

## **It happened that as he drew near the camp and saw the calf and the dances, Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them. (32:19)**

Hashem had informed Moshe *Rabbeinu* that the nation had sinned egregiously, so that he should descend the mountain and return to his people. What novel lesson did Moshe learn when he returned that provoked him to shatter the *Luchos*? Why did he wait so long? Simply, we might suggest that while he certainly believed Hashem, the matter was not yet engraved on his heart that the nation would be guilty of such treason. It is one thing to believe in Hashem unequivocally; it is another thing to be prepared to shatter the *Luchos* as a result of this belief. Seeing the sin in its complete depravity demonstrated to Moshe that the nation was seriously morally impaired.

*Rashi*, however, informs us that Moshe was motivated to shatter the *Luchos* by a *kal v'chomer* (lenient and strict, whereby we derive one law from the other, applying the logic that, if a case which is generally strict has a particular leniency, a case which is generally lenient will certainly have that leniency). Moshe reasoned, "If *Pesach*, which is only one *mitzvah*, does not permit a *ben neichar*, one who is strange to Jewish law, to partake of it, certainly one who rejects the Torah, the entire corpus of Jewish law and observance, does not deserve the *Luchos*." Thus, we see that Moshe had applied his analytical reasoning to deduce that shattering the *Luchos* was not only correct- it was mandatory.

*Horav Shmuel Berenbaum, zl*, explains that Moshe understood the human psyche's deference to the wiles and ploys of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, through which it attempts to drive a wedge between us and Hashem. Thus, when Moshe heard that the nation had sinned, he attempted to ameliorate their iniquitous actions by conjecturing that the people were looking for something. *Satan* provided that something – a medium, a powerful entity which appeared godlike in their eyes, with mystical powers that were the product of the *kochos ha'tumah*, powers of impurity, which are very real. True, they had sinned, but it was not their fault. They fell for *Satan's* gambit. When Moshe descended the mountain, however, and came face to face with a molten calf, around which the people were unabashed, dancing and acting in the most reprehensible manner, he broke the *Luchos*. Perhaps *Satan* put the bug in their minds, but the deterioration was purely their own fault. There was nothing beguiling about the Golden Calf. It was the depravity of the people that should be condemned. How could they debase themselves to such a nadir after having just experienced the greatest Revelation of all time?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains this with a practical analogy. A ben Torah who had heretofore spent years studying full time in *kollel* decided to leave the bastion of Torah and enter the world of commerce. His reason: his financial straits were choking him. He could not do this any longer. A few years passed, during which he had successfully navigated the world of commerce and now enjoyed the fruits of his labors: beautiful home, expensive car, children attending the finest schools and camps, clothing no longer an issue. Life was great. It is understandable that he might have felt

that his decision to leave the *bais hamedrash* was practical.

However, his counterpart had also left the *yeshivah*, but sadly did not make it; still lived with his large family in a basement apartment, scrounging for food, wearing second-hand clothing, with little hope for his financial future. To leave the *yeshivah* and have nothing to show for his troubles, not to be able to give a fortune to *tzedakah*, charity, but instead, be the one who is on the receiving end, is deplorable. Regarding him we could ask: Why did you leave, and what did you benefit from leaving?

When Moshe descended and saw the deplorable calf, he was shocked how the people could have acted so foolishly, as to exchange *Hashem Yisborach* for such an absurdity. If they would have at least in some way gained – nu – but now they had exchanged everything for absolutely nothing. As a result, Moshe shattered the *Luchos*. The people did not deserve them.

We should ask ourselves this question: For what are we exchanging Torah learning? Are we giving it up for frivolity and sham pleasure? If we are, we are truly piteous.