

DIRECT SUPERVISION

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Sisa

Direct Supervision

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Today's Learning:
Sotah 7:7-8
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Megillah 31
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Eruvin 36

We read in this week's parashah about the sin of the golden calf and Hashem's response, including (Shmot 33:2-3): *"I shall send an angel ahead of you, and I shall drive out the Canaani, the Emori, the Chitti, the Perizi, the Hivvi, and the Yevusi; to a land that flows with milk and honey - because I shall not ascend among you, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I annihilate you on the way."* Moshe responded (verse 15), *"If Your Presence does not go along, do not bring us forward from here."*

R' Don Yitzchak Abravanel z"l (1437-1508; prolific Torah commentator; Portugal, Spain and Italy) writes: Numerous commentaries ask why Moshe did not voice a similar objection when Hashem told him (three parashot earlier - 23:20), "Behold! I am sending an angel before you to protect you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have made ready." Ramban and R' Avraham ibn Ezra note differences between the descriptions of the angels in the two parashot and suggest that the earlier prophecy did not imply that Hashem was distancing himself from Bnei Yisrael, while the prophecy in our parashah does imply that; therefore, Moshe objected now and not earlier. [Ramban's explanation has deeper kabbalistic meaning that is beyond our understanding.] Rabbeinu Nissim z"l writes

somewhat similarly that Moshe did not object until Hashem said expressly, "I shall not ascend with you."

R' Abravanel offers a different interpretation. Earlier, Hashem told Moshe only that an angel would lead Bnei Yisrael until the borders of Eretz Yisrael. That was acceptable to Moshe. Here, however, Hashem spoke of an angel that would lead Bnei Yisrael inside the Holy Land. That, Moshe could not accept. Why? Because those who reside outside of Eretz Yisrael normally experience Hashem through intermediaries that we call "angels" - for example, the forces of nature. In contrast, inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael are meant to be under the hashgachah pratit / direct, personal supervision of Hashem. (Ateret Zekeinim, as elucidated by R' Moshe Zuriel shlita, Shevat 5747 / 1987)

"Every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul . . . so that there will not be a plague among them . . ." (30:2)

Why does the verse change from singular ("Every man shall give") to plural ("so that there will not be a plague among them")?

R' Yaakov Yichizkiyahu Gruenwald z"l (Hungarian rabbi; died 1941) explains: Our Sages teach that when one person repents, the entire world achieves a certain degree of atonement on his account. Thus, even one person's charity can avert a plague that could have affected multitudes.

(Vayagged Yaakov: Parashat Shekalim)

"This shall they give -- everyone who passes through the census -- a half shekel of the sacred shekel . . ." (30:13)

Why half a shekel? R' Eliyahu Hakohen z"l (Izmir, Turkey; died 1729) offers fourteen answers, of which we present half.

(2) Only the men participated in the sin of the golden calf, not the women. The Zohar says that a man without a wife is only half a person. Thus, only half an atonement is required.

(4) Just as on Yom Kippur two goats were brought -- one as a sacrificial offering and the other to be killed in a non-sacred manner (i.e., the se'ir l'azalzel), so one-half of a shekel is offered as a sacrifice and the other half is spent in a non-sacred manner.

(8) The Gemara teaches that G-d forgave only half the sin of the golden calf. For the remaining half, He exacts retribution from each generation a little bit at a time. This is symbolized by the half-shekel.

(10) Bringing only a half-shekel reminds a person that one cannot grow spiritually unless he also raises the spiritual level of those around him.

(11) Our Sages say that one who worships idols is considered to have denied the entire Torah. Thus, by worshiping the golden calf, Bnei Yisrael denied the "Ten Commandments," which consist half of man's obligations toward G-d and half of man's obligations toward other people. We also are taught that Hashem does not forgive a person for sinning against another person until the sinner appeases the offended-person. This is symbolized by the half-shekel, as if to say, "You transgressed all ten of the Aseret Ha'dibrot, but I, Hashem, can forgive you for only half of your transgression."

(12) The leaders behind the making of the golden calf were in fact from the erev rav, other nationalities that were hangers-on to the Jewish People. Bnei Yisrael's sin was in not preventing this occurrence. This is a lesser sin; thus, only a lesser atonement consisting of a half-shekel was required.

(13) Our Sages say that Bnei Yisrael never worshiped idols because they believed in the idols themselves, but only as an excuse to live an immoral lifestyle. Thus, their sin of idolatry was only half a sin.

(Aggadot Eliyahu: Shekalim Ch.2)

From the Haftarah . . .

"So I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed among the lands; according to their ways and their doings did I judge them." (Yechezkel 36:18)

What is meant by, "according to their ways and their doings did I judge them"? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (rabbi in Brody, Galicia; died 1869) explains:

R' Yosef Albo z"l (Spain; 1380-1444) writes (in Sefer Ha'ikkarim Part IV Ch.36): Logic dictates that the degree of reward for a mitzvah and punishment for a sin should bear some relationship to the mitzvah or sin. For example, if A insults B, the harm is usually short-lived; thus, the punishment should be short-lived. On the other hand, if A blinds B, the harm is permanent; thus, the punishment should be permanent. Similarly, some mitzvot would seem to deserve a longer-lived reward than others.

Why then, asks R' Albo, is man's reward in Olam Ha'ba eternal? Perhaps one will justify this on the grounds that man's reward should be proportionate to the greatness of the King that he has served. Since Hashem's greatness is unlimited, those who serve Him deserve unlimited reward. But, in reality, we give G-d nothing when we serve Him, as the verse (Iyov 35:7) states, "If you were righteous, what have you given Him, and what does He take from your hand?!" Moreover, the same logic would dictate that those who defy G-d's will and sin should receive an unlimited and eternal punishment. [Yet, our Sages say that this is not the case, except for the very worst sinners.]

The answer, writes R' Albo, is that Hashem's system of reward and punishment is not based on Din /

justice alone, but also on Chessed / kindness. As a result of His kindness, reward, which should be temporary, is eternal, while punishment, which should be eternal, is temporary. [This concludes the excerpt from Sefer Ha'ikkarim.]

R' Kluger disagrees. He explains that ever-lasting reward and relatively short-lived punishment both are dictated by Din / justice. It is true that Hashem does not need our service. However, He designed the world in such a way that, as the Kabbalists teach, our mitzvot further His goals by multiplying the amount of kedushah / holiness in the world. And, kedushah, once created, makes an eternal impression on the universe. Our sins likewise have a cosmic (albeit, negative) spiritual effect; however, that effect is temporary and we are assured that, at the end of time, evil will be eliminated from the world. It therefore is logical that the reward for our good deeds should similarly be everlasting, while the punishment for our sins is short-lived. This is what the quoted verse means: I, Hashem, do not base punishments on My nature, which is everlasting, but rather, "according to their ways and their doings did I judge them."

(Kohelet Yaakov - Parah: Drush No.1)

Diaries

Earlier this year we began to present excerpts from Ma'agal Tov, the diary of R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; 1724-1806), describing the author's travels as a "Shelucha D'rabbanan" ("Shadar" or "meshulach") on behalf of the Jewish community of Chevron. This week we present another excerpt. Note that some of the poetic language and Biblical references are lost in translation.

Adar 23 [5534 / 1774]: Sunday, Vayakhel. After havdalah [in other words, on Motza'ei Shabbat of Parashat Ki Tissa], I went to my room and opened the mail that had arrived on Shabbat, and I saw that, for my many sins, a decree had been pronounced [from Heaven] against the wife of my youth, a kind-hearted, clear-headed, G-d-fearing woman, charitable, modest, the delight of my eyes, the beauty of my home - my wife Rachel, her soul is in Eden; and the world grew dark around me. But it immediately came to my mind that if I disclose this, they [the local Jewish community] would willy-nilly force a wife upon me, and there would be no salvation from their hand because they are so very attached to me - unimaginably so! No argument would prevail against them. Blessed is His glorious Name who did kindness with me in this moment of great distress such that this thought came into my mind. I then immediately took a lamp and went to the synagogue and wept there for an hour or so; then I left there and washed my face.

In my room, I found R' Moshe and R' Yehuda, two brothers-in-law of the Qayid / communal leader, and a young man, R' Moshe ben Meir, who was staying with the Qayid, and also some other people. And I was there with them, in distress, until midnight. After they left, I sat on the ground to recite Tikkun Chatzot / prayers of mourning for the Temple. I [simultaneously] took off my shoes and socks to do mourning for "late tidings," for my wife had departed this life on the 20th of Sivan 5533 [1773,

i.e., nine months earlier]. [Ed. note: Because Chida received the news more than 30 days after her passing, halachah dictated that shivah not be observed. This presumably is why he was permitted to wash his face, as mentioned above.] May her soul be bound in the bond of the living. And everything was done in quiet and secret.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), 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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