

Moshe Broke the *Luchot* to Allow Us to Keep Them

Bnei Yisroel had just received the Torah. They were at their highest point in their relationship with God, and suddenly, they committed the greatest sin against God: the *Cheit Haegel*, the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe walked down with the *Luchot*, that God himself wrote, and smashed them to the ground.

Question: What would drive Moshe to destroy the holiest thing that was brought into this world?

A possible answer is that the *Luchot* were broken for the sake of keeping the Torah. It is written, "As he approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moshe displayed anger, and threw down the Tablets that were in his hand, shattering them at the foot of the mountain." (Shemot 32:19). While our initial reaction has always been disbelief that Moshe could have acted in this way, many commentators argue that God applauded Moshe for breaking the *Luchot*. In Rashi's commentary on the last verse in the entire Torah (Devarim 34:12), he explains that God agreed with Moshe's decision to smash the Tablets. Additionally, the Gemara in Shabbat on Daf 87a cites the phrase "*Asher Shibarta*" - "which you broke" (Shemot 34:1) and interprets it as "*Y'asher Kochacha SheShibarta*" - "well done for having broken them!" According to these sources, all signs lead to Moshe having done the correct thing, but why?

To further understand this, we must look at Parshat Bo, in which the Torah discusses the commandment of redeeming a first-born son. Before being redeemed, the son is considered very holy. After being redeemed, his holiness is diminished. Yet, for some reason we celebrate this lowering in holiness. The reason behind this is that we must recognize that as human beings, we are flawed. Our goal is to strive to reach perfection. A child who is in a state of perfection at birth, can only go down from there. We therefore partake in a ritual to diminish the child's sanctity to allow him to strive for this perfection on his own.

The *Luchot* that Moshe brought down for *Bnei Yisroel* were holy. Like the first-born son at birth, we were at a heightened level of sanctity, a level deserving of receiving *Luchot* that God himself wrote. However, after the sin of the Golden Calf, we no longer deserved them and it is for that reason that the second set were written by Moshe. Some commentators claim that had we received that original *Luchot*, we would have been granted the ability to remember all Torah that we learned. Now, however, when we learn Torah, it is a wonder how we can even understand something that comes from the mouth of God. What we have in our hands today, is a Torah that we need to strive to understand, just as the first-born son must strive to reach perfection after he is redeemed.

During *Cheit Haegel*, we, as a nation, thought we were perfect. We had just received the Torah and felt as if we had crowns on our heads. Having fallen from such a high level of spirituality to a lower level, is in some ways a cause for celebration. Yes, we didn't get the first set of *Luchot* which were designated for people who were angel-like. However, Moshe broke them to allow us to keep them. Had we received the original set of *Luchot*, we would have thought there would have been no room to advance in our Torah studies, as we would have believed that we had reached the highest level. He broke the *Luchot* so we could realize that we had made a mistake and that we were flawed. By breaking the *Luchot*, Moshe taught us the lesson of personal growth. We must be aware that we can never be satisfied with where we are in all aspects of our life, and that there is always room to grow. That is the beauty of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!