



## “He gave (the luchos) to Moshe, when He finished speaking with him” How Did Moshe’s Hand Have the Power to Snatch the Luchos from the Hands of HKB”H

In this week’s parsha, parshas Ki Sisa, we will focus on the phenomenal divine supervision related to the first set of luchos. Firstly, when Moshe Rabeinu was on top of Har Sinai, how was he able to take the luchos from the hands of HKB”H, who was accompanied by all the heavenly legions? Secondly, we must address what transpired when Moshe descended the mountain; he saw that Yisrael had sinned with the “eigel,” and he shattered the luchos in front of them.

Let us begin to shed some light on the subject with the passuk (Shemos 31, 18): **“ויתן אל משה ככלותו לדבר אתו בהר סיני שני: He gave to Moshe, when He finished speaking with him on Har Sinai, the two luchos of the Testimony, luchos of stone, inscribed by the finger of G-d.** It is apparent from this passuk that HKB”H gave Moshe the luchos at the completion of the forty days that he was on the mountain—when HKB”H finished teaching him the Torah. In fact, this is stated explicitly in a passuk in parshas Eikev (Devarim 9, 11): **“ויהי מקץ ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה: it was at the end of forty days and forty nights; Hashem gave me the two stone luchos, the luchos of the Covenant (“luchos ha’Bris”).**

### The Luchos Were Given to Moshe after Yisrael Had Already Sinned

This is indeed surprising! For, the “cheit ha’eigel” occurred one day prior to the conclusion of Moshe’s forty days on the mountain. As the passuk says (Shemos 32, 1): **“וירא העם כי בושש”**

משה לרדת מן ההר, ויקהל העם על אהרן ויאמרו אליו, קום עשה לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו, כי זה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו.” **The people saw that Moshe delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, “Rise up, make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we do not know what became of him!”** Rashi comments: **They thought Moshe was late, because when Moshe went up to the mountain, he said to them, “At the end of forty days, I will come within the first six hours of the day.” They figured that the day he ascended was part of the count, but he had told them “full days”—forty days along with their nights. But the day he ascended did not include its night.**

Thus, it is clear that the people erred by one day in their calculation of Moshe’s return. So, on the day prior to Moshe’s actual return, they solicited Aharon to make them a god. He responded by tossing their golden rings into the fire, and a golden calf emerged. Aharon attempted to stall this apparent avodah-zarah until the next day by announcing (ibid. 5): **“חג לה’ מחר”—“A festival to Hashem tomorrow!”** Rashi comments: **“A festival to Hashem tomorrow,” but not today; for (he hoped that), perhaps Moshe would return before they worshipped it.** However, those who worshipped the “eigel” thwarted Aharon’s good intentions by rising early to offer korbanos to the “eigel.” So, when Moshe returned at the designated time and witnessed the travesty, he shattered the first luchos. Thus, it turns out that Moshe received the

luchos at the end of forty days, which was after Yisrael had committed this sin of avodah-zarah.

This is extremely surprising! Why did HKB”H give Moshe the luchos after Yisrael had already committed the “cheit ha’eigel”? And why did the “cheit ha’eigel” cause Moshe to shatter the luchos? As it is written (ibid. 19): **וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְא אֶת הָעֵגֹל וּמַחֲוֹלוֹתָיו, וַיִּחַר אַף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלַךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת הַלּוּחוֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר הֶהָרַ”**—**as he approached the camp, he saw the “eigel” and the dances. Moshe became enraged; he threw down the luchos from his hands and shattered them at the bottom of the mountain.**

What is even more surprising is that HKB”H acquiesced to Moshe’s decision to shatter the luchos. We learn this in the Gemara (Shabbas 88a) from an elucidation of the passuk (ibid. 34, 1): **וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פֶּסֶל לָךְ שְׁנֵי לּוּחוֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרַאשׁוֹנִים וְכַתְּבָתִּי: עַל הַלּוּחוֹת אֵת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלּוּחוֹת הַרְאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ - יִיֶשֶׁר כּוּחֶךָ שִׁשִּׁיבַרְתָּ.”** Hashem said to Moshe, **“Carve for yourself two luchos of stone like the first ones, and I shall inscribe on the luchos the words that were on the first luchos, which you shattered.”** Why did HKB”H emphasize to him **“which you shattered”**? Because He was congratulating Moshe for acting appropriately: **“יִיֶשֶׁר כּוּחֶךָ שִׁשִּׁיבַרְתָּ”**. So, if shattering the luchos was the right thing to do in light of the “cheit ha’eigel,” then why did HKB”H give Moshe the luchos at the end of forty days, after Yisrael had sinned?

### The Struggle between HKB”H and Moshe over the Luchos

To solve this enigma, I would like to propose a wonderful explanation. We find a fascinating passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Ta’anis 4, 5) that is unbelievable. Supposedly, a struggle ensued between HKB”H and Moshe Rabeinu over the luchos after the “cheit ha’eigel” with an improbable outcome. Here is the passage:

**“הַלּוּחוֹת הָיוּ אֹרְכֵן שֵׁשׁ טַפְחִים וְרַחְבֵּן שְׁלֹשָׁה, וְהָיָה מֹשֶׁה תּוֹפֵשׂ בְּטַפְחֵיהֶם, וְהִקְבִּ”ה בְּטַפְחֵיהֶם, וְטַפְחֵיהֶם רְיוּחַ בְּאִמְצָעוֹ, כִּיּוֹן שֶׁעָשָׂו יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹתוֹ מַעֲשֵׂה, בִּיקֶשׁ הִקְבִּ”ה לְחוֹטְפָן מִיָּדוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְגִבְרָה יָדוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה וְחוֹטְפָן מִמֶּנּוּ, הוּא שֶׁהִכְתוּב מִשְׁבַּחוֹ בְּסוּף וְאוֹמֵר וְלֹכֵל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה, יֵיאָ שְׁלֵמָא עַל יְדָה דְּגִבְרַת עַלְיָה מִינְאִי.”**

**The luchos were six tefachim (handbreadths) long and three tefachim wide. Moshe held two tefachim in his grasp, and HKB”H held onto two tefachim;**

**remained between them. When Yisrael committed that deed (the “cheit ha’eigel”), HKB”H attempted to pull the luchos out of Moshe’s grasp; however, Moshe succeeded in taking them away from Him. This is the reason the Torah praises him at the end and says (Devarim 34, 12): “And for all the strong hand” . . .** The Korban HaEidah interprets this as HKB”H praising Moshe by saying that **“peace shall be with the hand that got the better of Mine.”**

Clearly, if Moshe’s hand was stronger than the hand of HKB”H, so to speak, it is because that was His intent and will. For, no human being could overpower HKB”H. Rather, Moshe sensed that HKB”H loosened His hold on the luchos and understood that it was His divine will that Moshe take possession of the luchos. This is also evident from the Midrash cited by the commentary of the Rosh on the Torah (end of Zos HaBerachah); he states that HKB”H gave Moshe the strength and courage (resolve) to take the luchos away from Him. Then, Moshe proceeded to descend the mountain with them.

Of course, we must endeavor to explain the conflicting attitudes of HKB”H depicted in this encounter. On the one hand, He held onto the luchos to prevent Moshe from taking them. On the other hand, He gave Moshe the strength to take them away from Him. Furthermore, the commentaries struggle to explain the fact that HKB”H praises Moshe: **“וְלֹכֵל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה”**—that Moshe’s hand overcame the hand of the Almighty enabling him to extract the luchos from His hold; and also that He blesses Moshe: **“Peace shall be with the hand that got the better of Mine.”** After all, we learned from the Gemara above that HKB”H acquiesced to the shattering of the luchos and even congratulated Moshe: **“יִיֶשֶׁר כּוּחֶךָ שִׁשִּׁיבַרְתָּ”**.

### In the Universe Called “Kol Yisrael” Everything is Perfect

I will now present to our esteemed audience an explanation that reconciles all of these difficulties. I thank Hashem for graciously granting me the wisdom to do so. We will begin by introducing a precious teaching from Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy”a, in the Noam Elimelech (Devarim). He addresses the opening passuk of sefer Devarim (Devarim 1, 1): **“אלה הדברים אשר דיבר משה אל כל ישראל:—these are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael.** He teaches us

that this passuk suggests a wonderful way to serve Hashem in the most ideal manner despite our iniquities. We must include ourselves among all of Yisrael. Thus, we are elevated to the exalted realm of **“Kol Yisrael”**; the blemish of sins and iniquities does not reach that universe.

To better comprehend this concept, our sacred sefarim teach us that the essential portion of a person’s neshamah remains in the heavens above; it does not descend to earth. What comes down to earth to be housed in a physical body is merely a branch of the neshamah. Thus, when a person sins with his physical body, he is only tarnishing the tiny portion of the neshamah within the body. The root and essence of the neshamah that remains above stays untarnished and unblemished. This is clearly for man’s benefit, so that even if he corrupts and blemishes his neshamah down below, he still has the option of making amends via teshuvah, since the root of his neshamah above was not blemished. In other words, as long as the essence of the neshamah is intact and untainted, it is possible to heal the branches and regenerate them.

When a person sanctifies the portion of his neshamah within his body through Torah-study and the service of Hashem, he is able to connect with the essence of his neshamah in the heavens. In this manner, the heavenly portion of his neshamah provides the portion of his neshamah in his body with tremendous enlightenment. This enables a person to ascend the ladder of Torah and to achieve a greater understanding of the Torah and to better serve Hashem.

This then is the lesson being taught by the Noam Elimelech. By including oneself among all of Yisrael prior to the performance of a mitzvah, a person is symbolically ascending to the universe of **“Kol Yisrael.”** The roots of the neshamos of all of Yisrael are located there in their pristine, unblemished state, unaffected by any sins or iniquities. This allows a person to study Torah, perform mitzvos and pray with a pure, unblemished heart. This is the significance of the **“I’shem yichud”** we utter; we proclaim that we are fulfilling the mitzvah **“in perfect unity, in the name of all Yisrael (Kol Yisrael).”**

With this understanding, we can begin to comprehend the advice of the Arizal in Sha’ar HaKavanos. He cautions every Jew to accept upon himself the mitzvah of **“Ahavas Yisrael”** before davening. This applies especially to fellows who study

Torah together; they must love and appreciate one another and be united and in harmony. Here are his sacred words:

**Before a person is ready to begin his tefilah in the Beis Kenesses, from the passage of the Akeidah and onward, he should accept upon himself the mitzvah of (Vayikra 19, 18):“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”—and he should have in mind to love every Jew as himself. For, in this manner, his tefilah will ascend as part of all the tefilos of Yisrael. Thus, it will be able to ascend upwards and produce results. In particular, there should be love among friends who study Torah together. Every individual must include himself as if he is one limb of his body of friends.**

Thanks to the insight of the Noam Elimelech, we can appreciate the benefit of adopting this practice. By accepting upon oneself the mitzvah of **“ואהבת לרעך כמוך”**, one merits ascending to the realm of **“Kol Yisrael.”** There, one unites with the unblemished roots of the neshamos of all Yisrael. As a result, one’s Torah and mitzvos ascend as a pleasing aroma to HKB”H.

### **Moshe Rabeinu Received the Torah in the Upper World Known as “Kol Yisrael”**

Based on this premise, we will now proceed to explain the entire subject of the receiving of the luchos and the shattering of the luchos after the **“cheit ha’eigel.”** In relation to Matan Torah, it is written (Shemos 19, 20): **“וירד ה' על הר סיני”**—**Hashem descended upon Har Sinai.** Rashi comments: **One might think that He actually descended on it. Hence, the Torah says (ibid. 20, 19): “For from the heavens I spoke with you.”** To reconcile this apparent contradiction, **it teaches us that He bent the upper and lower heavens and spread them over the mountain like a sheet on a bed, and the Kisei HaKavod descended upon them.** This implies that when Moshe went up to the top of the mountain, he actually ascended to the heavens that were on top of the mountain. This is consistent with the teaching in Gemara (Shabbas 88b): **“בשעה שעלה משה למרום, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, רבונו של עולם מה לילוד אשה בינינו, אמר להן לקבל תורה בא.”** **When Moshe ascended to the heights, the ministering angels said to HKB”H, “Master of the Universe! What is someone born of a woman doing amongst us?” He replied, “He has come to receive the Torah.”**

Thus, we can now understand why HKB”H gave Moshe the luchos at the end of his forty days on the mountain, one day after the “cheit ha’eigel.” Because when Moshe ascended to receive the Torah on behalf of all Yisrael, he ascended to the universe of **“Kol Yisrael,”** where the roots of all the neshamos of Yisrael are located. Seeing as the ill effects of sins and their concomitant blemishes do not reach that realm, HKB”H gave Moshe the Torah there.

This explains very nicely HKB”H’s remark to Moshe after giving him the luchos (ibid. 32, 7): **“לך רד כי שיחת עמך... עשו להם עגל מסכה וישתחוו לו.”** **“Go, descend; for your nation that you have brought up from Mitzrayim has degenerated. They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it and sacrificed to it.”** In other words, as we have explained, in the universe of **“Kol Yisrael,”** the ill effects and damage caused by the “cheit ha’eigel” were not felt. Then, however, Moshe was instructed: **“Go, descend”**—to the lower world; there, you will witness **“the corruption of your people.”** As such, they are not worthy to receive these luchos. Therefore, it was only after Moshe descended to the camp and witnessed the “eigel” and the dancing that: **“Moshe became enraged; and he threw down the luchos from his hands and shattered them.”**

### **The Profound Reason that HKB”H Grasped the Luchos Together with Moshe Rabeinu**

It is with great joy that we will now explain the fascinating passage in the Yerushalmi concerning the first luchos: **“The luchos were six tefachim long and three tefachim wide. Moshe held two tefachim in his grasp, and HKB”H held onto two tefachim; a space of two tefachim remained between them. When Yisrael committed that deed (the “cheit ha’eigel”), HKB”H attempted to pull the luchos out of Moshe’s grasp; but Moshe’s hand was stronger, and he snatched them away from Him.”**

It appears that the period of time when HKB”H and Moshe held onto the luchos from both ends was at the conclusion of Moshe’s forty day sojourn on the mountain, after Yisrael had already sinned with the “eigel.” Then, sadly, tragically, HKB”H told Moshe: **“Go, descend; for your nation that you have brought up from Mitzrayim has degenerated.**

**They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves to it and sacrificed to it.”**

At that unfortunate moment, when HKB”H notified Moshe of Yisrael’s cheit, it seems that HKB”H intended to take the luchos away from Moshe. He insinuated that Yisrael were not worthy of receiving those first luchos containing secret, concealed meanings. Nevertheless, little by little, HKB”H endowed Moshe with the strength and courage to snatch the luchos away from Him. He was teaching Moshe that only below in Olam HaZeh were Yisrael not worthy; however, in the upper world of **“Kol Yisrael,”** which was unaffected by the “cheit ha’eigel,” they were worthy of receiving the wisdom of the Torah of the first luchos.

Realizing that HKB”H reduced His own strength and efforts to snatch the luchos out of his hands, and that He even gave Moshe additional strength, Moshe understood that it was the divine will that he snatch the luchos. In the words of the Yerushalmi: **“Moshe’s hand was stronger, and he snatched them away from Him.”** For, in the upper realm of **“Kol Yisrael,”** Yisrael were worthy to receive the first luchos. Hence, HKB”H confirmed this by endowing Moshe with the strength to extract the luchos from His hands. Furthermore, HKB”H praised Moshe by saying: **“ולכל היר החזקה”—peace shall be with the hand that got the better of Mine.**

Nevertheless, this was only true in the upper world where the unblemished roots of Jewish neshamos are located, unaffected by the “cheit ha’eigel.” It was not true down below in Olam HaZeh. Therefore, when Moshe descended the mountain, it says: **“As he approached the camp, he saw the ‘eigel’ and the dances. Moshe became enraged; he threw down the luchos from his hands and shattered them at the bottom of the mountain.”** In Olam HaZeh, the “cheit ha’eigel” took its toll; Yisrael were no longer worthy to receive the Torah wisdom of the first luchos.

### **The G-d-given Neshamah Is the Source of Man’s Wisdom**

We will now attempt to explain the tremendous benefit that accrued from the fact that the first luchos were given to the root of Yisrael’s neshamos. We will refer to an amazing

chiddush from the divine kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, in Asarah Ma'amaros. He cites the Yerushalmi teaching that the first luchos contained all of Torah she'b'al peh, esoteric information that the world was not yet worthy to receive (Shekalim 6, 1): "חנניה בן אחי רבי יהושע אומר, בין כל דיבור ודיבור, כימא רבא." **Chananiah, the son of Rabbi Yehoshua's brother says that a wealth of Torah knowledge and information was contained between each and every commandment, as it is written** (Shir HaShirim 5, 14): "The tablets, His handiwork . . . are studded with 'tarshish' (commandments precious as gems)," like a vast ocean.

Based on this premise, the Rama of Pano teaches us that when a person toils in the study of Torah and is privileged to reveal novel, accurate Torah insights, he is actually revealing chiddushim that were contained on the first set of luchos. This is the significance of the words we recite in our Shabbas prayers: "ותן חלקנו בתורתך". We are praying that we will merit revealing our portions of the Torah that were inscribed on the luchos.

We can now suggest that this is why Moshe Rabeinu received the first luchos in the universe of "Kol Yisrael," on behalf of the roots of all Jewish neshamos. Thus, if a person studies Torah below diligently, l'shma—with sincere devotion—he will be privileged to have the secret meanings of the Torah revealed to him via the essence of his neshamah in the heavens. This is the meaning of words of prayer: "ותן חלקנו בתורתך"—that the specific secrets of the Torah given to the roots of our respective neshamos be revealed to us.

This notion is supported by the passuk (Iyov 32, 8): "ונשמת שדי תבינם—the neshamah from G-d gives them insight. We find the following interpretation of this passuk in the Zohar Chadash (Bereishis, page 11, column 1): **What is the meaning of that which is written: "ונשמת שדי תבינם"? Rather, it is the neshamah that leads a person to recognize his Maker, to enter him into Torah and good deeds; and praiseworthy are those that enter into the path of the Torah, the path of the neshamah. Because of it, they will merit the life of Olam HaBa and the virtue of the holy ones.** In keeping with this discussion, we can interpret this as referring to the secrets of the Torah that were on the first luchos that were given to the roots of the neshamos.

### The Letters Flew off the Luchos and Ascended to the Roots of the Neshamos in the Universe of "Kol Yisrael"

With this understanding, we can explain very nicely the reason Chazal give in the Midrash for the shattering of the luchos (S.R. 46, 1): "שפרחו הכתובים מן הלוחות לכך שברו"—**since the writing flew off the luchos, therefore, he shattered them.** Similarly, this is explained in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Ta'anis 4, 5): "הלוחות היו משאוי ארבעים סאה, והכתב היה סובלן, כיון שפרח כבודו על ידיו של משה ונפלו ונשתברו"—**the luchos weighed forty se'ah, and they were carried by the writing; when the writing flew off, they became too heavy for Moshe's hands, they fell and shattered.** We must try to comprehend the matter of the letters flying off the luchos.

As explained, the neshamos of Yisrael below in Olam HaZeh were not deserving of the first luchos and its esoteric wisdom; however, they were deserving with regards to the roots of their neshamos that were not affected by the "cheit ha'eigel." Therefore, when Moshe descended from the upper world to Olam HaZeh, the letters flew off of the luchos, and they ascended upwards to the roots of Yisrael's neshamos located in the place where Moshe had received the luchos from the hands of HKB"H.

Let us analyze the implication of the Yerushalmi: "**When the writing flew off, they became too heavy for Moshe's hands, they fell and shattered.**" As long as Moshe was still in the universe of "Kol Yisrael," and the letters remained on the luchos, they were not too heavy for Moshe to bear. In fact, HKB"H endowed Moshe with the strength and resolve to snatch the luchos from Him. This strength and resolve remained with Moshe, so long as the letters remained there.

Yet, when Moshe reached Olam HaZeh, the letters flew off of the luchos, since Yisrael in Olam HaZeh were not worthy of the luchos. Therefore, not only did the letters fly away, but the unique strength HKB"H had given Moshe also left. As a result, the luchos were too heavy for him; **so, they fell and shattered.**

This explains beautifully the conclusion of Torah she'b'chsav: "ולכל היד החזקה ולכל המזרע הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל"—**and for all the strong hand and for all the great awesomeness that Moshe performed before the eyes of**

**all Yisrael.** We presented above the interpretation of the Yerushalmi: "ולכל היר החזקה" implies that HKB"H was praising Moshe for the fact that he had the strength and resolve to snatch the luchos from the hands of HKB"H. Now, let's address the continuation of the passuk: "ולכל המורא הגדול"—this feat, the ability of a human being to snatch the luchos from the hands of HKB"H is truly incredible and awesome. The passuk goes on to explain why HKB"H endowed Moshe with this strength and resolve: "אשר עשה משה"—because he performed this feat: "לעיני כל ישראל"—for the eyes, so to speak, of the neshamos of Yisrael, that were free of sin, in the universe of "Kol Yisrael," to witness.

Based on what we have learned, let us conclude with one more intriguing thought. Sefer Devarim concludes with the words "אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל"—teaching us that Moshe Rabeinu received the first luchos on behalf of the roots of the neshamos in the universe of "Kol Yisrael," where the neshamos remain pure and unblemished. Therefore, at the beginning of sefer Devarim, the Torah attests to the fact that Moshe possessed the ability to communicate with the roots of the neshamos of Yisrael. That is the significance of the passuk: "אלה הדברים אשר דיבר משה אל כל ישראל". As we learned from the Noam Elimelech, this passuk teaches us that Moshe spoke directly to the roots of the neshamos of Yisrael in the universe of "Kol Yisrael."



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