

## And as he (Moshe) approached the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing; Moshe's anger blazed, and he threw down the Tablets that were in his hands and smashed them. (32:19)

The last three words of the Torah are: *l'einei Bnei Yisrael*, "before the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*." This refers to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* greatest act of leadership, indeed, his epitaph: He broke the *Luchos* before the eyes of the Jewish people. Hashem agreed with Moshe's decision. This is how the Torah ends. It begins with the Creation of the world and ends with (so to speak) the breaking of the *Luchos*. Clearly this begs elucidation. Does the Torah not present any other closing lesson, any other leadership decision that Moshe made that might deserve greater mention? Furthermore, how was Moshe able to break the *Luchos*? It is not as if the *Luchos* were made by man and, thus, susceptible to human intervention. What is made by man can be broken by man. The *Luchos* were created by Hashem. The Almighty did not just go down to a quarry, pick up some stones and engrave them with the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. He fashioned them from the raw material (which some say was sapphire) to the unique, miraculous engraving (from both sides). A human being cannot destroy what Hashem makes unless...the letters flew off (as they did), leaving plain stone. How could this be broken?

*Horav Yehudah Leib Chasman, zl*, explains that sin has the power to weaken a *maaseh Elokim*, creation of G-d. This was Moshe's message to the people: I broke the *Luchos* before your eyes to teach you what sin can do. No human endeavor can impose itself on a Heavenly creation, but sin can weaken even the *Luchos* and cause the letters to fly off. The *Luchos* (had they been given to us) would have changed everything. We would never forget the Torah that we have learned. Death would no longer be a threat, since it would have been eradicated. Free from pain; free from death; we could learn and never forget. Spiritual utopia! We lost it all as the result of sin. This is what Moshe was teaching *Klal Yisrael* when he broke the *Luchos*.

*Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, supplements this with a commentary from the *Daas Zekeinim M'Baalei Tosfos*. (I have searched for the source and have not succeeded in locating it.) What prompted Moshe to break the *Luchos*? *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 87b) explain that Moshe made the following *kal v'chomer* (the most basic hermeneutic principle; an argument *a fortiori*; literally lenient and strict, deriving one law from another, using the logic that, if a case which is generally strict has a particular leniency, then a case which is generally lenient will certainly have that leniency). *Korban Pesach*, which is only one of the 613 *mitzvos*, may not be eaten by a ben *neichar*, one whose actions have estranged him from Judaism (or a gentile), so certainly, if one becomes a total apostate by embracing an idol, then he surely has no part of our religion. In other words, people who reject Hashem by trading Him for a Golden Calf have no business connecting to the *Luchos*. The question is obvious: Reject the people, but why shatter the *Luchos*? Punish the sinners, but place the *Luchos* in a safe place for another time, for another group of Jews. Why do something that completely puts an end to all hope for reconciliation? Hashem agreed and even thanked Moshe for his taking the law into his own hands, so it obviously was a good decision. Agreed, but

why?

The *Baalei Tosfos* offer an answer so compelling, innovative and novel that *Rav Karlinstein* suggests that one should go to the *mikvah* and purify himself before he listens to it! Moshe heard Hashem tell him, “Go, descend (immediately), for your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt has become corrupt” (Ibid. 32:7). Moshe wasted no time. When Hashem says, “Go,” one runs. When Moshe arrived at the scene of infamy, he knew that he must immediately put a halt to the iniquitous revelry. He was carrying the heavy *Luchos* in his hands, and they were slowing him down. If he ran with the *Luchos*, it would take him longer to get into the midst of the nation to stop them. During those precious few moments one more Jew might fall prey to the sin. What should he do? He had no option. He flung down the *Luchos*, because to carry them might endanger the spiritual future of one more Jew! Moshe broke the *Luchos* to save a Jew! He had no time to lay them down “nicely” on the ground. During those two minutes, a single Jew might suffer spiritual demise.

As a result of this exposition, the *Baalei Tosfos pasken*, render, the following *halachic* decision: If one sees a fellow Jew about to commit an *aveirah*, transgress (for example about to be *mechallel Shabbos*, desecrate *Shabbos*, eat non-kosher), and it is within his ability to (hopefully) prevent him from committing this violation, but he is hampered because he is holding a *Sefer Torah* in his arms (thus obviating him from engaging the would-be sinner in a timely fashion), he may place the *Sefer Torah* on the ground (if there is no alternative place available) in order to save a Jew from spiritual censure. If Moshe could act in such a manner with the *Luchos*, he may follow suit with a Torah scroll, anything to spare a Jew from sin. The shattering of the *Luchos* teaches us a lesson concerning the pernicious effect of an *aveirah*, and to what extent we should go to save a Jew from sin.