

# WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RABBI YITZI

לרפואה שלימה ליוסף יצחק בן ברכה

## PARSHAT KI TISA

### Taking A Stand For Truth

The Haftora for Parshas Ki Sisa tells of the confrontation between our prophet Eliyahu, the prophet of Hashem, and the 450 prophets of Baal.

The Jewish people were at an all-time low. Queen Ezevel (Jezebel) of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who introduced Baal worship to the northern ten tribes, set out to kill all the prophets of Hashem. She was successful in killing all, aside from a hundred, whom Ovadia (Obadiah) had hidden in two caves and provided food and water for them, and Eliyahu, who eluded capture.

Eliyahu appeared before King Achav (Ahab), the king of the Northern Kingdom, who blamed Eliyahu for the famine that gripped the region because he knew that Eliyahu had the ability to end it. Eliyahu told Achav that the cause of the famine was because he turned away from Hashem and worshipped the Ba'al. Then he told him that if he wants the famine to end, he should summon all of Israel to Mount Carmel, together with the prophets of Baal.

They all assembled at Mount Carmel, and Eliyahu spoke to the people of Israel, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Hashem is G-d, then follow Him, and if it is Ba'al, then follow him." The people didn't know what to say.

Then Eliyahu proposed a challenge to lay to rest any doubt as to what was the one true G-d. He said, "I alone am left as a prophet of Hashem, and the prophets of Baal are 450 men." Then, he laid

down the rules of the contest. Each side would be given a bull to offer to their deity; it would be prepared and placed on the wood, but no fire would be put to them. "You will call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Hashem. The G-d Who answers with fire. He is G-d." The people agreed.

Eliyahu said that they should go first because they were the majority. They chose a bull, prepared it, and put it on the wood on their altar. They called in the name of the Ba'al from

the morning until the afternoon, and "there was no sound, and there was no answer." They jumped around their altar, but it was to no avail.

At noon, Eliyahu started to ridicule them, "cry louder... Maybe he is walking, or deep in thought, or on a journey. Or maybe he is sleeping." They cried louder, and they cut themselves until they were gushing blood, but "There was no sound, there was no answer, and there was no listener."

Eliyahu said to the people, "Come near to me," so they would know that there was no trickery involved in what he is doing. He took twelve stones, one for each tribe of Israel, and built them into an altar for Hashem, and he dug a ditch around it. He prepared his bull, arranged the wood, and put the bull on to it. He told the people to pour water over the bull and the wood again and again until the whole ditch was filled with water.

It was at the time that the mincha offering was brought in the Temple, and Eliyahu called out to Hashem, "... Answer me, Hashem, answer me, and this People will know that You, Hashem, are G-d..." The fire of Hashem descended and consumed the offering, the wood, the stones, the earth, and the water that was in the ditch. When the people saw this, they fell on their faces and said, "Hashem is G-d, Hashem is G-d."

The connection to our Parsha is that Parshas Ki Sisa tells about the sin of the golden calf and the forgiveness the Jewish people received from Hashem through the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy and the giving of the half shekel, getting back in good stead with Hashem. Also, in the Parsha, the Jewish people sinned with a calf, and in the Haftora, it was through two bulls (grown-up calves) that they were put back on the right path.

There are many lessons to be learned from this Haftora. I will touch on a few.

Eliyahu asked the people, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Hashem is G-d, then follow Him, and if it is Ba'al, then follow him."

Why didn't he ask: when are you going to stop serving Ba'al, a false idol, and start serving Hashem? Isn't idol worship one of the worst things a Jew can do? Yes, but in some ways, wavering between two opinions is worse than idol worship, as will be explained.

How does it happen that Jews, who are "believers the children of believers," could serve idols?

How is it that anyone served idols? The Rambam explains that it was because the flow of energy that comes from above, comes through the stars and constellations. So they began to honor the celestial bodies, hoping to get something from them. But this is silly because the celestial bodies have no say in the matter; they are but a tool that Hashem uses to do his bidding. It would be like asking a hammer to drive in a nail, it is not the hammer, but rather the person holding it, that has the power to make that decision.

In other words, they wanted something and thought that the celestial bodies could give it to them, so they started to serve them. They had no emotional or meaningful connection to the celestial bodies; it was just that they wanted to get something from them. It is like someone who becomes your friend because

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he wants something from you. There is no real relationship there.

This is the essence of idol worship, serving something for a possible gain.

This is also why a Jew was tempted into idol worship, not that he had any meaningful connection to it, but a hope for a personal gain.

What is wavering between two opinions? There are two kinds.

First, there is the person who is not sure. He is in doubt as to what is right to serve, so he serves both.

The second is the person who really doesn't care who he serves; he just wants the gain, and whoever he thinks could give him what he wants at that moment, he will serve.

There are three ways that wavering is worse than idol worship.

First, it is much more difficult to repent and return to Hashem. Because, being that he still serves Hashem, he doesn't see the wrong clearly, and he doesn't feel cut off, so he doesn't repent. In contrast, someone who just serves idols, when he recognizes that Hashem is the only true G-d, he will immediately realize how wrong he was and repent with all of his heart.

Second, when someone believes in and serves idols, although he is committing a grave sin, he at least has a general belief in spirituality. It may be wrong, but he wants to serve who he thinks is god. So when he finds out that Hashem is the only true G-d, he will drop what is false and embrace what is true. In contrast, the one who is wavering lacks spiritual conviction, if not cold to the whole idea altogether. It is very hard for a person who thinks this way to find his way to Hashem.

The third problem is the effect on others. Someone who wants to follow the Torah will not learn from someone who is a clear idol worshipper. But the waverer has a facade of someone who follows the Torah. Therefore, others will learn from him and be led astray.

Even though idol worship is not an issue today, there are those who worship money, honor, power, fame, etc. It is the same idea as idol worship; it is all for a selfish personal gain. Wavering, in this case, is when someone who acts in the light of the Torah most of the time will drop his observance for a period of time for personal gain. This is terrible for the same three reasons mentioned above.

Even the waverer could repent and come close to Hashem, but it takes intense teshuva, a sincere search for the truth, and an embracing of extreme clarity. Like the Children of Israel on Mount Carmel, where they came to an extreme clarity and proclaimed, "Hashem is G-d! Hashem is G-d!"

The Midrash tells us that the bull that was to be offered to Baal didn't want to go. He said to Eliyahu, "Me and my friend came out of one belly... He will go up to the portion of the Holy One Blessed Be He, and the name of the Holy One Blessed Be He will be sanctified through him, and I will go up to the portion of Baal, to anger my creator." Eliyahu responded to the bull, "Just as the name of the Holy One Blessed Be He will be sanctified through this one that is with me, so will it be sanctified through you."

From Eliyahu's words, "just as... So too," it seems that the sanctification of Hashem's name of both bulls is equal. But the one that Eliyahu brought up for Hashem had an open miracle; everyone saw how a fire of Hashem consumed it, and it made them see the truth of Hashem. On the other hand, the bull that was brought for Baal merely showed that Baal was false. How can they be equal?

The answer is that through what Eliyahu did on Mount Carmel,

causing all of the Jewish people to return to Hashem, the oneness of Hashem was revealed as they all proclaimed, "Hashem is G-d! Hashem is G-d!" And when the oneness of Hashem is revealed, the true G-dly purpose of everything in creation is revealed. Meaning that everything in the world has a G-dly purpose, even the things that we perceive as negative or bad, and when you begin to understand that it is all from Hashem, you realize that underneath the facade of bad is really Hashem's will and purpose, you recognize the good hidden in it. So, the oneness of Hashem is in everything, good, bad, etc. Here, the essential oneness of Hashem was brought out through the bull that was brought for Baal. And this revelation is equal, no matter where it is revealed, so both bulls equally sanctified the name of Hashem.

This is a lesson for us. Some may think, "I only want to deal with the bull for Hashem, only with the people who clearly serve Hashem, but I don't want to have anything to do with the bull for Baal, those who don't serve Hashem." And in truth, the oneness of Hashem is in them as well, and if you invest your time and heart into that person who may be far from the Torah path, even though it takes you away from your own growth in Torah, you will uncover the oneness of Hashem in that person, and he will return to Hashem. When that happens, all that you perceived as negative in that person, becomes merit, because when someone does teshuva his transgressions turn to merits.

This work of investing time and effort into someone who is far from Torah, is very important and comes before your own growth in Torah. As we read that first the bull for Baal was offered, and only after, the bull for Hashem.

May we strengthen our resolve in our service to Hashem and recognize his true oneness. And through our work with others, we will help them to also recognize the oneness of Hashem. This will surely bring us to hear Eliyahu herald the coming of Moshiach, when all will see that "Hashem is G-d! Hashem is G-d!" May it happen soon.

*"To all this may concern:*

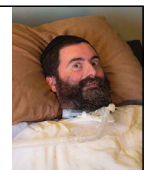
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*To Rabbi Yitzi, May you be given the strength to continue being the great source of spreading Torah worldwide in good health until the coming of Moshiach."*

**- Anonymous, South Africa**

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*Despite facing one of life's most difficult challenges, Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz continues to spread joy and faith to thousands around the globe. Diagnosed in 2012 with ALS, Rabbi Yitzi is now 95% paralyzed and no longer able to speak or breath on his own. Thanks to the miracle of technology, Rabbi Yitzi continues to spread his wisdom through his eyes, focusing on each and every letter of these Torah articles. Rabbi Yitzi, his wife Dina and their seven children are the Rebbe's Shluchim to Temecula, California.*



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