

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Ki Sisa

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Parshas Ki Sisa

Presented by

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1. The Negative Characteristic of Deprecation

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, “**There was no one who was able to speak *loshan hara* (evil speech) like Haman the evil one.**” Haman was the expert in destructive speech. He approached Achashverosh (the king of Persia) to annihilate the Jewish people. Achashverosh had several reservations. He was afraid that the G'd of the Jews would do to him what He had done to his predecessors who had previously attempted to destroy the Jewish people. Additionally, he was concerned that if he eliminated them it would diminish his power by leaving wide gaps in his kingdom. Haman reassured him that destroying the Jewish people would not be a diminishment because they dispersed throughout the empire. Thus, their elimination would not be noticed.

Haman's final convincing argument to seal the fate of the Jews was “If a fly were to fall into the wine of a Jew, he would simply remove it and drink the wine. However if the king were to touch the wine of a Jew he would pour it out and not drink it. Therefore they deserve to be destroyed because their behavior is disgraceful towards the king.” Haman was the expert in *loshan hara* because he was able to focus exclusively on the negative aspects of the individual without noticing any redeeming qualities. He was able to communicate this negativity with an intensity that was one of a kind. When he slandered the Jewish people, he negated their value to such a degree that they were perceived by Achashverosh as a detriment to his kingship.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, “The deprecator you shall smite. The fool can be wisened.” The Midrash tells us that “the deprecator you shall smite” is referring to Amalekite people (who were the ancestors of Haman). Yisro on the other hand is likened to the “fool” because he did not perceive the truth of monotheism. When he had heard all that G'd had done for the Jewish people he was wisened. Consequently, he relinquished his position of leadership and glory to go out into the desert and become part of the Jewish people. The Amalekites, rather than seeing and internalizing the awesome events that

surrounded the splitting of the Sea, attacked the Jewish people as if they were oblivious to all that had transpired. They had no capacity to appreciate the profound display of G'd's Might and Omnipotence as the rest of the world had understood. Despite the fact that the world was traumatized through G'd's demonstration of His concern for the Jewish people, the Amalekites were not. They are equated to the deprecator who does not have the capacity to appreciate the positive side of an issue. Therefore G'd states, “My Throne is not complete until Amalek is obliterated from under the heaven.”

The all-encompassing characteristic of the Amalekites is that they have the ability to only focus on the negative. Haman, who personified Amalek, who is identified as “the deprecator,” had the ability to express himself in the most destructive manner because he was not able to appreciate the qualities of the Jewish people. When one focuses solely on the negative, one's criticism becomes lethal. Therefore when the Jew speaks *loshan hara* he is assuming the posture of Amalek – causing a severe reaction from G'd.

Amalek has no capacity to value the spirituality of the Jewish people/G'd. Because they are G'd's chosen people, their representation is something that the Amalekites cannot tolerate. The strength of the Jew is his spirituality. The Jewish people were attacked by the Amalekites in Rephidim because they were laid-back in their Torah study and mitzvah observance. Whenever the Jew is deficient in his spirituality, he becomes vulnerable to their attack. Why is this so?

G'd refers to His Torah as His most precious commodity. If the Jew is not sufficiently engaged in something of this level of value, it is an indication that he truly does not appreciate the Torah. When the Jew behaves in this manner vis-à-vis the source of all spirituality, the Torah and its mitzvos, he assumes the posture of Amalek, who does not appreciate the value of spirituality. Thus, the Jew becomes vulnerable to their attack. The only manner the Jew can develop sensitivity and appreciation for spirituality is through the study of Torah. It is only when the Jew experiences G'd through his Torah study and

mitzvos can he negate and obliterate Amalek from existence.

2. G'd Provides the Antidote Before the Problem

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, "It was revealed and known to G'd that ultimately Haman would seal the fate of the Jewish people by giving coins to Achashverosh. Therefore, G'd preempted the coins of Haman with His coins (the half coin made of silver)." This is based on the concept "G'd creates the antidote before the problem."

The Torah tells us that the half coin made of silver was donated by every male above the age of twenty. All Communal Offerings (*Korbanei Tzibur*) that were brought in the Bais HaMikdash needed to be purchased with these coins that were replenished every Nissan. The Mishna tells us that in order to have a sufficient amount of the new coins by the first of the month of Nissan, they would announce at the beginning of the previous month (month of Adar) that one must send his half coin to the Temple.

The Gemara in Tractate *Megillah* tells us that Haman had advised Achashverosh after the death of his wife Vashti, that he should send out a royal proclamation throughout the entire kingdom stating that the male should be the dominant figure in his own home. The language spoken in each household should be the one spoken by the husband. The Gemara tells us, "Had it not been for the first proclamation that was sent out, the entire Jewish people would have been annihilated." Why was this so? After the first letters were received throughout the kingdom, another proclamation of the king followed – that every Jewish man, woman, and child should be annihilated on the 13th of Adar in the upcoming year. In fact, because of the level of disdain that the nations of the world had for the Jewish people, under normal circumstances the decree would have been carried out even before the intended date. However, because the letters that were received first preceded the second proclamation, the decree to kill the Jewish people was not taken seriously. When the initial proclamation was received the people were taken aback because of its absurdity. They had thought that only a fool could have issued such an order. Because it was obvious to all that even an individual who had no status in society is the king of his own household. Therefore the second letters were dismissed as something similarly absurd.

The Gemara tells us that Haman had made the suggestion regarding the content of the first proclamation, even though he was not the first ranking minister, his

arrogance did not allow him to remain silent. It was this arrogance that ultimately undermined the effectiveness of the second order. This is another example of the antidote preceding the problem (although this came about through Haman's own initiative).

The Torah tells us that Avraham, our Patriarch, had sent his servant Eliezer to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. Avraham had given Eliezer gifts of jewelry to be given to the woman who was destined to be Yitzchak's wife. The Torah tells us that when Eliezer realized that Rivka was the woman meant for Yitzchak, he placed two gold bracelets upon her arms. The Torah states that these bracelets were ten weight in gold. Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that the two bracelets correspond to the Ten Commandments.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Haman had chosen to give ten thousand talents of silver to Achashverosh to seal the fate of the Jewish people because he wanted to uproot and nullify the effect of the bracelets that were given to Rivka. He understood and appreciated the far-reaching effect of those bracelets regarding the permanence of the Jewish people. He therefore chose to undermine Eliezer's action to bring about the destruction of the Jewish people. He did not realize that the mitzvah of the half silver coin that was given to the Jewish people generations before would dispel and nullify the effect of his ten thousand talents of silver.

As a result of the bracelets that were given to Rivka, the destiny of the Jewish people was set in motion for them to receive the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Thus they assumed an eternal status. In order to guarantee that eternal presence, it was necessary for them to be given the mitzvah of the half silver coin to dispel the effect of the ten thousand talents of silver offered by Haman.

The half silver coin that was given by every Jewish male above the age of twenty was used to purchase the communal offerings. The symbolism of a half coin, rather than a whole coin, is to indicate and demonstrate that the Jew as an individual (not as a component/part of the Jewish people) has no value. Each Jew complements the other to bring about the whole. There is a principle that is mentioned by Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk based on an expression in the Gemara, "a tzibur (community) cannot die." A unified entity, although it is composed of parts, its reality is the whole. Therefore the half coin, which demonstrates this principle was given to the Jewish people as the antidote before the problem – to dispel and incapacitate the machinations of Haman.

3. The Coronation of G'd

The Torah states, **“G'd spoke to Moshe saying, When you take a census of the Children of Israel they ...this shall they give...a half shekel of the sacred shekel...”** The Midrash states, “This is similar to a king who had many garments. The king commanded one of his subjects to take extra care of the most special one. This garment was dear to the king because it was the one that he had worn on the day of his coronation. The king said, ‘I wore this garment on the day I was acknowledged and accepted as king. It is attached to my loins and I pride myself with it.’ Identically G'd has spoken to Moshe regarding the preciousness of the Jewish people. He had said, ‘Take special care of the Jewish people because they are attached to My loins. Just as one’s belt is attached to his loins, identically the House of Israel is attached to Me.’ Why are the Jewish people compared to king’s special regal garment? G'd said, ‘The Jewish people had accepted My Kingship upon themselves after the splitting of the Sea. They had said, ‘G'd shall reign for all eternity.’ Therefore they are the equivalent of the special garment worn by Me on the day of My coronation. Because of My enormous love for them I descended from above to the terrestrial level for My Divine Presence to dwell amongst them.”

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that the first person to refer to G'd as “Master” was Avraham, our Patriarch. The commentators ask, “We find that Adam was the first person to acknowledge G'd as ‘Master.’ Why then does the Gemara state that it was Avraham? Adam referred to G'd as ‘Master’ because he was the handiwork of G'd. To Adam, G'd’s Mastership was obvious; however, to Avraham who was born into a pagan world, G'd’s Presence was not known. It was only through Avraham’s own initiative that he recognized G'd as ‘Master’ of the universe. Thus, his acknowledgement of G'd was unique.”

Avraham’s recognition of G'd as Master was only on an individual basis. It is only a people/nation that could acknowledge G'd as “King.” As Chazal state, “There is no king without a people/nation.” At the time of the splitting of the Sea, there were 600,000 males above the age of twenty constituting the Jewish people as a “nation.” What Avraham had accomplished on an individual level, the Jewish people had expanded through their acknowledgement of G'd as King. They were able to do so because they were Avraham’s descendants and were beneficiaries of Avraham’s accomplishments. This was the

first time in the history of the world that G'd was acknowledged as “King” by a people.

The Midrash continues, “Moshe said to G'd, ‘My Master, You have only commanded me to instruct the Jewish people with Your commandments. Why have You not given Your commandments to the 70 nations of the world?’ G'd responded, ‘It is because the Jewish people are more beloved to Me than all the other nations of the world. They are My treasure...’” G'd had described to Moshe how special the Jewish people were to Him because they acknowledged Him as “King.” What was the basis for Moshe’s question regarding the nations of the world? If the nations of the world were created for the glory of G'd as the rest of existence, why are they limited to only the seven Noahide laws?

Moshe did not fully grasp the unlimited spiritual capacity of the Jew versus the limitation of the non-Jew. G'd only values the Jewish people as His treasure because of their relevance to Him. The love of G'd for the Jewish people is rooted in their unlimited spiritual capacity. Therefore all of the mitzvos beyond the Seven Noahide laws were only transmitted to the Jewish people and not the nations of the world.

4. The Fiery Coin That Was Shown to Moshe

The Midrash tells us that one of the things that Moshe had difficulty understanding was the mitzvah of the half silver coin (*Machtzis Ha Shekel*), which was used to purchase the communal offerings. G'd needed to show him “a fiery coin” in order for him to grasp the mitzvah. The half silver coin seems to be a simple concept - a half weight of silver in the form of a coin. What was the basis for Moshe’s difficulty?

The Midrash tells us that when Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah, G'd told him that the Jewish people had engaged in idolatry (Golden Calf). He understood that they needed to be atoned for this grave sin. How much does one need to give to be fully atoned for such a sin? “Reb Yehudah b'reb Elae says, ‘Moshe thought that the only way the Jewish people could atone for their sin was that each individual needed to give a block of silver (the equivalent of 120 coins).’ Reb Yochanon asks, ‘From where did Moshe understand that they must pay atonement? It is from the laws of slandering one’s wife.’” If a man accuses his wife of committing adultery and it is subsequently discovered that she was falsely accused, the witnesses who testified against her are

put to death and the husband must pay a hundred weight in silver for slandering her.

The Midrash continues, “The Jewish people slandered G’d with the Sin of the Golden Calf. They had said regarding the Calf, ‘This is the god of Israel.’ Therefore, Reb Yochanon concludes that Moshe believed that each Jew must pay a hundred weight in silver. Reb Shimon Ben Lokesh says, “Moshe learned the amount needed for atonement from the laws pertaining to rape.” The Torah tells us that if one rapes a virgin who is a maiden, he must pay a penalty of fifty weight in silver. The Midrash continues, “When the Jewish people engaged in the Golden Calf, although G’d had said in the Ten Commandments ‘You shall not have false gods’ they imposed their position against the Will of G’d and made the Calf. Therefore each Jew must to pay fifty weight in silver to atone for this sin...Reb Yehudah Bar Simon explains, ‘Moshe learned from the laws pertaining to the ox that gores.’ As it states, ‘If an ox (who was established as a goring ox) gores a slave or a maidservant, the owner must pay thirty weight in silver.’ Regarding the Sin, the Jewish people exchanged G’d for the Calf (the ox) by defying His Glory through its image. Therefore each of them must give thirty weight of silver.”

The Midrash states, “G’d knew that Moshe was considering all of these possibilities when he was attempting to calculate the amount that each Jew must pay to atone for the sin of idolatry. He therefore pointed with His finger to the *Machtzis Ha Shekel* and told him ‘this is the amount that each Jew must give.’” The Sin of the Golden Calf could be likened to several other sins such as slander, rape, and the goring ox. Based on the Torah that Moshe had learned in heaven, he understood that if one should transgress in any of these areas, one needed to pay a certain amount of silver in order to be atoned. No amount less than the above mentioned cases would have been adequate. Therefore the coin that was a half weight in silver atoning for the Golden Calf was difficult for Moshe to comprehend because it was not within the realm of what he had learned. G’d needed to explain to Moshe that there was something inherent in the half silver coin that had the capability of atoning/rehabilitating the spirituality of the Jew to reinstate him through the communal offerings. G’d showed Moshe a “fiery coin” to teach him that the amount of compensation needed for atonement was not based on any of the Torah that he had previously learned.

It is interesting to note that it was a “fiery coin” that G’d revealed to Moshe. The Torah is likened to fire. As it states, “All the words of G’d are fire.” Thus, the fire represents the Torah that Moshe needed to attain to

understand the significance of the half silver coin. This understanding has no relevance to any other concept that Moshe had previously learned. It was something newly introduced by G’d to him. Until Moshe was shown the fiery coin, he did not fully understand the spiritual infrastructure and process of how the half silver coin could bring about spiritual reinstatement of the Jewish people. He did not have difficulty understanding the physicality of the half silver coin, but rather its spiritual significance.

5. *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. Moshe supplicated G’d 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.**” 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 supplicated 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.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

2:00pm Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington