

## **They journeyed from the mountain of Hashem a three day journey and the Aron of the covenant journeyed before them...to search out for them a resting place. (10:33)**

*Rashi* contends that the "Aron Bris Hashem" -- which was taken out with *Bnei Yisrael* when they went to battle -- contained the broken *Luchos*. The "Shivrei Luchos" retained a unique power which served as a protective armor when *Bnei Yisrael* were in a difficult predicament. We must endeavor to understand why the *Aron* that contained the broken *Luchos* accompanied *Bnei Yisrael* in time of war. What was the significance of the *Shivrei Luchos*? What influence did they maintain over the people?

We suggest that the broken *Luchos* represent the integrity of *Torah* and each Jew's *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, to preserve that integrity. The Almighty fashioned the *Luchos* and gave them to Moshe *Rabbeinu*. They represented the epitome of *Torah*. *Chazal* tell us that had they not been broken, the level of *Torah*-learning accessible to the individual would have been incredible. Indeed, *Torah* would never be forgotten. When Moshe broke the *Luchos*, *Klal Yisrael's* bond to *Torah* was weakened. *Torah* was no longer an integral part of them. In the future, they would be required to toil to understand and to review and to remember its profundities. Yet, Moshe broke them, and he was commended for his grave action. Why? What was accomplished by breaking the *Luchos* that would compensate for the irreparable loss produced by his act?

When Moshe descended the mountain and witnessed *Klal Yisrael's* appalling behavior, their idol worship and reveling, he was shocked. He saw a nation that felt prepared to receive the *Torah*, but was not ready to give up its desires for material excess. He saw a nation that behaved in a manner unbecoming a people who had received the *Torah*. The revelry and debauchery that reigned was not what one would expect from decent people, let alone *Am Yisrael*. By breaking the *Luchos*, he sent a clear message; *Torah* is different. It is uncompromising; it does not yield to one's desires or bend to one's passions. You cannot have both. If you choose to live like a hedon, then you shatter the *Luchos*.

Moshe believed in the *Torah*. He understood its depth, appreciating the beauty and serenity of a *Torah* way of life. He knew that *Torah* is unequivocal. *Torah* remains intact. Man cannot change or append it. Moshe was willing to break the *Luchos* in order to teach *Klal Yisrael* that no false gods, no alien values, no strange desires can coexist with the *Torah*.

This integrity of *Torah* is preserved in the shattered shards that remained of the *Luchos*. They attested to Moshe's heroism, his devotion to *Torah*, and his love of the *Torah* and the people who received it. They represent *Torah* in its pristine form, unembellished, pure and unpolluted by alien interpretations and self-serving renderings of the text. This force, the power of truth, preceded the people into battle.

**Horav Chaim Pardes, Shlita**, cites the *Talmud Kesubos 104A*, which relates the last moments of Rabbi Yehudah *Ha'Nasi's* life. *Chazal* describe the "struggle" between the spiritual forces that sought to return the holy *neshamah* to its source and the *tzadikim* of this world who prayed fervently that he be spared. The text of *Talmud Bavli* reads, "*And the Aron Hakodesh was captured,*" which is a reference to Rabbi Yehudah *Ha'Nasi* who was the embodiment of *Torah* as represented by the *Aron Hakodesh*. In the *Talmud Yerushalmi* the text reads, "*The Luchos were grabbed.*" Both texts obviously refer to the lofty ideal to which Rabbi Yehudah *Hanasi* was compared. The *Bavli* focuses on the external *Aron Hakodesh*, whereas the *Yerushalmi* emphasizes the essence of the *Aron* - the *Luchos*.

If the *Luchos* represent - by their very nature - the greatness of *Torah* and the esteem of its scholars, then the breaking of the *Luchos* implies their loss.. They are the banner, the pride of *Klal Yisrael*. They maintain an inexorable bond between *Klal Yisrael*, *Torah* and Hashem *Yisborach*. It would follow logically that a *talmid chacham* who, either through age or illness, forgets part of his *Torah* learning is like the *Shivrei Luchos*, maintaining the original *kedushah*, holiness, that permeated the intact *Luchos*. Furthermore, those *talmidei chachamim* who have been abused and humiliated at the hands of our enemies throughout history, are also to be included as *Shivrei Luchos*. Even in their moments of pain and sorrow, during weakness and debilitation, amidst humiliation and chagrin, these people maintain their *zechus haTorah*, the merit of *Torah*. They reflect the *Torah* study for which they sacrificed themselves. Their pain precludes *Klal Yisrael* serving as a vehicle for success and victory.