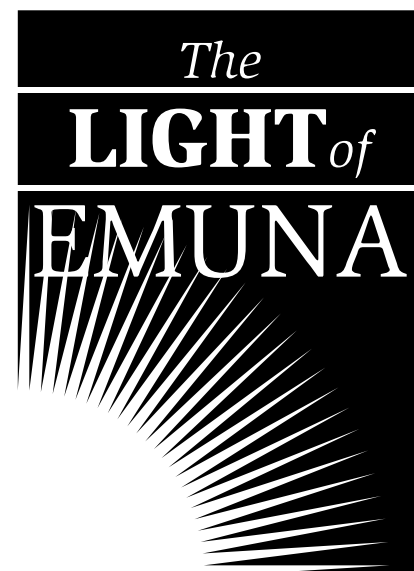


פרשת כי תשא – פרה אדומה

This week's adaptation is dedicated in honor of:
my dear wife, Devorah.



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

"כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם" (ל, יב)
"When you take a census of the
Children of Israel according to their
numbers"

Why was Moshe commanded to count Jewish people? R' Yudan in the name of R' Yishmael bar Nachmani said: To what can this be compared? To a king who instructs his servant to take special care of his undergarments. The servant inquires why these garments deserve special attention. The king explains that of all of his clothing, these lie directly on his skin. So said Moshe Rabbeinu to Hashem, "Master of the World, of the seventy nations that You have, why have You commanded me to pay so much attention to the Jewish people?" Hashem responded, "Since they are so connected to me." As the *pasuk* states, "For, just as the girdle clings to a man's loins, so have I caused the entire house of Israel to cling to Me."¹

"עשו להם עגל מסכה וישתחוו לו" (לג, ה)

Unbelievable. After the Jewish people merited receiving the Torah through wonders and miracles, when the Creator of the World Himself, in His Glory was revealed before their eyes and they were worthy of Divine Inspiration and attained the echelon of angels – so soon thereafter, they created a Golden Calf as a god? This was an act that encompassed all existing sins because "whovever submits to *avoda zara* is

as if he denies the entire Torah"² Can we comprehend such a possibility – can we digest this scenario? Even if they mistakenly believed that Moshe Rabbeinu died – his holy students were still alive – Ahron, Chur, Yehoshua – they could have approached them – sought their counsel – asked them for proper guidance. Rebbe Nosson explains that from this episode we can understand how powerful a person's freedom of choice is and how much effort the *yetzezer hora* employs against a person each day in this arena. For, Hashem created everything for the purpose of free-will – everything was created for man and the primary attribute and pedigree of a man is his exercise of his volition. Precisely because he chooses - his service is so significant, more than the service of all angels and *seraphim*, who have no discretion. Accordingly, everything was created for the exercise of free-will – thereby, bestowing tremendous power on its implementation, to the point that it is as if Hashem Himself cannot nullify free-will – for doing so would abolish the world, G-d forbid.³

If the entire world was created for the exercise of free will, the *yetzezer hora* has the intensity needed to overwhelm us anew each time – so that man has room to err.

¹ כי כאשר ידבק האזור אל מותני איש, כן הדבקתי אלי את כל בני ישראל (ירמיהו יג, יא) – פסיקתא דרב כהנה

²

³

רשי, במדבר טו, כג
ליקו"ה ברכת הריח דת לג

That is our war - at every moment – until our last moment. Our entire lives are struggle, struggle, struggle. “We do not desire to have urges, we yearn to fix our character flaws – but it is so difficult for us, Father. Help us. We know that You are the truth. We recall that in moments of attachments we covet nothing else – only You! That spiritual bliss – nothing is greater. But the *yetzer hora* overpowers us, Father, we are constantly in danger, constantly resisting. One minute we feel the sweet taste of clinging to You – and at the very next minute our intense physical passions overcome us and are victorious – exactly as happened to the Jewish people after the spiritual transcendence of the giving of the Torah, they fell for the Golden Calf.”

Our only option is holiness. That is the only thing that can protect us. We exist for the purpose of increasing sanctity – for without it, we cannot connect to Hashem. Saintliness is our gateway to Hashem. We must beseech for piety - we must battle. A person unexpectedly feels that he wants to experience Hashem, he wishes to concentrate in prayer, he aches to do good, he longs to forego, he aspires to stop speaking *loshon hora*, he wishes to eat a little less – these are the yearnings of his soul that long to be free of the constrictions of the body. “Hashem, I can no longer tolerate myself. Hashem help me change.” That is our *hisbodedus* – if we do not regularly *daven* for these things, to nullify our urges, to correct of characteristics – we are in perpetual danger.

Our journey in life is one of holiness. It seems so foreign to us. We cannot picture ourselves as holy men. But, slowly, we come to understand that it is our very bond with Hashem. That is how Hashem wants us to be. There are several expressions of holiness in this week’s *parsha*: “holy *shekel*,” “oil of sacred anointment,” “you shall sanctify them and they shall remain holy of holies.”⁴ We must instill holiness – otherwise, we will fall for the Golden Calf, G-d forbid – each person has his own particular Golden Calves that endanger him.

⁴ ל, יג – ל, לא – ל, כט

Holiness of Thought

Sanctity must precede connecting. We must endeavor to continually remember Hashem – the more we think about Hashem, the more we speak to Hashem – learning to live with Hashem twenty-four hours per day – going to sleep with Him and waking up with Him – always bound to Him. Hoist our hands above at every opportunity for joining Him. Lifting our eyes Heavenward, “Hashem, I love You, Hashem, I cannot live without You.” We must contemplate our purpose here.

This week is *Parshas Parah*. The *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah* is the greatest secret of the Torah – it purifies a person from the most extreme impurities. Yet, it is accomplished entirely outside – none of it is done inside the *Ohel Moed* or the *Mishkan*. It is completely outside – but we face the *Beis Hamikdash* – we do not avert our gaze – we keep our eyes on the objective – even when we are so remote.⁵

Thought occupies no space or time. We can go about our business while still thinking about Hashem. Essentially, that is holiness. Holiness is above time and above existence. It is a ladder standing on the ground, whose head reaches the Heavens. Whatever I do, I attempt to affix it to the service of Hashem. “One thing I ask of Hashem, that I seek – that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life.”⁶ Wherever it is that I find myself can be transformed into the house of Hashem, I can infuse holiness into any place, even where I work. “My soul yearns - it pines for the courts of the Lord.”⁷ That is our fiercest desire – the desire to always be with our Father. True, sometimes we need to vent, to clear our minds, to take a vacation, to eat something delicious – but it is still connected to the purpose, for we never forget Hashem.

⁵ באור פני מלך חיים

⁶ אחת שאלתי מאת ד' אותה אבקש, שבתי בבית ד' כל ימי חיי (תהילים כז, ד)

⁷ נכספה וגם כלתה נפשי לחצרות ד' (שם פד, ג)

Holiness of Speech

We must be so careful to guard our mouths – not to speak negatively – not *loshon hora*, *rechilus*, arrogance, anger, flippancy, dishonesty. Falsehood is not limited to speaking the complete opposite of truth – it can also be slight exaggerations, cutting corners, small things. True and false are often confusing. Consider any given day and ponder how many questions we did respond to inaccurately or dodged and how often we answered incorrectly. If that is merely one day – what can we say about a week or a month?

Holiness does not merely mean avoiding what is not forbidden – it applies to things that are technically permissible but are not necessary. We are allowed to converse with friends – but not to talk about silliness, not to be derisive. Less talk about the past or the future – the service of Hashem demands discussions about the here and now.

Holiness means foregoing – even in speech. Often we feel as if we must say something – we cannot just let things go, they cannot just be left unsaid. **Forego – remain silent** – and watch how things work themselves out faster and better. When someone speaks *loshon hora* and/or *rechilus* – all of his merits are transferred to his victim and his victim's sins are assigned to him. Yet, most of us are so cavalier about this. How happy is one who merits guarding a clean mouth? How happy is the home whose occupants guard their culture of discourse – being especially vigilant with *loshon hora* and *rechilus*.

One of the *talmidim* of the Chofetz Chaim zy" a related that when the Chofetz Chaim was eighty-three years old he still had perfect teeth, like the teeth of a teenager, and not a single one was missing. The Chofetz Chaim pointed them out and remarked, "I safeguarded the mouth that Hashem gave me and Hashem protected my mouth in return."

Holiness of Eyes

Holiness and attachment to Hashem is the true flavor of life. Every other penchant is imaginary and ends bitterly. The Zohar states that our primary challenge in life is in the area of holiness and modesty. A key to holiness is guarding our eyes from viewing inappropriate matters. At the advanced age of ninety, the Chofetz Chaim zy" a was still overheard *davening* to Hashem to help him with this challenge.

We must be patient – holiness is a lifelong mission. Just as Hashem loves us so much and it so patient with us – we must be so patient with our children, our spouses, our neighbors, ourselves – with all of theirs and our limitations, failings and callousness. If we want Hashem to be tolerant of us – we must be tolerant with ourselves and all those around us. We cannot attain everything instantly. Too much light too quickly can cause a descent into depression. We cannot blame ourselves for what we have not yet accomplished – but we may not absolve ourselves either. "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself of it."⁸ In spiritual progress – we must move from level to level and not attempt to ascend too quickly to heights that we are not ready for. And if we fall nevertheless, we pick ourselves up and start afresh. That is our trial.

Aharon Hakohen received everlasting *kehuna* from Hashem. Dovid Hamelech received everlasting monarchy from Hashem. We, the entire Jewish nation, received everlasting holiness from Hashem. The sanctity of the Jewish people is permanent – it is our connection to Hashem. There is no physical pleasure comparable to the spiritual pleasure of a soul that is attached to its Creator.

"Is it possible to comprehend how a Jew does not dance, day and night? At the same time, how that same Jew does not cry with longing, day and

⁸ לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה (אבות ב, טז)

night? How can we, children of Hashem, possibly divert our attention, for even a second, from the One who fills the Heavens and the Earth and sets aside everything else and desires only us? How are we able, and with such ease, to forego the infinite greatness and treasure that awaits us at every moment – and choose instead to follow an empty, bare and silly world that deceives us at every step and turn - leaving nothing remaining of us.”⁹

Holiness means serving with one’s entire heart – to give one’s entire heart to Hashem.

Reb Doyv’s Corner¹⁰

You ask, “How can I be happy if I am not?”

True, you can’t control the way you feel, but you do have control over your conscious thought, speech and actions.

Do something simple: Think good thoughts, speak good things, behave the way a joyful person behaves - even if you don’t fully feel it inside. Eventually, the inner joy of the soul will break through. ~ R’ Tzvi Freeman

תפילה

Master of the World! I wish to be Your servant, not a servant to my urges. Rescue me, Father, from this enslavement – when some compulsion or negative character trait triumphs, I feel so weak, so humiliated.

I thought, Father, that as I got older, I would demand less of certain foods, certain sweets – why has the opposite occurred? When I finally manage to partially limit my desire for candy – I am overwhelmed by my craving for cake – and when I manage to diminish that longing, I must have ice cream. It never seems to bother me enough to stop.

I thought that as I got older I would not require so much honor and recognition – I assumed that my priorities would be reordered and that I would focus more on what was happening in Heaven that what occurs down here. Why, Father, has it been the reverse for me? Why am I so sensitive and cannot relax when someone avoids me, fails to accord me respect – or even sometimes mocks me.

I thought that as I got older I would be able to pay heed to every word uttered from my mouth. Why has this not happened for me, Father? How is it possible that I am unafraid to speak forbidden words – how is it possible that I still comfort myself with all sorts of excuses, such as: “I just needed to unburden myself,” “they are relatives and close friend so it’s not that big of a deal” or other such baseless “justifications?” When will I begin to tremble over every word that I utter, Father?

Master of the World! I want holiness. I want connection. I want to be Your servant and not a servant to these negative desires. Help me, Father, to implement the amazing counsel of postponing for five minutes – when I do so, the *yetzer hora* departs. Then, I no longer “need” the extra piece of cake because the fervor in my mouth has subsided – I no longer feel compelled to tell someone that great story that I heard that contains crumbs of *loshon hora* – and I may even be able restrain and not respond to something that someone says to me, does to me or hurts me with.

Give me the strength refrain for five minutes – **just five minutes** – so that I can overcome whatever attempts to separate me from You. When I am victorious - I feel so close to You.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

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Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha’Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha’Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha’Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

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