

Parshas Ki Sisa in a Nutshell

(Exodus 30:11-34:35)

The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given regarding the making of the Sanctuary's water basin, anointing oil and incense. "Wise-hearted" artisans Betzalel and Aholiav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat.

When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a golden calf and worship it. G-d proposes to destroy the errant nation, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the tablets, destroys the golden calf, and has the primary culprits put to death. He then returns to G-d to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written."

(continued next column)



Moses' commitment to his people was non-judgmental. He was willing to make these sacrifices for them, not only when they lived up to the standards that he had set for them, but even when they failed to do so. He did not demand compliance for his commitment. He dedicated himself to his people as they were. For sure, he had his yardsticks, the principles and values which he strove so hard that his people live up to. But his love for them rose above these standards. -- *The Rebbe*

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G-d forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first G-d proposes to send His angel along with them, but Moses insists that G-d Himself accompany His people to the promised land.

Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends the mountain, where G-d reinscribes the covenant on these second tablets. On the mountain, Moses is also granted a vision of the divine thirteen attributes of mercy. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with G-d and to teach His laws to the people. ❖

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**Join us each weekday
morning Mon-Fri
as we delve into
the mysteries of
Chassidic concepts.
5:55 am, followed
immediately by Shacharis.**

Halachic Zmanim
Shabbos, Feb 19, 2022
Eastern Standard Time
Earliest Tallis 5:48 AM
Latest Morning Shema..... 9:25 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola) 12:38 PM
Plag Hamincha..... 4:32 PM
Earliest Evening Shema.... 6:04 PM

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

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Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – Feb 18 / I Adar 17

Candle Lighting.....5:17 pm

Mincha5:20 pm

Shabbos Day – Feb 19 / I Adar 18

Shacharis..... 9:30 am*

Torah Reading 10:40 am

Kiddush 12:20 pm

Mincha5:20 pm

Rabbi's Drasha.....5:40 pm

Shabbos Ends6:17 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:25 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri)6:15 am

Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am

Mincha (Sun-Thurs)1:45 pm

Maariv (Sun-Thurs)9:15 pm

Bulletin

*This week's Bulletin
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Chassidic Masters

Reasoning the Stone

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com*

And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand: tablets inscribed from end to end, on the one side and on the other were they written.

And the tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d, engraved upon the tablets.

-- Exodus 32:15-16

The Torah refers to its 613 divine commandments by an array of synonyms: mitzvah (commandment), dibbur (word), mishpat (law), ed (testimonial), and chok (decree), among others.

Chok implies a supra-rational decree — a law observed in submission to an authority which we have neither the right nor capacity to question. Thus, chok is also the name of a certain class of mitzvot — the chukim — which the human mind cannot rationalize: mitzvot such as the prohibition to mix meat with milk and the laws of ritual purity, which exemplify our innate inability to fathom the divine will.

The literal meaning of chok is engraving. Indeed, explains Chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the difference between the supra-rational chok and rational law or testimonial, is the difference between engraved letters and written letters.

The Torah was given to us in writing: by divine command and dictation, Moses wrote it in physical ink on physical parchment, giving us the Chumash (the five books of Moses), also referred to as Torah SheBichtav, The Written Torah. Even in its spiritual incarnation, before G-d willed that it be translated into a guide to physical life, the Torah is described by the Midrash as written in black fire on white fire—the supernal equivalent of ink on parchment.

But there is also a more basic state of Torah—Torah not as written law but as engraved law. The Zohar speaks of a level on which the Torah exists as the genesis of the divine will, engraved in the supernal purity. In its transmission to man, the written Torah was also preceded by an engraved Torah: the entirety of the divine law was first given to us encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, which were etched by the hand of G-d in two tablets of stone.

When something is written, the substance of the letters that express it (the ink) remains a separate entity from the substance upon which they have been set (the parchment). True, the two have bonded to form a single entity—the document—but this remains an entity that consists of two things: the ink and the parchment, the message and the medium, the definitive forms and the abstract background. On the other hand, letters engraved in stone are not added to their medium but are forged in it: the words are stone and the stone is words.

A person's understanding and feelings are inked upon his soul.

These are things he has acquired and has come to identify with, to the point that they comprise his personality; nevertheless, they remain an addition to his quintessential self. He distinguishes between his I and his intellect and emotions: the former is set and unalterable, while the latter are in a state of flux, developing and changing as he progresses through life.

Thus, the rational mitzvot, which we observe with an understanding and appreciation of their positive function—as they indeed should be observed, for it is to this end that they were garbed in garments of reason—are as ink written upon the parchment of our souls. Something has been added to our self, appended to our psyche with the adhesive of reason and emotion. I am doing the mitzvah only to the extent that our intellect and feelings are "me"—to the extent that ink and parchment become one in the document.

The chok, however, is an engraved decree.

We do it for no reason other than our innate obedience to G-d. And our obedience to G-d is not something we acquire or develop (though there might, at times, exist the need to waken it, when it is silenced and suppressed by the dross of material life). It is something that is of our very essence, something impressed in the spark of G-dliness at the core of every soul.

(Continued next page)

The Veneer of Reason

Chok, however, is not only a certain type of mitzvah; it is also a general name for all of G-d's commandments.

This is expressed in the opening words of the Torah section that bears the name of the engraved mitzvah—the section of Chukat (Numbers 19-21). Chukat begins with the law of parah adumah (the red heifer), which is prefaced with the statement *Zot chukat haTorah*--"This is the chok of Torah". The simple meaning of these words is that this mitzvah is the chok of Torah, the ultimate supra-rational law. Indeed, the law of the red heifer is often cited as the prototypic chok--the law of which King Solomon, the wisest of men, said: I sought to be wise to it, but it is distant from me. There are other mitzvot that defy rationalization; but the law of the red heifer is also counter-rational, replete with paradoxes and logical inconsistencies.

But the words *This is the chok of Torah* have another meaning as well. As Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi reads it, the verse is telling us: This is the mitzvah that expresses the chok of Torah, the most poignant example of the supra-rationality of the entirety of divine law. All of Torah is chok, the unfathomable will of G-d. Thus, the very quality that distinguishes parah adumah from all other mitzvot is the quality that makes it the essence of all of the mitzvot.

For each and every mitzvah is an expression of the divine will. Obviously, no reason or function—and certainly no reason or function that the human mind can conceive or understand—can possibly explain or describe a divine desire. So it is wrong to think of Torah as consisting of two parts—rationally inked laws on the one hand, and supra-rational chukim on the other. Rather, these are two dimensions of Torah as a whole, with each mitzvah possessing a written element in addition to its engraved essence.

If the human mind agrees with the mitzvah "Do not murder," if it appreciates the profound impact the weekly observance of Shabbat has on our lives, it is only grasping at an auxiliary garment in which G-d chose to clothe His expressed will. On the other hand, even the most mystifying chok can be studied and analyzed, and profound lessons derived from them to guide and inspire our lives.

Indeed, the engraved Ten Commandments (which, incidentally, are all rational mitzvot) embody the entire Torah, while also the most supra-rational chukim were inked by Moses upon parchment. Every mitzvah can, and ought to, be related to as the unfathomable will of G-d, driven by the obedience to G-d etched in the core of our souls. And every mitzvah can, and ought to, be appreciated intellectually and emotionally, and thereby appended to our thinking and feeling selves.

The only reason we classify mitzvot into logical laws, rational testimonials, and supra-rational decrees is because certain mitzvot have been heavily garbed in reason, so that our natural and initial reaction to them is a rational-emotional one, while others come to us as less veiled expressions of the divine will, with the immediate effect of stimulating our innate obedience to their commander. This is not to say, however, that we are to confine our observance and experience of a mitzvah to the most obvious face it presents to us. In the case of the ostensibly rational mitzvot, we must strive to nevertheless observe them with a simple, self-negating obedience to the divine will. Regarding the chukim, the challenge is to study and ponder their significance (including the significance and function of their non-rationality as stimulators of our unequivocal obedience to G-d) to the point that we observe them with the passion and intellectual involvement that characterize the most profoundly appreciated law or testimonial.

End To End

But why bother with such externalities? If the mitzvot, in essence, are the unfathomable will of G-d; if every soul, in essence, possesses an innate obedience to the divine will; why not keep our mitzvot pure? Why not strive only to awaken our intrinsic loyalty to G-d and observe His commandments, without the extraneous ink of intellectual inquiry and emotional empathy?

Because G-d commanded otherwise. G-d clothed His unqualifiable will in the patent logic of the mitzvah of charity, in the genius of the Torah's judicial code, in the emotional experience of Shabbat, in the subtle insights we glean from the most esoteric chok. G-d instructed us to not only implement His will but also to study it, analyze it, debate it and expound upon it. Why think and feel when it comes to G-d's decrees? Because this, too, is a divine decree.

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This is the ultimate meaning of the statement, "This is the chok of Torah". All of Torah is chok: not only is every law and testimonial essentially a supra-rational decree, but also their written surface, also our intellectual-emotional quest to comprehend and appreciate them, is to be undertaken in supra-rational obedience to the divine will.

For this, too, we have a metaphor in the two engraved tablets Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. If the difference between rational appreciation and supra-rational obedience is the difference between writing and engraving, the difference between obedience sans reason and obedient reasoning is the difference between two types of engraving.

Usually, engraved letters penetrate below the surface of the stone but do not cut through it from end to end. In other words, while the letters form an integral part of the stone, not every part of the stone is of the defining substance of the letters. If the letters are

carved one inch deep in a two-inch-thick tablet, then only the front inch of stone is engraved.

This is comparable to a mindless obedience to the divine will. The person's performance of the mitzvah is engraved in his soul's essence, but it does not cut through it from end to end. Certain aspects of his being—his intellect and emotions—remain untouched. True, these are the more external, appended aspects of his being—the reverse of his stone, if you will—but they are part of it nonetheless.

However, regarding the two tablets that embodied the Ten Commandments, we are told that they were inscribed from end to end. Each letter was a complete hollow, bored front to back; every inch of stone was both the medium and the substance of the letters. This represents a state of being in which also the externalities of the soul — the elements of self usually associated with writing — are part and parcel of the engraving of the divine desire in the human essence. ❖



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**SHABBAT MINYAN: PARSHAT VAYAKHEL / SHKALIM
@ THE PATERSON SHUL (plus A JEWISH BOXING DISCUSSION)**

The Paterson Shul @Seniors Tower of Paterson located at 510 E. 27th Street/Paterson will have Minyanim on Shabbat February 26 at 9:00 am. Besides a good Davening and a Kiddush, they will also be discussing "Jews in the Boxing Ring" with a special historian guest.
(With COVID restrictions lifted for masks, they are only required when entering/exiting the apartment complex.)
For more info visit: www.PatersonShul.org

From Our Sages

This they shall give . . . half a shekel (Exodus 30:13)

The mitzvah of the half-shekel is that each should contribute a coin that [is valued at] half of the dominant coin of that time. If the prevailing coin is a takal, they should give a half-takal; if it is a sela, they should give a half-sela; if it is a darcon, they should give a half-darcon.

-- (Midrash HaGadol)

Why not a complete coin? To teach us that no man is a complete entity unto himself. Only by joining with another can a person become a "whole thing."

-- (The Chassidic Masters)

This they shall give (Exodus 30:13)

G-d took a coin of fire from under His throne of glory and showed it to Moses, saying: "Such as this they shall give."

-- (Midrash Tanchuma)

Moses could not understand: How could a mere coin serve a person as "a ransom for his soul to G-d"? G-d answered him by showing him a "coin of fire." G-d was saying: When a person performs even a modest act of charity with the fire of passion and enthusiasm, he is indeed giving a piece of his soul.

-- (The Rebbe of Kotzk)

Money is fire. Like fire it can destroy and annihilate, or illuminate and warm, depending on how it is used.

-- (Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk)

The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less (Exodus 30:15)

People differ in their intellect, character and talents, in the quantity of their material resources and the timbre of their spiritual sensitivities. But all are equal in the very basis of their bond with G-d: the intrinsic commitment to Him that resides at the core of their souls. So while every man contributed to the making of the various components of the Sanctuary in accordance with their individual capacity, all gave equally of the silver of which its foundation was made. As regards the foundation of the relationship between man and G-d, the "rich man" cannot give more, and the "pauper" cannot give less.

-- (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet . . . when they come near to the altar to minister (Exodus 30:19)

Every person, upon waking in the morning . . . should wash his hands with [a minimum of] a quarter-log of water poured from a utensil . . .

Man entrusts his soul [to G-d at night] tired and exhausted, and G-d restores it to him rejuvenated and refreshed so that he may serve his Creator with all his capacity, this being the purpose of man. Therefore we should sanctify ourselves with His holiness and wash our hands with water from a vessel before serving Him and ministering to Him, like the kohen who would wash his hands from the basin each day before beginning his service . . .

-- (Shulchan Aruch HaRav)

All dirt and all filth betake themselves to the "other side" (the forces of evil), which derives sustenance from them; therefore it is a mitzvah to wash the hands . . .

-- (Zohar) ❖

Haftorah for Ki Sisa in a nutshell

1 Kings 18:20-39

In this week's haftorah, Elijah the Prophet demonstrates the worthlessness of the Baal, just as Moses chastised the Israelites for serving the Golden Calf, as discussed in this week's Torah reading.

The background of this week's haftorah: King Ahab and Queen Jezebel ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and encouraged the worship of the Baal deity as well as other forms of idolatry. To prove that G-d alone is in control and provides sustenance, Elijah decreed a drought on the kingdom—no rain fell for three years. When Ahab then accused Elijah of causing hardship for the Israelites, Elijah challenged him to a showdown. He, Elijah, would represent the cause of monotheism, and 850 idolatrous "prophets" would represent their cause. Ahab accepted.

The haftorah begins with Elijah, the Baal prophets, and many spectators gathering atop Mount Carmel. Elijah rebuked the people of Israel, uttering the famous words: "How long will you hop between two ideas? If the L-rd is G-d, go after Him, and if the Baal, go after him."

Elijah then stated his challenge: "Give us two bulls and let them [the Baal prophets] choose one bull for themselves and cut it up and place it on the wood, but fire they shall not put; and I will prepare one bull, and I will put it on the wood, and fire will I not place. And you will call in the name of your deity, and I will call in the name of the L-rd, and it will be the G-d that will answer with fire, he is G-d."

The people agreed to the challenge, and the prophets of the Baal were first. The prophets' entreaties to their god went unanswered. Elijah taunted them: "Call with a loud voice, for you presume that he is a god. [Perhaps] he is talking or he is pursuing [enemies], or maybe he is on a journey; perhaps he is sleeping and will awaken..."

As evening approached, Elijah took center-stage. He built an altar, laid his offering upon it and surrounded it with water. "Lord, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Israel," he declared. "Today let it be known that You are G-d in Israel and that I am Your servant, and at Your word have I done all these things. Answer me, O L-rd, answer me, and this people shall know that You are the L-rd G-d..."

A fire immediately descended from heaven and consumed the offering, as well as the altar and the surrounding water. "And all the people saw and fell on their faces, and they said, "The Lord is G-d, the L-rd is G-d." ❖

שבת שלום גוט שבת!



Good Shabbos to all!