

פרשת
כי תשא
Parashat Ki Tisa

*Shemot / Exodus 30:11-34:35, 1 Kings 18:1-39
Matthew 9:35-11:1*

The Greatest Sin Forgiven

This week's Torah portion (Parashat Ki Tisa) begins with the final comments on the construction of the Mishkhan (Tabernacle). We also read about Moshe going up the mountain of Sinai and spending forty days and forty nights on the mountain. The people became restless and they insisted that Aaron build them a golden calf to worship. Aaron gives in to the people's demands and builds them an false god, and the Lord God Almighty speaks to Moshe about the sin of the people below and says that He is willing to destroy these people and raise up a people out of the seed of Moshe. Moshe responds saying in *Shemot / Exodus 32:11* יֵא וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה יְהוָה : “*Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, “O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?” (NASB)* Here Moshe can't imagine why the Lord would burn against the children of Israel like this. He has not yet gone down and seen how the people are behaving and what they have done. The rabbis in the Talmud describes this situation in the following way:

Talmud Bavli Berakhot 32a:19

The Torah continues: “And Moses beseeched [vayḥal] before the Lord” (Exodus 32:11). Many interpretations were given for this uncommon term, vayḥal: Rabbi Elazar said: It teaches that Moses stood in prayer before the Holy One, Blessed be He, until it made him ill [heḥelahu] from overexertion. And Rava said: Moses stood in prayer until he nullified His vow, as the term vayḥal alludes to nullification of an oath. Here it is written vayḥal, and there referring to vows, it is written: “He shall not nullify [lo yaḥel] his word” (Numbers 30:3). And with regard to vows, the Master said: He who vowed cannot nullify his vow, but others, the court, can nullify his vow for him. Here, it is as if Moses nullified the Lord’s vow to destroy Israel.

The Talmud is looking at this phrase, וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו “*Moshe pleaded before HaShem his God.*” The text states that Moshe pleaded (וַיַּחַל) with the face (פְּנֵי) of God. Here the word וַיַּחַל means “*to become weak or sick.*” The idea is Moshe pleaded with the Lord until the point of exhaustion of his body. The reason Moshe is pleading with the face of God, a few examples reveal the following, *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:5*, וּשְׂמַתִּי אֶת פְּנֵי בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא, “*I shall set My face against that man,*” (related to idol worship) and *Tehillim / Psalms 34:17*, פְּנֵי ה' בְּעוֹשֵׂי רָע, “*the face of God is set against evildoers.*” Moshe pleading with the face of God is important based upon these references, the presence of God will lead to the destruction of the people if they are living in unrepentant sin. What we see here is Moshe praying to God and relating to him in a way that no one else has ever done before. Here the Masoretic text states אֱלֹהָיו saying “*Moshe’s God,*” (his God) where in the Torah we usually find this in connection with the patriarchs such as as “*the God of Abraham,*” or “*the God of Isaac,*” or “*the God of Jacob.*” Even in the example of David we find in *Isaiah 38:5* he quotes the Lord God telling Hezekiah: “*thus said the Lord, the God of your ‘father’ David.*” In Moshe’s case however, we find the Lord God associated His name with Moses by the means of a pronoun. The point may be the intimate relationship that Moshe has

with the Lord being able to speak to God face-to-face and plead on behalf of the people. Moshe was successful in turning God's wrath away from the people. In the context of Yeshua saying, "*Moshe wrote about me,*" the idea is in Yeshua we have an advocate, like Moshe, a picture of the Torah in the Messiah of God, of going before the Lord causing His wrath to turn from us, just as we see going on here in Parashat Ki Tisa. The NT teaching about Yeshua is a Torah centric principle about Moshe as an advocate on our behalf.

The commentary *Or HaChaim on Shemot / Exodus 32:11 Part 4* states the following:

Or HaChaim on Shemot / Exodus 32:11 Part 4

Seeing that G'd had refused to associate His name with the people and had referred to them as Moses' people, i.e. שחת עמך, how could Moses dare say to G'd "why would You become angry at Your people?" We must therefore understand that when Moses referred to the Exodus by saying אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאת, that at that time He had still called them His people, i.e. אשר.

Here we find the Lord not associating His name with the people who are involved in sin. The Torah describes the Lord saying to Moshe that these are his people. Moshe reminds the Lord of the Patriarchs and then states they are God's people and to have mercy. The kind of mercy that we find the Lord doing is similar to what we see here in the *Talmud Bavli Avoda Zara 55a* in the rabbinic discussion on idolatry.

Talmud Bavli Avoda Zara 55a

(צפניה א, ב) אסוף אסף כל מעל פני האדמה נאם ה' אסף אדם ובהמה אסף עוף השמים ודגי הים והמכשלות את הרשעים [וגו'] וכי מפני שהרשעים נכשלים בהן יאבדם מן העולם והלא לאדם הן עובדין (צפניה א, ג) והכרתי את האדם מעל פני האדמה [וגו']

"Shall I utterly consume all things from off the face

of the earth? says the Lord. Shall I consume man and beast? Shall I consume the fowls of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks of the wicked, and shall I cut off man from off the face of the earth? says the Lord” (Zephaniah 1:2–3). Should God remove objects of idol worship from the world due to the fact that the wicked stumble because of them? If so, He would have to destroy all of humanity as well, as do not idol worshipers also worship people? This is expressed in the continuation of the verse: “And shall I cut off man from off the face of the earth? says the Lord.”

Here the rabbis recognize the difficulty of removing idolatry, in the light of what *Ezekiel 14* states, “*each man sets up an idol in his heart.*” The act of idolatry runs deeply in the heart of men and is more than simply a graven image. This is how we are to understand the Talmudic conclusion of the Lord removing all idolatry from the world would result in cutting off mankind from the face of the earth. What we are learning from the interpretation of these things is in the deliverance of God’s people from Egypt, Moshe delivered a mixed multitude. When Israel went down into Egypt, we are told 70 nations went down. The later rabbinic interpretation was how the Torah was offered to all of the nations of the world, and only one nation, Israel, accepted God’s instructions. The people need to learn how to walk and live according to God’s will since they come out of an idolatrous nation (Egypt). The people had an advocate on their side who speaks to God face to face for mercy. This is the context we have of Yeshua being our advocate, a Messianic redeemer before God who intercedes on our behalf and causes the wrath of God to turn from us, just as we see going on here in Parashat Ki Tisa. The Jewish messianic hope is above all rooted in the deep belief that the one true God is concerned about human suffering and that He will send someone to help. That someone will be like Moshe who brought liberation when Israel was a slave in Egypt. Israel needed a miracle to escape the torments of slavery. Moshe was called to fulfill that mission, and in the same way Yeshua was also called to miraculously work in our lives to deliver us from sin.

Shemot / Exodus 32:30-33:23

32:30 On the next day Moses said to the people, 'You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'

32:31 Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, 'Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves.

32:32 'But now, if You will, forgive their sin and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!'

32:33 The Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

32:34 'But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.'

32:35 Then the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

33:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.'

33:2 'I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite.

33:3 'Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.'

33:4 When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments.

33:5 For the Lord had said to Moses, 'Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.'

33:6 So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

33:7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp.

33:8 And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent.

33:9 Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand

at the entrance of the tent; and the Lord would speak with Moses. 33:10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. 33:11 Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. (NASB)

ל וַיְהִי מִמִּתְחַרֵּת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אַתֶּם חֲטֹאתֶם חֲטֹאתֶם חֲטֹאתֶם גְּדֹלָה וְעַתָּה אֵעָלֶה אֶל-יְהוָה אוֹלִי אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעֵד חֲטֹאתֵיכֶם: לֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי חֲטָא הָעָם הַזֶּה חֲטֹאתָ גְדֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב: לִב וְעַתָּה אִם-תִּשָּׂא חֲטֹאתֶם וְאִם-אֵין מַחְנִי נָא מִסְּפָרָךְ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ: לֵג וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִי אֲשֶׁר חֲטָא-לִי אֲמַחֲנוּ מִסְּפָרֵי: לֵד וְעַתָּה לֵךְ | נָחַה אֶת-הָעָם אֶל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ הַיּוֹם מִלֵּאכֵי יְלֹךְ לִפְנֵיךָ וּבַיּוֹם פְּקֹדֵי וּפְקֹדֵי עֲלֵהֶם חֲטֹאתֶם: לֵה וַיִּגַּף יְהוָה אֶת-הָעָם עַל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת-הַעֲגֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱהֲרֹן: ס

ספר שמות פרק לג

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ עֲלֶה מִזֶּה אַתָּה וְהָעָם אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לְזָרְעֶךָ אֶתְנַנְּהָ: ב וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי לִפְנֵיךָ מִלְאָךְ וּגְרִשְׁתִּי אֶת-הַכְּנַעֲנִי הָאֲמָרִי וְהַחֲתִי וְהַפְּרִזִי הַחֹוֵי וְהַיְבוּסִי: ג אֶל-אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבָשׁ כִּי לֹא אֵעָלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ כִּי עִם-קִשָּׁה-עַרְף אַתָּה פֶּן-אֲכַלְךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ: ד וַיֵּשֶׁב מֵעַתָּה אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַרְעָה הַזֶּה וַיִּתְאַבְּלוּ וְלֹא-שָׁתוּ אִישׁ עֵדִיו עָלָיו: ה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם עִם-קִשָּׁה-עַרְף רָגַע אֶחָד אֵעָלֶה בְּקִרְבְּךָ וְכִלְיֹתֶיךָ וְעַתָּה הוֹרֵד עֲדֶיךָ מֵעֲלֶיךָ וְאִדְעָה מָה אֲעֹשֶׂה-לָּךְ: ו וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-עֲדֵימָם מִהָר חוֹרֵב: ז וּמֹשֶׁה יָקַח אֶת-הָאֹהֶל וְנָטָה-לוֹ | מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה הִרְחִיק מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה וְקָרָא לוֹ אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה כָּל-מִבְקֵשׁ יְהוָה יֵצֵא אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: ח וְהָיָה כִּצְאֹת מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָאֹהֶל יְקוּמוּ כָּל-הָעָם וְנִצְבּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ וְהִבִּיטוּ אַחֲרַי מִשָּׁה עַד-בֹּאוֹ הָאֹהֶלָה: ט וְהָיָה כִּבְּאֵר מֹשֶׁה הָאֹהֶלָה יֵרֵד עִמּוֹד הָעֲנָן וְעִמָּד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְדַבֵּר עִם-מֹשֶׁה: י וַיִּרְאֶה כָּל-הָעָם אֶת-עִמּוֹד הָעֲנָן וְעִמָּד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְקָם כָּל-הָעָם וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֹהֶלוֹ: יא וְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ וְשָׁב אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וּמִשְׁרָתוֹ יְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן-נּוּן נָעַר לֹא יִמִּישׁ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֹהֶל:

The Jewish messianic hope is found in the belief that the Lord God Almighty will send someone to deliver His people. This is the context we have of Yeshua being our advocate, a Messianic redeemer before God who intercedes on our behalf and causes the wrath of God to turn from us, just as Moshe had done for Israel at the mountain of Sinai here in Parashat Ki Tisa.

Now according to *Midrash Rabbah on Shemot Parashat 42*, we read the rabbis discussing who it was that sinned with the golden calf. The Midrash states that it was the mixed multitude that were involved in making and worshiping the golden calf. The rabbinic conclusion was that God was angry with Israel because they went along with the others in their sinfulness. The commentary *Malbim on Shemot / Exodus 32:11 Part 1* also states the following:

Malbim on Shemot / Exodus 32:11 Part 1

Against Your people. God had said, "Your people have become corrupt," referring to the mixed multitude whom Moshe took out of Egypt on his own authority. Moshe replied, "If only my people have sinned, why are You angry at Your people? And if it is because they did not protest, recall that it was only recently that You brought them from the land of Egypt." In Egypt even the B'nei Yisrael had fallen into idol worship. How, then, could they be expected to become zealous opponents of it in such a short time?

The way Moshe is describing the situation, it sounds as if there are a people that belong to Moshe and a people that belong to God. It could be that Moshe was referring to the descendents of Jacob when speaking of "*my people*" and all of the people including the mixed multitude as God's people. What these things teach us is the company that we keep, our friends, may cause us to sin if they are not walking in God's ways. We should be careful who we surround ourselves with, this is why David said in *Tehillim / Psalms 1:1* *How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! (NASB)* This parallels

the nations in their ways, idol worship, and those who do not love the things of God. As the people of God we are to be zealous for God's word. The rabbis say the people were not able to become proponents in such a short period of time having been just delivered from a land that was filled with idolatry (Egypt). The rabbinic literature generally looks at Israel as not capable of sinning, as we see in the commentary by Malbim who says those who sinned were the mixed multitude. The commentary *Or HaChaim on Shemot / Exodus 32:11 Part 1* however describes Israel as being incapable of sinning while also saying the golden calf was related to the mixed multitude.

We are taught in the Talmud that a mitzvah may be done vicariously through a messenger. What occurs is that there must be the intent to hire a man, a messenger, to perform the mitzvah. A well known example may be during Passover, one can request someone to check for chametz before the Passover if one is away. Another example, one seeks a mohel (מֹהֵל) to circumcise one's son. Here in the Talmud, we see how a messenger may be used to bring an offering. The discussion is on the one bringing the offering that is designated for another person.

Talmud Bavli Pesachim 62a

בהאי קרא קמיפלגי ונרצה לו לכפר עליו עליו ולא על
חבירו רבה סבר חבירו דומיא דידיה מה הוא דבר כפרה
אף חבירו דבר כפרה לאפוקי האי ערל דלאו בר כפרה
הוא

Disagree with regard to this verse, which is stated with regard to a different offering: "And it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Leviticus 1:4). It is inferred: For him and not for his fellow. One cannot achieve atonement through an offering that has been designated for someone else. Rabba and Rav Hisda disagree with regard to the halakhic conclusions that should be drawn from this law. Rabba holds that the law applies to another who is similar to him: Just as he is eligible for atonement through the sprinkling of

the blood of this offering, so the law applies to another who is eligible for atonement. This comes to exclude this uncircumcised person, who is not eligible for atonement. Since an uncircumcised person is not fit for the Paschal lamb, slaughtering it for him does not disqualify the offering.

The rabbis are discussing the issue of a sacrifice that was designated for another person. Here in Parashat Ki Tisa, Moshe told the people that he was going up the mountain to see if he could make atonement for their sin with the golden calf. He did not bring an animal, he simply ascended himself and spoke with God. For the mitzvah to make atonement for one's sins, in the time of the Tabernacle / Temple one could certainly have sent a messenger for a קורבן חטאת (sin-offering). The problem is that the confession of sin, apology, and regret with the intention not to repeat the sin, the Teshuvah process, is the way atonement is made, it is done with words and in the heart and mind. This makes it difficult for one to have someone else do these things without actually doing them yourself. In the sense of a messenger, one must also have the intent to confess and repent to God, one can't simply send a messenger to do these things for you without actually desiring to do them yourself. These are the points of difficulty that Moshe faced while going before the Lord with the hope of making atonement on behalf of the people. He also offered these things without actually getting their approval or their having requested for him to do so for them. These things have a particular impact on our understanding of the Messiah, and the messianic hope that is found in the belief that God would send a deliverer to His people. Yeshua came to make atonement on our behalf, but we also must have the proper intention, confession in the heart, and belief in the heart and mind that these things so, and the intention of repentance to not repeat the sin. We remember in the context of the messianic era, Elijah was to come first showing the way. We are told in the Apostolic Writings how John the Baptist had come in the spirit of Elijah. It is interesting what the rabbis have to say concerning Elijah, the man who never died. Hershey Friedman wrote a paper that summarizes the role of Elijah in the rabbinic literature saying the following:

“Elijah plays many diverse roles in The Talmud besides being the harbinger of the Messiah and the scholar who will answer questions that remain in doubt. These include: (a) miracle worker, rescuer, and healer; (b) discloser of secrets; (c) helper and comforter of the poor; (d) promoter of social justice; (e) teacher and scholar; and (f) punisher of the wicked. Elijah becomes an important figure in Jewish folklore and Chassidic tales. Lindbeck underscores the point that Elijah stories remain popular today (Lindbeck, 2010: pp. 165-170). She notes: “Clearly, the Jewish world is still charmed and fascinated by the figure of Elijah the prophet.” One can understand why people would be fascinated by a prophet who disguises himself as an ordinary person (often as a beggar) and rescues people from dangerous situations and/or reveals all kinds of secrets would be popular. He is a true superhero for the Jewish people.” (Friedman, Hershey. (2018). Talmudic Ethics: Lessons from Rabbinic Stories About Elijah, the Prophet who Never Died. 10.13140/RG.2.2.31263.61608)

It is interesting how all of these things follow through from Moshe as we read according to the Torah and to Yeshua in the Apostolic Writings. The narrative at the center of the rabbinic literature on Elijah depicts the one whom God has sent to work in the power of God to heal, to help, to comfort, to give peace, to promote justice, to teach Torah, and to bring punishment upon the wicked. The story of Elijah that comes out of the rabbinic literature portrays God’s blessing on the righteous. This same imagery is given here in Parashat Ki Tisa coupled with God’s mercy on the wicked so they do not die. The life and ministry of Moshe was for the good of His people. The Torah describes Moshe as the Messianic prototype, something of which the ultimate Messiah is expected to reflect. The Midrashim often refers to Moshe and the Messiah as the First Redeemer and the Ultimate redeemer. (Midrash Rabba Parashat 11 Part 3) The Midrash speaks of

them as being revealed but also of being subsequently hidden. Taking all of these things together Yeshua reflected this pattern, both the Torah and the Rabbinic literature casts Yeshua the Messiah in the pattern of Moshe!