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## פרשת כי תשא

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### פרק לב פסוק א

וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי־בִנְשׂוּשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְרִדָּת מִן־הַהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל־אֶהָרֶן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם עֲשֵׂה־לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי־זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה־הָיָה לוֹ:

רש"י

כי זה משה האיש: כמין דמות משה הראה להם השטן שנושאים אותו באויר רקיע השמים.

### Translation:

Because this man Moshe: A vision of Moshe was shown to them by the Satan, that they were carrying him (his coffin) in the air of the sky.

### Explanation:

We struggle to understand why Hashem would allow the Satan to mislead the Jewish people into thinking Moshe had died, and why, given the peculiar circumstances, they were not somewhat forgiven for their sin. However, the Satan is really another facet of the יצר הרע, giving form to the desire to sin. In effect, the people themselves, in their rush to replace Moshe, wished to be convinced that he was not going to return. They therefore created this vision which simply validated their will and allowed them to sin at the earliest possible opportunity.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

There are two words in the פסוק which require explanation. The first is the word וירא at the beginning of the פסוק, which seems a bit peculiar as they would not 'see' that Moshe delayed. In addition, the word זה at the end of the פסוק would seem to infer that the people were pointing to something they could clearly see. Since Moshe had not yet descended the mountain we struggle to understand what they were pointing to.

The Talmud explains both words by informing us of the attempts of the Satan to confuse the people into believing that Moshe had died and the people's reaction.

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## NOTES

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Our Musag is taken from the commentary of Rashi who seeks to explain the difficult wording in our פסוק. The phrase that stands out most is זה משה האיש. As we have seen in previous instances the word זה is used when referring to something that is seen<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore difficult to understand why the people would say זה משה האיש if Moshe had not yet descended the mountain. The beginning of our פסוק also presents a similar difficulty as it reads: וירא העם כי בשש משה. Again leading us to ask, what is it that they saw?

To this חז"ל answer that the שטן was busy doing all he could to convince the people that Moshe was not going to return. Rashi comments that the שטן did two things, which in effect explain both the term וירא at the beginning of the פסוק and the word זה at the end of the פסוק:

א. פָּא הַשָּׁטָן וְעָרַבב אֶת הָעוֹלָם וְהָרָאָה דְמוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ וְאֶפְלָה וְעָרַבּוּבָא  
ב. כְּמִין דְמוֹת מֹשֶׁה הָרָאָה לְהֵם הַשָּׁטָן שְׁנוּשָׂאִים אוֹתוֹ בְּאוּרִר רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם.

As Rashi mentions, his source<sup>2</sup> is the גמרא (מסכת שבת פט.) which teaches:

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי מאי דכתיב וירא העם כי בשש משה, אל תקרי בושש אלא באו שש. בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמר להן לישראל לסוף ארבעים יום, בתחלת שש, אני בא. לסוף ארבעים יום בא שטן ועירבב את העולם, אמר להן משה רבכם היכן הוא? אמרו לו עלה למרום. אמר להן באו שש ולא השגיחו עליו. מת ולא השגיחו עליו. הראה להן דמות מטתו. והיינו דקאמרי ליה לאהרן כי זה משה האיש וגו'.

There are, however, a few significant differences between Rashi's commentary and the text of the גמרא which he references.

The first is that while the גמרא simply said that בא שטן ועירבב את העולם, Rashi adds the following:

פָּא הַשָּׁטָן וְעָרַבב אֶת הָעוֹלָם וְהָרָאָה דְמוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ וְאֶפְלָה וְעָרַבּוּבָא. Normally we would translate the word עירבב as confuse<sup>3</sup> or confound. Why does Rashi add the darkness effect?<sup>4</sup> However, as mentioned above, Rashi understands that by telling us of the עירבוביא, the גמרא is coming to explain the word וירא at the beginning of the Pasuk. To explain the connection between עירבב and וירא, Rashi comments that the עירבב את העולם means that the שטן darkened the world, creating a mood of terrible catastrophe, which would lead the people to conclude that the world had turned dark due to Moshe's death<sup>5</sup>. This is what the people saw.

However, there is a much more significant difference between the simple understanding of the גמרא and how Rashi chooses to comprehend it. The גמרא focuses on the words כי בשש משה, and urges us to not read the word only as בשש, to delay, but as באו שש, the sixth hour has passed. The גמרא continues to explain that the שטן tried to convince the people that the sixth hour, by which Moshe had promised to return, had passed, proving that Moshe was not going to return or that he had died. When this was not successful he showed them a vision of Moshe's coffin. The גמרא seems to infer that the trick the שטן tried to play on the Jewish people was that in truth the sixth hour had not yet

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<sup>1</sup> The most famous example are the words זה קלי ואנוהו from which חז"ל learn מה שראתה שפחה על הים וכי. Additional examples include הזה החודש הזה לכם from which we learn וקדש הרה, or זה יתנו at the beginning of our פרשה from which we learn הראה לו כמין מטבע של אש.

<sup>2</sup> The only Midrash which somewhat resembles the גמרא is a תנחומא ישן which teaches:

רבתינו אמרו בא שטן ועירבב את העולם והראה להם כמו משה תלוי מן הארץ ומתו באוויר והיו מראין אותו באצבע ואמרו כי זה משה האיש.

However, what the Midrash does not explain is why the שטן needed to do both, create a sense of dark confusion and create an image of Moshe's coffin.

<sup>3</sup> Artscroll translates as 'threw the world into confusion'. Soncino translates as 'confounded the world'

<sup>4</sup> The Shoresh ע.ר.ב actually means to mix. It may refer to confusion as one who is mixed up, or may refer to a mixture of dark and light, as in evening which we call ערב.

<sup>5</sup> עיין באור החיים, וב"ש

arrived, and Moshe's return was not scheduled for a few hours. The שטן's plan was to fool them into setting their clocks a few hours ahead, thus despairing of Moshe returning and believing the rumors of his untimely demise.

However, Rashi rejects this understanding. Rashi is of the opinion that the error of the people was not simply a few hours, but an entire day:

פי כְּשֶׁעָלָה מֹשֶׁה לְהָרָא אָמַר לָהֶם, לְסוּף אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם אֲנִי בָּא בְּתוֹךְ שֵׁשׁ שָׁעוֹת. כְּפִסְבּוּרִים הֵם שָׂאוֹתוֹ יוֹם שֶׁעָלָה מִן הַמִּנְיָן הוּא, וְהוּא אָמַר לָהֶם שְׁלֹמִים, אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְלִילוֹ עָמוּ, וְיוֹם עֲלִיתוֹ אֵין לִילוֹ עָמוּ, שֶׁהָרִי בְּזֵי בְּסִינַי עָלָה, גִּמְצָא יוֹם אַרְבָּעִים בְּשִׁבְעָה עֶשְׂרֵת בְּתַמוּז. בְּט"ז בָּא הַשָּׁטָן וְעַרְבֵב אֶת הָעוֹלָם וְהִרְאָה דְמוּת חֹשֶׁךְ וְנֹאפְלָה וְעַרְבּוּבָא, לֹאמַר וְנָדַי מִתּ מֹשֶׁה לָכֵן בָּא עַרְבּוּבָא לְעוֹלָם. אָמַר לָהֶם מִתּ מֹשֶׁה, שֶׁכָּבֵר בָּאוּ שֵׁשׁ שָׁעוֹת וְלֹא בָּא וְכוּ', כְּדֹאִתָּא בְּמִסְכַּת שִׁבְתָּ. וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר לֹאמַר שְׁלֹא טָעוּ אֲלָא בְּיוֹם הַמְעֻנָּן בֵּין קוֹדֵם תְּצוֹת בֵּין לְאַחַר תְּצוֹת, שֶׁהָרִי לֹא יָרַד מֹשֶׁה עַד יוֹם הַמְחֻרָת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וַיִּשְׁכְּימוּ מִמְחֻרָת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֵלֹת" Rashi proves his point from the fact that Moshe did not descend until the following day, rather than a few hours later. While Rashi's argument has merit, it leaves us puzzled as to why the שטן would go to such lengths to fool the people into thinking that the sixth hour had come! Why not wait until after the sixth hour had completely passed (since in any case Moshe would not actually return until the following day on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz) and then use Moshe's absence and their miscalculation that the 40 days had concluded on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, to prove that he would not return?

A close reading of Rashi on the פסוק here shows that Rashi was sensitive to this point. Interestingly, even though Rashi refers us to the גמרא quoted above, he dances around the דרשה of באו שש. He begins his commentary with explaining the word בשש as meaning to delay, which is certainly פשוטו של מקרא. Rashi then goes on to explain why they thought Moshe had delayed, due to their error in calculation on which day the 40 days concluded. Rashi then quotes the גמרא which teaches how the שטן took advantage of their error to confuse them. Here Rashi slips in the line אמר להם מת משה שכבר באו שש, without ever insinuating that this is how we are to understand the word באו שש. Rashi deftly lowers the profile of the שטן *drosho*, even as he uses it to describe the methods used by the שטן. Rashi then concludes by stressing that the main issue was not the sixth hour, but rather the full day miscalculation. This returns us to the question we asked above: If the sixth hour calculation was basically irrelevant why does the Torah feel it is important to report?

Perhaps the most difficult issue raised by our Musag is: Why did Hashem give the שטן the ability to fool the people? And, how can the people be held liable for actions that were done under incredibly difficult circumstances? A moment earlier they were eagerly awaiting Moshe's return with the word of God and in a tragic turn of events they are brought the devastating news that he has died and they are alone in the desert bereft of the only leader they have ever known. Is it not only natural that they would seek alternative leadership? And, even though they looked in all the wrong places, should Hashem not take the circumstances into consideration?

There is a fascinating idea which radically changes the way we understand the concept of the יצר הרע. In a previous essay<sup>6</sup> we have discussed the ideas of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch who explains that the יצר הרע is not an outside force which is given the permission to seduce us to sin, but rather an internal force created by our negative choices. יצר הרע, he explains is to be understood as 'that which is fashioned through sin'. In short, the bad choices I make create a force of habit which drives me to make yet another bad choice – עבירה גוררת עבירה. This force is my יצר הרע; God does not create it, I do!

With this in mind we turn to the (בבא בתרא טז.) גמרא which teaches:

הוא שטן הוא יצר הרע הוא מלאך המות,

The גמרא reveals that the יצר הרע, the שטן, and the מלאך המות are all one and the same. Therefore, all of them are not to be understood as creations of God, but rather as creations of man. When a man sins he creates his יצר הרע, the force that will urge him to sin again. This very sin becomes an

<sup>6</sup> See פרשת נח ח:כא על הפסוק כי יצר לב האדם

accusing force, the שטן, a spiritual stain on his soul. And, finally, it is this stain which will be the source of his punishment, the מלאך המות.

Interestingly, Rashi, in his commentary on the Talmud, quotes this idea as well. And, surprisingly, he quotes it on our גמרא in מסכת שבת. When the גמרא tells us that the שטן fooled the people into believing that Moshe had died, Rashi sees fit to comment on who this שטן is:

בא השטן: הוא יצר הרע המחטיא את האדם.

Given the above, it would seem plausible to explain that the שטן's plan to fool the people was hatched in the hearts of the people themselves. In effect, they wanted to be rid of Moshe and his leadership. The visions of darkness and of Moshe's coffin were not created by some evil outside force who was given permission to trap others. Rather, those visions were created in the minds of those who wished to worship idols, they saw exactly what they wanted to see. In their lust to sin they sought to convince themselves of Moshe's demise at the earliest possible opportunity. Not only did they convince themselves that Moshe had promised to return that day, but they went even further and convinced themselves that it was already late in the day so that they could begin worshiping idols a few hours earlier. Thus, while the issue of the sixth hour was not actually that significant, it spoke volumes as to the intent of the people.

We can now understand Hashem's strong reaction to their actions. In one act they rejected both Moshe and Hashem, exhibiting an incredible lack of הכרה הטוב, as they killed Moshe in their minds and sought to replace both him and God with an idol of their own creation.

#### **Questions for Further Thought:**

- A. How is it possible that the generation that left Egypt, which saw such incredible miracles, and benefited so greatly from Moshe's leadership, could have fallen to such a low level?
- B. According to the way we have explained the sin of the Golden Calf, could we now understand why the פרה אדומה, the ultimate חוק, is considered an atonement for this sin?