

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXI: Ki Tisa (Ex. 30:11–34:35)

Essay 26. Attending to the needs of the community

נְשָׂא אָמַר ר' חָמָא בְּרַחֲמֵינָא, לֹא הֶעֱשִׂיר מֹשֶׁה אֶלָּא מִפְּסָלְתָן שָׁל לוחות, שְׁנַאמַר "פְּסָל־לָךְ" פְּסָלְתָן יְהֵא שְׁלָךְ ע"כ. צָרִיךְ עֵינֵינוּ לָמָּה דְּנֻקָּא הֶעֱשִׂיר מֹשֶׁה בְּדִרְגָּה זֶה וְלֹא בְּדִרְגָּה אַחֲרָת.

There in the Gemara being discussed in the previous essay, we find:

Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina, said: Moses became wealthy only from the waste [remaining] from [carving] the Tablets [of the Ten Commandments], as it is stated: “Carve for yourself two tablets of stone like the first.”¹ “Carve for yourself” [means that] their waste shall be yours. [As the tablets were crafted from sapphire, the leftover fragments would be very valuable.]

- Nedarim 38a

Investigation is required why Moses became wealthy specifically in this way, and not in another way.

וְגַם לומר שְׁהוֹאִיל שְׁמֹשֶׁה הָיָה מִתְעַסֵּק בְּצָרְכֵי צְבוּר, כְּדִאמְרֵינוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ עַל פְּסוּק "וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי סָר לְרְאוֹת", שְׁסָר מִעֲסָקוֹ כְּדִי לְהִתְעַסֵּק בְּצָרְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְכֵן מְצִינֵנוּ שְׁכָל יָמָיו הָיָה מְטוּפֵל עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל "וַיֵּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה לִשְׁפֹט אֶת־הָעָם. . . מִן־הַבֶּקֶר עַד־הָעֶרֶב", וְכֵן בַּחֲטָא הֶעֱגֵל יָשָׁב בְּהַר שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם, וּמִלֹּאכְתוֹ אֵימָתִי נִעֲשִׂיתָ? מִשׁוּם הֵכִי רָצָה הַקַּב"ה שְׁיִתְעַשֵּׂר בְּדִרְגָּה זֶה דְּנֻקָּא, כְּדִי שְׁיִדְעוּ הַכֹּל שְׁכָא לֹא הֶעֱוֹשֵׁר בְּשִׁבִיל שְׁנִתְעַסֵּק בְּצָרְכֵי צְבוּר. וְאִם הָיָה מִעֲשִׂירוֹ בְּדִרְגָּה אַחֲרָת הָיִינוּ אוֹמְרִים שְׁהֶעֱשִׂירוֹ מִחֲמַת הַתּוֹרָה דְּכִתִּיב "בְּשִׂמְאוֹלָה עֹשֵׂר וְכָבוֹד", אִךְ עֲתָה שְׁהֶעֱשִׂירוֹ בְּדִרְגָּה זֶה אֵין מְקוּם לְטַעוֹת.

It can be said that since Moses was engaged in the needs of the community, as it is said in the Midrash on the verse, “When the L-rd saw that he had turned aside to look, G-d called to him out of the bush: ‘Moses! Moses!’ He answered, ‘Here I am.’”² The Midrash states that “[Moses] turned from his affairs to see their burdens,” which is why G-d answered him.³

Similarly, we find that all his days he was taking care of the Jewish people, such as when the Torah explains that “Moses sat as magistrate among the people, while the people stood

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¹ Ex. 34:1.

² Ex. 3:4.

³ Ex. Rabbah 1:27.

about Moses **from morning until evening.**⁴ Similarly, because of the sin of the Golden Calf, [Moses] sat a total of **three times on the mountain for 40 days** each time, seeking forgiveness for the people,⁵ and when was his work done? Because of this, the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted him to become enriched specifically in this way, in order that everyone would know that the wealth came to him because he was engaged in the needs of the community. If his enrichment had been in another way, we would say that he had become enriched because of his knowledge of the Torah, as it is said regarding other Torah scholars, “In her right hand is length of days, in her left, riches and honor,”⁶ but now that he became enriched in this way, there is no room to err as to the reason.

ומכל שכן דאמרינו במדרש שקשנשנתברו הלווחות נגזר על ישראל שילמדו תורה מתוך דוחק, מתוך צער, מתוך עוני וכו', שלפי גזירה זו לא היה לו למשה להתעשר בלווחות שניות, שהוא היה הגורם ששיבר הלווחות, ולמה נתעשר בהם, אלא ודאי מוכח מכאן שלא נתעשר מחמת תורתו, אלא משום שאבד עסקיו כדי להתעסק בצרכי צבור.

Moreover, as is stated in the Midrash that when the Tablets were broken it was decreed upon Israel that they would learn Torah under pressure, with sorrow, with poverty, etc.⁷ Now, because of this decree, Moses should not have enriched himself from the second set of Tablets, as he was the cause of the breaking of the Tablets, which caused people to learn Torah in poverty. So why did he become enriched by them? Rather, it's certainly proven from this that he did not get enriched from his knowledge of Torah, rather from the fact that he lost business opportunities in order to deal with the needs of the community.

ועוד להודיע ששבירת הלווחות היתה לטובתן של ישראל, כמו שאמרו ז"ל מוטב תידון כפגניה וכו', והוא לא חטא כלל בשבירתן שאדרבא הסכים הקב"ה עמו, כדאמרינו יפה פתח ששבירתו. ומשום הכי רצה שיתעשר באלו הלווחות כדי שיידעו הכל שנה העושר בא לו בשביל שנתעסק בצרכיהם של ישראל והניח עסקיו, וכדי שילמדו כל העוסקים עם הצבור להתעסק עמם לשם שמים, פדתנו בפרק ב' דאבות.

Also, it was to inform that the breaking of the Tablets was for the good of Israel, as the [rabbis] of blessed memory said:

What did Moses do? He took the tablets from the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He in order to suppress His fury. To what is the matter comparable? To a prince who sent to betroth a woman through an intermediary. She went and strayed with another man. The intermediary, who was guiltless, what did he do? He took the marriage contract that the prince had given him to betroth her and he ripped

⁴ Ex. 18:13.

⁵ Rashi on Ex. 32:1; Rashi on Ex. 33:11; Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa, 31. Moses went up the first time and received the first set of Tablets. Upon descending, he saw the Golden Calf and broke the Tablets. He ascended a second time for 40 days and pled for mercy. He then went up a third time for 40 days, and received the second set of Tablets.

⁶ Prov. 3:16.

⁷ Tanna De'Vei Eliyahu Rabbah 21.

it. He said: **“It is preferable that she be judged as a single woman** [who broke off a potential match] and not as a married woman [who has committed adultery].”

- Ex. Rabbah 43:1

[Moses] did not sin at all in breaking them, for to the contrary, the Holy One, Blessed be He, agreed with him, as it is said, “You [showed] beautiful strength that you broke [them].”⁸

Because of this, He desired that [Moses] would be enriched with these Tablets, in order that everyone would know that this wealth came to him because he was engaged in the needs of Israel and put aside his own business. Another reason was so that everyone engaged in the needs of the community would learn to keep busy with them for the sake of Heaven, as is taught in the 2nd chapter of Pirkei Avot, where Rabban Gamliel said:

[A]ll who labor with the community, should labor with them for the sake of Heaven, for the merit of their forefathers sustains them (the community), and their (the forefather’s) righteousness endures forever; And as for you, [God in such case says] I credit you with a rich reward, as if you [yourselves] had [actually] accomplished [it all].

- Pirkei Avot 2:2

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⁸ Yalkut Shimoni on Torah, 393:1.