

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XXVI: Shemini (Lev. 9:1–11:47)

Essay 1. Aaron and the Golden Calf

פסוק "קח־לָךְ עֵגֶל בֶּן־בָּקָר לְחַטָּאת", פֶּרֶשׁ רַש"י, לַהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁמִּכְפָּר לוֹ הַקַּב"ה עַל יַד עֵגֶל זֶה עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל שֶׁעָשָׂה. הַקִּשָּׁה הַזֵּרָע בְּרַף חֶלֶק ב' דִּגַּשׁ לְדַקְדָּק עַל מָה שֶׁאָמַר לַהוֹדִיעַ וְכוּ', דִּהְיָה לוֹ לֹמַר בְּקִיצוֹר "עֵגֶל לְכַפֵּר עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל", וְתִירֵץ שֶׁם לְפִי דַרְכוֹ. וְנִרְאֶה לְדַקְדָּק עוֹד, מַהוּ הַטַּעַם שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּמְּנו אֵלָיו הַקְּרָבָנוֹת, שֶׁאֶהְרֵן הַבִּיא הָעֵגֶל לְחַטָּאת וַיִּשְׁרָאֵל הַבִּיאוּ הָעֵגֶל לְעוֹלָה. וְאֵיתָא בְּפֶרֶק ג' דְּרַאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה (דף כ"ו) אָמַר ר' חֲסִידָא מִפְּנֵי מָה אֵין פִּהֵן גְּדוֹל נִכְנָס בְּבִגְדֵי זָהָב לְפָנִים לְעִבּוּד עֲבוּדָה, לְפִי שֶׁאֵין קְטִיגוֹר נַעֲשֵׂה סְנִיגוֹר, וְלֹא וְהֵאִיפָא אָרוֹן וְכַפּוֹרֶת וְכְרוֹב, הוֹטָא בַל יִקְרִיב קְאָמְרִינוּ, וּפְרַשׁ רַש"י, הוֹטָא בַל יִקְרִיב, הָאֲדָם לֹא יִקְרִיבֵנו הַלּוֹם שֶׁהוּא חָטָא בּו עכ"ל. אִם כֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּדְאִי חָטָאוּ בְּעֵגֶל אֵינֵם יְכוּלִים לְהַבִּיא עֵגֶל לְחַטָּאת לְפִי שֶׁאֵין קְטִיגוֹר נַעֲשֵׂה סְנִיגוֹר, וְאִם גַּם אֶהְרֵן הִיָּה נִקְרָא חוֹטָא פְּשִׁיטָא שְׁלֹא הִיָּה יְכוּל אִף הוּא לְהַבִּיא עֵגֶל לְחַטָּאת, דְּחוֹטָא בַל יִקְרִיב. אֲלֵא וְדִאי מְדַהֲבִיא הָעֵגֶל לְחַטָּאת, שָׁמַע מִינָה שֶׁמָה שֶׁעָשָׂה הָעֵגֶל לֹא נִקְרָא חוֹטָא רַק כְּמוֹ גְּרָמָא בְּעֵלְמָא וּשְׁגָגָה וְאוֹנָס. וּמִשּׁוּם הַכִּי פֶתַב לַהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁמִּכְפָּר לוֹ הַקַּב"ה עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל, וְלֹא אָמַר בְּקִיצוֹר לְכַפֵּר עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל, שֶׁאִם הִיָּה אוֹמֵר כֵּן הִיָּה מִשְׁמַע שֶׁאֶהְרֵן חָטָא וְהִיָּה צָרִיף לַפְּרָה, וְאִזּוּ הִנֵּה קִשָּׁה לָן אִם כֵּן לְמָה הַבִּיא הָעֵגֶל וְהֵא אֵין קְטִיגוֹר נַעֲשֵׂה סְנִיגוֹר, אֲלֵא פֶתַב לַהוֹדִיעַ וְכוּ' שֶׁבָּא הַפְּתוּב לַהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁאֵינוֹ נִקְרָא חוֹטָא.

There is a verse: “[Moses] said to Aaron: ‘Take a calf of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and bring them before the L-rd.’”¹ **Rashi explained:** “[This was] to announce that the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted him atonement by means of this calf for the incident of the [Golden] Calf that he had made.”

The *Zera Berach*² (part 2), questioned this, that it’s necessary to check why [Rashi] said “to announce,” etc., that he could have said simply, “a calf to atone for the incident with the [Golden] Calf,” and he explained this according to his manner. It appears worthwhile to check this further: What was the reason that these offerings differed, for Aaron brought the calf as a sin offering, but Israel brought a calf as a burnt offering. It is brought in the 3rd chapter of tractate *Rosh Hashana* (page 26a):

Rav Chisda said: Why doesn’t the High Priest enter the innermost sanctum [i.e., the Holy of Holies], with golden garments to perform the [Yom Kippur] service? Because a prosecutor cannot become an advocate. [I.e., gold serves as a prosecutor in that it is a reminder of the sin of the Golden Calf, and thus it can’t become an advocate, i.e., be part of the High Priest’s garments as he prays on behalf of the Jewish people.]

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¹ Lev. 9:2.

² Rabbi Berachia Berech ben R’ Yitzchak Izaak Shapiro, *Zera Berach* (Krakow 1646), commentary on the Torah.

[The Gemara asks] **But there is the Ark, the Ark cover, and the cherub** [all of which are plated with gold]. [The Gemara explains] What we are saying is a sinner should not bring [gold] into [the Holy of Holies].

- Rosh Hashana 26a

Rashi explained [the meaning of the Gemara]: “**‘A sinner shall not bring’— the person should not bring an offering of that with which he sinned.**”³

If so, Israel, who certainly sinned with the [Golden] Calf, cannot bring a calf as a sin offering, because a prosecutor cannot become a defender. If Aaron too were considered a sinner with regard to the Golden Calf, it would certainly be improper for him to bring a calf as a sin offering, for a sinner should not bring an offering consisting of that by which he sinned.

Rather certainly, since he did bring a calf as a sin offering, we hear from this that his act of making of the [Golden] Calf did not label him a sinner, but it was like an indirect cause, or should be considered accidental, or that he was coerced. Therefore, [Rashi] wrote, “[This was] to announce that the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted him atonement by means of this calf for the incident of the [Golden] Calf that he had made,” and not simply, “to atone for the incident with the [Golden] Calf,” for if he had said this, the meaning would be that Aaron had sinned and needed atonement. For then there would be a question: If so, that he had sinned and needed atonement, why did he bring a calf, for isn’t it so that a prosecutor cannot become a defender? Rather, [Rashi] wrote “to announce that the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted him atonement,” for the Scripture came to inform that [Aaron] is not considered a voluntary sinner with regard to the Golden Calf.

ועוד יש לומר דאין הכי נמי שבבעשית העגל אהרן לא חטא כלל, אלא אדרבא ראוי הוא ליטול שכר לפי שעשה המעשה בכונה טובה ולשם שמים, והיינו דכיון ששמע שישאל אהרן, "קום עשה לנו אלהים" וכו', אם כן כבר הרהרו בעבודה זרה, ובהרהור עבודה זרה כתיב "למען תפוש את בית ישראל בלבם", ואם היו ישראל מקבלין הלוואות בפגם מהשקבה רעה הזאת בנדאי שלא היה להם תקומה, שהתורה לא תתקיים בידם ויפלו בהרבה עבירות חמורות. כמו שאמרו ז"ל במסכת תגיגה פרק ב' על דואג נאחיתופל נאחר שטינא היתה בלבם ופל עמר דלא נקי אגב אימיה, לא סליק. ואף אם אחר ביאת משה יוכיח על פניהם מומם, בנדאי שלא יתחרטו כראוי להם, בחשבכם שחטא הרהור אינו כל כך חטא, ולפיכך אהרן מלא את ידם לעשות העגל מפני שהיה יודע שאחר כך יתחרטו ויתביישו, כמו שמצינו "וישמע העם" וכו' "ויתאבלו ולא שתו" וכו', וגמירי שקל העושה עבירה ומתבייש בה מוחלין לו על כל עונותיו.

Furthermore, one can say that indeed Aaron did not sin at all in the making of the Golden Calf. On the contrary, he is worthy of receiving reward, since he acted with good intentions and for the sake of Heaven. That is, when he heard that Israel said, “Arise, make us a god to lead us,”⁴ it was clear that they had already entertained thoughts of idol worship. For thoughts of idol worship, it is written, “Thus I will hold the House of Israel to account for their thoughts.”⁵ If Israel had received the Tablets while blemished with this bad thinking, certainly they would not have survived, for the Torah would not have been fulfilled in their hands, and they would have fallen with their many great sins.

³ Rabbi Berachia Berech ben R' Yitzchak Izaak Shapiro, Zera Berach (Krakow 1646), commentary on the Torah.

⁴ Rashi on Rosh Hashana 26a.

⁵ Ezek. 14:5.

This is as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said in tractate Chagigah, chapter 2 (15b), about Doeg, and Achitofel, and Acher, who despite being Torah scholars are said to have no part in the World-to-Come, seeing that they had mud in their hearts. It is also said that that **all wool** that enters a pot to be dyed does not emerge colored, i.e., that not everyone who learns Torah emerges as worthy. One who was clean originally⁶ will emerge worthy, **but all who were not clean originally will not emerge worthy.**

Even after Moses' return, had he rebuked them for their flaw, it's certain that they would not have regretted it properly, thinking that sinful thoughts are not truly sinful. Therefore, Aaron facilitated their act of making the Golden Calf, for he knew that afterward they would regret it and be ashamed. This is as we find, "And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned; and no man did put on him his ornaments."⁷ We have also learned that anyone who commits a transgression and is ashamed of it, all his sins are forgiven.⁸

ובזה יובן לשון רש"י מלמד שהיה אהרן בוש וכו' אמר לו משה למה אתה בוש? לכה נבחרת עכ"ל. וקושה מהו לכה נבחרת. אלא הענין הוא כה, שאם נאמר שאהרן חטא במעשה העגל נקרא שהחטיא את הרבים ונתן מקשול לפניהם, ואם כן לא היה עוד ראוי להיות כהן ומכל שכן כהן גדול שהרי אפילו השלים צבור אין למנותו לכתחלה בכיוצא בזה. ומשום הכי אמר לו משה למה אתה בוש, שמעבדושה שיש לו נראה שחטאת, והלא לא חטאת כלל, שמטעם זה נבחרת לכהן גדול, ששם שפונתה היתה לטובה כדי שימיישו ותהיה להם כפרה. משום הכי מדה כנגד מדה נבחרת לכהן גדול כדי שלעולם תהיה מכפר על ישראל שתקריב קרבניהם, וזה שאמר הכתוב "וירא משה אתהעם כי פרע הוא" וכו', דהיינו שגלה ופרסם לחוץ מחשבת לבם הרע, "לשמצה בקמיהם" כדי שיהיה להם לחרפה נגד המקורגים, שהרי על ידי הבושה נתכפרו.

With this, we can understand the wording of Rashi, "This teaches that Aaron was ashamed. Moses said to him, 'Why are you ashamed? For this you were chosen.'⁹ What is the meaning of "for this you were chosen"? Rather, the matter is this: That if it is said that Aaron sinned with the making of the Golden Calf, it is considered that he caused the multitudes to sin and placed a stumbling block before them. If so, he is no longer suitable to be a priest, let alone High Priest, since even a prayer leader is not initially named if he has acted thus. Because of this, Moses said to him, "Why are you ashamed? That is, from your shame, it appears that you sinned, but isn't it so that you didn't sin at all, that for this reason you were chosen to be High Priest, because just as your intent was for the good, in order that they would be ashamed and would have atonement. Because of this, measure-for-measure, you were chosen to be High Priest, so that you would always atone for Israel by bringing their sacrifices. This is the meaning of what is written, "Moses saw that the people were out of control—since Aaron had let them get out of control—being disgraced before those who oppose them."¹⁰ That is, that the thoughts of their evil hearts were revealed and publicized openly, "being disgraced before those who oppose them," in order that they be scorned before the prosecuting angels, for through that shame, they were granted atonement.

⁶ Literally, "when with its mother."

⁷ Ex. 33:4.

⁸ Berachot 12b.

⁹ Rashi on Lev. 9:7.

¹⁰ Ex. 32:25.

ובנה יובן נמי הפסוק "אתה ידעת את העם כי ברע הוא", וקשה דמה התנצלות הוא זה לאהרן, ומה זו תשובה למה שאמר משה "מה עשה לך העם הנה כיי הבאת עלי חטאת גדלה", דאם נאמר שנהתנצלות הוא מה שאמר אהרן, "ניאמרו לי" וכו' "ואשלכהו באש" וכו', פלומר שיצא מעצמו על ידי כשופיהם, אם כן קשה דמה צורך הנה לו להקדים, "אתה ידעת את העם", ועוד מהו "אתה ידעת" הנה לו לומר "אנו יודעים", דמה הנה יודע משה בנה יותר מאהרן. ויש לומר דאיתא בשמות רבה על פסוק "ראה ראיתי" וכו' שאמר לו הקב"ה למשה ראה ראה אחת נאני ראה שתי ראיות, שאני ראה שפושבאים על הר סיני לקבל התורה הם שומטים צורת שור מן המרפכה ומכעיסים אותי בו עכ"ל. שגראה מכאן שאף מתחלה היתה להם המחשבה רעה, ומעתה אי אפשר שיהיה להם חרטה וכפרה אלא על ידי מעשה, שגנה באו לידי בושה.

By this, we can also understand the verse, “You know that this people is bent on evil,”¹¹ and a question is what defense was this for Aaron? How was this an answer to what Moses said, “What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?”¹²

Maybe it can be said that the defense is what he said afterward: “They said to me, ‘Make us a god to lead us . . .’ They gave [gold] to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this calf.”¹³ That’s as if to say that it emerged on its own through their sorcery. If so, the question is what need was there for him to preface with, “You know that this people is bent on evil.”

Also, what is the meaning of this “you know”? He should have said, “we know,” for what did Moses know more than Aaron about this?

It can be said what is brought in Ex. Rabbah on the verse, “I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings.”¹⁴

The Holy One, Blessed be He said to Moses: ‘You see one sight but I see two sights. You see them arriving at Sinai and receiving My Torah. I see when they arrive to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, I descend in my Divine Chariot, and they draw out the form of the [Golden] Calf from the Chariot, and thereby anger Me.

- Ex. Rabbah 3:2

The Divine Chariot mentioned in Ezekiel 1:4–28 includes the form of four animals, one of them being an ox. The intent of the Midrash is that the Israelites and Mixed Multitude unhitched the ox from the Divine Chariot, and used it as a template to form the Golden Calf. See also Chapter XLVI, Ekev, essay 10.

It appears from here that even initially, i.e., even before the long absence of Moses, they had evil thoughts. Now they could not attain regret and atonement except through an action of idolatry, for through this they would come to shame.

¹¹ Ex. 32:22.

¹² Ex. 32:21.

¹³ Ex. 32:23–24.

¹⁴ Ex. 3:7.

אָמְנָם עֲדִיין יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת, אִם הָאֱמֶת שְׁאַהֲרֹן לֹא חָטָא כָּלֵל לְמָה כְּתִיב "וּבִאֲהָרֹן הִתְאַנֵּף ה' " וְכוּ'. וְנִשׁ לֹמַר דְּאִין הָכִי נְמִי שְׁבִמְעֻשָׁה הָעֵגֶל לֹא חָטָא כָּלֵל, אֲלָא שְׁאַחַר כִּד הָיָה אֲהָרֹן נוֹטֵל קַרְבָּנָם וּפּוֹחֲסוֹ לְפָנֵיהֶם וְאוֹמֵר לָהֶם רְעוּ שְׂאִין בּוּ מִמֶּשׁ, וּבְזָה עֲשָׂאָם מְזִידִים כְּדִלְקִמֶן בְּסִמּוּד. וּמִשׁוּם הָכִי מִתּוּ בְּנָיו, שְׂאֵף עַל פִּי שְׁטָעוּ בְּסִבְרַתָּם שְׁהָיָה לָהֶם לְהִיזוֹת גִּידוּנִים כְּאַנּוּסִים וְשׁוֹגְגִים, מִשׁוּם דְּלִיבִיָּהּוּ אֲנִסִּינְהוּ וְלֹא חָטָאוּ בְּמִזִּיד וְלֹא הָיָה לָהֶם לְמוֹת, עִם כָּל זֶה גִּידוּנּוֹ כְּמִזִּידִים מִשׁוּם חָטָא אֲבִיָּהֶם.

However, there is still a question: if it is true that Aaron did not sin at all, why is it written, “And the L-rd was angry enough with Aaron to have destroyed him; so I also interceded for Aaron at that time.”¹⁵ It can be said that it is indeed so that in the incident with the Golden Calf, he did not sin at all. Rather, afterward Aaron took their idol and crushed it before them, and said to them, “See that it has no substance,”¹⁶ and through this, he caused them to become intentional sinners, as below. Because of this, his sons died — for although they erred in their reasoning and should have been judged as coerced or inadvertent sinners, since their hearts compelled them and they did not sin intentionally, and thus they should not have been liable to death, nonetheless, they were judged as intentional sinners because of the sin of their father.

וּבְזָה יוֹבֵן נְמִי הַפְּסוּק "וְכִפֵּר בַּעֲדָךְ וּבַעֲדֵי הָעָם", וְאַחַר כֵּן, "וַנַּעֲשֵׂה אֶת־קַרְבַּן הָעָם וְכִפֵּר בַּעֲדָם". וְקוֹשֶׁה תְּרִי פְּפֹרוֹת לָעַם לְמָה לִּי, וּמָה צוֹרֵךְ שְׁיִכַפֵּר קַרְבַּן אֲהָרֹן בַּעֲדָם. אֲלָא שְׁיִשְׂרָאֵל צָרִיךְ שְׁהַקְרִיבֵן שְׁלָהֶם וְכִפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל, אֲבָל כָּל הַחָטָא הַזֶּה הָיָה לוֹ דִּין שׁוֹגֵג, אָמְנָם מָה שְׁעֲשֵׂה אֲהָרֹן שְׁעֲשָׂאָם מְזִידִים, צָרִיךְ שְׁקַרְבְּנוֹ שֶׁל אֲהָרֹן יִכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם.

With this, we can also understand the verse, “Come forward to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering, making expiation for yourself and for the people,”¹⁷ and after this, “and sacrifice the people’s offering and make expiation for them.”¹⁸ A question is why do I need two atonements for the people? Also, what is the need for Aaron’s offering to atone for them?

Rather, the people of Israel needed their own offering to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. However, that entire sin had the status of an inadvertent transgression, but what Aaron did, which caused them to become intentional sinners, required that Aaron’s offering atone for them.

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¹⁵ Deut. 9:20.

¹⁶ Lev. Rabbah 7:1.

¹⁷ Lev. 9:7.

¹⁸ Id.