



COMMITMENT AND PROSPERITY

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF MATERIAL PLENTY. MOST PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN world live in an environment of comfort and even luxury compared with daily life a century ago. However, while we have material wealth, in some other respects our epoch is lacking. For example, when it comes to *commitment*, we often behave as if we were underprivileged and Third World.

Commitment means the ability to take significant steps beyond one's own self interest and self concern. Commitment is an integral part of marriage, of friendship, and ideally also in one's work and one's study. Commitment means constancy and dedication, faith and fidelity, firm and true from one's inner being. Above all, commitment applies in our relationship with G-d and with Jewish teaching which emanates to us from G-d, and connects us with Him.

This theme appears at several points in our Sedra¹ this week, and also in the Haftorah.

The most striking and disturbing event in the Sedra is the making of the Golden Calf. At the Ten Commandments, the Creator of the universe told us: I am your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt. Do not have any other Powers before Me... do not make any image and bow down to it..

In our Sedra, around six weeks later in the history of the

Jewish people, they made the Golden Calf and said “This is your G-d which took you out of the land of Egypt”².

G-d demanded faith, commitment and fidelity: at the Golden Calf, this faith was betrayed.

In the Haftarah too, taken from the Book of Kings, faithful commitment to G-d is the theme. Elijah the Prophet speaks to the Jewish people, who serve G-d, sometimes, and also sometimes served the idol Baal. He cried out to them: How long will you vacillate! Who are you going to serve? G-d or Baal?! Choose!³

The Haftara describes how a miracle happens, and the Jewish people enthusiastically express their faith in G-d, with a phrase we declare seven times at the climactic conclusion of Yom Kippur: “The L-rd is G-d”⁴. It was a moment of total repentance. Likewise, in the Sedra, when Moses returns from Mount Sinai, sees the Golden Calf and breaks the Tablets of the Law, everyone regrets what they had done.

Is there a way of strengthening our faith and our commitment to G-d? Yes. There is a clue at the beginning of the Sedra when G-d asks every Jew, without distinction, to give a donation of half a shekel of silver.

The half shekel represents the inner point of Faith in G-d. This is something that Moses needs to have, and also each one of us, man or woman, boy or girl. The Sages tell us the giving of the shekel expresses the way we commit our inner being to G-d.

When we know that *this* is what is needed, we can try to do it. We look in our inner being, and find our own half-shekel of commitment. We dedicate it to G-d, and *do* something to express that commitment. A little Mitzva, something: giving charity, lighting Shabbat candles, putting on Tefilin.

Through nurturing a sincere bond with G-d, we will also find it that much easier to bond with a genuine commitment in every other significant area of our lives. This will be our true prosperity...⁵

1. Exodus30:11-34:35. 2. Ex.32:4. 3. I Kings 18:21. 4. I Kings 18:39. 5. Based freely on a letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in *Likkutei Sichot* vol.1p.178 ff and *Sefer Hasichot* 5751 p.363 ff.

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SEDRA KI TISA

WRONG CALCULATION

Gabrielle and Michelle were walking through the park. They were on the way to Dona, their friend.

'What do you think we should do at Dona's house?' Gabrielle asked Michelle.

'I want to check out that new Judaica CD she told us about'.

'Yes, me too.' answered Michelle, 'my sister told me it's really good!'

Dona lived just across a main street. Michelle looked carefully as they crossed the road. 'Oh, look!' said Gabrielle, pointing to the pavement across from them, 'there is a policeman, he seems to be speaking to that man with the grey car!'

The policeman, who looked very serious, was writing on a notepad as he spoke to the man. As the two girls came near they could hear clearly what he was saying.

'The speed limit here is thirty miles per hour. And you were going at fifty!'

'Well, first of all, I thought the speed limit was forty. And secondly, I thought it doesn't matter if you go a few miles over the limit.'

'Well, you miscalculated, didn't you!', said the policeman. 'Now, let's have a look at your driving license'.

The two girls walked on, feeling rather upset. It was a shame seeing someone get into trouble, and also, it was a shame that the man went over the speed limit.

‘He miscalculated’, said Michelle. ‘If you miscalculate, you get into trouble.’

‘One second! That reminds me of something!’ said Gabrielle.

‘What? The miscalculation?’ asked Michelle.

‘Yes,’ answered her friend. ‘It’s in the Sedra this week’.

‘Let’s see,’ said Michelle. ‘What’s in the Sedra... There’s the Golden Calf... What’s that got to do with miscalculation..?’

‘Don’t you remember?’ said Gabrielle.

‘I know!’ exclaimed Michelle. ‘The Jewish people were told that Moses would be on the mountain for forty days. All through that time they waited patiently. But right at the end, they miscalculated one day, and they thought that forty days had gone by and since he hadn’t returned, they thought he was never going to come back.’

‘Yes, and that is why they were persuaded to make the Golden Calf. It was all because of the miscalculation.’

‘In fact, Moses was only one day late. G-d was very angry, but none of this would have happened if they hadn’t made a wrong calculation’, said Michelle. ‘Yes, but it was also wrong to make the Calf anyway’, replied Gabrielle.

‘You are right. But then the Jewish people were sorry, and G-d forgave them.’ The girls reached Donna’s house. They would see what her Judaica CD would tell them about the Golden Calf and about the Jewish people who miscalculated, and broke the law, and then repented and were forgiven.

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