

TUMULT AND TRANQUILITY

Parshas Ki Sisa reveals perhaps the most dramatic, chilling, and tragic story found in all of the Torah — the story of the Golden Calf. Just a few months after ‘Believing in Hashem and Moshe his servant,’ and just a few weeks after ‘We will do and we will listen,’ the Jewish nation turned their back on Hashem, declaring a man-made statue to be their new leader.

The *pasuk* recognizes this rapid turn of events, as Hashem said to Moshe, “They have quickly turned away from the path I have commanded them...”¹ Quickly, indeed!

In fact, asks Reb Chaim Shmulevitz,² (1902–1979) we find that idolatry is not something that people simply fall into. Rather, there is a slow process, where the *Yetzer Horah* first entices a person to one sin, and then another, and then eventually into idolatry.³ Considering the slow nature of falling into *avodah zarah*, coupled with the fact that *Klal Yisrael* was just at their spiritual heights, how can we possibly explain their rapid fall into the lowest depths?

Reb Chaim points out a particular trick the *Yetzer Horah* played on the *Bnei Yisrael*. Up until *Matan Torah*, *Klal Yisrael* was under the constant guidance and care of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. He was with them through the *makkos*, when they marched out of Egypt, and when they crossed the *Yam Suf*. He led them through *Marah*, and brought them to *Har Sinai*. But for the past forty days, he had left them, in order to learn the Torah with Hashem.

Seeing an opportunity, the *Yetzer Horah* caused the Jewish nation to believe *Moshe Rabbeinu* had died. The shock and trauma of such sudden terrible news had the desired effect. *Klal Yisrael* was taken by mass confusion, as turmoil and chaos set in. And in this turbulent setting, the ground was fertile for the most terrible of sins, idolatry.

During a time of tranquility, when one has all of their senses, it is easier to fight off our base desires. What, then, does the *Yetzer Horah* do? He throws tumult, chaos, and confusion at us, keeping us off balance. At that point, we are much more likely to waver, wobble, and even fail.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to control the chaos in our lives. However, if we are aware how susceptible we are when our normal routine is disrupted, we will be much better prepared to deal with the impact on our *avodas Hashem*.

¹ Shemos 32:8

² Sichos Mussar, Ki Sisa 5731

³ Shabbos 105a

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Chaos and tumult happens, it's a fact of life. What defense can there be against such an unstoppable force?

In one way, a great defense is something that we all already possess — foresight. While we cannot always control our environment, and our best laid plans will go awry, if we are ready for those events, we can prepare, either physically, or even mentally.

One sneaky way the *Yetzer Horah* tries to throw us off of our game is after we've already fallen in some capacity.¹ For example, if a person wakes up late to *Shacharis*, there may be that voice inside their head telling them to go back to sleep anyway.

And if they miss *Shacharis*, that voice will tell them their entire day is ruined, and why bother trying to learn Torah properly today, or make it to the *shiur*, etc.

Don't let our mistakes become more than they are! Unless we allow things to spiral out of control, we can still make peace within the chaos, with our eye focused on the prize of *avodas Hashem*.

¹ Sichos Mussar, Ki Sisa 5731

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**If one learns Mussar without an
intense desire to grow, he may be
learning the wisdom of Mussar, he may
be learning about Mussar, but he is not
learning Mussar.** - Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol.

V, pg. 195

AMONGST THE CHAOS

"Rabbi Gul," said Avigdor. "I wasn't going to come, but when I realized your wife had just given birth, and you decided to give the *shiur* anyway, how could I stay home?"

Rabbi Ayal Gul just had a child the day before, but felt his weekly *halacha shiur* should not stop. So, with his wife in the hospital, and other children at home, Rabbi Gul hired a babysitter, and gave the regular *shiur*.

"Believe me, Avigdor, I can totally understand. And if not for a particularly funny Purim play I saw many years ago, I don't think I would be here either."

"Ok, you've got me *rebbe*. What happened?"

Rabbi Gul smiled as his mind wandered back to years before. "I was already married for about a decade, and *Boruch Hashem*, already had a few children. The local *shul* had put on a *Purim shpiel*, and I was sitting in the audience. I don't remember exactly the point of the whole play, but I do recall one scene.

"There was a young man who had gone to *Eretz Yisrael*, and was singing about his concerns — perhaps he would turn out like his brother. And what happened to his brother? As the fellow was singing, a curtain rose, and you saw this boy's brother sitting at a dining room table, trying to learn, while there must have been fifty or more kids running around the table, jumping on his lap, pulling at his glasses, and so on.

"It was a pretty funny scene, but suddenly, in the midst of it all, I felt like I had a moment of clarity. *That's the way it should be*. Not that one must have little kids trying to rip your hat off while you learn, but the point is, even if you do, do what you can to stay focused on *avodas Hashem*.

"When my life gets chaotic — and we all know our lives can get chaotic, I remember that scene. First, it helps me laugh, which is just a smart thing to do when you feel you're getting overwhelmed. And second, it reminds me about my priorities. My priority is to Hashem, and how I can do what is right, despite the tumult around me.

"And thus, because of a Purim play, I am here tonight."

"And, I guess, me too! Thank you, Rabbi. Have a good night."

"...there must have been fifty or more kids running around the table, jumping on his lap, pulling at his glasses, and so on."

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Torah repeatedly cautions the Jewish warriors against their fears in battle, as each new event can disrupt a person's plans, and cause them to forget their faith.¹
- The tumult of this world is by design, as the challenges it creates give us so much greater reward in the next world.²

¹ *Da'as Chochmah U'Mussar*, Vol. I, 50

² *Chochmah U'Mussar*, Vol. IV, pg. 214