

חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

by Dr. Joseph Geliebter

Topics discussed

Shiva Asar B'Tammuz (The Seventeenth of Tammuz)

- ▶ **On the subject of the breaking of the Luchos (Tablets)**
- ▶ **The reason the Torah concludes with an allusion to the breaking of the Luchos**
- ▶ **The necessity for the breaking of the Luchos**
- ▶ **When Bnei Yisrael worshipped *avodah zarah* (idolatry), the crowns they received at Har Sinai were taken from them**
- ▶ **Breaking the Luchos in order to awaken them to what they had done**
- ▶ **At the striking of the rock, Moshe sought to sanctify Hashem's Name before Bnei Yisrael but did not**

Shiva Asar B'Tammuz

For any questions, comments, or to join the mailing list, contact the author at chamudeishai@gmail.com

On the subject of the breaking of the Luchos

Among the events over which we fast, mourn, and lament on Shiva Asar B'Tammuz is the breaking of the Luchos (Tablets), which came about as a consequence of the *Chet ha'Eigel* (Sin of the Golden Calf), as is well known.

Yet, there is something quite remarkable. At the very conclusion of the holy Torah, it is written: **וְלִכְלֵ הַיָּד: וְלִכְלֵ הַחֹזֶקָה וְלִכְלֵ הַמְּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל** "And for all the mighty hand and for all the great awe that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel" (Devarim 34:12)

Rashi explains:

"Before the eyes of all Israel"—that his heart carried him to break the Luchos before their eyes, as it says, "And I shattered them before your eyes" (Devarim 9:17). And Hakadosh Baruch Hu (The Holy One blessed be He, G-d) agreed with his decision, as it says, "That you broke" (Shemos 34:1) — "Thank you for breaking them."

The reason the Torah concludes with an allusion to the breaking of the Luchos

On its face, this is a very sad message. Why did Rashi choose specifically this teaching of Chazal to

succeed

- ▶ **The juxtaposition between Parashas Pinchas and the fast of the Shiva Asar B'Tammuz**
- ▶ **Message for our times in light of the events of Simchas Torah 5784**

explain the Torah's final words? And what is the connection to the words "before the *eyes* of all Israel"?

The Gemara states (*Shabbos* 87a) that Moshe deciding on his own to break the Luchos derived from the power of *Torah she'be'al peh* Oral Torah). He made a *kal vachomer* (an "a fortiori" argument) from the Korban Pesach (Paschal Offering). Since the Korban Pesach, which is only one of the 613 *mitzvos*, may not be offered by a *mumar* (Jew who turns away from Torah observance), then the Luchos, which represent the entire Torah, certainly could not be given to them at that moment when they rebelled against Hashem.

Tosafos challenges this, arguing that this is not a complete *kal vachomer*. Granted, one may prohibit the Korban Pesach to a *mumar*, but here Moshe should have given them the Torah and thereby brought them back to *teshuvah* (repentance).

When they worshipped *avodah zarah*, they lost the crowns and were immersed in sin

To answer *Tosafos'* question, I would humbly suggest that Bnei Yisrael had become so deeply immersed in the sin of *avodah zarah*, turning their backs on Har Sinai (Mount Sinai) and upon the great and awesome revelation that took place there. They could not do *teshuvah* (repentance) while immersed in *avodah zarah*, actively denying the pronouncement אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ "I am Hashem your G-d" that they had heard directly from the the A-Imighty. This would simply be a case of "one who immerses [in a *mikveh*] while holding a *sheretz* (creeping creature) in his hand."

At the time that Bnei Yisrael worshipped the *Eigel* (Golden Calf), they lost the crowns of "*Na'aseh veNishma*" ("We will do and we will hear"), as stated in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a), and they cast off the yoke of their Torah acceptance. They could not return in wholehearted *teshuvah* because they were immersed in evil and were without Torah. This is similar to the teaching of the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* (Parashas Shemos), that without Torah it is impossible to do *teshuvah* if, Heaven forbid, one has descended to the fiftieth gate of impurity. Likewise, the *Chasam Sofer* writes (at the end of *Maseches Yoma*) that at the fiftieth gate of *tumah* (ritual impurity) a person cannot repent without Heavenly assistance;

repentance through his own power is withheld from him.

The situation was therefore that Bnei Yisrael had become so deeply immersed in impurity that they could not return in *teshuvah* through their own powers; but they were not worthy of the Torah, about which Chazal say, "The light within it returns a person to the proper path." How, then, could they be saved if they had neither the Torah nor the ability to elevate themselves on their own?

Moshe devised a way to awaken them to *teshuvah*

Teshuvah must come through the choice of the *baal teshuvah* (penitent) himself. Therefore Moshe, acting as the conscience of Klal Yisrael and as their *shliach tzibbur* (representative), had to devise a solution on his own. He found a way to awaken them to *teshuvah* through an external stimulus, which was what they needed. He thus shattered the Luchos, sending them into a state of shock, in order to awaken them through this dramatic and shocking act. The Luchos symbolize the heart of the Jewish people, as it says: **כְּתַבְם עַל־לִיבָהּ לְבָרְךָ** "Write them upon the tablet of your heart" (Mishlei 3:3). The very breaking of the Luchos was intended to break the hearts of Bnei Yisrael and bring them back to *teshuvah*, as it says: **לֵב נִשְׁבַּר וְנִדְכָה אֱלֹקִים לֹא תִבְזֶה** "A broken and crushed heart, O G-d, You will not despise." And as the Kotzker Rebbe, *zatzal* (of saintly memory), taught: "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart."

By breaking the Luchos, Moshe caused the people to turn and look toward him and toward Har Sinai. They recalled that great event of the giving of the Torah, which they had forgotten. This is the meaning of **וְאֶשְׁבְּרָם לְעֵינֵיכֶם** "And I

shattered them before your eyes." This change of perspective is hinted at in the words **לְעֵינֵי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל** "before the *eyes* of all Israel." Through the breaking of the Luchos, Moshe caused them to look toward Har Sinai and remember *Maamad Har Sinai* (the event at Sinai), and through this they were aroused to complete *teshuvah*.

Moshe's gamble

In truth, Moshe Rabbeinu feared that after his passing he would be called to account, for having broken the Luchos HaBris (Tablets of the Covenant) of his own accord. The Luchos were not his personal property but literally the Luchos of Hashem, written with the finger of G-d, and containing open miracles (such as the letters *mem* and *samech*, which hovered miraculously), How could it have entered his mind to shatter them? Such an act would seem to be a desecration of the holy and an erasure of the holy Names, no different from, Heaven forbid, burning a *Sefer Torah* (Torah scroll)

In my humble opinion, however, Moshe knew very well that "the Luchos were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d..." that the *mem* and *samech* hovered miraculously, and that their entire existence was above the natural order. He therefore reasoned that harm would not necessarily result from breaking the Luchos. On the contrary, since his entire intention was *leshem Shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven), to bring Bnei Yisrael back to *teshuvah*, he prayed that Hakadosh Baruch Hu would not allow any harm to result from the breaking of the Luchos, but only benefit.

The entire breaking of the Luchos was only before the eyes of the Jewish people

It occurred to me that perhaps the entire breaking of the Luchos existed truly only "before the eyes of Yisrael," but not in all dimensions of reality. For this reason, שברי לוחות מונחים בארון "the broken Luchos were placed in the Aron," and that very Aron, containing the broken Luchos, would go out with Bnei Yisrael to war, and through it they would be victorious. This shows that the Luchos' power remained!

After developing this idea of the unbreakable dimension of the Luchos, I was privileged to discover that I had arrived at the understanding of great Torah authorities. Several sources document an awesome and wondrous episode involving Rabbeinu (our teacher), the Beis Yisrael of Ger, *zatzal*, wanting to comfort a Holocaust survivor who had literally lost everything during the years of wrath. The Beis Yisrael, who had also lost family in the Holocaust, said to that survivor: "It is written regarding the breaking of the Luchos, 'And I broke them before your eyes,' and 'before the eyes of all Israel.' Why is this so? It is based on what Chazal expounded on the verse, 'And he bound him before their eyes' (Bereishis 42:24; see Rashi there), that the entire imprisonment of Shimon was only a display before the brothers, while Shimon himself received royal honor in Yosef's 'imprisonment.' So too, the breaking of the Luchos was only before the eyes of Yisrael, but the first Luchos themselves remain whole." The Beis Yisrael concluded: "So too, we must believe that everything we lost in the Holocaust was only 'before our eyes,' while in truth everything remains whole in its place..."

Hakadosh Baruch Hu then comforted Moshe and informed him that he would not be punished for what he had done. On the contrary: Chazal said of the words **אשר שברת** "*asher shibarta*," ("which you broke") that Hashem said to Moshe in reference to the breaking of the Luchos that it can be read as **יישר כחך ששברת** "*yasher [kochacha] sheshibarta*" ("Thank you for breaking them"). Hashem promised Moshe that he would be the leader of the Jewish people even after the generation of the wilderness—in every generation, and even in the days of Moshiach. This is the secret of our existence. We atone for the sin of the *Eigel* through every calamity that falls upon us throughout the generations, until in the future no trace will remain of that terrible sin.

At Mei Merivah, his mission was not successful

However, about forty years later:

קח את המטה והקהל את העדה אתה ואהרן אחיך
 ודברתם אל הסלע לעיניהם ונתן מימיו... ויזרם משה את
 קדו ויזר את הסלע במטהו פעמים ויצאו מים רבים...
 ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן יען לא האמנתם בי
 להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל לכן לא תביאו את הקהל
 הזה אל הארץ אשר נתתי להם

"Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and Aharon your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give forth its water... Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and abundant water came forth... Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them" (Bamidbar 20:8-12)

Moshe, according to his exalted level, failed in the mission to speak to the

rock before the eyes of the people and thereby sanctify the Name of Heaven. By striking the rock before the eyes of the people, there was a *chilul Hashem* (Desecration of G-d's Name), and therefore it was decreed upon him that he would die in the wilderness and not merit to enter Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Shimon said... "Is it possible that a Sefer Torah is missing even one letter, when it is written, 'Take this Sefer Torah'? Rather, until this point Hakadosh Baruch Hu would dictate and Moshe would repeat and write; from this point onward, Hakadosh Baruch Hu dictated and Moshe wrote with tears" (*Bava Basra* 15a).

There is no doubt that when Moshe wrote the *pesukim* describing his death and burial outside Eretz Yisrael, he shed tears over his failure in striking the rock before the eyes of the people, which is what caused him to die outside the Land, according to everything he was writing from the mouth of the A-lmighty at that time.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu comforted Moshe at the very sealing of the Torah with the words **לְעֵינֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל** "before the eyes of all Israel," as if to say to him: *Moshe! There was another time when you struck stone before the eyes of the people, and through that you saved them forever. This is the gemar chasimah tovah (good final seal) of the eternal Torah and the eternal people.*

For how did we merit the possibility of attaining complete *kapparah* (atonement) without the destruction of the nation, G-d forbid? That came about when Moshe shattered the stone Luchos before our eyes, awakening us to look toward Sinai and remember *Maamad Har Sinai*. This opened the gates of *teshuvah* for us

and saved us from annihilation, placing us on the path to merit complete atonement, speedily in our days. Amen, may it be His will.

Connection between Parashas Pinchas and the fast of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz

The fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz falls close to the reading of Parashas Pinchas. Based on what we have written, one may suggest a fitting explanation for the proximity of these two matters. The tremendous shock brought about by Pinchas' act of zealotry, which lay outside the judicial framework of the *beis din* (rabbinical court), and in which it appeared as though Pinchas had rendered a *halachic* (Torah law) ruling in the presence of Moshe Rabbeinu himself, and above all, slew a *nasi* (tribal leader) of Yisrael before the eyes of the people in general, and before the members of that *nasi's* tribe in particular—this shocking act, which Pinchas performed with *mesiras nefesh* (self-sacrifice), brought about *kapparah* and *teshuvah* for Bnei Yisrael, very much like the breaking of the Luchos, in my humble opinion.

Reflections in the wake of the events of Simchas Torah 5784

I was privileged to develop the *diorei Torah* (Torah insights) in this essay more than six years ago, as an essay for Simchas Torah. However, in the wake the terrible tragedy that occurred this year (5784) on Simchas Torah, when our enemies fell upon us and carried out a massacre, together with every form of torture the likes of which we have not seen in cruelty and in the number of casualties since the awful Holocaust eighty years ago, I feel compelled to add a few words. This thought conveys an important

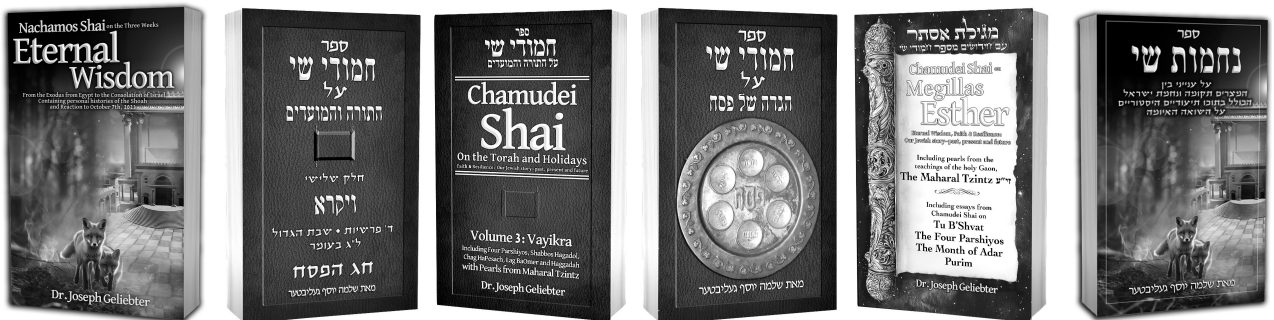
message that must be presented "before the eyes of all Israel" in every generation, and all the more so in our own generation, which experienced Simchas Torah 5784:

We merited to uncover the hidden meaning alluded to by Rashi, and the message that emerges is that even within the greatest crises lies the awakening and the strength to return in *teshuvah*, to rise, to take courage, and to continue – not merely *with joy*, but *from joy*; that is, with the joy that follows *teshuvah me'ahavah* (out of love). This is the secret of why we read this section on Simchas Torah. And it is through its power that we proclaim, "*Chazak, chazak, venischazek!*" ("Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another!") and continue to a new

beginning with the profoundly meaningful reading of Bereishis, as we begin the Torah anew.

And who knows whether, in this explanation, I haven't perhaps captured even a small part of what my revered father and teacher, *zatzal*, intended when he concluded the letter that he wrote from the depths of the valley of tears, at the height of the horrors of the Holocaust, in which he documented all the cruelty that befell our people, with the words: **לְעֵינֵי כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל**

(The complete letter, together with a Hebrew translation, appears in *Nechamos Shai*, and in the appendix to *Chamudei Shai* on Sefer Shemos.)



For more information on the Chamudei Shai series, and to purchase copies in either Hebrew or English, go to
www.rlgfoundation.org/publications,
in the US at Stores of Z. Berman Books



www.zbermanbooks.com

and in Israel available at stores of



www.sifreiorhachaim.co.il