



Smitten with Love

Category: Shemos

Does Israel exist because of the Holocaust or despite it? Was the Tabernacle built because of the golden calf or despite it? And what did the rabbi say when a young yeshiva student was smitten?

This Week in Jewish News

This week, there were two items in the news related to Jews — one to the Holocaust and the other to Israel.

The first story is Whoopi Goldberg; she claimed, “the Holocaust was not about race.”

This statement came during a panel discussion about the Holocaust on “The View,” and even when others attempted to correct her, she insisted that it was “two groups of white people” — it had nothing to do with race. She did apologize afterwards, but too little and too late.

The second incident this week was Amnesty International accusing Israel of apartheid crimes against Palestinians. The

Israeli Foreign Ministry responded that this false accusation “uses double standards and demonization in order to delegitimize Israel. These are the exact components from which modern antisemitism is made.”

In this case, too, it is clear to everyone that it’s about the Jewish people, not just about Israel. Blaming Israel for apartheid harms not only Israel but also incites anti-Semitism all over the world.

The Holocaust and Israel have always been intertwined. Since 1948, historians have debated this question: “Did modern Israel come to be through or despite the Holocaust?”

According to conventional wisdom, the United Nations resolution to establish a Jewish homeland in the land of Israel passed only because the world felt guilty after the Holocaust. According to this line of thought, if it were not for the Holocaust, who knows how much time would have passed until the nations of the world reached a consensus and recognized that the Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel.

On the other hand, most historians believe that the Jewish community in the Land of Israel even before the Holocaust existed as a state within a state. From the beginning of the twentieth century, tens of thousands of Jews immigrated to Israel and established moshavim and kibbutzim. In 1936, Tel Aviv had one hundred and twenty thousand residents, being the largest city in Israel. It was clearly only a matter of time before the UN officially recognized the Jewish State’s existence.

In fact, some argue that as a result the extermination of a third of the Jewish people in the Holocaust, there were fewer Jews to

immigrate to Israel.

I'm not a historian and I'm not going to make a determination in this important question. I'm just mentioning it up as a prelude to a similar discussion we find in this week's parsha.

Before or After?

This week we read Parshas Teruma, which speaks about the Mishkan that the children of Israel built in the desert. Torah commentators have the following debate: Was the Tabernacle built after and as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, or did G-d plan from the outset that the children of Israel would build a Tabernacle for Him? Did the Tabernacle come because of the sin of the Golden Calf or despite the sin of the Golden Calf? Or, as we would say today, is the Tabernacle Plan A or Plan B?

This argument arises from the fact that G-d's commandment to Moses to build the Tabernacle was written in the Torah *before* the sin of the Golden Calf, but Moses gives the commandment to the people of Israel *after* the sin of the Golden Calf. In the Parshas Teruma and Tetzave, G-d commands Moses regarding the Tabernacle, in Parshas Ki Sisa, we read about the sin of the Golden Calf, and then, in Parshas Vayakhel and Pekudei, Moses tells the Jews about G-d's commandment.

Rashi, the Torah's foremost commentator, believes that the Tabernacle came as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf: "The sin of the Golden Calf preceded the commandment to erect the Tabernacle by many days, for on the 17th of Tammuz, the Tablets were broken, and on Yom Kippur, G-d forgave Israel, and the next day they began donating for the Tabernacle, and it

was established on the first day of Nissan.” (Ki Sisa 31:18)

Rashi believes that the people of Israel first donated their gold to build the Golden Calf. As atonement for that deed, they were commanded to build a Tabernacle for G-d — also of gold. In the words of the Midrash: “Let the gold of the Tabernacle atone for the gold of the calf” (Midrash Tanchuma Teruma 8).

If so, why does the Torah precede G-d’s commandment regarding the Tabernacle to the story of the Golden Calf? Rabbeinu Bachaye explains that it is to mention atonement before sin. When Jews throughout the ages learn about the sin of the Golden Calf, they should already know from the outset that there is a path to atonement.

The Zohar, on the other hand, believes the exact opposite:

G-d commanded Moses immediately, on Shavuot, right after they heard the Ten Commandments, to build a Tabernacle for Him — and they immediately began collecting money for it.

The Zohar bases its opinion on the fact that in order to make the calf, they donated the jewelry on their bodies; the verse says that they gave the “golden earrings which were in their ears” (Tisa 32:24).

This seems very strange; the children of Israel left Egypt with immense wealth; what happened to all of it? Why were they forced to give their personal jewelry?

The Zohar concludes that the gold from Egypt must have already been donated to the Tabernacle, leaving them with only

the jewelry on their bodies (Zohar vol. 2 pg. 224a).

Now, the Rebbe says that in Tanya, we see that the Alter Rebbe chooses the opinion of the Zohar.

The Alter Rebbe says that at Mount Sinai, the people of Israel experienced such a sublime Divine revelation that they were unable to endure it. In the language of Sages: “At every commandment, their souls left their bodies,” “and therefore He immediately commanded them to make him a Tabernacle with a Holy of Holies to rest His presence” (Tanya ch. 34).

The Rebbe explains that the people of Israel were so enthused and inspired by the tremendous spiritual experience of Mount Sinai that “Moses had to do something for them immediately. Therefore, he immediately told them about the commandment to build the Tabernacle. The children of Israel, for their part, couldn’t wait, and immediately brought their donations” (Toras Menachem vol. 53 pg. 86).

The people of Israel were so enthusiastic about the giving of the Torah that they felt an intense urge to do something for G-d. It was like a person who hears about a terrible tragedy and is so affected that he looks all over to make a donation and help the family in need.

The Tabernacle wasn’t a backup plan to atone for the Golden Calf; it was an expression of love and devotion from the Jewish people.

Smitten

I want to share with you a story from the Talmud that proves

the approach explained in Tanya — that the Tabernacle was really Plan A.

Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi was the great Jewish leader who lived after the destruction of the Second Temple and the compiler of the Mishnah.

The Talmud says (Kesubos 62b) that he arranged a marriage between his son and a daughter from the house of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra, and the two sides agreed that they would support the young groom so that he could study Torah for twelve years before he gets married.

But when the girl was “passed before” the bridegroom, that is, when he first saw her, he changed his mind; he said he would only study Torah for six years before marrying her. When she was “passed before him” again, that is, after the second date, he changed his mind completely and said that he would marry her first and only then go to study Torah.

Now, the boy was a bit embarrassed that he was so smitten that he could not bring himself to delay his wedding and focus on Torah study first. His father, Rabbi Yehuda, tried to make him feel better, and said, “My son, you acted the way G-d did.”

What did he mean?

In the Song of the Sea, the verse states, “Until Your nation passes through, O G-d, until this nation You have acquired passes through. O bring them and plant them on the mount You possess. The place You dwell in is Your accomplishment, G-d. The shrine of G-d Your Hands have founded” (Beshalach

15:16-17).

The meaning of the verse is that there is a planned order for the events to play out: First the Jewish people were to cross the sea, then pass the desert, then enter the Land of Israel, and only then build the Temple.

But in practice, right after G-d gives the Torah, He commands them to build the Tabernacle!

The construction of the Tabernacle is akin to a marriage between G-d and the people of Israel. On the words, “And it shall come to pass in the day Moses finished [*kalos*] building the Tabernacle,” Rashi says, “It uses the word *kalos*—finishing [which also means bride]. On the day the Tabernacle was built, Israel was like a bride entering the chuppah.” (Naso 7:1). The building of the Tabernacle was the moment G-d “married” the Jewish people.

Rabbi Yehudah said to his son, “You acted like G-d”; G-d planned to first bring them to the Land of Israel and only later to marry them, i.e., build the Temple, but when he saw them at Mount Sinai, he was so overcome with love that he asked them to build the Tabernacle immediately.

It was love on both ends. The Alter Rebbe explains that the children of Israel, overcome by the Divine revelation, asked Moses what they could do to express their love, and the Talmud teaches us about the other side — that G-d was also overwhelmed when he saw the “bride,” the people of Israel, that He couldn’t wait for the Tabernacle to be built.

What we can take from this story is that love is a two-way street. If we love G-d, He loves us, and when we express our love for Him — by doing Mitzvos in general and the commandment to love our fellow Jew in particular — G-d will love us back.

It's been tried and proven.