

Zera Shimshon

Profound Divrei Torah culled from the writings of the Gaon and Mekubal Rav Shimshon Chaim ben Rav Nachman Michael Nachmani zy" a, author of Sefer Zera Shimshon on Chumash and Toldos Shimshon on Pirkei Avos, who promised that all who study his words will be blessed with an abundance of good, wealth and honor, and will merit to see children and grandchildren thriving around their table.



אמרות שמשון

Since it did not mention "calf" but rather "ox," it becomes evident that they repented and were atoned

"An ox, or a sheep or a goat, when it is born, shall remain seven days under its mother; and from the eighth day onward it shall be accepted as a fire-offering to Hashem." (Vayikra 22:27)

In the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 27:3), the phrase "An ox, or a sheep or a goat, when it is born, etc." is explained: "This is what the verse refers to when it says (Yechezkel 29:16): 'And it shall no longer be for the Children of Israel a support that recalls iniquity,' etc. For does an ox come into being at birth? In reality, what is born is a calf! So why does it say 'An ox [...] when it is born'? Rather, because of the sin of Israel—'they made for themselves a molten calf'—the verse calls it 'ox' and not 'calf,' because it did not wish to mention the calf with which they sinned."

Further on in the Midrash (section 8), another teaching is brought: "What did the Torah see to make the ox the first (that is, to mention it first) among all the offerings? Rabbi Levi said: 'Because the nations of the world afflict Israel, saying to them: "You made the calf." Therefore, the ox was made first [in mention] among the offerings, to declare that HaKadosh Baruch Hu examined the matter and found in it no substance whatsoever.'"

To the eyes of the commentators, these two Midrashim are astonishing and appear to contradict one another: in the first Midrash it is explained that the verse did not wish to mention "calf" because it would recall the sin; whereas in the second Midrash it is explained that the ox is mentioned first among the offerings in order to declare that there was no sin at all in their actions.

It may be said, in accordance with what we find in the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 3:2), that HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe: "I foresee that when I come to Mount Sinai to give them the Torah, they will take one of the beings of My chariot and anger Me with it," etc. That is, He foresaw that the Children of Israel would take one of the beings of His supernal chariot, namely the ox, as it is written (Yechezkel 1:10): "...and the face of an ox on the left," and with it they would provoke Him.

It is thus explained that the original intention in the sin of the

Children of Israel was to make an ox and serve it; and the reason it was not an ox but rather that a calf emerged for them is explained by the Siftei Kohen: in order that they should see their disgrace, for if it were a deity or a leader, it would not require growth; but this calf is a newborn, and must eat grass until it grows and becomes an ox (see there).

It follows, then, that the fact that it was a calf was brought about by HaKadosh Baruch Hu in order to shame and humiliate them. However, certainly in the eyes of the observers, who did not know this, it appeared that even Israel's intention had been to make an actual calf.

According to this, it is well understood: if the verse had said "a calf, when it is born," this would have recalled the iniquity of Israel, as it appeared to those who saw that a calf had emerged. Therefore, the verse was precise in stating "an ox, or a sheep or a goat, when it is born," and did not mention a calf, even though an ox initially is a calf.

Furthermore, it specifically mentioned the ox first in order to teach us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu examined the actions of Israel and found in them no substance, since their intention was not fulfilled: they wished to make an ox, but a calf emerged, and upon its being a calf they were ashamed, as explained according to the Siftei Kohen. Therefore, there is no substance in this act, for an act is not considered when it is contrary to the intention.

And this verse comes to teach us the reason why HASHEM forgave them: because they intended an ox but a calf emerged, and they were ashamed of it; and anyone who commits a transgression and is ashamed of it is forgiven immediately (Berachot 12b).

For this reason, the verse precisely mentions the ox first, because from this term "ox" it becomes evident that they repented and were ashamed; thus, it is certainly fitting that it be mentioned first among the offerings.

In this way, the words of both Midrashim are perfectly reconciled, for both refer to one idea: that the verse mentions "ox" in order to teach us that their sin was not so severe, since they did not succeed in carrying out their intention, and moreover they experienced great shame in their actions, which aided them in achieving atonement.

But if the verse had mentioned "calf," it would not have been known that initially they intended to make an ox; on the contrary, we would have said that this constitutes a remembrance of their sin. (Zera Shimshon, Parashat Emor, Art. 3)

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Chapter 4 Mishna 4

Rabbi Levitas, a man of Yavneh, says: "Be exceedingly humble of spirit, for the hope of man is the worm."

With Hope Placed in the Worm

We must understand what the Tanna meant by the phrase "the hope of man is the worm," for the heart of every person always hopes and longs for good things and consolation. So who is it that hopes for something bad (which is what the worm seems to represent in the *Mishnah*)?

This can be explained based on what another Tanna said (*Avot* 3:1): "[Man, reflect,] where are you headed? To a place of dust, worms (*rimah*), and maggots (*tola'ah*)." The commentators explained that the worm (*rimah*) and the maggot (*tola'ah*) are two distinct things: the worm appears before the flesh begins to decay, and the maggot comes afterward, once the flesh has already decomposed (see *Siftei Kohen, Parashat Beshalach*, under "*Vayanichu*").

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 152b) also mentions that a person who

harbors envy in his heart — his bones rot after death; but one who has no envy — his bones remain intact. Nonetheless, the Tosafot (*Bava Batra* 17a, under "*Shiv'a*") wrote that although the maggot may not affect him, hardly anyone is spared from the worm.

Now, one who is humble certainly has no envy at all. Therefore, his bones will endure and only the worm — not the maggot — will have any effect on him, and based on his spiritual level, it's possible he won't even feel it. So the Tanna's intention in saying "the hope of man is the worm" is not to imply that man's hope is for something bad, but on the contrary — it is a positive hope: that his final fate will be only the worm and not the maggot. Hence, he taught that since every person hopes that only the worm will affect his bones and not the maggot, he must be humble of spirit, for through that he will merit that his bones remain whole and not be consumed by the maggot.

Chapter 4 Mishna 8

Rabbi Yose says: "Anyone who honors the Torah — his body is honored by people; and one who disgraces the Torah — his body is disgraced by people." (Mishnah 8)

Well-Deserved Honor

We must understand what the Tanna comes to teach us by repeating his words, for it's obvious that someone who does not honor the Torah will not be honored by others. Why, then, did he say "his body is honored" and not simply "he is honored"? Additionally, we must examine why he said "his body is honored by people" and not "among people."

This can be explained based on what the *Poskim* (halachic authorities) wrote (*Yoreh De'ah* 244:12): that one is obligated to rise before a person who performs good deeds. It is also ruled (*Yoreh De'ah* 243:6) that it is forbidden to make use of someone who studies *halachot* (Torah laws). Based on these principles, the Tanna teaches us two things.

First, he said: "Anyone who honors the Torah," that is, one

who performs good deeds — even if he is not a Torah scholar — "his body is honored by people", meaning others may not use his body for labor or tasks, just as it is forbidden to make use of one who studies *halachot*. That is why the Tanna precisely stated "his body is honored by people" — because using his body is forbidden, and everyone will regard him as someone above them.

Secondly, he added: "One who disgraces the Torah — his body is disgraced", to teach us a novel idea: even if he is a Torah scholar, if he disgraces the Torah, his body becomes *chol* (חול) mundane, devoid of sanctity), as Rashi explains, and others may use him freely without any prohibition. For the Talmud (*Yoma* 72b) says: "Any Torah scholar whose inside does not match his outside is not a true scholar and is called an abomination."

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