

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

ואנשי קדש תהיון לי ובשר בשדה מרפה לא תאכלו לכלב תשלבון אתו ... (כב-ל)

Chazal in *Maseches Yoma* teach us that a heavenly fire rested upon the *mizbeach* throughout both Temples, yet its appearance differed dramatically. In the First *Bais HaMikdash*, the fire descended from above in the majestic form of a lion, reflecting the era’s spiritual fullness. Built by *Shlomo HaMelech* of *Shevet Yehudah*, likened by *Yaakov Avinu* to a lion – “*Gur Aryeh Yehudah*” - this Temple embodied royalty, prophecy, and the radiance of the *Shechina*. By contrast, explains the **Maharsha ז”ל**, the Second *Bais HaMikdash* arose under Persian rule, without a line of *Malchus Bais Dovid*, *Nevuah*, the *Aron HaKodesh*, or the *Urim v’Tumim*. Chazal in *Rosh Hashanah* associate Persia with the dog, a loyal yet lowly creature. The heavenly fire appeared as a dog to mirror the diminished spiritual stature of that period.

Yet there is another layer to this symbolism, one that emerges from a remarkable narrative preserved in the writings of the **Abarbanel ז”ל**, and this is what he wrote: “*As for Koresh, his beginnings and deeds, Yosef Ben Gurion did not remember a single thing about him, and I saw fit to tell you here what is written about him in the books of the kings of Persia, and what the Latin writers brought in their chronicles.*” He continues and explains that according to ancient Persian chronicles, Koresh (Cyrus) the very king who authorized the rebuilding of the Temple had an extraordinary origin story. His grandfather, King Astyages, had only one daughter, who secretly married a nobleman of the realm. When Astyages discovered the truth, his fury was boundless. He saw the marriage as a political betrayal. The prince was seized and thrown into prison, where he languished until his death. His daughter, once the apple of his eye, was confined to a guarded chamber, isolated from the world. And when she gave birth to a son, the king’s rage only deepened. To him, the child was not a grandson but a threat - a rival claimant to the throne, born of defiance and disobedience.

Astyages issued a chilling decree: the infant must not live. He summoned one of his trusted servants and handed him the newborn, wrapped in a royal cloth. The servant was commanded to take the child into the wilderness, far from human habitation, and leave him there to perish. The man obeyed, though his heart trembled. Here was a royal heir who was fated to die. He carried the infant deep into a forest known for its wild beasts, a place where no child could possibly survive. There, beneath the shade of ancient trees, he laid the baby on the ground and walked away, unable to look back.

But fate had other plans. As the child cried in the stillness of the forest, a lone dog wandered into the clearing. Some versions describe her as a wild dog, hardened by the struggle for survival; others imagine her as a domesticated animal that had strayed from a nearby settlement. Whatever her origin, she approached the infant not with predatory instinct but with a strange, maternal tenderness. She sniffed him, circled him, and then lay beside him, offering warmth. When he cried from hunger, she nursed him. When danger approached, she growled and stood guard over her tiny human charge.

Miraculously, the child survived, grew strong, became a superior archer and eventually gathered around him a band of followers. When Astyages, now old and weakened, heard rumors of a mysterious young warrior gathering followers, he sensed danger. He sent soldiers to eliminate him, but the young man - Koresh - defeated them in a defiant and ruthless battle. He marched on the royal city, overthrew the king, and claimed the throne that had been denied him since birth.

Because he had been raised by a dog, the chronicles say, he was called “Kyros,” a name associated with the dog in Persian. The animal that had saved him became part of his identity, a symbol of loyalty, survival, and unexpected providence. If Koresh, the benefactor of the Jewish people, bore this canine symbolism, then the dog-shaped fire of the Second *Bais HaMikdash* takes on a new meaning. It becomes not merely a symbol of diminished spiritual stature, but also a gesture of gratitude. The **Yerushalmi** teaches that one must acknowledge goodness even to a dog. How much more so to a king whose kindness enabled the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the holy Temple. The fire’s form thus becomes a subtle tribute to Koresh himself, a recognition of the unlikely instrument through which divine mercy was delivered.

The Jewish people were instructed to contribute a *Machatzis HaShekel* - a half-shekel coin to the treasury of the *Bais Hamikdash*. This was a way to take a public census, as well as money to upkeep the *Mishkan*. Similarly, due to the public’s lack of care, the young King Yoash and Yehoyada, the *Kohen Gadol*, institutionalized a system to ensure that there would always be sufficient funds to keep the *Bais Hamikdash* clean and beautiful.

R’ Pinchas ben Pilta ז”ל (Bris Shalom) explains that the *posuk*, “*the money of the value of the people ... to bring to the house of Hashem,*” is meant to be understood that because Jews are never allowed to be counted, the worth of the *Machatzis HaShekel* coin was meant to be a substitute

to the actual human being (*Megilla 29b*). However, as we know, human life is priceless so how can one ever evaluate the value of a human soul?

Chazal tell us that the “*Machatzis HaShekel*” donation was given with “*money which comes from a man’s heart,*” and the same coin was given whether the person was wealthy or poor. The purpose of this was to create a unity amongst the Jewish people and even though the coin itself might have been of little value, it was HOW the half-shekel coin was given that made all the difference.

Ultimately, the motive, not the societal class of the giver, was the deciding factor in evaluating the value of the *Machatzis HaShekel* coin.

זה יתנו כל העבר על הפקדים מהצית השקל בשקל הקודש עשירים גרה השקל ... (שדך לפרשת שקלים ל-ג)

Rashi in *Parshas Ki Sisa* on this *posuk* cites Chazal who explain the word “ה” in this context to mean, not merely a conceptual *shekel*, but a real physical picture of one. Because *Moshe Rabbeinu* was somewhat unsure as to what this coin was, *Hashem* showed him a מטבע של אש. Why enlighten Moshe with a fiery coin and not an actual metal coin?

The **Chiddushei HaRim ז”ל** says that the word *shekel* shares the same three letters as the Aramaic word *shokal* - which means to take. Meaning, he says, this donation of the half-shekel was meant to inspire each *yid* to *take* control and establish oneself to be firmly rooted in *avodas Hashem*. Moshe was perplexed as to how such a seemingly small donation can effect such profound spiritual stimuli. *Hashem* then showed him a מטבע made out of fire. There is a more profound message here. A *baal darshan* in an *Ashkenazic kehilla* once expounded on this thought, and explained that with *hislahavus* - a burning passion - one can be catapulted to extraordinary spiritual heights. Hence, even a nominal monetary donation, if given with “*hartz*” and fervency will favorably inspire the donor. When the **Kotzker Rebbe ז”ל** heard this interpretation, he was astonished that a *Litvishe* rabbinic figure could say such a beautiful *drash*. He said that since this particular *kehilla* was meticulous in the *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim*, they were *zoche* to reveal this *pshat*.

Chazal say that we read *Parshas Shekalim* before *Adar*. How appropriate it is that after *Klal Yisroel* said the immortal words, “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” the week after we were “forced” to be *mekabel* the *Torah*, we dedicate ourselves with a fire and a “*bren*.” Through that zealotness, *Klal Yisroel* “re-accepted” the *Torah* on *Purim* with *simcha* and “*hislahavus*.”

As the השפעת ארבע פרשיות begin this week, let us work to connect to their special השפעות!

משל למה הדבר דומה

כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון ... (כב-כא)

משל: One afternoon, amidst the hustle and bustle of the Lower East Side, a student came to visit his *Rebbi*, **R’ Moshe Feinstein ז”ל**. Just then, a woman entered the room. She looked broken, having recently become a widow, carrying the heavy weight of her new reality. With great pain, she poured out her heart to the *Rav*, filling the room with the raw depth of her grief, her future, and her crushing loneliness.

The student watched in awe, expecting the *Rosh Yeshivah* to offer words of wisdom or deep perspective. But R’ Moshe didn’t. As the woman spoke, tears began to stream down his face. He wept openly with her, his shoulders shaking with a shared, genuine grief. After she finished speaking and he offered a few soft, heartfelt words, the woman left the room looking visibly lifted and comforted.

By his intense emotional connection, the *talmid* assumed R’ Moshe knew her husband or was close to him. But R’ Moshe said that he didn’t know him and until she walked in that day, he didn’t know her. “Then why did the *Rosh Yeshivah* cry so bitterly for a stranger?” R’ Moshe looked at him with deep sincerity and said, “She is a part of *Klal Yisroel*. Her pain is my pain. I must also carry her burden.”

נמשל: The prohibition against afflicting a widow or orphan is not limited to financial oppression or causing her pain of any kind. One need not always provide financial support to make a difference; rather, by simply displaying genuine kindness and sensitivity, one fulfills the profound *mitzvah* of caring for them. In the eyes of the *Torah*, a listening ear and an open heart can be just as valuable as gold, turning a moment of isolation into one of comfort. mage of *Hashem*. To disrespect a person is to criticize his or her Maker.

ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם ... (כא-א)

INSIGHTFUL TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE WEEKLY SEDRA TO LEARN AND TO ENJOY BY R’ MOSHE GELB

זינפש ...

Parshas Mishpatim marks a significant transition in the *Torah’s* narrative. Following the awe-inspiring *Kabbolas HaTorah* at *Har Sinai*, the *Torah* pivots to a dense series of civil laws. We move from the thunder and lightning of the Ten Commandments to the granular details of damages and labor laws, and then back to the pronouncement of *Naaseh V’nishma*. It’s enough to make anyone dizzy! Why does the *Torah* interrupt the story of *Matan Torah* with the myriad halachos of *Parshas Mishpatim*?

One might say that the *Torah* is teaching us a fundamental principle: spirituality is not found only in the clouds, but in how we treat our fellow human beings on the ground. The *mitzvos* of *bein adam lamakom* commanded in this *parsha* are just as essential to *Matan Torah*. As mentioned, the *parsha* concludes with the Jews’ declaration of “*Naaseh V’nishma*” - we will do and we will hear (or understand). This phrase defines the Jewish approach to Divine service. By placing “doing” before “understanding,” the *Torah* suggests that commitment to ethical action and Divine law precedes intellectual comprehension. It is the *mishpatim* of the *Torah* which define our character and who we are, not the other way around.

Indeed, it is the *Torah* which is the only true path to *tikkun hamidos*. There are many people who study ethics and philosophy but are far from practicing what they learn and preach. It is only the *koach haTorah* invested in the *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro* that has the power to change one’s essence. This is alluded to in the *posuk* וירפא יתן ורפא ירפא. It is when one puts in the “שבת” - the sitting and learning *Torah* and applying its precepts into practice, that “וירפא ירפא” he may heal whatever spiritual malady and character defects he may have. In our modern lives, it is easy to separate our religious identity from our professional or social conduct. *Parshas Mishpatim* reminds us that they are one and the same. The laws of the marketplace and the laws of the *Mikdash* both originate from the same source. When we act with integrity in our business dealings and show compassion to those who need it, we are fulfilling the vision of *Matan Torah*. May we be *zocheh* to be so inspired.

על פי כל כסף הקדשים, כסף נפשות עירבו כל כסף אשר יעלה על לב אש (מלכים ב' ג-ה)

A PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE WEEKLY HAFTORAH BY AN UNEQUALED HISTORIAN

תורת הצבי על הפטרות

