

Ki Sisa 5777

March 17, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Shattering Revelation

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Ayin hara, the evil eye, gets a lot of bad publicity. Purportedly warded off by the ubiquitous but dubiously-sourced *roite bendel* (red band), the Talmud, and many subsequent Torah sources, tell us that *ayin hara* can be the source of many troubles.

Ayin hara makes an appearance in this week's parsha. When Moshe is commanded to ascend Mt. Sinai to receive the second set of *Luchos* (Tablets), Hashem orders that no one ascend the mountain with him. Rashi (Ki Sisa 34:3) explains that the first *Luchos*, given with much fanfare, were affected by *ayin hara*. For the second time around, a more modest - very modest - event was planned, with nobody else in attendance.

G-d does not mistakes. So if *ayin hara* is a real problem, affecting even the first *Luchos*, G-d's handiwork, why was the Giving of the Torah done with so much pomp and ceremony? Skip the lightning, thunder, flames and clouds, give the Torah in a private, quiet ceremony, and everyone can live happily ever after!

The Shem Mishmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain; 1855-1926) says that it is quite impossible for *ayin hara* to have caused the shattering of the first *Luchos*, as they were created by G-d Himself. What, then, does Rashi mean? He explains that the *Luchos* can be likened to a human. A human is comprised of a body that is invested with a soul. When a person dies, the body conveys the greatest possible degree of *tumah* (spiritual impurity). The reason for this, says the Shem Mishmuel, is because the vessel that contains G-dliness, upon being emptied of that great holiness, is now left with a huge, gaping void

- a void that was large enough to contain a soul bestowed from G-d Himself. This void is filled by the forces of impurity and evil that exist in Creation. The Medrash states that when Moshe descended the mountain and beheld the Jewish People celebrating as they danced around their Golden Calf, the letters on the *Luchos* flew away, leaving two huge slabs of stone - an empty shell, now devoid of the sanctity of the letters of the Ten Commandments. And when a vessel is lacking the sanctity it was built to contain, when all that potential is unrealized, when there is a successful physical existence that does not measure up spiritually, the forces of *tumah* - a.k.a. *ayin hara* - set in.

The Torah tells us that Moshe smashed the *Luchos*, and Hashem agreed with his decision. A number of explanations are advanced as to why the *Luchos* had to be broken, but based on the aforementioned ideas, the Shem Mishmuel provides us with a new insight. When a vessel becomes contaminated with *tumah*, it can be purified by breaking it. The stones of the *Luchos*, now affected by *ayin hara*, had to be smashed to rid them of the evil that had taken hold.

Why does smashing cleanse *tumah*? Because *tumah* and *ayin hara*, says the Shem Mishmuel, take hold when a physical vessel exists without the sanctity it was created to contain. When that physicality is obliterated, the *tumah* has nothing to cleave to.

When the Jewish People sinned with the Golden Calf, they also lost the lofty levels they had achieved. The *Luchos* mirrored the Jews' descent into impurity. The first *Luchos* were

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Stories For The Soul

Dreams are Reality

Based on a story on revach.net

Rabbi Chatzkel Levenstein (1895-1974) was the *mashgiach* (spiritual guide) of the Mir Yeshiva during WWII, when the institution escaped to Shanghai, China. Rav Chatzkel spoke constantly about trusting in G-d, which was so necessary during that difficult and frightening time. He taught the students to feel a palpable sense of trust in G-d at every moment.

At one point during the yeshiva's sojourn in Shanghai, the city was being heavily bombed. It was suggested that the yeshiva leave the city and move to a town called Charvin. Rav Chatzkel opposed the move. Despite a great deal of opposition from portions of the student body, who could not understand his decision-making process, the yeshiva remained in Shanghai. Later, Rav Chatzkel revealed that the great Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936), his predecessor as *mashgiach* of the Mir Yeshiva, had appeared to him in a dream and instructed him not to move the yeshiva.

After the period of danger had passed, the students heard the news that Charvin had been bombed twice as much as Shanghai, and the city had suffered far-worse casualties.

In this week's parsha, the Jewish People panicked when Moshe did not return. Instead of following the leadership of Aharon and the others who had been chosen by Moshe, they struck out on their own, ultimately creating the Golden Calf. Following the guidance of our Torah leaders is imperative, even if we don't necessarily understand the reasoning behind their decisions.

Kollel Happenings

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: How many times a year do we read from two Torah scrolls in one setting?

A: Excluding those times when we read from three Torah scrolls at one reading, the amount varies, based on the calendar setup, between 22 and 27 days a year (in the Diaspora). These include: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, the first two days of Sukkos, Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos (not applicable every year), Shemini Atzeres, Shabbos Chanukah (when it doesn't coincide with Rosh Chodesh; also, for some years, Chanukah occurs on two

Shabbasos), Rosh Chodesh Teves on Chanukah (some years have two days of Rosh Chodesh Teves), the Four Parshios (the special readings on four Shabbasos around Purim time; if any of them coincide with Rosh Chodesh, three Torah scrolls are used), all eight days of Pesach, Shavuos, and any Shabbos which coincides with Rosh Chodesh.

This week's question: Between the days that we read from two Torah scrolls (at one reading), which are Mishna/Gemara-based, and which are of later origin?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef, Part XVII

This voice, known as a *maggid*, is described by the great Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital as a form of *ru'ach hakodesh*, Divine inspiration. Rabbi Caro recorded some of the discussions of the *maggid* (though the Chida, Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai [1724-1806] states that not even 1/50th of the discussions were recorded), and these writings were later published as *Maggid Maisharim*.

Rabbi Caro maintained a yeshiva in Safed. In 1759, an earthquake destroyed the building, and it was rebuilt, only to be reduced to rubble again when an earthquake struck in 1837. The structure was rebuilt a third time, and that building,

the Yosef Caro Synagogue, stands today on the site of the original yeshiva.

As mentioned in an earlier column, Rabbi Caro married three times. Rabbi Caro's second wife passed away late in his life, and he married his third wife when he was already in his ninth decade. This wife bore him a son, Yehuda, when he was 82 years old.

Rabbi Caro passed away in 1575, while writing a response to a question addressed to him. His son Yehuda wrote on the blank page, "Here the master, of blessed memory, left the page blank. He would have written the answer, but was called to the Academy on High."

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made for a perfect people, and could thus exist in their brilliance and glory without concern for *ayin hara*, but the second pair were meant for a flawed people, tainted by sin. It was impossible for stones of such great potential to have their magnificence displayed to all; *ayin hara* would inevitably result.

The Shem Mishmuel concludes with a vital lesson. Just as the means of fixing the *Luchos* was by shattering them, we,

too, can remove the evil that is so much a part of us by breaking our hearts. King Solomon (Proverbs 3:3) exhorts us to write the Torah upon the tablet of our hearts. But a heart filled with selfishness and focused on personal interests and needs cannot possibly be the repository for the Torah. Through introspection, self-effacement and humility, the heart becomes a fitting home for the words of G-d to reside.