

SNEAK PREVIEW OF MESSIANIC TIMES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 137, The Census: Can Jews Be Counted? Good Shabbos!

The Half-Shekel Census: Economy Class Giving For Everyone

In relation to the Census of the Half-Shekel the Torah tells us "The wealthy should not give extra and the poor should not give less" [Shemos 30:15]. Rav Yeruchem points out that there is an opinion among the enumerators of the commandments that this is one of the 365 negative prohibitions of the Torah.

It is understandable why the Torah must prohibit giving less than a half Shekel. We all know that when we are asked to give 'X' amount of dollars, we always have excuses to give less. However, there has probably never been a Building Campaign in the history of the Jewish people where there was a need to emphasize "The wealthy should not give more".

What kind of person is the Torah referring to here when specifying that he shouldn't give too much?

Rav Yeruchem tells us an insight into human psychology. He says there is a Yetzer Hara for a wealthy individual to want to give more than his neighbor. Part of the Yetzer Hara of being rich is the attitude "It is not appropriate for me to be like everyone else."

This is what I call the "First Class Syndrome". Recently, I received a free upgrade from US Air. It was only good until January 15. I had never before flown first class, so I decided to take advantage of the opportunity. I had a scheduled flight from Newark to Baltimore -- all of forty minutes but I wanted to find out once and for all what goes on behind that curtain.

I was the only person there. As soon as I came in the stewardess asked me "Would you like a drink?"

Why would someone pay 20% more for a ticket just so the stewardess can offer him a drink, before he has a chance to sit down? Does it make sense to pay \$50 dollars more to save \$3 on a cocktail?

The insight here is that some people sit in first class because "es'past nischt" (it's beneath my dignity)

for me to sit back there with the masses in economy class.

This attitude, says Rav Yeruchem, is what the Torah is addressing here -- everyone will give the same amount. The wealthy person is confronted with a constant test (nisayon) of haughtiness. "How can I let this person, who has a tenth of what I have, give the same thing as me? I'm different. I'm better. I can't just give a half shekel. I can't just be equal."

This is what the Torah is addressing. Here there is only one class. Everyone is the same. There is a Yetzer Hara against this. Some of us have it with money; others have it with where we sit or how we are treated. We all have it on different levels.

"I should get Revii?" (See Glossary) There is a famous story of a fellow who comes to shul and the gabbai wants to give him Chamishi. He tells the gabbai "where I come from, they give Chamishi to the 'proste mentchen' (coarse people)". The gabbai responded "that is our custom too."

"The wealthy shall not give more" -- that is the test the Torah is addressing.

Sneak Preview of Messianic Times (Succas-Pessach 5752; Winter 1991-92)

This week's portion contains the incident of the sin of the Golden Calf. The Ramba"n says this was not real idolatry that was being worshipped -- the Jews just wanted an intermediary, thinking Moshe Rabbeinu was dead. Nonetheless, it was a terrible sin.

What the Torah tries to convey is that what happened was akin to a run-away freight train. Things got out of hand. Moshe was late in returning. The Satan saw an opportunity. He made, what Rash"i tells us was the appearance of "confusion in the world". The people clamored for an intermediary. Chur got up and tried to stop them. The people killed Chur. That is how things got out of hand. It was like a snowball coming down a mountain. Unstoppable.

Aharon, who feared for his life after seeing what happened to Chur, went along with the people, while trying to minimize and mitigate. But he also gets swept along in this unstoppable snowball.

All of a sudden Moshe came down from the mountain. He put up his hands and, in a sense, said, "Stop!" In an instant the whole thing stopped.

What happened? How is it that this unstoppable "snowball" could stop on a dime?

The Beis Av makes the following observation: This is the power of Truth. Since their sin was based on Falsehood, on an incorrect assumption, on an act of Satan with no validity to it, as soon as the Truth became apparent, it was as if someone turned on a light in a dark room. The darkness dissipates in a moment. Such is the power of Truth to push away Falseness.

Sheker (falsehood) can be stopped in its tracks with pure unadulterated Emes (truth).

This is a tremendous ethical lesson for us. For thousands of years we have been wanting, praying for the coming of Moshiach. We say that when Moshiach will come that "every creature will know that You have created him..."

We may ask ourselves, how will it turn-around in Moshiach's time? How will it be that all of a sudden all people will realize the centrality of the Jewish people in the Universe? How will it be that the religious leaders of other faiths will all of a sudden say "You are right -- there is only One G-d; the rest of it is all Sheker"? How is this entire scenario going to happen?

This Parsha in the Torah teaches us how it will happen. When Falsehood meets Truth, Falsehood melts. When the Truth of Moshiach becomes evident, the whole world will turn around.

Note: This story occurred in 1992 when Rav Pam came to Baltimore to visit Rabbi Binyomin Steinberg (z'l) who was very ill. Rabbi Steinberg was a student of Rav Pam and was the Menahel (principal) of the Bais Yaakov High School of Baltimore for many years. Rabbi Steinberg was also an outstanding teacher of Jewish history and current events.

I was not privy to the following conversation. But, I am told that Rabbi Pam visited Baltimore not long ago and was at Rabbi Steinberg's house. Rabbi Steinberg had the opportunity to speak to his Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Pam, and asked him the question that is on everybody's mind: What is going on in the world?

The world that we are living in today -- shortly before Pessach 5752 (1992) -- is a different world than the world we were living in 6 months ago before Succos 5752 (1991)! Before Succos there was a Communist Government in Russia, the world was functioning as it has "always" functioned, there were two Germanys, everything was "normal." Less than six months later everything has changed. What does it mean? Why does it all happen?

In his characteristic fashion, Rav Pam shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know." But he did offer one insight. G-d is trying to show us -- See! This is how it is going to happen!

If anyone doubts how the Moshiach will turn things around, how overnight people will reject life-long beliefs and proclaim that G-d is True and the Jewish People are his Chosen Nation, and all other religions will be thrown in the towel... If anyone will say to himself "It can't happen -- How can it change overnight?", this is what G-d has done for us in the last 6 months. The world has revolutionized almost overnight. This has been the "sneak preview".

This too is the lesson of our parsha. Sheker can be pushed away by Emes. Moshe Rabbeinu stopped the Golden Calf on a dime. This is how the Moshiach will do it -- may it be speedily in our own days.

Personalities & Sources:

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz -- (1874-1936) the Mir Mashgiach; Mir, Poland.

Beis Av -- Rav Elyakim Schlesinger- Rosh Yeshiv, London England

Rav Pam -- Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Torah Vo'daath, Brookln, NY; Member of Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Agudas Israel.

Glossary

Yetzer Hara -- Evil Inclination

s'past nischt... -- (Yiddish) It is beneath my dignity to...

revii, (chamishi) -- the fourth (fifth) Aliyah to the Torah (perceived as less of an honor than shlishi -- the third aliya (the first aliya for which a non-Levite is eligible)

Sheker / Emes -- Falsehood / Truth

Moshiach -- Messiah

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion #137 The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: The Census: Can Jews Be Counted. The other halachic portions for Parsha Ki Sisa from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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