

Buy Jewelry - It's A Halacha!

Why must men buy their wives gold jewelry for holidays? And why aren't women obligated to buy similar gifts for their husbands?

Haggadah or Megillah

A woman once related to me how on Purim eve she had rushed to Shul to hear the Megillah. She arrived at the Shul just moments before the Chazan commenced the reading. She settled down in a chair and opened up her little Book of Esther. To her utter shock and dismay, she realized that in her rush she had grabbed the Haggadah instead of the Megillah.

I explained to her that she hadn't blundered. Everything happens for a reason. In our tradition, the Rabbis would begin to teach the laws of Pesach thirty days before the holiday began.

Since Jewish law states that this custom still exists and leaders should teach about Pesach thirty days before the holiday, I am obliged to do so. However, I do not want to bore you with things you already know like the cleaning, which will only bring back bad memories. Therefore, we'll discuss something productive that is connected both with Pesach and with this week's Torah portion.

The Graven Images

The hottest topic of this week is the story of the golden calf. The most obvious question is, how did this wise nation, just days after hearing the Ten Commandments, transgress the first two? In fact, while Moses told the people most of the commandments, G-d himself said the first two, "I am G-d your G-d and you shall have no other gods before me." And it was specifically these two that the people transgressed right off the bat!

As much as we try to bring good reasons for this sin, it remains inexplicable.

So Moses has to return to the top of Mt. Sinai to beg G-d to forgive his people. And it was on Yom Kippur that G-d finally agreed to pardon the Jewish people, wholeheartedly. G-d then gave Moses the second set of Tablets to replace the broken ones and commanded him to instruct the Jews to build a Mishkan, a Temple of gold for G-d as atonement for their worshipping an idol of gold.

However, looking at the vessels of the Mishkan, they all seem to have a place and purpose except for the Cherubs on the Ark. These Cherubs were placed on top of the Ark. They were made in the form of a little boy and a little girl with wings. When the Jews were meritorious, the Cherubs would face each other as if in an embrace. When, however, the Jews were not meritorious, they would turn their backs on each other.

This raises a simple question.

The Mishkan was built as atonement for the glorification of a graven image. How could the Holy of Holies, on the Ark of the Covenant, have the forms of a man and a woman! The second of the Ten Commandments is “You shall not make any graven images,” and here there are two statues of children in the Temple!

Perhaps this can be explained by clearly understanding the laws of Teshuva, repentance. Maimonides explains that the sign that a Jew has achieved complete repentance is when he is faced with the same challenge, in the exact same situation as the last time, and he overcomes it nonetheless.

For the Jews in the desert, the “sign” that they had achieved complete Teshuva for the Golden Calf was to make a golden image — not only was it not an idol, it actually brought the Jews closer to G-d. Creating images in the Temple was the cure for the “blemish” of idol worship.

Modern-day Atonement

The midrash states that “there is no generation that doesn’t have a hand in the atonement for the Golden Calf.” Today when we have no temple, how do we do this?

The way we atone for the golden calf is by using our gold for mitzvos. One example is the golden ring used by Jews in the marriage ceremony. Although a silver ring is kosher for marriage, we traditionally use gold, to atone for the Golden Calf.

This brings us back to the Halachah that we mentioned above of

preparing for a holiday 30 days before. The Shulchan Aruch states that “On all seven days of Pesach, the eight days of Sukkos and Shmini Atzeres, each person is obligated to be very happy. This applies to the men, their wives and everyone in each household. This happiness is a positive commandment directly from the Torah.”

How do we make everyone in our households happy? We buy toys and candy for the children, and new clothes and jewelry for the women.

The halachah means to say that before each holiday, the husband should buy his wife clothes or jewelry. Even though it doesn't say that the jewelry should specifically be gold, jewelry generally is of gold.

This leads to another interesting point.

Why are all mitzvos that are fulfilled with gold directed at the men, for them to give to the women?

Who Was Enthusiastic?

When the Jews in the desert made the Golden Calf, the women would not let their husbands take their jewelry, and the men had to donate their own gold to the calf. Rashi says that Aharon was certain that the women and children would protect their jewelry and this way, the matter will be delayed long enough for Moshe to get back. This is exactly what happened, but the men did not want to wait, and they gave their own jewelry.

On the other hand, at the time of donating for the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, the women rejoiced at the chance

to give. The Rambam comments that the women were the first ones to give, and the men came after them.

Kabbalah teaches that our generation is a reincarnation of the generation that wandered the desert. It is therefore fitting that as atonement for worshiping a foreign god, Jewish men should have the opportunity to achieve complete repentance by giving expensive and beautiful golden gifts to the women who work so hard to remind us of the Mitzvos we are supposed to be doing — especially this one!

Have a Kosher and happy Pesach!