

Parshas Ki Sisa

This week's Parsha, Ki Sisa, is pivotal, as it is the Parsha that recounts the sin of the Golden Calf, which was a major inflection point in Jewish history. The recent birth of the nation, the promise of the Torah, and the redemption from Egypt would have been enough reason not to stray so quickly and diametrically from the critical first laws, i.e., not to serve other gods. Avraham became our forefather because he famously recognized G-d's omnipresence, even as the rest of the world was pagan and idolatrous. Yet, the Jews got into a negative groove and collectively sinned.

There is a Rashi in Perek 29, Posuk 34 in Bereishis (I was learning it with my daughter for her school), and there Yakov names Levi (different than the other children of Leah who she named- look in the pesukim the word is in the feminine, versus this Posuk, where it is in the masculine, i.e. Yakov named Levi), and Rashi answers that the reason for this was because Malach Gavriel came bearing 24 gifts for Levi at his birth, for his eventual priesthood, these gifts 'accompanied' him, and therefore Yakov called him Levi (from the same root). This explanation is given even though Leah, upon Levi's birth, exclaimed that "her husband would become attached to me" as the reason. Why then would Rashi

explain this? Furthermore, the priesthood was originally supposed to be a firstborn job (as we know with Esav, who was "mevazeh the bechoros" see Rashi there). Then, because of the sin of the golden calf, the firstborns who took part in the sin lost that responsibility, and it was endowed to the tribe of Levi, who didn't participate in the sin.

Based on Rashi's explanation, it would seem that this was meant to happen. Arguably, it was, since it is what occurred, but when in the order of the world did this change take place? Meaning it would seem the Jews were set up for disaster. The answer could be that sin is a normal course of being human, and the Torah teaches us this by recounting the story, and more so, changing the course of the script of how things were supposed to be, to what they became. This is because, at the end of the day, Hashem empowers us to make decisions and act how we need to in this world. The critical takeaway is that Torah contains the way to act. This is evident in this Parsha. Firstly, the Parsha begins with the ½ Shekel, which is a redemption coin that shows a) Hashem's love for us¹ and b) that we have a path to forgiveness, i.e. that a physical object can be used (offered) as a mode of forgiveness. And we read this section of the Parsha in the weeks leading up to Purim, as an addendum to the weekly reading to remind us about Hashem's love

¹ Every time the Jews were counted it showed Hashem's love for us even after the golden calf.

for us, and our connection to Hashem. Next, the Parsha recounts the engineers and architects of the Mishkan's vessel and structure, who were endowed with the knowledge, understanding, and information to complete the task. This tells us that Hashem is the one who blesses us with the power to do what we need to with tools that are special to us. Because in this world, we are tasked to do what we can as Jews to bring light and spread light, and we cannot say we don't have the tools to. There is always a way, whether in our thoughts, speech or actions. The section of the building of the Mishkan is connected to the commandment to keep Shabbos, which teaches us 1) that the laws of Shabbos are derived from the activity of the building of the Mishkan, 2) the words used are that Shabbos is a sign to connect and live out the idea that Hashem is our master. So even though there may be sin, keeping Shabbos is another way to connect to Hashem, as it is the crucially obvious way to show our servitude to the Master of the Universe. And Hashem concludes there that by keeping Shabbos, He makes us holy, but Kadesh (holy) is also separate, meaning this will differentiate us from among the nations of the world who don't have Shabbos, and therefore a way to recognize Hashem (although if we think about it, the universal standard week has Saturday as a day of rest; over time with our work, we will enlighten the world to Hashem.

Then the section of the golden calf takes place in the 32nd Perek, which is the word heart in Hebrew, because even though the Jews sinned, Hashem still has us in His heart, and we have Him on our hearts. We are told of the sin to note human fallibility, but nevertheless Hashem loves us. This Leining is also read on Shabbos Chol Hamoed, and the third day of Chol Hamoed Pesach. Because in this section, the holidays are listed as a reminder that Hashem set special days on the calendar throughout the year, so we always have an opportunity to connect, regardless of how distant (or sinful) we may feel or think we are. Next, the forgiveness of the Jews (pesukim 34:7 and 34:14), there is a large Nun and Reish, which spells Ner (candle). Because we Jews, and our souls are a fire, which can ignite other flames in others around us, and it doesn't diminish the first fire. The interesting quality of a candle is that if it passes a flame to a new wick, the fire of the first flame doesn't diminish. This lesson is that even in a dark, sinful place, we can inspire and ignite others, and we ourselves can be inspired and ignited. Similarly, one amongst many, part of the collective fire that unites all our souls (connecting to the beginning of the parsha, that the rich or poor give the same redemption coin) because the spiritual underpinnings of our lives, are all always connected to the source flame of Hashem.

Finally, the parsha ends with a renewal of the relationship and promise between the

Jews and Hashem, and Moshe was radiant when he came down the mountain. Because if we work to remain close to Hashem, which we always are, our covenant is renewed, and we will radiate the light of Torah, Hashem, and goodness.

This week we also read Parah, about the red heifer which was used to purify those who became unholy (obviously to read this before Pesach, so people became purified in time for Pesach), but for us, to note, that we listen to Hashems laws, and perform them, even if they don't have a reason, and because Hashem said so, as we are connected to Him, and by doing this, we spread the light in the dark world.

Good Shabbos