

I grasped the two Tablets and threw them from my two hands, and I smashed them before your eyes. (9:17)

Ramban explains the hidden meaning behind Moshe *Rabbeinu's* admonition to the people, "Your sin was too great to tolerate. Until the moment that I saw you 'playing' – dancing and reveling – before the Golden Calf (I might have been able to tolerate your sin), I could no longer refrain from acting. I broke the *Luchos*, Tablets."

Apparently, it was not the creation of the *eigal*, Golden Calf, that catalyzed Moshe's action. It was the way the people were behaving. They had lost complete control of themselves, an indication that they had no clue concerning the gravity of their nefarious deed. They had rebelled against Hashem – an unpardonable sin in its own right. Nonetheless, once a person realizes the seriousness of his mutiny, he can repent and return to Hashem. If the sin is accompanied with levity, reveling, a total breakdown of one's moral compass, it is too late. In order to repent, one must acknowledge his sin. When one jests and makes a complete farce of the evil which he perpetrates, he has lost his ability to acknowledge. He has lost hope for return. The Jews who participated in the Golden Calf debacle were in a frenzy, lost in their wanton abandonment of Hashem.

Teshuvah, return/repentance, can only occur when one comes to the full realization that he has broken the rules and gone too far. No different than a parent whose child has erred, Hashem waits for His children to return. Until we acknowledge our infraction, however, we are incapable of carrying out proper *teshuvah*. The first step, remorse, can only occur when the sinner confronts both his sin and the hurt that it has caused in Heaven and on earth. He is as much a victim as those who suffer as a result of his noncompliance with Hashem's *mitzvos*. It does not take much. It does, however, require sincere acknowledgment and a strong desire to return. When the sincerity is accompanied with love, the path to return is so much less complicated.

Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates the following story. It is both meaningful and inspirational, teaching us that *teshuvah* offered with love is all Hashem wants from us. The rest will come with time. It is the breakthrough, that one spark of feeling that commences a relationship which becomes stronger with time and effort.

A nine-year old girl walked into an upscale jewelry shop in *Eretz Yisrael* and began eyeing the jewelry cases, obviously looking for something specific. Finally, she motioned the jeweler to come over, as she pointed to a beautiful bracelet that was selling for a few thousand dollars. The owner, who was no longer a young man, patiently came over and asked the girl how he could help her. She replied that she would like to purchase the bracelet.

The man said to the girl, "You have excellent taste. You must be buying this bracelet for a special person."

"Yes," she said, "it is for my older sister. You see, my parents have both died, and my older sister has assumed full responsibility for our welfare. My siblings and I want to somehow show her how much we love her. After all, she is not that old herself.

"I brought all of my money, which I have saved. Certainly, it will be enough to buy this bracelet." She proceeded to take out some coins from her little purse and place them on the table.

The jeweler counted up the coins, which amounted to seven *shekel* and change (less than \$2.00) and said, "Perfect, exactly what the bracelet costs. Let me polish it up for you and put it in a nice box." He did this, wrapped up the gift, and then bid good-day to the young girl.

A few hours later, a teenage girl entered the store carrying the box. "I am so embarrassed and sorry that my little sister took this bracelet without paying for it," she said.

"What are you saying?" The jeweler asked. "She most certainly paid full price for the bracelet.

"What? How is it possible? This bracelet must be worth thousands of dollars!" the girl countered.

"Your little sister paid seven shekel and change – and a broken heart! That more than covers the value of the bracelet," the jeweler said.

With a sad, pained look on his face, the jeweler continued his explanation, "You are young and will hopefully have a long, fruitful and joyous life. I am no longer a young man. I am a widower, my wife having passed away a few years ago. Other than the people who come into my store in search of jewelry to satisfy their fancy, I see very few people. Even the customers that purchase my beautiful jewelry are people of means. They have no problem dropping thousands of *shekel* for a piece of jewelry which catches the eye. When your sister walked into the store, however, for the very first time since my wife died, I once again experienced the meaning of love. Her love and appreciation for what you have done for her and your siblings is very real. She sought something through which to express her deep love. Her broken heart was more than enough to compensate me for the bracelet – because it was sincere; it was real."

Rabbi Spero quotes *Rav Goel Elkarif*, who, after hearing the story directly from the jeweler, adds the following thought. Every year during the *Yomim Noraim*, we are very much like that little orphaned girl. We seek to purchase a very expensive and beautiful item – with very little funds to pay for it. We all want life, but nary have the means of paying for it. We simply lack the *zechuyos*, merit, which we need in order to be granted life.

Nonetheless, we come before Hashem and empty out our pockets. We grasp whatever *zechuyos* we can put our hands on: "I will come on time to *davening* – I will not even talk"; "Perhaps I will drink *cholov Yisrael* during *Aseres Yimei Teshuvah*;" "I will visit someone in the hospital;" "I might even call someone who is lonely;" "I will refrain from speaking *lashon hora* for two hours a day

(well, maybe only one hour),” “I will attempt to recite the *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar* as if I mean it.” These are small commitments, but, like the little girl who had less than \$2.00, we really mean it. It is our expression of love.

Hashem responds favorably, because we are sincere. He says, “It has been so long since I have felt true love.” He sees what we are willing to do, how much we really love Him, and how little we have to offer. He replies, “It may be little, but if it is accompanied by a broken heart, you have paid in full!” He accepts our *teshuvah*, and we are granted life. We just have to show true love.