

TORAH WEEKLY



CELEBRATING
25 years
OF TORAH GROWTH
TOGETHER

Parshas Ki Sisa | March 1, 2024 | Volume 25 | Issue 19

Where It All Starts and Ends

By: Rabbi Nesanel Kipper (Originally Published 2021)

The Sin of the Golden Calf, one of the greatest tragedies to take place in the history of the Jewish People, is detailed in this week's parsha. The Torah tells us that when Moshe came down from Mt. Sinai and saw the Jewish People celebrating around the Golden Calf, he took the Luchos (Tablets) and threw them to the ground, breaking them. What purpose did Moshe have in breaking the Luchos?

The Meshech Chochma (Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk; 1843-1926) provides an approach to understanding Moshe's actions. Throughout the Torah, says the Meshech Chochma, there are numerous instances of kedusha (holiness) that exist in physical objects, such as the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and its vessels; in locations, such as the Land of Israel; and in people, such as Aharon and his descendants. It is imperative to recognize that the kedusha which they possess does not independently belong to these people, places or things, but, rather, it is bestowed upon them by Hashem. This idea is expressed in the Talmud (Yevamos 6b), which says that when the Torah says, "You shall fear my Sanctuary" (Vayikra 19:30), the Torah is not demanding that one fear the Mishkan (Tabernacle) itself, but, rather, the One Who commanded us regarding the Sanctuary. Similarly, the Talmud (Gittin 56b) relates how, during the destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash (Temple), the Roman general Titus entered the Holy of Holies with a harlot, unrolled a Torah scroll, and committed a sin upon it, yet he walked out unscathed. The explanation for this is that the Bais Hamikdash is holy because G-d's presence rests within it when the Jewish People live at the spiritual level expected of them. At the time of the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, however, the Jewish People had already driven G-d's presence away through their sins. By the time Titus entered the Bais Hamikdash, even the Holy of Holies had lost a large degree of its sanctity.

Mankind has always had trouble relating to G-d, Who is entirely spiritual. This issue, says the Meshech Chochma, is the origin of the sin of idolatry. People felt the need to arouse their senses by turning toward physical objects as a means of connecting to Hashem. What began as a mere representation would eventually evolve into worshipping the physical objects as though they themselves contained independent spiritual power. This idea appears when the Philistines, after capturing the Aron (Ark) during a battle with the Jewish People, were struck by a plague. The verse (Samuel I 4:8) states that they cried out, "Who will save us from this mighty god?" referring to the Aron itself. They mistakenly thought that the Aron had caused the plague to befall them, rather than G-d Himself.

All of these sources make it clear that one must maintain the proper perspective with regards to kedusha and spiritual power; failure to do so can lead one to view a physical object as an independent source of spiritual power. This idea, says the Meshech Chochma, can be used to explain the error that led to the Sin of the Golden Calf. Bnai Yisrael mistakenly put too much emphasis on the kedusha of Moshe, mistakenly thinking that his kedusha was self-generated rather than instilled by Hashem.

When Moshe failed to return by the deadline calculated by the Bnai Yisrael for his return, the people decided to create another entity to serve as a physical object that would represent the spiritual force they now lacked. Some people even went so far as to label this Golden Calf as the entity which took them out of Egypt (see Shemos 32:4). In doing so, they showed that they had mistakenly viewed Moshe in the same way, an independent spiritual force who brought them out of Egypt. Indeed, the Bnai Yisrael told Aharon (ibid:1), "For this man, Moshe, who brought us out of Egypt - we don't know what happened to him."

Upon seeing the tragic error committed by the Jewish Nation, Moshe made the decision to break the Luchos. This was not simply because they were not deserving of them. Rather, Moshe understood that giving the Luchos to the Jewish People would serve to potentially extend their original error, as they would simply substitute the Golden Calf with the Luchos, connecting to the kedusha they contained instead of directly to Hashem.

By breaking the Luchos, Moshe intended to teach the Bnai Yisrael a powerful lesson: No entity has its own, independent holiness or power; it all comes from Hashem. Even the Luchos, made and written by Hashem himself, were only special because Hashem had imbued them with sanctity so that the Jewish People could live in accordance with their dictates. However, when they sinned and forsook Hashem, they drove Him from their midst and the Luchos lost their kedusha. Having lost their sanctity, Moshe decided to use them to show the Jewish People that the Luchos, in of themselves, were useless unless the Jewish People imbued them with Hashem's kedusha through their observance of Torah and mitzvos.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 14b) tells us that the second set of Luchos were put in the Aron together with the pieces of the first Luchos. What purpose did the broken Luchos serve? The Meshech Chochma, continuing his approach, says that the first Luchos served as a reminder that kedusha exists in Hashem alone, and that no physical object contains any independent holiness - it only receives kedusha from Hashem Himself.

It happens that a person begins a worthy project, one that he hopes will lead to spiritual accomplishment and growth. However, as time goes on, the person becomes so focused on the project that he loses sight of the ultimate goal of using this endeavor as a means to connect to Hashem. One mustn't forget that the good deeds he is looking to perform do not contain their own independent sanctity. Rather, one's goals and actions only have validity so long as they are in line with the will of Hashem. One must constantly reevaluate and confirm that what he is doing is indeed fulfilling the will of Hashem.

Alumni Focus

Rabbi Nesanel Kipper

PAST



Rabbi Kipper, teaching in Kollel, 2019

2018-2022

Years as a Denver
Kollel Scholar

PRESENT



Rabbi Kipper, 2023

Director of Development

Hillel Academy of Denver

Kollel Happenings



Agudah voting stand at the Kollel.