



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Ki Sisa

March 5, 2021

A Taste of Torah Where It All Starts and Ends

by Rabbi Nesanel Kipper

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.

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Stories for the Soul

Silent Treatment

Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel (1821-1912) served as the rabbi of the Polish city of Lodz, which had a large Jewish population. Rabbi Meisel fought valiantly for the observance of Shabbos in Lodz, and his efforts bore fruit. Occasionally, though, there were individuals who would attempt to open their businesses on Shabbos, and Rabbi Meisel would need to take action to seal the breach before it widened.

One such instance occurred when Rabbi Meisel was informed that a particular Jew was opening his business, located on the outskirts of the city, on Shabbos day. That Shabbos, Rabbi Meisel told the congregation not to wait for him at the morning services. Early that Shabbos morning, instead of going to the synagogue, he made his way to the outskirts of the city. Upon arriving in the area of the business, he borrowed a chair and a *sefer* (Torah book) from one of the local Jews (there was an *eruv*, and so carrying was permitted), sat down in front of the still-closed store, and began studying the *sefer* he had brought.

Soon enough, the shopkeeper arrived but, seeing the esteemed rabbi of the city sitting there, he simply did not have the chutzpah to open his store. Thinking the rabbi was there on some other business, he decided to wait for him to depart. After several hours of Rabbi Meisel sitting silently in the chair engrossed in his Torah study, though, the shopkeeper suddenly realized why the rabbi was there - because he, the shopkeeper, was open on Shabbos! The fellow did not want to distress the great rabbi of the city, and so he pleaded with him, "Rabbi, please, don't sit here all day on my account! I promise, I will not open my store on Shabbos!"

Rabbi Meisel wordlessly displayed a face full of gratitude to the man, returned the chair and *sefer*, and returned home, having accomplished his mission.

Following the Sin of the Golden Calf,

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Kollel Happenings

THIS WEDNESDAY! KOLLEL CELEBRATION VIA ZOOM

The Kollel will hold its 23rd Anniversary Celebration, *The Journey*, this Wednesday, March 10 at 7 pm. The event will feature *A Journey of a Thousand Miles: The Sperber & Aragon Story*, and *A Never Ending Journey: The History of the Kollel Movement*. For details and to reserve, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: In a scenario where vegetables were cooked in water, how is it possible for the water to require a blessing of *ha'adama* but the vegetables a blessing of *shehakol*?

Answer: If the vegetables were removed from the water and pureed, it is possible that the broth requires a *ha'adama* but the vegetables would require a *shehakol*. This is based upon two halachos.

The first halacha is that water in which vegetables were cooked and which is flavored by the vegetables requires a blessing of *ha'adama* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 205:2). It is important to note that there are

several conditions that must be met for to require a *ha'adama* blessing rather than a *shehakol* blessing. Opinions vary as to what these conditions are; a halachic authority should be consulted.

The second halacha is that fruits or vegetables that are pureed to the point that they bear no resemblance to the original item require a *shehakol* (Rema Orach Chaim 202:7 with Mishna Berura *ibid.*:42,43; Mishna Berura 208:38).

This week's question: How is it possible that a raw, unprepared vegetable would require a different blessing due to the location where it is being consumed?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XIX

The rise of Islam and the Moslem conquests of the Middle East and parts of Europe during the 7th century led to greater cultural exposure for the Jews now

under Moslem rule. This was part of an era known as the Golden Age of Islam, when philosophy, wisdom and culture dominated Moslem society.

A Taste of Torah

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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.

Stories for the Soul

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Moshe initially pitched his tent outside the main encampment. However, Hashem told Moshe to return to the camp, explaining that although He, Hashem, was currently

displaying his anger at His People by remaining distant, the Jewish People needed someone - Moshe - to care for them and guide them despite their sorry state.