



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

THE SYMBOL OF SHABBAT

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When it comes to making kiddush on Shabbat, the variety of minhagim is mind-boggling. Sit or stand? Pass the cup or pre-pour? Make your own kiddush or be

yotzei with someone else's? Put ten people in a room and ask them about their family's kiddush customs and you'll get (at least) ten different answers.

The essence of the mitzvah of kiddush is the recitation of the actual bracha, *borei pri hagafen*. On Friday nights, we preface that bracha with the pesukim that describe God resting on the original seventh day, after He finished creating the universe. This set of pesukim has become inextricably attached to the Friday night kiddush, universally recited before the *borei pri hagafen*.

The kiddush we recite Shabbat day also has pesukim attached to it, a lot of pesukim, anywhere from

one to three paragraphs, depending on...you guessed it...your minhag! This one's tricky. Some people (mostly Sephardim) begin their kiddush with "im tashiv"; others begin with "veshamru"; still others start with "zachor et Yom haShabbat". But here is where it gets really complicated. Some people begin with half a pasuk from the end of the third paragraph ("al kein berach") and others don't recite any introductory pesukim at all!

Why does everyone seem to agree on what to do on Friday nights whereas Shabbat day is a free-for-all?

The kiddush we recite on Friday nights is mid'orayta, biblically obligated. The kiddush we say on Shabbat day is mid'rabanana, rabbinically instituted. Therefore, it would make sense to give our Friday night kiddush more weight by attaching pesukim to it. On Shabbat day, it's theoretically enough to simply recite the *borei pri hagafen* and fulfill the rabbinic obligation, hence the plethora of minhagim.

If so, why is there even an option to recite additional pesukim before the bracha? What's the point,

when it's totally unnecessary and may even detract from the superior halachik importance of the kiddush on Friday night?

The simple and most commonly-offered answer to these questions is that the Shabbat day kiddush needs the extra weight, the extra substance that these additional pesukim provide. Because it is “only mid'rabanan”, the Shabbat day kiddush is somehow less important and therefore requires the introductory paragraphs to boost its significance.

This sensitivity aside, perhaps another answer to our question can be found by looking at the specific meaning of the Shabbat-day pesukim themselves and trying to understand what they add.

While the pesukim we universally recite on Friday night remind us of God's creation of the world, the pesukim we have an option to recite on Shabbat day focus on something else entirely. The paragraph of “veshamru” comes from this week's parsha and describes the Jews' observance of Shabbat during their years of wandering in the wilderness. The paragraph of “zachor” comes from the aseret hadibrot in Parshat Yitro.

In both of these cases, the additional pesukim are describing the unique role Shabbat plays in the relationship the Jewish people have with God. Whereas creation of the world is (or should be) celebrated by all Mankind, the mitzvah to observe Shabbat is uniquely Jewish. The fact that we as a people have kept Shabbat continuously from the time of the midbar until this very weekend testifies to our special relationship with Hashem.

This week's parsha instructs us to keep Shabbat as a sign, a symbol of our ongoing commitment to God's mitzvot, not just a commemoration of one great act of Creation. Our observance of Shabbat, including our recitation of kiddush on Shabbat day, is an opportunity to testify to that commitment. Of course we can fulfill our obligation to recite kiddush without the optional extra pesukim, but including them is a way of appreciating God not only as Creator but as an integral part of our everyday lives, reminding us of who we are as Jews.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

ADAM SHALLOWAY ('17)

In this week's parsha, Ki Tisa, the Jewish people make a grave mistake. When Moshe does not return from Har Sinai at the time that Bnei Yisrael are expecting him, they become scared. The people say, “Come on! Make us gods that will go before us, because this man Moshe, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we don't know what has become of him” (Exodus 32:1). The Jews think they have lost their leader and, in a moment of weakness, turn back to idol worship. This is, of course, the famous scene of the golden calf.

This is one of many mistakes Bnei Yisrael make that is vividly described in the Torah. One might ask, why publicise all of our mistakes? Doesn't that portray the Jews negatively? There are two answers to this question. First, one must be reminded of the mistakes of the past in order to avoid repeating them. Second, we learn that Hashem is compassionate and will forgive our transgressions.

Although the Torah appears to portray the Jewish people negatively, in actuality, it simply shows that we are human. We are going to make mistakes, hopefully not on the scale of the golden calf, and we need to learn and grow from them.

FINISHING STRONG

SHANI WOLFSON ('17)

In Parshat Ki Tisa, Moshe goes up to Har Sinai and tells the people he will be back in 40 days and 40 nights. The people miscount, and when they think the 40 days and 40 nights are over and Moshe has not yet returned, they believe Moshe has abandoned them. To replace him, they build the golden calf. This is not the first time the Torah mentions an event that takes 40 days and 40 nights. Earlier in the Torah, Hashem tells Noach to build an ark in order to survive the 40 day and 40 night flood. The connection between these two episodes is puzzling because

they are inversely correlated.

In the story of Noach, the people are sinners, so Noach builds an ark to survive 40 bad days and 40 bad nights while Hashem wipes out the rest of the generation. After the extended flood, there is peace and a new generation. In the story of Moshe, however, the people were good and new, having just been taken out of Egypt and witnessing Matan Torah. Moshe is told to go up Har Sinai for an amazing 40 days and 40 nights, during which he will learn Torah with and be close to Hashem. By the end of the story the people are sinning and are punished.

What does the inverse correlation of these two stories teach? Upon first look, one might conclude that no matter what, whether the Jews start out good or bad, they end up being punished, whether it be with a flood or with fire. However, in both stories, despite severe punishment, Bnei Yisrael emerges ok in the end. After the flood a new generation is created, and in Moshe's time, a new set of luchot is written, demonstrating that ultimately Bnei Yisrael were forgiven.

Perhaps the Torah is trying to teach us that in life, we will inevitably face hardship, but after the ordeal we will come out newer and stronger versions of ourselves. Just like metal that must endure hundreds of hammer blows to finally become a perfect sword, we sometimes must endure difficult situations to become stronger people.

TURNING AWAY

JORDAN LANDES ('18)

In this week's parsha, Bnei Yisrael commit the serious sin of the egel hazahav. Moshe ascends Har Sinai to accept the aseret hadibrot from Hashem and, when he does not return when Bnei Yisrael expect, the nation becomes nervous.

In complete panic they convince Aharon to construct the egel. Moshe comes down the mountain

with the luchot to find the people in the middle of committing a tremendous sin.

Hashem tells Moshe,

סָרוּ מִהֵר מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל
מִסֶּכֶה

“They have been quick to turn away from what I have commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf...”

What does the Torah mean with the word maher-“they were quick to turn away?” It is normally not possible to “quickly” leave behind mitzvot. There are too many. If a person is for some reason slacking in following some mitzvot it doesn't mean that he or she has totally tuned out everything Hashem has commanded. However, the impression that Bnei Yisrael gave off was that they were willing to “run away from it all”, all at once.

The Bahag questions if “Anochi Hashem Elokecha” can really be a mitzvah if it is a matter of feeling and belief. How can we be commanded in a belief system?

He reconciles this by stating that the first two of the aseret hadibrot are not commandments, but prerequisites to all other mitzvot. After all, if you do not believe in Hashem as the One and Only God of the universe, how can you perform the other mitzvot?

Bnei Yisrael's idolatrous sin of the golden calf violates these first two commandments. Because they disregarded the fundamental beliefs of our faith, just weeks after God Himself spoke these two commandments to them, the Torah tells us that they were “quick to turn away,” to leave everything behind.

Rather than being quick to turn away, the Talmud in Pesachim 4a teaches “zrizin makdimin lemitzvah” -- we should always be quick to perform mitzvot. This rush to perform God's commandments shows that we are dedicated to God and beautifies the mitzvot. May we use our speed for good, for service of God.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

LEORA KROLL ('17)

In this week's parsha, Ki Tisa, we encounter one of the most confounding episodes in all of chumash. In Moshe's absence, the Jewish people create and worship the golden calf. God warns Moshe about what he is about to see, and then when Moshe actually sees their worship of the golden calf, he breaks the luchot. Why didn't Moshe break the luchot when Hashem first told him of the sin?! Why did Moshe wait until he saw it himself to make a scene and break the luchot?

R' Yaakov Kamenetsky gives a beautiful answer showing the true fairness and righteousness of Moshe. When Hashem first told Moshe that the Jewish people had created a golden calf, Moshe tried giving the people the benefit of the doubt; Moshe wanted to believe that this act was done out of pain and sorrow for not having their leader with them at the moment and for being stranded in the wilderness. So when Moshe heard the news from Hashem he was not horrified; he thought the people had different, more pure motives. But when Moshe comes down from Har Sinai and sees Bnei Yisrael singing and dancing, he becomes enraged. He saw that the people were enjoying their idol worship! Moshe was no longer able to give the people the benefit of the doubt; he sees that they are joyous in their worship of the golden calf.

Pirkei Avot teaches that one of the forty-eight ways to acquire Torah is to study with joy because the mind best absorbs actions done with joy. When a person finds pleasure in an act, the mind more easily takes in the information and when someone is sad the mind can barely hold any information at all. Moshe breaks the luchot when he sees that the people delight in their worship of the golden calf, because he realizes that this act is one that will become more ingrained in the people. He reasons that the Jewish people certainly do not deserve the luchot at a time when they would rather be getting pleasure out of idol worship.

Moshe's actions teach us two lessons. The first is to give benefit of the doubt; do not immediately assume the worst of people just from hearing one aspect of the situation. The second is that learning and acting with joy enables things to be more easily attainable, and we should take that extra step to bring us joy in the things that are important to us, while watching out for the "idolatrous" actions.

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