

They shall make an Ark of atzei Shittim (Acacia wood)... You shall place in the Ark the Testimonial tablets that I shall give you. (25:10,16)

The *Aron HaKodesh* was the receptacle that contained within it the first *Luchos HaBris* –which Moshe *Rabbeinu* broke as a result of the *cheit ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf – and the second *Luchos*. Chazal (*Berachos* 8b) compare a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who, due to no fault of his own has forgotten his learning to the *Shivrei Luchos*, Broken *Luchos*. As we are instructed to place the Broken *Luchos* respectfully beside the *Luchos Shniim*, Second *Luchos*, so, too, are we commanded to respect the elderly Jew whose Torah erudition is sadly now a matter of history. One may think that the scholar's distinction is his Torah knowledge, and, once this Torah knowledge is no longer extant, the scholar is no longer a scholar, and he is no longer deserving the respect that was once accorded to him. We see from the *Shivrei Luchos* that this is untrue. As the *Shivrei Luchos* (which once were special) are placed in the *Aron*, likewise, the *talmid chacham*, who “once was,” is to be respected.

The metaphor of the “broken” next to the “whole” has been the topic of much commentary. The *Kotzker Rebbe*, *zl*, was wont to say, “There is nothing as whole as a broken heart.” This lends us much insight into the true meaning and value of brokenness. One who is presently broken, but was for the majority of his life whole, is actually transitioning from one form of “whole” to another (perhaps more poignant) form of “whole.” The *Luchos* without the Divinely-engraved lettering (which flew off) reverted to stone; the *talmid chacham* whose Torah knowledge has left him is a mere man without the spiritual accoutrements and benefits that Torah knowledge affords a person. The *Aron HaKodesh* did not contain a set of “whole” *Luchos* and particles of the broken *Luchos*, but actually had two “whole” *Luchos* – one represented whole in the physical sense; the other represented the wholeness of a broken heart. For the Jew who confronts life amid adversity, his hope and trust enable him to cement the broken shards and make them whole again.

I think there is another connection that exists between the *Shivrei Luchos* and the *talmid chacham* who has forgotten his Torah. They both impart a similar message. When Moshe descended the mountain and saw the moral profligacy that had bewitched the nation, the perverse revelry which showed their delight in sinning against Hashem, he made a judgment call to break the *Luchos*. A Golden Calf and *Luchos* do not mix. Torah must remain pristine. It cannot collaborate in any way with anything that undermines Torah values. Torah neither brooks compromise, nor does it need embellishment. It is free-standing and requires neither assistance nor support. One who is devoted to Torah does not dance around a Golden Calf. Moshe made a major leadership decision which Hashem ratified. The Almighty thanked Moshe for his decision, and it became his epitaph as the closing words (*I'einei kol Yisrael*, “before the eyes of all *Yisrael*”) of the Torah. The *Shivrei Luchos* represent a solemn, awe-inspiring *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name, a lesson for future generations: The Torah does not negotiate. It must remain pristine, untouched, pure.

The *talmid chacham* whose learning is no longer a part of him represents a person who has devoted his life wholly to Torah. He neither sought nor cared for material benefit and physical diversion. He gave it all up in order to devote his life to the study of Torah and dissemination of Torah. Now, he is old, shattered by the ravages of time and ill health. His Torah is no longer a part of him, as the words of the *Luchos* were no longer a part of the *Luchos*. They both attest to the verity of Torah without embellishment, Torah without compromise. People might harshly view the *talmid chacham* in his present state as a sad relic. The Torah views him as a *mekadesh Shem Shomayim*. This is why he is compared to the *Shivrei Luchos* and accorded the same respect, because, after all, he has earned it.