

Parasha Meditation Ki Tisa

Shemot 30:11-34:35

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Raising our Desires for Life

Introduction:

Eradicating “Strange Service” from Within and Without

Parashat Ki Tisa describes the sin of the Golden Calf, which teaches that no one is completely immune to idol-worship (Literally “strange service”). According to the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* Menachem Mendel Schneerson z”l, a version of modern idolatry is when a person is only partially involved in a Jewish lifestyle without embracing Judaism in a total way. Allowing a separation between ourselves and Judaism, may eventually cause actual idolatry, G*d forbid. Therefore, we need to constantly evaluate if our service is appropriate and complete, to prevent descending to the level of “strange service.” The spiritual ammunition against falling into “strange service” is the opening verse of our Torah portion: **כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל /ki tisa et rosh b’nai Yisrael – “Raise the head of the Jewish people.”**¹ This implies to be more involved in studying Torah, especially its inner dimensions. This is the best way to eradicate “strange service” both from within and without.²

Elevating the Evil Cycle

The Hebrew word for calf is **עֵגֶל** – *egel*. The root **ע** – *ayin*, **ג** – *gimel* **ל** – *lamed* also forms the Hebrew word **אֵגֶל** *agil*, which means earring, from which the Golden Calf was made. This word is connected to the word for circle – **עֵגוּל** which can either refer to an evil cycle or a positive spiral-like cycle, revolving around ascent toward G*dliness. A negative cycle is when a person follows the cycles of nature, without recognizing the Divine Providence in the world. This reflects the Golden Calf, made partially of gold from the women’s earrings, which the men had forcefully taken from them.³ King David implores G*d to lead him in **מַעְגְּלֵי צְדָקָה** – “*ma’aglei tzedek*,”⁴ – righteous circular ways.⁵ From within the evil cycles of strange worship, there is a road to G*dliness. The construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), whose golden vessels were also made of the jewelry of the women,⁶ was the rectification for the Golden Calf. When jewelry brings out the true grace of a righteous woman, it is holy, and reflects the holy *Mishkan*.⁷

¹ *Shemot* 30:12.

² Based on article by Rabbi Shaul Leiter (W:5760-25/KiTisa) for the ASCENT of SAFED website www.ascent.org.il.

³ Rashi, *Shemot* 32:2.

⁴ *Tehillim* 23:3.

⁵ The Hebrew word **מַעְגָּל** can also mean road or way.

⁶ *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* 44.

⁷ Rav Yitzchak Ginsburg, Rectifying the Golden Calf with Balanced Leadership, http://www.inner.org/parshah/exodus/ki_tisa/E_009.php.



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Our Desires Indicate Who We Are

A woman's desire for jewelry can either come from a low place of "Golden-Calf-desire" for the physical, or from a spiritual desire to reflect Hashem's glory, beautify herself for her husband, and take pleasure in the holidays. We are what we desire. When we desire material things we are connected to the body. When we desire spiritual things we are connected to our soul. However, desire for physical things can sometimes emanate from our soul, when we desire the physical for spiritual reasons. For example, for some women, cleaning and decorating their home, is a spiritual worship of Hashem. Periodical self-assessment can help us get clarity of where we are holding, and spur us to consciously chose a more spiritual path. We can ask Hashem to help us rectify our desires, so that we will desire closeness to Him.

Raising our Heads on Shabbat

"When you raise the heads..."⁸ the Hebrew word for raise – רָשָׁא/*tisa* with the *kollel*⁹ has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word שַׁבָּת/Shabbat. This alludes to the fact that Shabbat is the time suitable to raise the heads of the children of Israel. The word following "when you raise the heads of B'nai Yisrael" is לִפְקֹדֵיהֶם/*lifkudeihem* – according to their numbers. This word also indicates a lack as in "not one man among us is נִפְקָד/*nifkad* – missing."¹⁰ We learn from this that in order to become raised up we need to first recognize our lack, and faulty character-traits. By means of this self-awareness we can repent and return to an elevated state. However, the danger of contemplating on our faults is that we might fall into depression. Therefore, specifically on Shabbat which is from the World of Building, can we recognize our faults and repent from them without falling into depression. The word Shabbat is an acronym for שַׁבָּת בּוֹ תְּשׁוּבָה/*Shabbat bo tashuv* – in Shabbat you shall repent. The soul accounting we do on Shabbat will only lead us to repentance and closeness with Hashem rather than weakening us and making us feel distant. The continuation of our Torah verse "...that there be no plague among them," teaches us that there is no need to be concerned about falling into depression "when you raise their head" on Shabbat. For then the contemplation and the soul accounting is from the World of Building which brings a Jew close to Hashem.¹¹

Meditation:

Sit comfortable in your chair and close your eyes. Take several deep breaths and get in touch with yourself. Feel the outline of your body touching the chair you are sitting in.

1. Imagine a circle of light surrounding your head. Breathe into this circle of light several times.
2. Move your consciousness to your torso and imagine a golden circle surrounding it as you breathe into it.

⁸ *Shemot* 30:12.

⁹ It is an accepted way of calculating the numerical value of a word by including an additional number corresponding to the word itself.

¹⁰ *Bamidbar* 31:49.

¹¹ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Ki Tisa*, P. 236.

3. Finally, connect with your pelvis and breathe slowly into it several times as you imagine a circle of light surrounding it.
4. Allow yourself to feel relaxed and centered. As you continue to breathe slowly, ask yourself, "What am I making into an idol? Which materialistic secular goals run my life?"
5. Ask yourself "Who am I? I am my desires! What are my desires? Who I am? What do I desire? Life of Death? Do I desire to pray? Do I desire the spiritual tranquility of Shabbat, the mitzvah of welcoming guests? Or do I desire to go shopping, to see movies and read fashion magazines?" Please add to this list of questions to yourself.
6. Keep asking yourself even deeper questions: "What do I truly desire? Do I desire physical things, or do I desire spirituality and closeness to Hashem? Are my physical desires spiritual? Or are my spiritual desires physical, for the sake of my ego and self-aggrandizement?"
7. Access where you are at, and what kind of desires you have. Ask yourself: "How can I have more life in my life rather than choosing something that makes me feel dead and disconnected?"
8. In the stillness of yourself, imagine Hashem before you and ask, "Please Hashem, help me become more connected to my Neshama. I desire to desire spiritual things, but if my spiritual will is weak, oh Hashem please strengthen my spiritual will. Please help me detach more and more from the physical and dead, and become more and more connected to You and to true life!"
9. Now, with Hashem's help, quietly resolve to choose life rather than death...the reality, not the fantasy.

Notes:

We have the ability to refine our will, by getting in touch with and recognizing our material desires. Our purification emanate from the source of our impurity. They are both part of the same cycle. Therefore, the atonement for the Golden Calf is through the Red Heifer as Rashi explains, "This may be compared to the case of a handmaid's child that defiled the king's palace. They said: Let the mother come and wipe up the excrement. Similarly here: since they became defiled by a calf, let its mother (a cow) come and atone for the calf.¹² These two animals are photo negatives of one another. The difference between them is that the Golden Calf is dead, whereas the Red Heifer is very much alive and filled with blood used for sacrifices. It is "life" that makes the difference between ultimate sin and ultimate redemption. Let us detach from the desire for "dead things" and learn to appreciate that which is connected to the Source of life, *L'Chaim!*

¹² Rashi, *Bamidbar* 19:22.

About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work.

For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

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or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

Come Learn With Us!

Beginner and advanced levels are offered for women of all ages and religious backgrounds. Whether your interest in Judaism has recently been ignited, or you are seeking a wider perspective, Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin offers the opportunity to improve your learning skills while strengthening your commitment to Judaism within the parameters of Halachah – all while engaging your inner creative spirituality, working the Land, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Support Our School!

You have the unique opportunity to help us continue to build and amplify the light of Torah on the Land of Israel. With your help we can increase our ability to provide women an extraordinary Torah environment where they can build a solid Jewish foundation which will have an impact for generations to come.

