

A Taste of Torah Only His Command

By Rabbi Shachne Sommers

The tragedy of the Golden Calf is one of the most troubling stories in the Torah. A mere 40 days earlier, the People had experienced the voice of Hashem speaking to them, telling them not to serve idols. How could they have fallen so low, so fast?

The 19th century Torah giant, Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, in his classic work Bais Halevi, sheds a totally different light upon this episode. As many commentators point out, the motivation of the people to create the golden calf was not to serve it as a god. On the contrary, in Moshe's absence, the Jewish people were searching for a way to strengthen their service of Hashem. To further that goal, they felt that they needed some physical object to serve as the means to increase their connection to Hashem.

This concept is by no means absolutely wrong. The Mishkan (Tabernacle), which they would build soon after, would serve that very purpose. The golden calf was actually meant to be a Mishkan of sorts,

to facilitate the people's bond with Hashem.

So where then did they go wrong? Why did the Mishkan become the vehicle for Hashem's Presence in the world, whereas the Golden Calf ended up being the polar opposite?

The distinction, explains the Bais Halevi, boils down to one word: Mitzvah (Commandment). Only Hashem Himself can determine the means by which to connect with Him. The Mishkan was built as a fulfillment of a command of Hashem; thus it became a vehicle to connect to Him. The Golden Calf, although built with lofty motivations, was essentially a man-made attempt at creating a means to connecting to Hashem, and was thus doomed to failure.

It would serve us well to remember this principle. Lofty intentions are not enough. Indeed they can lead to the greatest of tragedies. If we follow Hashem's directives, His mitzvos, we can be assured of success in our search for greatness.

Ask the Rabbi Comforting Kindness

Jeff Nelson from Lenexa, KS wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Recently a close friend of mine died in a car accident. He was married only six months ago. My friend was only 20 and his wife 19. Neither is Jewish, and my friend was cremated. This is the first time someone has died that not only did I know, but felt very close to. Though

neither he nor his family is Jewish, what is my duty as a Jew to do for them, and myself?

Dear Jeff Nelson,

The death of a loved one is always very traumatic. One is often confronted with a sense of helplessness and uselessness in the face of tragedy. Our

Stories For The Soul

Uniquely Equal

Every Jew was commanded to contribute one half shekel for the Mishkan. The wealthy were limited from contributing more and the poor were not permitted to give less. Each person's contribution was the same. This reminds us that every person has the ability to make a contribution to society as great as anyone else. Everyone has the potential to achieve greatness. That greatness can be tapped in remarkable ways as the following true story, told to me by Rabbi Zvi Freund, illustrates:

Early in his career, Rabbi Hillel Mandel taught 4th grade in Yeshiva Tiferes Moshe in Kew Gardens, NY. He once had a student Heshy, who was not doing well in his studies and behaved in a manner that disrupted the class.

Rabbi Mandel was asked by the principal to try to "lift him up". The principal explained that Heshy's parents were in his office, pleading that their boy had a good heart, but he was getting lost and no one was helping him. He was drowning and no one was throwing him a lifeline. The principal asked Rabbi Mandel to do whatever he could.

Rabbi Mandel accepted the challenge, and immediately tried every trick in the book to aid young Heshy. He tried moving him to a better seat. That didn't help. He tried calling on him more. That didn't help. He tried positive reinforcement. That didn't help. He tried talking with him privately and strategizing together about his schoolwork. Still nothing. He tried giving him extra help on his

Kollel Happenings

JOY IN MARRIAGE FOR MEN

As part of our "Year of Joy" the Kollel will be offering a four part series on "Joy in Relationships." Rabbi Yechiel Erlanger will be giving a class for men on "Joy in Marriage." It will be held on Mon., Feb. 21 at the home of Harvey and Jenna Pacht at 9850 E. Grand Ave. For information or to RSVP, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or rmh@denverkollel.org



TUESDAY NIGHT TORAH AT AISH KODESH IN BOULDER

Join the Kollel for a dynamic one-on-one and small groups Torah encounter. Maariv will be held at 8:15 followed by Torah study at 8:30. Program will be held at Aish Kodesh, 1805 Balsam Ave. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or rmh@denverkollel.org or Charles Fried at 917-499-4307 or charlesfried@gmail.com.



SIEVERS TO BE HONORED AT KOLLEL BENEFIT EVENT ON MARCH 15

Dr. Marc and Dale Sievers will be receiving the Community Leadership Award at the Kollel's thirteenth annual Benefit Event. Rabbi Yissochor and Avigail Steinharter are the event chairs. The event will be held at District 475, with guest speaker Rabbi Ephraim Eliyahu Shapiro addressing the theme, "Joy: Awakening the Power Within." To place an ad or RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or visit www.denverkollel.org.

Interpersonal Issues Prohibition of Envy

The Shulchan Aruch rules that one does not transgress the prohibition of being envious of another's possessions through mere thoughts of desiring those possessions. However, scheming how to get the owner of the desired item to sell, where the owner does not really want to, is a transgression of the prohibition

of *lo sisaveh*. If one succeeds in getting the owner to sell the desired item when the owner doesn't really want to, it is a transgression of the prohibition of *lo sachmod*.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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Torah requires us to offer kindness to any person, and comforting friends at a time of loss is a great mitzvah. The best comfort you can offer to people at such a time is to be there for them. If they want to talk, be there to listen. If they want to be silent, be silent with them so that they are not alone.

Don't just ask, "What can I do to help?" See what needs to be done and do it. Perhaps they need food; perhaps

there are errands that need to be run or other ways in which you can be useful.

Often, after a few weeks have passed people forget about the mourners and go on with their lives. The mourners still need to know that someone cares. Be there for your friends when all the fuss is over and everyone has gone home. May you and your friends know no more sorrow.

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Stories for the Soul

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assignments. All to no avail.

No amount of praising, coaxing, cajoling or anything else made any impact on poor Heshy. There was no change whatsoever in his poor performance. Every day, Heshy fell further and further behind the rest of the class. Rabbi Mandel truly felt for him. He was, after all, a nice boy, but what could he do? He was running out of ideas.

In addition to his academic failings, he was not doing well socially within the class, and his behavior was going from bad to worse. Even during recess, Heshy had problems.

One day the class was going on a special field trip where they would eat a picnic lunch. As they were about to leave the classroom, Heshy said, "Don't forget the bentchers."

Suddenly, a thousand lights went off

in Rabbi Mandel's mind. It occurred to him that despite the qualities and abilities Heshy possessed or lacked, he had a keen sense of responsibility. Finally there was a glimmer of hope - a leg to build on.

From that moment on, whenever he needed to be reminded of something, he would single out Heshy. "Heshy, remind me to give out the workbooks. Heshy, remember to collect the extra credit assignments."

This proved to be the key to the mystery that was Heshy. He felt that he had a contribution to make to the class. This new sense of self-worth set Heshy on a path that ultimately unlocked his potential. By the end of the year Heshy had improved dramatically - both academically and socially. He was now indeed a model student.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek

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