

# כִּי תִשָּׂא

## KI TISA/WHEN YOU ELEVATE Shemot/Exodus 30:11 – 34:35

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This week we will focus on the phrase, “**stiff-necked people**,” words that are used four times in the book of **Shemot**, and all within the narrative of the golden calf. Rashi defines the notion of “**stiff-necked**” persons to be those who become stubbornly set in their ways. Once they start in a certain direction, they will never turn around to reconsider their ways. So, their neck is stiff because they are unable to turn around and view the situation from a broader perspective or to look to the side to see if they might consider a different path. Instead, once they’ve started down a path, they’re determined to stick with it even if it’s a bad way.

The first time “**stiff-necked people**” appears, ה'הוה is ready to “**destroy**” His chosen ones:

**Shemot 32: 8** "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " <sup>9</sup> And ה'הוה said to Moshe, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a **stiff-necked people** (am kashe oref - עַם־קָשֶׁה־עֵרֶף)! <sup>10</sup> "Now therefore, **let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them**. And I will make of you a great nation."

But something very interesting happens in our story of the golden calf. The very reason why ה'הוה is ready to reject His people and destroy them (**because they are stiff-necked**), becomes the very reason Moshe begs for their acceptance and forgiveness (**because they are stiff-necked**):

**Shemot 34:9** Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Adonai, let my Adonai, I pray, go among us, (**for it is a stiff-necked people**); and **pardon our iniquity and our sin**, and take us as **Your inheritance**

Instead of completely rejecting the Israelites, Moshe is asking for complete acceptance and forgiveness. Moshe even asks that this “**stiff-necked people**” could be the Almighty’s “**inheritance**.” In between the two verses we looked at already are two more “**stiff-necked**” verses:

**Shemot 33:2** "And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. <sup>3</sup> "unto a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I **consume you** on the way, for you are a **stiff-necked people**."

**Shemot 33:5** For ה'הוה had said to Moshe, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You are a **stiff-necked people**. I could come up into your midst in one moment and **consume you**. Now therefore, **take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you**.' "

If you compare the above verses, there are some similarities. In **Shemot 33:2-3**, יהוה tells them He won't go with them lest He “**consume them**,” yet in the mirror verse of **33:5** He seems to soften His tone a little and tells them to “**take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.**” What has happened? I'd like to propose that the significant thing that happened is the verse in between –

**Shemot 33:4** And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.

In **verse 4**, we read that when the people heard יהוה would not personally go with them, “**they mourned.**” And they did not “**put on their ornaments.**” Why is this so significant? If we take a step back and consider the entire story, we notice that nearly all of the interaction takes place between Moshe and יהוה. The Israelites have been waiting for their fate to be declared and Moshe has been their intercessor. However, **verse 4** tells us the **ONE** thing they did do – “**they mourned**” and “**no one put on his ornaments.**”

The Israelites were in fact, beginning the process of “**teshuva**” (return). The small act of “**taking off their ornaments**” was more than a physical act. It was an act of letting go of that “**stiff-neckedness**” ...that stubbornness, that haughtiness. They were actually able to loosen their “**necks**,” looking back to come to grips with how they had betrayed their Deliverer.

There's something else that you would only catch if you were reading Hebrew. Take a look at the verb used describing how they took off their ornaments:

**Shemot 33:6** So the children of Israel stripped themselves (וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ - **vayitnatzlu**) of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

The verb form is in the Hitpa'el, which means it's reflexive...in other words, the focus is on themselves, not the ornaments. They were using ornaments to “**strip themselves**” – not just physically, but they were also laying themselves very bare emotionally. Interestingly enough, there's one other time when this verb is used in this form. It is when the Israelites came out of Egypt, and what do they do? They “**stripped**” (וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ - **vayitnatzlu**) Egypt of its wealth:

**Shemot 12:35** Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moshe, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. <sup>36</sup> And יהוה had given the people **favor** (chen – חֵן) in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them *what they requested*. Thus they stripped (וַיִּתְנַצְּלוּ - **vayitnatzlu**) the Egyptians.

Of course, this is a fulfillment of a promise יהוה had made to Avraham back in **Bereshith 15** when He said after a period of slavery, the people would go out wealthy. How did this miracle happen? **Shemot 12:36** says that יהוה gave the people “**favor**.” Hebrew for “**favor**” is “**chen** – חֵן” a word we know better as “**grace**.” יהוה gave the Israelites “**grace**” in the eyes of the people of Egypt and as a result, the Israelites were able to “**strip**” the Egyptians of their wealth.

So...since these verses are the only times in the Torah when the verb “**vayitnatzlu**” (to be stripped of) is used, is there a connection between the two events? Let’s consider the “**golden ornaments.**” The Israelites asked the Egyptians for “**golden ornaments**” and by “**grace,**” they received. What happens to these “**golden ornaments?**” Here’s the next time we see them:



**Shemot 32:2** And Aharon said to them, "Break off the **golden earrings** which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." <sup>3</sup> "So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aharon. <sup>4</sup> And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an

engraving tool, and **made a molded calf.** Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

They took off their “**golden ornaments,**” the gifts which they had received through “**grace,**” and brought them to Aharon in order to fashion the golden calf. And then, having realized how they had squandered the meaning of this precious gift that יהוה had given them as they left Egypt...how they had even turned it against יהוה, they come to grips with it and end up “**stripping**” themselves of the remaining ornaments (**Shemot 33:6**). They no longer feel worthy of all those gifts that they acquired from Egypt through “**grace.**” They are a broken people.

By handing over the “**ornaments**” for the golden calf, the Israelites desecrated the miraculous “**grace**” יהוה had given them in the eyes of the Egyptians. But they were coming to grips with it and they expressed their repentant hearts by “**mourning.**” Hearing of the loss of the Presence of יהוה in their midst, they “**strip off their ornaments.**” And what happens next? The same word “**grace**” (chen - חן) kicks in once again. Suddenly the word begins to appear in the text over and over again! Moshe begins to plead for the people, asking for “**grace**”:

**Shemot 33:12** Then Moshe said to יהוה, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found **grace** (chen - חן) in My sight.' <sup>13</sup> "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found **grace** (chen - חן) in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find **grace** (chen - חן) in Your sight. And consider that this nation *is* Your people." <sup>14</sup> And He said, "My Presence will go *with you,* and I will give you rest." <sup>15</sup> Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go *with us,* do not bring us up from here. <sup>16</sup> "For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found **grace** (chen - חן) in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth."

יהוה answers Moshe’s plea for “**grace**” (chen - חן):

**Shemot 33:17** So יהוה said to Moshe, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace (chen – חן) in My sight, and I know you by name."

Then, in an amazing promise, again covered with “**grace**,” the Almighty declares He will, through His “**Name**,” give “**grace**”:

**Shemot 33:19** Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and **I will proclaim the Name of יהוה** before you. **I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious**, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Those who were in despair, now found reason for hope. It was exactly the people’s fall from “**grace**” that magnified and glorified יהוה’s “**grace**” and “**mercy**” as proclaimed by יהוה in what is known as the “**13 Attributes of Mercy**”:



**Shemot 34:6** And יהוה passed before him and proclaimed, " יהוה, יהוה El, **merciful and gracious**, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, <sup>7</sup> "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

So, going back now to take another look at how this all happened, we take note that while Moshe is up on the mountain receiving the tablets, some of the people are at the base of the mountain with their golden calf. BOTH the calf and the tablets end up destroyed...the tablets are shattered, and the calf is ground to pieces. But as a result of יהוה’s forgiveness of their betrayal, the relationship is brought back to life and a second set of tablets is given. But the question is...

### **Have His people resurrected the golden calf?**

Natan Lawrence (<https://hoshanarabbah.org>) writes:

The golden calf represented the spiritual idols or strongholds of sin that were already in their hearts, and which they failed to leave behind in Egypt. Though the Israelites had physically come out of the idolatry of Egypt, they hadn’t gotten Egypt’s idols out of their own hearts. When the way of the wilderness became too tough and their faith was tested, instead of trusting יהוה, they grew weary and defaulted to following the idols in their hearts. What were these idols or false gods? They were wealth, materialism, pleasure, and entertainment.

...Sadly, many of us have become weary of waiting for the promise of Yeshua’s coming. We haven’t turned our back totally on Yeshua and His Torah, but we have turned back to some of the ways of Egypt. The idols that have been laying hidden in our hearts and which we have been secretly worshipping all along are rising to the surface, and we’re beginning to make golden calf

monuments to them. These are our real masters – our real gods, for, in reality, they take precedence over obedience to and faith in יהוה. We may give lip service to Elohim, but He’s not the only Master of our lives!

We reason within ourselves, “I’ve been waiting for יהוה – Yeshua for a long time now. I have struggled to be faithful to Him. While others around me are enjoying the good life, I’ve been sacrificing by not giving in to seeking my own pleasures. I’m getting tired of waiting, so now I’m going to enjoy this physical life a little more than I have been. יהוה won’t mind if I enjoy the mammon and the pleasures of this life and put off just a little “seeking first His kingdom and righteousness.” And so, we justify ourselves in our sin of idolatry (golden calf worship) as we move seeking יהוה with all our hearts to the back burner of our lives.

...we accepted Yeshua at the time of our initial salvation or conversion, and we agreed to make Him the Master of our lives. For most of us, Yeshua really isn’t our Master. This isn’t just true of the mainstream Christian church, but of most of יהוה’s people who have supposedly come back to the Torah and are part of the so-called Hebrew Roots Movement. How is this? Many of them are mixing Sabbath and feast day observance with the religion of Egypt, while still calling it “a feast to יהוה.” They’re not observing His divine appointments wholeheartedly as יהוה commands because their job, education, or other secular activities are more important to them. This is golden calf worship! It’s worshipping money, pleasure, and entertainment more than Elohim. How is that any different than the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf and calling it a feast to יהוה? What was יהוה’s view of this? He wanted to destroy them, for their loyalty to the idols of Egypt, which in reality, had taken precedence over obedience to Him. Only the intercessions of Moses on behalf of the sinful and spiritually adulterous Israelites spared them from יהוה’s annihilation. (end of quote)

Yet, we must not forget the end of the story as יהוה gave a display of His grace and mercy. From the lowest point the people could sink, יהוה lifted them even higher than before. When they repented and mourned, He was willing to restore all things. While we wait, keeping our eyes fixed on the Word which gives life and sustains life, we realize that through every part of our journey, יהוה is able to create a path of new revelation and growth. How awesome He is!! And finally...Words of “**grace**”:

**John 1:14** And the **Word became flesh and dwelt among us**, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, **full of grace and truth**.

**Titus 2:11** For the **grace of Elohim that brings salvation** has appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup> **teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age

**Romans 16:24** The **grace** of our Adonai, Yeshua the Messiah *be* with you all. Amen.

Shabbat Shalom!

*Ardelle*