

Ki Tissa Parshat Parah – A tale of two cows

Rashi on Shemot 31:18

ויתן אל משה וגו'. אין מקדם ומאחר בתורה – מעשה העגל קדם לצווי מלאכת המשכן ימים רבים הנה – ששהר' ב"ז בתמוז נשתברו הלוחות, וביום הכפורים נתרצה הקב"ה לישראל, ולמחרת התחילו בנדבת המשכן והזקם באחד בניסן (תנחומא):

ויתן אל משה וגו' AND HE GAVE UNTO MOSES etc. — There is no “earlier” or “later” (no chronological order) in the events related in the Torah: in fact the incident of the golden calf (related in ch. 31) happened a considerable time before the command regarding the work of the Tabernacle was given (ch. 25 and the following chapters). For on the seventeenth of Tammuz were the Tablets broken (when the people were worshipping the calf) and on the Day of Atonement God became reconciled with Israel (after Moses had prayed 80 days for forgiveness; so that it is very unlikely that the command for the building of the Tabernacle should have been given before that day) and on the next day, the eleventh of Tishri (cf. Rashi on Exodus 33:11, at end of comment on ושב אל המחנה), they began to bring their contributions for the Tabernacle which was set up on the first of Nisan. (From the seventeenth of Tammuz until the eleventh of Tishri are almost three months — ימים רבים) (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 31).

Shemot 33:18-20

ויאמר ה' אל משה: ויאמר אני לא את-כבודי: ויאמר אני על-פניך וקראתי בשם יהוה לפניך ותגדלי את-אשר אחיך ורמתי את-אשר ארחם: ויאמר לא תוכל לראת את-פני כי לא-יראני האדם וחי:

He said, “Oh, let me behold Your Presence!” And He answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live.”

Sefer Kuzari 1:97

Now when the people had heard the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, and Moses had ascended the mount in order to receive the inscribed tables which he was to bring down to them, and then make an ark which was to be the point towards which they should direct their gaze during their devotions, they waited for his return...He, however, tarried forty days... Many views and opinions were expressed, till at last some decided to do like the other nations, and seek an object in which they could have faith, without, however, prejudicing the supremacy of Him who had brought them out of Egypt. On the contrary, this was to be something to which they could point when relating the wonders of God...We do the same with the sky and every other object concerning which we know that it is set in motion by the divine will exclusively, and not by any accident or desire of man or nature. Their sin I consisted in the manufacture of an image of a forbidden thing, and in attributing divine power to a creation of their own, something chosen by themselves without the guidance of God...There was nothing strange in the form

of the cherubim made by His command. In spite of these things, those who worshipped the calf were punished on the same day, and three thousand out of six hundred thousand were slain...

Bamidbar 19:2

זאת תקת התורה אשר צוה יהוה לאמר דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליהם פרה אדומה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה על:

This is the ritual law that the LORD has commanded: Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid.

Rambam Hilchot Mikvaot 11:12

משנה תורה, הלכות מקואות י"א:י"ב

דבר ברור וגלוי שהטמאות והטהרות גזרות הכתוב הן. ואינו מדברים שדעתו של אדם מכרעתו. והרי הן מפלל החקים. וכן הטבילה מן הטמאות מפלל החקים הוא שאין הטמאה טיט או צואה שנתעבר במים אלא גזרת הכתוב היא והדבר תלוי בכונת הלב. ולפיכך אמרו חכמים טבל ולא החזק כאלו לא טבל. ואף על פי כן רמז יש בדבר קשם שהמכון לבו לטהר כיון שטבל טהור ואף על פי שלא נתחדש בגופו דבר כך המכון לבו לטהר נפשו מטמאות הנפשות שהן מחשבות האון ודעות הרעות. כיון שהסכים בלבו לפרש מאותן העצות והביא נפשו במי הדעת טהור. הרי הוא אומר (יחזקאל לו-כה) "וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל טמאותיכם ומכל גלוליכם אטהר אתכם". השם ברחמיו הרבים מכל חטא עון ואשמה יטהרנו אמן:

It is obviously clear that the laws concerning defilements and purities are biblical decrees, and not things which the human mind can determine; they are classified as divine statutes. So too, immersion as a means of ridding oneself from defilement is included among the divine statutes. Defilement is not mud or filth to be removed with water, but is a matter of biblical decree; it depends on the heart's intent. Accordingly, the sages have declared: If a man immersed himself, but without a definite purpose in view, it is as though he had not immersed himself at all. Nevertheless, there is some ethical allusion to this: just as one who sets his mind on becoming clean becomes clean as soon as he has immersed himself, even though nothing new is produced in his physical being, so one who sets his mind on purifying himself from all the spiritual defilements, namely wrongful thoughts and evil traits, becomes clean as soon as he made up his mind to abstain from those notions, and brought his soul into the waters of reason. Indeed, Scripture declares: "I will pour clean water over you, and you shall be clean; from all your impurities and idolatries I will cleanse you" (Ezekiel 36:25).

Tanchuma Chukkat 8

R. Ayyevu said, "It is comparable to the son of a female slave who defiled a king's palace. The king said, 'Let his mother come and clean up the excrement.' Similarly has the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'Let a heifer come and atone for the incident of the [golden] calf.'"

אמר רבי איבו, משל למה הדבר דומה. לכן שפחה שטנף פלטרין של מלה. אמר המלה, תבוא אמו ותקנח את הצואה. כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, תבא פרה ותכפר על מעשה העגל.

