

Breaking News- Is Moses Angry?

PARSHA INSIGHTS - AIKEV (5758)

YOU SHATTERED THE TWO TABLETS? CONGRATULATIONS!

Today we will prove that Moshe deserved praise for demolishing the first set of *luchos* [tablets]. We will discover that although it appears that he did this out of rage, his anger was intentional and under control. There is no choice but to say this, since he is repeatedly commended for this act. In contrast, a person who loses his temper and becomes destructive is considered sinful. We will not look into Moshe's motives for shattering these heavenly objects. This topic might be dealt with at a different time. A separate *d'var Torah* [lesson] is needed to do it justice. Rather, we will simply bring evidence that Moshe's behavior conformed to Torah values, and was not a display of uncontrolled anger.

“A person who rips his garments in his rage, or he smashes his vessels in his anger, or he scatters his money in his wrath, should be in your eyes like an idolater. This is the skillfulness of the evil inclination. Today he tells him, ‘Do this’; tomorrow he says to him, ‘Do this’, until he advises him, ‘Serve idols’, and he goes and serves” (*Gemara Shabbos 105B*).

The message is clarified by the *Maharsha* in the following manner. The *yaitzer hora* [evil inclination] acts this way by profession. He brings a person from relatively small infractions, misdemeanors, to major transgressions. One who tears his clothes out of anger is destroying something useful. He is, in a way, violating “*bal tashchis*” [do not destroy objects which have value] (based on *Parshas Shoftim*, 20:19 regarding fruit trees). This sin is “insignificant” compared to the cardinal offense of idolatry, but it might eventually lead to it. *Maharsha* adds that the sages who occasionally performed acts to inspire their households with awe and respect, namely by breaking utensils and the like, would shatter broken objects, things that were already ruined beforehand. They were in control of their emotions, and they wasted nothing useful.

We see that one must stay on top of his temper and not let it get the best of him. Otherwise, the destructive behavior in its wake might lead to more serious iniquities. If so, how are we to explain the breaking of the *luchos*, the first set of tablets? This occurred in *Parshas Ki Sisa* (32:19), and Moshe *Rabainu* [Moses our teacher] analyzes the episode in today's *parsha* [Torah portion] (9:17). In *Ki Sisa*, it says that when Moshe “saw the (golden) calf and the dancing, Moshe's anger burned, and he threw the tablets out of his hands, and broke them at the foot of the mountain”. If one reads this in a perfunctory way, does it not seem like Moshe was enraged, and he tossed those sacred *luchos* from his hands in a fury? Did we not establish that one who exhibits such behavior is to be viewed as an idol worshipper? Was Moshe *Rabainu* no better than those who actually served the *aigel*, [calf] at whom he was enraged, *chas v'shalom* [heaven forbid]? “Both these and these served idols...” Wouldn't this be quite ironic? Have there been any “utensils” or “vessels” in history more useful than the *luchos*? I thought we are not supposed to smash items of value in our anger! But we have hopefully learned our lesson over and over again, not to interpret the Torah based on surface meaning. It is abundantly clear that Moshe was quite in control of his temper. It flared intentionally; our holy leader deliberately cast down these tablets for some specific purpose. The proofs to this are numerous; two will follow now.

A glaring piece of evidence is the last verse of the Torah. In fact, the very last words of the entire Five Books of the *Chumash* [Torah] testify that Moshe *Rabainu's* action in breaking the *luchos* was fully endorsed by Hashem. “...And all the great, fearsome acts which Moshe performed **in the sight of all Yisroel...**” That phrase, “*I'aini kol Yisroel*” - in front of the eyes of all *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] hints to the great feat of shattering the *luchos* (*Rashi* on *Zos Habrachta* 34:12). How so? *Rashi* elaborates: His heart inspired him to break the tablets IN FRONT OF THEIR EYES, as Moshe relates to the Jews (today's *parsha* of *Aikev*, 9:17), “And I smashed them IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES”. The words “*I'ainai kol Yisroel*” are part of the eulogy for Moshe *Rabainu*, the very end of the Torah. He is lauded for his greatest achievements, among them destroying the *luchos*. Furthermore, the *Gemara Shabbos 87A* deduces from another source that Hashem approved of his decision. In its list of three deeds Moshe initiated, which Hashem considered praiseworthy, shattering the *luchos* is enumerated. Since it says “**asher shibarta**” - WHICH YOU BROKE, we expound the word “*asher*” to mean “*iyasher kochacha sheshibarta*” [you deserve congratulations for the fact that you broke them]. In other words: There is a

pasuk [verse] that says “*asher shibarta*”; the word “*asher*” is taken to mean “*iyasher kochacha*”. Where is this *pasuk*, “*asher shibarta*”, and what is its context?

If we look at the *Gemara Bava Basra* 14B, we find more discussion about these broken *luchos*. Without getting into a detailed Talmudic discussion, suffice it to say that the *Gemara* learns out that the broken tablets were placed in the *aron* [the holy ark]. This is derived in a *Midrashic* way from today’s *parsha*. On the words of 10:2, *Chazal* learn out this idea from the above-mentioned phrase, “*asher shibarta*”, being written right next to the words “And place them in the *aron*”. In short, the ones which Moshe broke were to rest in the *aron*.

☞ The *Ramban* on *Bava Basra* 14B shows that the “congratulations” - *iyasher kochacha* - is hinted to precisely by this word “*asher*” in 10:2, because right after the words “*asher shibarta*”, there is an indication that the broken tablets should have their place in the *aron*.

Explains the *Ramban*: We see that THE BROKEN LUCHOS WERE PRECIOUS TO HASHEM. If Hashem had been upset at Moshe for breaking them, He never would have told Moshe to preserve the shattered pieces in the *aron*. After all, “a prosecutor cannot become a defense attorney”. This means that if the act of smashing these sacred objects had been considered sinful, their very presence in the *aron* would “remind” Hashem of the transgression. This would have the effect of a prosecuting force, a strike against Moshe and the Jews. But since Moshe was told the opposite, according the deeper meaning of today’s *pasuk* quoted above, we see that it was a heroic and praiseworthy act. It is to our credit and advantage to keep these broken pieces. Thus, the words in 10:2, “*asher shibarta*” - which you broke - hint to “*iyasher kochacha sheshibarata*”, you deserve commendation for this. Or, similarly, the word “*asher*” is like “*ashrai*” - fortunate is the one who smashed the tablets. This is the *Ramban*’s approach on *Bava Basra* 14B.

We see that Moshe *Rabainu* obviously did not lose his temper, *chas v’shalom*. His actions were deliberate and productive. He is complimented in the very end of the Torah, plus there is a hint to this in the word “*asher*” in today’s *parsha*, as explained above.

As stated earlier, Moshe’s exact purpose in shattering the *luchos* also needs to be clarified. In a summer *shiur* [class] a few years ago, we had this very discussion, and at least two solutions were presented. Stay tuned, because this might be addressed, *b’ezras Hashem* [with G-d’s help], at a later date in this weekly *d’var Torah*.

Something we can gain from this is a lesson about anger. Let us recall how serious an offense it is to destroy useful objects in a rage, as the above mentioned *Gemara Shabbos* states. Moshe is commended more than once for demolishing the *luchos*, so he was obviously in total control of his emotions.

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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