

ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

It Takes a man

...and each man... (Ex. 30:12). Rabbi Mordechai HaKohen of Tzfas writes in *Sifsei Kohen* that from this passage we see that sometimes it a person has to be “a man” in order to give *tzedaka*. Meaning, he has to man up to his responsibilities and overcome his *yetzer harah*. He cites a story from the Gemara which tells about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa who went to purchase a wedding package for his daughter’s dowry, and on the way he bumped into a *gabbai tzedakah* who was collecting money for marrying off an orphaned girl. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa took an oath in order to quell his *yetzer harah* that tried convincing him to keep the money he had for his own daughter, and instead was able to overcome his *yetzer harah* and gave the money he had saved for marrying his own daughter to the cause of marrying off this orphaned girl.

Fascinating Palindromes

And they shall give... (Ex. 30:12). The *Baal HaTurim* points out that the word “they shall give” (ונתנו) is a palindrome, because it is spelled the same backwards and forwards. This alludes to the idea that whatever money a person gives as *tzedaka*, he will ultimately receive in return. Speaking of palindromes, there is a remarkable poem written by the Ibn Ezra in which each line is a palindrome, it is brought in the work *Pardes Yosef*. This poem takes the form of a question and answer both full sentence palindromes, about the arrival of the Messiah: “My father—'Living God' is Your name—why has the King Moshach not come? (אבי אל חי שמך (למה מלך משיח לא יבא)?” The answer put in Hashem’s mouth via poetic license reads: “You should know, from your forefathers I will not be embarrassed [i.e. because I promised them a future redemption and will not renege on that promise], I shall surely return to you when the time comes (דעו מאביכם כי לא בוש אבוש שוב אשוב אליכם כי בא מועד).”¹

Why Half a Shekel?

...half of the shekel... (Ex. 30:13). The Midrash (*Bereshis Rabbah* 84:18) and Talmud *Yerushalmi* (*Shekalim* 3:3) explain that giving the half-shekel served as an atonement or the sin of the Golden Calf, for the fact that they violated the Ten Commandments, and for the sin of selling Yosef. *Tzemach Dovid* (p. 189b) and *Pnei Dovid* (*Ki Sisa* 5) explain that the significance of *half* a shekel is that the *half* a shekel is supposed to atone for the missing *half* of the exile to Egypt, for they were destined to be in Egypt for 430 years, but in practice, they were there only 210 years—which is about half the allotted time. By giving *half* a shekel, we make up the other *half*. Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (cited by Rabbi Moshe Alshich) cites other commentators who explain that the *half* a shekel symbolizes unity, as by giving only *half* of the unit, everyone

¹ See below “The Luchos Backwards and Forwards” for another palindrome in this week’s Parashah.

realized that they are only part of a bigger whole. The Alshich himself adds that this was meant to serve as an atonement for those implicated in the sin of the Golden Calf by not protesting the sins of the active participants. This is because the *half* shekel symbolizes that all Jews are part of one collective unit, and even those who did not actively participate need some form of atonement if they did not protest their idolatrous brethren. Rabbi Alshich, as well as Rabbi Efraim Lunshitz (*Sifsei Daas* to Ki Sisa 137) explains that the *half* a shekel was meant to allude to the fact that only *half* of the Jewish People were truly guilty in the sin of the Golden Calf, because only the men sinned, while the women remained free of sin. Rabbi Azariah Figo (*Binah LiItim, Drush* 20) explains the symbolism of the *half* a shekel differently. He explains that the *half* a shekel served as a metaphor for the world, which our sages tell us (Mishna Kiddushin, ch. 1) one should always look at as half innocent and half guilty, and one should assume, says the Mishna, that his next choice will push the world either into negative territory or positive territory. This attitude inculcates a sense of personal responsibility into each individual, as his actions will be the deciding factor in tipping the scales for better or for worse. Rabbi Avraham Saba (*Tzror HaMor*) explains that the uniform requirement of giving exactly *half* a shekel served to teach that in the long run, all people are created equal, whether they seem to be important or unimportant, and attitude is supposed to break any traces of haughtiness and teach humility. Abarbanel takes a different approach and explains that the uniform mandatory suggestion served as the lowest common denominator that even a poor man could afford without too much bother.

Only the Wise Receive Wisdom

And in the hearts of every wiseman, I gave wisdom... (Ex. 31:6). The Talmud (*Brachos* 55a) says that Hashem only gives wisdom to somebody who already has wisdom, as it says, “And in the hearts of every wise man, I gave wisdom... (Ex. 31:6).” Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas HaTorah, Yisro* p. 628) asks the obvious question: If everything comes from Hashem—including wisdom—then how can we say that HE only gives wisdom to somebody who has wisdom, how else can somebody have wisdom if not from Him? R. Shlomo Kluger answers that sometimes Hashem Himself grants people different gifts, and sometimes He does so via an agent. Accordingly, in order for somebody to receive wisdom directly from Hashem, he must first already have wisdom (through Hashem’s agents). What he seems to be answering is that first Hashem “tests the waters” by giving somebody wisdom through a Divine agent. If that person shows that wisdom is something precious to him and he is able to hold on to that wisdom, then Hashem sees that this person deserves more wisdom, and then He Himself will give that person wisdom directly. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (in *Nefesh HaChaim* 4:5, see also *Ruach Chaim* to Avos 4:1) answers differently. He explains that there are two types of

ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

wisdom. One is the conventional wisdom with which we are all familiar. The other type of wisdom is Fear of Heaven. Fear of Heaven is the type of wisdom which is a prerequisite for all other forms of wisdom, as it says in Tehillim, “The beginning of wisdom is Fear of Heaven” (Ps. 111:10). Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchok*, *Pesach* 3:6) offers a synthesis of these two approaches. He explains that when we say that wisdom is a prerequisite for wisdom, this means that being drawn to wisdom and respecting wisdom is a prerequisite for wisdom. He explains this by pointing to the Mishnah (*Avos* 4:1): “Who is a wiseman? He who learns from everyone.” Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona explains that this means that in order to become wise, one must have a respect for wisdom, and a drive to acquire wisdom. If he appreciates wisdom, then even if he doesn’t know anything, he is already on the way to becoming wise. But if he does not appreciate wisdom and does not value wisdom, then even if he knows everything that there is to know in the world, he is considered a fool. Accordingly, Rabbi Hutner explains that the only way a person can come to such a love and appreciation of wisdom is if he already has the fear of Heaven. As it says in Mishlei, “If you search for it like silver, and like treasures you seek it, then you will understand fear of Hashem and the Knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:4–5). Once a person has acquired Fear of Heaven, then he can strive to collect knowledge and he is on his way towards wisdom.

The Uniqueness of Moshe’s Prophecy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe face-to-face, like a man speaks to his friend, and he [Moshe] returned to the camp, and his attendant Yehoshua, son of Nun—a lad—would not move from inside the tent (Ex. 31:11). The Gemara (*Brachos* 7a) relates that when Moshe was praying for the Jews’ forgiveness after the sin of the Golden Calf, he asked of Hashem that He not allow His Holy Presence to rest upon any other nation except for the Jewish People. Rabbi Moshe Sofer, author of *Chasam Sofer*, asks in *Toras Moshe* (to Ex. 33:16) why Moshe did so. If the gentile prophets were worthy of His Holy Presence, then why should Moshe Rabbenu want them to lose out on the gift of prophecy? Rabbi Sofer explains that there is a great difference between the type of prophecy experienced by the gentile prophets and that of Moshe Rabeinu. The gentile prophets would only receive their prophecies in a dream at night, while sleeping and not interacting with other people. However, Moshe Rabbenu would receive his prophecy in the middle of the day; while he was conversing with the masses, he could suddenly stop to consult with Hashem (see Num. 9:8), in the same way that one speaks to his friend. According to this, Moshe’s prayer was that He not rest His Holy Presence upon the entire nation except for amongst the Jews. Meaning, he did not mean to ask God to take away prophecy from gentile prophets, but rather meant to ask Him that when He converses with gentile prophets, He should only speak to the prophets when they are

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

separated from their people, but when He would speak to Moshe Rabbeinu, He would continue to do so while Moshe was still surrounded by other Jews.

The Shabbos Spice

The Children of Israel should guard the Shabbos to make the Shabbos... (Ex. 31:16).

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 119a) tells that the Caesar once asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah why the Shabbos foods have such a far-reaching good aroma. He answered back, “we have a spice—it is called ‘Shabbos’, and we put it inside [the food] and that makes its aroma² spread”. The Caesar then said, “Give me from this spice” to which Rabbi Yehoshua replied “For anyone who observes the Shabbos, it helps, for somebody who does not observe the Shabbos, it doesn’t help.” Rabbi Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau points out in *Lishmoa B’Limudim* (to *Shabbos* 119a) that Rabbi Yehoshua seemingly said something untrue, because he said “we have a spice—it is called ‘Shabbos’, and we put it inside [the food]...”, yet Shabbos is not something that you put inside a food. How can this be? Rabbi Landau explains that the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 11:4) tells that “God blessed the seventh day” (Gen. 2:3) refers to a special blessing that causes good taste in foods for Shabbos, and the Gemara elsewhere says (*Shabbos* 10b) that Shabbos is a special present that Hashem gave to the Jewish People. This means that Shabbos brings a blessing of good taste to foods, and Shabbos observance belongs to the Jewish People, so in essence, it is the Jewish People who put the good taste into the Shabbos foods. This is why Rabbi Yehoshua said, “...we put it inside [the food]...” Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad similarly writes in *Ben Yehoyada* (there) that Rabbi Yehoshua did not, heaven forefend, lie. Rather, the “spice” to which he referred was the special “light” of the holiness of Shabbos which spread out to the foods which were prepared in honor of Shabbos. This “light” is called “Shabbos” because it is derived from the sanctity of Shabbos.³ Accordingly when the Jewish People keep the Shabbos, they create this light/spice called “Shabbos”. With this in mind, Rabbi Yosef Chaim explains the passage at hand which says: “The Children of Israel should guard the Shabbos to make the Shabbos”. How does guarding the Shabbos make the Shabbos? It means that if the Jews keep the Shabbos properly, then they will effectively be creating the

² Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (cited below) explains that the spice of Shabbos, of all things, has an especially good scent because Shabbos is understood to be a microcosm of the World To Come. In that World, the souls will be in the Garden of Eden where there is no food or drink, rather they are sustained from the sweet smell of Eden. So too, the spice of Shabbos does not add any taste, *per se*, but rather adds to the dish’s smell.

³ Rabbi Yosef Chaim adds that this is property of the Shabbos spice is alluded to in the very word Shabbos (שבת), whose *gematria*, if each letter is spelled out and then subtracted from the total (שׁוּבַת בֵּית תִּיּוֹ = 486), plus the six letters (486 + 6 = 492) equals the *gematria* of the word “spice” (תבלין = 492).

ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

spice/light called “Shabbos”. This special relationship between the Jewish People and the sanctity of Shabbos is alluded to in the word “dish” (תבשיל), which read backwards can mean “To me is Shabbos” (לי שבת). Moreover, Rabbi Yosef Chaim cites the following story which happened in Baghdad: There was once an apostate Jew who converted to Islam, but according to local law, a Jew’s conversion to Islam was not complete until he had spoken to a Jewish sage who must try to convince him not to convert and he will remain obstinate in his decision to leave Judaism. This was to ensure that his conversion was whole-hearted and not done under duress or some other form of coercion. This Jew went to the Jewish Sage of the city, who tried to convince him to return to Judaism, but he could not. Finally, as this Jew was taking leave of the Sage, an old friend of his from when he was Jewish came in. That friend knew that he loved eating the eggs which were customarily left overnight in the *chamim* (*cholent*) because they tasted so good. Every Shabbos he used to eat seven or eight such eggs. This friend told the soon-to-be-Muslim that if he leaves Judaism, then he will no longer be able to enjoy the special taste of these eggs on Shabbos. His word immediately bore fruit, and the apostate rescinded his desire to convert to Islam. [When I first read this story, it seemed preposterous to me. But upon further consideration, the small comforts and tastes and smells of food and home have a great hold over us, and a great power to encapsulate within their experience a wealth of feeling and experience that represents much more. I will never forget watching some relatives smell a book that had been saved from their grandfathers home, and how their minds were transported by that distinct smell to another time. They later explained to me that as soon as they smelled the book, they remembered the seder; and felt themselves back in the kitchen with their mother and aunts, cooking and peeling apples and potatoes; how they remembered waking up early in the morning and watching their grandfather freshly squeeze them orange juice. All from a smell.]

Chametz at Six Hours

***And the nation saw that Moshe was delaying...* (Ex. 32:1).** The *Chemdas Yamim* (Pesach, Ch. 5) writes in the name of the *Tikkunei Zohar* (13) that the reason why one is forbidden from eating Chametz even before Pesach, from six hours into the day on Erev Pesach is that it serves to rectify the sin of the Golden Calf which also began at the sixth hour. This is alluded to in the text of the Scripture because the word “was delaying” (בשש) can be read as “the sixth [hour] had come” (בא שש), alluding to the arrival of the sixth hour which prompted the Jews to fashion the Golden Calf. By sinning in the sixth hour, the Jews inadvertently conjured the sin of Adam who also sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge at the sixth hour, as the Bible reports that beforehand he was naked and “was not embarrassed” (לא יתבוששו)—a

Much of the material presented in **Oneg!** has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the **Oneg!** weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of **Oneg!** send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com

word which is closely related to **בשש**. Accordingly, the prohibition of eating Chametz on Erev Pesach from six hours and onwards serves to rectify both the sin of the Golden Cal and the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

The Gods of the Erev Rav

These are your gods O Israel (Ex. 32:4). The *Ksav Sofer* explains that when the Torah mentions that the *Erev Rav* exited Egypt alongside the Jewish People, the Torah also immediately notes that the Jews exiting also had a lot of sheep and cattle and other livestock. Because of this juxtaposition, the *Ksav Sofer* suggests that the Torah meant to criticize the *Erev Rav* in that they left Egypt with the Jews for financial gain, because they saw how successful the Jews were monetarily, but not because they had any desire to connect to Hashem like the Jews did. Based on this, he explains the passage at hand was a sarcastic dig at the *Erev Rav*'s worldview: "These [the gold and silver which made up the idol] are your [i.e. the *Erev Rav*'s] gods'.

The Stiff-necked Nation

And Hashem said to Moshe, 'I saw this nation, and—behold!—it is a stiff-necked nation (Ex. 32:9). The Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 42:9) explains that Hashem did not call the Jews stiff-necked in order to disparaged, but rather in order to praise them. They looked at campaigns to forcibly convert them as a dichotomy of either be a Jew or be crucified, for converting out was never considered an option. Indeed, the Midrash itself notes that the Jewish People are called by the Christians the "stiff-necked" or "obstinate" nation. *Likutei Basar Likutei* explains in the name of *Vayidaber Moshe* that Hashem was registering His disappointment with the Jewish people by branding them a stiff-necked nation in the following way: He told Moshe that the reason he chose the Jewish People, even though He knew that they have various flaws and are not perfect, is because He knew that the Jewish People are at least obstinate, such that if He would give them the Torah, they would stick to it, and it would be hard to get them to turn their back on the Torah. Yet, here in the story of the Golden Calf, the Jews did not live up to their reputation and easily discarded the worship of Hashem in favor of worshipping the Golden Calf. Accordingly, Hashem's complaint was that if they do not even have the trait obstinance, then He does not want them as His people.

Evil is coming...

And Hashem had remorse over the bad which He said to do to His nation (Ex. 32:14). The author of *Pele Yoetz* writes in *Dan Yadin Al HaTorah* (p. 234) that "over the bad" means that Hashem recanted His decree to destroy the Jewish People on account of the "bad". Meaning, Moshe Rabbenu argued that if Hashem would destroy the Jewish People, then this

would prove the Pharaoh's premonition "See that bad is opposite your faces" (Ex. 10:6), and if indeed the Jews would be destroyed, that would be a fulfillment of something bad which Pharaoh saw portended in their future. When Moshe Rabbenu made this argument, Hashem agreed to him and rescinded the decree against the Jewish People "because of the 'bad'", meaning because of Pharaoh's premonition of something bad that will happen.

The Luchos Backwards and Forwards

And the Tablets—they were the work of God (Ex. 32:16). Rabbi Chaim Palagi (*Nefesh Chaim* 5:21) notes that the word "they were" (המה) is a palindrome, as it is spelled the same backwards and forwards. This alludes to the fact that text on the Tablets were written through and through and could be readable from both sides of the Tablets. Even though this doesn't make sense, because if you engrave something through and through, on one side it will be readable, but on the other side, the text will come out backwards, Hashem made a miracle that the Tablets were readable both ways. The point of this miracle was to teach that no matter from what perspective one is looking at the Torah, the Torah remains timeless and relevant. In other words, the Torah is something which remains applicable and relevant in all generations, it's not just something that can only be read in one way.

Moshe's Anger

And it was when he [Moshe] approached the camp, and he saw the calf and the dancing-circles. And Moshe became angry, and he flung the Tablets from his hands, and he smashed them at the foot of the mountain (Ex. 32:19). Why did Moshe suddenly get angry now when he descended the mountain, if he already knew that the Jews were worshipping the Golden Calf before he came down? *Shaarei Simcha* explains that even though Moshe Rabbenu already knew that the Jews were serving the Golden Calf, he thought that they were only worshipping it because of his own absence. He figured that the moment he returned, they would stop worshipping the Golden Calf and would return to Hashem. However, as he came down the mountain and he saw that they still continued to worship the Calf even though they saw imminent arrival—and they were not embarrassed of him to worship idolatry in his presence—he became angry and smashed the Tablets.

Five Times the Amount of Sinners

And about three-thousand men fell from the nation on that day (Ex. 32:28). This passage tells us that in the fallout of the Golden Calf debacle, some three-thousand Jewish men died. However, there is a cryptic *Midrash* which ties this verse to another verse concerning the punishment of one who steals and then slaughters/sells an ox: "Five-fold cattle he shall pay instead of the ox" (Ex. 21:37). What is the connection between this verse and the passage at

hand? The Vilna Gaon (in *Kol Eliyahu*) explains this based on another Midrash. It says in Ecclesiastes, “One man out of a thousand I have found, but a woman amongst ‘these’ I have not found” (Ecc. 7:28). The Midrash explains that this refers to the sinners of the Golden Calf, as amongst the men, one out of a thousand men partook in the idolatrous revelry, while amongst the women, not even one woman joined the idolatrous celebration.⁴ The problem with this assertion is that if one 1/1000 of the Jewish men sinned at the Golden Calf, then this means that only 600 men sinned at the Golden Calf (because 1/1000 of the total 600,000 Jewish men who exited Egypt is 600 men). Is only 600 men sinned at the Golden Calf, then why did 3,000 men die in the fallout? This, explains the Vilna Gaon, is the question motivating the *Midrash Pliyab*. The answer is that besides the actual sin itself, by worshipping a bovine creature, the Jews’ action reverberated in the Heavens and stained the prototypical ox which is etched on Hashem’s Throne of Glory. By doing so, the Jews had proverbially stolen and slaughtered/sold that ox, and were therefore obligated to pay back five times the ox’s value. For this reason, it was not just the 600 men who sinned at the Golden Calf who died, but five times that amount—3,000 men.

Seeing Hashem

...for no man can see Me and live (Ex. 33:20). The Abudraham (*Mussaf Shabbos, Kedushah*) renders this verse differently, “for no man or living creature can see Me.” He explains that “living creature” in this context refers to angels, and this teaches us that even the angels cannot see Hashem. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 31) famously says that right before a person dies, he actually does see Hashem (see also *Tzidkas HaTzaddik* 127,171). This means that when a person is about to die, he can actually see more than an angel can. Perhaps this explains why the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 9) says that when Hashem created man and saw that he is “very good”, this refers to the Angel of Death. What’s so good about the Angel of Death? According to what we have said, it makes a little bit more sense, because the Angel of Death gives man the opportunity to see Hashem. Indeed, the *Chida* (*Dvash LeFi, Maareches Mem* 24) writes that one of the reasons why *tzadikim* die even though they don’t deserve it is so that they can have a chance to “see Hashem”.

Hashem as a Chazzan

And Hashem passed over his [Moshe’s] face, and He called out... (Ex. 34:6). R. Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov, author of the *Bnei Yissaschar* writes (in his commentary *Veheyay Bracha* to the fifth chapter of *Brachos*) that in rabbinic parlance, a *shaliach tzibbur* is called “he

⁴ Midrashim (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:10, *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* §4:9, and *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 45) assert that the Jewish women were are righteous and did not sin in the Golden Calf episode.

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

who passes before the box” based on this wording of the passage at hand, whereby Hashem “passed over” Moshe Rabbenu’s face. Indeed, tradition (*Taanis* 17b) teaches us about this passage that Hashem, so to speak, wrapped Himself with a *tallis* like a *shaliach tzibbur* and taught Moshe Rabbeinu how to properly invoke His 13 Attributes of Mercy.

Patience, my dear

And that which bursts out of a donkey [i.e. a firstborn donkey] shall be redeemed with a sheep, and if it is not redeemed, its neck [should be broken]. All your firstborn sons you shall redeem. And you shall be not been seen by My face empty[-handed] (Ex. 34:20). Rabbi Moshe Sofer, in *Drashos Chasam Sofer (Shovavim, p. 109b)*, offers a homiletic integration of this verse as alluding to the way a Torah Scholar should interact with an ignoramus. He explains that “that which bursts out of a donkey” refers to disparaging comments that an ignoramus might make against a Torah Scholar. The Torah Scholar’s reaction ought to “be redeemed with a sheep”, meaning it should be met with patience, as sheep are known to be domesticated and calm animals. However, “if it is not redeemed” meaning that the Torah Scholar cannot meet the ignoramus’ comment with patience, but instead must become angry with him, then “its neck [should be broken]” meaning that the Torah Scholar’s anger can bring about the ignoramus’ death, as we find many times in the Talmud that a Torah Scholar got angry and the person at whom his anger was directed immediately turned into a heap of bones. Nonetheless, if the Torah Scholar holds himself back and does not become angered with the ignoramus, then “all your firstborn sons you shall redeem” meaning that all his sons will be *Talmidei Chachamim* themselves, who are called “firstborns” because they are prominent like firstborns are. This is adduced by the Talmud (*Nedarim* 81a) which explains: “Why are the sons of *Talmidei Chachamim* not *Talmidei Chachamim*? Because they disparage the ignoramuses.” If a Torah Scholar does not disparage the ignoramuses, then he will merit that his sons will follow in his noble path and will also become *Talmidei Chachamim* like him.

When is Sukkos?

And the festival of the in-gathering—at the turn of the year (Ex. 34:22). Rashi explains that “the turn of the year” means the beginning of the New Year. According to this, Sukkos is at the beginning of the year, indeed we celebrate Sukkos in the month of Tishrei—two weeks after Rosh HaShanah. However, earlier in *Parshas Mishpatim* the Torah tells us that the festival of the in-gathering is at the “end of the year” (Ex. 22:16). This implies that Sukkos should be at the end of the year, in Elul sometime before Rosh HaShanah. So which one is it? The beginning of the year or the end of the year? Rabbi Shimon Betzalel Neumann answers this question in his work in *Pninim Yekarim* (end of *Parshas Mishpatim*). He begins his answer

ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

by citing the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*, Pinchas 782): Rabbi Levi said that originally, Hashem wanted to give the Jews a holiday in each month of the summer: Peasch is supposed to be in Nissan, Pesach Sheini in Iyyar, Shavuos in Sivan, and originally Hashem planned a major holiday for Tammuz, but because the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf in Tammuz, He pushed off all holidays for three months (Tammuz, Av, and Elul), and then in the month of Tishrei, He gave us three holidays, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos to make up for those three months, in addition to Shmini Atzeres/Simchas Torah which was originally supposed to be in Tishrei anyways. Based on this Midrash, Rabbi Neumann reasons that it seems that according to the original plan, Sukkos was supposed to be in the month of Elul, but because of the Golden Calf, He pushed it off to Tishrei. With this in mind, Rabbi Neumann addresses the apparent contradiction over the timing of Sukkos. In *Parshas Mishpatim*, the date of Sukkos is give as the “end of the year” in Elul because *Parshas Mishpatim* was said *before* the sin of the Golden Calf and reflected the original plan. However, our Parshah was said *after* the sin of the Golden Calf and reflected the new plan, in which Sukkos would be in the beginning of the New Year—in Tishrei. According to the original plan, Rosh HaShanah—the day on which we proclaim Hashem as the King of the Universe was supposed to be on the 17th of Tammuz, but in practice the Jews misused that day to give credence to idolatry. Similarly, Yom Kippur—the day we repent our sins and return to where we belong vis-à-vis our relationship with Hashem—was supposed to be on the 10th of Av (instead of the 10th of Tishrei), but instead we misappropriated that day to complain about going to the Holy Land (where we truly belong) and ended up wandering the desert for forty years.

Learning Fear of Heaven from Moshe

And they feared from approaching him [Moshe] (Ex. 34:30). The Vilna Gaon, cited by the Dubno Maggid (*Obel Yaakov* to *Parshas Reay*) explains that this verse means to teach that anybody who came close to Moshe Rabbenu became influenced by him and strengthened his Fear of Heaven. For this reason, Moshe Rabbenu said, “What does Hashem your God want from you—just fear?” as though Fear of Heaven was a simple matter. Indeed, the Talmud (*Brachos* 33b) says that for Moshe Rabbeinu, Fear of Heaven was a small matter. The Kli Yakar and others explain that when the Gemara says that **לגבי מה מילתא זוטרתא היא** - that for Moshe fear of God is simple, it can also mean “ligabei Moshe, for one who was close to Moshe, fear of God was simpler and easier to accomplish, just by being in his proximity.”

Moshe's Mask

The Talmud (*Sukkah* 28a) relates that Hillel the Elder had eighty students, thirty of whom were fitting to have the Holy Presence rest upon them like Moshe Rabbeinu did, thirty of whom were fitting to have the sun stop on their behalf like it did for Yehoshua, and twenty of

ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

RABBI ELCHANAN SHOFF

PARSHAS KI SISA

whom where somewhere in between these two levels. The greatest of his students was Yonason ben Uzziel, and the smallest of all these students was Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. They said about Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai that he mastered all of Scripture, Mishnah, Gemara, Halachos, Aggados, Dikdukei Torah, Dikdukei Sofrim, Kal VaChomers, Geziros Shavos, Astronomical Calculations, Gematriyos, the Conversations of the Ministering Angels, the Conversations of the Demons, the Conversations of the Palm Trees, cleaners' parables, fox parables, a great thing, and a small thing. The Talmud then clarifies, that "a great thing" refers to the *Maase Merkava* and "a small thing" refers to the arguments of Abaye and Rava. And this just the level of mastery achieved by Hillel's smallest student, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. But his greatest student, Yonason ben Uzziel, when he would engage in Torah Study, all the birds which flew above him would spontaneously burst into fire. The Gerrer Rebbe *Sefas Emes* (cited in *Likkutei Yehudah*) extrapolates from this the greatness of their teacher Hillel the Elder, about whom it does not say that the birds flying about him burnt up. Hillel was able to control the fire inside of himself, and not allow it to go outside and show itself outwards. The Gerrer Rebbe *Imrei Emes* adds that this was the nature of Moshe Rabbeinu's mask. It served to hide the Rays of Glory which emanated from his face and suppress the great fire which burned inside of him, so that it not consume others.