

In this week's *Parashah*, Moshe Rabbeinu returned from *Har Sinai* with the *Luchot*. We read (32:15): "Moshe turned and descended from the mountain, with the two *Luchot Ha'edut* / Tablets of the Testimony in his hand, *Luchot* inscribed on both their sides; they were inscribed on one side and the other."

Our Sages teach that, miraculously, the *Luchot* could be read from either side, even though the writing on each side was engraved all the way through the *Luchot*, from one surface to the opposite surface. Indeed, say our Sages, the letters "*Samech*" and "*Mem Sofit*" had to exist miraculously. (Both those Hebrew letters are similar to the English letter "o," with a solid center that cannot naturally remain in place if the letter is carved all the way through the writing surface.)

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains the meaning of this phenomenon: The *Luchot* were engraved all the way through, leaving some letters levitating in the air, because the Torah is "pure intellect." It is manifested in our world through *Mitzvot* that relate to physical things, but the essence of the Torah is something much higher than our world. Had the Torah simply been engraved on the *Luchot*, we would have thought, incorrectly, that the Torah is merely something that exists in our world like any other physical phenomenon. (*Ohr Chadash* 4:5)

## Pesach

"*Sho'alin* / We ask about the laws of *Pesach* thirty days before *Pesach*."  
(*Shulchan Aruch: O.C. 429:1*)

R' Chaim Hakohen z"l (1585-1655; Aleppo, Syria) writes: This *Halachah* is derived from the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 6a), which actually says, "*Sho'alin* / We ask about *V'dorshin* / and expound upon the laws of *Pesach* thirty days before *Pesach*." This implies two different things: asking *Halachic* questions and listening to *Derashot*. However, because our Sages say (*Pesachim* 3b), "A person should always teach his student in a concise way," the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* consolidated both ideas into one word--*Sho'alin*.

R' Chaim continues: The preparations for *Pesach* referred to here include both asking any necessary *Halachic* questions and listening to *Derashot* on the relevant verses of *Tanach*. Thirty days are necessary because there are many *Halachot* to learn, and also much to learn about the miracles that *Hashem* performed, so that one will be prepared to retell them properly on the night of *Pesach* (i.e., at the *Seder*). These two obligations are alluded to in the verse (*Tehilim* 147:19), "He relates His words to *Yaakov*"--this refers to *Derashot*--"His statutes and judgments to *Yisrael*"--this refers to *Halachot*.

R' Chaim adds: There is another reason to begin these *Pesach* preparations thirty days before *Pesach*--i.e., on Purim. The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 6a) teaches that when the enemies of the Jews fall, the Jews rise. Thus, when Haman and his sons fell, and with them the "forces of impurity" off of which they fed, the "forces of holiness" in the world increased in strength. We are called upon to take advantage of these forces of holiness by increasing our Torah study during this period. (*Tur Bareket*)

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**“Hashem passed before him and proclaimed, ‘Hashem, Hashem, Kel, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger . . .” (34:6)**

**“Hashem, Slow to Anger . . .” (Bemidbar 14:18)**

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 111a) relates: When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven, he found *Hashem* writing, “Slow to Anger.” He said, “Master of the Universe! Is this Attribute used toward the righteous?” *Hashem* answered, “Even toward the wicked.” Moshe said, “Let the wicked be destroyed!” *Hashem* responded, “By your life! A time will come when you will need this.” Sure enough, when *Bnei Yisrael* made the Golden Calf and again when they listened to the Spies, Moshe appealed to *Hashem*’s Attribute of “Slow to Anger.” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Chaim Friedlander z”l (1923-1986; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) asks: What did Moshe Rabbeinu think at first, and what changed his perspective?

R’ Friedlander explains: We read (*Bereishit* 1:1), “In the beginning, *Elokim* created the heavens and the earth.” *Rashi* z”l writes that the Torah uses the Divine Name “*Elokim*” in connection with Creation, rather than the Name “*Hashem*,” because *Elokim* signifies His Attribute of Justice, while *Hashem* signifies His Attribute of Mercy. In the beginning, say our Sages, G-d planned to create the world using the Attribute of Justice, but He saw that the world could not survive that way, so He put the Attribute of Mercy first.

Of course, writes R’ Friedlander, G-d does not learn new things, discover new information, or change His mind. Rather, our Sages are teaching that a world run with Justice is the ideal, a world where man toils to earn reward and does not get handouts. Such a world would be in mankind’s best interest, for a person has the greatest satisfaction from that for which he has worked. For now, however, man cannot live up to that ideal; therefore, G-d places Mercy “first,” with the ideal world to come later.

This, continues R’ Friedlander, is what Moshe Rabbeinu learned. At first, Moshe thought that the world could fulfill its purpose, and G-d’s Name could be sanctified, only if strict justice would be meted out to the wicked; “Slow to Anger” should not apply to them. But, when *Bnei Yisrael* sinned grievously, Moshe understood that Mercy is necessary also.

The Talmudic passage quoted above concludes: *Hashem* said to Moshe, “Didn’t you say that ‘Slow to Anger’ should be only toward the righteous?” Moshe responded, “Didn’t You say, ‘Even toward the wicked?’”

What was the point of this last exchange? R’ Friedlander explains: Every aspect of *Hashem*’s relationship with us is meant to teach us how to emulate Him. Thus, so long as Moshe Rabbeinu did not understand the need for the Attribute of “Slow to Anger--even toward the wicked,” it was not appropriate for *Hashem* to use that Attribute. Only when Moshe himself said, “Even toward the wicked,” was it time for *Hashem* to display that Attribute.

(*Siftei Chaim: Mo’adim* I p.57)

**“When you take a census of *Bnei Yisrael* according to their numbers, *V’nat’nu* / every man shall give *Hashem* an atonement for his soul when counting them, so that there will not be a plague among them when counting them.” (30:12)**

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 13b) teaches: The sage Reish Lakish said, “It was revealed and known to the Creator that Haman would one day weigh out [*i.e.*, he would offer *Achashveirosh*] *Shekalim* for [the right to kill] the Jews. Therefore, He caused their *Shekalim* to precede his *Shekalim* [*i.e.*, *Hashem* gave the Jewish People the *Mitzvah* of giving *Shekalim* so that its merit would protect them from Haman’s *Shekalim*].” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Yitzchak Weiss z”l *Hy”d* (rabbi of Verbau, Slovakia; killed in the Holocaust) writes: The *Gemara*’s teaching is alluded to by the *Trop* / cantillation mark on “*V’nat’nu*”--a *Kadma V’azla* [which, in Aramaic, means to “go first,”] hinting that *Bnei Yisrael*’s *Shekalim* should precede Haman’s *Shekalim*. (*Siach Yitzchak*)

**“The wealthy shall not give more, and the destitute shall not give less, than half a *Shekel*.” (30:15)**

R’ Avraham Mordechai Alter *shlita* (Yerushalayim) writes: Commentaries explain that the reason for requiring half a *Shekel* from everyone--rich or poor--is to drive home that no one is complete by himself, not even the wealthiest person. Rather, everyone needs others to help him become a complete person.

At the same time, R’ Alter adds, it is important to remember that a half-*Shekel* is not half a coin; it is a complete coin worth half a *Shekel*. The message in this is that a person should be humble, but not broken.

(*Divrei Emet: Emtza Makom L’Hashem* p.25)

**“So *Bnei Yisrael* were stripped of their jewelry from Mount Chorev.” (33:6)**

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 88a) relates that when *Bnei Yisrael* said, “*Na’aseh Ve’nishma*,” 600,000 angels came, and each tied two crowns on a person. Later, when *Bnei Yisrael* sinned (by making the Golden Calf), 1.2 million angels came and removed those crowns. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Meir Margulies z”l (1707-1790; rabbi of Ostrog, Ukraine; one of the earliest disciples of the *Ba’al Shem Tov*) asks: Our Sages teach that the goodness *Hashem* doles out is 500 times greater than the punishments he metes out. Where is that formula reflected here?

He answers: The *Gemara* (*Shevuot* 39a, based on *Tehilim* 105:8) states that the souls of 1,000 generations stood at *Har Sinai*. Assuming that each generation consisted of 600,000 adult males, just like the Generation of the Exodus, then each angel would have needed to tie 2,000 crowns (*i.e.*, two per person x 1,000).

In contrast, at most four generations pay for an ancestor’s sin (see *Shmot* 20:5). It follows that only four of the 1,000 generations that received crowns subsequently lost them. And, says the *Gemara*, there were twice as many angels removing crowns as there had been giving them. Thus, each angel gave 2,000 crowns but took away only four crowns, a ratio of 1/500. (*Meir Netivim*)