

I took hold of both of the Tablets, and I cast them from my hands, and I broke them before your eyes. (9:17)

A powerful lesson can be derived from this *pasuk*, which describes Moshe *Rabbeinu's* act of shattering of the *Luchos* not simply as a negative act or an act of weakness, but rather, as a forceful, compelling, even positive act. **Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl**, comments that, were it not for the Torah's unembellished description, one might harbor the thought that Moshe was so overcome with shock in seeing the Golden Calf that he dropped the *Luchos*. Perhaps another scenario would be that they were too heavy. Moshe's strength came from the People. Their merit infused him. Once they fell off their spiritual perch, Moshe no longer had the ability to hold the extremely heavy *Luchos*, and they dropped from his hands.

The *pasuk* conveys an entirely different message. Moshe's act of breaking the *Luchos* was deliberate. With deep circumspection and forethought, Moshe assumed responsibility for the *Luchos* and decided that the nation did not deserve them. So he acted accordingly by shattering them. He was not weak; he was not indecisive. He was acting with great decisiveness when he broke the *Luchos*. He was not giving these Tablets to a nation that reveled with a molten idol.

Furthermore, Moshe's decision was far from popular. *Chazal* teach that the Seventy Elders attempted to prevent Moshe from breaking the *Luchos*. His own brother, Aharon *HaKohen*, also tried unsuccessfully to convince him to rethink his decision and not break the *Luchos*. Moshe's mind was made up. He knew what had to be done, and he was determined to do it. It was his duty as leader to break the *Luchos*. Sometimes leadership calls for the leader to put a stop to something – not to give it a chance, because it will be a blemished achievement; it will mean short-selling a product, settling for mediocrity when only a superior, untainted product will suffice.

The closing *pesukim* of the Torah laud Moshe for breaking the *Luchos*. *U'l'chol ha'yad ha'chazakah... asher asah Moshe l'einei kol Yisrael*, "And for all the mighty hand... that Moshe did, before the eyes of all *Yisrael*" (*Devarim* 34:12). *Rashi* explains "the mighty hand" as a reference to the courage and determination manifest by Moshe when he broke the *Luchos*. It was no accident; it was duty at its most sublime implementation.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita, explains why Moshe took it upon himself to break the *Luchos* "before the eyes of all *Yisrael*," an act which was arguably his greatest act as leader of the Jewish People. Moshe realized that presenting the *Luchos* which had engraved upon them the enjoinder, "You shall not have any other gods," to a nation that was in the midst of celebrating around a molten calf/idol would be their undoing. If Moshe were to give the *Luchos* to *Klal Yisrael* at that moment, they would immediately be held accountable for idol worship; thus, they would be deserving of execution. By breaking the *Luchos*, Moshe saved the nation from punishment.

Our leader went out of his way to break the *Luchos*, rather than conceal them for a later date when

the nation would be deserving, because he sought the shock-effect. Shattering the *Luchos* would jar the people into humility and submission. The shock would shake them up and “shatter” their false sense of security and invincibility. Thinking that they could withstand and even triumph over the forces of evil with which the evil-inclination challenged them was fool-hardy. No human is spiritually invincible. Everyone has a spiritual Achilles heel which makes him conquerable. “Pride goes before the fall” is the expression that has accompanied so many haughty people to the dung heap of history.

eik The *Rosh Yeshivah* offers a strategy for fighting pride. When one is aware of the nadir of sinfulness and depravity to which misplaced pride can lead, he thinks twice before falling victim to his own shortsightedness. Second, one only has to think of the valuable treasures he will lose as a result of capitulating to his base desires. The Jews lost the precious *Luchos*. Others have lost their families, the respect of their friends and community. Everyone has that one precious commodity which supersedes everything. We must never lose sight of it.