



In the Name of All of Israel Parshas Ki Sisah

My father's first trip to Crown Heights to visit the Lubavitcher Rebbe was in 1960's. My father never forgot that amazing meeting. After Shabbos morning prayers my father was invited to Kiddush with Nechama Dinah, the Rebbe's mother in law. He found a small group of elder Hassidim sitting around a table. They sat and listened to the stories told by Nechama.

One story she told was of the community in Vilna, Lithuania. In those days Vilna had a strong bastion of opponents to Hassidism. One day one of the rich members of that group came to pray at the Hassidic synagogue. He was suspected of some transgression and was banned from the main synagogue. The Hassidim were not sure if they should admit him; it would not look good that they are letting a transgressor into their midst. On the other hand, how can they ban a Jew from prayer?

They decided to ask the Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady.¹ When they presented the Rebbe with their conundrum he answered with a story: Once a rich man built a mansion. He used the best materials and had the best professionals do the job. The interior decorations were exquisite and a beautiful garden surrounded the estate.

He threw a special party when he moved in, offering a unique banquet. Musicians played at the event. A person who stands in such a dreamy a setting, lacks nothing, all the pleasures of the world are available to him, but all this cannot compare to the satisfaction G-d experiences when someone refrains from transgressing even once.

The message was clear: if the sinner finds his place in their community and refrains from sinning again, G-d will be pleased. The rich man should be admitted into the community.

In our weekly parsha we learn about the Ktores, incense: "And the Lord said to Moshe: "Take for yourself aromatics, balsam sap, onycha and galbanum, aromatics and pure frankincense; they shall be of equal weight." Our sages

explain that galbanum, a spice with a vile odor, is counted among the ingredients of the incense in order to teach us that we should not look askance at including Jewish transgressors with us when we assemble for fasting or prayer. The Torah instructs us that they should be counted with us.



The Talmud further elaborates: "Said Rabbi Hana bar Bizna in the name of Rabbi Hisda the pious: A fast in which none of the sinners of Israel participate is no fast; for behold the odor of galbanum is unpleasant and yet it was included among the spices for the incense."² We are taught that in every good thing we must incorporate something which is not good, and in

that way the good will become even better.

A teaching of Rabbi Meir Simchah of Dvinsk³ will solidify this important lesson: the Beis Hamikdash was the place where G-d's divine presence dwelt, it united the Jewish Nation. All around the world Jews praying turn towards the Temple, which is the inner point of the Jewish People. The Temple in Jerusalem had a place for everyone. And therefore our synagogues too must have a place for everyone; even "sinners".

The Hassidim returned to Vilna. They accepted the new member with much warmth, and he did eventually repent.

This teaching became a family tradition, the idea that everyone is equal before G-d, and the infinite value of any Jewish soul when it's shown the proper path.

Only because of the community's inclusiveness did he repent, even if he didn't merit it. They saved not only him but his descendants as well, throughout the generations.

¹ (1745 – 1812), was an Orthodox Rabbi, and the founder and first Rebbe of Chabad, a branch of Hasidic Judaism, then based in Liady, Imperial Russia. He was the author of many works, and is best known for Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Tanya and his Siddur Torah Or compiled according to the Nusach Ari.

² Tractate Kritot 6b.

³ 1843–1926) was a rabbi and prominent leader of Orthodox Judaism in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century. He was a kohen, and is therefore often referred to as *Meir Simcha ha-Kohen* ("Meir Simcha the Kohen"). He is known for his writings on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, which he titled *Ohr Somayach*, as well as his novellae on the Torah, titled *Meshech Chochma*.