

HEADS UP!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Sisa

Heads Up!

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Today's Learning:
Yoma 3:9-10
O.C. 527:15-17
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 60
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kilayim 27

Our parashah opens: "When you raise the heads of Bnei Yisrael according to their numbers, every man shall give an atonement for his soul when counting them . . . a half shekel." Why, asks R' Moshe Feinstein z"l, was the command to take a census phrased as "raising the heads of Bnei Yisrael?" He explains:

If you ask a typical person why he does not study more Torah or do more mitzvot, he will answer, "Who am I? I am not capable of being a Torah scholar or a tzaddik." To counter this misplaced "humility," to "raise the heads of Bnei Yisrael," Hashem said that every person should give exactly one half of a shekel, no more and no less, toward the census. In this way, each person will realize that he

is on par (at least potentially) with the greatest scholar and the greatest tzaddik. All that one needs is determination, effort and commitment.

There is another lesson in these words. The Gemara (Bava Batra 10b) asks, "How will the honor of Israel be uplifted? Through 'Ki tissa' / 'When you raise'." Commentaries explain that the Gemara is actually referring to the end of the verse, which alludes to the mitzvah of tzedakah / charity. Why, then, did the Gemara quote the beginning of the verse? R' Feinstein explains that it is not enough to give charity. Rather, the honor of the Jewish people is uplifted when we are able to "raise our heads," i.e., to hold our heads high after giving tzedakah. This depends on how we give tzedakah - for example, whether we give an honorable amount in relation to our means and whether we give it with the right attitude rather than begrudgingly. (Darash Moshe)

"The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain . . ." (32:1)

Rashi writes: "Satan came and threw the world into confusion, giving it the appearance of darkness, gloom and disorder, so that people should say; 'Surely Moshe is dead, and that is why confusion has come into the world'."

Tradition records that the women of that generation did not participate in this sin, and they were therefore rewarded with a holiday of their own - Rosh Chodesh / the festival of the new moon. Why did they not participate, and why was their reward Rosh Chodesh?

R' Ben Zion Rabinowitz shlita (the Bialer Rebbe in Yerushalayim) explains: It is well known that women possess a certain intuition that men lack. It was that intuition that told the women that Moshe was not dead. Therefore, they of course did not participate in making or worshipping the golden calf.

Rosh Chodesh is the only holiday mentioned in the Torah that has the status of an ordinary workday. However, a woman's intuition can discern the holiness in even such a day. This is why Rosh Chodesh is a holiday for women.

(Mevasser Tov: B'zchut Nashim Tzidkaniyot p. 278)

"They said, 'This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt'." (32:4)

Were they really so gullible as to think that a golden calf that had just been formed before their eyes had taken them out of Egypt?

R' Chizkiyah ben Manoach z"l (Provence, southern France; 13th century) explains: The slaves in Egypt had seen that Pharaoh's magicians could mimic many of the miracles that Moshe had performed. In reality, the magicians' abilities were the result of the koach ha'tumah / "power of impurity" that Hashem created for the purpose of testing mankind. However, those who saw the magicians thought they were using Ruach Ha'kodesh / a Divine power, just as Moshe was doing.

When the nation at Har Sinai saw the golden calf emerge on its own out of the furnace, they likewise did not realize that a koach ha'tumah was at work in order to test them. They thought that the same Ruach Ha'kodesh that had enabled Moshe to take them out of Egypt had also made this calf. Thus they said, "This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt."

(Chizkuni)

Thirty Days Before Pesach . . .

"I might think that the obligation to discuss the Exodus commences with the first day of the month of Nissan." (The Pesach Haggadah)

Why might I think this? R' Avraham ben Hagra z"l (died 1808; son of the Vilna Gaon) explains: The ancient Egyptians worshiped the sheep, and to counter this fallacious belief, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to slaughter sheep for the Korban Pesach. Not coincidentally, the sheep (Aries) is the astrological sign for the month of Nissan. Therefore, I might think that the time to speak of the Exodus and of Hashem's mastery over all other forces begins on Rosh Chodesh, when the sign of the sheep first ascends.

For the same reason, the Haggadah states that I might think the time to discuss the Exodus is on the afternoon of Erev Pesach. That is the time when the Korban Pesach was slaughtered.

(Geulat Avraham)

"It is this that has stood by our fathers and us." (The Pesach Haggadah)

When we recite these words during the Seder, it is customary to cover the matzah and to lift the cup of wine. Why? Is not the matzah a mitzvah de'oraita / a Torah-ordained mitzvah, while the Four Cups are only a rabbinically-ordained mitzvah? Why do we seem to attribute more importance to the rabbinic mitzvah than to the Torah mitzvah?

R' Menachem Mendel Kalish z"l (1819-1868; Rebbe of Vorka, Poland) explained: What is it that has held the Jewish people together and has stood us in good stead throughout the millennia of exile and persecution? It is the Torah scholars of each generation who have ensured the continuity of halachah and mitzvah-observance, and it is our adherence to their words that has preserved us as a nation. This is why we point out a rabbinic mitzvah and say, "It is this that has stood by our fathers and us."

When R' Mordechai Rokeach of Bilgorai z"l (died 1948; father of the current Belzer Rebbe) repeated R' Kalish's explanation to his father, the Belzer Rebbe, R' Yissochor Dov Rokeach z"l (1854-1926), the latter ordered that it be written down immediately. When he was reminded that it was chol ha'moed, when writing should be avoided if possible, R' Yissochor Dov responded that such a thought is too

important to forget. It must be written down, even on chol ha'moed.

(Quoted in Mi'saviv La'shulchan No. 140)

R' Moshe Feinstein z"l

Part II

Shortly after Purim 5681 (1921), R' Moshe Feinstein was offered the rabbinate of Lyuban, Belarus (White Russia). He assumed the post before Pesach and immediately impressed his congregants by acting firmly in the matters that came before him. Less than two months later, on the night of Lag Ba'omer, the pogroms spawned by the Russian civil war reached Lyuban. One night, the home where R' Moshe was staying was ambushed, apparently with the intent to assassinate the rabbi. Miraculously, R' Moshe escaped into a nearby corn field. Adding to the miracle, R' Moshe noted that the corn stalks were unusually tall for that time of year.

After a hiatus of close to a year, R' Moshe returned to Lyuban and served as its rabbi for 15 years. In R' Moshe's collected responsa, Igrot Moshe, there are halachic decisions written during that period. Throughout the Lyuban years, R' Moshe had to deal with many challenges from the Communist government, including closure of the mikvah and the cheder and repeated confiscations of R' Moshe's own home. Nevertheless, unlike many other Russian citizens, R' Moshe made clear that he recognized the Communists as the legitimate government of Russia. For example, when relatives sent him money from America, a fact that was known to the government, he always asked at the post office to have it converted to rubles, which was the only legal currency. In this way, he was saved from even greater persecution. R' Moshe would also relate that he saw clearly the hand of Hashem in his ability to deal with the authorities. For example, when one of his congregants was caught possessing ten dollars, R' Moshe was asked if he thought the man was concealing more money. R' Moshe answered, "How much money could a worker have saved under the reign of the Czar?" The Communists, who were happy to hear such criticisms of the Czar, who they considered an "enemy of the workers," let the man go.

In 1922, R' Moshe married Sima Kostonowitz, the daughter of one of the leading citizens of Lyuban. They had two sons and two daughters who survived to adulthood.

To be continued

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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