

"Go down, for your people have dealt corruptly... they have made them a molten calf... and he cast out of his hand the tablets and he broke them." (32:7,15,19)

The shattering of the *luchos* is probably the most impressive act performed by Moshe during his tenure as the leader of *Klal Yisrael*. The last *pasuk* in the *Torah*, in which Hashem portrays the climax of Moshe's life mentions the *vezjv sh*, mighty hand, and the *kusd trun*, the great awe which Moshe wrought in the sight of all *Bnei Yisrael*. *Chazal* state that Moshe's act of might and awe was his shattering of the *luchos*. It would seem that this is Moshe's greatest epitaph. There remains a question, however, which demands a response. Why did Moshe wait to come down *Har Sinai* before making this momentous statement? When Hashem informed Moshe of *Klal Yisrael's* act of rebellion was that not sufficient "proof" of their incursion?

The simple response to this question seems to be that we cannot compare seeing to hearing. This answer might be acceptable if the testimony had been imparted by a human being. Moshe, however, heard the report from Hashem Himself! Perhaps Moshe wished to teach future judges the importance of visual perception before arriving at conclusions.

Horav Eliyahu Shlessinger, Shlita, suggests the following explanation. He cites the *Kehillos Yitzchak* who states that the *luchos* which were composed of two tablets, symbolize the two types of *mitzvos*. The first type of *mitzvos* focuses upon man's obligations to Hashem, while the second type focuses upon man's relationship with his fellow man.

When Moshe heard from Hashem that *Bnei Yisrael* had sinned with the Golden Calf, a sin which reflected a breach in their relationship with Hashem, Moshe felt this act of insurrection alone did not warrant the breaking of the *luchos*. His rationale was that the second tablet, which represented man's relationship with his fellow man, did not "incur" this liability. When Moshe descended the mountain and was confronted with *Klal Yisrael's* debasement, when he personally witnessed the fact that they had fallen to the nadir of immorality, to incest and murder, he broke the *luchos*. Once they had trespassed both boundaries, evidencing a disdain for both *luchos*, Moshe broke them.

Horav Shlesinger advances this idea further. At first, Moshe reasoned that one can be a good Jew if he observes only the humanistic aspect of *mitzvos*, those meeting his relationship to his fellow man. He quickly realized that unlike other nations, our code of human relationship and our system of morality are ordained by Hashem. When there is a breakdown in man's relationship with Hashem, his perspective towards his fellow man is ultimately affected as well. We need only to observe contemporary society or to glance back a few years in history in order to see the way a society not dictated by a code of G-d given mandates suffers a breakdown in morality. As Jews, we may never separate these two disciplines.

We may suggest another rationale for Moshe's hesitance to break the *luchos*. When Hashem

admonished Moshe regarding his people's (Ing ,ja), miscreant behavior, perhaps Moshe accepted the following justification. *Bnei Yisrael* had just recently been extricated from a decadent society which was totally alien to Hashem. Although recent acquiescence to follow in Hashem's ways was undoubtedly based upon amazing revelation, it was still a response to the demand of their mentor and source of inspiration, Moshe. *Bnei Yisrael* were now "alone," without guidance.

When Moshe came down and perceived that his presence was ignored, he was confronted with the stark reality that his people had breached the final limit. There was no validation for this rebelliousness. Moshe was now compelled to shatter the *luchos*, for their inestimable value would no longer be appreciated.