

"And by all the strong hand, and all the great fear which Moshe did in the eyes of all Yisrael." (34:12)

In the *Talmud, Shabbos 87*, Chazal interpret "And by all the strong hand," as referring to Moshe's act of breaking the *luchos*. It is notable that Moshe's epitaph, the climax of the career of *Klal Yisrael's* greatest leader, recorded the smashing of the *luchos* as his greatest moment. Should not Moshe have been remembered for a more "positive" act, rather than for an act of destruction ?

Horav Eli Munk, z.l., infers from here that this was Moshe's ultimate act of authority. He took a "positive" stand against the tide of alienation. He reacted angrily to a wave of liberal and wanton obstruction of the truth of the Divine Law. This single act of authority had a greater effect on *Am Yisrael* than all of Moshe's preaching about proper conduct. A forceful authoritative gesture by a responsible leader is of greater benefit than rhetoric about order and discipline. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* swift decisive action corrected a situation that had regrettably become compromised.

This is not to say that compromise is unacceptable, as long as the compromise represents the correct approach and the compromise is not in the area of *Torah* law. Decisiveness and resolute action is the mark of greatness. Vacillation and deference from taking a stand are signs of weakness. Moshe's greatest attribute was his ability to act when a wrong was occurring -- without retreating.

Since *Parashas V'zos Ha'Bracha* is read on *Simchas Torah* I will relate a story which was narrated by my *Rebbe, Horav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, z.l.*

It happened on *Simchas Torah*, in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Fifty *bochurim*, young men, were taken to the crematorium to be executed. As they entered the crematorium the Nazi guard told them the usual ruse. "Take off your clothes, so that you may shower and cleanse yourselves." One young man, knowing full well what awaited them in the "showers," overcame fear and apathy and, in a voice full of determination and resolve, proclaimed to his friends: "My friends, tonight is *Simchas Torah!* True, we have no *Torah* in our possession, but the *Ribbono Shel Olam* is with us, here and now. Let us dance with Him before we perish!" Immediately, they gathered in a circle and began to sing and dance with a fervor and ecstasy never before experienced. They sang "ubkrud ohgb vnu ubekj cuy vn ubhrat." "We are fortunate - How good is our portion, how pleasant our lot." They concluded with ",ntc lscgk ubck rvyu." "Purify our hearts to serve You in truth." The sounds of their singing reverberated from within the walls of the crematorium throughout the camp as they reached a frenzy of devotion in expressing their apparent joy in being Jewish!

The Nazis, seeing their display of unparalleled martyrdom, ran into the room in an attempt to put an end to this "foolishness" and also to question their motivation. "What are you so happy about ?"

questioned the commandant angrily. The young men responded, "We are doomed to die momentarily. This specifically is our source of joy, for we will be able to leave a world where such vile miscreants as you make decisions regarding the lives of others. To be relieved of such accursed degenerates as you is enough of a reason to sing and dance. But, we have another more profound reason for singing. Soon we will meet our parents and other members of our family whom you mercilessly slaughtered in the most heinous ways. Yes, we have reason to be joyous!"

The sadistic beast, the Nazi commandant, screamed back in fury, "No, I will not permit you to die quickly. I will cast you all into solitary confinement where I will subject you to the most agonizing tortures. I will slice pieces from your bodies until the souls that you care about so much will leave you very slowly and painfully."

The young men ignored him and returned to their singing and dancing until he broke up the circle and carried them off to a solitary block. The very next day a transport taking Jews to labor camps in Germany was leaving. It so happened that miraculously the majority of these fifty men were selected to be on that transport. The remainder of them were integrated into other work forces in Auschwitz so that no one recognized them. In the end, all fifty young men were miraculously saved.

The *zechus* of joyful expression, the merit of *mesiras nefesh* with ecstasy, the ability to transcend physical pain and deprivation out of love for Hashem, stood by these young men on that fateful day. To paraphrase one of the survivors of Auschwitz, "They can take my body, but not my soul!" Let us keep this in mind as we prepare to dance with the Torah!