

# ANSWERING THE CALL

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## Rabbi Frand on Parshas Ki Sisa

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 320, The Melacha of Dyeing. Good Shabbos!*

### Answering The Call of "Who Is For G-d? Let Them Gather To Me"

This week's parsha contains the unfortunate sin of the Golden Calf. We are taught about the famous incident when Moshe stood at the gate of the camp and called for volunteers to punish the people involved in this grievous sin: "Who is for G-d? Let them gather to me." The Torah testifies that "all the children of Levi gathered by him." [Shemos 32:26]

Moshe instructed them based on the word of Hashem: "Let each man put on his sword and go from one gate to the other in the camp. Let each one kill [all those involved in the idolatry], even his own brother, close friend, or relative" [Shemos 32:27].

This is the first of a series of times when the Tribe of Levi rose to the occasion, putting aside their own personal considerations of family and friends and heeding the call of G-d to punish the people who deserved punishment. At the end of the Torah, Moshe recognized the Tribe of Levi's actions saying, "He was the one who said of his father and mother, 'I do not see them', not recognizing brother or child. They thus kept Your word and safeguarded Your covenant. [Devorim 33:9]"

When Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) was a young man, he spent a Shabbos with Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan zt"l, the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933). That Shabbos left an indelible impression on the young Rav Schwab, who told many famous stories regarding the events of that weekend. One of those stories contained the following powerful ethical lesson.

The Chofetz Chaim asked Rav Schwab if he was a Kohen or a Levi. Rav Schwab responded in the

negative. The Chofetz Chaim (who was a Kohen) told his young guest that it was a real pity that he did not have that status. "Moshiach will soon come and the Kohanim and the Leviim will have a premiere function in the Beis HaMikdash. The rest of the Jewish people will all be excluded. It's a shame you are not from the Tribe of Levi. You will miss out on all of these holy privileges."

The Chofetz Chaim then asked Rav Schwab a very strange question: "Why are you not a Kohen?"

Rav Schwab gave the obvious answer. His father was not a Kohen.

But the Chofetz Chaim persisted, "Why wasn't your father a Kohen?"

By this time Rav Schwab grasped that the Chofetz Chaim was leading to a concept that had nothing to do with Yichus [lineage] or genealogy. The Chofetz Chaim asked, "Do you know why your father was NOT a Kohen and my father WAS a Kohen? Because there was once a time in Jewish history when our teacher Moshe called out 'Who is for G-d? Let them gather to me.' My great- great grandfather answered the call and your great-great grandfather did not answer the call. That is why my father was a Kohen and your father was not a Kohen."

The Chofetz Chaim was not trying to tease, saying "Hah, hah! I am a Kohen and you are not a Kohen". The Chofetz Chaim did not engage in teasing behavior. The Chofetz Chaim was not trying to "rub in" the fact that Rav Schwab's ancestor did not respond to Moshe's call. The point that the Chofetz Chaim was driving home was that sometimes there are an occasions in life where the clarion call goes out to rally around G-d's banner. If upon hearing that call, one rises to the occasion, his actions can have ramifications until the end of time. If one fails to heed the call and does not respond, that too can affect not only the person, but also his children and his grandchildren, for all generations. The point that the Chofetz Chaim was trying to teach to Rav Schwab is that one day he himself might receive such a call, perhaps not in the exact same words, but in a similar way. The Chofetz Chaim was telling Rav Schwab to remember this lesson, so that he would not repeat the mistake of his great-great grandfather -- with potential ramifications until the end of time.

### **The Source of Moshe Rabbeinu's Beams of Glory**

There is an interesting Medrash Tanchuma on this week's parsha. The Torah says that when Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai, he was unaware that beams of light ("karnei or") were shining forth from his face. The Medrash asks, "On what basis did Moshe merit these unique beams of glory?" One opinion is that Moshe received them when he was hidden in the cleft of the rock and the Glory of G-d passed before him. The opinion of Rav and Shmuel in the Medrash is different: When he was writing the original Sefer Torah which G-d dictated, there was a little drop of ink left over. G-d took that ink and rubbed it on Moshe's head. The beams of glory that shone forth from Moshe's head were the result of that drop of ink.

In Parshas Be'Ha'aloscha, the Or HaChaim Hakadosh (1696-1743) asks a simple question. Obviously, in human projects there are always surplus raw materials. When ordering bricks for a building

project, it is impossible to plan the exact number of bricks that the project requires, down to the last brick. Inevitably, there will be bricks remaining. But when G-d is preparing to write a Sefer Torah and he 'orders the ink', he knows exactly how much ink is necessary, down to the last drop. Why was ink left over?

The Or HaChaim explains the source of the 'extra' ink. In Parshas Be'Ha'aloscha, when Moshe Rabbeinu wrote the pasuk [verse] where G-d testified that Moshe was the most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth, Moshe, in his utter humility, could not bring himself to write that complete pasuk. Therefore, he left out a letter and wrote the word for humble person (Anav) defective - without the Yud. He spelled it ayin-nun- vov, rather than the way that it is normally written -- ayin-nun-yud-vov. G-d used that 'leftover' ink to dab Moshe's forehead, resulting in the beams of glory.

This insight brings two lessons to mind. First of all, this is a classic example of the rabbinic teaching that one who flees from honor is pursued by honor. In the worst way, Moshe did not want to write the accolade about himself that he was the most humble of men. Because of this humility and fleeing from honor, he was 'pursued' by having an even greater honor overtake him.

The Shemen Tov points out another lesson, perhaps by way of homiletics. The Shemen Tov says that we learn according to this Medrash that part of the Torah was never written down. That Yud was supposed to appear in the Torah but it was not written down. That is the lesson.

It important to realize that not everything in the Torah is written down. Sometimes we tell someone "You should not do that". He immediately retorts "Where does it say so? Where in the Torah does it say that this cannot be done?" In reality, sometimes it does not need to say it. Sometimes the essence of Torah and the essence of what a Jew is all about -- says it! Sometimes it might not appear in Shulchan Aruch, it might not appear in the Torah -- not because it is not true, but because not all of Torah is written down. This is what we are taught through the missing Yud. This is what is often referred to as the "fifth portion of the Shulchan Aruch" - the unwritten Shulchan Aruch that applies to every Jew because he is a Torah observing Jew.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Ki Sisa are provided below:

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