



Parshas Ki Tisa 2023, wash it away

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia, may their souls be uplifted.

Our Parsha begins with G-d asking Moshe to take a census of the Jewish people by collecting a half-silver coin from each person. After being counted, the accumulated coins were melted into the sockets to hold up the walls of the Mishkan.

Moshe was then given a few laws dealing with the everyday service of the Mishkan. Before beginning work each day, all Kohanim had to wash their hands and feet by Kiyor, a large copper water basin. Aaron, his children and every vessel in the Mishkan had to be concentrated with the special anointing oil. This anointing oil was used for generations to anoint all future kings and high priests.

The Parsha then details the sin of the Golden Calf. Last week's Torah portion concludes with G-d calling Moshe Rabbienu up the mountain to learn the Torah for forty days and nights. But some people miscalculated the date and thought Moshe died on the mountain. They convinced many others that Moshe had passed on and that it was time for a new leader.

They turned to Aaron, Moshe's brother and told him to create a golden calf so they could worship it. Having no choice, Aaron collected gold and threw it into a large fire. As some of the Jewish people began to dance around the fire, the gold developed into the form of a calf.

Moshe headed down the mountain with the first set of Lochos that G-d wrote Himself. When he saw the Jewish people celebrating around the golden calf, he threw the Lochos to the ground and shattered them instantly.

Moshe burnt the Golden Calf and ground it into a fine powder. He went to the tribe of Levi and said, "Join me and defend the oneness of G-d and His Torah." The entire tribe of Levi joined him as he punished those that sinned with the Golden Calf.

After they finished, Moshe turned to G-d and begged Him for mercy; he asked G-d to remember the covenant He made with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. He told G-d that if He was to destroy the Jewish nation, G-d should erase his name from the entire Torah. G-d forgave the Jewish nation and revealed to Moshe the thirteen attributes of mercy we say daily.

However, a question comes to mind: As mentioned above, every Cohen had to wash their hands and feet by Kiyor before beginning their service each day. The Pasuk writes (30:19), "וַיִּרְצֵי אֶהְרֹן וּבָנָיו מִמַּיִן וּמִמַּגֵּן אֶת יְדֵיהֶם וְאֶת רַגְלֵיהֶם - *And Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet from (the kiyor).*" The Torah is usually very clear and concise with its wording, yet here, it adds "וְאֶת." Why does the Torah seemingly add an unnecessary word by the washing of the kiyor?

Rashi, Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading Torah commentator, gives a simple answer. He writes that "וְאֶת" is a connective word that binds the two words together. Rashi answers that the word "וְאֶת" teaches us that the hands and feet are to be washed together simultaneously.

Unlike today, where we wash our hands individually, a Cohen would place their hands on his foot and clean them simultaneously. The water faucets of the kiyor were located near the bottom to facilitate this cleaning and scrubbing process easily.

The Rabbienu Bachya, Rav Bachya Ben Asher, gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He agrees with Rashi that the word "וְאֶת" teaches us that the hands and feet to be washed together simultaneously. But he provides two reasons, one simple and the other Kabbalistic.

He quotes the Talmud in Shekalim (Yerushalayimi 5:a), which describes how a king's servant would wash their hands immediately before attending to their king. This washing was done whether or not the servant's hands were dirty, for it was done out of reverence for the king.

The Rabbienu Bachya explains that the Kohanim would wash their hands and feet even if they weren't dirty out of respect for entering G-d's home.

But according to the Kabbalistic approach, the washing was done to elevate the Ten Sefirot. Rabbienu Bachya explains that the cleaning of ten fingers and ten toes represents the uplifting of the Ten Sefirot. Hence, the Torah adds "וְיָ" to ensure they were washed simultaneously.

The Rabbienu Bachya continues that although a Cohen had to immerse in a mikvah before working in the Mishkan, their hands and feet needed to be rewashed. Since the hands and feet are the two extremities that interact with the world most, our hands through touch and our feet on the ground.

Our hands and feet can be used to accomplish immense good or the opposite C"V. Therefore, G-d instructed that they be washed together and simultaneously to remove all impurities and enable their work to be pure.

This lesson is ever so prevalent as we learn about the sin of the golden calf and come from the holiday of Purim. In both instances, extremities were used for the opposite purpose they were created.

Led by Mordechai, the Jewish people had the opportunity to transform and return to G-d in the Purim story. But today, we still need to repent, find the physical unity we once had G-d and proclaim His Oneness to the world.

“Technically, humans have excelled. Morally they have failed and continue to fail. Freedom is a double-edged sword. The freedom to do good is inseparable from the freedom to do harm and commit sin. The challenge we face is using just one edge of the sword.”

-Rabbi Lord Dr. Jonathan Sacks

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*