



Sicha Summary

Chelek 16 | Ki Sisa | Sichah 4

The Verse:

After the episode of the sin of the Golden Calf, the Torah relates: “G-d spoke to Moshe: ‘Go, ascend from here, you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt....’” (*Shemos* 33:1)

The Rashi:

You and the people — Here it does not say, “your people.”

Rashi’s Intent:

Rashi is addressing the following difficulty:

Earlier, when G-d informed Moshe of the people’s sin, He commanded Moshe to “Descend, for *your people* whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have become corrupted.” (*Shemos* 32:7) Rashi explains that the unusual phrase “your people” refers to the “mixed multitude” — Egyptian convert Egypt whom Moshe accepted into the Jewish people. G-d disparaged the mixed multitude, referring to them as Moshe’s people and not G-d’s people, because they were the ones who instigated the sin of the Golden Calf. (*Rashi, ibid.*)

After Moshe successfully petitioned G-d for forgiveness, and after the idolatrous Jews were punished, G-d told Moshe to continue on towards the land of Israel: “Go lead the people to where I have told you....” (*Shemos* 32:34) Then, the Torah tells of a plague that G-d sent upon a remaining segment of the offenders. And following this interruption in the narrative,

our verse appears: “G-d spoke to Moshe: ‘Go, ascend from here, you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt....’”

Rashi is bothered by G-d repeating His instruction to Moshe to continue traveling with the people toward Israel in verses 32:34 and 33:1.

Rashi concludes that the people mentioned in each verse are in fact different segments of the nation. The people in chapter 32 — “Go lead the people to where I have told you” — are the remaining members of the original, native Jewish people who did not sin with the Golden Calf and who were spared capital punishment. The people in chapter 33 — “Go, ascend from here, you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt” — are some members of the mixed multitude who *did* sin with the Golden Calf, but who were spared punishment, as we will soon see. Moshe was commanded to not only bring up the innocent Jewish people, but some of the guilty mixed multitude as well.

The Spared Sinners:

What evidence is there that some of the mixed multitude were spared? Rashi previously explained that there were three death penalties meted out for those who worshiped the Golden Calf: “If there were witnesses and warning — they were punished by the sword...; witnesses without warning — through a plague...; neither witnesses nor warning — through *hydrokan* [a disease that distends the belly, similar to the death suffered by a *sotah*, a suspected adulteress whose culpability was confirmed by miraculous water], for the water tested them, and their stomachs became distended.” (*Rashi to Shemos 32:20*)

Regarding the first two penalties, the Torah says, “there fell from the people...” and “G-d smote the people.” (*Shemos 32:28, 35*) However, regarding those who “the water tested... and their stomachs became distended,” it says, “He gave the Children of Israel to drink.” (*Ibid 32:20*)

Clearly, “the people” includes the entire nation, including converts, whereas “the Children of Israel” (when it appears in contrast to “the people”) refers specifically to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

Why were the mixed multitude spared from the punishment of the testing waters? Rashi explained that the water was meant to test the people’s innocence like the *sotah* waters administered to a suspected adulteress. (*Rashi* to 32:20) If innocent, the water would bring blessing into the woman’s life, and if guilty, she would die of a distended belly. In a later comment, Rashi introduces a parable where G-d is the King, the Jewish people are His betrothed, and the mixed multitude are the maidservants whose immoral behavior sullies the reputation of the betrothed. (*Shemos* 34:1) It follows, therefore, that the test of the water could only be given to native Jews — the betrothed — and not to the mixed multitude — the maidservants.

Thus, Rashi comments: “*You and the people* — Here it does not say, ‘your people.’” While previously the mixed multitude were in a degraded, sinful state — “your people” — now they were fit to go on toward Israel and would be referred to in a more dignified, inclusive way: “the people.” Although they had sinned in the most grievous way, through their repentance, they elevated themselves from their inferior position and joined the remaining Jewish nation — “the people.”

The Deeper Dimension:

The repentance and subsequent salvation of the mixed multitude was the climax and ultimate objective of the saga of the Golden Calf. Our Sages taught that: “The Jewish people were not deserving of involvement in the incident of the Golden Calf”; it was, rather, “a Royal decree... in order to pave the way for a penitent.” (*Avoda Zara* 4b)

Meaning, G-d allowed the people to be swayed by their evil inclination so that the possibility of repentance could be created. The superiority of the penitent over the purely righteous person is that the penitent can reveal the unity of G-d in a deeper way than the righteous person can. When

confronted with evil which challenges G-d's unity, the righteous person rejects and discards this evil, thus revealing that it had no substance, was a mere mirage, and so posed no challenge to G-d's unity. The penitent, however, already engaged with the evil, and then through his repentance, he elevated and transformed that experience into sacred energy. Thus, he revealed that G-d is one even with the negative forces within Creation.

In order to achieve this display of His unity in the world, G-d engineered the sin of the Golden Calf, so that this sin could be rectified through repentance. The lowest and darkest sin was perpetrated by the mixed multitude who not only sinned themselves, but also incited others to sin. Their repentance, therefore, represents the full realization of G-d's "plot," namely, the transformation of abject evil, to reveal G-d's unity.

The Lesson:

No one can excuse themselves from influencing, teaching, and interacting with those who engage in sinful behavior. For the deepest expression of G-d's unity comes not through the service of the righteous, but through the difficult transformation of the penitent.