

Parshas Ki Sisa

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1. Shabbos Quantifies the Jew

The Torah states, **“Now you (Moshe) speak to the Children of Israel saying. However, you must observe the Shabbos, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am Hashem, Who makes you holy...”** The Torah is saying that despite the fact that the Jewish people were engaged in the sacred task of building the Mishkan, to accommodate the Divine Presence, they were to cease from its construction on Shabbos. The Jew is obliged to observe the Shabbos because it was given to him as a “sign” between G’d and the Jewish people. Its observance is a testament that He is the Creator. The verse concludes, **“...to know that I am Hashem...”** One would think that the verse is addressing the Jew – so that *he* should know that Hashem is the Creator. However Rashi cites Chazal who explain that G’d gave the Jewish people the Shabbos (the day that He rested) as their day of rest, so that it should be a “sign”/testament to the world that the Jewish people are His Nation.

One is not permitted to wear tefillin (phylacteries) on the Shabbos because it is considered a violation of the prohibition of *“baal tosif - you shall not add (to the Torah).”* Tefillin, like Shabbos, is referred to by the Torah as a “sign” that identifies the Jew with G’d. As it is stated, *“Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be totafos (tefillin) between your eyes.”* Observing the Shabbos is itself the “sign” of the relationship between G’d and the Jew – thus rendering the tefillin unnecessary and superfluous on that day. This is why wearing tefillin on the Shabbos is considered an infraction of *“baal tosif.”*

The Torah states, *“When the people of the world will see the Name of G’d upon you (the Jewish people), they will be afraid of you / revere you.”* The Gemara explains that the verse is referring to the tefillin that is worn on the head. Since both Shabbos and tefillin are identified as “signs” by the Torah, it is logical that when the nations of the world see the Jew observing the Shabbos, they will also revere him – just as they would if they see him wearing the tefillin on his head. They will know that the Jewish people are sanctified by G’d. Thus, it is only through the tefillin and the Shabbos that the world can appreciate the spirituality of the Jew. However, if the Jew does not observe the Shabbos, then he no longer identifies as one of “G’d’s people” and will thus be perceived by the world as an ordinary physical person.

The Gemara in Tractate Beitzah tells us that since the beginning of existence, the sanctity of the Shabbos is set and fixed in place, regardless of the existence of the Jewish people. However, the sanctity of the Festivals and other Yomim Tovim (Holidays – such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) are determined by the consecration of the Sanhedrin. They establish and determine the beginning of the month based on their Sanctification of the New Moon. When the Festival coincides with Shabbos the blessing of the Yom Tov and Shabbos concludes, *“...Blessed are you, Hashem Who sanctifies the Shabbos, Israel and the festivals.”* Meaning, that Hashem initially Sanctified the Shabbos and subsequently He Sanctified the Jewish people. Thus, because of their own sanctity, the Jewish people have the ability to sanctify time to establish the sanctity of the Festivals. The sanctity of the Jew is an extension of the sanctity of Shabbos. It is the Jew’s observance and adherence to the laws of the Shabbos, which establishes his relationship with G’d and is thereby sanctified.

Rashi explains that Hashem will only dwell in the midst of the Jewish people when they observe the Shabbos- similar to the Commandment, “You shall make a Sanctuary for Me to dwell in your midst.” Thus, the Jews must refrain from creative activity – even for the sake of building of the Mishkan on the Shabbos.

The Torah refers to the Festivals as, “... These are the meeting times/ holidays of Hashem (Moadei Hashem), which are callings of Kiddushah (assemblies for the sake of Holiness)...” Although we experience the Festivals with physical celebration (such as eating and drinking), they are nevertheless an expression of the spirituality of the Jew. Sforno explains that if the Jew celebrates the Festival only to satisfy his physical desire and pleasure, then it is not considered as “Moadei Hashem” because it is not an assembly for the sake of Kiddushah/Holiness.

Shabbos is not a day that is to be dedicated exclusively to physical indulgence. It is a day that the Jew must reflect on who he is – appreciating that his innate value is rooted in his connection to G’d. The Jew was chosen to observe the Shabbos, with all of its laws, only because he is the only one qualified to be the testament to the world that G’d is the Creator.

2. Appreciating Moshe’s Level of Negation

The Torah tells us that after the Sin of the Golden Calf, G’d wanted to destroy the Jewish people because they were involved with idolatry. Moshe beseeched G’d that He should not destroy them. He said, “**And now if You would but forgive their sin! - but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have written.**” Seemingly, Moshe was saying to G’d that if He was not willing to forgive the Jewish people, he wanted his name to be removed from the Torah. What is the significance of Moshe’s request?

Sforno explains that Moshe beseeched Hashem saying, “If You are not willing to forgive their sin (because they do not have sufficient merit) then erase my merit from Your Book and place it on their account (the Jewish people) so that they should merit forgiveness.” The inherent value of an individual is his mitzvos, Torah study, and good deeds. Moshe wanted that his merits (value) be taken from him and attributed to the Jewish people. Why would the merits of Moshe, as an individual, be sufficient to spare the Jewish people from destruction? Moshe’s spiritual value was the equivalent to that of the entire Jewish people. Thus, Moshe wanted to transfer his value (which was the equivalent of the entire Jewish people) to tip the balance in their favor.

Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to forfeit his entire existence/spiritual accomplishments for the sake of the Jewish people. Why was Moshe willing to do this? The Prophet tells us that G’d said, “For My (G’d) Glory I have created it (the world).” All existence was only created as a setting for G’d’s Glory. The ultimate Glory of G’d comes about through the Jewish people. They were chosen to be His “kingly, priestly, and holy nation” because they were qualified to bring about the purpose of existence through His Holy Torah. However if the Jewish people had disqualified themselves from that role, then the world stands in peril. Because the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, the Jewish people were no longer qualified. Thus, Moshe was willing to transfer his merits to the Jewish people in order to bring about the Glory of G’d – “For My Glory I Created it.”

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the ultimate Redemption will occur whether the Jewish people are worthy/meritorious (self-motivated to repent), or unworthy (have no relevance or interest in repenting). The Gemara states, “If the Jewish people are unworthy, G’d will install a king over them whose decrees are more severe than those of

Haman, the evil one (so that they should repent).” Ultimately G’d wants the Jews to be restored and reinstated to be His spiritual people who will bring about His Glory. Thus, Moshe was willing to give up all that he had accomplished to spare the Jews so that they can be given the opportunity to do teshuvah (repent) – thus being in a position to Glorify the Name of Hashem. Moshe’s request to be erased from the Torah, the giving up of his life’s accomplishments, was his ultimate investment in spirituality- to bring about the Glorification of G’d’s Name.

The Vilna Gaon z’tl would designate an individual as his agent every year well in advance of the Festival of Succos to seek out a proper Esrog on his behalf. One year the Esrog crop did not yield favorable results and it was difficult to procure a beautiful one. The Vilna Gaon’s agent, after a lengthy search, came upon a wealthy individual who had purchased an Esrog that would meet the Vilna Gaon’s approval. The agent informed him that he was seeking to purchase an Esrog on behalf of the Vilna Gaon. He was willing to pay any price for it. The wealthy man responded that because he was already a man of means he was not interested in selling the Esrog. The agent asked him, “Is there anything that you would want for your Esrog?” The man responded, “I will give you my Esrog in exchange for the Vilna Gaon’s share in the world to come.” Reluctantly, the agent agreed and returned to Vilna with the Esrog. When the Vilna Gaon asked him, “What was the cost of the Esrog?” He hesitantly responded, “Your share in the world to come.” The Vilna Gaon joyfully replied, “Baruch Hashem (Thank G’d) I can for the first time in my life perform a mitzvah completely selflessly for its own sake, without any consideration of reward (*l’shmah*).” The Vilna Gaon appreciated performing a mitzvah in the most perfect manner. He was willing to give up all his life’s spiritual accomplishments for the sake of doing the Will of G’d even if it was just one mitzvah. This level of sacrifice brought about the ultimate Glory of G’d - “For My Glory I Created it.”

The Torah tells us that because Moshe had struck the rock rather than speaking to it, as he was told by G’d, it was decreed by G’d that he should not enter into the Land of Israel. Moshe pleaded with and beseeched Hashem to allow him to enter the Land. The Gemara explains that he had wanted to enter the Land in order to fulfill the mitzvos that are exclusive to being in the Land of Israel. However, Hashem said to Moshe that He would credit him with those mitzvos as if he had fulfilled them. Thus, Moshe’s request to enter the Land was denied. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, “Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of reward...” Based on the dialogue between Moshe and G’d, it seems that Moshe’s interest in entering into the Land was for the sake of reward. However this could not be the case because we see from Moshe’s plea to G’d on behalf of the Jewish people that he was willing to forfeit all of his merits for the sake of G’d’s Glory. How do we understand this?

When the Mishna in Pirkei Avos tells us that one should not serve G’d for the sake of reward, it is referring to the individual who performs the mitzvos for his own self-interest and not for the sake of G’d. However, if one serves G’d for the sake of fulfilling G’d’s intent of creation, which is that man should be deserving of His reward, then this is considered as performing mitzvos for the sake of G’d. Ramchal explains that because G’d is Good and the source of all Goodness, He created existence as an opportunity for man to be deserving of that Goodness. Thus, doing the mitzvah for this purpose, although it is for the sake of reward, it is the ultimate fulfillment of the purpose of creation.

3. To What Degree is Man affected by His Environment

The Torah tells us that after the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf, G’d wanted to destroy them and bring about through Moshe another great nation. The

Torah states, "...Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you (Moshe) a great nation." Moshe beseeched Hashem, "...Remember for the sake of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisroel (Yaakov), Your servants..."

Rashi cites Chazal who explain this verse to mean, "Remember Avraham – if the Jewish people violated the Ten Commandments then remember the merit of Avraham our Patriarch who withstood the ten tests. Let his ten successes counter the ten failures of the Jews. If the Jewish people deserve to be destroyed through fire, then (Hashem) remember Avraham was willing to sacrifice himself in the fiery Kiln of Kasdim for Your sake. If the Jews deserve to die by the sword, then (Hashem) remember Yitzchak had extended his neck at the time of the Akeidah to be slaughtered by his father Avraham for Your sake. If the Jews deserve exile, then remember Yaakov who was exiled in Charan. If the Jewish people cannot be saved in the merit of the Patriarchs, then how could You say to me that You will make of me a great nation? If a throne that stands on three legs cannot withstand Your wrath, then definitely a throne with only one leg cannot?"

Moshe had asked G'd that if a throne (the Jewish people) with three legs (the merits of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) could not survive, then how could a throne (a new nation created through Moshe) stand on one leg (his merits alone)? Moshe's response to G'd seems to be difficult. Why would the great nation that would emanate from Moshe only have the ability to survive based on the merit of Moshe? Seemingly, they would also have the merits of the three Patriarchs who are the antecedents of Moshe Rabbeinu. Thus, the future nation would be a throne that would stand on four legs. How do we understand this?

When the Jewish people unequivocally declared at Sinai, "*Naaseh V'nishmah* – we will do and we will listen," they merited special spiritual crowns, which were placed upon their heads by angels. Their level of unquestioning acceptance of G'd's Torah caused Him to send 600,000 angels to place two crowns on the head of every Jew – one for "*Naaseh*" and the other for "*Nishmah*." However after the Sin of the Golden Calf, the entire Jewish people forfeited their spiritual crowns. They were diminished because of their involvement in idolatry and no longer possessed the special spiritual level that they had attained at Sinai.

After the Jewish people had forfeited their special spiritual level, the Torah tells us that Moshe radiated with holiness in such an intense manner that the Jewish people could not even gaze upon his face. Rashi in the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos explains that the basis for the new level of Moshe's radiance came about because he had received all of the spiritual crowns that were shed by the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that the Tribe of Levy, because they did not participate in the Golden Calf, was chosen to be the officiants of G'd. If this is so, then why did the Levyim need to forfeit their crowns of holiness? Additionally it is difficult to understand if they did not participate in the Sin, they why did they deserve to be destroyed together with the entire Jewish people?

It is evident that the only reason they deserved to be destroyed, despite the fact they did not participate in the Sin, is because the Tribe of Levy is part of the Jewish people. If the Jewish people need to be destroyed there is no longer a Jewish nation. It is clear that the merits of the Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) were not sufficient to sustain and protect the Jewish people from destruction. If this is the case, then why was Moshe, being recognized as part of the Jewish people, spared from destruction?

It is evident that the basis for Moshe's survival was his own dimension of person – unrelated to being part of the Jewish people. Therefore, G'd wished to bring about a great nation through him.

Although the Tribe of Levy was part of the Jewish people, they did not deserve to be destroyed. One could say that one only needs to resort to the merits of the Patriarchs if he had sinned and requires their merits in order to be spared. The Tribe of Levy was openly opposed to the idolatry, as we see later that they risked their lives when Moshe had called out, “**whoever is for G'd come to me...**” If this is the case, then why did they deserve to be destroyed? Secondly, why did they forfeit their special spiritual level/crowns of spirituality?

At the time of the Golden Calf, the Tribe of Levy was in the same context of existence as the Jewish people. Thus, they were diminished as a result of the spiritual impurity that was brought about by the Jewish people. However, Moshe Rabbeinu at this time was in heaven receiving the Torah from G'd. He was not in the same sphere of existence as the Tribe of Levy and the Jewish people. He was not exposed to and effected by the impurity of the Golden Calf and was thus not diminished.

We see from this that even if one is not associated with evil (or even opposes it), he will nevertheless be diminished by that impurity. Therefore Levy was in need of merit because of their spiritual diminishment.

Every day we conclude the Amidah (silent prayer) with the request that Hashem should rebuild the Temple and there we shall worship Him with fear and “the offering of Yehudah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Hashem, as in the days of old and in former years.” One would think that “...the days of old and in former years” is referring to the time of the First Bais HaMikdash or the Mishkan when the Divine Presence dwelt in the midst of the Jewish people. However the Yalkut explains that “days of old and in former years” is referring to the days of Adam before idolatry was introduced to the world. At the time of Adam, because the world was spiritually pure – free from idolatry, the offerings that were brought to G'd were not in any way tainted from being exposed to the impurity of the world. Therefore we pray to Hashem that our offerings should be as pleasant to G'd as it was in the time of Adam – that they should not be tainted with the impurity of the world.

At the end of time G'd's Kingdom will be recognized by all mankind and thus the world will be restored to its pristine spiritual state.

4. Good and Evil – Inextricably Linked

The Gemara in *Tractate Megillah* states that during the daytime period of Purim one has an obligation to eat a festive meal. In addition, one has an obligation to drink an intoxicating beverage to the point where one cannot distinguish between, “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai” (*Arur Haman baruch Mordechai*). Is the Talmud suggesting that that one should become intoxicated to the point of saying, “Blessed is Haman and Cursed is Mordechai” (G'd forbid)? Or is it telling us something else?

Some decisors of Jewish Law (*poskim*) explain this passage in the Gemara and rule that one does not need to become intoxicated in order to fulfill the mitzvah of “drinking” to the point of non-discernment between Haman and Mordechai. Rather, one can drink a full measure of wine or other intoxicating beverage (a *reviis* – which measures 2.9 oz) and follow it with a nap. This is because when one is asleep one cannot discern between

Haman and Mordechai. However other decisors take the statement of the Gemara literally to mean that one has to reach a point of intoxication that he cannot discern between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai.”

Maharal of Prague z’tl explains in his work on Purim the Rabbinic Law of celebrating Purim through feasting and drinking. This law is to emphasize and appreciate the nature of the evil of Haman. When Haman issued the decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child he did not differentiate whether the Jew was a believer in G’d or pagan in his beliefs. Haman could not tolerate the physical existence of the Jewish people. He thus decreed that every living Jew, regardless of who he was, should be killed. Thus, to bring this point to light, one celebrates the day in the most physical context through feasting and drinking intoxicating beverages – to the point of not functioning within the context of our intellectual facilities. One should come to the point of functioning as a physical being – to the point of not being able to discern between Cursed is Haman and Blessed is Mordechai.

When the Gemara states that one needs to be intoxicated on Purim to the point that he is not able to discern between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai” it does not mean to say that one should say “Cursed is Mordechai” and “Blessed is Haman;” but rather, when one declares “Blessed is Mordechai” he is affirming and establishing what is inherently “good” and thus worthy of blessing. Consequently, when one states, “Blessed is Mordechai” he is in essence saying – anything that is contrary to that is deserving of being cursed because it is evil. The blessing of Mordechai and the cursing of Haman are inextricably linked. Since one has established what is “good” in the absolute sense, anything that is contrary to that is by definition “evil.”

On Purim, through celebrating and commemorating the events of Purim, one must reflect and come upon an understanding that “good” and “evil” are not independent and unrelated entities; but rather, one is the result of the other. Therefore when we curse evil, we are in essence blessing good.

If we do not come to this level of understanding, then we are not fully appreciating the lesson that is to be learned from the Purim event. By comprehending the intent of Chazal we are able to understand that the mitzvah of the level of intoxication on *Purim* is not merely to imbibe; but rather, the drinking is a mechanism to enable us to reflect on the fundamental understanding of good and evil.

5. Mordechai’s Unique Ability

The Torah states regarding the anointing oil (*shemen hamishcha*), “**Now you (Moshe), take for yourself choice spices): five hundred shekel-weights of pure myrrh (*mor dror*), fragrant cinnamon...**” The anointing oil was necessary to inaugurate the Mishkan (Tabernacle) with all its vessels. Despite the fact that Bezalel had overseen the building of the Mishkan and infused every aspect of it with the proper spiritual intent to bring about the desired effect, the Mishkan with its vessels were not spiritually activated until they were anointed with the *shemen hamishcha* (*anointing oil*). It was only after the Mishkan and its vessels were anointed did they assume the special status that was capable of accommodating the *Shechina* (Divine Presence). Hashem had commanded Moshe to personally anoint the Mishkan and its vessels. Moshe, because of his spiritual dimension and relationship with G’d, was the only one who was qualified to anoint it.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah asks, “Where do we find Mordechai alluded to in the Torah?” The Gemara answers, “The first ingredient in the spices that was needed to

produce the anointing oil was “*Mor dror – pure myrrh.*” Targum explains, ‘*Mor dror*’ as ‘*mori dachiya.*’” Thus, the Torah alludes to Mordechai through one of the essential ingredients of the anointing oil. What commonality does Mordechai have with the anointing oil?

When the Jewish people were initially invited to the feast of Achashverosh, Mordechai vehemently discouraged them from attending. However, because the Jews believed that if they did not attend the Emperor’s feast, there would be grave consequences, they participated in it contrary to Mordechai’s wishes. This was the beginning of a series of events which led to the decree against the Jewish people – that every Jewish man, woman, and child should be annihilated.

It was Mordechai who orchestrated all the elements which ultimately brought about the miracle of Purim; at the final moment, the decree was annulled, and rather than the Jewish people being destroyed, they brought destruction upon their enemies. Mordechai had instructed Esther to conceal her true identity until the appropriate moment.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that Rachel, our Matriarch, is identified by the characteristic of “*Shteeka – silence.*” She had given the code words needed to identify her as the prospective wife of Yaakov, to her sister Leah. At the time of the wedding, Rachel remained silent as Yaakov married Leah, despite the fact that she was the intended bride. Esther, descending from Rachel, demonstrated the same characteristic of silence when she did not reveal her pedigree, thus her true identity remained hidden. Mordechai, who had instructed Esther to behave in this concealed manner, was also a descendent of Rachel, our Matriarch. The Torah focuses on the exceptional beauty of Rachel, our Matriarch. Despite the fact that she is identified as such, her true dimension of being stemmed from her spirituality. Thus, her essence was concealed.

It is interesting to note that it was Mordechai who galvanized the Jewish people and motivated them to do teshuvah (repentance) to counter the decree that was issued against them. Thus, it was Mordechai who took the initiative to bring the Jewish people to a level that they should merit the miracle of Purim. Just as the anointing oil was the element that initiated the Mishkan and elevated it to a level that could accommodate the Divine Presence, so too did Mordechai elevate the Jewish people to a level that they should merit G’d’s intervention.

Amalek represents darkness and confusion. In fact the numerical value of “Amalek” is equivalent to the numerical value of “*safaik – doubt.*” When confusion exists, truth becomes concealed. After the Splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the mightiest army (Egypt) the world stood in awe of the Jewish people. They were perceived as being invincible. However, after they were attacked by the Amalekites, it dispelled that special reverence and awe, which came upon the world. The awe was replaced by confusion and doubt. The world no longer was certain whether the Jews were as awesome and special as they had thought.

The numerical value of ‘Mor’ in ‘*mor dror – pure myrrh*’ is the equivalent numerical value of ‘Amalek.’ Just as Amalek represents confusion and concealment of truth, Mordechai also represents concealment. The true greatness of Mordechai and his plan to save the Jewish people was concealed. Although he appeared to be no different than any other Torah Sage, he had the ability to bring about a change of events that would set in motion the destruction of Amalek – the enemy of the Jewish people. Mordechai, whose true ability was concealed, was the counterforce to Amalek – who conceals truth

through confusion.