

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI

תשפ"ו

Klal Yisroel received the Torah at Har Sinai, achieving an unbelievable level by saying naaseh v'nishma. But suddenly they have a shocking collapse with the Eigel Hazohov and Moshe Rabbeinu breaks the luchos. Moshe Rabbeinu goes up again to get kapporoh, comes down, and then goes up again on Rosh Chodesh Elul to get the second luchos and comes down on Yom Kippur, achieving full kapporoh.

The next day, the command is given to construct the Mishkon and its keilim. Klal Yisroel have a lot of gold! The Menorah was pure gold. The Aron, the Shulchon and the Mizbeach Haketores were all covered in pure gold. Where did all this gold come from?

In Egypt, Klal Yisroel were not wealthy. Moshe told them to go ask their Egyptian neighbors for all sorts of things – gold and silver vessels and clothing. Why does this make any sense if the Egyptians despised Klal Yisroel for generations? All of the sudden, Hashem gave Klal Yisroel grace in the eyes of the Egyptians, and the Egyptians gave it all to them – no questions asked! It doesn't make any sense.

Klal Yisroel were in Egypt for a total of 210 years. For the first 127 years, life was wonderful. The Egyptians loved them, took care of them and supported them completely. But then it all switched. They hated them and enslaved them. Chazal explain this sudden reversal. When the Jews get too close to the non-Jews and want to assimilate, the non-Jews push them away and persecute them.

Before they made this request from the Egyptians, Klal Yisroel were required to do something very difficult.

When Moshe Rabbeinu demanded to leave after Makkas Orov, Pharaoh agreed to let them serve Hashem – but within Egypt. Moshe insists that we can't worship Hashem within Egypt. We have to make sacrifices and we need sheep to slaughter, and the Egyptians would never stand for it. Why? Because sheep is what they worship!

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל מִשְׁפַּחַת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָנוּ זָבַח וְיִאֱמָרוּ לָנוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְאֵלֵינוּ לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִסְקָלְנוּ דָרָךְ שְׁלֵשֶׁת יָמִים גִּלְגֹּל בַּמִּדְבָּר וְזָבַחְנוּ לָהֶם אֶלְקֵינוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר יֵאמָרוּ אֵלֵינוּ:

So just imagine, before Makkas Bechoros what does Hashem instruct every household in Klal Yisroel to do? Give themselves bris miloh – which is a painful, dangerous operation. Then, take a sheep and slaughter it and put its blood on the doorposts for all the Egyptians to see! Why did Hashem endanger Klal Yisroel like that?

The answer is that one of the major things Klal Yisroel did to become accepted by the Egyptians was that they stopped bris miloh. It was the physical separation of the Jews from the Egyptians. So, in order for Klal Yisroel to be worthy of leaving Egypt, Hashem said that Klal Yisroel would have to show that they absolutely reject what Egypt is all about. You have to do bris miloh – which they stopped doing in order to assimilate. Then you have to take the animal that the Egyptians worship publicly, slaughter it, and put the blood on the doorpost to show that you have renounced the entire culture of your former Egyptian masters.

Hashem said that Klal Yisroel need to put the blood on the doorpost to protect the house from the destroying forces that will be unleashed during the night of Makkas Bechoros. What does that mean?

The answer is that if there is a gezeirah on a tzibbur, then anyone who is a part of that tzibbur will join the fate of that tzibbur. This was the

instruction of the malochim to Lot and his family when they had to flee S'dom. They explained that they could not turn around to look at S'dom as it was being destroyed. Why not? Because the gezeirah is on the people of S'dom. If you look back and you feel some kind of identification with S'dom, you will share their fate. Lot's wife turned back because she still felt deeply connected to her life in S'dom and was turned into salt on the spot.

So in order for Klal Yisroel to avoid the gezeirah of destruction placed on the Egyptians on the night of Makkas Bechoros, they had to make sure they have completely dissociated themselves entirely. They had to make extreme demonstrations to show they are not included in the Egyptian tzibbur and they were saved. They made bris miloh and slaughtered the avodo zoro of the Egyptians.

And once that happened, and Klal Yisroel became Klal Yisroel again, the Egyptians fell in love with Klal Yisroel again – like they did before Klal Yisroel tried to assimilate. Hashem is showing Klal Yisroel that everything is being orchestrated to show you what it is all about.

So Klal Yisroel walk out with all this gold and silver and fabrics to build the Mishkon. Then they have the bizas hayam which is even more gold and silver.

The minute Moshe delayed in coming down from Har Sinai, Klal Yisroel immediately become nervous. They instinctively go back to old behavior patterns. People can start to change, but they still struggle to get rid of old, deeply ingrained bad habits.

In Egypt, Klal Yisroel were used to physical symbols of power and were not used to relating to the purely spiritual reality of Hashem. While they went through kriyas Yam Suf and Ma'amad Har Sinai and saw the truth of Hashem, it takes a while for that fundamental reality to strike deep roots. The minute something went wrong, they panicked and asked Aharon to make a physical representation.

We see another thing in this incident.

Aharon said to give gold from your wives and children. The wives and children refused, they did not participate in this aveiroh – so the men donated their own gold for the Eigel.

If you want to know where a person's values lie, look at what they spend money on.

They were so desperate for a physical symbol. They were poverty-stricken for most of their lives. They are a mere 89 days out of Egypt and they have all this gold. They've never had this kind of wealth before. But when they are desperate and panicked, they decided to spend it on the Eigel.

It is true that to relate to Hashem directly, you don't need any physical symbols or intermediaries. But Hashem said there will be a place, a physical structure where we feel the intensity of Hashem's presence, and now is the time to donate all that gold and silver to build this place.

Hashem tells them: the same willingness you had to spend the wealth on the Eigel, show that same willingness to spend it on the Mishkon. Klal Yisroel responded to the call with more than enough donations. This is how the Mishkon was a kapporoh for the Eigel – to show the same willingness to give up what you have for hashro'as haShechinoh.

Another lesson of the Parsha:

Moshe Rabbeinu comes and tells them about Shabbos. Klal Yisroel have an unbelievable opportunity to have a place where they could relate to Hashem in an intense, tangible way. But there is a more important way to relate to Hashem – in time.

There are places that are kodosh and there are times that are kodosh. Which is more important? Which is the priority? Kedushas hazman is more important. Why? Because Klal Yisroel can survive without any places which are kodosh, but it cannot survive without times that are kodosh.

There are two reasons why a person wouldn't do melocho on Shabbos. One way is that he is so busy indulging himself physically with eating long seudos, getting drunk, and taking long naps, that he simply had no time to do any physical activity. But that isn't what Shabbos is all about. Such a day misses the point of Shabbos entirely. Shabbos is a yom menuchoh u'kedushoh. No melocho – why? It is time dedicated to avodas Hashem. The purpose of the menuchoh is the kedushoh.

Oneg Shabbos means a person physically enjoys Shabbos. Why is that important?

There are two times in our calendar that the Torah calls 'Shabbos Shabboson'. One is Yom Kippur – total denial of the pleasures of Olom Hazeh. But Shabbos has oneg – which is another way of serving Hashem besides depriving one's self of pleasure. You can use the pleasure in your avodas Hashem. It can also be a Shabbos Shabboson – on par with Yom Kippur – just through enjoyment.

It is like the two types of korbonos – a korbon olah and a korbon shelomim. A korbon olah is entirely burnt to Hashem on the mizbeach – not to be eaten by anyone. But the shelomim is also a korbon – we serve Hashem by eating the meat of that korbon in addition to burning the fats on the mizbeach. They are both aspects of avodah.

If you put Yom Kippur next to Shabbos, which one has a higher kedushoh? Shabbos! The punishment for melocho on Shabbos is more severe than on Yom Kippur.

Hashem saw that after they were suddenly given so much gold and silver, they couldn't handle it. They were slaves for so long and they didn't know how to handle it when it came to a moment of crisis. So Hashem gives them an opportunity to show they know how to use this wealth for the right reasons – if they will be just as eager to donate it for a Mishkon where we can connect to Hashem in the most intense place.

But even more important than that is to relate to Hashem properly in special times of intense kedushoh.

One final point to finish off Sefer Shemos:

At the beginning of Parshas Pekudei, Moshe Rabbeinu is giving an account of where each donation went and what it was used for. Moshe was a completely spiritual human being. He gave us the entire Torah. But guess what? Hashem says Klal Yisroel will suspect you about how you use their money. You need to give an exact accounting for each tiny amount you received.

When the posuk describes the accounting of the silver donations, there is an 'azlah gereish' by the word "elef":

וְאֶת־הָאֶלֶף וְשֵׁבַע הַקָּאָוֶזֶל וְחֲמִשָּׁה וְשָׁלֹשִׁים עֶשְׂרִים וְאֵים לְעֹמֻדִים וְצִפָּה רֵאשִׁיחִם וְשֵׁק אֲתָם:

But this is strange because the azlah gereish cantillation usually denotes that something dramatic has happened. What's so dramatic about the thousand seven hundred and seventy-five silver shekalim?

Chazal tell us an interesting story. Moshe knows he was given a

tremendous amount of precious materials and fabrics and Klal Yisroel is expecting an exact accounting of all of it. Otherwise, they will accuse him of being a thief. Moshe makes the account of the silver, and it doesn't fit – it doesn't add up! 1,775 silver shekalim are missing! They're going to think I stole it! Suddenly, Moshe looks up and sees the silver hooks on the amudim and realizes – that's where the missing silver went. Now he can show he isn't a thief!

This whole story is deeply tragic. Moshe Rabbeinu – the greatest human being in history – always has to prove himself to the Jews in the midbor. On the one hand, Moshe separated from his wife to be able to receive nevuah on the highest level at any given moment. Yet he is suspected of having an adulterous relationship on the side. There is a resistance by Klal Yisroel to recognize that some people occupy an entirely elevated level of greatness that we cannot fathom. We are constantly trying to pull them down to our level.

There are many lessons here.

The first lesson is that a person has to know that we have backgrounds that have given us habits and perspectives that don't naturally conform to the Torah. We come to yeshiva to change our instincts and perspectives, and to see the world through the Torah's eyes. The Torah defines my essence and my being, in every situation. We ask: what does the Torah want me to do here? It doesn't matter what profession you join. Doctor, lawyer, accountant, rosh yeshiva – it doesn't make any difference. We always ask: what does the Torah demand of me in this situation? What are my values?

Although we all grew up as part of the western world and absorbed many of its values, we have to re-evaluate and check ourselves. We need to go through a careful process of reconstruction. Klal Yisroel had to be cleansed and purified in the midbor for 40 years before they were ready to enter Eretz Yisroel. They were raised to a high level very quickly at Har Sinai – coming immediately from generations of slavery – and they fell very quickly with the Eigel. It takes time to integrate Torah values into your core identity to make it who you are.

Another lesson is that you spend money on the things you truly value. We say: תשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה. Why is tzedokoh all the way up there with teshuvoh and tefilloh to get kapporoh? Because you can cry and carry on and on with saying how much you want to improve and daven, but if you can't put your hand in your pockets to part with your money, then all the teshuvah and tefilloh aren't worth much. People show what they really care about if they are willing to spend money on it.

Another lesson is that as much as there is kedushas hamokom, there is kedushas hazman. Setting aside 26-hour periods of time every week, dedicated to avodas Hashem in all kinds of ways, is vitally important for our ruchniyus development.

There is a Rosh in Maseches Beitzah. He asks why Yom Tov has simcha and Shabbos has oneg? He says Shabbos is not a social time because you can't leave the house with children or carry anything with you to visit other people. You can carry on Yom Tov so it is a more social time. Shabbos is dedicated to avodas Hashem – not to be distracted by social engagement.

Mishkon is a mokom kodosh. And the Torah is telling us the kedushoh of zman is more important than kedushas hamokom. The Shabbos Shabboson is for Hashem.

And finally, we need to appreciate that there are people who are so much greater than we are. One of Klal Yisroel's big failures is accusing and suspecting Moshe Rabbeinu of all kinds of petty little things. We have to understand the towering level of those who dedicate their lives to avodas Hashem, and not try to pull them down to our level.