

## And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael. (34:12)

The *Matnos Kehunah* cites the *Yerushalmi* that states that, after *Klal Yisrael* had sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem refused to give them the *Luchos*. He was close to retrieving the *Luchos* from Moshe, when Moshe grabbed them back. This is the meaning of the *yad hachazakah*, strong hand, which Moshe demonstrated as he "took away" the *Luchos* from Hashem. Rashi applies the popular *p'shat*, interpretation, that *yad ha'chazakah* is a reference to Moshe's breaking the *Luchos*. Obviously, Moshe did not demonstrate greater strength than when he grabbed the *Luchos*. The *Yerushalmi* is telling us that there was a dialogue between Hashem and Moshe in which Hashem "conceded" to Moshe's *taaneh*, interceding, on *Klal Yisrael's* behalf. What really happened?

In his response to this question, **Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl**, first cites his father. In his *sefer*, *Aznaim La'Torah*, **Horav Zalman Sorotzkin** wonders why Moshe took the *Luchos* down in order to break them. After all, he knew that the people had sinned. He was aware that their iniquity would not change as he came down. He explains that while Moshe perceived their sin, he was not convinced of its extent. If this was a spiritual error in which *Klal Yisrael* misdirected their allegiance due to faulty spiritual perception, Moshe would have had reason to hope for their *teshuvah*. He would come down, explain their error to them, and inspire them to repent. When he descended the mountain, however, and observed the revelry that ensued, when he saw a complete breakdown of their moral fiber, when he saw the murder that they committed, he was convinced that this was no *avairah b'hashkafah*, error in spiritual perspective; rather, this was wanton lust, debauchery at its nadir. The people had gone over the moral limits.

*Horav Boruch Sorotzkin* takes a somewhat different approach to explaining *Klal Yisrael's* behavior and Moshe's reaction. Moshe took the *Luchos* down with the intention of breaking them. He wanted *Klal Yisrael* to acknowledge what they were doing wrong, so he sought to shock them into awareness. Smashing the Divinely fashioned *Luchos* in front of their eyes would deliver the message that what they were doing was *kefirah*, apostasy. The people erred in thinking that they could serve Hashem while building a Golden Calf. They deceived themselves into thinking that they could mix light with darkness, that they could call themselves a *Torah* nation while they still continued to act like pagans. Giving them *mussar*, ethical lectures, would not help; reasoning with them would leave the same impression. They had to be jolted into understanding the gravity of their sin, the travesty of the nature of their Jewish "observance."

Hashem told Moshe that as long as *Klal Yisrael* remained in such a state, they could not receive the *Luchos*. Moshe agreed; he only felt that in order for them to accede to performing *teshuvah*, they must realize their iniquity. This would only occur if the *Luchos*, the symbol of their assured "Jewishness," would be smashed in front of their eyes. Let them see what comprises Judaism devoid of observance. Let them visualize *Torah* without *mitzvos*. Let them come to their senses in order to confront the reality that they could not refer to themselves as faithful Jews as long as they

embraced the Golden Calf. . Hashem deferred to Moshe. Thus, the two explanations for the term "*yad ha'chazakah*" are congruous: Moshe "bested" Hashem so that Hashem gave him the *Luchos*, which he proceeded to break before *Klal Yisrael's* eyes.

Alternatively, we may suggest another reason for Moshe's insistence on bringing the *Luchos* down to *Klal Yisrael*. True, he was aware of their sin; Hashem had told him, "*Go descend, for your people that you brought from Egypt has become corrupt,*" (*Shemos*, 32:7) Moshe was hoping, however, that the sin had been limited only to the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, that had come along when *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt. He hoped that it had not spread to the decent, observant Jew. When he descended the mountain, he beheld the revelry and blatant iniquity that had spread beyond the ranks of the *erev rav*. When he saw how observant Jews stood by apathetically -- even, in some instances, shamefully participating -- as a sign of unity with those that had assimilated their faith -- he realized there was no choice. The *Luchos* must be broken. The message that *Torah* cannot be compromised for any reason was clear. Principle accompanies conviction. To believe in the *Torah* is to uphold it under all circumstances, regardless of external pressure and the lack of popularity that one may encounter. Moshe broke the *Luchos*; Hashem was in accord with his actions. Unfortunately, we have not assimilated the timelessness of this lesson.