

Parsha Ponders

Shemini | April 24, 2025 | 26 Nissan 5785

Attorneys, prosecutors, and Golden Calves¹

ויאמר משה אל-אהרן קרב אל-המזבח...

Moshe said to Aharon: "Come close to the Altar..."²

After the *Mishkan* was built, there was a weeklong inauguration festival. The entire service was performed by Moshe. On the eighth day, it was Aharon's turn. He would bring a few offerings, and then the *Mishkan* would be ready for its regular service. The nation eagerly awaited to see the Divine Presence rest upon the *Mishkan*. However, Aharon was hesitant. He was embarrassed to inaugurate the *Mishkan*. Moshe had to encourage him and inform him that it was for this very reason that he was chosen³. How can we understand why Aharon was hesitant, and what was Moshe's consolation?

We have a concept known as: "A prosecutor cannot be made into a defense attorney"⁴. This is a metaphor for when someone does a sin and then recalls that sin when doing a *mitzvah*. For example, the Jews made a calf made of gold and turned it into an idol. Because of this, the Kohen Gadol cannot wear his usual golden articles of clothing when he enters the Holy of Holies, for it recalls the sin of the Jewish people. However, we seem to find contradictions to this rule. We are told that the red heifer atones for the Golden Calf⁵. Yet, how could the very animal, namely a cow, be used as an atonement? Doesn't it recall the sin⁶?

The answer is that it depends. When the sin *itself* can be used as a means to rectify the sin and provide atonement, then we do say that the prosecutor turns into the defense attorney. On the contrary, it's actually preferable this way, as it shows that the repentance is complete and sincere⁷. Therefore, the cow can atone for the calf. However, when the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies, he's providing atonement for other sins. As a result, he cannot wear golden garments, as they recall the sin of the Golden Calf⁸.

With this, we can start to understand Aharon's thought process. He was partially responsible for the construction of the Golden Calf. He was very embarrassed for what had happened. Even after everything had passed, it was still on his mind. His guilt was so strong, he actually kept envisioning the Golden Calf on the altar⁹.

Ironically, one of the offerings Aharon was required to bring on the eighth day was a calf. In fact, Rashi explains¹⁰ that this calf was to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. If so, Moshe's consolation makes a lot of sense. He was telling Aharon not to be embarrassed, not to keep envisioning the Golden Calf. It's the exact opposite. It's precisely he who should be doing this, for this is the very reason he was chosen. He was involved in the Golden Calf, and now he can rectify it himself by offering another calf. Only he can make the prosecutor into the defense attorney. He was the perfect man for the job.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Divrei Shaul to Leviticus 9:7, by the Shoel UMeishiv

² Leviticus *loc. cit.*

³ Rashi *ad. loc.*, quoting Toras Kohanim *ad. loc.*

⁴ Rosh Hashanah 26a

⁵ Midrash Tanchuma *Chukas* § 8. See also Sanhedrin 70b

⁶ R' Aharon Albadilah/Abu Aldabi (different versions on how to spell his last name) in his 15th century commentary on Rashi to Leviticus 16:2, quoted by Yefeh Toar to Vayikra Rabbah 21:9 s.v. והיום הם מבקשים. The Yefeh Toar to Bereishis Rabbah 17:13 s.v. יש לדקדק asks this question himself

⁷ Yefeh Toar to Bereishis Rabbah *loc. cit.* Cf. Ibid to 15:2, where he gives a different resolution why the Jews would use "*Shittim*" wood for the *Mishkan* to rectify the sin of the land of "*Shittim*"

⁸ The Yefeh Toar himself doesn't finish his thought, but the Divrei Shaul fills in the blanks

⁹ Toras Kohanim *loc. cit.*, brought by Ramban

¹⁰ Rashi to v. 8