

Parshat Ki-Tisa

The Lesson of the Luchot

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In this week's Parsha, Moshe climbs up Har Sinai to bring down the *Luchot* to the nation. He comes down forty days later to find the people – who had just witnessed many revelations of G-d's might and power – sunk so deeply in idolatry and incest, dancing around their newly crafted golden calf. Moshe was so utterly appalled and disgusted at this sight that he threw down the *Luchot*, the beautiful present he had brought for the people, and broke them into pieces. What caused Bnei Yisrael to revert back to their previous level of spiritual abyss in such a short amount of time?

The Meshech Chochma explains that Bnei Yisrael weren't out to serve Avodah Zarah when they decided to make the calf; they were just trying to find a new intermediary to Hashem to replace Moshe, whom they were sure they had lost. They didn't realize, though, that the Torah was given to each and every Jew equally. They didn't understand that both the lowest of the lows and the highest of the highs have equal status in the eyes of Hashem. They perceived Moshe as one who had more of a portion of the Torah than they; one who was by nature on a completely different level of connection to Hashem. They felt that without Moshe, they could not possibly fulfill Hashem's will, and this was the mindset that caused the creation of the golden calf. This was why Moshe got so angry at the people. By breaking the *Luchot*, he rebuked them, effectively saying: "There is nothing – even the *Luchot* – that has inherent sanctity other than through the service of Hashem! I have no inherent Kedusha of my own, I'm on the same level as you in that respect!"

This connects to the Kli Yakar at the beginning of the Parsha that gives many reasons why Bnei Yisrael had to bring exactly a half-shekel. One reason is to atone for the sin of the golden calf, which caused the breaking of the Tablets (*bekiat haluchot*). Thus, in response, Bnei Yisrael were required to give a *bekah*, a shekel split (*baku'ah*) into half, and donate it to create the *adanim*, sockets, of the Mishkan. Both rich and poor gave the half-shekel equally. No one person could give an entire shekel on his own; only together with another could a complete shekel be formed. The half-shekel donation was supposed to make people fix their misplaced sense of inequality, to show them that a nation is made up of people with different traits and qualities, but not out of individuals who are separate and disconnected from each other.

Rav Hirsch similarly writes that the donation to the Mishkan was supposed to teach the nation that they, too, had a part in the Mishkan. The Mishkan wasn't established for the Kohanim as a mitzvah only for the learned men or for those who have been selected by G-d. The purpose of the Mishkan would not be fulfilled unless the entire nation was bound up with it. An individual has value in the nation and can accomplish only when joined together, as the shekalim were when they were smelted and formed into blocks.

Perhaps, with this idea we can help continue to heal the wound that was created by the golden calf.