



PARSHAS KI SISA & PARSHAS PARAH

SHALOSH SEUDOS TORAH

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The Greatness of the Jewish People

Introduction

The Rebbe of Ropshitz zt"l, in his sefer (book) 'Zera Kodesh,' writes that on Shabbos Parshas Ki Sisa the light of Purim still shines and that it completes Purim. This must be understood.

After sinning with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu requested of Hashem that He reveal the ways by which He runs the world. Hashem responded by teaching Moshe Rabbeinu 'The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.'

Why did the Jewish people merit receiving 'The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy' after the grievous sin of the Golden Calf?

The mitzvah of 'Parah Adumah' (the Red Heifer) is a 'chok' – a commandment for which we do not know the rationale. However, Rashi quotes his teacher, R' Moshe HaDarshan, who gave the following explanation for the mitzvah of Parah Adumah:

After the giving of the Torah, the decree of death meted out to Adam was abolished. However, because of the sin of the Golden Calf the decree of death was reinstated. Therefore, it is a cow – the mother of the calf - that is processed into the waters that cleanse from the impurity caused by contact with a corpse. It is the task of the mother to clean up after the child.

Why is the mitzvah of Parah Adumah termed a 'Chok' if there is a reason for it?

A Puzzling Mishnah

The Mishnah¹ describes the system by which the mitzvah of Terumas Hadeshen (the removal of the ashes) was allocated to a specific Kohen (priest).

In the beginning, anyone who wished to fulfill the mitzvah did so. [Later when it became more popular,] those who wanted to do the mitzvah would run up the ramp of the Mizbe'ach, and the one who arrived first merited fulfilling the mitzvah. If there was a tie, they would make a lottery [between all the Kohanim²].

There are a few difficulties with this Mishnah. First of all, if two Kohanim won the race, why make a drawing between all the Kohanim and not just between the two winners?

Furthermore, the entire idea of racing seems strange. Only the young athletic Kohanim should merit performing the mitzvah and the elderly, saintly Kohanim should be excluded? Athletic prowess is not a Jewish value; it is a relic of Ancient Greece. In the Bais HaMikdash, of all places, the fastest runner takes the trophy?!

The Race is Won by the Most Worthy

King Shlomo teaches, "לא לקלים המרוץ³", 'not to the nimble [person] is the [winning of the] race.' The frenetically ambitious man will succeed no more than his more laid back counterpart. Every person receives what is prepared for him from heaven; anxiously chasing one's goal will not further its attainment.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim once saw a man panting and puffing as he sped down the street. The Rebbe asked the man, "Where are you running to?"

The man answered, "To my livelihood, of course!"
The Rebbe retorted, "How do you know that you are running *toward* your livelihood? Maybe you are running *away* from it?"

However, this is not evident in daily life. It seems to us that the ambitious succeed and the incompetent fail. This is because Hashem has hidden Himself in the course of nature.

In the Bais HaMikdash, however, the existence of Divine providence was obvious. There, it was evident that "לא לקלים המרוץ". In the Bais HaMikdash, it was the most worthy man who was the winner. The one who was most deserving – be it the elderly, clumsy or swift Kohen - won the race up the ramp to the altar and merited performing the mitzvah of 'Terumas Hadeshen.'

We now understand why it was proper to delegate a mitzvah through racing. What still needs to be explained is why - when there was a tie - a lottery would be drawn between all of the Kohanim and not just the two winners⁴.

Two Systems Through Which Hashem Runs the World

The usual manner through which Hashem runs the world is according to merit. The worthy receive blessing and the opposite is also true. Bounty is bestowed upon the deserving, and punishment is meted out to sinners.

However, sometimes there is a revelation of the most sublime of spiritual spheres: רצון העליון - Divine Favor. The world is then conducted through the principles of this transcendent world. From רצון העליון, Hashem conducts the world above the constraints of reward and punishment.

In this world merit is not considered. It is the place where the fundamental relationship the Jewish nation has with Hashem - that they are the children of Hashem – comes to the fore.

A son may be a better or worse son according to how he relates to his parents. However, his actions make him not less or more of a child. It is possible for his relationship with his parents to deteriorate; however, his being a child is immutable. A father and mother are equally parents to their most dedicated child as to their most aggravating, antagonizing, and rebellious one. (In fact, in a case of danger they would *instinctively* endanger their lives to save them both.)

The Prophet Yeshaya chastised the Jewish people calling them, 'Children who do evil! Destructive children!'⁵ Our sages read between the lines and deduce from this verse that even when the Jewish people are destructive and do evil, they are still referred to as the children of the living G-d⁶.

It is from the lofty realms of רצון העליון that the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy emanate. In רצון העליון, the paternal compassion of Hashem does away with any consideration of the worthiness – or the lack thereof - of the Jewish people.

Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur, the lofty world of רצון העליון is revealed and Hashem cleanses the Jewish people of their sins despite their unworthiness.

On Yom Kippur, we purify ourselves, "לפני ה'7" - simply translated as – facing Hashem. The Baal HaTanya explains that this refers to the lofty spiritual sphere of רצון העליון that is even above - ק, ו, ק, י¹ – the four letters of the name of Hashem.

רצון העליון is rooted in the point of the 'ו' of the name of Hashem. From this world of unconditional love, stems the atonement of Yom Kippur.

The pardoning of Yom Kippur takes place primarily through a goat that is cast down a jagged mountain. This goat is not a sacrifice and its blood and fat are not burned on the altar, because it is under the dominion of the evil powers⁸. Nevertheless, the Jewish people were cleansed of their sin through it.

This symbolized that even if the sacrifice of Jewish people is not worthy of ascending the altar because they are dominated by their evil side; nevertheless, they are purified.

The Compassion of a Parent to his Sick Child

A child who is warned, "Do not climb that tall and dangerous tree!" will be punished if he disobeys. However, if he climbs the tree, falls off and is severely injured, his parents won't punish him – to the contrary, they will rush to his rescue.

The external 'reward and punishment' mode in which parents deal with their children – if you are good you get a candy, if you are naughty you get a potch - disappears when the child is in danger and is replaced by the fundamental essence of the relationship; he is their child! Their abundant parental mercy will be aroused – "Oh my! My child is in danger! I must save him!"

After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu entreated Hashem not to destroy the Jewish people. He began with the words "אֲנִי הִטָּא הָעַם הַזֶּה הַטָּאָה גְּדֹלָה"⁹, 'Please! This nation has committed a very great sin!' What kind of defense is the argument that 'They committed a very great sin!'?

The Jewish people damaged themselves very critically through the sin of the Golden Calf; they were in grave spiritual danger. Moshe Rabbeinu exclaimed – 'Now is not the time to punish them for climbing the tree! You have to save your child!'

Through this argument, Moshe Rabbeinu merited the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy are rooted in the world of רצון העליון - where the relationship of Hashem to the Jewish people is that of a father to his child.

In a time of crisis, Hashem will view the Jewish people not by the merit of their worthiness, but by their fundamental essence - as His children.

Gorel – A Lottery

The manner by which Hashem conducts the affairs of His nation through רצון העליון is also termed Gorel, a lottery.

When someone works hard and earns a lot of money, we can explain why he deserves to have it. We can also understand why a son should inherit a fortune from his father. However, we can neither explain, nor understand why a specific person should be the lucky winner of a lottery.

¹ The ק is instead of the ה of the name of Hashem. This is in order to avoid writing this supremely holy name of G-d.

A lottery is above logic; it is rooted in the sublime spheres of רצון העליון - the world where everything is in accordance with the incomprehensible will of Hashem, which we cannot understand or explain¹⁰. (This concept was explained at length last week.)

Explaining the Mishnah Quoted Above

Sometimes two Kohanim would tie in their race up the ramp of the altar to fulfill the mitzvah of 'Terumas Hadeshen.' This would seem to mean that they were of equal merit. This, however, cannot be.

No two people are equal. Each person occupies his niche in a vertical chain which comprises the Jewish people. Two people may be on very similar - but not identical - spiritual levels.

If there was a tie, it meant that on this day the world was not being run according to merits. In heaven, only the essence of each Jew was being considered. The essence of each Jew is that he is a child of G-d; and in that sense, all Jews are equal, and it is possible for two Kohanim to tie. (This was explained at length last week.) The system being utilized in heaven on that day was that of 'Gorel.'

Therefore, a Gorel would be the only way to determine who would merit the mitzvah of 'Terumas Hadeshen. Furthermore, all Kohanim were included in the Gorel because they are no less than the first two winners.

Purim is a Day of Gorel

The miracle of Purim occurred during an era when the Jewish people were very sinful – many of them had intermarried. Furthermore, almost all of the Jews had eaten from and enjoyed the sinful meal of Achashveirosh.

Astoundingly, it was precisely as the Jewish people were sinning by eating from the banquet of Achashveirosh that the cogs in the miracle of Purim began turning: Vashti was killed to vacate her position for Esther, through whom the miracle would take place¹¹.

The sphere of רצון העליון was revealed at that time. Our Merciful Heavenly Father was engaged in orchestrating events so as to save the Jewish people spiritually by arousing them to repent through the threat of annihilation, and then to rescue them.

Therefore, Purim is named in commemoration of the 'pur' – the lot – that Haman drew. The entire miracle of Purim is one which emanates from the world of Gorel.

Mordechai was questioned, "Why do you violate the command of the king?" when he refused to bow to Haman. He answered, "I'm a Jew."

This exchange is homiletically understood to mean as follows: The servants of Achashveirosh, the gentiles, scorned Mordechai, "Why do you violate the commands of the King of the world? You are an unworthy Jew!" Mordechai answered, "No matter how worthy I am, I'm a Jew!"

In the world of רצון העליון only our fundamental essence as Jews counts. Therefore the custom by tzaddikim on Purim was to sing the folksong: "וואס מיר זענען, זענען מיר, אבער אידן זענען" "וואס מיר! – 'Whatever we are, we are, but we are Jews!'"

This is also the meaning of drinking wine on Purim. Through becoming intoxicated we give up our logical faculties. We are in the realm of רצון העליון, a world above logical understanding. In this sphere, only Hashem understands what is happening.

The Purification of the Parah Adumah

The Parah Adumah is prepared outside of the Bais HaMikdash as the goat of Yom Kippur is. The Parah Adumah atones for the sin of the Golden Calf; it cleanses from the impurity caused by death which is the result of this sin.

The impurity of death is so strong that even the purifying waters of the mikvah are not sufficient to remove it. There is a difference between the purification of the mikvah and the purification of the waters of the Parah Adumah.

In a mikvah, one must descend, bend down and completely submerge himself in the purifying waters to attain purification. On the other hand, the Parah Adumah waters are sprayed upon the person. This symbolized that for the man who is incapable of even bending himself into the purifying waters, the waters will come to him. He can remain in his place and Hashem will sprinkle the purifying waters on him, as the verse of the Haftorah of Shabbos Parshas Parah states – "וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מֵיִם טְהוֹרִים"¹², 'I will sprinkle upon you purifying waters.'

The nations of the world taunt the Jewish people, what kind of mitzvah is this Parah Adumah? Why should you be deserving of atonement for such a grievous sin as the Golden Calf? Hashem replies – this is a 'Chok!' You cannot understand it!

There is an explanation for the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, as R' Moshe HaDarshan taught – to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf - **but the reason has no reason**. Why should Hashem purify the Jewish people from such a terrible sin? There is no logical explanation; just because we are children of Hashem. It is rooted in רצון העליון.

The sphere of רצון העליון is revealed every Shalosh Seudos. Therefore, there is a custom by many to have the lights extinguished during Shalosh Seudos. With the light of the day we can discern reality; when it is dark, we understand nothing. In the world of רצון העליון, we are clueless.

Haman was Rewarded for his Advice

The Targum Yonoson on the Megillah states that 'Memuchan,' who is listed among the seven ministers who advised Achashveirosh to execute Vashti, was really Haman. Later, the Targum Yonoson states that in his lonesomeness after Vashti was killed, Achashveirosh had these seven ministers hung for advising him to kill her.

If the Memuchan mentioned among Achashveirosh's seven advisors was Haman, and all of these advisors were hung, how did Haman survive to play the leading role in the story of Purim?

This question was asked of Harav Chaim Kanievsky shlit"a, who answered that Haman must have escaped prior to being hung. However, the question remains; how did he return and achieve his political power if the king was so upset with him?

Haman promotion occurred after Esther thwarted the assassination plot of Bigson and Seresh.

What must have happened is as follows: Haman indeed escaped, as Harav Kanievsky said, since he feared Achashveirosh would kill him for advising him to kill Vashti.

However, when Achashveirosh married Esther, he was filled with joy and happiness. She was much more beloved to him than Vashti, especially after she saved his life. On the contrary, he realized that Vashti would never have saved his life - so poor was their marital harmony.

He realized that this was to the credit of his seven ministers who had advised him to do away with Vashti. He was especially grateful to Memuchan/Haman who was the one who actually gave him the advice.

When the news reached Haman that Esther had saved the king's life, he knew that Achashveirosh was no longer angry that Vashti was dead.

He figured that Achashveirosh would now reward him for advising to kill Vashti, because it actually was great advice; Achashveirosh got the great Queen Esther in her stead! Indeed, he returned and 'the king made Haman great'¹³.

Moshe Rabbeinu Demands *his* Reward for his Advice

Hashem wanted to destroy the Jewish people after their sin with the Golden Calf. Moshe Rabbeinu prayed on their behalf and prevented Hashem from doing so.

Hashem is very happy that He did not destroy the Jewish people. After surviving two thousand years of exhausting, harrowing exile, the Jewish people remain loyal as ever to Hashem.

Our generation creates so much pleasure for Hashem!

Our hearts are clogged and we feel almost none of the feeling associated with Judaism that only a few generations before us took for granted. Additionally, we face temptation in one day that our grandparents did not face in a lifetime!

However, despite our suffocating, claustrophobic spiritual vistas, we persist and insist on remaining loyal to Hashem!

Moshe Rabbeinu gazes upon our generation and is awed. He cannot get over us! Such small people; and despite this, they serve Hashem?!

He comes to Hashem and says, "Are You not glad with the advice I gave You – not to destroy this people? Look how much delight they cause You! I want You to reward me for my advice!"

The Zohar¹⁴ states: The first redeemer, Moshe Rabbeinu will be the final redeemer, Mashiach. His soul will unite with the soul of King David, and this will be Mashiach.

As a reward for his advice, Moshe Rabbeinu begs Hashem to allow him to appear as Mashiach and redeem the nation he rescued from the Divine wrath after the Golden Calf.

May Hashem grant Moshe Rabbeinu his wish speedily, and we will joyfully bless Him as the

בונה ירושלים ה'

Hashem, the Builder of Yerushalayim

¹ יומא ריש פ"ב

² רע"ב שם

³ קהלת ט:יא

⁴ ועי"ש בתיו"ט

⁵ ישעי' א:ד

⁶ קידושין לו:א

⁷ ויקרא טז:ל

⁸ רמב"ן פרשת אחרי

⁹ שמות לב:לא

¹⁰ תניא

¹¹ התם סופר

¹² יחזקאל לו:כה

¹³ אסתר ג:א

¹⁴ ה"ג ר"ס ע"ב