



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת כי תשא תש"ע ♪ Parshas Ki Sisa 5770

GOING TO GREAT LENGTHS

FRONTLOADED

Usually, the different sections of a given *parshah* are more or less uniform. Seven people are called to the Torah on Shabbos, and so the *parshah* is divided into seven *aliyos*. While some are longer and some are shorter, the variations in length between the different *aliyos* are usually not too pronounced. The lengths of the *aliyos*, then, are usually determined by the length of the overall *parshah*. By and large, a long *parshah* contains longer *aliyos*, while a shorter *parshah* has shorter *aliyos*.

That is, until we get to this week's *parshah*. A quick perusal of this week's *aliyos* may leave one scratching his head. *Parshas Ki Sisa* is one of the larger *parshiyos*, but the break-up of its *aliyos* appears somewhat disproportionate. If it seems to you that the first two *aliyos* are taking a lot longer than the rest, you're not mistaken. These first two *aliyos* alone contain well over half of the entire *parshah* (really closer to two thirds)! The remainder of the *parshah* is divided into comparatively short increments over the other five *aliyos*.

WHAT HAPPENED HERE EXACTLY?

Far from being some haphazard arrangement, the *Chidushei Harim* (*parshas Ki Sisa*) explains that the organization of these *aliyos* was eminently purposeful and really reflective of the utmost sensitivity.

Our *parshah* relates at length the unfortunate event of the *Cheit Ha'eigel* (Sin of the Golden Calf). The only ones to refrain from participation in – and publicly oppose – this sin were the Leviim. As a result, they replaced the firstborn of Yisrael to become the ministers and priests of

the Temple service.

Let us remember that the first two *aliyos* are designated for a Kohen and Levi, respectively, while a Yisrael receives the third and subsequent ones. And so, had the *aliyos* of the *parshah* been divided more uniformly, the result would have been that by the time *shlishi* (the third *aliyah*) rolls around, we would still

be reading about the *Cheit Ha'eigel*. The Yisrael presiding over this *aliyah* would feel embarrassed, as his ancestors shared involvement in this transgression. And so, the *Chidushei Harim* explains, in order to spare anyone these unpleasant feelings, the *aliyos* were specifically arranged so that the entire episode of the *Cheit Ha'eigel* would be completed within the first two *aliyos*. In this way, they would be read for the Kohein and Levi, who – having distinguished themselves by desisting from this act – would feel no embarrassment at

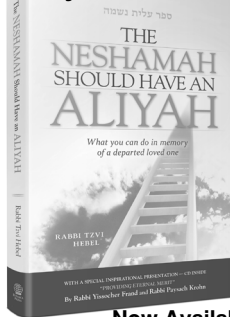
the recounting of this occurrence. By the time a Yisrael is called up to *shlishi*, the focus has shifted from the actual sin, and he need not suffer humiliation.

UNIFORM SERVICE

There are numerous other instances in which Chazal go to great lengths to protect an individual's feelings, even arranging specific dictates to safeguard someone's dignity. One example relates to the laws governing the treatment of *aveilim* (mourners), when the *aveil's* meal is brought to him by neighbors. The Mishnah in Mo'ed Katan (3:7) instructs:

אין מוליכין לבית האבל לא בטבלא ולא באסקוּטלא
"One should not transport (the meal) to the *aveil's* house using any of the following containers: a tray, a miniature table, or an elegant vessel. He may only use

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a basket.”

According to the Bartenura, in instituting this guideline, Chazal were being mindful of the poor. The less well-to-do householder might feel bad seeing his neighbors sending food in fancy trays or elaborate dishes, while all he can afford is a plain old basket. To spare him this degradation, Chazal mandated that *everyone* use a modest basket, regardless of the magnitude of their personal bank accounts or their desire and ability to flaunt it.

URGENT!

Someone who personified this idea was R’ Yitzchak Elchonon Spector, one of the foremost luminaries of his generation.

It so happened that the *yetzer hara* stirred up trouble amongst the members of a certain community, as he is wont to do. The *rav* of that town fell into arrears with some of the more scholarly elements of the city. These congregants, who prided themselves on their erudition, waited impatiently for their *rav* to trip up. When they thought they saw their chance, they pounced.

A certain *shailah* (*halachic* query) had been presented to the *rav*, who consequently issued his ruling. The scholars were certain that he had erred, since his ruling was contradicted by the recorded opinion of the Shach (one of the most highly regarded commentaries to the Shulchan Aruch). Deciding to show him up once and for all, they sent the *shailah* to the renowned R’ Yitzchak Elchonon, confident that his ruling would concur with their assessment and thus cause their *rav* much shame.

R’ Yitzchok Elchonon, of course, was no one’s fool. He immediately sniffed out the situation but was caught in a real quandary. If he were to rule truthfully, in accordance with the Shach, the *rav* would suffer much embarrassment. If he would support the *rav*’s position, though, he would be falsifying the Torah and causing the multitude to sin.

And so he came up with a solution only R’ Yitzchak Elchonon could come up with.

He indeed sided with the *rav* (acting as if he was

unaware of the Shach’s opinion), thus safeguarding his honor. He sent this ruling in a letter to the congregation of that town.

When mailing the letter, however, he immediately dispatched a telegram to them as well, knowing that it would reach them before the letter did. (In ancient times, the only alternative to “snail mail” was a telegram.) The telegram stated the following:

“Regarding the *shailah* you sent me: Please be aware that I erred in my initial response (which I sent via regular mail). The real *halachah* is like the Shach. Disregard my letter (containing the faulty ruling) when it arrives.”

In this way, R’ Yitzchak Elchonon covered all the bases. He was willing to forego his own honor, in order to “demonstrate” to the scholars of that town that “even the *gadol hador*” was capable of overlooking the Shach, making the same mistake that their *rav* had made. R’ Yitzchak Elchonon indeed clarified what the true *halachah* was, but he did so in a way that kept the *rav*’s dignity intact.

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