



# דרכים בפרשה

עקב

## פסל לך שני לוחת אבנים כראשונים וגו' אשר היו על הלחת הראשנים אשר שברת ושמתם בארון

*Carve for yourself two stone Luchos like the first ones etc., that were on the first Luchos that you smashed, and you shall place them in the Aron*

The gemara in Masechta Bava Basra (14b) teaches, **אשר שברת. אמר לו הקב"ה למשה יישר** - *That you smashed: HaShem said to Moshe, Yasher Koach (may your strength be firm) for smashing the Luchos.* One would think that HaShem would have been angry at Moshe for breaking the Luchos. This gemara teaches us that Hashem actually thanked Moshe for doing so. What needs to be understood is why was this thank you only being given now by the second Luchos; wouldn't it have been better to thank Moshe right away so that he wouldn't feel bad?

The Panayach Raza explains that HaShem was fine with Moshe breaking the first set, but not to be repeated a second time; once was enough. Just to be sure, "place the second set of Luchos in the Aron". Should that desire to smash them arise again, they are not in your hands, readily available.

The Midrash Tanchuma (Ekev 11) states that Moshe only broke the Luchos after he saw the letters flying away. The Panim Yafos suggests that the stone Luchos, absent of its letters became extremely heavy. Moshe let go of them due to their weight. He didn't feel bad about letting them go because they were physically impossible to hold onto, so clearly, it wasn't within his ability. But when HaShem told him to take the second set without the letters and only afterwards carve the letters, Moshe would now see that he could

have still held onto them. So now HaShem needed to tell him not to feel bad.

Delving deeper into this midrash, I believe there is a beautiful message to be gleaned. The letters of the luchos refer to the life of the Torah. The reason why the Luchos were able to be carried was due to the principal of **החי נושא את עצמו** - *the living carry themselves.* Remove those letters and all you are left with is just a pile of heavy lifeless stones that become unbearable.

And this is the question that we must constantly have on our minds as we approach any of the mitzvos of the Torah. Do we feel like the mitzvos are dragging us down at times, or are they an incredible source of energy? Are they looked at as a welcome opportunity or perhaps as a burden which causes us to recite the bracha of **ברוך שפטרני** with extra kavana?

The navi Yeshaya writes (43:22), **ולא אתי** - *and to Me, Yaakov did not call out, because Yisroel was wary of Me.* On this possuk, the Dubno Maggid famously related a parable of a father that asked his son to fetch his bag from the train station. After some time, he sees from afar how his son is working up a good shvitz, schlepping the suitcase. Before the son has a chance to say anything, the father calls out that it is not the right bag. "But of course it is", replies the son. "It is exactly how you de-



scribed it.” The father responds that it can’t be because “mine was not that heavy.” (Note: the parable was related differently a few times with the same message)

Is it possible that for many of the mitzvos in our bank account which we performed with groans for some added effects, and at times even calling it mesiras nefesh, maybe just maybe we will come Upstairs and the response might be, “Nope, that’s not My mitzvah?”

The Torah tells us **וְהָיָה בָהֶם** and you shall live by them, and we learn from this that **וְלֹא בָהֶם** **שִׁמּוֹת בָהֶם** and you shall not die from them. The Torah is meant to invigorate, breathing life into us, not *chas v’shalom* the opposite. **וְהָיָה בָהֶם** - is this where I get my *chiyus* from? Do I leave shul in the morning after davening and learning with my chavrusah with the feeling that I am prepared to seize the day?

So how do we access the strength that the Torah offers? **עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקֵיהֶם** - A tree of life to those that hold onto it. Grab onto the Torah, feel it, live it, hold it, breathe it. That is how you access its strength.

I remember from my childhood the day that my father brought home a new water cooler machine. It sat proudly in our kitchen corner with the blue five-gallon bottle nestled on top. Each time the bottle emptied, a new bottle of water would be opened and inserted into the machine. As children, we always liked watching “the changing of the bottle”, because back then, these bottles had a standard bottle cap that did nothing to prevent the inevitable spilling. We had always marveled at the strength needed to successfully turn over the forty

plus pound jug without flooding our home.

If for a moment we can think about swimming in a pool, feeling the water rushing over our shoulders as we take our laps across, there is a curious thought that comes to mind. No one ever asks, “How are you able to carry all that water on your shoulders?” But what is wrong with that question? Aren’t there thousands of gallons of water now sitting on top of you? And of course, the answer is obvious: When you are in it, you don’t feel it!

The same is true with the Torah and its mitzvos. From a peripheral glance, it seems tough and at times exhausting. One can stand by and watch others as they carry the Torah, learning from it and toiling in it. It seems daunting and difficult. But of course, if we are in it, it all feels different. Gone are the hardships of carrying it. A common question that a Torah observant Jew is asked is, “Don’t you find your life so restrictive and difficult? I can never live that type of a lifestyle!” But once again, standing on the outside without ever jumping in will definitely give off that impression.

When HaShem “thanked Moshe for breaking the heavy “lifeless” Luchos, HaShem didn’t merely give Moshe a “shkoyach”, but rather literally, HaShem blessed **יִישַׁר כַּח שְׂשִׁיבֵרֶת** - May your strength be firm. It was specifically now, as Moshe was ready to start the second Luchos that HaShem told him that this is where his strength will come from.

**Good Shabbos, מְרַדְכֵי אֶפְפֵּל**



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