

THE LITTLE PURIM

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Sisa

The Little Purim

We read in our parashah that Hashem told Moshe, following the sin of the Golden Calf (33:-12), "I shall send an angel ahead of you, and I shall drive out the Canaanite, the Emorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivvite, and the Yevusite--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*." The implication of these verses was that Hashem planned to distance Himself from Bnei Yisrael only while they ascended to Eretz Yisrael, but not after they reached the Land. This requires explanation, writes Rabbeinu Nissim z"l ("Ran"; 14th century; Barcelona, Spain). If there was a concern that Hashem would annihilate the Jewish People because of our ancestors' stubbornness, why was that concern not present after the Nation settled in Eretz Yisrael as well?

Rabbeinu Nissim explains: The sin which angers G-d the most is the sin of idolatry. And, the risk of committing that sin is far greater outside of Eretz Yisrael than in the Land. The reason for this is that Hashem does not guide the affairs of the diaspora directly, as He does the affairs of Eretz Yisrael. Rather, He has placed the lands of the diaspora under the control of His agents, and man is wont to mistake those agents [whether one calls them angels, constellations, the zodiac, or nature] for deities. [In fact, Rambam explains that that is how idolatry started in the first place.] The fact that Hashem remains aloof from the affairs of the diaspora is why, Rabbeinu Nissim explains, the Gemara states (Ketubot 110b): If one dwells outside of Eretz Yisrael, he is likened to someone who has no G d.

In addition, Hashem created the desert to be a place of natural danger. Some people want to seem very religious, writes Rabbeinu Nissim, so they argue that Hashem is equally capable of protecting a person wherever he is. However, that is not how Hashem operates, Rabbeinu Nissim explains. Rather, He is less likely to protect a person outside of Eretz Yisrael, thus making the snakes and scorpions in the desert more dangerous than those in Eretz Yisrael. (Drashot Ha'Ran: Drush 4)

"And now, if You would but forgive their sin! -- but if not, erase me now from Your book that You have

written." (32:32)

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) said in his eulogy for the Chafetz Chaim z"l: Our Sages teach that the death of tzaddikim atones for the nation's sins. This does not mean that tzaddikim atone only in death. We see, for example, that Pinchas atoned for the nation in life (see Tehilim 106:23). Rather, it means that tzaddikim atone even in death.

R' Levovitz continued: Commentaries ask: Why are there punishments at all? Why isn't G-d's mercy sufficient to atone for all sins? The answer, apparently, is that G-d's mercy goes only so far. That is why Hashem gave us Yom Kippur, so that its merit will accomplish what G-d's mercy alone does not accomplish. And, when the sins are too great even for Yom Kippur to atone, the death of a tzaddik atones.

This, said R' Levovitz, was what Moshe meant when he said, "If not, erase me now from Your book that You have written." If my prayers are inadequate to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe said, then let the erasure of my name from the Torah be equivalent to the death of a tzaddik, which atones to a greater degree.

(Relating this idea to the occasion, R' Levovitz continued: The Chafetz Chaim devoted his entire life to bringing atonement to the Jewish People, but now, apparently, the Jewish People needed a greater atonement than the Chafetz Chaim could bring about in life. Every year, the atonement of Yom Kippur comes after Rosh Hashanah, but this year [in which the Chafetz Chaim died on 24 Elul, Hashem has brought the atonement of Yom Kippur before Rosh Hashanah.] (Da'at Torah Vol. 5b, p. 261)

"He said, 'Show me now Your glory'." (33:18)

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu make this request at a low point--after the sin of the Golden Calf--and not at the high point of Matan Torah? R' Aharon Dovid Goldberg shlita (Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland) explains: R' Moshe Cordovero z"l (Remak; 1522-1570) writes that G-d is not like man. If one friend sins toward another and then apologizes, the aggrieved friend may express his forgiveness, but the friendship often will never return to its former intensity. In contrast, when man sins toward G-d and then repents, G-d brings him even closer than he was before. Thus, R' Goldberg writes, after Bnei Yisrael had sinned by making the Golden Calf and had begun the repentance process, it was an even more auspicious occasion than when the Torah was given. Thus, it was a fitting time for Moshe to make his request. (Ve'halachta B'drachav al Tomer Devorah p.65)

"I shall show favor when I choose to show favor, and I shall show mercy when I choose to show mercy." (33:19)

R' Moshe Cordevero z"l (see above) writes: There are some people who behave improperly, yet Hashem has mercy on all. He continues: The Gemara (Berachot 7a) comments on our verse, "Hashem said, 'This is a storehouse for those who are unworthy'." Remak explains: There is a "storehouse of favor" from which Hashem shows favor and gives gifts for nothing, for He says, "They have the merit of the Patriarchs, and I swore to the Patriarchs. Therefore, even though they behave improperly, they will merit because they are descendants of the Patriarchs, to whom I have taken an oath. Therefore, I will lead them until they find their correction." (Tomer Devorah ch.1, middah 12)

R' Aharon Dovid Goldberg shlita (see above) asks: If G-d shows favor to the Patriarchs' descendants because He took an oath to the Patriarchs, how is that "mercy"? He answers: The fact that Hashem took the oath in the first place demonstrates His mercy, because it shows that He was willing to overlook the sins of the descendants so that the Patriarchs would not feel shame or pain.

R' Goldberg continues: Although Remak says that Hashem gives "gifts for nothing," he means only that the recipients of the gifts have done nothing to merit those gifts. However, the merit of the Patriarchs does "pay" for those gifts. Were this not the case, then Hashem would be a "vatran" / one who overlooks bad deeds, and our Sages tell us that it is forbidden to say that Hashem is a vatran. (Ve'halachta B'drachav al Tomer Devorah p.88)

R' Avraham Abele Gombiner z"l (Poland; 1635-1683) cites the following halachic ruling of R' Shlomo Luria z"l (Maharshal; 1510-1573): One should never say, "I have more than I deserve," because then he is calling G-d a vatran. Rather, one should say, "I have more than I would deserve were it not for the fact that the merit of the Patriarchs assists me."

R' Gombiner disagrees. He writes: It appears to me that Hashem may give more generously than a person deserves without overlooking the person's sins. Rather, He is patient and delays punishment. (Magen Avraham 156:1)

R' Mordechai Scheinberger shlita (Yerushalayim) notes that Hashem's mercy is not unconditional. Rather, as quoted above, Remak writes: "I will lead them *until they find their correction*." G-d's mercy is predicated on the assumption that the recipients will, eventually, repent to some degree. (Va'yomer Moshe al Tomer Devorah p.83)

"Beware of what I command you today . . ." (34:11) The verses that follow repeat a series of laws that were taught in Parashat Mishpatim, which we read only three weeks ago. Why?

R' Chaim Kanievsky shlita (Bnei Brak, Israel) explains: The Gemara (Eruvin 54a) teaches that, if not for Moshe's breaking the Luchot, one would never forget his Torah learning. Therefore, in our parashah, after the breaking of the Luchot, the Torah teaches the importance of review as an aid to memory.

(Ta'ama D'kra)

The "Little" Purim

If this year were not a leap year on the Jewish calendar, this Friday and Shabbat, the 14th and 15th of Adar, would have been Purim and Shushan Purim, respectively. Instead, these days are known as Purim Kattan / "Little Purim," while the actual holiday will be observed one month from now. The custom is that certain signs of joy are observed on the two days of Purim Kattan as on the two days of Purim; for example, tachanun--and on Shabbat, "Av Ha'rachamim"--is not recited and eulogies are not delivered.

Why do we mark these days which, after all, are not Purim? R' Mordechai Menashe Zilber shlita (Stutchiner Rebbe in Brooklyn, N.Y.) explains:

We read in Megillat Esther (9:26), "That is why they called these days 'Purim' from the word 'pur' / 'lottery'." However, "pur" is singular, while "Purim" is plural. Why? The answer is found in another verse (3:7), "He cast a pur--that is, the lot--in the presence of Haman from *day to day*, and from *month to month*." In fact, R' Zilber explains, there were two lots--one, a lottery of *days*, to identify a propitious day on the *solar* calendar to annihilate the Jews (G-d forbid), and the second, a lottery of *months*, to identify a propitious day on the *lunar* calendar. Miraculously, both lots--the "purim"--identified the same day, the 13th day of the twelfth month [starting from Nissan], i.e., the month of Adar.

Why are there two months of Adar in some years? Because the Torah requires that Pesach be observed in the spring. The beginning of spring, like all the seasons, is determined by the sun. On the other hand, the fact that we have months at all is a function of the lunar calendar. In most years, the solar and lunar calendars roughly coincide, and we observe only one Purim. In leap years, however, we separately acknowledge Purim's place on the lunar calendar (by observing Purim Kattan in the twelfth month) and its place on the solar calendar (by observing Purim near the onset of spring). [The Gemara explains that the "main" Purim is the second one so that we observe the two holidays of redemption--Purim and Pesach--adjacent to each other.]

R' Zilber adds: The Torah commands (Devarim 25:17-19), "Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt . . . You shall not forget." These verses state both an affirmative commandment ("Remember") and a negative commandment ("You shall not forget"). Amalek was an ancestor of Haman, and Purim, the holiday associated with Haman's defeat, also includes both affirmative mitzvot (e.g., Megillah-reading, mishloach manot) and negative mitzvot (e.g., not fasting or delivering eulogies). Purim Kattan, however, has only negative mitzvot (e.g., not fasting or delivering eulogies), paralleling the negative commandment, "You shall not forget." Purim Kattan, which is tied to the lunar calendar, falls twelve months after last Purim, which parallels our Sages' teaching that

memory fades after twelve months. [That is why mourning lasts twelve months.] (Gilyon Divrei Torah 5765)

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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