



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Ki Sisa 5776

February 26, 2016

# A Taste of Torah

## Point of No Return

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

It is one of the most horrifying events in Jewish history. Its ramifications and consequences are felt until this very day. It resulted in a fall from perfection, from a state where sin, exile, and death would never make their way into the Jewish Nation. All sufferings and tribulations that befall the Jewish People contain some of its punishment.

When the Jewish People created a golden calf, the vast majority of them had no designs to worship an idol. They simply felt that this supernatural being would replace Moshe, whom they believed to be dead, as an intermediary between themselves and Hashem. Alas, they acted on their own, and contravened a very significant law against creating an image for any purpose whatsoever. They had good intentions, but the road they paved led in a very different direction.

Up in Heaven, meanwhile, Hashem informed Moshe of the terrible sin that had been committed. Moshe earns a reprieve from complete destruction of the Jewish People, and then descends Mt. Sinai with the *Luchos* (Tablets). As Moshe approaches the encampment, he catches sight of the calf, as well as the festivities and rejoicing being held in its honor. The Torah tells us that Moshe hurled the *Luchos* from his grasp, smashing them at the foot of the mountain.

There is a perplexing problem present in the narrative. Hashem had informed Moshe of the goings-on in the camp, yet Moshe still took the *Luchos*, presumably with the intent of delivering them to the Jewish People. Yet Moshe apparently changed his mind upon beholding the sight of the Jews dancing and singing around the Golden Calf. Seeing may be believing, but it is difficult to fathom that Moshe harbored any disbelief of Hashem's account of events down below

- so why the sudden change of heart?

The answer, explains the Seforno (Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno; c. 1475-1550), is contained in the verse itself that describes what Moshe observed from the mountain. The verse (Ki Sisa 32:19) states that Moshe saw the calf and the dances. It was the happiness that brought Moshe to cast the *Luchos* down, says the Seforno. Until that point, Moshe was well aware that the people had committed an egregious sin, one so severe that Hashem initially wanted to wipe them out. But Moshe believed that the sin could be rectified, the people could repent, and he would be able to return them to the pristine state they had occupied following the Giving of the Torah. The *Luchos* could then be bestowed upon the once-again-perfect Jewish Nation.

But then Moshe saw *dancing*. He saw that the Jewish People were happy with their error. They were rejoicing. They believed they had made a correct decision, and this was the right and proper thing to do. This was not just a temporary mistake; this was their new identity. And Moshe suddenly realized, with searing clarity, that two Tablets would not cure the illness the Jewish People had contracted. Repentance would allow them to take a different, tortuous route to arrive at their destination, but the damage done would preclude their ability to again ascend the pinnacle where they could receive those special *Luchos*. The *Luchos*, whole and flawless, fashioned and inscribed by Hashem Himself, intended for a perfect nation, were now irrelevant; they had to be shattered.

Ah, how history repeats itself. Sin is terrible. But if a person slips, gives in to temptation, even numerous times, but is ashamed, recognizes that he has erred, then then the sin has not yet burrowed

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## Stories For The Soul

### Well-Read

based on a story from [revach.net](http://revach.net)

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (1899-1985), known as the Steipler, once sent a messenger to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) regarding an important issue that the Steipler wanted Rav Moshe to become involved in. The messenger discussed the issue with Rav Moshe and told him all the details. When he was finished, he pulled out the *Hamodia* newspaper (an Orthodox publication), explaining that this edition of the paper contained an article about the matter at hand. Rav Moshe declined to take the newspaper, saying that he had already heard the details; there was no need for him to see the article. The messenger persisted, explaining that it was possible that Rav Moshe might glean more insight by reading the article.

Rav Moshe responded, "I have not held a newspaper in my hands for seventy years. As soon as I read a newspaper, I will no longer be qualified to rule on this matter, because my mind will not be one hundred percent *da'as Torah* (intellect based purely on the Torah)."

In this week's parsha, the Jewish Nation accepted the Golden Calf, not as a god, but as a replacement for Moshe, whom they thought dead. Though they may have meant well, they were severely castigated because they took matters into their own hands. While we'd like to think that our minds can perceive true right and wrong, it is only the pure Torah mind that can see things with absolute clarity.

## Kollel Happenings

### KOLLEL'S 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION MARCH 15<sup>TH</sup>

The Denver Community Kollel will hold its 18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration on Tuesday, March 15<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at Aish Denver. Kollel founders Rabbi Myer J. and Mrs. Bruria Schwab will be the guests of honor. The Kollel will recognize the 18 current and past Kollel families who reside in Denver. To reserve or place an ad, visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org), email [journal@denverkollel.org](mailto:journal@denverkollel.org), or call 303-820-2855.

### FULL DISCLOSURE VS. BUYER BEWARE THIS WED. AT TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Brad Licht, Managing Broker, Licht Realty Company and Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab, Dean, Denver Community Kollel, as they reveal how much one must reveal in a deal. March 2, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### A LEAP OF FAITH THIS SUNDAY IN TWO LOCATIONS

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a discussion about the background and significance of the Jewish leap year. The class will be held this Sunday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, at two locations: the Kollel building, 1516 Xavier St., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, at 10 am, for women only, and Aish Denver, 9550 E. Belleview Ave., at 7:30 pm for men and women. For more info and sponsorship opportunities, contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** What custom is unique to the weeks of the Torah reading of Terumah and Tetzaveh of a Jewish leap year?

**A:** There is a custom, based on the Arizal, to fast and/or recite special prayers on Thursdays during the weeks of the parshiyos of Shemos through Tetzaveh of a Jewish leap year. Shaa'rei Teshuva (Orach Chaim 685:2) relates that the custom of his time was to fast on all years (not only leap years) on Thursdays of Shemos through

Mishpatim, adding Terumah and Tetzaveh during leap years only. These weeks are referred to as ShoVaVIM (an acronym for the names of the parshiyos of Shemos through Mishpatim) or ShoVaVIM TaT (adding Terumah and Tetzaveh).

**This week's question:** What is the longest aliyah (reading for one individual called to the Torah) of the year, and why?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org).

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel – the Rosh, Part II

The Rosh's teacher, Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, was the leader of the Jewish communities in Germany. In 1286, Emperor Rudolph declared the Jews *servi camerae* (serfs of the treasury), which had the effect of negating their political freedoms. In response to this persecution, many Jews fled Germany; this displeased Rudolph, who wanted his Jewish population to remain and contribute to his coffers.

Among those fleeing was Rabbi Meir, who took his entire family and set out for the Land of Israel. While passing through Lombardy, though, Rabbi Meir was recognized by an apostate Jew who was accompanying the archbishop of Mainz. The archbishop had Rabbi Meir

arrested and taken back to Germany. There, by order of Emperor Rudolph, Rabbi Meir was imprisoned in the fortress of Ensisheim and held for an exorbitant ransom. The emperor knew that the Jews would give away their last mark to redeem their beloved rabbi, and, indeed, the sum of 20,000 marks was raised for Rabbi Meir's freedom.

Rabbi Meir, however, forbade his followers to redeem him. Based on a Rabbinic edict in the Talmud, he felt that if the ransom was paid, other rabbis would be arrested and held for ransom by the greedy and cruel German rulers. Rabbi Meir preferred to remain in prison in order to save many others from a similar fate.

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itself into the persona to the extent that return to original perfection is impossible. But when a person - or a culture - declares that imperfections and shortcomings, problems whose resolution require serious work and introspection, are in fact a source of pride, something to rejoice in, proclaim loudly and praise, then we are in serious trouble, for the bridges to the straight and proper path have been burned.

We cannot fix all of society's ills. But we

can look at our own lives, and see if we are guilty of a similar mistake, albeit on a much smaller scale. A basic tenet of Judaism is that what we do affects everything around us, be it for good or otherwise. If we can be courageous enough to examine the path upon which we stride, and ensure that we have not taken our challenges and converted them into attributes, there is hope that our efforts can effect positive change in the world in which we reside.

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