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# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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## Nerves of Steel

[From the parashah sheet "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Parashat Tzav 5768]

In his last year before ascending in high, our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook zt"l spoke about the same topic every Saturday Night: Moshe. One can certainly talk about Moshe day and night for a thousand years and only scratch the surface of his gargantuan greatness, which reaches to the heavens. Yet Rav Tzvi Yehudah chose to speak specifically about a particular chapter: the Golden Calf.

Following the spiritual climax of the revelation at Sinai, in which the Master of the Universe revealed Himself to the Nation of Israel face to face, Moshe took hold of the Tablets, written by the finger of G-d, in order to bring them down to the people. Yet he was first banished from heaven. G-d said, "Go down, for the people have become corrupt" (Shemot 32:7). G-d was saying: "The people you brought out of Egypt are corrupt and there is nothing to be done with them. The shidduch [match] has unraveled! As for My promise to Avraham about a great nation, that shall be fulfilled through you. With this Nation of Israel, I have no further dealings." G-d concluded, "I shall destroy them and make you into a great nation" (verse 10).

How did Moshe react to this announcement? First of all, he admitted guilt, saying, "This people has committed a grave sin" (verse 31). He did not respond like a lawyer might, trying to blur the facts. Yet at the same time, he presented a shocking argument to G-d: "Now, if You would, please forgive their sin. If not, You can blot

me out from the book that You have written" (verse 32). What "book" was he referring to? The World-to-Come (see Igrot Ha-Re'iyah of "Maran" [our revered teacher] Rav Kook vol. 2, 188-189). Moshe was saying, "I am willing to forego everything, my place in the World-to-Come, for the sake of the Nation of Israel." Rav Tzvi Yehudah emphasized that here Moshe's great love for the Nation of Israel was revealed, to the point of "mesirut nefesh", meaning not just "sacrifice of the body" but "sacrifice of the soul", of his place in Heaven (Sichot Rabbenu 53, 58).

What had happened here was just terrible. "On the day of his wedding, the day of his rejoicing" (Shir Ha-Shirim 3:11), Moshe was banished from on high. Down below, not only did he discover the people dancing around the Golden Calf, but committing sexual sin and murder (Rashi). The whole thing defies belief! Yet Moshe was ready to sacrifice his soul and to abandon his World-to-Come for the sake of the Nation of Israel.

Rav Tzvi Yehudah would stress again and again that for that you need nerves of steel. Every Saturday Night he would mention Moshe's nerves of steel. You can view this as a sort of "last will and testament" of our Rabbi. It wasn't his way to leave behind a will laying out who should receive what inheritance or position, but a last will regarding spiritual matters – yes. He apparently thought that days would come when we would need nerves of steel. And indeed, those days have arrived. The Nation of Israel is not exactly the way we would want. Yet this is our people and we must always stay with them.

With this people, this generation, this country, this army – we are together, without divisiveness, without arrogance, without rejection. But we need nerves of steel and great patience. It is true that we have harsh criticism regarding many Jews – and they have harsh criticism of us as well. All the same, we must continue on together. Always we must remain together with the Nation of Israel, the Assembly of Israel, the soul of Israel.

And anyway, we know that all of the shortcomings we see in public life do not reflect shortcomings deep down in the soul.

A Christian said to Rabbi Chanina: "Now you are most certainly impure, as the verse says, 'Israel wore her impurity' (Eichah 1:9), and the Divine Presence cannot rest amongst you when you are impure" (Rashi). Rabbi Chanina responded, "Come and see what the Torah says about them. 'He dwells with them amidst their impurity'

(Vayikra 16:16). Even when they are impure, the Divine Presence dwells amongst them" (Yoma 57a).

"Come and see!" This is an expression from the Zohar that appears ten times in the Talmud. It means, "See from within. See with your spiritual sight. Then you will see something clear and simple. You will see all the virtues of Israel, who dwell in Zion, who carry on their backs an entire country, with all its problems. Then you will fall in love with the Nation of Israel once more, in keeping with the Master of the Universe, who "lovingly chooses His Nation Israel" (Morning Prayers) and who "loves His Nation Israel".(Evening Prayers). G-d loves us always, and chooses us always, and rejoices in us always. And we are His Nation! His Nation!