

REPENTANCE AND PURITY

Parshas Ki Sisa, Parshas Poroh

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Parshas Ki Sisa, coinciding most years with Parshas Poroh, it should be of interest to find a particular parallel. Indeed, some basic anecdotes connect the two, timely reading before Chodesh Nissan.

One of the most difficult aspects in Jewish history, conveyed in our Sidra, is the request by Moshe of Hashem "Show me Thy glory". (Yes, it is history, because Hashem's response is not only to Moshe, but the whole Jewish people in all generations.) Moshe spent forty days with Hashem on Sinai. That closeness to Hashem was more than any human ever achieved. "Peh el Peh," says Hashem, mouth to mouth do I speak to him (to Moshe) in a clear vision... (Bamidbor 12:8). "Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face, as a man would speak with his fellow" (our Sidra 33:11). Even on that propitious level of closeness it did not dawn on Moshe to request to "see" Hashem. Now after the tragic downfall of Israel, hundreds of rungs down the slope, because of the terrible sin of idol worship, dancing to the golden calf, Moshe has the courage to ask for it? Amazing, shocking!

Moshe, who was always the humblest of the humble, was even more broken as he came down, and saw the abyss to which his brethren plunged. He smashed the Tablets. Was this the appropriate time to request super high levels of closeness to Hashem?

[Smashing the tablets was considered a colossal achievement. The very last passage in the Torah credits Moshe for his courage to do that. "For all the signs and wonders that Hashem sent him to perform in the land of Egypt... and for the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel". Rashi expounds this as a reference to smashing the Tablets.

Commentators explain that by smashing the Tablets, Moshe actually saved Israel. By bringing the Tablets to the Israelites it were to constitute a complete relationship, as a full marriage, so to speak. Turning afoul with the

golden calf would have been likened to a married woman cohabiting with a stranger, rendering her forbidden to the husband. By smashing the Tablets, the full "marriage" not having been taken place, thus treated as a single woman, the "marriage" was still permitted to take place. For this the Torah concludes with huge credit for Moshe. The question now becomes more wondrous: Was this the appropriate time for Moshe to ask for that gift of high level closeness?

An astonishing saying of the rabbis affords us a clue to understand the above. The rabbis say: "The place (level) where a Baal Teshuva (repenter) stands, even a complete Tzadik cannot reach" (Brochos 34b, Sanhedrin 99a).

The period when Moshe came down from Sinai on Yom Kippur, with the good news of "SOLACHTI", I have forgiven, that was the time when he came down with the second Tablets. In a sense, all our connection to Torah is a Yom Kippur connection, the contact through repentance. As Rav Hutner z.l. once observed in a pre Yom Kippur shiur, the only time we pray for Torah in the Shemona Esra is in the fourth Bracha "Hashivainu, Return us back O our Father, to thy Torah". The Bracha concludes Boruch Who seeks repentance. This coincides with the above that ours is a Yom Kippur Torah.

On Moshe's emboldened request to see G-d, Rashi comments, Moshe realized that this was a "Ais Ratzon" a moment of opportunity, (to take advantage of). One conjectures Rashi refers to Moshe's realization that a special relationship with Hashem developed in connection with repentance and atonement, a level superbly higher than ever before. That was the "ais ratzon" Moshe sought to take advantage of.

Though Hashem's response to Moshe's request was not positive, "You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see My face and live" (33:20) - the request was not completely ignored. "You will see my back". Cites the Talmud (Brochos 7a) that Hashem showed Moshe the knot on His Tefilin, which contains the verse "and who is like Your people, one nation in the world" (II Samuel 7:23). That knot symbolizes that Hashem and Israel are tied; the sin of the golden calf forgiven and again tied as one.

It is interesting to note, that just as Hashem's Tefilin is indicative of Hashem's forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, so has our Tefilin a reference to that forgiveness. So it seems from the Shulchan Aruch chapter 32, Halacha 44 where we learn that portions inserted inside into the Tefilin come encircled with a hair from a calf "in order to bring atonement for the sin of the golden calf" (Mishna Brura ibid 210).

The special MAFTIR, Parshas POROH, coinciding with this week's Parsha is most appropriate, Poroh Aduma discussing the process of purification after having been contaminated by a corpse. The very fact that a contaminated person is forbidden to enter the MISHKAN, the Beth Hamikdosh, is testimony to the higher element of life in the Mishkan, Mikdosh. The Torah, nevertheless, provides the contaminated person a process of Tahara (purification). This is similar to the sinner who is given the opportunity of repentance.

The interrelationship between Tahara (purity) and Tshuva (repentance) is clearly manifest in the law of PRISHA. On the last seven days of Adar, Moshe, Aaron and his children were required to seclude themselves at the entrance of the Ohel Moed for a seven day period, PRISHA, in intensive preparation to the erection of the Mishkan on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and the Korbonos that follow. The same procedure, PRISHA, is to be observed on two more occasions: seven days before Yom Kippur and seven days before burning the Poroh Aduma (Vayikro 8:34, see Rashi). Obviously, these two procedures have one common goal. Repentance is an act of Tahara, purification of the Neshama.

On the 23rd day of Adar, seven days before Nissan, as it did seven days before Yom Kippur, the process of PRISHA prepared the Kohain to perform the Avodah in the MISHKAN on the highest level of sanctity.

Temporarily, today, after the churban, until the geula (bimhairo) we are given the opportunity of "Kol Halomaid... whoever studies the laws of Korban Oleh, it is as bringing a Korban Oleh" (see Taanis 27b). The same applies to the above. This, too, is a Divine gift.

