

חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

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Topics Covered

Parashas Ki Sisa

- ▶ *Moshe learned from the law of the Sotah (a woman suspected of infidelity) that for the sake of peace, Hashem's name is erased*
- ▶ *Moshe's words were a plea: "Erase me, please"*
- ▶ *Moshe learned from Avraham that for salvation, one must ask for even difficult things*
- ▶ *When it comes to the salvation of the Jewish people, one speaks in harsh terms*
- ▶ *Hashem granted Moshe's request, but only after 51 parashiyos*
- ▶ *A special prayer for a leap year*
- ▶ *Through Moshe's prayer, we merited the phenomenon of a leap year*
- ▶ *The intent behind the words "ulekharas pesha" ("ולכפרת פשע"),*

Parashas Ki Sisa

In the holy Torah, in our parasha (Shemos 32:32), it says:

"וְעַתָּה אִם-תִּשָּׂא הַטָּאֲתָם וְאִם-אֵין מְחַנֵּי נָא מְסַפְּרֶה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ"

"And now, if You will forgive their sin – [then good]; but if not, erase me, please, from Your book that You have written."

Explaining Moshe's request to have his name erased

One wonders greatly at the language used by Moshe Rabbeinu: **"And if not, erase me please from Your book that You have written."** This is an extremely sharp and severe expression—one we find only in reference to the Jewish people's worst enemies, such as Amalek, as we say in the *Yotzros* ("liturgical poems") regarding Amalek, may his name and memory be blotted out

Even more puzzling is the very possibility of such a request: Can one even ask such a thing? After all, the Torah was created 974 generations before the creation of the world (see *Shabbos* 88b), and it is an established halacha that a Torah scroll missing even a single letter is invalid. So **how could Moshe Rabbeinu request that his name be erased from the Torah after it was already written? Would not the Torah then be missing many letters and become invalid, G-d forbid?!**

“and for the atonement of sin,” which we say in the Rosh Chodesh prayer

- ▶ *Since the Jewish people themselves made the calf, they are commanded to eradicate all idolatry*
- ▶ *The breaking of the Tablets - the salvation of the Jewish people and the world*
- ▶ *The reason for reading the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy every fast day and day of repentance.*
- ▶ *Moshe Rabbeinu instituted this for the Jewish people*

Moshe Rabbeinu’s request — according to the secret of the Sotah waters

It appears that **Moshe Rabbeinu’s statement** was derived from the laws of the *Sotah* (a woman suspected of infidelity), which he had studied along with the rest of the Torah during his forty days and forty nights with Hashem. Indeed, those among the Jewish people for whom there were no witnesses to testify whether they had sinned with the Golden Calf were tested by Moshe. He gave them to drink from the water mixed with the ground-up powder of the calf, in accordance with the laws of the *Sotah*, as stated by our Sages and cited by Rashi (Shemos 32:20, s.v. “He made the Children of Israel drink”). Now, regarding the law of the *Sotah* (Bamidbar 5:23), it is taught (*Nedarim* 66b): “To bring peace between a man and his wife, the Torah says: ‘My Name, which was written in holiness,

shall be erased into the bitter waters in a case of doubt.’” That is, Hashem says: “It is better that My Name be erased for the marital peace between a husband and wife.” From this, in my humble opinion, Moshe Rabbeinu learned an attribute of Hashem — that He forgoes His own honor. And so Moshe said to himself: “If Hashem’s name can be erased to make peace between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven — that is, for ‘**shalom bayis**’ (‘**peace in the home**’) **between Hashem and the Jewish people, then all the more can my name—the name of a flesh and blood human being—be erased for this purpose.**

**“Erase me, please”
—using an
expression of
supplication**

In my humble opinion, there is deep meaning in Moshe’s words, “*Erase me, please, from Your book.*” For Moshe knew that if his name were, G-d forbid,

erased from the Torah, the Torah would be lacking greatly— G-d forbid. Verses such as “Hashem said to --- saying...” or “Hashem spoke to --- saying...” would be left incomplete. Therefore, Moshe did not express this to Hashem as a demand, but as a plea. As our Sages said (*Berachos* 9a), “The word 'na' ('please') always denotes a request.” Although Moshe knew that erasing his name would cause a lack in the Torah, he felt that as the representative of the people, he had to pray on their behalf and argue merit for them—even if it meant sacrificing himself on their behalf, G-d forbid.

Still, it remains to be understood: Where did Moshe Rabbeinu get such a bold style of prayer from? And where did he learn that it's even possible to pray in this way? **It seems to me that he learned this from the prayer of Avraham Avinu when Avraham pleaded against the destruction of Sodom.** Avraham prayed to Hashem, “**Far be it from You to do such a thing – to kill the righteous along with the wicked, so that the**

righteous fare as the wicked!” Avraham Avinu showed through this **that when it comes to saving lives, one must speak even with such strong language.** And that was in prayer for Sodom and Amorah, who were not even of the Jewish people!

When it comes to saving the Jewish people, one prays with any expression necessary

From this, Moshe Rabbeinu understood **that he is obligated to save the Jewish people and needed to pray in a very resolute manner. Yet even so, he adds the word “na,” an expression of supplication,** because he knows that on the one hand there is really no chance Hashem will do it **but on the other hand he has to ask;** it is the least he could do for the sake of the Jewish people, for he is to them like a faithful shepherd.

It is possible, in my humble opinion, to add further insight into this by way of an analogy to a captain whose ship is sinking in the sea—he is sinking along with them. So too **Moshe's perspective, as**

the leader of the Jewish people and their captain, was that if the Jewish people would perish due to the sin of the Golden Calf, he too would go with them in his self-sacrifice for them. Without any reservation, he would perish with them, for they are his people and the flock of his pasture. This was the level of his devotion to the Jewish people.

“A tzaddik decrees and Hashem fulfills”

The Sages noted (see *Zohar*, Parashas Pinchas) that Moshe's request was fulfilled in Parashas Tetzaveh, where his name is not mentioned at all (and in most cases, this parasha is read close to the 7th of Adar, the day of Moshe's passing), because he said, “Erase me, please, from Your book,” and “a tzaddik decrees and Hashem fulfills.” And since Moshe had spoken in the form of a supplication, his request was granted—but only regarding one parsha: Parashas Tetzaveh.

My son, Yisrael Binyamin, offered a beautiful insight: Since the request “Erase me from Your book” appears in our parasha, Ki Sisa,

why was Moshe's name omitted from the previous parsha, Tetzaveh? Perhaps this too reflects Hashem's compassion for Moshe—that the omission of his name should not be too conspicuous. **Therefore, Hashem did not omit his name from the portions following Ki Sisa (Vayakhel and Pekudei) but waited until we came around to Tetzaveh again. This way, by the time the next year's reading of Tetzaveh arrived, it would not be recalled that he asked for his name to be omitted, and it would not be adjacent to "please erase me from Your book." For it was Hashem's will that the omission should not be conspicuous, out of respect for Moshe.**

**"נא"/"na"
("please") — "51"—
corresponding to the
number of
parashiyos Hashem
waited before acting
on Moshe's words**

It can be further explained, in my humble opinion, that there's a measure-for-measure principle at play here. The Hebrew word "na" ("נא") in the phrase *"Mecheini na misifrecha"* ("Erase me,

please, from Your book") has a numerical value of 51. On average, there are approximately 51 parashiyos in a year, whether a regular year or a leap year, due to instances of combined parashiyos ("double-portions"). **Therefore—because Moshe said, "Mecheini na" ("נא")—Hashem waited 51 parashiyos, corresponding to the numerical value of "na," before fulfilling Moshe's words.**

This is the intent behind the addition of "ulekhpapas pesha" ("ולכפרה פשע"), "and for the atonement of sin," in the Rosh Chodesh prayer

It seems to me that we can add another insight: In a leap year, we insert the phrase *"ulekhpapas pesha"* ("ולכפרה פשע"), "and for the atonement of sin") into the Mussaf prayer of Rosh Chodesh until after Rosh Chodesh Adar II. This is to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. And by virtue of Moshe Rabbeinu's plea for forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish people, they are granted an additional Adar, whose

theme is repentance out of love, as is known. (See the writings of the GR"A that Adar II is composed of the same three spiritual phases as the Ten Days of Repentance.)

This is similar to what we find with Rivkah. The Midrash, cited by Rashi on the verse "And she said, 'If so, why am I thus?'" (Bereishis 25:22), states that she said, "If the pain of the 'ibbur' ('pregnancy') is so great, why am I thus?" The Bnei Yissaschar (*Essays on the Month of Adar*) explains that she was alluding to *'shana m'uberes'* (lit. a 'pregnant year' but actually the term for a 'leap year'), which is known to have some harsh aspects to it. She was saying, "If the pain of the 'ibbur'—the *'shana m'uberes'*—is so great...." Therefore, we add the phrase *"ulekhpapas pesha"* which is a request for atonement, so that we don't experience anything harsh.

Through Moshe's prayer, we merited a leap year

Moshe Rabbeinu prays on our behalf for *"karpas pesha"* — that we be forgiven for the

sin of the Golden Calf. This is what he pleads for through the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* – that he should attain for us “**kaparos pesha**” for this grave sin, which he himself was not a part of. **For he is our “shliach tzibbur” (“communal representative”) who intercedes for us—the likes of whom we never had and never will have.**

Another thought occurred to me: Immediately after Moshe’s request for forgiveness and reconciliation on behalf of the Jewish people, Hashem commands the prohibition against forging covenants with idol worshipers in the Land of Israel, and also commands the destruction of their altars, monuments, and *Asherah* trees (a tree planted to beautify a house of idol worship).

Now most surprisingly, the enumerators of the mitzvos – such as the Rambam and the Chinuch – do not cite these verses from our parasha as the source for the positive commandment to eradicate all traces of idolatry in the Land of Israel. Instead, they

bring the verses from Parashas R’ei! Why did they not cite the verses from our parasha as the source? I would humbly suggest that the verses in our parasha are intended as advice to the Jewish people for rectifying **the sin of the Golden Calf.**

Since the Jewish people themselves made the calf, they are commanded to eradicate all idolatry

Regarding Egypt, it is written: “And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.” Hashem was ready to personally remove idols from the land. But since the Jewish people themselves, His intimate nation, made the Golden Calf, an idol, Hashem says to them, so to speak, “Your repentance and rectification for making an idol is that you **yourselves** will erase every trace of idolatry. I will not do as I did in Egypt, where I personally destroyed their idols – rather, you, **with your own hands, will bring about the rectification for the Golden Calf, which you made with your own hands.**”

The breaking of the Tablets — a salvation for the Jewish people and the world

Regarding the phrase “*asher shibarta,*” (“**which you broke**”), the Sages expounded (*Shabbos* 87a) that Hashem said to Moshe, “*Yasher ko’ach,*” (“thank you”) for breaking them.” This can be explained in light of the Sages’ teaching (*Avodah Zarah* 3a) that “the Jewish people were not deserving of that act, but it happened in order to teach repentance.” How, indeed, did it teach them repentance?

It seems that when Moshe saw the act of the Golden Calf, he broke the Tablets before the eyes of the entire nation in order to arouse them to rectify the sin. By doing what he did, the people saw that Moshe was in fact alive and had been on Mount Sinai, and **they would see before their very eyes the shattered pieces of the Tablets** that had been given to them in the merit of “we will do and we will hear,” **and their hearts would be broken.** For the Jewish people knew that Hashem had made a condition with the works

of Creation: If the Jewish people accept the Torah, good; but if not, He will return the world to "*tohu va'vohu*," ("astonishing emptiness"). They now realized that through the grave sin of the Golden Calf, they had violated that condition, and the world would return to "*tohu va'vohu*," G-d forbid.

**The reason we read
the Thirteen
Attributes of Mercy
every fast day and
day of repentance**

As soon as the people saw that they had been given a path to turn away from the act of the Golden Calf and return to Moshe and Mount Sinai, they were aroused to engage in complete "*t e s h u v a h*" ("repentance"). The breaking of the Tablets was the strategy Moshe devised to awaken the Jewish people to teshuvah—**and through this, he saved the Jewish people, the Torah, and the entire world.** What Moshe did was a wondrous thing — and that's why Hashem said to him "*'asher shibarta'* ('which you broke') — '*yasher ko'ach sheshibarta'* ('thank you for breaking

them')! Because by doing so, you caused them to repent."

This is why every fast day and day of repentance, we recite the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy — the formula Moshe taught the Jewish people for returning to Hashem. Indeed, it was Moshe who caused repentance to be introduced to the world. Just as teshuvah must come from a human being, so too, the revelation of the power of teshuvah came through a human being — the most unique human being, Moshe Rabbeinu.

This explains what Rashi writes at the end of the Torah, on the verse "before the eyes of all Israel":

"His heart moved him to break the Tablets **before their eyes,** as it says: 'And I broke them **before your eyes,**' and Hashem agreed with his decision, as it says: "*'asher shibarta'* ('which you broke') — '*yasher ko'ach sheshibarta'* ('thank you for breaking **them')**." The explanation is this: After breaking the Tablets, Moshe feared he might have done something unacceptable

—breaking the work of G-d's own hands. Hashem responded that **only before the eyes of the Jewish people** did it appear that the Tablets were shattered—to stir them to repentance. But in truth, he had not harmed the Tablets at all —**they were still truly still intact.** Therefore, Hashem said, "**Thank you for breaking them**" — meaning, "you need not worry over having damaged something holy. Rather, **through the appearance of the broken Tablets in front of the people,** they were awakened to teshuvah, and as for the Tablets themselves—**they truly remain intact.**

May it be Hashem's will that Moshe Rabbeinu illuminate for us the path of teshuvah, and through this we will merit to see our righteous Moshiach speedily in our days.

(See also what I wrote in *Chamudei Shai* on Bereishis, in the essay for Sukkos - Shemini Atzeres.)

ב-י-ל-א ואמן Mahara! Tzintz

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

In this parasha, Hashem says to Moshe: "And you, take for yourself choice spices..." (Shemos 30:23). Why the focus on "for yourself"? Why "You, Moshe – "take for yourself"?"

All the ingredients are mixed together with oil, and the mixture is then applied to all the vessels and the Tent of Meeting, and it makes them holy. But how does the oil itself become holy?

The Mahara! Tzintz, in his work *Malo Ha'Omer*, presents a novel explanation: The oil became holy through contact with the holiness of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe takes from his own holiness and makes the oil holy. And this is the significance of, "for yourself." "Take it for yourself" so that it becomes infused with holiness.

And once the anointing oil becomes holy in itself, it is able to transmit that holiness further.



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