



## *Parshas Ki Tisa 2022, coin of fire*

*This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of HaRav Amitai Ben Shoshanna and in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.*

Our Parsha tells us the story of perhaps the biggest lapse of judgment in our history. A sin that caused G-d to want to destroy that generation and begin anew. The transgression that thousands of people died from and are felt till this very day, the sin of the Golden Calf.

The story began at the end of last week's Torah portion when G-d called Moshe Rabbienu up the mountain after the giving of the Torah. He was to stay on the mountain for forty days and nights to study the Torah and then teach it to the Jewish nation.

While he was on the mountain, some people intentionally miscalculated his return date and convinced people that Moshe had died. They went to Aaron and Chur, Miriam's son, demanding they make an Idol to lead them in Moshe's stead.

Chur immediately tried to talk them out of it; he told them that Moshe's return was imminent and there was no need to worry. But he was killed for refusing to follow along with their sinful plans. Aaron realized he had no choice but to follow their plan or face a similar fate.

He told them to gather all their gold and bring it to him to create an Idol. Secretly he hoped that it would take a while for them to collect it, and Moshe would come back before they were done.

Unexpectedly, the people swiftly collected all their gold and brought it before him. Having no other choice, Aaron put all the gold into a fire, and the gold took the form of a calf. The Jewish nation began dancing around the Golden Calf, believing it was their leader in Moshe's stead.

Meanwhile, G-d saw what the Jewish people were doing and told Moshe to go down to them. Moshe took the two Luchos and headed down the mountain; he saw the Golden Calf and the people dancing around it as he got closer. The Luchos he was holding suddenly became heavy, so he threw them to the ground, shattering them instantly.

Moshe burnt the Golden Calf and ground it into a fine powder. He went to the tribe of Levi and said, "join me and defend the oneness of G-d and His Torah." The entire tribe joined him as he punished those that sinned with the Golden Calf.

After they finished, Moshe turned to G-d and begged Him for mercy; he asked G-d to remember the covenant He made with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. He told G-d that if He was to destroy the Jewish nation, G-d should erase his name from the entire Torah. G-d forgave the Jewish nation and told Moshe the thirteen attributes of mercy we say daily.

However, a question comes to mind: Before the episode of the Golden Calf, G-d tells Moshe to count the Jewish people. He was to collect a half-shekel from each man between the ages of twenty and sixty and then calculate the coins to get the total.

The Midrash writes that, surprisingly, Moshe did not know what a half-shekel looked like, so G-d showed him a half-shekel of fire to demonstrate what the coin looked like. But the half-shekel was not a highly valuable coin; it was an extremely common coin. But **how did Moshe not know what the half-shekel looked like?**

Furthermore, there are many ways for G-d to demonstrate to Moshe which coin He refers to. So **why did G-d need to show him a coin of fire specifically?!**

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) answers this question by explaining that this coin is weight-based. As the Pasuk writes (3:13) "**a**

**half-shekel by the sanctuary weight—twenty gerah to the shekel."** Rashi writes that there were different measurements for a half-shekel of "sanctuary weight" and the standard half-shekel. Hence, Moshe wanted to be certain about which coin he was to collect.

However, the Rabbeinu Bachya (*Rav Bachya Ben Asher, a Spanish commentary*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that Moshe's confusion was not about the coin itself but rather its purpose and value. Meaning Moshe didn't understand how an insignificant coin could be of utmost importance to G-d. Therefore, G-d showed Moshe a fiery vision to indicate the coin's deeper purpose and meaning.

The Rabbeinu Bachya continues that the significance of the half-shekel of fire is that we are not complete without G-d in our lives. No matter how successful or knowledgeable we are, we become indistinguishable from the masses without space for G-d's holiness. We do not accomplish our singular purpose, nor do we leave a legacy fitting the uniqueness of our soul.

Yet, when we consciously make room for the light of G-d to illuminate our lives, we begin to see the gravity behind the details. How a seemingly small act of kindness can drastically change a person's life. The Torah, the wisdom of G-d, is more practical and necessary now than ever. Most importantly, **the universe is incomplete without each unique soul in it.**

In our daily life, if we cease to grow thinking that we know it all, the path to our undoing will never be more defined. Our world is ever-changing, and in our day and age that changes happen even faster. Yet, if we build a solid foundation of knowledge and self-awareness, we can add or subtract as needed to maintain our achievements in an ever-evolving world.

**"The greatest enemy of success is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge."**

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,  
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*