

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vayeshev

The Sale of Yosef – How Long Does it Last?

וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת הַכֹּתֶנֶת בַּדָּם

They slaughtered a goat and dipped the coat in the blood (37:31)

The focus of this week's Parsha undoubtedly surrounds the sale of Yosef and the events which unfolded therefrom. In a later discussion,¹ the Meshech Chochmah demonstrates how this episode not only impacted on the future of the Jewish people, but from a certain point of view accompanies them as well.

YOM KIPPUR: MORNING AND AFTERNOON

As we know, when the Kohen Gadol enters the *kodesh hakodashim* (Holy of Holies) on Yom Kippur, he does not wear his usual eight garments, but rather four "white," i.e., pure linen garments. The Kohen Gadol changes into white garments twice over the course of Yom Kippur:

- The first time is in the morning, when he performs the various services in the *kodesh hakodashim*, such as sprinkling the blood of the special *korbanos* of the day, as well as offering *ketores* (incense) there.
- The second time is in the afternoon, when he removes the ladle and pan in which he brought the *ketores* that morning.

The Mishnah² states that the linen garments which he wore in the morning were not the same as those he wore in the afternoon. Rather, the garments worn in the morning were more expensive. The Gemara³ explains the reason for this: in the morning he is wearing them in order to perform *avodos* through which to achieve atonement; while in the afternoon he is simply wearing them to enter and remove the items which he placed there in the morning. This gives the morning visit primacy, which is reflected in the relatively more expensive garments worn during that time.

1 *Vayikra 16:30.*

2 *Yoma 32b.*

3 *Ibid. 35a.*

Now, the above discussion mentions the morning and afternoon garments generally, and implies that all four garments worn in the morning were more expensive than those worn in the afternoon. However, it is apparent from the Rambam's codification of this halachah that he understands that only one of the four garments – the *kesones* (tunic) – varied in value from the morning to the afternoon, while the others were the same.⁴ This is rather intriguing. Of all the four garments worn, why would the quality of the *kesones* specifically change from the morning to the afternoon, and not the others?

ECHOES

In the course of discussing the sin of the Golden Calf, the Gemara⁵ makes the statement that there is no generation which does not taste some of the retribution from that sin. This is quite a challenging idea. Why should later generations, who did not participate in that sin, bear a portion of its retribution?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that this idea based on a principle established elsewhere in the Gemara. Commenting on the pasuk which states that Hashem “visits the sins of the fathers on the children,”⁶ the Gemara qualifies that this applies specifically to a situation where the children perpetuate those sins.⁷ Based on this principle, we are apparently being told that every generation likewise perpetuates the sin of the Golden Calf and hence tastes some of its retribution. In what way is this so?

To broaden the picture, the Meshech Chochmah refers to a parallel statement of Chazal⁸ concerning the sale of Yosef, namely, that each generation partakes of some of the punishment for that sin as well. Based on the above, we likewise ask: Is the sale of Yosef perpetuated in every generation since that time?

Yes, says the Meshech Chochmah, it is.

As is well known, the positive and negative *mitzvos* of the Torah are divided into two broad categories: between and man and God and between man and man. It is possible to perceive the two monumental sins of the Golden Calf and the sale of Yosef, committed at such formative stages of our existence, as “root” or “parent” sins in the area of between man and God and man and man respectively.

Looked at in this way, these sins can be re-opened by later generations.

- Every subsequent sin in the area between man and God constitutes a perpetuation of the sin of making the Golden Calf.
- Every subsequent sin in the area between man and man constitutes a continuation of the sin of the sale of Yosef.

Thus, as long as the Jewish people are remiss in these two areas, they taste some of the punishment for those two pivotal sins.

4 See *Hilchos Klei Hamikdash* 8:3.

5 *Sanhedrin* 102a.

6 *Shemos* 20:5.

7 See *Berachos* 7a.

8 *Midrash Shochoer Tov Mishlei* chap. 1.

SEEKING FULL CLOSURE: DRESS – AND LOCATION

Throughout the year, we do not necessarily focus on the relationship between that year's wrongdoings and these two original episodes. However, on Yom Kippur, we seek to address these issues fully and from their roots. We are looking for a healing that goes all the way back to the two "parent" sins. As we have stated, the most sensitive *avodos* of Yom Kippur are done in the *kodesh hakodashim*, with the Kohen Gadol wearing only white. Why does he not wear his usual eight garments?

The Yerushalmi⁹ explains that this is based on the principle of "קמיגור נעשה סניגור" – *the prosecution cannot become the defense*." The regular garments of the Kohen Gadol contain gold threads. Gold is reminiscent of the sin of the Golden Calf, and thus represents "the prosecution" for that sin. It is therefore inappropriate for him to wear these garments while trying to achieve atonement for the people, for ultimately he is looking to atone for the perpetuation of the sin of the Golden Calf itself!

But, as we have seen, the Golden Calf is only one half of the equation. What about the sale of Yosef? Does the principle of "the prosecution not becoming the defense" express itself with regards to that sin as well?

Indeed, it does.

The Gemara¹⁰ tells us that the majority of the Beis Hamikdash grounds was in the territory of the tribe of Yehudah. However, the *kodesh hakodashim* was in the domain of the tribe of Binyamin. Binyamin was the only one of the brothers who was not involved in the sale of Yosef! It is for this reason that the most sensitive aspects of the day's *avodah*, including achieving atonement for perpetuating the sale of Yosef, are performed in the "safe" territory of Binyamin, in order to avoid any association with the "prosecution" regarding that sale.

THE KESONES OF YOSEF – AND THE KOHEN GADOL

Bearing the above in mind, we return to the Kohen Gadol's garments in the morning and afternoon of Yom Kippur. We asked, out of the four garments, why is the *kesones* specifically singled out as needing to be more valuable in the morning when the "atoning work" is performed?

The Gemara¹¹ informs us that the garments of the Kohen Gadol serve to help atone for different sins and discusses which sin is atoned for by which garment. The *kesones*, says the Gemara, helps atone for the sin of bloodshed. As a source to demonstrate the connection between these two things, it adduces the pasuk in our Parsha which states, "וַיִּשְׁחַטּוּ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת הַכֶּתֶנֶת בְּדָמָם" – *They slaughtered a goat and dipped the kesones in the blood*! It emerges that, of all the garments worn by the Kohen Gadol, the *kesones* has a special association with the sale of Yosef. As we have seen, atoning for this sin represents a priority of the highest order on Yom Kippur and hence exceptional measures are invested in the quality of the garment which corresponds to the sale for whose perpetuation atonement is being sought.

In fact, associations with Yosef's coat resonate on Yom Kippur in other areas as well.

9 Yoma 3:3.

10 Yoma 12a.

11 Zevachim 88b.

With regards to the special two goats of Yom Kippur, the Gemara¹² states that a length of scarlet wool two *selas* in weight was divided between the two goats, with one half being tied around the neck of the goat which would be brought as a *korban*, and the other half tied between the horns of the goat which would be sent away to the wilderness. What is the significance of the weight of “two *selas* of wool”? Have we ever met this concept before?

When the Gemara¹³ seeks to identify Yosef’s *kesones* as a significant factor in the strife between him and brothers, as well as the exile which ensued, it refers to it as “two *selas* worth of wool”! It emerges that when we take the wool which will be involved in the atonement of the two goats on Yom Kippur, we choose the amount of wool equal to that from which Yosef’s coat was made, for the events associated with that coat represent one of the two primary sins for which we are looking to atone.

IN THE PRAYERS

Even in our current state where we lack the Beis Hamikdash, the dual focus of rectifying the Golden calf and the sale of Yosef can be seen in the tefillah of Yom Kippur. Toward the conclusion of the middle blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei we say:

כי אתה סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי ישורון בכל דור ודור

For you forgive Yisrael and pardon the tribes of Yeshurun in each and every generation.

This formula is quite unusual. Nowhere else in the course of the yearly prayers do we find separate references to “Yisrael” and “the tribes of Yeshurun,” and for good reason! After all, what are the “tribes of Yeshurun” made up of if not the people of “Yisrael”?

However, says the Meshech Chochmah, based on our discussion, we can fully appreciate the background to this unique formula, for these two phrases reflect the two “parent” sins which, as we have seen, we are looking to address on this day. First we say that Hashem “forgives Yisrael,” referring to the sin of the Golden Calf which represents all sins between man and God and which was committed by the people Israel. We then say that He “pardons the tribes of Yeshurun,” referring to the sale of Yosef that represents sins between man and man and which was perpetrated by Yosef’s brothers, the “tribes of Yeshurun.”

And so we see through the eyes of the Meshech Chochmah that the sale of Yosef is not an isolated historical event, but rather, an ongoing concern for the Jewish people. Additionally, we see that we have the capacity, through investing in the area of *mitzvos* between man and man, to rectify the sale that has accompanied us through the centuries and to shut it down for good!

12 *Yoma 42a.*

13 *Shabbos 10b.*