



The Fascinating Connection between Parshas Ki Sisa and Shabbas Parah The Parah Adumah Atoned for the Cheit HaEigel Emphasizing that Teshuvah Must Also Rectify Sins from Previous Gilgulim

The auspiciously approaching Shabbas Kodesh is known as **Shabbas Parah**. For, in addition to reading the parshas hashavua, Ki Sisa, we read the passage pertaining to the mitzvah “parah adumah” as the Maftir. Thus, it is fitting for us to explain the wonderful connection between these two Torah readings. Now, in parshas Ki Sisa, we read about the calamitous sin of the “cheit ha’eigel” that continues to haunt us until this very day. This is evident from HKB”H’s response to Moshe in the aftermath of that sin. Moshe tries valiantly to beseech HKB”H to forgive Yisrael; HKB”H responds (Shemos 32, 34): **”וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם”**—**and on a day that I make an accounting, I shall bring their sin to account against them.** Rashi comments: **Always, whenever I shall make an accounting of Yisrael’s sins against them, I will hold them accountable to some small degree for this sin along with the other sins; there is no punishment that comes upon Yisrael which does not have in it some retribution for the sin of the eigel.**

Nevertheless, we are consoled by what we read in in parshas Chukas. Pertaining to the mitzvah of the “parah adumah”—the red heifer—it is written (Bamidbar 19, 1): **”וידבר ה’ אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר, זאת חוקת התורה אשר צוה ה’ לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליך ברה אדומה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה עול.”** **Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: This is the statute (“chukah”) of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come.** Rashi (ibid. 22) comments in the name of Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan

that everything written about the Parah Adumah alludes amazingly to the “cheit ha’eigel” and its atonement:

“They shall take to you”: From their own. Just as they removed golden rings for the “eigel” from their own, so should they bring this for atonement from their own. “Parah Adumah”: It is analogous to the son of a maidservant who soiled the palace of a king. They said, “Let his mother come and wipe away the excrement.” Similarly, let the “parah” (cow) come and atone for the “eigel” (its calf). “Red”: In keeping with the passuk (Yeshayah 1, 18): “If they (your sins) will be as red as scarlet dye,” which implies that sin is called red. “Perfect”: It had to be perfect, because it is symbolic of Yisrael before the sin of the “eigel”; let it atone for them, correcting their blemished state and returning them to their state of perfection. “Upon which a yoke has not come”: Just as they removed the yoke of Heaven from upon themselves.

This year, we are privileged to read these two intimately related passages on the same Shabbas. We read Ki Sisa as the parshas hashavua, chronicling the calamity of the “cheit ha’eigel,” and we read the passage of the “parah adumah,” describing the atonement for that sin. As we know, by reading that passage, it is considered as if we actually performed the mitzvah of the “parah adumah” and are afforded atonement, in keeping with the dictum (Hoshea 14, 3): **”ונשלמה פרים שפתינו”**—**and let our lips substitute for bulls.** In other words, we should have brought sacrificial animals to atone for our sins. In lieu of those korbanos—which we cannot bring without a

Beis HaMikdash—let the pertinent words of Torah uttered by our lips be accepted in their place.

The Cheit HaEigel Was Ordained from Above to Encourage Ba'alei Teshuvah

We will begin our illuminating journey by examining the passage pertaining to the mitzvah of the “parah adumah” (Bamidbar 19, 2): **“This is the ‘chukah’ of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish . . .”** Rashi comments: **“This is the ‘chukah’ of the Torah”—because the Satan and the nations of the world aggrieve Yisrael by saying, “What is this commandment?” “What reason is there to it?” Therefore, it is referred to as a “chukah,”** implying that it is a decree from Hashem which we do not have the right to question.

The commentaries are perplexed by this statement. How can we say that the “parah adumah” is a statute—a “chukah”—which is inexplicable and cannot be questioned? After all, Rashi himself, explains in the name of Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan that the “parah adumah” provides atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel.” The Noam Elimelech reconciles the matter magnificently based on a teaching in the Gemara (A.Z. 4b):

“אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, לא עשו ישראל את העגל אלא ליתן פתחון פה לבעלי תשובה, שנאמר (דברים ה-כו) מי יתן והיה לכם זה להם ליראה אותי כל הימים.”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Yisrael only made the eigel in order to provide encouragement for ba’alei-teshuvah. Rashi explains that the people of Yisrael in that generation **were courageous and virtuous and had control over their yetzers. They would not have succumbed to their yetzers and made the eigel had it not been decreed from above that they do so to provide encouragement for ba’alei teshuvah. Thus, if a sinner would argue that he would not repent, because he was confident that his teshuvah would not be accepted, they could respond to him, “Go and learn from the episode of the eigel; they committed sacrilege and, nevertheless, they were accepted back via teshuvah.”**

It turns out that the two viewpoints go hand-in-hand. The “parah adumah” does indeed atone for the “cheit ha’eigel.” Yet, it is precisely for this reason that it is categorized as a “chok.”

For, as we learn from the Gemara, the people of Yisrael in that generation would not have committed this blasphemous act of their own accord were it not for a divine decree. If that is so, then why do they require atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel”? Hence, is categorized as a “chok”; it was a divine decree that is not to be questioned.

Even so, this still deserves further clarification. According to Rashi, the people of that generation were extremely virtuous and in control of their yetzers. It was only due to a decree from the Almighty that the yetzer was able to incite them to sin with the eigel. If so, how does this demonstrate to sinners that they can achieve a tikun via the process of teshuvah? For, in reality, Yisrael did not actually sin.

Purification from “Tum’as Meis” Hinges on Atonement for the Cheit HaEigel

We will begin to unravel this enigma by presenting a question posed by the Alshich hakadosh. How can Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan assert that the “parah adumah” came to atone for the “cheit ha’eigel” when the Torah teaches us that the purpose of this mitzvah is to purify a person from “Tum’as Meis”—corpse-tumah? As it is written (Bamidbar 19, 17): **“ולקחו לטמא מעפר שרפת החטאת ונתן עליו מים חיים אל כלי... והזה הטהור על הטמא ביום השלישי וביום השביעי וחתאו ביום השביעי והזה הטהור על הטמא ביום השלישי ורחץ במים וטהר בערב—they shall take for the contaminated person some of the ashes of the burning of the purification animal, and put upon it spring water in a vessel . . . The pure person shall sprinkle upon the impure person on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall purify him on the seventh day; then he shall immerse his clothing and immerse his flesh in water and be pure in the evening.** So, what is the connection between the “parah” atoning for the “cheit ha’eigel” and the fact that it purifies a person from corpse-tumah?

He explains that the decree of death was imposed on humanity and all living creatures as a consequence of the sin of Adam HaRishon. As it is written (Bereishis 2, 17): **“ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות”—but of the Eitz HaDa’as Tov VaRa, you must not eat thereof, for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.** In Sha’ar HaMitzvos (Vayechi), the Arizal explains the rationale for this decree. During the commission of the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as,” the “nachash hakadmoni”—the primeval serpent—**injected**

its vileness and perversity into Adam and Chava and all future generations of human beings. Therefore, to be cleansed of this contamination, it is necessary for a person to die and return to the dust of the earth, so that that foulness will be absorbed by the dust of the earth, which is the food and sustenance of the serpent.

Now, at Matan Torah, Yisrael were cleansed and freed from the corruption of the nachash. In the words of the Gemara (Shabbas 146a): "ישראל שעמדו על הר סיני בסקה זוהמתן"—**Yisrael, who stood on Har Sinai, their contamination ceased.** As a result, they should have no longer been subject to the death sentence imposed on humanity. However, after the "cheit ha'eigel," they were reinfected with the foulness and perversion of the nachash, and death became necessary once again. Here is the pertinent excerpt from the Gemara (A.Z. 5a): "לא קיבלו ישראל את התורה אלא כדי שלא יהא מלאך המות שולט בהן, שנאמר אני אמרתי אלהים אתם ובני עליון כולכם, חבלתם מעשיכם אכן." **Yisrael only received the Torah, so that the Malach Hamaves would not prevail over them, as it is stated (Tehillim 82, 6): "I said, 'You are divine, sons of the Most High are you all.'" However, you have corrupted your deeds (with the "cheit ha'eigel") and therefore (ibid.): "Like men you shall die."**

Based on this understanding, the Alshich hakadosh explains that the entire matter of "Tum'as Meis" stems from the contamination of the nachash, with which it infected Adam. Yet, so long as a person is still alive and engages in the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvos, it does not come to fruition; it remains dormant. However, when a person dies and is no longer able to study Torah and perform mitzvos, the contamination of the nachash emerges and reveals itself in full force. Consequently, anyone who touches a corpse or hovers over it becomes tamei—ritually impure.

We can now comprehend very well the magnificent duality of the "parah adumah." Firstly, it atones for the "cheit ha'eigel"; secondly, it purifies a person of "Tum'as Meis." For, in reality, the two are interdependent. As a consequence of the "cheit ha'eigel," the foul contamination of the nachash returned; hence, the death decree was reinstated, and anyone that touches a corpse or hovers over it becomes tamei. Therefore, it is specifically the "parah adumah"—that provides Yisrael with atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel"—that is capable of purifying a person of "Tum'as Meis"—that is attributable to

the contamination of the nachash. In summary, the atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel" and the purification from "Tum'as Meis" are intimately related.

A Frightening Insight from the Ramban concerning Fathers' Influence on Their Offspring

Following this intriguing path, let us now justify the surprising statement of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: "**Yisrael only made the eigel in order to provide encouragement for ba'alei-teshuvah.**" We learned from Rashi that **it was the King's decree that their yetzers control them to provide encouragement for ba'alei teshuvah.** We will refer to Moshe Rabeinu's rebuke of Yisrael (Devarim 29, 17): "פן יש בכמ איש או אשה או משפחה או שבט אשר לבכו פונה היום מעם ה' אלקינו ללכת לעבוד את אלהי הגוים ההם, פן יש בכמ שורש פורה ראש ולענה." **Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our G-d, to go serve the gods of those nations; perhaps there is among you a root growing hemlock and wormwood.**

Concerning the words: "פן יש בכמ שורש פורה ראש ולענה"—**perhaps there is among you a root growing hemlock and wormwood**—the Ramban writes something truly disturbing and frightening. Moshe Rabeinu was suggesting to the people that if a person entertains even the slightest thought of heresy—denial of Hashem—it can constitute a bitter root that can actually sprout in one of his future descendants, G-d help us! Here are his sacred words:

He said, "Perhaps there is among you . . . whose heart has turned away this day" referring to him who has already been beguiled by avodah-zarah and who secretly believes in them this day. "Or perhaps there is among you a root" that will blossom and grow and in the coming days will bring forth poisonous buds and grow bitter fruit . . . For, the father is the "root," and the son is the (Yeshayah 11, 1) "twig that will grow forth from his roots." He mentioned the "root" to indicate that he can bring the coming generations into this oath, for the root from which they will grow is before him this day; it comes within this covenant and oath. He says "a root that produces hemlock" to suggest that from a sweet root no bitter fruit will emerge. And all those whose hearts are whole with the Glorious Hashem and gave no thoughts to idols, will not give birth to progeny that avow it.

Then, the Ramban goes on to address an apparent contradiction: **Now, do not refute me on this matter on the basis of the passuk (Yechezkel 18, 10): “And if a man (who is righteous and law-abiding) begets a violent (tyrannical) son,” for the matter is true, there being a great secret therein that I cannot explain.** He is referring to that which is written (ibid. 5): **“ואיש כי יהיה צדיק ועשה משפט וצדקה... בחקותי יהלך ומשפטי שמר לעשות אמת, צדיק הוא, חיה יחיה נאם אדני אלקים, והוליד בן פריץ שופך דם... את כל התועבות האלה עשה מות יומת דמיו בו יהיה.”** **If a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness . . . goes according to My decrees and observes My ordinances to practice truth—he is a tzaddik; he shall surely live—the word of the Lord, Hashem/Elokim. If he begets a violent son, who sheds blood . . . he has committed all of these abominations; he shall surely die, and his blood will be upon himself.**

In light of this passuk, the Ramban asks: The passuk states explicitly that if a person is righteous and abides by the law that he is a tzaddik. So, how is it possible that he begets a violent, cruel son? After all, the Ramban contends that: **All those whose hearts are whole with the Glorious Hashem and gave no thoughts to idols, will not give birth to progeny that avow it.** Nevertheless, the Ramban concludes: **The matter is true, there being a great secret therein that I cannot explain.**

In fact, the Ramban does not provide a solution to this quandary: How is it possible for a genuine tzaddik to father an evil son? We do, however, find a solution in the sefer Recanati (Nitzavim) authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Recanati, ztz”l. While it is true that when a tzaddik fathers a son with an entirely new neshamah—that has not yet appeared in this world—he is assured that the son will be a tzaddik. Yet, when his son has a neshamah that has already been in this world but had to return through the process of gilgul due to previous sins and iniquities, that is the situation depicted in the passuk: **If he begets a violent son, who sheds blood.** It is speaking of a tzaddik who begets a son who was a **“בן פריץ”—violent and cruel—in a previous reincarnation.**

The First Gilgul Is the “Father” and the Second Is the “Son”

It appears that we can embellish the intriguing explanation of the Recanati. Perhaps the Ramban himself hinted to this

when he wrote: **The father is the “root,” and the son is the “twig” that will grow forth from his roots.** Let us refer to what the Arizal explains in Sefer HaGilgulim (Chapter 6) in relation to the passuk (Shemos 20, 5): **“פוקד עון אבות על בנים”—the sins of the fathers are visited on the children.** A person’s initial incarnation is called the “father.” Its subsequent reincarnation is called a “son.” This then is the message conveyed by the passuk: **“The sins of the fathers are visited on the children”—HKB”H** associates the transgressions from previous gilgulim—referred to as **“fathers”—**with subsequent gilgulim—referred to as their **“sons.”**

This concurs magnificently with how the Alshich hakadosh interprets the deeper significance of the established formula of the “vidui”: **“אבל אנחנו ואבותינו חטאנו”—but indeed we and our fathers have sinned.** He ponders: **Why should we cause their bones to turn over in their graves? Where is the respect due the fathers that we should be responsible for reminding them of iniquity?** Along the lines of what we have discussed, we are admitting to sins that we committed in previous reincarnations that are analogous to **“fathers.”** This is the implication of the confession: **“But indeed we and our fathers have sinned.”**

This gives us a deeper appreciation of the Ramban’s sacred comment: **“Or perhaps there is among you a root” that will blossom and grow and in the coming days will bring forth poisonous buds and grow bitter fruit . . . For, the father is the “root,” and the son is the “twig that will grow forth from his roots.”** He was suggesting that the passuk is admonishing us that even if a person is a tzaddik, he must take care to avoid even the faintest trace of heresy. Because such a thought is akin to **“שורש פורה ראש ולענה”—a root growing hemlock and wormwood—that is liable to sprout in a future gilgul causing it to actually worship avodah-zarah, chas v’shalom.**

So, when he writes: **The father is the “root,”** he is alluding to the first incarnation; **and the son is the “twig” that will grow forth from his roots,** he is alluding to the second reincarnation. This coincides with the interpretation of the Recanati: When the passuk speaks of a true tzaddik **“who begets a violent son, who sheds blood,”** it is referring to a son who possesses the neshamah of a rasha from a previous gilgul—a scenario orchestrated by HKB”H, the Master of all neshamos, for reasons known only to Him. However, if a

tzaddik begets with his virtue a brand new neshamah, that son will undoubtedly be a tzaddik.

To summarize, this teaches us that it is not enough to perform teshuvah for sins in this gilgul, but also for sins related to previous gilgulim, in keeping with the “vidui”: **“But indeed we and our fathers have sinned.”** Similarly, we find the following explicit words from the Gaon Chida, ztz”l, in Dvash L’Fee (6, 2):

“תכלית יודוי הוא שיכיר החטא, ולפני מי חטא, ויתבייש מאד ויתחרט, ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא יחטא עוד ואל ישוב לכסלה כמו שכתב הרמב”ם בהלכות תשובה, ויכוין להתוודות עליו ועל כל בני ביתו, על מה שחטא בגלגול זה ובגלגולים אחרים, וישער בעצמו כי הוא חייב מיתה על שהכעיס למלך ועבר מצוותיו, ובחרדה ורעדה בא לבקש שימחול לו המלך.”

The purpose of “vidui” is that one acknowledge the sin, and before Whom he has sinned; he should be extremely ashamed and remorseful. Such that the One Who knows secrets (mysteries) attests to the fact that he will not continue to sin and will not return to his foolishness, as the Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah. He should have in mind to confess for himself and his entire household for what he sinned in this gilgul and in other gilgulim. He should imagine that he deserves to die for having angered the King and transgressed His mitzvos and has come with fear and trepidation to request that the King pardon him.

The Neshamos of Yisrael that Sinned with the Eigel Were Guilty of Avodah Zarah with the Eitz HaDa’as

With great joy and elation, we can now shed some light on the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: **“Yisrael only made the eigel in order to provide encouragement for ba’alei-teshuvah.”** Rashi explains that the people of Yisrael in that generation were courageous and virtuous and had control over their yetzers. They would not have succumbed to their yetzers and made the eigel had it not been decreed from above that they do so to provide encouragement for ba’alei teshuvah. In Sha’ar HaPesukim (Shemos), the Arizal teaches us that the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim were reincarnations of all the neshamos that were contained in Adam HaRishon when he sinned with the Eitz HaDa’as. To make amends and rectify their involvement, they suffered the harsh enslavement in Mitzrayim.

Additionally, let us introduce a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Behar 111b): Avraham Avinu was a gilgul of Adam HaRishon. Among other things, the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as” included a component of avodah-zarah. For, Adam and Chava were enticed by the duplicitous argument of the nachash (Bereishis 3, 5): **“כי יודע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם:”** **“for G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d, knowing good and bad.”** Rashi explains: The nachash argued: **“Every craftsman hates others of his craft; G-d ate from the tree and created the world. So, by eating from the tree, you will be like G-d, fashioners of the world.”** Clearly, there is no greater blasphemy than to say this about HKB”H.

Therefore, in order to rectify the avodah-zarah of Adam HaRishon, Avraham Avinu shattered all of his father’s idols and disseminated the name of Hashem throughout the world. As it is written (Bereishis 21, 33): **“ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא:”** **“he planted an “eshel” in Be’er Sheva and there he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe.** Rashi comments: **By means of that “eshel,” the name of HKB”H was proclaimed as G-d of the entire universe. After they would eat and drink, he (Avraham) would say to them, “Recite a blessing to the One of Whose you have eaten.” Do you think that you have eaten of mine? Of that which belongs to Him Who spoke and brought the universe into being you have eaten.**

Now, we are taught that an avodah-zarah must be burnt, as it is written (Devarim 7, 25): **“פסילי אלהיהם תשרפון באש”—** **the carved images of their gods you shall burn in fire.** Therefore, Avraham Avinu acted accordingly. To correct the transgression of avodah-zarah of Adam HaRishon, he refused to heed Nimrod’s command to worship idols and was willing to sacrifice his own life in the burning, fiery furnace to sanctify the name of Hashem.

The Parah Adumah Atones for the “Cheit Eitz HaDa’as” which Is the Root of the “Cheit HaEigel”

Let us now return to the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi just cited and Rashi’s clarification. In reality, the people of Yisrael in that generation, in that gilgul, were themselves courageous, virtuous people, who controlled their yetzer

haras. As we have learned, however, they were reincarnations of the neshamos contained in Adam HaRishon at the time of the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.” As such, they were guilty of avodah-zarah. Therefore, it was decreed by the Heavenly King, HKB”H, that they fail in the matter of the eigel, which was another instance of avodah-zarah, so that they would serve as an example for ba’alei-teshuvah and teach them a crucial lesson: It is necessary to perform teshuvah to rectify not only the sins committed in the present gilgul but also sins committed in previous gilgulim.

In this light, we can better appreciate what we learned from the Alshich hakadosh. The mitzvah of Parah Adumah atones for the “cheit ha’eigel” and also purifies a person from “Tum’as Meis”—a condition that returned as a consequence of the “cheit ha’eigel.” Let us clarify this point based on what we have discussed. Indeed, the people of Yisrael in that generation were virtuous and would not have succumbed to the “cheit ha’eigel” if not for divine intervention. However, they were still tainted by their involvement in the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as”—which constituted a “שורש פורה ראש ולענה”—a corruptive influence from a previous gilgul. Since that first sin involved avodah-zarah, it caused them to succumb to avodah-zarah in this gilgul with the “cheit ha’eigel.” Therefore, they required the atonement afforded by the Parah Adumah, in keeping with the analogy: Let the mother (the parah) come and clean up the mess of her child (the eigel).

This explains Rashi’s comment beautifully: **“This is the ‘chukah’ of the Torah”—because the Satan and the nations of the world aggrieve Yisrael by saying, “What is this commandment?” “What reason is there to it?” Therefore, it is referred to as a “chukah,”** implying that it is a decree from Hashem which we do not have the right to question. We can suggest that Satan and nations of the world mock Yisrael and harass them by saying: **“What is this commandment?” “What reason is there to it?”**—to get them to admit that the Parah Adumah is an atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel.” Thus, they prove that Yisrael were not virtuous and were not able to withstand the yetzer. On the contrary, they committed the “cheit ha’eigel” intentionally.

To refute their claim and to prove that Yisrael were virtuous and in control of their yetzers, the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is called a **“chukah.”** This indicates that the “cheit ha’eigel” was ordained from above; it was the **King’s decree.** HKB”H decreed that Yisrael should fail in the matter of the eigel, **“and we are not permitted to question it** (His rationale for this decree).” In truth, however, HKB”H orchestrated the events from above intentionally to demonstrate the pathway of teshuvah. He wanted to teach us that it is imperative to rectify not only the sins committed in this gilgul but also the sins committed in previous gilgulim.

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