

Ki Sisa

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This week's Parsha- Ki Sisa is filled with a roller coaster of events. At first the Parsha begins with the commandment to give the ½ shekel as part of the census of the Jews. It then goes through some services of the Kohanim, it repeats the commandment to keep Shabbos, then it goes into the details of the events of the Chet Haegel, which we subsequently read on all fast days, and we recite the 13 attributes of mercy almost every day that we say Tachanun, and on Yom Kippur, and fast days (Selichot).

The commandment of the ½ Shekel census requirement has a few meanings. First Hashem shows Moshe what the coin looks like, in the image of fire. Then we are required to only give a ½ shekel and no more or less, no matter our economic standing. And this ½ shekel will be used as a "redemption" for our souls. This is because we cannot count people as a number and denigrate a human to just a statistic, rather, we count them for their neshama, and life force that exists within them, as Hashem showed through the coin of fire. The Chassidic masters explain further that a ½ coin was used, because all Jews are incomplete one without the other, like 2 halves coming together to make a whole. Which is why on Yom Kippur, even though I personally may not have sinned all the recitations of Al Chet, I say it on behalf of my brothers and sisters, as we are Areivim Zeh Lo'Zeh, K'Ish echad, B'Bleiv Echad.

This week we commemorate the Yohrzeit of R'Noam Elimelech of Lezinsk. R'Noam Elimelech comments further on the "fiery coin". That money, just like fire has a twofold purpose, it can either be destructive and consuming like fire, or provide good, like fire can do to provide warmth and for cooking. This beautifully connects with a passage from Talmud Pesachim 104a where the rabbis are discussing the nusach of Havdala and the order of the Berachos. Rabi Menachem Bar Simai is quoted and is called a holy one. The gemara ask, why was Rabi Menachem called holy? Because he didn't gaze at the images on the coins. This is either because he was strict to not gaze upon an idol or

because he didn't want to be focused on material wealth, (so it wasn't the image on the coin that he was avoiding looking at, rather, it could just be the coin altogether.) This connects beautifully with this week's parsha, in that it opens with the discussion of money being used for the redemption of the souls, as part of the census. Then we told some of the work of the mishkan and the Kohanim, then we are reminded of Shabbos, then there is the story of the Egel.

The profundity of Rabi Menachem's dissociation with money is how the parsha tells us to live. Not that money isn't important, rather if it is a means to a particularly mundane end, the result may be serving it like an Egel, even if we don't intend on sinning. Whereas if we remember the usage of money is a means to a higher end, (serving Hashem with greater fervor, or to give tzedakah) or to work 6 days and on the 7th to rest and serve Hashem, this would be appropriate. (I heard in a shiur I gave from a person named Ari Friedman, who pointed out that that word מַחְצִית for the ½ Shekel is comprised of 5 letters. The outer two spell Meis-death, the next two spell Chai, and the middle letter Tzaddik is for tzedakah. That by giving tzedakah, one brings about life, and pushes away death. As is pointed out in the Gemara in Shabbos 156b, Rabbi Akiva exclaimed Tzedaka Tatzil Mimoves (that Tzedaka saves a person from death). Furthermore, the ordering of the parsha is how we operate in our lives. We work, and surround ourselves with money, then we sprinkle our lives with service to Hashem. But Hashem reminds us, that if we don't work 6 days to keep Shabbos, which is the ultimate recognition of the Kingship of Hashem over us and the universe, we may result in an egel in our lives.

Which is perhaps why the nusach and discussion in the Gemara in Pesachim about Havdala is poured over. As how does one reenter the mundane after having Shabbos with Hashem, especially at peak holiness at the end of the afternoon on Shabbos? Only once we say Havdala (as the Rebbe explains in different Mamarim) are we "allowed" to reenter the mundane week. The hope is that we imbue the spirituality and holiness from the culmination of creation on Shabbos to reenter the new week. (Which is likely why there is an opinion in the Gemara that reciting Havdala properly can give long life). Similarly, why we say 3 or 7 enunciations of separation. We are calling out and

proclaiming Hashem's sovereignty over us. If we forget this, we will bring an Egel into our lives.

It may be difficult to understand how or why one would serve another idol. Yet, we do, because what seems real, may not actually, be. Similar notion is provided with the fact that the rich not give more or the poor person less. We cannot necessarily believe that a wealthier person has some greater power or potential than someone not in that demographic. We as humans have potential that we have to tap within us. Also, one cannot be swayed that someone who physically has "more" can give more spiritually. Furthermore, what one person gives and sacrifices to give ought not be viewed with more or less value. Hashem equalizes the giving, in that we all collectively have a responsibility, and what may seem like a greater or lesser sacrifice for one or another cannot be assumed. Furthermore, we have a responsibility to our neighbor, and not bring upon Eyin Hara (which Rashi points out happened in King David's time).

Everything on this earth has the potential to have spirituality drawn out from it. (Even the incense from Mor D'ror which may not have come from a "kosher" source could still be used in the service of the Beis Hamikdash).

Perhaps the type of idol the Jews made at the time was intentional. The fact that it was a calf, and not some other animal or image. We have discussed before that the calf and chariots was used by Yosef when he sent a message to his father Ya'akov in order to allay Ya'akov's concern that he wasn't responsible for his "community", like when an Eglarufa is used to recuse a town of its responsibility over the unknown death of a migrant found in a field. Eglarufa shows on the communal responsibility we have to each other. If our collective consciousness is improperly placed, we can run the risk of serving an Egel (which looks real, feels real, sounds real, but may not actually be real.) Which is why the shekel was used as a forced measure of the census, as it is not obvious that people will support one another or our community as we ought to (for various reasons and in various ways, not necessarily monetarily).

And so, we can learn from R' Noam Elimelech's twin brother R' Zushe of Anipoli, who on his death bed was crying. When his chassidim asked him why he was sad, R' Zushe stated, when I come up to

heaven, I will not be asked why I wasn't like Rambam or Moshe Rabbeinu, I will be asked why I wasn't like R' Zushe.

The coin of fire is our potential. And even in the mundane and physical world, we ought to remember that Shabbos, and Hashem is the most important, if we don't we run the risk of serving an Egel. The whole 6 days that we work, is to serve Hashem, and not any other Egel. We are only "allowed" to work 6 days, because of the Havdala we say and through which we recognize and continue to crown Hashem with glory. We must bring the 3 or 7 expressions of Havdala (which are the levushim or the 7 middos tovos) of Shabbos into our physical week. An egel is also the loshon of Igul, which means a circle. Sometimes we chase our tails and cycle through what seems like a never-ending cycle, as opposed to a trajectory which follows a path in a direction with ups and downs. If our weeks and lives are linear in a direction onwards and upwards (even with its challenges) we are maximizing our potential, whereas if we feel like our lives are spiraling, and seem to repeat itself one day after another, we run the risk of living like an egel. (Which is why we are even called Poshim-mistakers- because we are our own limitations- in most instances- which is why even we as poshim can be meileim mitzvos Krimon- filled with mitzvos like a pomegranate-because we may physically be performing an act- because we have to, but not with its full fiery potential. This is not to say even if we aren't fully invested in a mitzvah, we are performing that it isn't counted, rather, that is a cyclical attitude, and we ought to try and recognize this, and when possible, bring a Chayus into our lives, and mitzvos. Tosafos and Rashbam on Pesachim 102b state, we don't perform mitzvos in bundles, so we don't make them like chores.)

Hashem ordered the Torah in a specific chronology for a purpose. I think that the way Parshas Ki Sisa is organized is pertinent to our lives and applies today as much as ever.

Good Shabbos