לך גדולה אלא בשבילם. באותה שעה נתנדה משה מפי בית דין של מעלה:

Go, descend – from your greatness. I only gave you greatness for their sake. At that moment Moshe was excommunicated by the Heavenly Court.

Exactly how to balance these two sources, found consecutively in Rashi, is certainly one of our challenges.

Another challenge, and one upon which we will now focus, is what we read a little later on in our Parsha.

As Moshe Rabbenu finds that Hashem is willing to forgive Israel, at least partially, through his prayerful intervention, he seeks to draw even closer to HaKodosh Boruch Hu. Drawing nearer to Hashem for Moshe Rabbenu means having a greater understanding of HaKodosh Boruch Hu and His ways.

Thus we find Moshe Rabbenu made two requests of HaKodosh Boruch Hu in this regard.

First, Moshe says (Perek 33/Posuk 13):

וְעַתָּה אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוֹדִיעֵנִי נָא אֶת דְּרָכְךָ וְאֲדַעַךְ לְמַעַן אֲמַצֵּא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
וְרָאָה כִּי עֲמַךְ הִגּוֹי הַזֶּה:

Now if I have found favor in Your eyes, please let me know Your ways and I will know you in order that I will find favor in Your eyes; See the nation is Your people.

Rabbenu Bachye explains:

הוֹדִיעֵנִי נָא אֶת דְּרָכְךָ. על דרך הפשט: "דרכיך", מדותיך, כי דרכי השם יתברך הם מדותיו, וכן באר דוד עליו השלום: (תהלים קג/ז⁶) "יודיע דרכיו למשה"... והנה משה בקש הודעת השם יתברך מתוך דרכיו ומדותיו, כלומר מתוך דרכי פעולותיו...

Please let me know Your ways – according to the *p'shat* interpretation, 'Your ways' refers to 'Your 'attributes' [of interacting with Your creations]. Because the ways of Hashem are His *Middos* [the ways in which He interacts with His creations]. This is what Dovid HaMelech *olov haShalom* explained, 'Hashem tells His ways to Moshe'.

And behold, Moshe requested that Hashem should let Moshe know about Hashem through His ways and attributes. This means from the way His actions are.

Moshe also requests (Posuk 18):

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֹאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ:

Moshe said, 'Show me please Your Glory.'

Rabbenu Bachye, in continuation, says:

ומשה בקש שתי שאלות: האחד אפשרית, והיא, "הודיעני נא את דרכך", והשנית נמנעת, והיא: "הראני נא את כבודך", ועל שאלת "הראני נא" השיב לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: "לא תוכל לראות את פני".

⁶ The entire verse reads:

יֹדִיעַ דְּרָכָיו לְמֹשֶׁה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲלִילוֹתָיו:
He tells His ways to Moshe, his actions to Israel.

Moshe made two requests, one of which was possible – ‘Let me know Your ways’. The second was impossible [to fulfill] and it was ‘Show me please Your Glory.’

Regarding the request ‘Show me please’ Hashem responded ‘You are not able to see My face’.

The verse (Posuk 20) that Rabbenu Bachye refers to reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פָּנַי כִּי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי:

Hashem said, ‘You are not able to see My face because man cannot see Me and live.

It is apparent that seeing a ‘face’ is a clear identification and knowledge of the one who is being viewed. Of course, Man cannot know G-d to identify Him. No living creature can. That is the meaning of וְחַי.

וְחַי doesn’t really mean ‘and live’ with the implication that if you see G-d you die. It means you can’t be alive and see G-d. It is beyond the capacity of any creation.

And thus Moshe Rabbenu was refused this second request⁷.

But, even as this request was met with a refusal, Hashem grants Moshe the very limit to which he can be allowed.

We read (P’sukim 19-23):

⁷ Of course the question begs to be raised: we read that Hashem spoke to Moshe *ponim el ponim* – face to face. And, confounding our understanding even more, is part of this very section, before we read Moshe’s requests and learn Hashem’s responses, we read (Perek 33/Posuk 11):

וַדַּבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים כְּאִשׁוֹר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ וְשָׁב אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה וּמִשְׁרָתוֹ; הוֹשַׁע בֶּן נוּן
נָעַר לֹא יָמִישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל:

Hashem spoke to Moshe face to face like a person speaks with his friend and Moshe returned to the camp and his servant Yehoshua bin Nun the lad did not remove himself from the tent (Ohel Moed).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל טוֹבִי עַל פְּנֵיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְּשֵׁם ה' לְפָנֶיךָ וַחֲנַנְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אַחַן
וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם: וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פָּנַי כִּי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי:
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל הַצּוּר: וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדִי וְשִׁמְתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר
וְשַׁלַּתִּי כְּפִי עֲלֶיךָ עַד עֲבָרִי: וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת כְּפִי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת אַחֲרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרְאוּ:

Hashem said, 'I will cause all of My goodness to pass by near your face and I will call in the Name of Hashem before you and I will favour whom I will favour and I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.

Hashem said, 'You will not be able to see My face because Man cannot see me and live.

Hashem said, 'Behold, there is a place that is with Me and you will stand on the rock. And it will be when My Glory passes I will place you in the crevice of the rock and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed. I will remove My hand and you will see My back and My face will not be visible.

I believe the *p'shat* of these verses is to be understood as follows:

Hashem acquiesced to Moshe's request to know 'His ways'. Therefore, He will let Moshe see 'His goodness', that is the goodness and kindness with which He interacts with His creations. That will be expressed in the *שלש עשרה מידות*, the Thirteen Middos of G-d's kindness that we will bring shortly, when He calls in His Name ה' ה'.

Despite this revelation of His ways, Hashem cautions Moshe Rabbenu that he will still be unable to grasp Hashem's interactions with His creations. Thus, He concludes that He will favour and show kindness as He sees fit, meaning that Moshe cannot have total comprehension.

Hashem then, after acquiescing to the request to know His ways, refuses to let Moshe see His glory because no creation can know that.

The next stage is the fulfilment of knowing His ways and that is the impact of the last verses and the final phrase we read here – 'You will see My back and My face will not be visible.

The *middos* of Hashem are expressed by Him a few verses later as we read (Perek 34/P'sukim 6-7):

וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל פְּנֵיו וַיִּקְרָא ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת: נֶצַח חֶסֶד
לְאַלְפִים נֶשָׂא עֵוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְיָה לֹא יִנְקֶה פֶקֶד עֵוֹן אָבוֹת עַל בְּנִים וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנִים
עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רַבְעִים:

Hashem passed near his face and He called, 'Hashem, Hashem, G-d, Merciful One, Compassionate One, Slow to anger, One of Much Kindness, One of Much Truth. One Who Guards Kindness for thousands of generations, One Who Forgives sin of *avon*, One Who forgives sin of *pesha*, One Who forgives sin of *chato'oh*; One Who Cleanses⁸

He will not cleanse, He visits the sin of fathers upon sons and upon sons of sons, on the third and the fourth generations.

The juxtaposition of *נקה*, He will cleanse, with *ולא ינקה*, He will not cleanse adds to the uncertainty that even Moshe Rabbenu will endure.

However, our question, the one to which we do not think that we have an answer, is as follows:

⁸ The *middos* of G-d's goodness end here.

For the exact interpretation as to the number '13' see the various commentators.

We note that when we recited the 13 Middos as part of our prayers, following the word *ונקה* we add the final words of a closely following verse (Posuk 9):

וַיֹּאמֶר אִם נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדַבֵּר... דַּבְּרֵנוּ... יְיָ נָא אֲדַבֵּר... דַּבְּרֵנוּ... בְּקִרְבְּנוּ כִּי עִם קִשָּׁה עֵרְף הוּא וְסִלְחָתָ
לְעֹנֵנוּ וְלִחְטָאתֵנוּ וְנַחֲלֵתָנוּ:

Moshe said, 'If I have please found favour in Your eyes, G-d, let G-d go in our midst because the people is stiff-necked; and You shall forgive our *avon* sins and our *chato'oh* sins and give us and inheritance.

Adopting the view of Sefer Chasidim, my Rebbe Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, ZT"l held that the words

וְסִלְחָתָ לְעֹנֵנוּ וְלִחְטָאתֵנוּ וְנַחֲלֵתָנוּ:

and You shall forgive our *avon* sins and our *chato'oh* sins and give us an inheritance.

Has Moshe's status changed due to the sin of the Eigel?

Would Moshe Rabbenu have sought the very knowledge that we read about in our Parshas Ki Siso had there not been *Cheit Ha'eigel*? Was that knowledge something that was on his agenda in any case? Or was that knowledge something that he thought was beyond him until he came face-to-face with the unique *עת רצון*, that time of special grace that only came about because of the sin and the accompanying repentance and Divine forgiveness?

It is when Moshe requests to see G-d's Glory that Rashi comments:

ויאמר הראני נא את כבודך - ראה משה שהיה עת רצון ודבריו מקובלים, והוסיף לשאול לראותו מראית כבודו:

He said, 'show me please Your Glory – Moshe saw that this was a time when Hashem was pleased with him and that his words were being accepted and he continued to request [an additional request] to see the vision of His Glory.

As we said, we don't know the answer but that question is vital to understand what we saw earlier.

Hashem placed Moshe in the crevice of the rock and He said that when He will pass Moshe He will cover him with His hand:

וְשָׁכַתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד עֲבָרִי:

I will cover you with My hand until I have passed.

Why did Moshe Rabbenu need protection and was that protection a sign of a lowered status because of the sin of the *Eigel* or was it a sign of a higher status?

If it was a sign of a lower status that would mean that in any case Moshe would have made the requests that we read here and would have been told what he was told and he would not have needed this protection of G-d's sheltering hand.

If Moshe had a special opportunity that came about only through the circumstances that the sin of the *Eigel* let unfold, then perhaps he would not have

been able to have any vision whatsoever. Because of the עת רצון he had a privilege that would not have otherwise been given to him. However, since he was elevated to a unique position, he required protection.

To begin to understand and penetrate this unknown, we have to first understand the nature of the protection that Moshe needed. What was threatening him?

If we can ascertain that Moshe would have been impervious to whatever threat there was prior to the sin and now he is in danger, then we can interpolate that he, together with Israel, was placed on a lower level following that sin.

On the other hand, if it appears that Moshe Rabbenu arrived at a new level that he wasn't able to access previously and this protection is a barrier necessary because of his ascent, then it is clear that his level was not lowered due to the sin of the *Eigel*.

What do Chazal and our *meforshim* teach us?

Midrash Sh'mos Rabbah (Parshas B'shalach Parshata 23/15) offers a fascinating comment regarding Israel when they crossed Yam Suf.

The verse in question reads (Sh'mos Perek 15/Posuk 2):

עֲזִי וְזַמְרַת קֹהֵל יְיָהוִי לִי לְיִשׁוּעָה זֶה קֹלִי וְאֲנִי הוֹדֵא... לִקְרִי אָבִי וְאֶרְמָמְנָהוּ:

G-d is my strength and my song and He became my salvation; this is my G-d and I will praise Him; He is the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.

Rashi, with a source in another Chazal, writes:

זֶה קֹלִי - בְּכַבּוּדוֹ נִגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיוּ מֵרָאִי אֹתוֹ בְּאֶצְבַּע, רֵאתָה שִׁפְחָה עַל הַיָּם מֵהַ
שְׁלֵא רָאוּ נְבִיאִים:

This is my G-d – in His *Glory* He was revealed to them and they pointed at Him. What the maidservant saw at the [Red] Sea, the prophets did not see.

With the added emphasis to the word בכבודו, in His *Glory*, we can anticipate the Midrash that writes:

זה קלי ואנוהו, אמר רבי ברכיה בא וראה כמה גדולים יורדי הים, משה כמה נתחבט ונתחנן לפני המקום עד שראה את הדמות שנאמר הראני נא את כבודך אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לא תוכל לראות את פני. ובסוף הראה לו בסימן שנאמר והיה בעבור כבודי... ועולי הים כל אחד ואחד מראה באצבעו ואומר זה זה קלי ואנוהו:

This is my G-d and I will praise Him – Rabi Berachia said, ‘Come and see how great were those who went down into the [Red] Sea.

How much did Moshe suffer and plead before Hashem until he saw the image as it says, ‘Please show me Your Glory’ and G-d said to him, ‘You are not able to see My face.’ Finally, Hashem showed him an indication as it says, When My Glory passes over...[and My face will not be seen.]

Those who ascended from the sea, each and every one pointed and said, ‘This is my G-d and I will praise Him.’

It is certainly evident that if the lowly ‘maidservant saw’ that Moshe Rabbenu was able to see as well. And, now, a few months later following the crossing of the Red Sea Moshe Rabbenu cannot see that *Glory*⁹!

From another Midrash, we have what appears to be a different view of the events. This Midrash deals with Hashem’s willingness to at least partially answer Moshe’s request to see the Glory of Hashem

We read in Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer¹⁰ (Perek 46):

⁹ It is certainly in place to ponder whether or not the *Glory* that was seen at the Sea is the same level of *Glory* that Moshe wished to perceive.

Nonetheless, until proven differently we should assume that the term *Glory* is used with precision since the Midrash is comparing and contrasting two instances involved in that *Glory*.

¹⁰ Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer may be the earliest *Midrash Aggadah* on record. It was authored by the Tanna Rabi Eliezer ben Horkonus who is mentioned throughout Shas and noted in the Mishna in Masseches Ovot (Perek 2/Mishnah 8) as the first of the 5 primary students of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

אָמְרוּ מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת לְפָנָי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, הֲרִי אָנוּ מְשֻׁרְתִים לְפָנֶיךָ בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וְאִין אָנוּ יְכוּלִין לְרִאֲוֹת אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ, וְזֶה יְלֻד אִשָּׁה רוֹצֶה לְרִאֲוֹת אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ. וְעַמְדוֹ עָלָיו בְּזַעַף וּבְבִהָלָה לְהַמִּיתוֹ וְהַגִּיעָה נַפְשׁוֹ עַד מוֹת. מָה עָשָׂה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, נִגְלָה עָלָיו בְּעֵנָן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר [שְׁמוֹת לַד/ה'¹¹] וַיֵּרֵד ה' בְּעֵנָן... וְסִכָּךְ עָלָיו הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכַף יָדוֹ שֶׁלֹּא יָמוּת

The angels said before HaKodosh Boruch Hu, 'Behold, we serve You day and night and we are not able to see Your Glory, and this one born of woman wants to see Your Glory?'

The angels stood near Moshe with anger and haste to kill him and Moshe almost died.

What did Hashem do? He appeared before Moshe in a cloud as it says, 'Hashem descended in a cloud.' And He protectively covered Moshe with the palm of His hand so that Moshe would not die.

Now, this Midrash alone does not seem to be directly related to our question, however another Midrash (Pesikta Rabbosi 10), very similar in content to this one, adds the following at its end:

ומשם נטל משה קרני ההוד

From there Moshe received the rays of splendor.

That is, from that protective covering of G-d's hand that was upon Moshe, the radiance that shone forth from him was born.

This is as we read in our Parsha (Perek 34/P'sukim 29-30):

וַיְהִי בְרִדְתַּת מֹשֶׁה מִהָרַ סִינַי וַיִּשְׁנֵי לַחַת הָעֵדוּת בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה בְּרִדְתּוֹ מִן הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אֹתוֹ: וַיִּרְא אֶהָרָן וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְהִנֵּה קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו וַיִּירָאוּ מִגֹּשֶׁת אֵלָיו:

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיֵּרֵד ה' בְּעֵנָן וַיִּתְּצֵב עִמּוֹ שֵׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה':
Hashem descended in a cloud and He called in the Name of Hashem.

When Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai and the two tablets of testimony were in Moshe's hand when he came down from the mountain, Moshe did not know that the flesh of his face shone when Hashem spoke with him. Aharon and all of B'nei Yisroel saw Moshe and behold the flesh of his face shone and they were afraid to approach him.

This radiance was a new gift from G-d when Moshe descended from Sinai on Yom HaKippurim with the second set of the *Aseres HaDibros*.

This radiance was obviously a gift that Moshe received as a sign of his ascendancy, not an indication of a lowered level whatsoever.

It is the very language of these Midrashim that imply that Moshe had reached a level above the previous heights that he had attained.

This is because the language here is very similar to that which we read in the well-known Gemara that describes Moshe's ascent to heaven to receive the Torah.

In Masseches Shabbos (88 b):

בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם, מה לילוד אשה בינינו?

When Moshe ascended to the heavens [to receive the Torah] the angels said before Hashem, 'Ribbono Shel Olom, what is one born of woman doing amongst us?'

However, there is a difference in the outcome of the two cases. In the latter instance, Moshe and the angels established a camaraderie to such an extent that

כל אחד ואחד נעשה לו אוהב, ומסר לו דבר

Each and every angel became a loved one of Moshe and gave him a gift.

In the former, the subject under discussion here, there was no rapprochement. Were it not for the Divine intervention, Moshe's life could have been taken from him!

Thus we see, at least from the perspective of these Midrashim, that 'seeing the *Glory* of G-d' was viewed by the angels as something even greater than receiving the Torah and thus, this achievement of Moshe Rabbenu was greater, according to these Midrashim, than *Kabbalas HaTorah!*

If we take this last opinion to guide us, the question before us is:

Why should it be?

Why should it be that Moshe Rabbenu Olov HaShalom who was chosen by G-d to take Israel out of the Land of Egypt and to lead them to Sinai and to receive the Torah for them and to lead them until they were prepared to enter Eretz Yisroel – why was the event of the *Eigel* a necessary step for him to get to the level that G-d revealed hidden knowledge to him that otherwise he would not have attained?

As we began this essay, we did not pretend to think that we could really know the answer. Nonetheless, we will suggest some thoughts that may be explanatory.

We read in Masseches B'rachos (34 b):

אמר רבי אבהו במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים גמורים יכולים לעמוד
שנאמר שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב (ישעיה נז/ט"ב)¹² רחוק קודם לקרוב.

Rabi Avahu says, 'In the place where penitents stand, even those who are completely righteous are not able to stand. This is as it says, '*Shalom, Shalom* to the distant and to the close'. [Hashem speaks to the one who is] distant first and then to the one who is close¹³.

¹² The entire verse reads:

בּוֹרָא נּוֹב שְׁפָתַיִם שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרָחוֹק וְלִקְרוֹב אָמַר ה' וְרָפְאֵתִיו:
He creates the speech of the lips; '*Shalom, Shalom* to the distant and to the close', says Hashem, 'And I will heal him.'

¹³ There are differing opinions regarding Rabi Avahu's thesis and his interpretation to back up the thesis. See the entire Gemara there.

See also Zohar Sh'mos (106 b) regarding this issue.

Among the many commentators who attempt to explain this opinion that may seem counter-intuitive is the Maharal.

He writes in *Tiferes Yisroel* (Perek 57):

רבי אבהו...אומר 'במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים, צדיקים גמורים אינם יכולים לעמוד'. וטעם זה דבר מופלג ועמוק מאד מאד. וזה כי הצדיקים, אף שהם צדיקים גמורים, מכל מקום מדרגתו ומעלתו של צדיק הוא מן עולם הזה, כי הוא נברא ונולד בעולם הזה. אבל זה שהיה כל ימיו רשע, וחזר בתשובה להיות צדיק, אין ספק כי הפרישה מן הדבר יותר במעלה ממי שלא היה צריך לפרוש. לכך אמרו (פסחים מט ב)...כי הפורש מן התורה יותר רחוק מן התורה ממי שלא ראה תורה מימיו...וזה שפירש מן החטא, שהיה נוטה אל עולם הזה הגשמי, הוא יותר במעלה ממי שלא היה נוטה אחריו כלל. ולפיכך המדרגה זאת, שהיא יציאה מן החטא, לא בא לו מצד עולם הזה, לפי שבעל תשובה מסלק החמרי אשר בו החטא, כי אין חטא נבדל מן החמרי, וסלוק החמרי אינו רק מצד עולם העליון, שאין במדרגה ההיא נמצא שום חמרי. ובאותה מדרגה עליונה הוא סלוק החמרי...

Rabi Avahu says that in the place where the penitent stands the fully righteous cannot stand'. The reason for this is extraordinary and very, very deep.

The reason for this is that the righteous, even though they are completely righteous, nonetheless, their level and height is one of this world. This is because this *Tzaddik* was created and born in this world.

But, one who was wicked his entire life and repented and became a *Tzaddik*, undoubtedly his separation from sin is greater than one who never had to separate. Therefore it says in Masseches Pesachim that one who separates from Torah is more distant from Torah than one who never knew what Torah is.

The one who separates from sin had a tendency to this material world and thus is on a higher level than one who never had such a tendency.

See *Moadim B'Halachah* by Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin ZT"l who cites the Rogachover Gaon ZT"l as bringing a proof that the Halachah is like Rabi Abahu.

See the *Sefer Daf al Daf* to this Gemara for a discussion about this Halachah.

Therefore this level, which is leaving sin, does not come from this world because the penitent is removing the materialism in which he sinned. This is because 'sin' cannot be separated from the 'materialism' of his sin. Leaving materialism can only come from the upper worlds where there is no materialism. It is on that elevated level that sin is dismissed.

As unfortunate and sad that sin is, one who repents has experiences that one who never needs to repent will never have.

To repent is to reject the materialism which drew the person to sin. The strength to reject materialism cannot be derived from *kochos* in this world because this world is inherently materialistic.

The strength to repent, to reject materialistic values, must come from the 'upper worlds', those more pristine and removed from worldly pursuits.

Thus, the *Baal Teshuvah* must garner strength from the higher worlds to become that penitent. Such an experience is not available to the *Tzaddik Gamur* who has never sinned.

Of course it is better not to sin than to sin¹⁴. However, if we consider it, since there is a Mitzvah to repent, then the benefit of fulfilling that Mitzvah, besides

¹⁴ In Masseches Bava Basra (119 b) Tosfos (d.h.) *afilu* quotes a Midrash. The discussion in the Gemara there has a reference to the *Mekoshesh Eitzim* about whom we read in Parshas Sh'lach.

The Torah writes there (B'midbar Perek 15/P'sukim 32,35-36):

וַיְהִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיִּמְצְאוּ אִישׁ מִקִּשְׁשׁ עֵצִים בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת:
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה מוֹת יוֹמֵת הָאִישׁ רְגוּם אֹתוֹ בְּאֲבָנִים כָּל הָעֵדָה מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל
הָעֵדָה אֶל מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְגְּמוּ אֹתוֹ בְּאֲבָנִים וַיָּמָת כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה:

B'nei Yisroel were in the wilderness and they found a man gathering wood on the day of Shabbos.

Hashem said to Moshe, 'This man will surely die; the entire congregation should surely cast stones upon him outside of the camp. The entire congregation took him outside the camp and they cast stones upon him and he died; as Hashem commanded Moshe.

the actual cessation of sin, may bring a person to a particular *madreiga* that otherwise would not have been experienced.

At this point, the attentive reader may wish to object. All of the above may be true regarding penitents but what does that have to do with Moshe Rabbenu? Moshe did not sin with the *Eigel* and so he didn't repent!

The answer to this important query is a Gemara in Masseches Bava Basra (9 a) that has specific reference to *tzedakah* but is not limited to that Mitzvah.

The Gemara writes:

Tosfos writes:

...אמר במדרש דלשם שמים נתכוין שהיו אומרים ישראל כיון שנגזר עליהן שלא ליכנס לארץ
ממעשה מרגלים שוב אין מחויבין במצות עמד וחילל שבת כדי שיהרג ויראו אחרים...

The Midrash says that the *mekoshesh* intended his act to be for G-d. he did so because Israel were saying that once the decree was given that B'nei Yisroel would not enter Eretz Yisroel because of the sin of the *meraglim* spies, they were no longer obligated to observe the Mitzvos.

The *mekoshesh* took the initiative and profaned Shabbos so that he would be killed and others would see [that the Mitzvos were still binding].

Of course, the Torah gives no leniency to this act of the *mekoshesh*. Man is not allowed to attempt to 'outsmart' the Ribbono Shel Olom. A sin is a sin!

Thus, Rambam writes very clearly in Hilchos Teshuva (Perek 4/Halachah 1):

ארבעה ועשרים דברים מעכבין את התשובה, ארבעה מהן עון גדול והעושה אחד מהן אין
הקדוש ברוך הוא מספיק בידו לעשות תשובה לפי גודל חטאו. ואלו הן... והאומר אחטא
ואשוב ובכלל זה האומר אחטא ויום הכפורים מכפר.

There are twenty-four things that prevent repentance from being effective. Four of these things are a very great sin and one who does [even] one of them – Hashem does not enable him to repent because of the greatness of his sin. They are... One who says, 'I will sin and then I will repent'. Included in this category is 'One who says, 'I will sin and Yom HaKippurim' will atone for me'.

Thus, a sin is a sin with all the weight that it bears. Nonetheless, a sincere penitent has an opportunity that is not presented to one who hasn't sinned.

אמר רבי אלעזר: גדול המעשה יותר מן העושה, שנאמר: (ישעיה לב/ז) והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום ועבודת הצדקה השקט ובטח עד עולם...

Rabi Elazar said: One who causes another 'to do' (*me'a'seh*) is greater than the one who actually does it as it says, 'The act of Tzedakah is peace and the labor of tzedakah is quiet and security forever.'

Rashi explains the inference in the verse that led Rabi Elazar to his conclusion:
מעשה הצדקה - טורח המעשים את חבריהם מדלא כתיב והיתה הצדקה שלום.

Doing Tzedakah – the effort that they did to enable their friends [to do a Mitzvah]. [The implication is derived from that fact] that the verse could have written *Tzedakah will bring peace*' [without writing the word *מעשה* all.)

If Reuven encourages or leads Shimon to a *Mitzvah* act, Reuven is greater than Shimon.

If we substitute 'Moshe' for 'Reuven' and 'Israel' for 'Shimon' we see that the fact that Moshe was the enabler for Israel to repent made him greater than them.

If when Israel repented they were in this new and higher level than they were before¹⁵, then he who brought them to such a level is even greater.

The logic for this principle is explained by Maharal on this Gemara:

גדול המעשה וכו'. רוצה לומר כאשר הצדקה היא מוכרחת על ידי עשוי, וכל צדקה הוא ויתור ולפנים משורת הדין, וכאשר הויתור ולפנים משורת הדין...הדבר הזה נותן שלום שלא יבא מחלוקת. כי המחלוקת ולפנים משורת הדין הם שני הפכים, כי בעל המחלוקת אינו נכנס לפנים משורת הדין, ומעמיד דבריו על הדין לגמרי, וכאשר מעשין על הצדקה שהוא לפנים משורת הדין, עד שנמצא לפנים משורת הדין לגמרי, דבר זה נותן שלום לגמרי,

Greater is the one who causes others to do – this means to say that when *tzedakah* is forced because someone made him.

¹⁵ Of course, repentance does not mean that the sin did not take place. The punishment visited upon Israel of removing their crowns remained intact.

All *tzedaka* is relinquishing and is beyond the letter of the law...this brings peace and avoids dispute because 'dispute' and behavior that is beyond the letter of the law are two complete opposites. One who is involved in disputes cannot behave beyond the letter of the law and demands that all be done according to the letter of the law only.

When one causes others to give tzedakah which is beyond the letter of the law and they come completely beyond the letter of the law, that causes complete peace.

Let us now take this idea and place it in the context of our discussion.

What is the letter of the law in our context and what is beyond the letter of the law in our context?

The letter of the law was what Hashem spoke to Moshe:

וְעַתָּה הַנִּיחָה לִּי יַיִחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאֶכְלִים וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל:

Now, leave Me be and My anger will be incensed against them and I will destroy them and I will make you into a great nation.

These are the words of Hashem. They are a *Halachah*. They form the letter of the law.

When Moshe Rabbenu chooses to go beyond the letter of the law (at Hashem's invitation, as above) he is now avoiding מחלוקת. מחלוקת does not only mean 'dispute' or 'argument'. It means 'division'.

The letter of the law allowed Moshe to divide himself from all of Israel. He alone would remain and the rest would be destroyed.

When Moshe took that step beyond the letter of the law, his goal was to obviate the מחלוקת, to prevent division.

When Moshe stepped over that line of the letter of the law, it was he who was making peace, not Israel.

And when Moshe brought Israel to repent, and thus saved Israel from G-d's announced plan of their annihilation, he prevented an even greater מחלוקת, a permanent and irrevocable division between Man and G-d if Israel would have been destroyed.

Therefore Moshe's attainments and Israel's attainments are all accrued to Moshe and he is certainly greater than Israel.

If when Israel repented they came to an even higher level by virtue of their actions, then Moshe who was greater than them came to a level that was higher than the one that they achieved.

If this is so, we now understand how the events surrounding the *Eigel HaZahav* formed the catalyst to allow Moshe to rise even higher in his understanding of Hashem.

When this week's Parshas Ki Siso coincides with the reading of Parshas Poroh, as it often does, then we can easily find an association with what we have written here and the nature of Parshas Poroh.

We will read (B'midbar Perek 19/Posuk 2):

זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליה פרה אדמה
תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה על:

This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem commanded saying, 'Speak to B'nei Yisroel and they should take for you a completely red heifer, which has no blemishes, upon which no yoke was ever placed.

Rashi writes:

זאת חקת התורה - לפי שהשטן ואומות העולם מונין את ישראל לומר מה המצוה
הזאת ומה טעם יש בה, לפיכך כתב בה חקה, גזירה היא מלפני ואין לך רשות
להרהר אחריה:

This is the statute of the Torah – since Soton and the nations of the world abuse Israel saying, 'What is this Mitzvah? What logic is there in it?'

Therefore the Torah wrote *statute*. It is a decree from before Me and you are not allowed to question it.

One who thinks after reading these words that there is no discussion allowed regarding this Mitzvah is in error. The opposite is true. There is an entire Masseches Poroh and there are ample discussions in the commentators on this verse regarding its meaning for us.

There is vibrant and vital discussion – but it is within the realm of *chok* – a statute.

After one knows that the answer is *chok*, then one can pursue understanding as much as one wants-until we arrive at the barrier – our inability to understand further.

We have explored a very special segment in the unique life of Moshe Rabbenu. We have raised many issues and suggested an approach to understand them better to the best of our ability.

There is always more to learn and more to understand and more questions to raise.

That is our right and that is our duty.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock