

PARSHAS KI SISA

תשפ"ב

We are coming to one of the most confusing and difficult parshiyos of the Torah. In Parshas Yisro and Mishpotim, we discussed kabbolas haTorah. Klal Yisroel left Egypt after a year of being exposed to unbelievable miracles. Ten makkos showing in all kinds of ways how Hashem totally controls nature and that there is no other power besides Him. This reached a climax with a gilui Shechinoh at makkas bechoros. Then, seven days later at kriyas Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel received a level of nevuah of the highest nevi'im. Even the lowest among them was able to point and say "Zeh Keli". Six weeks later they are standing at Har Sinai with fire and thunder and they hear Hashem speaking to Moshe. They say 'naaseh v'nishmah' and accept the Torah because they have reached total clarity about the reality of Hashem.

But then, after a short while, they make a miscalculation about which day Moshe was supposed to return with the luchos. They were off by one day – and they make a golden calf! It is a very steep fall after going all the way up. What are the lessons we learn from this?

Moshe comes down and smashes the luchos. Then goes up again for forty days to ask for forgiveness, and goes up a third time to receive the second luchos. When he comes down on Yom Kippur with the second luchos, they begin building the mishkon.

What happened and why did it happen?

On the one hand, Klal Yisroel were in Egypt for generations. They had sunk to the 49th level of defilement. On the other hand, as we say in the haggodoh, Klal Yisroel were developing and growing rapidly in their avodas Hashem. These were opposite forces pulling at them simultaneously. Before the night of makkas bechoros, they were ready to do bris miloh and slaughter the avodo zoro of their masters. Once they showed they were ready to make such sacrifices, Hashem was able to make a bris with them. Then at Har Sinai, they saw with absolute clarity the truth of Hashem and the falsehood of avodo zoro. At the time of maamad Har Sinai, it wasn't a mitzvah to believe in Hashem. It was simply the reality that they saw.

However, there had to be an adjustment period of getting the avodo zoro out of their system. There are levels of avodo zoro that had to be removed. There is primitive avodo zoro which was removed by all the open miracles they saw during yetzias mitzrayim, proving that only Hashem controls the world and all the forces of nature. But then there is a more subtle form of avodo zoro – critical mistakes in the kind of relationship we need to have with Hashem.

When they were at Har Sinai, hearing the aseres hadibbros, Klal Yisroel insisted that Moshe be the go-between between them and Hashem. Even though they saw all the miracles themselves and achieved a high level of nevuah, and even though they went through Yam Suf themselves without Moshe Rabbeinu leading them in front, still, they believed Moshe had some supernatural ability to connect to Hashem that they didn't have. Klal Yisroel thought that if Moshe isn't available, we need another physical representative to connect to Hashem for them.

We have to appreciate that Klal Yisroel went through a very rapid rise to be on the level to receive the Torah. They still needed time to integrate all the lessons they were learning. They were at a vulnerable stage in their development of their relationship with Hashem. The slightest disruption – losing Moshe Rabbeinu on whom they were relying to maintain that delicate connection – caused Klal Yisroel to go into a panic. They thought they couldn't do it themselves, and instinctively

tried to find more familiar ways of relating to Hashem.

This was their mistake. A Jew goes straight to Hashem. We are all children of Hashem and we all can make a direct connection to Hashem without any intermediaries.

They proclaimed, "this is your god, Yisroel, who took you out of Egypt". But how could it be? They just made it! It means this is the physical representation of Hashem they felt they needed to connect to Hashem.

Then the verses say Klal Yisroel got up "le'tzacheik". Some say it means arayos, some say it means murder. Why did this follow? It is because it is very difficult to live with the knowledge that everything comes from Hashem, and every single event that takes place in this world happens with Hashem's power in response to our mitzvos and aveiros. There is no fooling Hashem – no getting out of the consequences of disobeying Him. But if things have to go through an intermediary, people can think they can manipulate this power to do what they want and avoid consequences.

This is what makes accepting the Torah so difficult. It means you are responsible for everything that happens because there is reward and punishment for everything you do. This is no bending the rules. The advantage of avodo zoro is that you can negotiate and make deals and avoid having to live by absolute rules with no flexibility. The whole culture of Egypt revolved around arayos and Klal Yisroel were eager to find some wiggle room to keep their old lifestyle.

There was a first kabbolas haTorah and the first luchos on Shevuos. Then the golden calf was made and the luchos had to be smashed. The first time, everything was dramatic and thunderous. The second time, everything was done quietly without any fanfare.

The Beis HaLevi shows a fundamental truth. There is a critical difference between the first and second luchos. With the first luchos, Klal Yisroel were on such a high level – the Ramban says they were on the level of Odom HoRishon before the sin – that they were able to derive all of Torah Shebaal Peh just from receiving Torah Shebichtav. But since this level wasn't integrated deeply inside of them, they crashed. They mistakenly thought they needed some physical intermediary. Hashem said no – you aren't going to get it.

Moshe Rabbeinu broke the first luchos and came down a second time with a different Torah. It was in a split format of Torah Shebichtav and Torah Shebaal Peh separately. The kind of Torah we have today was received on Yom Kippur. This is why our Simchas Torah is on Shemini Atzeres – right after Yom Kippur – and not on Shevuos. Because the Torah we have now wasn't the first one given on Shevuos but the second one given on Yom Kippur.

It is very hard to relate to Hashem directly. He is beyond anything physical and tangible – very abstract. One of the main advantages of separating Torah Shebaal Peh from Torah Shebichtav is that we can become preoccupied with the words of Hashem with our own human minds. I can connect straight to Hashem through immersing my mind in the Torah's ideas.

We have a concept of kabbolas ol malchus shomayim. This is what Shema Yisroel means. Hashem controls all the forces and He is unique. He is our G-d and we accept Him over us. We introduce this acceptance with a number of brochos – each with its own theme. The first one is of Hashem controlling the physical universe. The second one is that Hashem has tremendous love and mercy for us. He taught us how to

live our lives through keeping taryag mitzvos. We ask to learn how to subject all aspects of our lives – all our actions and thoughts – to Hashem's will.

But knowing how to keep all the mitzvos is not enough. We ask for more – to understand deeply enough to really be connected to Hashem and be connected to the mitzvos through our deep understanding of the mitzvos. Then we will have ahavoh and yiras Hashem and be single-minded in our devotion to Hashem's will.

When Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Har Sinai a second time, and had with him a Torah Shebichtav and Torah Shebaal Peh, Hashem was giving us the tools to directly connect to Hashem. It was too hard to relate to Hashem, which is very abstract. Trying to understand the chochmoh of Hashem through our understanding of His Torah is easier. It can be our direct link to Him. Chazal say Yisroel, the Torah, and Hashem are one interconnected unit. This is the incredible gift Hashem gave us with the second set of luchos.

So while Klal Yisroel were elevated to a very high level, and they even made a bris over a sefer habris, they still didn't have enough time to immerse themselves in this Torah to be able to connect to Hashem directly. They still needed an intermediary and they crashed. Moshe comes down again and gave us Torah Shebaal Peh separately, and we were able to connect to Hashem directly. For us, on our level we are on today, the Torah we have is the way to connect to Hashem in the most intense way.

This is why we have Simchas Torah on Shemini Atzeres – because the kabbolas haTorah of Shevuos did not last. The Ramban writes that one day, after the final geuloh, we can recapture that level of the first luchos – which was like Odom HoRishon before the sin.

Torah is our medium to connect to Hashem, and it is also an unbelievable kind of chochmoh – like no other chochmoh in this world. Each person can learn the same exact Torah – but on his level. The Torah can be understood on a very simplistic way by a five and a nine year old, and it can be learned on much higher levels simultaneously. The Rambam says every single person can understand the entire Torah on their level. This is the greatness of Hashem giving us the Torah – and it has to be this way. It has to be that Hashem can be accessed by every single type of person in Klal Yisroel on whatever level he is on – through his own individual connection to Torah.

This is what happened at the end. The second time Moshe came down on Yom Kippur, it was quiet – no big loud noises and no fanfare. But the moment Klal Yisroel got this format of Torah, the whole derech avodoh of Klal Yisroel changed dramatically. They no longer needed a physical representation to be connected to Hashem.

People outside the beis midrash wonder what we are doing here learning sugyos in shas all day. We have to understand that this is the highest derech avodoh of connecting to Hashem and bringing His presence into our day-to-day lives.