

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Lessons From Davening



RABBI
DOVID TZVI
MEISSNER

The quintessential *chuka*, unexplained statute, of the Torah is the commandment of the *Parah Aduma*, Red Heifer. Even Shlomo Hamelech, wisest of men, wasn't able to understand this *mitzvah*. The commentators ask about a *Rashi*. In his commentary, he quotes Rav Moshe HaDarshan as explaining the *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah* was given to atone for the sin of the *Chet Ha'egel*, the Golden Calf. "This is analogous to a maidservant's child who dirtied the king's palace. They said, let his mother come and wipe away his filth. So too, let the *Parah Adumah* come and atone for the *Egel*." Seemingly, there is an understanding for this *mitzvah*; why then, is this considered a *chok*, commandment without a known reason?

On a simple level, the *Yismach Yisroel* explains that, indeed, the reason for the *mitzvah* of *Parah Aduma* is to atone for the *Chet Ha'egel*. The unexplainable *chok* is why the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* serve both to purify the impure, and conversely, ritually defile the pure.

However, Rav Yitzchok of Vorka and others explain that *Parah Adumah* has no known reason, and that's exactly why it serves to atone for the *Chet Ha'egel*. The root of the sin of the *Egel* was a deficiency in *emunah*, a lack of faith in Hashem and His servant, Moshe. Hence, the atonement for such a sin is to fulfill a *mitzvah* "blindly," exhibiting *emunah* by showing that we serve Hashem just because we're commanded to do so, independent of our understanding of the rationale behind the commandments.

This also explains Chazal's statement that Moshe Rabbeinu knew the reason for *Parah Adumah*. He had not sinned at all with the *Egel*; his *emunah* was completely intact, so he didn't need this "remedy" of not knowing the reasoning of this *mitzvah*.

There's nothing wrong with trying to understand the reasoning of the *mitzvos* we perform, but in no way is that the reason *why* we perform them. We do so regardless of our understanding, solely because we are commanded to by Hashem.

Sometimes, we may feel more motivated to perform the *mitzvos* which are more logical to us. Some only fulfill those that make sense to them. The lesson of the *Parah Adumah* teaches us otherwise. Hashem is our King; we must always obey His commands. It is encouraging to bear in mind that Hashem wants to benefit us, and that's why he gave us so many *mitzvos*. The numerous *mitzvos* aren't burdensome, rather they are golden opportunities to develop an intimate connection with Hashem, and of course, the reward is great. This is essentially Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya's statement: *Ratza Hakadosh Baruch Hualizakos es Yisroel lifikach hirba lahem Torah umitzvos*—Hashem wished to confer merit upon Yisrael; therefore He gave them Torah and *mitzvos* in abundance (*Makkos* 3:16).

May we all merit to attain true *emunah* and strengthen our connection to Hashem. 🕯

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM
ME'AH SHE'ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

One time, Yaakov saw his friend Yoni put down his *tefillin* in an unsafe place and decided to teach him a lesson. Yaakov took Yoni's *tefillin* and hid them. When Yoni returned, he couldn't find them and was very distressed. Finally, Yaakov told Yoni that he took them, but warned him that next time he should be more careful to put them in a safe place because he might not be so lucky.

Q Was it appropriate for Yaakov to take Yoni's *tefillin* to teach him a lesson that he must guard them properly?

A The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 61b) states that the prohibition of stealing includes one who steals merely to cause distress to another. *Ketzos Hachoshen* (348:1) quotes *Shita Mekubetzes* explaining that this is including a situation where he plans on keeping the object he stole even if he derives no personal benefit. *Ramba"m* (*Sefer Hamitzvos Mitzvah* 244) implies that even if he intends to return what he stole, it would be prohibited.

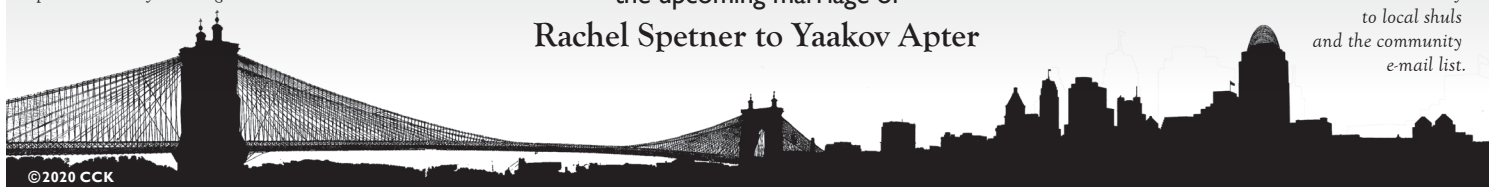
Seemingly, then, Yaakov should not be allowed to take Yoni's *tefillin*, even though his intention is to teach him a lesson.

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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However, it would appear that it would be permitted to take the *tefillin* once he noticed it lying in an unsafe place. He would be performing a *mitzvah* by preventing its desecration, especially if Hashem's name would have been erased. Additionally, he would fulfill the *mitzvah* of *hashavas aveida*, returning one's lost object, by preventing its theft. Once he took the *tefillin* permissibly, he will not be considered to be stealing even if he withholds it, and perhaps it would even be permitted in this case to teach Yoni the lesson of guarding his *tefillin* properly.

Additionally, if Yaakov would be Yoni's Rabbi who is charged with his spiritual growth, it may be permitted for him to take the *tefillin*. Stealing just to cause another distress is prohibited precisely because one is not allowed to cause his fellow aggravation. A Rebbe, however, is allowed to cause stress to his student in order to teach him and promote his spiritual growth. However, more clarification is needed on this matter. 🕒

Mazel Tov to

Mazel Tov to Rabbi & Mrs. Spetner and family on the upcoming wedding of Rachel to Yaakov Apter! 🕒

POWER OF PRAYER

Moshe as a child would watch his mother light the Shabbos candles every Friday evening. Every week she would light the candles and then stand next to the candles in prayer for several minutes afterward. Moshe was intensely curious; what was she saying? One week he decided to find out and he snuck under the table that the candlesticks were set up on. His body was hidden by the tablecloth draped over the table except for part of his hand which stuck out just a little bit. His mother soon came in, lit the candles, and said, "Master of the world, light up the eyes of my children with the words of your holy Torah." And she said it again. And again. And again. Until Little Moshe felt warm tears hit his hands. The feeling of those tears made an indelible impression on the young boy.

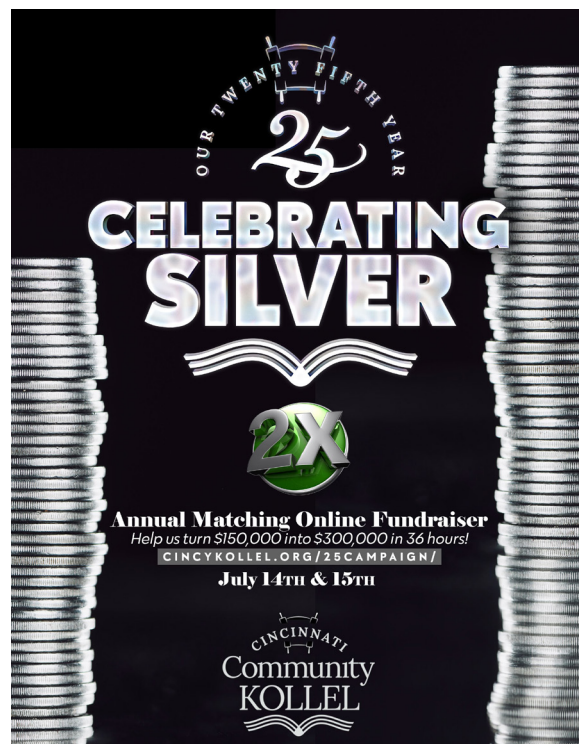
A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

Where are Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos alluded to in Parshas Balak?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 🕒

Little Moshe Sherer felt a determination welling up within himself. He would make sure that he did his part in his mother's heartfelt prayers come true. 🕒



BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

It was generally assumed that the American scene did not lend itself to the *shtetl* lifestyle of Europe—and especially not to the lifestyle of the *chassidim* of eastern Europe. This assumption, however, was proven wrong. In the 1920s, a time when the influx of young immigrants slowed because of restricted immigration, and when a new generation became increasingly estranged from the religion of their immigrant parents, a group of young men completely bucked the trends and established the first group of American *chassidim*. Rav Chaim Avraham Dov Ber Levine *Hakohen*, a *chassidic* Jew known in Europe as “the *Malach*” because of his piety and asceticism, immigrated to America in 1923 with his only son. Upon meeting Rav Levine, Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, principal of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, who always encouraged his students' exposure to men of great Torah learning, encouraged students to spend time with Rav Levine. Rav Levine would have a transformative influence on these students. His students began to look for his guidance in serving G-d, and they would emulate their new Rebbe in modes of conduct and dress. For the first time, young American men voluntarily let their beards and sidelocks grow, wore long black jackets, and gave up wearing clothing that fit the American mainstream. Now known as “the *Malachim*,” their group gave up study of secular subjects and began to converse only in Yiddish amongst themselves. Rabbi Mendlowitz was not in favor of the changes and informed the boys that they could not stay in yeshiva in their current state. Three years later, the young men opened their own yeshiva. This lifestyle choice was powerfully symbolic, as it showed that Americanization of immigrants and their children was not a foregone conclusion and that *shtetl* life could be attractive even to boys born and bred in America. It also showed that one could live in the New World without being involved in American culture. These men and the enclave they established in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn laid the foundation for post-war *chassidic* courts and the renaissance of *chassidic* Jewry in America that came forth from the fires of the Holocaust.. 🕒

SOURCE: Mintz, Jerome R. “Hasidic People, A Place in the New World.” Harvard University Press. 1998.

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