

"I have seen this people and behold they are a stiff-necked people." (32:9)

One of the most difficult incidents which took place in the history of *Bnei Yisrael* is the *chet ha'eigal*, sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe *Rabbeinu* responded to the nation's sudden iniquity by breaking the *Luchos*. It is difficult to grasp Hashem *Yisborach's* eternal retribution reflected in his statement, *h,sepu hsep ouhc*, "In the day when I remember (when they will continue to sin) I will remember this sin (also)." Why did Moshe respond in such a fashion? It seems as if he was "giving up," as if he felt that the people had gone beyond the limits of no return. Also, if the sin of the Golden Calf is still being visited upon us, it must be because we are still acting in a manner parallel to our behavior on that fateful day.

In his commentary regarding Hashem's description of *Bnei Yisrael* as a "stiff-necked people," the *Sforno* writes, "Their neck is like an iron sinew, and they will not turn to listen to the words of any righteous teacher in any manner; hence, there is no hope that they will repent." In his commentary *Sforno* suggests the reason for Moshe *Rabbeinu's* reaction. A primary step in achieving repentance is the acknowledgment of one's sins, *hakoras ha'chet*. One who is blind to his own shortcomings, who refuses to accept reproof, who will not even listen to admonition has little chance of returning. To sin is tragic; to ignore the sin is reprehensible!

Horav Chaim Friedlander, z.l., suggests that this is why Moshe responded in such a definitive and irrevocable manner. Someone who is so smug that he remains oblivious to warning and rebuke, who ignores the pleas of friends and family and continues with his iniquitous behavior, needs an individualized "wake up" call. Moshe *Rabbeinu* cried out to the Jews, "Look what you have lost! You could have had the *Luchos* which were the handiwork of Hashem, and you rejected them for a molten god." He hoped to arouse them, to shock them from slumber, to help them realize the effects of their sin. Unless they were to acknowledge their transgression, they could not respond with *teshuvah*.

Imagine someone removing a *sefer Torah* from the *Aron* and, *u"j*, tearing it apart. Can there be a more horrible and shocking sight? Such a spectacle would surely affect and upset even the most obstinate, insensitive Jew. How much more so would the shattering of the *Luchos*, a Divine work, unnerve the most intractable, irreverent Jew. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* shock treatment succeeded in bringing back a nation that was tottering on the precipice of spiritual demise.

This is, regrettably, a contemporary reality. We fail to acknowledge the tragic blow we incur when we stray. We do not realize what we could obtain if only we would adhere to His command. Hashem must, therefore, impose upon us circumstances which will jolt us. He wants us to recognize who we are and what is our objective in life, as well as the severe consequences if we neglect our mission in life.

We may suggest another approach along the same lines. Invariably, when we do something "wrong," we do not really view our actions as being "that bad." Indeed, even the most alienated Jew would deem certain transgressions abhorrent. Rarely do we reflect upon the gravity of the sin. Moshe was indicating to *Bnei Yisrael* that their actions were tantamount to breaking the *Luchos*. Iniquity is relative; sin is relational to the standards set forth by Hashem. For instance, when children are lax in their school performance or fail to adhere to the school's code of discipline, their infractions are reflected on their report card. One child might get upset, while another will even dismiss it as unimportant. If they would see the pain and torment that their parents go through with each low grade, they would never misbehave or fail to do their work. Children have only to perceive and acknowledge what their parents endure, and they would revert to model students.

What type of Jew would desecrate a *Torah* scroll or defame a *shul*? If we would only realize that many of our wrongdoings are equivalent to these travesties, we would immediately restrain our actions and modify our lifestyle. Moshe's rebuke to *Bnei Yisrael* is as timely today as it was then.