



RABBI SHALOM

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Cheftza and Gavra – Shattering and Carrying the Luchot

וַיַּחַר־אַף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת־הַלְּחֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם תַּחַת הַהָר

Moses became angry. He hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. (Shemot 32:19)

Parashat Ki Tisa recounts one of the most dramatic moments in the Torah: Moshe Rabbeinu descending from Har Sinai and shattering the Luchot. Yet Chazal offer seemingly contradictory descriptions of this act. Was the breaking of the Luchot a deliberate decision, or an event beyond Moshe's control?

YASHER KOCHACHA SHE'SHIBARTA – INTENTIONAL SHATTERING

At the very end of the Torah, Rashi (See also- Bava Batra 14a) comments on Moshe's greatness and notes that Hashem congratulated Moshe for breaking the Luchot:

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“וַיִּשָּׂר כַּחַךְ שֶׁשִּׁבַּרְתָּ” - *well done for shattering them.* Moshe reasoned that after the grievous sin of the Golden Calf, Am Yisrael was no longer worthy of receiving the Luchot. The act was not one of rage alone, but of profound responsibility.

This, Rashi explains, is the meaning of the Torah's final words describing Moshe's deeds as being performed “לעיני כל ישראל” - before the eyes of all Israel. Moshe's leadership was defined not only by transmission, but also by restraint: knowing when *not* to give.

WHEN THE WORDS FLEW HEAVENWARD

Yet a strikingly different portrayal appears in the *Yalkut Shimoni* (Ki Tisa §393):

נסתכל משה בלוחות וראה הכתב שבהן שפורח... וכבדו על ידי משה ונפלו מידי ונשתברו

Moshe looked at the Luchot and saw the letters flying heavenward. The tablets suddenly became heavy in his hands; he lost his grip, and they fell and shattered.

According to this midrash, Moshe did not *decide* to break the Luchot. Rather, once the spiritual content of the divine letters departed, the tablets were transformed into an unbearable burden. The breaking appears almost accidental, as if it was a consequence of spiritual loss.

How are we to reconcile these two

depictions? Was Moshe praised for a bold act of leadership or overwhelmed by forces beyond his control?

CARRYING THE SECOND LUCHOT

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik offers a remarkable interpretation (cited in *Masoret HaRav*; see also *Birkat Yitzhak*) that reframes the entire episode. After Hashem forgives Bnei Yisrael, Moshe is commanded to carve and bring a second set of tablets:

וַיִּפְסַל שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרַאשֵׁינִים וַיִּשְׁכֶּם מֹשֶׁה
בְּבֹקֶר וַיַּעַל אֶל־הַר סִינַי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ
שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים:

He carved two tablets of stone like the first ones. Moshe rose early in the morning and ascended Mount Sinai as God had commanded him, and he took the two stone tablets in his hand. (Shemot 34:4)

We are told that Moshe ascended the mountain with a new set of Luchot ready for inscription. This description is astonishing. If Moshe could not *carry* the first Luchot down the mountain, how could he now ascend the mountain carrying an equivalent, if not greater weight? From a purely physical perspective, this should have been even more difficult.

The Rav explains this through the Brisker distinction between **cheftza** and **gavra**. A *cheftza* is an object - acted upon by external forces. A *gavra* is a subject - an active agent who acts with purpose and direction.

When Moshe descended the mountain upon hearing of the Golden Calf, he was shattered. Disappointed, heartbroken, and disoriented, he was pulled downward by despair. In that moment, Moshe became almost a *cheftza*, overwhelmed, acted upon, unable to carry the burden placed upon him.

However, when Hashem invited Moshe to ascend once more and to participate in



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the giving of a second chance, everything changed. Moshe was once again a *gavra*: purposeful, energized, and mission-driven. The same weight that had crushed him before now became viable to be carried. Not because the load was lighter, but because Moshe himself was spiritually stronger.

BECOMING A GAVRA

Life often places us in situations where the weight feels unbearable. Disappointment, failure, and loss can drain us of agency, leaving us feeling passive. We feel pushed and pulled by circumstances beyond our control. In those moments, we resemble the first Moshe descending the mountain: burdened not only by stone, but by despair.

Yet the Torah reminds us that this is not our permanent state. When we reconnect to purpose and recognize that we are still invited to climb, to build, and to begin again, we recover our identity as a *gavra*. The very same challenges that once felt crushing can now be lifted and carried.

The second Luchot teach us that *second chances are heavier, but holier*. They demand effort, carving, and ascent, but they are also the tablets that endure. Our task, then, is not merely to survive the weight of life, but to choose how we carry it. To transform ourselves from objects acted upon into agents of meaning, growth, and hope. ■