

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES
The Portion of

Ki Sisa

February 21, 2008

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
<i>1. The Characteristic that is Needed for Atonement</i>	2
<i>2. The Fruits of One's Choice</i>	3
<i>3. Shabbos – a Day of Focus</i>	4
<i>4. The Awesome Power of Torah</i>	5
<i>5. Aaron's Qualifying Characteristic as High Priest</i>	6

About the Yad Avraham Institute

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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Ki Sisa

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Characteristic that is Needed for Atonement

The Torah states regarding the half a silver coin (*machtzis ha'shekel*), **“This shall they give...a half shekel of the sacred shekel, the shekel is twenty geras (in weight), half a shekel as a portion to Hashem...The wealthy shall not increase and the destitute shall not decrease from half a shekel...to atone for their souls.”** Every Jewish male of the age of twenty and above was required to give a half a silver coin, which was used to purchase communal offerings (*korbanai tzibur*) that brought about atonement. Regardless of one's financial status, one needed to give the half a silver coin – not more and not less. What is the significance of a “half (*machtzis*)” a silver coin? Why were they not required to give a whole silver coin?

The Torah states regarding the specifications of the Holy Ark that contained the Testament (Torah), **“They shall make an Ark...two and a half cubits in length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height.”** Baal Haturim explains that the reason the specifications of the Ark had half measures was to indicate that in order for one to have the capacity to acquire and retain Torah, one needs to break his character traits. It is only when one is humbled that one becomes worthy of being a receptacle for Torah. Therefore, the concept of “half (*machtzis*)” connotes humility.

The basis for sin is when one feels a sense of entitlement and empowerment. If one were to give more than the half a coin because of his financial capability, it would not qualify because it would be considered as if he was flaunting his wealth. This lack of humility is an impediment for atonement, thus undermining the purpose of the *machtzis ha'shekel*. A uniformity and anonymity must be maintained among the Jewish people to demonstrate the characteristic trait of humility.

It is interesting to note that Baal Haturim explains that the numerical value (*gematria*) of the word “*esrim* (twenty)”, which was the weight of the half silver coin, is the same numerical value of the words “*asher v'daal* – the wealthy and the poor man.” The weight of this coin indicates that there is no differentiation between the wealthy and the poor. All Jews must see themselves as being of equal value in order to be eligible for atonement. In addition, the obligation of the *machtzis ha'shekel* begins at the age of twenty (*esrim*) and above – once again emphasizing the necessity of Jews seeing themselves in a humble context.

The Torah tells us that in order for an offering to be qualified as a sacrifice it must be unblemished (*tamim*). This level of perfection is required because the sacrifice is brought to G'd, Who is perfect. In order for the sacrifice to be valid, it must reflect G'd's characteristic of perfection.

A Jew has an obligation of declaring his belief in the Unity of G'd (Echad/One). Maharal of Prague explains that the numerical value of the word “*echad* (one) is thirteen. The Jewish people are comprised of thirteen tribes– twelve who were given a share in the Land of Israel and one (Levy), who did not. The fact that the Jewish people are comprised of thirteen tribes, reflects the characteristic of G'd, which is *echad/Unity*. Maharal explains further that not only do the Jewish people reflect G'd's Unity in number, but also within the infrastructure of the Tribes themselves.

The most spiritual of the thirteen tribes was the tribe of Levy, who did not sin with the Golden Calf. They were thus chosen to be the officiants of G'd. In order to indicate the unique status of the Tribe of Levy, they are classified with the letter “*aleph*” (one). Of the four wives of Yaakov two of them were Matriarchs (Rachel and Leah) of the Jewish people and the other two were considered concubines/maidservants (Bilhah and Zilpah). The Matriarchs, who were of special spiritual status, bore for Yaakov eight sons- Leah mothered six and Rachel

mothered two. The number eight is connoted with the letter “ches”. The wives of Yaakov who were maidservants, bore him four sons, which is connoted in Hebrew with the letter “dahled.” Identifying the various levels of spirituality contained within the infrastructure of the tribes of Israel: there is the tribe of Levy which is represented through the “aleph”, there are the children of the Matriarchs which are represented through the letter “ches”, and there are the children of the maidservants represented through the letter “dahled.” Combined, they equal/spell the word “echad (one).” Therefore, the Unity of G’d is reflected within the infrastructure of the Jewish people.

If the wealthy person were to give more than the half silver coin or the needy person were to give less, it would be a breach in the characteristic of “echad”/unity of the Jewish people. Just as the sacrifice needed to be unblemished/perfect in its physicality in order to reflect the perfection of G’d, so too did the *machtzis ha’shekel* need to be given within the context of unity among the Jewish people to reflect the unity of G’d.

2. The Fruits of One’s Choice

The Midrash cites a verse from Ecclesiastes, “Sweet is the sleep of the laborer— whether he eats a small or a large amount. The fullness of the wealthy man does not allow him to sleep.” King Solomon is addressing the various predicaments of the devoutly righteous who invest the years of their lives in Torah study...In one situation, an individual engages in Torah study and mitzvos from the age of ten until he passes away at the age of thirty. Another individual toils in Torah study and mitzvos from the age of ten until he passes away at the age of eighty. Perhaps one would say that the one who toiled in Torah and mitzvos for seventy years is more deserving of reward than the one who only toiled for twenty years. To this, King Solomon responds, ‘whether he eats a small or large amount ...’ Meaning, the one who lived for thirty years could come before G’d and say, ‘If You had not taken me in the middle of my days, I would have lived longer and would toiled for additional years in Torah and mitzvos.’ Therefore, the level of reward for the one who lived less years is no less than the one who had toiled during his lengthy life.”

The Midrash continues, “Where do we see a proof of this? The Torah tells us that Moshe served the Jewish people for forty years and lived until the age of one hundred and twenty. Shmuel the Prophet had only lived for fifty-two years during which he carried the burden of the

Jewish people. Although, Moshe and Shmuel served the Jewish people for different lengths of time (Shmuel had passed away at a younger age) they are as deserving as one another. As the verse in Psalms equates them. It states, ‘Moshe and Aaron were among His priests and Shmuel was among those who invoke His Name...’”

The Torah tells us that there was a particular sin offering that was brought in the Temple, whose species was determined by one’s financial status. The wealthy individual was obligated to bring an animal as his sin offering. The needy person brought a bird for his sin offering. The Gemara in Tractate Menachos explains that although the wealthy man brought a meat offering of significant value that exuded a pleasant fragrance when roasted and the poor man brought a bird offering of minor value which exuded a foul odor because of the burning of its feathers, the Torah states regarding both of these offerings, “Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma.” The Gemara states, “From this we learn that “Regardless of how much or how little one does, as long as it is done with the proper intent for the sake of G’d, they are valued identically.”

One can only succeed to the degree of his potential, which is endowed to him by G’d. If one is given a short lifespan or is allocated limited finances, he must make due and address his potential within that context. He is required to invest his life in spirituality with a proper intent. G’d does not expect one to be more than he is meant to be.

The Mishna in Tractate Makkos tells us that if the court sentenced an individual to death and subsequently it was revealed that the witnesses that gave testimony to bring about the verdict were conspiring, if the death penalty was not yet carried out, the witnesses are put to death. Rebbe Akiva states if the conspiring witnesses are held fully culpable for their evil intent although it did not come to fruition, how much more so should the one who intended to do a mitzvah and was not able to bring it to fruition be fully deserving of its reward. Thus, if one lived a life of Torah and mitzvos and was taken by G’d before he was able to carry out his spiritual aspirations, he is fully accredited for what he had intend to accomplish.

The Torah states in the Portion of Chayei Sarah, “Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years these were the years of Sarah’s life.” If Sarah had lived 127 years, it is obvious that these were the years of her life. Why does the verse conclude with the words “these were the years of Sarah’s life”- seemingly it is superfluous? Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that

although Sarah passed away at the age of 127, which was before her intended time, she was fully accredited for all the years she would have lived as a devoutly righteous woman. The reason Sarah passed away prematurely was because satan had informed her that Avraham had bound her only child Yitzchak to be slaughtered as a sacrifice. Sarah's life was fully invested in doing the Will of G'd. Every moment of her existence she yearned to bring about more. She was only denied her spiritual aspirations because of the circumstances that came upon her. Therefore, she is fully accredited for all of the years she would have lived. This is the meaning of the conclusion of the verse, **“these were the years of Sarah's life.”**

Rambam writes in The Laws of Repentance that every Jew can be as great as Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe, the *“Ish Elokim,”* had a direct relationship with G'd that was at the level of “face to face” (within the context of prophecy) and was chosen to be the conduit of Torah to the Jewish people. How is it possible that every Jew could ascend to that level? Moshe's accomplishment was that he had actualized his potential. This reality is within the ability of every Jew. If a Jew meets his potential with which he was endowed, his accomplishment is no less valued than that of Moshe.

3. Shabbos – a Day of Focus

The Torah states regarding the Shabbos, **“Hashem said to Moshe saying, ‘...You must observe My Shabbos, for it is a sign between Me and you for generations...You shall observe the Shabbos, for it is holy to you; its desecrator shall be put to death...for six days work may be done and the seventh day is a day of complete rest...’”** After describing the importance and significance of the Shabbos and its observance the Torah continues, **“The Children of Israel shall observe (v'shamru) the Shabbos, to make (laasos) the Shabbos an eternal covenant...”** Seemingly, the reiteration of the observance of the Shabbos is superfluous.

The Torah states when Yosef had shared his dreams in the presence of his father, Yaakov, **“Aviv shamar es ha davar - His father awaited/anticipated these things (to come about).”** Meaning, after hearing Yosef's dreams, Yaakov awaited with anticipation for them to come to fruition. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that similarly, the Torah uses the term *“v'shamru”* regarding the observance of the Shabbos to indicate that one must await its coming throughout the week with anticipation. During the week one is permitted to engage in all activity as long as it is in conformance

with the Torah. However, on the Shabbos one must refrain from all creative activities. Rather than perceiving this restriction as a burden, the Jew must appreciate its value and thus anticipate the coming of the Shabbos. This is because the Shabbos is the most holy and special day of the week.

Since Shabbos is a time that it is forbidden to engage in creative activity and it must be observed as a day of rest, one could mistakenly perceive its value as a day to recoup one's energies from the physical toil of the week. The Torah is telling us that this is not so. Ohr HaChaim explains that the Torah uses the term *“laasos”* (to make) to indicate that one must actively engage in the holiness of the day. The Shabbos is not a time to be preoccupied with the physicality of the day, but rather one must focus on its spiritual value and observe the Shabbos for its own sake.

Chazal tell us that Shabbos is a day that G'd enters into existence at a level unlike any other day. It is similar to the King entering into His Kingdom. Therefore, one should anticipate (*v'shamru*) His coming, and dedicate himself to doing His Will (*laasos*) on the Shabbos. Since the King enters into the home of every Jew on that day, one must conduct himself with proper reverence and illation – indicating the sense of privilege to be able to host the King.

The Midrash tells us that every day of the week has its “mate.” For example, the mate of the first day of the week is the second day and the mate of the third day is the fourth day, etc. The Midrash continues, “Shabbos came before G'd and asked, ‘Every day of the week has its mate. What is my mate?’ G'd responded, ‘the Jewish people shall complete you (be your mate).’” When the Jewish people observe (*laasos*) the Shabbos properly, they complete existence.

The six days of Creation were to prepare the setting for G'd to enter into existence on the Seventh Day (Shabbos). This is similar to the concept of **“Build for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst”** (regarding the building of the Mishkan). The Gemara tells us that the juxtaposition of the Shabbos to the building of the Mishkan is to teach us that the Shabbos cannot be violated for the sake of the building of the Mishkan. In addition, this juxtaposition teaches us that the thirty-nine classifications of creative activities that were necessary for the building of the Mishkan are the same creative activities that are forbidden on the Shabbos. Just as the Mishkan was the medium for G'd to dwell in the midst of the Jewish people, so too is the setting of the Shabbos the

context in which G'd dwells in their midst. In order to facilitate this, one must be fully engaged with a proper mindset (*laasos*) in the observance of the Shabbos.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, "A non-Jew who observes the Shabbos is liable for the death penalty." The Midrash asks, "If a non-Jew wishes to observe the Shabbos as the Jew, why should he be held liable and deserve to forfeit his life?" The Midrash answers, "It is similar to one who eavesdrops on an intimate conversation that is taking place between the king and his queen." The non-Jew observing the Shabbos is the equivalent of this level of infringement.

The Shabbos is a time of intimacy between G'd and the Jewish people. As the Gemara states, "Shabbos is a semblance of the world to come." The world to come is characterized to be the most intimate level of relationship between G'd and the Jew. Therefore, the Jew must anticipate the coming of the Shabbos because of its spiritual dimension.

4. *The Awesome Power of Torah*

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah asks, if one had performed all of the mitzvos of Purim on its proper day and subsequently because of certain circumstances that arose, the Sanhedrin determined that another month must be added to the calendar (a second Adar), is one obligated to perform again the mitzvos of Purim on the 14th of the second Adar? The Gemara concludes that must repeat all of the mitzvos that were performed in the first month again during the second month of Adar. Why is the second month of Adar considered to be so significant that one needs to perform the mitzvos of Purim again?

The basis for the question – whether the first month is primary or the second is based on the location of the month of Adar in the calendar. The month of Adar always follows the month of Shvat and precedes the month of Nissan. Normally, Purim is celebrated during Adar which follows the month of Shvat. If this is so, then the first Adar should be considered the primary Adar. However, simultaneously, the month of Adar, although it follows Shvat it precedes the month of Nissan. Meaning, Purim is normally celebrated before the month of Nissan. If so, during a leap year, Purim should be celebrated during the second Adar, which is the month that precedes Nissan. The Gemara concludes that one must celebrate Purim during the second Adar because "We juxtapose one redemption to another redemption."

The festival of Purim commemorates the redemption of the Jewish people from the decree of Haman, that every Jewish man, woman, and child should be annihilated. Although their predicament seemed to be hopeless, at the last moment G'd caused the decree to be withdrawn and the Jewish people were given permission to destroy the Amalekites. Since the month of Nissan was the time that G'd had redeemed the Jewish people from the Egyptian bondage, it is therefore appropriate to celebrate Purim in a setting of redemption, which is the month that is associated with Nissan.

We are able to see from the question that is posed in the Gemara that the 14th and 15th day of the first month of Adar also has relevance to commemorating the Purim miracle. In fact, normative Jewish law dictates that one does not recite certain prayers on these days because it assumes they assume a semi-holiday status. It is because the month of Adar inherently has relevance to redemption. The only question is which Adar is most appropriate to have relevance to celebration.

The celebration of Purim is day of commemoration of the victory over the Amalekites, those who personify evil. Haman, the prime minister of the Persian Empire, was the one responsible who had initiated the decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child. He was a direct descendant of Agog, the king of the Amalekites.

The first nation to attack the Jewish people after their miraculous redemption from Egypt were the Amalekites. After the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, the world stood in awe of the Jewish people. The aura that the Jewish people had possessed was a sanctification of G'd's Name. What G'd had done openly for them had never previously taken place in the history of existence. The Torah states, "**Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim.**" The Midrash explains that the value of identifying the location of the battle against Amalek as Rephidim is because it alludes to the quality of the Torah study of the Jewish people. It was done in a haphazard and laid-back manner. They were not fully engrossed in the Torah that they had been given. As a result of not being fully engaged in their Torah study, the Jewish people became vulnerable to attack by the Amalekites.

There is a positive commandment to remember what Amalek had done to the Jewish people when they had left Egypt as well as to obliterate their name from under the heavens. Despite the fact that the world stood in awe of the Jewish people because of what had transpired, the

Amalekites were not affected by the miraculous events. They therefore chose to attack them. Chazal depict Amalek as the fool who had jumped into a scolding bath. "Although the fool is burnt, he nevertheless cools the bath for all those who follow him." Because the Amalekites attacked the Jewish people, they dispelled the awesome aura that surrounded them. They perpetrated an act that had far-reaching ramifications. Until the end of time, their attack is the root of all the desecration of G'd's Name. If the aura of the Jewish people had not been diminished, the world would have continued to see them as G'd's people and would have thus had a potential to achieve a level of truth. Therefore, Amalek deserves to be obliterated.

Had the Jewish people not been lackadaisical in their Torah study after they were redeemed, they would have not been vulnerable to the attack of Amalek. If sufficient Torah study would have protected the Jewish people from Amalek, how much more so would it provide them with protection from all of their enemies. The Jew is under constant attack from the nations of the world. As it states, "The Jewish people are the equivalent of the sheep that are surrounded by seventy wolves," which is symbolic of the seventy (root) nations of the world. Virtually every nation is anticipating the demise of the Jewish people and the destruction of Israel. It is only because the Jewish people are not sufficiently immersed in Torah study, that they are vulnerable to their enemies. The Torah states regarding Yitzchak's quantification of Yaakov, "**Hakol kol Yaakov v'hayadayim yidei Esav - the voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav.**" Chazal explain this statement to mean that as long as the Jewish people utilize their "voice" as the "voice" of Yaakov (symbolic of Torah study) then they will not be subject to the hands of Esav (Amalek). Therefore, the Jewish people must engage sufficiently in Torah to be protected from all of their enemies and to ultimately merit redemption.

5. Aaron's Qualifying Characteristic as High Priest (from Tetzaveh)

The Torah states regarding the Chosen (Breastplate of Judgment) that was worn by the High Priest, "**And Aaron shall bear judgment of the Children of Israel on his heart...**" Sforno explains, "**And Aaron shall bear judgment of the Children of Israel on his heart...**" to mean, "Aaron should pray on behalf of the Jewish people so that they should be meritorious in judgment." It is the responsibility of the High Priest to pray on behalf of his generation that they should be

protected and merit favorable judgment before G'd. Why did Aaron merit to have the Breastplate upon his heart?

The Torah tells us that when G'd appeared to Moshe at the burning bush, He had entered into a seven-day dialogue with him. Moshe was told by G'd that he was to be the Redeemer of Israel. Moshe was obstinate in accepting this mission. Moshe resisted accepting the role of Redeemer because he was concerned that it would slight his older brother Aaron. G'd told Moshe, to the contrary that when Aaron would be made aware that his brother was chosen to be the Redeemer, he would go out and greet him with "**joy in his heart.**" Chazal tell us that because Aaron had "**joy in his heart,**" he merited to wear the Breastplate of Judgment upon his heart. Although Aaron was Moshe's elder brother he did not have a trace of envy but rather he had joy for the good fortune which came upon Moshe. Because Aaron possessed such a pure heart, he merited that as High Priest, the Breastplate of Judgment should be worn upon his heart.

Rav Y.Y. Ruderman zt'l (Baltimore Rosh Ha'Yeshivah had asked, "Why do Chazal tell us that Aaron merited to wear the Breastplate on his heart because he was happy for his brother Moshe? If in fact Aaron was the spiritual equivalent of his brother Moshe, then he should have merited this vestment because of his special dimension of spirituality." He answered, "From the words of Chazal we are able to understand that one's innate special character traits are primary." However, one is able to understand why the Torah focuses on Aaron's special heart in another way.

The Torah reveals that the primary responsibility of the High Priest was to pray on behalf of the Jewish people. He needed to pray that G'd should render on their behalf a positive judgment. Unless the High Priest possessed a purity of heart, this level of concern for every Jew would not be possible. Therefore, the Torah quantifies Aaron through his purity of heart to qualify him as High Priest.

The Torah tells us that if a person kills inadvertently, he must flee to one of the cities of refuge that is designated by the Torah (*Aarei Miklot*). He must remain there until the passing of the High Priest. The Gemara in Tractate Makkos asks, "Why is the release of this individual from the city of refuge contingent on the passing of the High Priest?" The Gemara explains that if the High Priest would have prayed sufficiently, this tragedy would not have occurred. The Jewish people would have merited a level of Mercy that would have protected them from tragedy. Since the High Priest has a

degree of culpability for the inadvertent killing, it is clear that he had failed. He failed because his heart was not pure enough to be sensitive for the need of every Jew. It is not enough for the High Priest to be a devoutly righteous person, he requires a special purity of heart.

It is interesting to note that if a new High Priest was installed after the inadvertent murder had taken place, but before the verdict of the court, the murderer must remain confined to the city of refuge until the passing of the new High Priest. The Gemara in Tractate Makkos asks, "If the tragedy had already occurred before the new High Priest was installed, what is his culpability?" The Gemara answers, "The culpability of the new High Priest is attributed to a failing of his. He could have prayed that the defendant in question should have been found innocent rather than guilty. The incarceration of this person is attributed to the failing of the High Priest, that he did not evoke sufficient Mercy from G'd. Therefore, the inadvertent murder must remain in the city of refuge until the passing of the new High Priest."

Aaron was the first and most special High Priest. His heart was uniquely pure. He thus had a special love for every Jew. He was dedicated to the welfare of the Jewish people. A prerequisite for a High Priest to succeed in his role is to reflect the characteristic of his forbearer.