

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר

“This is the decree of the Torah that Hashem has commanded, saying...” (19:2)

Why did Hashem give *Klal Yisrael* the *mitzvah* of *para adumah*? It is the quintessential *chok*, we do not know the reason for this *mitzvah*. This *mitzvah* was given to *Klal Yisrael* so that they never become haughty. One should never thin that he has a complete understanding of the Torah; one must always act with humility and strive to follow the will of Hashem, even when the meaning behind the *mitzvah* is hidden from us. (Baruch Moshe)

This exact expression is only found twice in the Torah. At the beginning of *Chukat*, where it speaks of the preparation of the *mei chatat*, waters mixed with the ashes of the *para adumah* for the purification of the unclean; and in *Matot*, where it speaks of the cleansing of utensils taken from the Midianites as spoils of war.

The Torah wishes to allude here to the fac that these two issues, the purification of the body and the *koshering* of one's utensils is a prerequisite to the observance of the 613 *mitzvot*.

(Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch)

Rashi writes that the *para adumah* somehow comes to compensate for the sin of the Golden Calf. At first glance, the association between the two seems unclear. When normally referring to the Golden Calf, one thinks of those who played the most active role, meaning those who instigated and actively participated in demanding it and causing it to be made. *Chazal*, however, tell us that the active participants were relatively few in number, consisting only a minority.

Perhaps that piece of information provides a key through which to understand why, specifically, it was the *mitzvah* of *para adumah* that was the most appropriate vehicle for atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Yes, it was a minority that bore direct responsibility for the calf. However, that does not mean that the majority were blameless.

What possible problem was there with the majority if they were never involved? Actually, the lack of involvement was, in fact, the basis for their requiring atonement. They stood by. They did not interfere. They heard what some of the *tzibbur* was busy with, namely a sin. And they felt that it was none of their business. They felt that whatever this minority was doing had nothing to do with themselves. They were above it all. And therein lies the sin. *They failed to recognize their shared fate with the rest of society.* They were above it and could not lower themselves.

(Rabbi Nissan Alpert)

יען לא האמתם בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל

“Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael...” (20:12)

Hashem told *Moshe* that he made a mistake: *Moshe* thought that Hashem only performs miracles for *tzaddikim*. However, in instances that will result in the sanctification of *Shem Shamayim*, Hashem performs miracles for *resha'im* as well. **יען לא האמתם בי** – because *Moshe* did not properly believe how Hashem does miracles, and therefore did not speak to the rock, להקדישני – and did not bring about a *kiddush Hashem*, *Moshe* did not merit to bring *Bnei Yisrael* into *Eretz Yisrael*.
(*Tzror HaMor*)

ונצעה אל ה' וישמע קלנו

“We cried out to Hashem and He heard our voice...” (20:16)

Klal Yisrael continue to speak to the Edomites saying we both share the tradition from our forefather *Yitzchak*, that “the voice is the voice of *Yaakov*, and the hands are the hands of *Eisav* (*Bereshit* 27:22), which means that as long as *Yaakov* continues to use the power of his voice in prayer and Torah study, *Eisav's* hands, his physical power, will be ineffectual against them. Thus, since “we cried out unto Hashem” in Egypt and He accepted our prayers – “He heard our voice” – you may observe that the “voice of *Yaakov*” is functioning quite well, and your sword will be of no avail against us.
(*Wellsprings of Torah*)

וישמע הכנעני מלך ערד ישב הנגב כי בא ישראל דרך האתרים וילחם בישראל

“And the Canaanite king of Arad, who dwelled in the south, heard that Israel had come by the route of the spies, and he warred against Israel.” (21:1)

QUESTION: Of what significance to the war with the Canaanites is the fact that the Jews had come *derech ha'atarim* – “by the route of the spies”?

ANSWER: The spies who went to the land of Canaan (*Eretz Yisrael*) outwardly presented themselves as righteous people, but inwardly they were wicked and corrupt. In reality, the nation that launched the attack mentioned in our verse was *Amalek*, not Canaan. They merely altered their dialect to speak like the Canaanites, so that *Bnei Yisrael* would erroneously pray to Hashem for protection from the Canaanites, and thus their prayers would be of no avail.

Hashem conducts himself with the Jewish people *middah k'neged middah* – measure for measure. If he punishes them, G-d forbid, He does so in a way that echoes the offense. With the words *derech ha'atrim*, the route of the spies – the Torah is telling us that the occurrence was Hashem's way of punishing measure for measure. Since the Jews “followed the route” by succumbing to the influence of the spies, who endeavored to disguise themselves, Hashem now sent upon them the Amalekites, disguised as Canaanites.
(*Luach Erez*)

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