**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT KI TISA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

*Megilat Ester* (6:12) tells that after Haman, following the king’s orders, paraded Mordekhai with great honor through the streets of Shushan, “Mordekhai returned to the royal gate” where he normally sat. The Gemara in Masekhet Megila (16a) comments that when the verse tells of Mordekhai “returning” to his previous state, it means that he “returned to his sackcloth and his fasting.” As we read earlier (4:1), after Haman’s edict to annihilate the Jews was announced, Mordekhai donned sackcloth – a sign of grief and mourning – and went out into the public square. And, Ester had called upon all the Jews of Shushan to observe a three-day fast (4:16), and thus the Gemara understands the verse as emphasizing that Mordekhai continued fasting and put on his sackcloth after being paraded through the city.

The Gemara’s comments, at first glance, seem difficult to understand in light of the chronology of the events. The *Megila* relates that Ester first came before the king “on the third day” (5:1) – referring, apparently, to the final day of the three-day fast which is mentioned in the previous verses (4:16-17). At that meeting, she invited the king and Haman to a banquet held that same day, and at that banquet, she asked the king and Haman to return for a second banquet the following day. That night – the night in between the two banquets – Achashveirosh could not sleep, and ended up instructing Haman to parade Mordekhai through the city, which Haman did the next day, right before the second banquet. (Soon after the parade, the royal chariots came to bring Haman to the second banquet – 6:14). It turns out, then, that the parade took place on the day after the three-day fast observed by the Jews of Shushan. Why, then, does the Gemara speak of Mordekhai continuing his fast after being paraded through the city, when the three-day fast had already ended?

Rashi, in his commentary to the Gemara, implicitly addresses this question, and he explains that when the *Megila* speaks of Ester approaching Achashveirosh on “the third day,” this does not refer to the third day of the fast. Rather, it means that she came before the king on the third day since the announcement of Haman’s edict. It was on that day when Mordekhai informed Ester of the ban, and Ester then called for the fast, which began the following day. She came before Achashveirosh two days after the announcement – on the second day of the fast, such that Mordekhai was paraded through Shushan the next day, the third day of the fast.

The Rashash (to Megila 15a) notes that the Midrash seems to have understood differently. The Midrash (*Ester Rabba* 8:7) comments that the Jews of Shushan fasted from the 13th through the 15th of Adar – which means that the first day of the fast was the very day when Haman’s edict was first issued, as the edict was announced on the 13th (3:12). (Already Rav Shlomo Alkabetz, in his *Manot Ha-levi*, questions this view, noting the halakhic requirement to formally commit to a fast the previous day.) According to this opinion, then, the day when Ester came before the king – “the third day” – must have been the final day of the fast, even if we interpret “the third day” as referring to the third day since the announcement of Haman’s edict, because this was also the first day of the fast. Hence, in the view of the Midrash, we have no choice but to conclude that Mordekhai was paraded through the Shushan the day after the fast ended.

If so, the Rashash writes, then we must explain that when the Gemara speaks of Mordekhai fasting after the period, it means that he took upon himself an additional day of fasting, beyond the three days enacted by Ester. Although the three-day fast had concluded, Mordekhai nevertheless chose to continue. We might add that the Gemara describes Mordekhai returning to “HIS sackcloth and HIS fast” – perhaps indicating that this fast was “his” – meaning, his personal practice, as he refused to end the fast after the three days observed by the other Jews of Shushan.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the different views that exist regarding the three-day fast which Ester asked the Jews of Shushan to observe in response to Haman’s edict (4:16). The intuitive understanding is that on the day the edict was announced – the 13th of Nissan (3:12) – Mordekhai informed Ester of the tragic news, whereupon she ordered the Jews of Shushan to fast, and thus they began fasting the following day, the 14th of Nissan. However, the Midrash (*Ester Rabba* 8:7; *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer* 50) states that the three days of fasting were the 13th through the 15th of Nissan – clearly indicating that the Jews of Shushan began fasting the same day the edict was announced. As we noted parenthetically yesterday, this understanding seems difficult in light of the Gemara’s explicit ruling (Ta’anit 12a) that a halakhic fast requires a formal acceptance of the fast the previous day. This question was raised by Rav Shlomo Alkabetz, in his *Manot Ha-levi* commentary to the *Megila* (4:16).

A creative answer to this question is proposed by Rav David Cohen, in his *Ohel David* (vol. 3, p. 146). The *Megila* introduces its description of Mordekhai’s reaction to the news of Haman’s edict by stating, “And Mordekhai knew of everything that happened.” The Midrash (*Ester* 7:18) comments, “How did he know? Eliyahu the prophet informed him.” According to the Midrash, Mordekhai heard the news of Haman’s edict to annihilate the Jews through some quasi prophetic means. The obvious question arises as to why such means were necessary. After all, the *Megila* in the previous verses elaborates at length describing the efforts that were made to inform all people in the empire of Haman’s edict. The news clearly spread very quickly. Why did Mordekhai need Eliyahu to inform him that the Jews were condemned to annihilation? One answer emerges from Rashi’s comments to this verse, explaining that it was revealed to Mordekhai that the Jews were deserving of punishment for certain wrongs which they committed (participating in Achashveirosh’s feast, and bowing to s statue). According to this reading, the Midrash refers to not the news of Haman’s decree per se, but rather the reason why God brought this crisis upon the Jews.

Alternatively, Rav Cohen suggests, the Midrash perhaps presents an entirely different understanding of the sequence of the events. It may have sought to explain a basic question that arises from the text – why the *Megila* needed to emphasize that Mordekhai “knew all that was happening.” As mentioned, the Persian officials ensured that the news would be spread throughout the empire, and thus certainly, everyone in Shushan – the capital city, where the edict was first announced – was aware of the decree, and thus there would seem to be no reason to note that Mordekhai knew what was happening. The Midrash therefore proposes that the phrase “And Mordekhai knew all that was happening” means that already the previous day, before the announcement was made, Mordekhai was informed through prophecy that Haman had decided to annihilate the Jews. It was on this day – the 12th of Nissan – that he communicated with Ester, and she called for a three-day fast, which began the next day, the 13th. The Midrash is thus consistent in stating that the fast began on the 13th of Nissan.

Later (pp. 145-6), Rav Cohen proposes a different theory, suggesting that the king’s messengers perhaps set out to announce Haman’s edict on the night of the 13th, and already that night, Mordekhai informed Ester of the news and she called for a fast. If so, then the three-day fast began on the morning of the 13th. Rav Cohen draws possible support for this theory from the “*Az Rov Nissim*” hymn which is sung towards the end of the *seder* on Pesach, which speaks of several Biblical events which transpired at night, including, “*Sin’a natar Aggagi ve-khatav sefarim ba-layela*” – “The Aggagite [Haman] harbored hatred, and wrote letters at night.” These “books” refer to the scrolls on which his edict was written which were then distributed throughout the empire, as the *Megila* relates (3:13). The author of this hymn maintained that these scrolls were written at night, and it is thus possible that the messengers were dispatched already that night. Indeed, the *Megila* tells that the messengers left “*dechufim*” – urgently (3:15)– suggesting that they were sent immediately after the scrolls were prepared. This might lend support to the theory that the announcement was made at night, in which case we can explain that the Jews accept the fast that night, and began fasting the next morning.

Monday

One of the obligations we must fulfill on Purim is *matanot la-evyonim* – giving charitable gifts to the poor, as the *Megilla* explicitly states (9:22).

Rav Yair Bachrach (author of *Chavot Yair*), in his *Mekor Chayim* (694), writes that the use of the term “*evyonim*” in this verse in reference to the needy is instructive with regard to the precise requirements of the *matanot la-evyonim* obligation. The Gemara in Masekhet Bava Metzia (111b) establishes that the different terms used by the Torah for “poor” are not precisely synonymous, and refer to different levels of poverty. Specifically, an “*ani*” is a pauper who requires financial assistance, but whose state of deprivation has yet to compel him to beg, whereas an “*evyon*” is somebody facing such dire straits that he goes around asking for help. Accordingly, Rav Bachrach writes that since the special charity obligation on Purim is formulated by the *Megila* with term “*matanot la-****evyonim***,” one must ensure to give charity specifically to *evyonim* – people suffering extreme poverty.

Significantly, however, the Rambam (*Hilkhot Megila* 2:16-17), as well as the *Tur* and *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 694), use the term “*matanot la-****aniyim***,” and do not specify that one must give specifically to those who fall under the category of “*evyon*.” The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* (694:3) explains that the *Megila* uses the word “*evyonim*,” rather than “*aniyim*,” not to require giving charity specifically to “*evyonim*,” but rather to clarify that one fulfills the requirement even by giving to “*evyonim*.” One might have assumed, the *Arukh Ha-shulchan* writes, that one should give only to those who are too ashamed to ask for charity, and not to those who have reached the point where they must beg. The *Megila* therefore formulated the *mitzva* as a requirement to give to “*evyonim*” – not because it is fulfilled only by giving to *evyonim*, but to make it clear that one fulfills the obligation even by giving to *evyonim*. Interestingly, the *Arukh Ha-shulchan* comments that it is indeed a greater *mitzva* to lend assistance to *aniyim* – those who are still too ashamed to request help – then to help *evyonim* who ask for money, even though the *evyonim* need the help more desperately. The *evyonim* – despite their more extreme state of poverty – have an advantage in the sense that they have already overcome their natural inhibitions and approach people for help, whereas the *aniyim* do not. Therefore, in the view of the *Aruch Ha-shulchan*, it is considered a greater *mitzva* to give to those in need who are still reluctant to ask for help, than to give to those in more dire straits who have already resorted to begging.

(See [Rav Asher Weiss’ discussion of the topic](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/148_20_80.pdf).)

Tuesday

The customary practice when reading Parashat Ki-Tisa is to end the first *aliya* just before the story of the sin of the golden calf (31:17), and to then read the entire narrative of this story for the second *aliya*. This results in a very lopsided distribution of the *parasha* – featuring two unusually lengthy *aliyot* followed by five relatively brief *aliyot*.

This practice is mentioned already by Rav Chaim Benveniste, in his *Kenesset Ha-gedola*, as cited by the *Magen Avraham* (428:8). The reason this is done is so that the story of the golden calf would be read entirely by a *Levi*, who receives the second *aliya*. As Levi was the only tribe which did not participate in the sin of the golden calf (as indicated in 32:36), it is appropriate to have this narrative read specifically by a *Levi*. (Interestingly, the *Kenesset Ha-gedola* also writes that it is customary to read this section in a low, subdued tone, a practice which is not commonly observed nowadays.)

Rav Chaim Palagi, in his *Yafeh La-leiv* (428:3), writes that if the *kohen* who receives the first *aliya* wants to continue and read also the story of the golden calf, he may be allowed to do so. Since *kohanim* also belong to the tribe of Levi, the custom to have a *Levi* read this section can be fulfilled also by a *kohen*. (Of course, the remainder of the *parasha* must then be divided into six *aliyot*, instead of the usual five.) However, Rav Palagi then cites those who disagree, arguing that since *kohanim* are the descendants of Aharon, the one who actually made the golden calf (notwithstanding the fact that his intentions, according to the traditional understanding, were sincere, hoping to stall until Moshe returned), it would be inappropriate for a *kohen* to read this section.

Rav Palagi’s ruling might perhaps serve as a precedent for a similar case – where no *kohen* is present in the synagogue on Shabbat Parashat Ki-Tisa, such that the first *aliya* can be given to any congregant. It stands to reason that if a *Levi* is present, it would be preferable to call the *Levi* for the first *aliya*, and extend the first *aliya* until the end of the story of the golden calf, so that this section is read by a *Levi* – similar to the *kohen* in the case discussed by Rav Chaim Palagi. Indeed, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, in *Chashukei Chemed* (Menachot 30a), tells of a synagogue in which this was done when no *kohen* was present on Shabbat Parashat Ki-Tisa, and Rav Zilberstein’s brother-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, said that this was the correct procedure to follow under the circumstances.

Rav Zilberstein addresses also a different case that once happened in a certain synagogue – where neither a *kohen* nor a *Levi* was present, and a *Yisrael* was called for the first *aliya*, but right when the reading began, a *Levi* walked in. Once a *Yisrael* is called for an *aliya*, no subsequent *aliyot* can then be given to a *kohen* or a *Levi*, and thus, seemingly, in this situation, there is no possibility of following the custom to have a *Levi* read the story of the golden calf, since a *Yisrael* was already called for the first *aliya*. However, the *gabbai* at this synagogue conceived of a creative solution. *Halacha* permits adding *aliyot* on Shabbat beyond the seven required *aliyot*, and *Leviyim* may be called for the additional *aliyot*. The *gabbai* thus suggested that the first section of Parashat Ki-Tisa, which is normally read as the first *aliya*, should be divided into seven *aliyot*, and then the *Levi* who had just arrived can be called for an eighth *aliya*, which would extend from the beginning of the story of the golden calf through the end of the *parasha*. This way, a *Levi* will be able to read the story of the golden calf. Of course, the result of this arrangement is an extremely imbalanced distribution of *aliyot* – seven very short *aliyot*, followed by one exceptionally long *aliya*.

Rav Zilberstein writes that in principle, this arrangement should be followed in such a case, in order to fulfill the custom of having the story of the golden calf read by a *Levi*. However, the leaders of the congregation must determine if whether having such an exceptionally long *aliya* will cause the congregants to grow impatient and restless, in which case it is preferable to conduct the reading as usual, as the custom to have the story of the golden calf read by a *Levi* does not justify overburdening the congregation.

Wednesday

The Mishna in Masekhet Menachot (87b) lists the various measuring utensils which were present in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and presents an argument among the Sages as to whether these included a utensil measuring one *hin* (a measurement of volume, equal to around 4 liters according to Rav Chaim Naeh, and around 7 liters according to the *Chazon Ish*). The majority opinion in the Mishna maintains that there was such a measuring utensil, but Rabbi Shimon disagrees. Rabbi Shimon notes that although various rituals in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* require a half-*hin* or other percentages of a *hin*, and so such measuring utensils were present in the *Mikdash*, the only time a full *hin* was required was at the time of the *Mishkan*’s consecration at Mount Sinai. As we read in Parashat Ki-Tisa (30:22-30), God commanded *Benei Yisrael* to prepare the *shemen ha-mishcha* – special anointing oil with which to formally consecrate the *Mishkan*, its furnishings, and the *kohanim*. The amount of olive oil that God commanded to prepare for this purpose was a *hin* (30:24). However, as the Gemara establishes in Masekhet Keritut (5b), the oil prepared by Moshe would miraculously last for all time, as indicated by God’s instruction to Moshe that this anointing oil would serve “*le-doroteikhem*” – “for your generations” (30:31). As this was the only requirement involving a *hin*, Rabbi Shimon notes, and the *shemen ha-mishcha* would never again need to be produced, there was no reason for such a measuring cup to be present in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

The Gemara (Menachot 87b) explains that the majority of the *Tanna’im* disagreed with Rabbi Shimon, maintaining that after the *hin* utensil used by Moshe to produce the *shemen ha-mishcha* was preserved for all time, even though it was not needed. The Rambam follows the majority opinion in *Hilkhot Kelei Ha-mikdash* (1:18), that the *hin* used by Moshe was preserved in the *Beit ha-mikdash*. The Radbaz, commenting on the Rambam’s ruling, writes that the *hin* was preserved “*le-zeikher be-alma*” – simply as a relic, commemorating Moshe’s production of *shemen ha-mishcha* at Sinai.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, however, in his *Dibrot Moshe* (Bava Kama, vol. 2, p. 322), suggests a different reason for why the *hin* was kept in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. He explains that in principle, the requirement to produce the *shemen ha-mishcha* applies for all time, for the purpose of consecrating the *Mikdash*, its furnishings, and the *kohanim*. As a practical matter, we have been guaranteed that the initial supply prepared by Moshe will suffice for all time (and will resurface when the *Mikdash* is rebuilt), such that we will never need to prepare more. Nevertheless, since in essence there is a requirement to produce a *hin* of *shemen ha-mishcha*, this utensil was kept in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

This novel explanation will affect the question of whether we may apply the discussion of this *hin* to other similar situations of a utensil designated for a sacred purpose which is no longer needed. Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, in *Chashukei Chemed* (Menachot 87b), addresses the case of a synagogue which purchased an especially large goblet for the “*chanukat ha-bayit*” celebration held when the synagogue first opened, and had been since preserved. However, as it occupied valuable space, and was no longer needed, the congregants thought it should be discarded. Rav Zilberstein, without reaching a definitive conclusion, considers the possibility that according to the majority view, there might be value in preserving sacred articles used by a synagogue even when they are no longer needed. However, according to Rav Moshe Feinstein’s understanding, the *hin* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was preserved only because there was a theoretical halakhic purpose, in which case it does not serve as a precedent for other sacred articles.

Thursday

We read in Parashat Ki-Tisa that after the sin of the golden calf, Moshe pleaded to God to forgive the people, and he introduced his plea by acknowledging, “This nation has committed a grave sin – it made a golden deity” (32:31).

The simple reading of this verse (as Ibn Ezra explains) is that Moshe here confessed on the people’s behalf, as only after acknowledging guilt can one request forgiveness. Indeed, the Rambam, in *Hilkhot Teshuva* (2:3), cites this verse as proof that when one confesses his sin when repenting, he must specify the wrongful act – just as Moshe here specified what the people had done. The Rambam interpreted this verse as an example and model of *vidui* – confession, one of the indispensable components of repentance, as one cannot begin to request for forgiveness and seek atonement without acknowledging guilt.

However, Rav Yitzchak of Vorki offered a deeper reading of this verse, suggesting that this “confession” was, in fact, a crucial part of Moshe’s plea on the people’s behalf. Rav Yitzchak of Vorki drew a comparison to a child who climbs on a table and then falls off and is hurt. If the injury is not significant, the parent will scold the child for his dangerous, reckless behavior. But if the child is seriously hurt, the parent will immediately rush to help the child, bring him to a doctor if necessary, and do anything he can to comfort and console him. Similarly, Rav Yitzchak of Vorki explains, Moshe was arguing to God that *Benei Yisrael* at this time needed compassion, not anger, because they had suffered a severe spiritual “injury.” The sin of the golden calf – when the people worshipped a graven image just weeks after beholding God’s revelation – extended beyond mere wrongdoing, and constituted a spiritual malady. Their condition was like that of a child who acted unsafely and ended up seriously hurt. And so what they needed was not anger, but rather compassion and assistance to recover. Moshe therefore began his petition by exclaiming, “This nation has committed a grave sin” – not as an acknowledgment of guilt, but rather as an appeal for mercy.

This chassidic teaching draws our attention to the fact that sometimes, the appropriate response to wrongdoing is not anger and disciplinary measures, but rather love and compassion. Anger, in many instances, leads us to overlook the underlying “injury” which the child suffers, the pain that either results from the wrongful act or that led the child to commit the wrongful act. Even those who have acted improperly require and deserve compassion and help – and sometimes, even more so than others.

Friday

We read in Parashat Ki-Tisa of Moshe’s angry reaction when he came down from Mount Sinai and witnessed the scene of *Benei Yisrael* worshipping the golden calf: “Moshe was incensed, and he threw from his hands the tablets, shattering them at the bottom of the mountain” (32:19). The Gemara (Shabbat 87a), as Rashi cites, explained that Moshe destroyed the tablets upon which God had engraved the commandments because he concluded that after worshipping a graven image, they were not worthy of receiving the Almighty’s Torah.

Rav Yisrael of Chortkov (in *Neizer Yisrael*) creatively saw this act as Moshe’s effort to prepare himself to plead to God on the nation’s behalf in the wake of this grievous sin. Moshe knew that in order to effectively help the people and pray for them, he needed to be able to identify with them, to feel a part of the nation, and to understand and empathize with them. This was very extremely difficult for Moshe to do after he spent forty days living atop Mount Sinai like an angel, receiving the Torah from God, while *Benei Yisrael* rapidly regressed to the point where they worshipped a foreign deity. How, he wondered, would he be able to properly relate to the people, understand them, and identify with them, given the vast difference between them? The Rebbe of Chortkov explains that for this reason Moshe got angry and shattered the *luchot* – because the Gemara (Shabbat 105b) teaches that “one who breaks utensils in his fury” is considered as though he worshipped idols. After breaking the tablets out of anger, Moshe was then not all that distant from *Benei Yisrael*, who had just worshipped a graven image…

This clever chassidic quip is likely intended to instruct us how we can emulate Moshe’s example, and continue feeling love and compassion for people despite their failings and wrongdoing. The way this is done, the Rebbe of Chortkov here teaches, is by reflecting on our own imperfections which resemble, to one extent or another, other people’s imperfections. When we remember that we are able and expected to respect ourselves and feel generally good about ourselves despite our failings, we will be able to respect and others and judge them positively despite their failings. The Rebbe of Chortkov depicts Moshe as undergoing a process of identification with the people after the sin of the golden calf by acknowledging his own human frailties, such as anger, which, in a sense, resembles idolatry. (This resemblance is commonly understood to mean that anger and frustration bespeak a refusal to accept the undesirable circumstances, which amounts to a denial or rejection of Providence which orchestrated those circumstances.) Similarly, when we realize that we are all far from perfect, we can connect with and relate to all people, flawed and imperfect as they may be, so that we can all work together in friendship and harmony to make ourselves and the world better.

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