Points to Ponder

Ki Sisa/Parah 5783

Ketores () – One of the ingredients of the Ketores, the Chelbana, smelled bad. The Gemara uses it to symbolize the idea that we should include the Reshaim in Klal Yisrael. Rav Schachter quipped that this teaches us that the Rabbi should try to elevate the level of religious observance, but not keep anyone out of shul based on his or her personal level of religious observance alone.

See I called in the name of Betzalel () – Why do we need to “See” the call to Betzalel and why do we note his three generations to Alaliav’s 2 (him and his father)? Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein explains that the people needed to know that the building of the Mishkan was an atonement for the sin of the Eigel. The people did not know that their atonement as accepted until they saw that Betzalel, the grandson of the one who was murdered trying to prevent the Cheit HaEigel was going to be the chief architect on the project. Hence, they needed to see Chur’s name on the project.

This nation sinned a big sin () – Why would Moshe call the sin a big sin? Wouldn’t Hashem treat that as exceptionally bad? The Kedushas Tzion of Bobov explained that sins are considered big if they are done by people who are otherwise Tzaddikim. By calling the sin “big” Moshe was going to backdoor the idea that Hashem should forgive the people because they were otherwise Tzaddikim and thus, worthy of his mercy.

He gave to Moshe when He had finished speaking with him upon Har Sinai 2 Luchos (31:18) – Rashi explains that the word Luchos is spelled in the singular because they were both alike like one. Rav Moshe Feinstein adds that many people mistake the idea that the division of the Luchos into Bein Adam L’Makom and Bein Adam l’Chaveiro means that they are mutually exclusive but they are interdependent. Torah cannot be looked at in the person’s own rationale and emotions. S/he needs to realize that even the values and sensibilities of interpersonal relations are in the realm of the will of Hashem.

Because they are a stiffnecked people (34:9) – Earlier the people were accused and prosecuted for being stiff necked (32:9). Why would the same phrase be used in the context of defense of the people if it was the basic argument of the prosecution? Rav Yisrael Meir Lau explained that it simply depends on how you channel this trait. Stubborness in the sense of insisting on something sounds negative like insisting

on arguing, insisting on being stubborn, not willing to accept authority or to listen to others, not willing to take on any duties or responsibilities, that’s stubborn in the negative context. A stubborn people however, can reflect having a strong spine, having character, strong values, principles that one insists on having and insisting on fulfilling those values and principles. Moshe defends Am Yisrael not by saying to Hashem to have mercy on Am Yisrael despite fact we are a stiff necked people, rather have mercy on us

because we are a stiff necked people-.עם קשה עורף הוא . Specifically the people who have suffered more than others, who have been exiled more than others are the only ones who have survived; and why is that? Because when the Jewish people needed to they had the tough spine and determination when they needed to and stuck to their values.

Foreign idols you should not make but you should observe Pesach (34:17-18) – What is the connection between these sections? Rav Mordechai Gifter explained that together with the Halachos about not cleaving to Goyim we have the connection to Pesach which is the active Mitzva of Emunah and our chance to connect to Hashem.

Maftir: Parshas Parah – Zos Chukas Hatorah (Bamidbar 19:2) – The Shulchan Aruch (OC 685:7) notes that according to many, the reading of Parshas Parah is a biblical commandment. Where is there a hint to this idea? Rav Schwab explained that the fact that the Chukas Hatorah is listed and then the words, “Daber El Bnei Yisrael” hints that even the speaking to Bnei Yisrael is a Chok in the torah.

Haftara: The Haftarah presents a different type of impurity than presented in the Torah reading. Rav Soloveitchik distinguished between the Tumah (impurity) described in the Parasha, caused by death (contracted through contact with a corpse or remaining under the same roof as a corpse) and all other forms of halachic impurity. Firstly, death requires complete separation of a kohen, even from his own spouse. Yechezkel begins his prophecy by evoking the imagery of the Nidda rather than death, to underscore that Hashem continues to dwell with Bnei Yisrael even in their defilement, as a husband, even if he is a Kohen, remains with his wife throughout the period of separation. Secondly, in

all cases, except for death, purification is achieved through self-immersion in a mikveh, not requiring the participation of others in the process. The person who has encountered death may only be purified through the kohen sprinkling the water containing the red heifer’s ashes. This halachic singularity reflects the uniqueness of death as an existential threat and crisis that the human being cannot conquer on his or her own! Yechezkel therefore transitions from the impurity of nidda to the process of purification of a tamei met; he compares the defilement of the Jewish people caused by their sins to a state of impurity that leaves the people powerless, unable to extricate themselves from exile without the active assistance of Hashem!