

And by all the strong hand and by all the awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael. (34:12)

The concluding pasuk of the Torah describes Moshe Rabbeinu's greatest feat as the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael and its consummate rebbe. His acceptance of the Luchos in his two hands and his subsequent shattering of them in the presence of the entire Jewish nation – because he felt that their sin concerning the Golden Calf negated the message of the Luchos – are considered Moshe's greatest moments, the epitaph by which he is to be remembered. Moshe lived an incredible life of dedication to Hashem and to His nation. He achieved a position of leadership unparalleled, yet, he is remembered for his strength of conviction in zealously taking into his "hands" and breaking the Luchos. Apparently, this was his greatest moment.

I think that we may go one step further. This was Moshe's defining moment. It was the breaking of the Luchos which was not only his greatest act – it was the act of perfection that made the ultimate difference in his life. In other words, despite all that Moshe had done, regardless of his unprecedented and unparalleled achievements, had he not shattered the Luchos – everything that he had accomplished throughout his life would have been for naught. This is how critically important it was that Moshe not give the Luchos to a nation that had embraced the Golden Calf. His entire life of achievement preceding this defining moment was on the line. This decision would characterize and determine his life's achievement. Would it be a life of success, or would this moment place a negative stamp on his life?

How true this is. Many have achieved and accomplished great successes for Torah, only to make a serious mistake at a critical juncture in their lives and, regrettably, be remembered in infamy. Others have lived mediocre lives, basically what we would refer to in a spiritual sense as "hanging in there," but, once, at a time of great significance, they took the initiative and made a positive decision, one that not only transformed their lives, but actually altered their destiny.

Indeed, one act of perfection can define a lifetime. Likewise, one error at a crucial moment can have a negative impact for life. It all boils down to that “one moment,” that moment of destiny. In his volume on sports and Torah, Timeout, Rabbi Dov Lipman tells the story of Don Larsen, a mediocre pitcher for the 1956 New York Yankees, whose contribution to the Yankees’ triumphant emergence from the 1956 World Series was the most discussed story of the day, earning him the award as World Series Most Valuable Player.

The Yankees were playing their long-running rival, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Larsen had pitched poorly in Game 2 of the series, and, basically, he was all washed up – or so everyone, including himself, thought. Casey Stengel, legendary manager of the Yankees, shocked everyone when he gave the nod to Larsen for Game 5. He began to pitch with a support team of players and fans, all feeling a sense of trepidation. Clearly, they were not a confident group.

Incredibly, to everyone’s shock and disbelief, he threw ball after ball with tremendous control and precision. One after another, the Dodger players came up to bat, only to be retired meticulously by the Yankees’s “new” pitcher.

Every once in a while a Dodger player would make contact with the ball, only to have it caught by one of the Yankee players. With each ensuing inning, the Yankee fans thought that surely their pitcher would come apart. Sooner or later, his game would unravel and, he would revert to the pitcher they had come to know. However, Larsen kept up the pace. It was the ninth inning. He needed three more outs to achieve a perfect game. Three batters went up to the box. Three batters were out! The game was over, and Don Larsen, the mediocre pitcher, had performed the nearly impossible: he had pitched a perfect game. Indeed, the next day, the New York Daily News ran the following headline: “The imperfect man pitched the perfect game.”

Don Larsen went on to play for other teams after being traded by the Yankees. While he was never remembered as a pitcher of any consequence in baseball history, his name is recorded for posterity, because, for one day, he performed an extraordinary feat. For one day during the World Series, he was perfect.

Total perfection is impossible, but that should not negate one from striving for periodic perfection, for excellence in a specific mitzvah, spiritual endeavor, or area of Torah study. That one moment can have a serious defining effect on a person. Moshe Rabbeinu worked an entire life to reach the

pinnacle of spiritual achievement, but he might have lost it had he allowed the Luchos to be given to a people obsessed with a Golden Calf. Individuals have turned their lives around as the result of one positive action at the right time. Yeish koneh olamo b'shaah achas, "One can acquire his portion in the World to Come in one moment." Regrettably, one can similarly lose it b'shaah achas. The next time an opportunity arises when we feel uninspired, or simply question the significance of performing a specific mitzvah, we should think about the "one moment" of Moshe Rabbeinu. An entire life of achievement might have hinged on his reaction. His decision defined his true conviction. Since we never know when that one moment or one mitzvah will materialize, we should act accordingly all of the time. One never knows.