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פרשת כי תשא
פרשת פרה
Parshat Ki Tisa

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

MORDECHAI AND THE SENSE OF SMELL

RABBI BEN SUGERMAN

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ELIANA BROIDE ('21)

YAAKOV EISENMANN ('20)

CHANI KAMINETSKY ('20)

LEAH CHAMBERS ('23)

The gemara at the end of Masechta Chulin (139b) asks a curious question:

מרדכי מן התורה מנין?

"Where is Mordechai found in the Torah?"

This suggests that Mordechai, a personality who lived 900 years after the Torah was given, is somewhere encoded in the Torah. Where can we find him?

The gemara immediately provides an answer:

דכתיב מר דרור (שמות ל, כג) ומתרגמינן מירא דכיא

The pasuk in this week's parsha which describes the fragrances that went into the anointing oil (the *Shemen Hamishcha* was used to sanctify the vessels of the Mishkan together with Aharon and his sons) labels the first of the spices as *mar d'ror*; the Aramaic translation of that spice is *mara dachya*, which in English translates as pure myrrh. The Aramaic translation is very similar phonetically to the name Mordechai, which the gemara therefore concludes is where we can find Mordechai in the Torah.

All this is very strange as the connection itself is far from self-evident, and even after accepting the gemara's answer what, did we just learn? Obviously the gemara is not playing a game of word-search for the sake of seeing who we can find in the Torah?

There must be some connection between Mordechai and the spices that Chazal wants us to understand.

The Vilna Gaon offers a penetrating insight. Of the primary senses that we use to make sense of the world, vision, speech, and sight are necessary for learning Torah, but the sense of smell has no part in *limud Hatorah*. However it is an intrinsic part of tefillah. The Torah constantly describes the incense that is part of the avodah (which nowadays is equivalent

to tefillah) as a ריח ניחוח לה׳, a pleasing aroma to Hashem. When the gemara connects Mordechai to the first of the spices, the gemara is commenting on Mordechai's profound connection to tefillah. We see when the Megillah introduces Mordechai, it provides the names of his ancestors as well, מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי בן קיש and the gemara (Megillah 12) explains that each name refers to another aspect of Mordechai's power of prayer: "ben Yair" – he lit up the eyes of the Jews through his prayers, "ben Shimi" – God hearkened to his petitions, and "ben Kish" – he knocked on the doors of mercy."

The sense of smell is a powerful connector, more than any of our other senses. When our nervous system relays any sensory information to our brain for interpretation, it first sends it through a relay station known as the thalamus, which is at the stem of the brain. Olfaction, the sense of smell, is a chemical sense where the receptors in our nose have a hotline to the limbic system of the brain. Nothing conjures up memories more than the sense of smell.

Mordechai's deep connection to Hashem was able to guide and save the Jews during desperate times. As we are currently experiencing what seems to be a surreal existence and serious external threats, let's draw from Mordechai and engage in serious תפילות and beseech our Father in Heaven to help our community and the world at large to get us through these tough times.

UNITED HALVES

ELIANA BROIDE ('21)

In Parshat Ki Tisa, Moshe is commanded by Hashem to take a census of the people by counting the half-shekel each person gives. One of the many questions that could be asked about this commandment is: why should the people be counted through a half-shekel? Is each individual not even worth one full skekel? Certainly, this can't be the case!

The fact that each person contributes only a half-shekel rather than a full one forces us to acknowledge something so important about us and our nation. Although we do have so much value as a single individual, we are still only a half-shekel. We become a full shekel once all of our halves unite together as a strong nation. Each half-shekel definitely has value, but it is certain that the pile of shekalim is at its highest worth when everyone contributes. Similarly, we each have so many unique qualities and differing strengths when standing alone, so we are surely undefeatable when we unite together as a powerful nation.

On the other hand, we see later in the parsha with the sin of the Golden Calf the possible negative impact we can have on each other. A popular question is: why was everyone punished for this transgression with the breaking of the luchot and Hashem's desire to destroy the entire nation? Why not just punish the people who were involved in the act? This is especially interesting since about 3,000 out of 3 million people were involved, which is approximately 0.1%. So, why does *everyone* get punished?

We are able to see so clearly that the same way we have the opportunity to strengthen each other, we are also at risk of affecting each other negatively. We are all so fortunate to be a part of something greater than ourselves and greater than our single half-shekel. Instead of, God forbid, using this *bracha* that we have for the worse, we should strive to join together to help us grow as individuals and as a nation.

ALWAYS UNITED

YAAKOV EISENMANN ('20)

The parsha begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a census of the Jews by collecting and counting half shekels from every person in the nation over the age of twenty. The half shekels would then be donated to the Mishkan. Today, we continue to observe the prohibition of not directly counting Jews by not counting out loud or by using pesukim with each word representing a person and then counting the words. For example, when people are counting for a minyan, they use the pasuk:

הוֹשִׁיעָה אֶת עַמֶּךָ וּבָרֵךְ אֶת נַחֲלָתֶךָ
וּרְעֵם וְנַשְּׂאֵם עַד הָעוֹלָם

In Perek 24 of Shmuel Bet, the Navi tells the story of how David Hamelech commanded Yoav to count the Jews. Yoav tried to convince David that it wasn't necessary, but David persisted. David was punished for this act with a plague that killed 70,000 Jews.

The question here is obvious: Why does Hashem care so much about not counting the Jews? The answer is that Klal Yisrael operates as a singular unit, not a collection of individuals. Rabbeinu Bachya (Pasuk 12: "*Venatnu ish kofer nafsho*") explains that when Bnei Yisrael are treated as individuals, they cannot hope to succeed. We see this concept come up all over the place in *halachot* regarding the *tzibur*. For example, *tefillah b'tzibur* is compared to a sword, which is easy to direct at a target, whereas *tefillah b'yichidut* is compared to a bow and arrow, which requires far more precision and care to use properly.

Moshe Rabbeinu himself understood the importance of not straying from the *tzibur*. Later in the parsha, after Bnei Yisrael created the *egel hazahav*, Hashem tells Moshe that He will start a new nation with him as the founding member. Moshe refuses, pointing out that if a table with three legs (the 3 Avot) cannot stand, then a table with one leg (Moshe) certainly cannot succeed. Even after a sin as bad as the *egel hazahav*, Moshe still had faith in the unit that is the Jewish people.

We often succumb to our *yetzer hara* telling us that we are better than others. We are plagued with thoughts like, "I could do a better job myself." But this is missing the point. Our mission as Jews, both amongst ourselves and as members of the world at large, is not to lift ourselves out of the foolishness or immorality of society, but rather to engross ourselves in trying to elevate others. We should constantly strive to be like Moshe Rabbeinu and work to better the world.

Even though we now understand the purpose of the Machatzit HaShekel, a question still remains: What was David's mistake? David assumed that the principle of unity had been established and enshrined within the Jewish people. This was incorrect. Even though this idea may seem obvious, it actually must be retaught in every generation. We must never think that we have succeeded in creating a truly united nation because there is always room for improvement. Good Shabbos.

BRINGING HASHEM INTO OUR LIVES

CHANI KAMINETSKY ('20)

This week's parsha, Ki Tisa, discusses the construction of the Mishkan and concludes those instructions with the obligation to keep Shabbat.

וְאַתָּה דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אַךְ אֶת
שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ כִּי אוֹת הִוא בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לָדַעַת כִּי אֲנִי ה' מְקַדִּשְׁכֶם

"Speak to the Israelite people and say: Nevertheless, you must keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout the ages, that you may know that I, the Lord, have consecrated you" (31:13)

Why are the laws of the Mishkan juxtaposed to the reminder about Shabbat? What is the connection between these two fundamental parts of Jewish life?

There is an inherent connection between Shabbat and the Mishkan because the *melachot* of Shabbat are defined by the actions in the Mishkan. The dos and don'ts are determined by the way we build the Mishkan. But what is the deeper connection between these two?

Rashi suggests that this juxtaposition is for Bnei Yisrael to understand that the building of the Mishkan does not override Shabbat. He continues to say that if you would be anxious and therefore want to complete the work of the Mishkan on Shabbat, you can not.

The Sforno adds to Rashi's comment by quoting from the pasuk as a reason for why the Mishkan does not override Shabbat. The pasuk says,

אוֹת הִוא בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם , the Sforno's point is that the Mishkan is a symbol of the mutual relationship between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. Therefore, if we were to ignore Shabbat, a sacred icon of our relationship with Hashem in order to build the Mishkan, it would be a complete contradiction of the goal.

Similar to the Mishkan, Shabbat represents a mini "Har-Sinai experience" for Bnei Yisrael. Both the Mishkan and Shabbat give us a chance to reconnect to that uplifting and awe-inspiring moment where we all stood together to accept the Torah. Let us use the concept of the Mishkan and the opportunity to have Shabbat every single week to connect to Hashem and bring Him into our everyday lives.

HE HAS OUR BACK!

LEAH CHAMBERS ('23)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Ki Tisa, we see the whole Jewish nation contributing exactly a half-shekel of silver to build a sanctuary for Hashem. Moshe climbs up to *Har Sinai* for 40 days and 40 nights to create the לוחות containing the Ten Commandments, but when Moshe does not return as fast as the people expected, they begin to get anxious. *Bnei Yisrael* then proceed to create a golden calf and worship it. Moshe comes down from the mountain and destroys the לוחות engraved with the Ten Commandments upon seeing this, and he destroys their golden calf too. Moshe goes back on top of the mountain to plead for Hashem to have mercy and exonerate the Jewish nation from their sin; he even goes as far as saying, "if You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written." Hashem forgives the people and Moshe goes back up *Har Sinai* to make another set of לוחות .

Today, we don't have the luxury of having prophets and sages extremely close to Hashem, therefore it is extremely hard to have a strong faith and not be influenced by modern-day עבודה זרה . It is important that we do not get anxious when we feel that Hashem isn't with us and resort to other measures. We should always recognize that being Jewish is not only a privilege—but also a challenge that preempts all temptations surrounding us. We should take this week's lesson into our lives by remembering that even though we may not feel that Hashem is always working with our interests in mind, in reality He always is. Shabbat Shalom!

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