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DVAR TORAH UNITED SISTERS

Yaakov's blessing to Yosef includes the cryptic expression "בנות צעדה עלי שור". One way of translating "בנות צעדה עלי שור" (Bereishit 49:22) is, "The daughters step on the wall." Who are those daughters and what wall did they step on?

One approach in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:6) holds that the "daughters" are the daughters of Tzafchad, and the "wall" is the Yarden River. Tzafchad is descended from Yosef; so his daughters are aptly referred to as Yosef's daughters. Why is the Yarden referred to as a wall? The Midrash answers that because Hashem did not allow Moshe to cross the Yarden, the Yarden is a wall. Why, though, does the Torah refer to the "daughters" of Tzafchad as "stepping on the wall" – the Yarden? Apparently it is because the daughters of Tzafchad married men from their own tribe of Menasheh (see Bamidbar 36:11-12); and the inheritance of the tribe of Menasheh included land on both sides of the Yarden River. The daughters of Tzafchad divided up the land their father would have received, but their husbands did not necessarily live in the same place – so the five families, this Midrash assumes, were split on both sides of the Yarden.

There might have been a special reason for the Midrash to assume that this particular line in Yosef's blessing refers to the daughters of Tzafchad. There is a blatant grammatical difficulty in the verse: **בנות** is a **plural** noun while **צעדה** is a **singular** verb. Why isn't the verb also in the plural form? Shouldn't the Torah have said, "בנות צעדו עלי שור," [Some commentators (assuming that the verse refers to the daughters of Egypt climbing on a wall to see how handsome Yosef was) explain that each one of the daughters climbed on the wall. But that explanation still views this verse as irregular. **צעדו** would still have been a simpler choice of words.]

The daughters of Tzafchad are five sisters but act as one unit. All five sisters always appear together: when listed in the family tree of the tribe of Menasheh (Bamidbar 26:33); when they approach Moshe (Bamidbar 27:1); and when they get married (Bamidbar 36:11). They are five, but they are one.

The Sifrei (133, quoted by Rashi) points out how the Torah orders them differently in different places to make it clear that they were all of equal stature. Another Midrash says that when they spoke with Moshe, each one of them said a different part of their speech (Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar 27, Remez 773); they even spoke as one. Therefore, in the blessing of Yaakov, a singular verb sufficed for all five sisters.

Why was their unity emphasized while speaking about them stepping on the Yarden River? Perhaps the tribe of Menashe served as a unifying element – uniting the tribes of Reuven and Gad on the eastern bank of the Yarden, with the other ten tribes on the western bank of the Yarden (see Haamek Davar Devarim 3:16 for another approach). One tribe, Menashe, unified the two halves of Israel. Within that one tribe, there was one family – Tzafchad's daughters, the five united sisters – who served as the super-unifying element within that tribe. They were one unit, yet on both sides of the river. Through that one family, that one unified group of sisters, all of Israel was tied together.

SOURCE GUIDE: GOLDEN CALF, RED HEIFER

The sin of the Golden Calf took place on the 17th of Tammuz. This source guide, that relies heavily on a passage in the Alshich's commentary, explores why midrashim see the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer) as the "mother cleaning up her child's filth," a way of repairing the harm done by the Golden Calf.

A. The 17th of Tammuz, the Golden Calf, & the Red Heifer

The connection between the 17th of Tammuz and the sin of the Golden Calf is rooted in the Mishnah:

<p>1. Mishnah Ta'anit 4:6 ... On the Seventeenth of Tammuz the Tablets were broken ...</p>	<p>משנה תענית ד:ו: ... בשבועה עָשָׂר בְּתַמוּז נִשְׁתַּבְּרוּ הַלְוִיחוֹת ...</p>
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The Two Tablets, with Divine words etched into them by Divine writing, were broken by Moshe when he came down from the mountain and found the People of Israel sinning with the Golden Calf. Rabbi Aivu in the Midrash connects the Red Heifer with the Golden Calf:

<p>2. Bamidbar Rabbah 19:8 Why, even though all of the sacrifices are offered from male animals, is this one from a female? Said Rabbi Aivu: "We can understand based on a parable. The son of a maidservant dirtied the palace of the king. The king said, 'Let the mother come and clean up her child's filth.' Thus, said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Let the cow come and atone for the episode of the Golden Calf.'"</p>	<p>במדבר רבה י"ט:ח: ומפני מה כל הקרבנות זכרים וזו נקבה? א"ר איבו: "משל לבן שפחה שטינף פלטיין של מלך. אמר המלך, 'תבא אמו ותקנה את הצואה.' כך אמר הקב"ה, 'תבא פרה ותכפר על מעשה העגל.'"</p>
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The Red Heifer atones for the sin of the Golden Calf that brought about the breaking of the Tablets on the 17th of Tammuz.

B. Removing the Filth of Sin

Harav Moshe Alshich, זצ"ל (1508-1593) asks a simple question:

<p>3. Torah Moshe on Vayikra 21:1-2 Isn't this difficult, because the Red Heifer does not come to atone for the sin of the calf, but, rather, to purify the impure?!</p>	<p>תורת משה על ויקרא כא:א-ב הלא יקשה כי לא לכפר על עון העגל באה הפרה, רק לטהר את הטמאים.</p>
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According to a straightforward (pshat) reading of the Chumash, the Red Heifer does not bring atonement for any sin, but, rather, purification from impurity that comes from contact with the dead.

He answers by first explaining the concept of **טומאת מת**, impurity that comes from a dead person:

<p>4. Torah Moshe on Vayikra 21:1-2 When G-d created man on the earth, His wisdom dictated that man and his descendants should live forever. This is because man was holy, devoid of sins; his body was G-d's handiwork; and his soul was a part of the Divine above. Because everything about him was holy, it was not possible that death should befall him. However, when man sinned, the snake came and cast within him the filth of impurity (Shabbat 146a). On his soul and flesh rested a filth that stemmed from impurity. As long as that filth clings to man, he cannot escape it, because he is wrapped up in it.</p>	<p>תורת משה על ויקרא כא:א-ב ... מאז ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ גזרה חכמתו יתברך יהיה הוא וזרעו חי לעולם. והוא כי קדוש היה, משולל עכירות, הגוף מעשה אלהים הוא, והנפש חלק אלוך ממעל, הכל מהקדושה אשר לא תפול בה גדר מיתה כלל. אמנם כאשר חטא על הנפש בא נחש והטיל זוהמת טומאה (שבת קמו.), מנפש ועד בשר שרתה חלאת טומאה אשר היא מבחינת הטומאה וכל עוד שחלאת הזוהמה היא דבקה באדם לא יוכל מלט ממנה כי היא כרוכה בה.</p>
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The only way to remove this impurity is through death and rebirth:

<p>5. Torah Moshe on Vayikra 21:1-2 Even if, granted, that a soul would be so purified from its sin through repentance and suffering – as with King David, may he rest in peace – death is still necessary in order to purify the filth of physicality through the crucible of the earth. The person then</p>	<p>תורת משה על ויקרא כא:א-ב וגם לו יונח תטהר הנפש מעונה על ידי תשובה וייסורין כאשר בדוד המלך ע"ה, המיתה מוכרחת למען זכך חלאת החומר בכור הארץ, ויעלה מן הארץ זך בלי שמרי</p>
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rises up from the ground pure without the dregs of filth, ready to receive the holiness of the pure soul with a bind of holiness that will no longer spread apart. He will become just as man was when created, before he sinned. For sin will not be present after resurrection, because there will no longer be an evil inclination.

זוהמא, מוכן לקבל קדושת הנפש טהורה בקשר קדושה שעוד לא יתפרדו, כאשר היתה נפש האדם באדם בהבראו טרם יחטא. שחטא לא ימצא אחר התחיה כי אין יצר הרע עוד.

With Avraham began the purification of Man, distancing from the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, and the removal of the "filth." This process was completed when the Jews stood at Mount Sinai:

3. Torah Moshe on Vayikra 21:1-2

As our Sages say, "When Israel stood at Mount Sinai their 'filth' ceased" (Shabbat 146a). Therefore they were free from the Angel of Death; for with the negation of the "filth" there was no more death. But afterwards, through the Calf, the "filth" returned to its place. Through that death, tied to man through the "filth," returned.

תורת משה על ויקרא כא:א-ב
 וכמאמרם ז"ל (שבת קמו א) ישראל שעמדו על הר סיני פסקה זוהמתן. ועל כן היה להם חירות ממלאך המות, כי בבטול הזוהמא אין עוד מיתה. אך אחרי כן על ידי העגל חזרה הזוהמא למקומה. ועל ידי כן חזרה המיתה הכרוכה באדם על ידי הזוהמא.

But there is still hope for man, after the sin of the Golden Calf. For, through the Red Heifer, Israel can once again remove the impurity that comes through death. This explains how Rabbi Aivu's statement is not at odds with the simple understanding of the reason for the Red Heifer. Removing the impurity that comes from death is synonymous with atoning for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Golden Calf was, for Israel, what the sin of the Tree of Knowledge was for Mankind.

C. Losing Innocence

At first glance, this comparison seems tenuous. Israel dancing around the Golden Calf seems to be so different than Adam and Chavah succumbing to the snake's temptation. How are they similar?

Perhaps it is not so much the sins, but the sinners who were similar. Adam and Chavah were newly created perfect beings, and the people of Israel at Sinai had reached the level of Man before the sin. Both were perfect and pure. Rashi (Bamidbar 19:22), quoting Rabbi Moshe the Darshan, explains why the Parah Adumah had to be "completely and perfectly red" (temimah). "Israel were complete and perfect and became flawed (baalei mumim). Let this come and atone for them so they can return to their perfection."

The comparison is very striking. Whereas Adam and Chavah were **created** pure and perfect; the people of Israel, through a forty-nine day process, **became** pure and perfect. Israel is considered equal to Adam and Chavah before the sin. The tragedy of the sin of the Golden Calf was that after doing such a thorough and amazing teshuvah, the Jewish people did not hold on to it. We commemorate this tragedy by fasting on the 17th of Tammuz over the broken tablets, the symbol of our destroyed perfection.

Perhaps the special message of the Seventeenth of Tammuz is, "We must hold on to our teshuvah." We must protect our (and our childrens') innocence, purity and newfound perfection, not break our tablets.

Doing teshuvah and holding on to teshuva are different types of challenges. The path to teshuvah is difficult but romantic, with its exciting transformations and dramatic life changes. Holding on to teshuvah is less exciting and demands a different set of skills: developing good habits, setting down roots in a Torah community, learning with devotion, and working hard on our inner lives.

But what if one does not hold on to teshuvah? The Parah Adumah teaches us that purity can be regained. The Parah Adumah atones for the Golden Calf. But it is a process that demands humility (Rashi – "One who was high like a cedar must lower himself like a hyssop") and total restructuring (Rashi – "Just as the Golden Calf was totally burned so is the Parah Adumah"). We should not make the mistakes like those of the Golden Calf and the Tree of Knowledge. But we are told never to despair, for there is always a Parah Adumah.

RECLAIMING MISSED POTENTIAL

BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

The month of Tammuz is beclouded by the fast of the 17th, when:

1. the tablets were broken [by Moshe, after the sin of the Golden Calf];
2. the Tamid (daily sacrifice) was annulled [during the siege of the First Temple];
3. the city was breached [at the time of the Second Temple];
4. the evil Apostomos burned the Torah; and
5. he erected an idol in the Temple [during the days of the Second Temple] (Taanit 4:6).

The sin of the Golden Calf exemplifies Israel's fickleness, "For they are an inconstant generation, children without trustworthiness" (Devarim 32:20). Rashi says, "At Sinai they said, 'We will do and we will listen' (Shemot 24:7), and shortly thereafter they broke their promise and made the Calf."

The 17th of Tammuz is characterized by tragically missed potential. Originally every month was meant to contain a festival – Pesach during Nisan, Pesach Sheni during Iyar, Shavuot during Sivan – until the sin of the Golden Calf nullified the festivals intended for the summer (Pesikta Rabbati-Addition, Chapter 4). Had it not have been for the sin of the Golden Calf; the 17th of Tammuz, when Moshe brought down the tablets from Hashem, would have been a festival!

The Maharal (Netzach Yisrael, Chapter 8) says that with each of the events of the 17th of Tammuz, "Behold it is possible otherwise." By this, I believe, he means that each tragedy could have had a different outcome. If they had been taken as a summons to sincere teshuvah, perhaps an even greater tragedy could have been prevented.

By listening to the "wake up call" of the 17th of Tammuz, we can transform it into the festival it was meant to be.

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