

# Pulse OF Emunah

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Foundation

ISSUE # 444 | PARSHAS KI SISA

FRIDAY MARCH 6TH, 2026 | 17 ADAR, 5786

life

LESSONS



gem

OF THE WEEK

## IN-FLIGHT CONNECTION

Alaska Airlines Flight 241 was en route from Mexico City to Los Angeles when panic suddenly struck. Three men had fastened black boxes to their foreheads and arms, tying them in place with straps, and the three were now standing in their seats and murmuring to themselves in an unfamiliar language.

The flight attendants noticed the passengers' suspicious behavior and notified the security crew on the plane, prompting them to lock the cockpit and order a security alert on the ground. When the plane landed, it was met by fire crews, foam trucks, FBI agents, Transportation Security Administration workers, and police. The three passengers were taken into custody and questioned before being released.

To those in the know, the explanation for the men's strange behavior is obvious: They were Orthodox Jews davening Shacharis while wearing their *tefillin*. But to their fellow passengers on the plane, their actions were alien and frightening.

When a non-Jew encounters unfamiliar Jewish practices for the first time, it can often result in confusion and misunderstandings — even if the results aren't always quite so dramatic.

Many of those misunderstandings, however, can be avoided with proper communication. At the beginning of a flight, for instance, an Orthodox Jewish passenger might consider explaining to his seatmate why he will have to leave his seat several times to wash his hands. Explaining the reasons for our unusual behaviors, even briefly, can turn a potentially uncomfortable encounter into an experience of mutual understanding and respect.

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## INVIOLEABLE TRUTHS

*By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow*

With the instructions to build the Mishkan and with the handing over of the Luchos, Matan Torah was completed. Now it was necessary to plant the nation's soul, the Torah, in its midst. From the Mishkan, the Torah would radiate out to the entire nation, and its spirit would fill the heart of each individual, to realize the promise: *Vasu li mikdash, veshachanti besocham*.

But as all this was transpiring on Har Sinai, events were taking place in the camp below that attested only too realistically to the vast gulf between the reality of the people and the heights of the Torah they were to receive.

Hashem's threat—“*Achaleim, v'e'eseh oscha l'goy gadol*,” that the nation that had been established to receive the Torah would be destroyed, while Moshe and the Torah were assured of a future—demonstrated the absoluteness of the destiny ordained for this Torah, which comes from Hashem, and like Him, is timeless.

No one should ever imagine that the Torah should be adapted to changing times. On the contrary, each generation is entitled to a present and a future

*continued on reverse side*

powerful  
PRAYER

EMES V'YATZIV:  
OBLIGATION ACCEPTED



After we finish all of Shema, we make an amazing statement: *emes v'yatziv*. We say that the reason we have accepted all the obligations of Shema is that it is *emes*, the truth.

Not because it makes us feel connected. Not because it gives us a sense of security in a world spinning out of control. We accept these words simply because it is the absolute truth that there is a Borei Olam who is the Master of the world. He gave us a wonderful, beloved Torah, and we keep it because it is the *dvar Hashem*.

*Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom*

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## A COMPULSION TO SIN

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

The story of the Golden Calf arouses much wonderment today. How was it possible that a mere forty days after the Revelation at Sinai, the people should return to idol worship?

It's true that they had been worshipping *avodah zara* in Mitzrayim, but all that they had seen and experienced since then should have made it unthinkable to repeat their previous sins. Hadn't belief in Hashem, the first of the Ten Commandments, been made crystal clear?

In this question lies a fundamental misunderstanding of the idol worship that persisted throughout the entire Tanach era, the main sin that caused the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash, and the exile into Bavel. There existed in that time period a unique temptation to worship idols, which Chazal call the *yitzra d'avodah zara*.

It was not an intellectual mistake. Most worshippers were actually *maaminim*; they knew that Hashem runs the world and that He gave us a Torah that we must obey. However, they were pulled by a sense of desire that, as the *nevi'im* described on several occasions, was similar to the desire for immorality. Just as it is possible for an ostensibly *frum* person to cheat in business or succumb to lust, so too was it possible in that era to believe in Hashem and His Torah but still be drawn to idolatry.

The leader of Klal Yisrael during the period of the editing of the Gemara was Rav Ashi. He once made a disparaging remark about Menashe, a king of Yehuda who had been one of the worst idolators of his time, corrupting the nation and inducing them to follow his ways. Menashe soon appeared to Rav Ashi in a dream. He asked him a certain *halacha*, which Rav Ashi did not know. Menashe told him the answer.

Rav Ashi was astonished: Menashe, one of the biggest *ovdei avodah zara* in history, was as learned as the greatest *talmid chacham*! "If so," he asked Menashe, "how could you have worshipped idols?"

"If you had lived during a time of this *yetzer hara*," Menashe told him, "you would have lifted the hem of your cloak to run faster after it!"

It is not surprising that only forty days after the Revelation at Sinai, a small percentage of the Jewish nation was pulled after the Golden Calf. So strong was this temptation that it could compel even the greatest of *chachamim*.

only while it accommodates itself to the Torah. The Torah is the absolute, ultimate goal of the Jewish nation. And the generation of Matan Torah was still infinitely far from it.

If, the Torah, with its unalterable ideals, nevertheless came down to that generation, the implication is this: the Torah was not given to the people to suit their convenience. Rather, it was given to *klal Yisrael* so that the nation should shape itself, elevate itself, to the moral and spiritual heights of the Torah.

As soon as the Torah came down to *klal Yisrael*, over whom it was meant to reign supreme, *cheit ha'eigel* presented it with its first challenge. The Torah was to demonstrate Divine power by training this people to accept it out of complete submission, and its resting place was to be first and foremost a place of education toward a better and purer future.

In Devarim 9:20, we are told that Aharon committed a serious sin in playing along with the *cheit*. He should have opposed the people, even at the risk of his own life. Aharon thought, however, that it would be prudent to yield. He reasoned that if he were to fall victim to the mob, they would lose all restraint. By taking control of the events, Aharon believed he would be able to stall until Moshe's return and limit the scale of the people's sin.

In the aftermath, the first *kohen gadol* learned, and taught all future generations, that a Jewish leader cannot try to be clever. The truths of the Torah are not his own to concede. He may not give up part of them to save the rest.

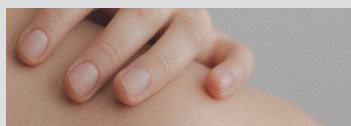
G-d's testimony is inscribed on granite rock. One can acknowledge it, or, at his own peril, reject it. But no one, not even the *kohen gadol*, can alter so much as one letter.

Based on the commentary of Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



## wonder WORLD

### SKIN DEEP



#### How does rest benefit the body?

In Parshas Ki Sisa, the Torah reminds Bnei Yisrael about the mitzvah of Shabbos, a day of rest every week. Rest isn't only important for people—it's also important for the body itself. Skin is the largest organ in human body. All day long it protects us from germs, sunlight, and injury. But while you sleep, your skin begins an important process of repair. Special cells divide and replace damaged cells, helping heal small cuts and restore the skin's surface. At night, the body releases growth hormones that help rebuild tissues. Blood flow to the skin increases, bringing oxygen and nutrients that support healing. That's one reason doctors say good sleep helps wounds heal faster. Even though our skin works hard all day, it depends on regular rest to stay healthy and strong.

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