

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Ki Sisa

February 25, 2005

In loving memory of

Yehudah Ben Chaim Dov HaKohen z'l

May his neshama have an aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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Parshas Ki Sisa

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. Thought Makes the Difference

The Torah tells us that two of the vestments that were worn by the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) were the Ephod and the Choshen (Breastplate). Regarding the workmanship that went into both of these vestments the Torah uses the term, “*maaseh chosheiv*.” Rashi explains that “*maaseh chosheiv* – of woven design” means that this was a special type of weaving requiring unique expertise in which a design developed on both sides of the garment simultaneously. It is interesting to note that the word “chosheiv” is derived from the word that means “thought.”

Klee Yakar cites the Gemara in Tractate Erchin which explains that the eight vestments of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) atone for various sins of the Jewish people. The Choshen (Mishpat) (Breastplate), which was worn over the heart of the High Priest atoned for the sin of courts that were corrupt. The Ephod atoned for the sin of idolatry. We find that the Torah uses the same term “chosheiv” regarding these two vestments. What is the relationship, within the context of “thought”, between these two vestments?

It is true that a judge can only render judgment based on what he sees and understands. However, it is only the judge himself who knows if his verdict was just and honest or corrupt. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that when a judge renders a proper (truthful) verdict (absolute truth – *emmes la'ameto*), it is considered as if he is G'd's partner in Creation. However, if he does not render a proper judgment, he deserves to die. Tosfos asks, “The Gemara could have simply referred to a proper judgment as “*din emmes* – truthful judgment.” Why does it refer to it as “*din emmes la'ameto* – verdict that is absolute truth)?” Tosfos answers by presenting the concept of “*din merumeh*.” Meaning, although the witnesses had met all the criteria to establish them as credible, and the defendants had presented their position in a proper context; nevertheless the judge senses that there is something not quite right, but he cannot identify what is the problem. In this situation, the judge has an obligation to disqualify himself from the case because his verdict would not be

absolute truth. However the only who has a sense of this reality is the judge himself.

Similarly, idolatry (unlike other sins) is one that one can transgress with thought alone. The Torah tells us that even if one did not do an action but had an idolatrous belief, he is still considered an idolater. Thus, the two vestments that atone for corrupt judgment and idolatry are referred to as “*maaseh chosheiv*” – vestments that have relevance to thought.

One can understand the relevance between the Chosen and the Ephod slightly differently. The Torah refers to the judge who is qualified to be a member of the Sanhedrin as “Elohim.” An appellation which is identical to G'd Himself. He is referred to in this context because a judge who has proper ordination and meets all the criteria of a “proper court” is assisted by G'd to process the information at hand. As the verse states, “Elokim netzav b'adas Keil – G'd convenes together with the court.” Thus, the judge sees the case through “the Eyes of G'd.” However if a judge is corrupt, which is only known to himself, it is the equivalent of idolatry. Since the judge is perceived as “Elokim,” when he does not act in accordance with the criteria set forth by the Torah, he is a misrepresentation of G'd. He is the equivalent of a false G'd. When one believes in a deity, he is recognizing something as being G'dly although it is something that is false. Identically the judge is perceived as “Elokim” although he is corrupt. The only one who is aware of this inconsistency is the judge himself. Thus, the commonality between the Ephod and Chosen/idolatry and corrupt judges manifests itself in the “*machshava/chosheiv* (thought).” Therefore the two vestments are referred to as “*maaseh chosheiv*.”

2. 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 G’d 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 G’d 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 G’d (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.

3. 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 G’d 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 G’d. 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 G’d 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, G’d 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.

4. 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 G'd, "...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 (G'd) 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 (G'd) 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 Levymim 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 G'd should rebuild the Temple and there we shall worship Him with fear and "the offering of Yehudah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to G'd, 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 G'd 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.

5. *The Negative Side of Individuality*

The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, When you take a census of the Children of Israel according to their numbers, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, so that there will not be a plague among them when counting them. This shall they give...a half shekel (Machtzis HaShekel)...**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason the census of the Jewish people was conducted through the medium of the *Machtzis HaShekel* (half-silver coin) for every male above the age of twenty, rather than simply counting them, was to prevent "a plague" that would be caused by *ayin ha'rah* (evil eye). Whenever people are counted as individuals, they are subject to *ayin ha'rah*, which brings about plague. Therefore, the Jewish people needed the *Machtzis HaShekel* for the purchase of communal offerings for atonement in order to ward off the *ayin ha'rah* when they were counted.

The blessing that Yosef's children, Menashe and Ephraim, received from their grandfather, Yaakov our Patriarch was, "**May you proliferate abundantly like fish in the midst of the land.**" Chazal explain that the reason Yaakov chose a term which refers to the proliferation of fish rather than simply giving them the blessing to increase abundantly, is for one of two reasons: Firstly, there is nothing comparable to the proliferation of fish. Secondly, since fish are concealed by the water and are not seen by the human eye they are not subject to the evil eye. The blessing to Yosef's children was that they should multiply at an unlimited level and not be susceptible to the evil eye. One could say that the first interpretation of Yaakov's blessing is contingent on the second. This means that the reason they are able to increase in unlimited numbers is that they are not subject to the human eye.

The Torah tells us that when Esav approached Yaakov's family, each of Yaakov's wives came forth and bowed to Esav, followed by their children. However, Yosef went before his mother Rachel to shield her from the gaze of Esav, the *rasha* (evil person). He did not want him to gaze upon the beauty of his mother. Chazal tell us that because Yosef shielded his mother from the gaze of Esav, he merited the blessing from Yaakov of "*Alei ayin - You are above the eye,*" meaning that he was not susceptible to the evil eye.

Another reason given by Chazal why Yosef merited the blessing of "*Alei ayin - You are above the eye,*" was because as the Viceroy of Egypt, he would pass through the city in his chariot and all the women would gaze at his beauty (he was the most handsome man who had ever lived). However, he did not return their gaze. Chazal tell us, "Since his eye did not benefit from anything that was not his, no eye could affect Yosef's existence."

In order for the *ayin ha'rah* (evil eye) to effect something the person who is bring it about must have a semblance of an understanding of what he is gazing upon. However, if a person looks upon something and does not perceive or understand what he is seeing, he cannot affect it with the evil eye. This is because what he is affecting, in essence, is not actually what he is seeing. For example, if one gazes upon copper and believes it to be gold, he will not affect it because the item is in fact different from what he believes it to be. Yosef's being was of such a dimension that it could not be comprehended nor understood because of his exceptional ability.

Whatever one could perceive in Yosef was not even close to the reality. Relatively speaking, Yosef was an unlimited person. Furthermore, anything that Yosef associated himself with assumed a similar quality. For

example, as we see regarding the gathering of the grain in Egypt. The bounty reached a point that it could no longer be quantified.

The Torah tells us that before the Jewish people entered into the Land of Israel Moshe forewarned them not to be negatively affected by the great bounty that they will have when they settle in the Land. The Torah states, **“Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G’d, by not observing His commandments, His Ordinances, and His Decrees, which I commanded you today...”** The Torah is warning that one may come to forget G’d as a result of prosperity. After one has achieved great success he may say, **“My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!”** This is something to which every human being is susceptible. When one experiences great success, one wishes to attribute his accomplishments to his own initiative. This will ultimately lead to one’s downfall.

By attributing one’s success to oneself and not to G’d, he is assuming a position that is quantifiable because he and his success are one in the same. By taking on this persona he is allowing himself to be susceptible to the *ayin ha’rah*, because he has equated his success to himself. However, if on the other hand one attributes his success to G’d’s blessing, which is unrelated to himself but rather to an unlimited source, he is not subject to the *ayin ha’rah*. He is not the basis for his success.

There is a Positive Commandment to accept upon oneself the *yichud (unity)* of G’d twice a day. This is brought about through the recitation of the Shema in the morning and in the evening. The mitzvah of declaring the unity of G’d is in actuality a declaration that everything emanates from Him because all existence exists only because of His Will. There is nothing in existence that is not directly connected to G’d. The essence of everything is *“echad”* which is the concept of unity. If one truly internalizes the reality that his very existence and all he possesses are only because G’d Wills them, then one cannot be affected by the *ayin ha’rah*.

Torah states in the Book of Devarim (Portion of Ki Savo), **“Hashem will remove all illness from you.”** In Tractate *Bava Metzia*, Rav explains that this verse is referring to the removal of the *ayin ha’rah*. When G’d will remove the *ayin ha’rah* from the Jewish people, they will no longer be subject to illness. The susceptibility to all illness begins with the evil eye. When will G’d remove “all illness” (the evil eye)? The Torah states that it will be removed only when the Jewish people observe and study the Torah and walk the proper path. When one lives his

life as prescribed by the Torah one understands that everything emanates from G’d. The Zohar states, “Yisroel, Torah, and Hashem are all intermingled (are one entity).” Thus, if one has an appreciation of this concept that is stated by the Zohar then one will not be susceptible to the *ayin ha’rah*.

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Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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Thursday

- 10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
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