



# THANK YOU HASHEM

## For Shabbos Kodesh!

### Parshas Ki Sisah

#### HaMeor Shebah

*A Short Burst of Relevance*

העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעט ממחצית השקל...

*“The wealthy shall not add and the poor shall not detract from the Machatzis HaShekel...”*

IN SEFER MEI Hashiloach, the holy Ishbitzer Rebbe explains the deep and ever-relevant message of the *Machatzis HaShekel*. From the perspective of *halacha*, it is immediately clear how the Torah encompasses every possible facet of the human experience, guiding our behavior in both joyous times as well as the opposite, providing direction in best-case-scenarios as well as for those times when things don't seem to work out as we hoped they would. But in truth, the broad and encompassing practical framework of halacha is mirrored by a similarly broad corpus of Aggadic teachings, a wide-ranging spectrum of ideas that relate to the multi-faceted nature of the Jew's inner world. On a very basic level, these teachings may be divided into two parts: those aimed at the downtrodden, and those aimed at the successful. At every given moment, one has the ability to draw from these two streams of thought - to lift oneself up with the *chizzuk* of Chazal in a moment of darkness, or to curb his pride and remind himself of all that is yet to be done in a moment of great light and achievement. Chazal teach that a Jew should always see himself as being “half guilty and half worthy”. The Ishbitzer teaches that on the deepest level, this means that a truly guilty person should always remember his merits, and a person who is truly pure should never forget his

HASHEM LOVES YOU  
MORE IN A MOMENT  
THAN ANYONE  
COULD IN A LIFETIME.

essential guilt, the ways in which he can still continue to improve. This is what the *Machatzis HaShekel* represented - the manner in which every person should always see himself as “half”; neither too guilty to move on, nor too successful to stop moving. Thus, the *Machatzis HaShekel* ensures that, “*He'ashir lo yarbeh*”, a Jew who is experiencing success in his avodas Hashem will not come to arrogance and stagnation, “*v'hadal lo yamit*”, and, on the other side of the coin (pun intended), a person who is destitute of Torah and mitzvos will never come to see himself as being hopeless or a lost cause. 🤴

#### Parsha Roundup

*A 60-second Review*

- 🤴 An obligatory contribution of exactly half a shekel of silver to the Mishkan is required of every Jew over twenty. Hashem gives instruction for making the *Kiyor*, anointing oil and incense. Betzalel and Aholiav are appointed to oversee construction, and another command is given regarding Shabbos.
- 🤴 Moshe delays in descending Har Sinai and the people make a golden calf. Hashem desires to destroy the nation, but Moshe intercedes on their behalf. Moshe breaks the *luchos*, destroys the *eigel*, and has those involved put to death.
- 🤴 Due to Moshe's intercession, Hashem forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. Moshe insists that Hashem Himself, and not an angel, accompany His people to Eretz Yisrael.
- 🤴 Hashem reinscribes a second set of *luchos*. On Har Sinai, the thirteen attributes of mercy are revealed to Moshe. In order to protect the people from his awesome radiance, Moshe covers his face with a veil, which he removes only to speak with Hashem and to teach Torah to the Jewish nation.

## P'nimiyus haParsha

### An Encounter with the Soul of the Torah

ויקח מיידם ויצר אתו בכרסו ויעשהו עגל מסכה..

*"This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf..."*

IN THIS WEEK'S parsha, we read about one of the most tragic and difficult episodes in the Torah, the *Cheit Ha'Egel*. The *meforshim* offer various explanations for how it was possible for the Jewish nation to experience such a dramatic spiritual descent just a short while after hearing the voice of Hashem Himself declare, "I am Hashem your God." Most of these explanations center around the essence of the sin and attempting to understand the message embodied in the golden calf.

In his inimitable fashion, Reb Shlomo Carlebach explains the nature of the sin in a basic, but penetrating manner: "*We did not want Hashem, we wanted a God.* It didn't matter who it was, as long as we had something." To Reb Shlomo, this was the most hurtful aspect of the *Cheit Ha'Egel*, the suggestion that beyond our need for a "God", our relationship with Hashem didn't truly mean all that much to us.

Reb Shlomo recounted a story to illustrate this point. A few hundred years ago in Hungary, a family wanted to marry off their youngest daughter to a certain person. The match was made and a date for the wedding set, but on the night of the wedding - much like the story of Lavan and Yaakov - the father of the bride felt regret in allowing his younger daughter to marry before her older sister and directed his older daughter to stand under the chuppah in her place. When the veil was lifted after the chuppah and the bride was revealed to be the older daughter, the *mesader kedushin*

sent a letter to the great Rabbonim of the time, asking whether the marriage was valid. In their response, they *paskened* that it depended on how the *chossan* felt about it. When they asked him, he said, "It's fine. She is also a woman! Who cares?"

Beyond the grave sin of idol worship, what was most "hurtful" about the *Cheit Ha'Egel* was the implication that, as long as we had a God, it didn't matter who it was - that our relationship with Hashem isn't deeply essential, that we don't share a deep and abiding connection with Hashem at our core.

We know that the Torah is eternal, and that all its episodes contain eternal messages that are relevant in every generation. Although we may not be making golden calves in our day and age, it is important to take the time to reflect honestly on whether the message of the *Cheit Ha'Egel* might express itself in the way we relate to the Torah and mitzvos. Is our Yiddishkeit essential to us? Do we feel a deep-seated bond to the *mitzvos* we perform? Are we in an intimate relationship with Hashem? Or do we *chas v'shalom* feel as if any "God" will do?

May we merit to work on truly "getting to know" Hashem, and for our experience of Yiddishkeit to flow forth from our deepest essence, permeated with love for the Being we are called upon to serve, our Father in heaven Who loves us more than we can ever begin to imagine. 🕎



*When we work on reframing our engagement with Torah and mitzvos as a relationship with Hashem rooted in the very essence of our being, this rectifies the Chet Ha'Egel.*

## Tohameha

### Tasting the Depth of Shabbos Kodesh

AS WE DISCUSSED last week, the time of *Mincha* on Shabbos afternoon is the holiest part of the entire Shabbos. We learned that this is the reason *Mincha* is the shortest *tefillah*, because, entirely overwhelmed by the infinity of Hashem expressed in the walls of the *Beis Knesses* and His eternity expressed in the limited moments before sunset, we are aware that the only knowledge we can possibly attain is the knowledge that it is truly impossible for us to attain even an inkling of Hashem's greatness - "the pinnacle of knowing is to know that one does not yet know." This is why, during the brief *shemoneh esrei* of *Mincha*, we refer to Hashem using the simplest and most abrupt terms - "*Atah echad, v'Shimcha echad,*" "You are one, and Your Name is one." Then, immediately after declaring this most basic foundation of our faith, we must again return our focus upon the lower realms; "*umi k'amcha Yisrael, goy echad ba'aretz.*" This, explains the tzaddik, is also the deeper meaning of the *pasuk* we recite before opening the *aron* during *mincha* of Shabbos, "*Va'ani tefillasi lecha Hashem es ratzon, Elokim b'rov chasdecha, aneini b'emes yish'echa.*" In light of what we have learned, the Chernovitzer reads these words in the following manner: "*Va'ani tefillasi lecha Hashem*" - When we ready ourselves to daven *Mincha* and long for our *tefillah* to connect us to Hashem, we find that we have no ability to express our awe and nullification to the great Light that is revealed, for "*eis ratzon*" - it is the time when "*ravah d'ravin*", the deepest desire and love Hashem has toward am Yisrael, is revealed. Therefore, because we are unable to connect to Hashem's essence in this way, we immediately express our limited comprehension using the name "*Elokim*", which alludes to limit and constriction, begging Hashem, "*b'rov chasdecha aneini b'emes yish'echa*" - please allow for this trait of blinding Truth and Kindness to work salvations on our behalf, despite our inability to express all that is in our hearts at this time. 🕎

*This section is adapted from the sefer "Sidduro Shel Shabbos" by R' Chaim of Chernowitz zy"a (1760-1816)*

## Profiles of Tzaddikim

### Biographical sketches of the Chassidic Masters

#### The Degel Machaneh Efraim zy"ra

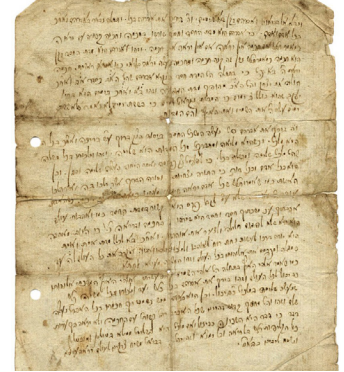
Reb Moshe Chaim Efraim of Sudylkov was born in Medzbozh in 1748 (5508) to Rabbi Yechiel Ashkenazi, a mysterious *mekubal* who had moved from Germany to Podolia, and Adel - daughter of the Baal Shem Tov, whose soul had been drawn from the loftiest of spiritual realms. His brother was the well-known Reb Baruch of Medzbozh. As the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, Reb Moshe Chaim was exposed to the teachings of Chassidus from an early age. His grandfather loved him dearly and would spend much time with him, teaching and guiding him as he learned to develop his own relationship with the Master of the world. The Baal Shem Tov recognized early on that his grandson was an extraordinary genius in learning and foresaw the incredible impact he would have on the movement of Chassidus and the Jewish People as a whole.

After the Baal Shem Tov left this world, Reb Moshe Chaim studied under the Maggid of Mezeritch as well as Reb Yaakov Yosef of Pollonye, the famed "Toldos Yaakov Yosef". He eventually settled in Sudylkov where he served as Rabbi and Maggid, spending the rest of his days teaching Torah amidst abject poverty. Shortly before he left this world, the tzaddik returned to Medzbozh where was laid to rest beside his esteemed grandfather.

Reb Moshe Chaim Efraim authored the *sefer Degel Machaneh Efraim*, a collection of teachings on the weekly Torah portion which is considered one of the most fundamental works on Chassidic thought, as well as one of the primary sources for many of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and his general theology. The *Degel*, a title by which the tzaddik is lovingly known, left this world in 1800 (5560), leaving behind a legacy of Chassidic thought that continues to burn bright today, over two-hundred years since his passing. 🕎

*Zechuso yagein aleinu! This section is written by R' Akiva Bruck, author of "From Behind the Curtain" (Mosaica Press)*

A rare letter written by the holy Degel Machaneh Efraim (the only of its kind.)



## Chassidus 101

### Exploring the Foundations of Chassidus

ONE OF THE central tenets in Chassidic thought is the role of the "Rebbe." While there are certainly practical reasons as to why one should have a Rebbe or a spiritual guide who can present a person with the tools necessary to navigate life in this world, there is a much more fundamental idea underlying this theme of the "tzaddik" or Rebbe.

The Baal HaTanya famously describes the inner struggle between the *yetzer hara* and *yetzer tov* as that of two kings constantly fighting over control of the "small city," – the body – each wishing to utilize it to fulfill its desires. Far more than a book of laws, the Torah is a guide with which we can overcome this constant battle and emerge victorious. However, to attempt to navigate the chaotic nature of this world based on one's own simple understanding would be counterproductive. After all, how are we to be sure that we are doing what is asked of us, or if we are utilizing the Torah's tools properly, in the right circumstances? Each situation is unique, and each situation calls for a balanced, healthy response.

While many of the mitzvos are readily understandable, the concepts essential to our spiritual struggles - beyond what merely pertains to the external, behavioral details of everyday life - require a refined soul and a clear mind. This is where the role of the tzaddik becomes so important.

The archetypal enemy of the Jewish People is Amalek. But more so than an actual nation, Amalek manifests as the struggles we face internally as well. The tzaddikim explain that the quality which defines Amalek at its core is *gaavah*, haughtiness. In fact, this quality is the

exact antithesis of creation, for Hashem placed us in this world solely to bring about a revelation of His greatness and love. One who acts with haughtiness is essentially blinding himself to this understanding and pushing Hashem out of the picture, *chas v'shalom*.

The Chassidic Masters explain that *gaavah* generally manifests as haughtiness, as it's usually understood, but also as sadness. At its core, sadness stems from the belief that a situation should have turned out a certain way, and then when it doesn't, and things go wrong, we feel sad. But in truth, who are we to assume that a situation should be one way or the other? Isn't this tinged with the malady of arrogance? A truly humble person has the ability to relinquish his control and anxieties and place total faith in Hashem, thus overcoming the sadness rooted in the illusion of autonomy.

The role of the tzaddik is to combat these two aspects; to infuse a Jew with *simcha* during times of sadness and to bring one "down to earth" when one feels as if they have nothing else to work on or have completely refined themselves. Understood in this way, the theme of the tzaddik is central not only to Chassidus but to Yiddishkeit in general. It is only with the strength and guidance of one who has overcome the struggles of this-worldliness himself that we can approach each situation and struggle with a proper balance, enabling us to overcome the Amalek manifest within and emerge victorious in this multi-generational battle. May we each merit to overcome the various struggles along the journey to an elevated avodas Hashem and witness the Final Redemption, speedily and in our days. 🕎

*This section is written by R' Akiva Bruck, author of "From Behind the Curtain" (Mosaica Press)*

## A Quick Mayseh

*A Story to Warm the Heart*

THE YEAR WAS 1948, and the Lelover Rebbe, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai Biderman zt"l, was invited to celebrate in the pidyon haben ceremony and festive meal of one of his chassidim in Yerushalayim. The tzaddik left his home in Tel Aviv early, in order to arrive on time. But when the hosts were ready to begin the celebration, there was still no sign of the guest of honor.

The guests waited an hour, and another hour. The Rebbe had still not arrived. Finally, after three hours of waiting, the Rebbe finally arrived. His face radiated joy and he immediately rushed to wish mazal tov to the father of the baby. Nobody dared ask the Rebbe why he had arrived so late, nor did he offer an explanation.

After the meal was over, the Rebbe quietly left the festivities and made his way to a doctor's office. He told the doctor that several hours earlier on his way to Yerushalayim, the bus on which he was traveling was struck by another vehicle and had turned over. Several passengers had fallen on the Rebbe, crushing him. After a short examination, the doctor discovered that several of the Rebbe's ribs were cracked. The doctor stared at the Rebbe in wonderment. Unable to hold himself back, he exclaimed, "How could you sit calmly through a meal, acting as though nothing was wrong? Broken ribs cause excruciating pain! How could you bear it?" The Rebbe couldn't understand the question. To him it was simple! Unwilling to detract from another person's joyous occasion, he had chosen to put aside the pain and suffer in silence.

On another occasion, the tzaddik revealed how he was able to handle such immense pain: "It's simple" he said. "I wholeheartedly believe that Mashiach will arrive at any moment and all pain will disappear. Since I know that my suffering will last only seconds longer, it is easy to bear."

*Every person experiences pain of some sort in this lifetime. May Hashem grant us the ability to manage our suffering with staunch belief that Mashiach is coming so soon, and that all tears will finally be wiped away forever. 🕎*

## "THANK YOU HASHEM FOR SHABBOS KODESH!" IS A WEEKLY PROJECT OF @TYHASHEM

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"THANK YOU HASHEM  
FOR SHABBOS KODESH! WEEKLY"  
IS WRITTEN BY R' YAAKOV KLEIN,  
AUTHOR OF **THE STORY OF OUR LIVES** (FELDHEIM)  
AND EDITED BY **ASHIRA HERZFELD**  
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