



The Incredible Lesson Learned from Moshe Rabeinu about Lashon HaRa While Moshe Was Holding the Luchos HKB”H Informed Him that His People Had Acted Corruptly—He Said He Would Not Believe It until He Saw It with His Own Eyes

This week’s parsha, parshas Ki Sisa, describes the unfortunate shattering of the luchos. Surprisingly, even though Moshe Rabeinu was told definitively by HKB”H that Yisrael had sinned with the eigel, he did not shatter the luchos until he witnessed the corruption with his own eyes. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Shemos 32, 7): **”וידבר ה’ אל משה לך רד: כי שחת עמך אשר העלית מארץ מצרים, סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צויתים עשו להם עגל מסכה וישתחוו לו ויזבחו לו ויאמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך Hashem spoke to Moshe: “Go, descend; for your nation that you have brought up from Mitzrayim has acted corruptly. 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. And they said, ‘This is your god, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Mitzrayim.’”**

Yet, after being informed by HKB”H of the grievous sin committed by Yisrael, Moshe Rabeinu descended the mountain while still holding the luchos, as it is written (ibid. 15): **”ויבן וירד: משה מן ההר ושני לוחות העדות בידו לוחות כתובים משני עבריהם מזה ומזה הם כתובים, והלוחות מעשה אלקים המה והמכתב מכתב אלקים הוא חרות על הלוחות.”** Moshe turned and descended from the mountain, with the two luchos of the Testimony in his hand, luchos inscribed on both of their sides; they were inscribed on this side and on that. The luchos are the work of G-d, and the script was the script of G-d, etched on the luchos.

One cannot begin to imagine the emotional turmoil experienced by the loyal shepherd, Moshe Rabeinu, as he

rushed down the mountain carrying the luchos. Yet the narrative details for us Moshe’s reaction upon seeing the eigel (ibid. 19): **”ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחולות ויחר: אף משה וישלך מידיו את הלוחות וישבר אותם תחת ההר, ויקח את העגל אשר עשו וישרוף באש ויטחן עד אשר דק ויזר על פני המים וישק את בני ישראל.”** 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. He took the “eigel” that they had made and burned it in fire; he ground it until it was a fine powder and scattered it upon the water; and he made Bnei Yisrael drink it.

It is incumbent on us to reconcile this surprising sequence of events. Even after being told explicitly by HKB”H what the people had done, he continued down the mountain as if he still intended to deliver the luchos to Yisrael. Only after being close enough to witness the travesty with his own eyes did he become enraged enough to shatter the luchos.

How Our Greatest Commentaries Interpret These Events

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing the simple, straightforward explanations found in the commentaries on the Torah—such as the Alshich hakadosh, the author of Sefer Halkarim, the author of the Akeidah, the Yad Yosef, and the Yifei To’ar. They point out that receiving bad news from others, even when its truth and

accuracy are beyond a shadow of a doubt, is not the same as seeing it with one's own eyes. The Alshich writes that this is what happened with Moshe: **Even though HKB"H informed him of the tragic events, and he also heard about them from Yehoshua, they did not weigh heavily on his heart until he saw them for himself; then he became enraged.** In this vein, the author of the Akeidah adds that a person reacts more intensely to what he sees than to what he hears, even though he does not doubt the veracity of what he heard.

The Alshich hakadosh relies on the facts presented in the narrative. When Moshe Rabeinu heard about the "cheit ha'eigel" directly from HKB"H, he did not become so upset. He considered the possibility that the people of Yisrael had become victims of the malicious advice of the yetzer; and he was certain that they regretted their actions. However, when he approached the camp and saw the eigel along with the dancing and merriment; he realized that they did not have any remorse. At that point, he became enraged and shattered the luchos. He points out that the essence of serving Hashem is doing so with simchah and wholeheartedly. But if a person is saddened by his sin, there is hope that he will perform teshuvah and make amends; if his sin makes him happy, his situation is hopeless, cha v'shalom.

Along these lines, the Sforno comments: **When he (Moshe) saw that they were rejoicing as a result of their corrupt acts . . . he got angry and gave up hope of being able to rectify the impropriety—such that they would return to their innocence and would be deserving of those luchos.** Based on this, he explains Moshe's displeasure with Aharon prompting him to say to him (ibid. 21):

"מה עשה לך העם הזה כי הבאת עליו חטאה גדולה." **"What did this nation do to you that you brought a great sin upon it?" They rejoiced with improper behavior and with dancing, because you promised them a holiday on the following day. That is worse than the sin and mutiny that they performed with the eigel . . . Therefore, he said (to Aharon), even though they ganged up on you to force you to make the eigel for them, what did they do to you to compel you to promise them a holiday on the following day? For that was the reason for the dancing they did to celebrate the eigel, which was worse than the actual making of it.**

In his commentary the Eimek Davar, the Netziv explains Moshe Rabeinu's rationale for delaying the shattering of the luchos until after he saw the eigel. He wanted Bnei Yisrael to comprehend the gravity of their sin and to feel brokenhearted. Therefore, he did not break the luchos while still on the mountain. Instead, he waited until he came down to the camp, so that the people of Yisrael would see the luchos being shattered and would comprehend the severity and tragic consequences of their actions.

Here is one of the answers suggested by the author of the Akeidah: When HKB"H instructed Moshe: **"Go, descend; for your nation that you have brought up from Mitzrayim has acted corruptly. They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf"**—he thought that they had not actually worshipped avodah-zarah but only planned to do so. Yet, as the Gemara (Kiddushin 40a) teaches, in the eyes of HKB"H, a negative intent concerning avodah-zarah is associated with an actual deed. But if they had not committed an actual deed, Moshe thought that there was still hope for them, and it would not be necessary to break the luchos. However, when he reached the camp and saw the eigel and the merriment, he realized it was too late; he was overwhelmed with rage and shattered the luchos.

Moshe Refused to Believe that Yisrael Had Sinned until He Witnessed It with His Own Eyes

I would now like to introduce to our royal audience an intriguing passage in the Midrash on this subject (S.R. 46, 1):

You find that when HKB"H said to him: "Go, descend, for your people have become corrupt," he held onto the luchos and did not believe that Yisrael had sinned. He said: "If I do not see it, I do not believe it," as it is stated: "It happened as Moshe drew near to the camp (that he saw the calf and the dancing. Moses' wrath was enflamed, and he cast the tablets from his hands, and he shattered them at the foot of the mountain)." He did not break them until he saw with his own eyes. Woe to those people who testify about what they have not seen. The Midrash queries: **Is it possible that Moses did not believe HKB"H, Who said to him: "For your people have acted corruptly"? Rather, Moshe was teaching Yisrael proper conduct. Even if a person hears**

a matter from a trustworthy individual, it is prohibited to accept his testimony and to take action based on his word if he has not seen it.

It is noteworthy that Chazal provide us with additional details in another Midrash (ibid. 42, 5):

“Go, descend”—Rabbi Avin said: HKB”H said to Moshe, ‘Do not feel badly that I told you, ‘Go, descend from here’; for in two or three instances, I descended, as it were, from heaven to earth in order to observe the corruption of the creatures,” as it is stated (Bereishis 11, 5): Hashem descended to see the city and the tower” (in the generation of the dispersion); (ibid. 7) **“Come let us descend”** (also regarding the Tower of Bavel); (ibid. 18, 21; regarding the people of Sedom) **“I will descend and see.” “So, you, too, ‘go descend’—it is sufficient for a servant to be equal to his Maker.”** (In other words, Hashem was instructing Moshe with the term “לך” to follow His example and descend as He did.)

We learn from this Midrash that even though HKB”H informed Moshe explicitly that Yisrael had sinned with the eigel, HKB”H also instructed him to go down and verify it with his own eyes before taking any action. After all, HKB”H Himself did not punish the generation of the dispersion or the people of Sedom until He descended to witness their evil deeds firsthand, so to speak. We find a similar teaching in Rashi (Bereishis 11, 5); he cites the Midrash Tanchuma: **“Hashem descended to see.” He did not need to do this, but He did this to teach judges that they should not convict the defendant until they see and understand** (the evidence).

In the Upper Spheres Anger and Haughtiness Are Tantamount to Avodah-Zarah

I would like to propose a wonderful explanation of my own. We have learned that with the directive: **“לך רד כי שחת עמר”**—HKB”H was teaching Moshe not to act on something until he has witnessed it with his own eyes. According to the Midrash, Moshe responded: **“אם איני רואה איני מאמין”**. I will begin by introducing a precious insight from the esteemed Rabbi Yaakov of Narol, zy”a, a disciple of the Chozeh of Lublin, zy”a. He comments on the passuk (Bereishis 18, 20): **“ויאמר ה' זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה וחטאתם כי כבדה מאד, ארדה נא ואראה הכצעקתה הבאה.”** So Hashem said, **“Because the outcry**

concerning Sedom and Amorah has become so great, and because their sin has been very grave, I will descend and see if their outcry that has come to Me is indicative of their conduct, and they deserve annihilation. And if not, I will know.”

The commentaries are puzzled by this depiction. Is it necessary for HKB”H to descend to verify man’s actions? In fact, we have an explicit passuk that states otherwise (Tehillim 33, 13): **“משמים הביט ה' ראה את כל בני האדם, ממכון שבתו השגיח אל כל מושבי הארץ”**—**from heaven Hashem looks down, He sees all mankind; from His place of dwelling, He oversees all the inhabitants of earth.** Rabbi Yaakov of Narol addresses this difficulty. The following explanation is brought down in his name in Eizor Eliyahu (Beha’aloscha):

I heard (the following) **in the name of the holy Rav of Narol, our teacher Rabbi Yaakov, zlh”h, regarding the passuk: “I will descend and see if their outcry that has come to Me is indicative of their conduct.”** The term **“I will descend”** requires further explanation. **He, of blessed memory, provides a reason. It is the accepted minhag throughout the world to make a yahrzeit for the passing of one’s father and mother, G-d help us, because it is said that a person is judged annually above.**

This is seemingly difficult to comprehend. Since the person has already been judged once, why must he be judged annually? He of blessed memory explains that the neshamah ascends to a higher level every year. Therefore, it must be judged anew, because there are aveiros that are not considered to be sins in the lower world, but are considered to be sins in the higher world . . . Therefore, it is necessary to pray for the individual each and every year.

He of blessed memory asserts that this is the meaning of the passuk under discussion: “Because the outcry concerning Sedom and Amorah has become so great”—perhaps these sins are only in the upper world, but they are not considered sins at all down below. If that is the case, they do not deserve to be punished in this world but only in the upper world. Therefore, the text says: “I will descend and see.” In other words, it was as if HKB”H said to the heavenly court, **“I will descend and see if they truly deserve annihilation”—that is, if their conduct is**

considered sinful even in the world of action, then they will be exterminated.

The Upper Worlds Were Created with Thought

We will now elaborate based on the statement of Chazal cited by Rashi at the beginning of parshas Bereishis (1, 1). They note that the opening passuk of the Torah employs the name Elokim rather than Havaya; this indicates that the Creator initially intended to create the world based on the midah of “din.” He foresaw, however, that the world could not survive based on this strict standard. Therefore, He preferentially partnered the midah of “rachamim” with the midah of “din.” This partnership and preference for “midas harachamim” are evident in the passuk (Bereishis 2, 4): **“ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ ושמים”**. Note that in this passuk both divine names are employed, but the name of rachamim precedes the name of “din.” Nevertheless, the commentaries are perplexed by this assertion. HKB”H does not exist in time; He foresees everything from its beginning to its end. As such, it is implausible that He initially intended to create the world with the midah of “din,” and only when He saw that the world could not endure based on this standard, He changed His mind, so to speak, and created the world with a combination of “rachamim” and “din.”

The Arvei Nachal (Bereishis) explains: We find that HKB”H created the world with ten utterances. This is attested to by the passuk (Tehillim 33, 6): **“בדבר ה' שמים נעשו וברוח פיו כל צבאם—with the word of Hashem the heavens were made and by the breath of His mouth all their legions.** Just as the spoken word of HKB”H, which is more tangible, created the material and physical Olam HaZeh; so, too, as it were, the upper spiritual worlds were created with His divine thought. After all, His thought is much more spiritual than His speech, and those worlds are inhabited by spiritual creatures, such as malachim, seraphim and holy ophanim.

Now, the yetzer hara has no power in the upper, spiritual worlds that were created with the Blessed One’s thoughts. Since the spiritual kedushah is so great up there, it is impossible for evil to gain a foothold there. Therefore, those worlds are conducted based on the standard of “din” without any collaboration with “rachamim.” “Rachamim” is not necessary in those worlds; they are able to exist and endure totally based

on “midas hadin”; after all, the malachim and seraphim that inhabit those worlds do not have yetzer haras. This is not true of our physical, material world, which was created with divine speech. Here, the yetzer hara and its evil forces are able to exist and wreak havoc. Consequently, this world cannot continue to exist based solely on the strict standard of “din”; the collaboration of “midas harachamim” is required.

This then is the message conveyed by Chazal’s statement: **He initially thought to create it with “midas hadin.”** Those spiritual worlds that HKB”H created initially with His thought, were, indeed, created with “midas hadin.” That was not problematic, since it is impossible for evil to prevail there; hence, the collaboration with “midas harachamim” is unnecessary. That was not the case, however, when HKB”H created this, material, physical world with His speech: **He foresaw that the world could not endure,** because this world cannot survive and continue to exist if it is based solely on “midas hadin.” Therefore, **He prioritized “midas harachamim” and partnered it with “midas hadin.”** Thus, we see that HKB”H did not reconsider or abandon His original plan. The spiritual worlds which were conceived initially with His thought were, indeed, created based on “midas hadin.” This material world, however, which cannot endure based exclusively on “midas hadin,” was created based on the collaboration of “midas harachamim” with “midas hadin.”

The Higher the World the Greater the Scrutiny

The Arvei Nachal applies this concept to explain various stringencies expressed in the teachings of Chazal. For example (Sotah 4b): **“אמר רבי יוחנן משום רשב”י, כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח כאילו—עובד עבודת כוכבים”**—**Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rashbi: Any person who possesses a haughtiness of spirit is regarded as though he worships idols.** It seems obvious that it is not really as if he worshipped idols and is considered to be a complete heretic. So, why do Chazal make such a harsh, emphatic pronouncement—that a haughty person **“is regarded as though he worships idols”?**

Here is the explanation: In essence, the heavenly kingdom mirrors the earthly kingdom. Human kings impose laws delineating what is permitted and what is prohibited. Nevertheless, the farther away one is from the king’s palace, the less stringently the laws are enforced. Conversely, the

closer one is to the king's palace, the more stringently the laws are enforced. Within the palace itself, one must abide by the laws scrupulously; improper, unlawful behavior is simply not tolerated.

The same applies to the kingdom of heaven. While it is true that HKB"H gave us "taryag" mitzvos of the Torah and seven Rabbinically-ordained mitzvos to observe down on earth; nevertheless, there are several matters that are not considered sins in this material world. Yet, the closer one is to HKB"H in the upper, spiritual worlds, the more stringently a person is treated. Therefore, haughtiness in this world is not truly equivalent to idolatry. In fact, it is much easier to perform teshuvah for this shortcoming than it is for actual avodah-zarah. Nevertheless, after a person passes away, the higher he ascends in the spiritual worlds, haughtiness is considered to be a serious transgression, truly analogous to idolatry. Hence, he will be held accountable for having worshipped avodah-zarah.

Accordingly, the Arvei Nachal clarifies the familiar expression employed by Chazal: "מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו"—from the perspective of Torah-law, it is viewed as if etc. This means that even though a particular deed or thought is not considered to be a serious transgression in this world; nevertheless, "מעלה עליו הכתוב"—when HKB"H elevates ("מעלה") his neshamah to a higher, spiritual world, it is viewed there as if he actually committed a serious transgression. Similarly, wherever Chazal employ the term "כאילו", it implies that in this world, a particular deed is not really a serious transgression; however, when that person ascends to a higher, spiritual world after passing away, that deed will be considered a significant, consequential transgression.

This clarifies the insight of the great Rabbi Yaakov of Narol magnificently. His comments addressed the passuk: **"So Hashem said, 'Because the outcry concerning Sedom and Amorah has become so great, and because their sin has been very grave.'"** It is plausible that the conduct of the people of Sedom and Amorah was only considered a grave sin in the higher realms. In that case, they wouldn't have deserved to be punished by HKB"H in this world but only after their deaths, when they reached the upper world where their actions were considered grave. Therefore, HKB"H said: **"I will descend."** In other words, I will evaluate the significance

and degree of their transgressions in the physical, material world. **"And I will see if their outcry that has come to Me is indicative of their conduct"**—I will determine whether or not their conduct is considered a serious transgression even in this world. If so, **"they deserve annihilation"**—I will exterminate them in Olam HaZeh. **"And if not"**—if their actions are only considered transgressions in the upper world; then, **"I will know"**—I will remember to punish them for their actions after they die, when they ascend to the upper, spiritual world, but I will not punish them in Olam HaZeh.

Moshe Rabeinu's Deliberation

This concept also applies very nicely to how Hashem dealt with the generation of the mabul, where it says (Bereishis 6, 5): **"וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ"—Hashem saw that man's wickedness on earth was great.** In other words, their wickedness and sinfulness had transcended even the limits of this material world—**"on earth"**—i.e., it was not considered sinful only in the heavenly realms. Therefore, Hashem pronounced His judgment: **אמוחה את האדם אשר בראתי מעל פני האדמה—I will eliminate man whom I created from the face of the earth.**

Then, the narrative proceeds to emphasize this fact: **וירא אלקים את הארץ והנה נשחתה... ויאמר אלקים לנח כל בשר בא לפני כי מלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והגני משחיתם את הארץ—G-d saw the earth and behold it was corrupted . . . and G-d said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me."** Do not think that their behavior is only judged to be corrupt **"before Me,"** in the upper worlds. **"For the earth is filled with robbery through them"**—even below on earth their behavior is judged to be corrupt and sinful. Consequently: **"Behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth."**

We can now illuminate the statement in the Midrash above: **He held onto the luchos and did not believe that Yisrael had sinned.** Without a doubt, Moshe Rabeinu believed what HKB"H had told him: **"They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a molten calf."** However, Moshe Rabeinu entertained the possibility that HKB"H meant that in the higher, spiritual realm, where Moshe was at that moment while receiving the Torah, only there was it viewed as if they had actually fashioned an eigel and bowed down to it.

In this context, he responded: **“If I do not see it, I do not believe it.”** He wanted to see with his own eyes whether or not they had actually made an eigel and bowed down to it or merely intended to do so. Yet: **“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.”** He witnessed that they had actually sinned—not merely intended to sin. Hence, he reacted appropriately and expressed his rage by shattering the luchos.

Based on this version of the incident, Chazal added a lesson of vital importance regarding lashon hara: **Woe to those people who testify about what they have not seen.**

Is it possible that Moses did not believe HKB”H, Who said to him: “For your people have acted corruptly”? Rather, Moshe was teaching Yisrael proper conduct. Even if a person hears a matter from a trustworthy individual, it is prohibited to accept his testimony and to take action based on his word if he has not seen it. Elsewhere, Chazal take this a step further (Avos 1, 6): **“זהווי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות—**not only is it prohibited to receive and accept lashon-hara about a fellow Jew, but **one should judge every person favorably.** In this merit, may HKB”H also judge every one of us favorably and grant us an eternal geulah, swiftly in our times! Amen.



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