

## Moshe's anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. (32:19)

To break something which Hashem made is an act that transcends. Unquestionably, for someone of Moshe *Rabbeinu's* stature to make such a move requires remarkable insight into what he was about to do. This was not a simple decision. Indeed, the fact that Hashem agreed with Moshe is in and of itself an indication that Moshe did not act out of anger, but rather, because he felt that it was the correct and proper thing to do. The commentators endeavor to provide a rationale to come to grips with this decision. *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*, offers a novel explanation.

He quotes *Chazal (Eruvin 54a)* who teach that the *Luchos HaRishonos* (first Tablets) had a unique characteristic: Had they not been shattered, Torah would never have been forgotten from *Klal Yisrael*. They had within them a G-d-given attribute that as long as they were extant, anyone who studied Torah would never forget what he had learned. As such, when Moshe beheld the tragedy of the Golden Calf before his eyes, he realized that this wonderful Heavenly attribute could be used to profane Hashem's Name and the entire foundation of religious observance. Imagine not forgetting Torah; whatever one learns becomes an integral part of his psyche, never to be forgotten. A person could learn and later in life decide that he wants to see how the other half live. Within a short space of time, this man becomes a *mushchas*, a coarse, obnoxious individual, whose religious leanings are practically non-existent and his moral character equally so. Had the first *Luchos* remained, this man could go around expounding citations from the *Shas/Talmud*, all the while denigrating the Written and Oral Law!

As a result of this image that passed before Moshe's eyes, he decided that it would be far better to shatter the *Luchos* and have a new set made, which would not include this supplementary characteristic of non-forgetting. Hashem created the first *Luchos* by engraving the letters into the stone. Thus, it would last forever. The second set of *Luchos* was Moshe's handiwork, so that they would remain in force only as long as certain criteria were met.

Today we are connected to the Torah via the second set of *Luchos*. Moshe toiled in Heaven in order to master the Torah. All of this toil was imbued into the second set of *Luchos*, which he fashioned at the behest of Hashem. If we learn Torah with such ardor and love, it will become a part of us and will remain with us. If we learn Torah as if it were only an intellectual pursuit, then our memory will grasp only so much for so long. Moshe saw to it that Torah should become the *kinyan*, acquisition, of only those who work for it – those who deserve it.

The Torah is the Heavenly bequest to every Jew. It is up to us to accept it. This acceptance is a task borne of love and toil. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, puts it perfectly. "We might have researched and studied all of it (the Torah) and found everything in it except ourselves." One must seek and find his personal *cheilek*, portion, in Torah. He can only discern his *cheilek* through intense searching.

In his Collected Writings, *Rav Hirsch* explains a Jew's requisite relationship to the Torah. Architects and their assistants may have a knowledge of blueprints and plans for a magnificent edifice – perfect in its every detail; yet, they might have no inkling of the central idea behind the blueprint which governs the entire construction. They would have neither feeling for – nor understanding of – the one who will occupy this building and whose personality and conduct will constitute the atmosphere that will permeate the house. Likewise, one may possess the entire Torah – which is the blueprint and ground plan for the individual, the family and the community; one may have studied all the texts and delved through all the sources of Jewish learning, even gain the title Jewish theologian/scholar. Yet, despite all these attainments, he may still be lacking in true Jewish knowledge. He may know it all, but he might be too absorbed in particulars to understand the underlying concept. As a result, his knowledge is not integrated into his psyche. [He is very much a *chamor nosei sefarim*, donkey carrying books. He has the knowledge, but it is merely like books carried externally, never fused into his essence.] Love of Torah and *ameilus*, toil in Torah, are more than slogans. They represent criteria for attaining Torah scholarship. One must, however, first understand the principle upon which these requisites are established: recognizing the value of Torah (what it means to us).

In his biography of *Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero quotes from one of the *Rosh Yeshivah's shmuessen*, ethical discourses. The *Rosh Yeshivah* quoted the *Lutzker Rav, Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl*, concerning a well-known *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 94b) which teaches us about the unique character of *Chizkiyahu Hamelech: No'atz cherev al pesach bais hamedrash*; He planted a sword at the entrance to the *bais hamedrash* and declared, "Sancheirev is here with a powerful army who helped him conquer the world. We are the end of the line, the last ones to be attacked by him. He has a sword, and we must be fearful of his sword."

The king then took his own sword and placed it at the door of the *bais hamedrash*. He called out, "Whoever shall leave the *bais hamedrash* and cease studying Torah shall be killed by this sword." As a result of his decree, the king's agents searched throughout *Eretz Yisrael*. They did not find any man, woman, or child who was not well versed even in the difficult laws of ritual purity.

Obviously, *Chizkiyahu's* actions require elucidation. To think that whoever leaves the *bais hamedrash* should be killed is a bit extreme. Wasting time from Torah study is a transgression of a *mitzvas asei*, positive *mitzvah*. It certainly does not warrant that the *bais din* execute him. *Rav Zalman* explains that *Chazal* are conveying to us a powerful lesson concerning Torah study. We understand that visual explanation/optics make a world of difference in getting an idea across to an audience, regardless of size. We all know that Torah is our life; *Ki heim chayeinu*. However, if someone stands in front of us with a sword and a message asserting that, if you leave, you die, then leaving the *bais hamedrash* is suicide.

*Chizkiyahu's* message was clear: "Torah is your lifeblood. Without it, you cannot survive." As a result, the men left their fields and vineyards and proceeded to the *bais hamedrash*. They had no interest in worldly pursuits. When they came to the *bais hamedrash*, they were greeted by the

sword which reminded them, “If I leave the *bais hamedrash*, I am killing myself. If I remain in the *bais hamedrash*, no sword can harm me – not even the sword of Sancheirev.”

I conclude with a thought gleaned from the insightful, yet powerful words of the *Gerrer Rebbe*, the *Imrei Emes*, *zl*. His *Rebbetzin* was concerned that her husband was late for his meal. He usually came at a specific time and then returned to his learning. That time had long passed, and, atypically, he had communicated to her that he might be late. She went over to his private room and peeked inside. She saw that he was deeply engrossed in his learning. She was now relieved. He had probably lost track of time. The *Rebbe* noticed her and he looked up. She asked, “Until when will you be learning?”

He replied immediately, without batting an eyelash, “Until the very last second (of my life). *Kol ze'man she'ha'neshamah b'kirbi*; “As long as my soul is within me!”

This was the *Imrei Emes*. His *dveikus ba'Torah*, deep-rooted bond with the Torah, was equaled by his love for it. Indeed, as long as his heart beat within him, he would learn. His life did not just revolve around Torah – his life was Torah! They were one and the same. As long as he lived, he remained totally immersed in it.