

PARSHAS KI SISA

by Gedalia Litke

The relationship between Hakadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisroel, especially in the context of Matan Torah, is often described by Chazal in terms of a relationship between husband and wife. (See, for example, last Mishna in Ta'anis, Rashi on k'chaloso 31:18, Ba'al HaTurim 31:18, Sefer HaMakneh introduction to Maseches Kiddushin.) In this context the luchos (tablets) would be a kind of jewelry piece or precious wedding gift between Hakadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisroel. A famous indication of luchos-as-jewelry is in Parshas Chayay Soro. Eliezer gives Rivkah two gold bracelets which weighed ten. (24:22) Rashi there says the two bracelets relate to the two luchos and the weight of ten relates to the ten commandments which were inscribed on the luchos. (See also Targum Yonasan in our Parsha, 31:18, describing the Luchos as being sapphire and see also Ba'al HaTurim in Parshas Mishpatim, 28:9, relating the two precious stones of the ephod to the two Luchos.)

This connection between luchos and jewelry is useful in understanding why Moshe Rabbeynu broke the Luchos after the Chet Ha Egel (sin of the golden calf).

Jewelry has intrinsic concrete value; it can be sold by the owner for its worth on the open market, and the owner can otherwise also employ the jewelry for his own tangible benefit. Jewelry has a price tag. But jewelry also can have an intangible value in the sense of representing a relationship. This is true of any gift, but especially so for jewelry. In this higher sense there is no price tag or concrete value. It is the relationship that is truly precious; the jewel is a tangible symbol, sparkling and rare, of the beauty and potential of the relationship. It may be true that an engagement ring is worth thousands of dollars, but woe to the couple who finds its value inherent in what it will fetch on the market instead of appreciating the priceless symbolism of the ring.

When HaKadosh Boruch Hu gave the luchos all of Klal Yisroel should have understood that the proper way to appreciate a gift of jewelry is as a relationship symbol. Subsequently, however, it became clear that not all of them did. Aharon asked for gold jewelry as a delay tactic, assuming the people would not want to part with their precious relationship symbols (and according to Chazal the women in fact did not participate in this), yet Aharon was quickly overwhelmed with lots of jewelry. Individuals among Klal Yisroel were ready to misuse jewelry for their own purpose, for their own tangible needs, desires and agendas; they had not yet understood the proper role of jewelry as a relationship symbol. When Moshe was informed of their activities he perceived all of this, and had no choice but to destroy the luchos, as Klal Yisroel was not yet ready to handle jewelry, especially jewels of the magnitude of the luchos.

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