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Devorah *bas* Kaddish *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Mutually Exclusive

## PARSHAS BEHA’ALOSCHA 5778

Something changed at Har Sinai.

Now, that is an understatement, of course. A lot of things changed at Har Sinai, most notably the fact that Klal Yisrael now received and became obligated in fulfilling the Torah. But Chazal tell us that there were a number of additional sweeping changes that came about in connection with the grand event of the Revelation at Sinai.

### Forfeiting the Gift

Among these was the fact that the people were cured from any number of ailments. As the Midrash recounts: “...Yisrael stood by Har Sinai and declared, ‘(Regarding) all that Hashem has spoken – we shall do and we shall hear’ (*Shemos 24:7*). At that moment, there was not to be found among them (anyone suffering from)... lameness, blindness, muteness, deafness... Regarding that time, it states (*Shir Hashirim 4:7*): ‘You are entirely beautiful, My beloved, and there is no blemish in you’” (*Vayikra Rabbah 18:4*).

Alas, as the continuation of the Midrash makes clear, this idyllic state was not to last. Eventually the people sinned, and as a result they became subjected once again to various types of afflictions. The Rabbis disagree as to what exactly triggered the return of such ailments. According to one opinion, the key factor was the *Cheit Ha’eigel*, the Sin of the Golden Calf. But R’ Yehudah bar R’ Simone points instead to the sin of the *Misonenim*, the Complainers, which takes place in this week’s *parshah*. The *passuk* states: וַיְהִי הָעָם כְּמַתְאֲנִיּוֹת וַיִּהְיֶה הָעָם כְּמַתְאֲנִיּוֹת וַיִּשְׁמַע ד’ וַיַּחַר אַפּוֹ וַתִּבְעַר רָבָם אֵשׁ ד’ – “And the people were (acting) as complainers, which was abhorrent to the ears of Hashem; and Hashem heard, and His wrath was kindled, and a fire of Hashem burned among them” (*Bamidbar 11:1*). According to R’ Yehudah, it was as a consequence of this episode that the ailments returned to the people.

The issue is that, at first glance, one of these positions appears much more acceptable than the other. Attributing the return of the ailments to the *Cheit Ha’eigel* certainly seems reasonable enough. After all, it was through the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai that the people were cured of their infirmities. The perpetration of this act appears to have been a direct violation of the prohibition against idolatry, which headed off the *Aseres Hadibros* (Ten Commandments) with which Yisrael was just charged. And so, as the *Cheit Ha’eigel* essentially constituted a negation of the fundamentals of the Sinaitic Revelation, it stands to reason that the attendant benefits of that Revelation were rescinded.

But what exactly are we to make of the opinion of R’ Yehudah, who identifies the sin of the *Misonenim* as the responsible factor? The nature of these complaints, as understood by the *medrash*, centered around a desire for food, as stated later in this narrative (v. 4): “And they said: ‘Who will feed us meat?’” Now, granted that this was a less-than-stellar display of character and forbearance; but in what way can this be equated with a repudiation and total contradiction of the Revelation at Sinai, in the same manner as the *Cheit Ha’eigel*? And perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that the sin of the *Misonenim* occurred much later than the *Cheit Ha’eigel*. How, then, could R’ Yehudah maintain that the perpetration of the *Cheit Ha’eigel* did *not* cause the return of the ailments, while the complaints did?

## Connected to Sinai

To elucidate this issue, it is important to first clarify what the experience at Sinai entailed. First and foremost, of course, was the Giving of the Torah amidst the grand Revelation. But as stated previously, there were many glorious aspects that were associated with this event. Indeed, the Midrash elsewhere (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:3*) informs us of the fact that Yisrael remained engaged at Har Sinai for a span of twelve months, during which time they were “*mismatkim*” (tasting the sweetness) of the words of Torah.

On this topic, there is a classic pronouncement of the Ohr HaChayim Hakaddosh, who comments on the following Mishnah (*Avos 6:3*):

אין טוב אלא תורה שֶׁנֶאֱמַר כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נִתְּנִי לָכֶם תּוֹרַתִי אֶל תַּעֲזוּבוּ.

“*Tov* (good) refers to none other than the Torah; as it states (*Mishlei 4:2*), ‘For I have given you a portion of goodness; do not forsake My Torah.’”

Elaborating on this notion of the inherent goodness of Torah, the Ohr HaChayim issues his renowned statement: “If people were to feel the true sweetness of the Torah’s inherent goodness, they would go absolutely crazy in a frenzied attempt to attain mastery of Torah knowledge. Even an entire world filled with silver and gold would be considered as nothing in their eyes; for the Torah encompasses all the good to be found in the entire world.”

Emerging from the Ohr HaChayim’s characterization, then, is the fact that there is a certain “mutual exclusivity” between the sweetness of Torah and a passion for materialism. As long as a person truly feels the sweetness of Torah, he cares not a whit for any of the mundane aspects of the material world.

Thus, we can better understand the position of R’ Yehudah. We had wondered how it could be that expressing a desire for meat can be classified as a negation of the Giving of the Torah, even when the *Cheit Ha’eigel* itself would not cancel the effects of Sinai. Based on the above, however, we see that it is appreciation for Torah’s sweetness that is indeed the key factor. Of course the *Cheit Ha’eigel* was an egregious deed; but as long as Yisrael could still taste the sweetness of Torah, they maintained their connection with Har Sinai. As the Midrash in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* stated, the Sinaitic experience extended for a long period, during which Yisrael were engaged in just this exercise: “*mismatkim b’divrei Torah*” (tasting the sweetness of the words of Torah). But as the Ohr HaChayim intimated, a desire for materialism runs counter to this notion. As long as one appreciates the sweetness of Torah, he has no passion for worldly matters. And so, once they began pining for meat, they revealed that their passion for Torah had diminished – and with it, their connection to Har Sinai. Thus it was that R’ Yehudah maintains that the complaining is what caused the return of their infirmities. With their attachment to Har Sinai severed, the special blessings associated with that glorious chapter came to an end (*R’ Yeruchem Olshin, Yerach L’mo’adim, Shavuos, vol. II, § 45*).

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