

Ki Tisa Study Sheet : Was it Anger ?

Source Sheet by Judith Spicehandler

Why did Moses suddenly break the tablets when he already knew what the Israleites had done and had already defended them before God?

Exodus 32:7-14

(7) The Adonai spoke to Moses, “Hurry down, for **your people**, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely.

(8) They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I enjoined upon them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it and sacrificed to it, saying: ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” (9) Adonai further said to Moses, “I see that this is a stiffnecked people. (10) Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation.” (11) But Moses implored Adonai his God, saying, “Let not Your anger, Adonai, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. (12) Let not the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.’ Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people. (13) Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever.”

(14) And Adonai renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people.

Exodus 32:19

(19) And it came to pass, as soon as he came unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount.

שמות ל"ב:ז'-י"ד

(ז) וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּךְ־יָרֵד כִּי שָׁחַת עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (ח) סָרוּ מִהָר מוֹנֵה־לָרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָם עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסֹּכָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ־לוֹ וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רְאִיתִי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עִם־קִשְׁי־עֲרֹף הוּא: (י) וַעֲתָה הִנֵּיחָה לִי וַיִּחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם וַיֹּאכְלֵם וַאֲעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל: (יא) וַיִּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־פָּנָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה יְהוָה יַחַרָּה אַפְּךָ בְּעַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה: (יב) לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר בְּרָעָה הוֹצֵיאָם לְהָרֵג אֶתְּם בְּהָרִים וּלְכַלְתֶּם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה שׁוּב מִחֲרוֹן אַפְּךָ וְהִנַּחֵם עַל־הָרָעָה לְעַמְּךָ: (יג) זָכֹר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בְּךָ וַתְּדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם אַרְבָּה אֶת־זֶרְעֶכֶם כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֲתָן לְזֶרְעֶכֶם וְנָחֳלוּ לְעָלָם: (יד) וַיִּנַּחֵם יְהוָה עַל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ: (טו)

שמות ל"ב:י"ט

(טו) וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֵל הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְא אֶת הָעֵגֶל וּמַחֲלֹת וַיִּחַר אַף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ מִיָּדוֹ [מִיָּדָיו] אֶת הַלְּחֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵר אֶתֶם תַּחַת הָהָר.

Approach #1: Moses Overcome with Rage & Sadness

Ramban on Exodus 32:16:1

Nevertheless, Moshe did not prevent himself from breaking the tablets for he was enraged upon seeing this evil spectacle, and he could not bear it.

רמב"ן על שמות ל"ב:ט"ז:א'
לא נמנע משה בכל זה מלשבר אותם,
כי חרה לו בראותו המעשה הרע ההוא,
ולא יכול להתאפק

Approach #2 : Inadvertent consequence of God's withdrawal**Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 45:8**

Moses took the tables (of the law), and he descended, and the tables carried their own weight and Moses with them; but when they beheld the calf and the dances, the writing fled from off the tables, and they became heavy in his hands, and Moses was not able to carry himself and the tables, and he cast them from his hand, and they were broken beneath the mount, as it is said, "And Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount" (Ex. 32:19).

פרקי דרבי אליעזר מ"ה:ח'
ולקח משם את הלוחות והיה יורד והיו
הלוחות סובלין את עצמן ואת משה
עצמו עמן, וכשראו העגל ואת המחולות
ברחו הכתובים מעל הלוחות נמצאו
כבדים על ידו משה ולא היה משה יכול
לסבול את עצמו ולא את הלוחות
והשליכן מידו ונשתברו תחת הר שני'
ויחר למשה.

Approach 3: Moses is protecting the People**Midrash Avot DeRabi Natan chapter 2**

He looked at them and saw that the words had flown out of them. He said, "How can I give the Jewish people the tablets with no substance? Rather, I will grab them and break them."

Approach #4 (Meshech Chokmah, Shemot 32:19): Faith in the Wrong Places

כאשר ראו כי "בושש משה", נפלו מאמונתם ובקשו לעשות להם עגל ולהוריד
על הצורה ההיא רוח ממעל ולשפוט על זה כי הוא מרכבה לאלקות...ועל זה
צווח משה ככרוכיא: האם תדמו כי אני ענין ואיזו קדושה בלתי מצות ה', עד כי
בהעדר כבוד עשיתם לכם עגל! חלילה, גם אני איש כמוכם, והתורה אינה תלויה
בי, ואף אם לא באתי היתה התורה במציאותה בלי שינוי חלילה

When they saw that Moshe delayed (from coming down the mountain)

they lost their faith, and sought out a foreign god to use as a conduit for God... and this is why Moshe was enraged: "Do you think that I am important? What holiness is there other than God? To the extent that in my absence you make a calf! Heaven forbid, I am a person just like you, and the Torah does not rely on me, and even if I were not to .have come, the Torah would not change

Approach 5: Casting his lot with the People

Shemot Rabbah 46:1

He saw that there was no hope for the Children of Israel to be forgiven, so he threw his lot in with theirs and broke the tablets. Then he said to God: they sinned, and I sinned by breaking the tablets. If you forgive them, forgive me, too... And if you don't forgive them, don't forgive me, either...

שמות רבה מ"ו:א'

רָאָה שָׂאִין לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲמִידָה וְחֵבֶר נִפְשׁוּ
עִמָּהֶם וְשִׁבַּר אֶת הַלְּחֹת. וְאָמַר לְהִקְדוּשׁ
בְּרוּךְ הוּא: הֵם חָטְאוּ וְאֲנִי חָטָאתִי,
שְׁשִׁבַרְתִּי אֶת הַלְּחֹת. אִם מוֹחֵל אַתָּה
לָהֶם אִף לִי מִחֵל... וְאִם אֵין אַתָּה מוֹחֵל
לָהֶם, אֵל תִּמְחֹל לִי...

Now What?

Exodus 34:1

(1) And the Adonai said unto Moses: 'Hew for yourself two tables of stone like the first; and I will write upon the tables the words that were on the first tables, which you broke.

שמות ל"ד:א'

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה פְּסֹל לְךָ שְׁנֵי
לְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים וְכָתַבְתִּי עַל הַלְּחֹת
אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלְּחֹת
הַרְאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַרְתָּ.

Exodus 34:27-29

And the Adonai said to Moses: Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel. And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water; and he wrote down on the tablets the terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him.

שמות ל"ד:כ"ז-כ"ט

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב־לְךָ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּי עַל־פִּי | הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּרַתִּי אִתְּךָ בְּרִית וְאֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיְהִי־שָׁם עִם־יְהוָה אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתָה וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְחָת אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית עֲשֶׂר הַדְּבָרִים: וַיְהִי בִרְדַת מֹשֶׁה מֵהָר סִינַי וּשְׁנֵי לְחָת הָעֵדֻת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה בִּרְדָתוֹ מִן־הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו בַּדְּבָרוֹ: אָתּוֹ:

Shemot Rabbah 47:6

(6) "... And Moshe did not know that rays illuminated the skin of his face" - and from where did Moshe get rays of splendor? ... Rabbi Yehudah Bar Nachman says, in the name of Rabbi Shimeon Ben Lakish: [Moshe] was writing with a reed that had a bit left over, and he passed it on his head, and from that reed the rays of splendor were made, as it is written "And Moshe did not know that rays illuminated the skin of his face."

שמות רבה מ"ז:ו'

(ו).... ומֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו, וּמֵהֵיכָן נִטַּל מֹשֶׁה קַרְנֵי הַהוֹד...רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בַּר נַחֲמָן בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן לֵקִישׁ אָמַר עַד שֶׁהָיָה כּוֹתֵב בְּקוֹלְמוֹס נִשְׁתַּיֵּיר קַמְעָא, וְהָעֵבִירוּ עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וּמִמֶּנּוּ נַעֲשׂוּ לוֹ קַרְנֵי הַהוֹד, שְׁנַאֲמַר: וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו.

Talmud Tractate Bava Batra 14b

Rav Huna said... the [full] tablets and the broken tablets lay [side by side] in the *Aron* (Holy Ark).

Berakhot 8b

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi further advised:

And be careful to continue to respect **an elder who has forgotten his Torah knowledge due to circumstances beyond his control.** Even though he is no longer a Torah scholar, he must still be respected for the Torah that he once possessed. **As we say:** Both **the tablets** of the Covenant **and the broken tablets are placed in the Ark** of the Covenant in the Temple. Even though the first tablets were broken, their sanctity obligates one not to treat them with contempt. An elder who forgot the Torah knowledge he once possessed is likened to these broken tablets.

ברכות ח' ב

וְהִזְהִירוּ בְזִקְנֵי שִׁשְׁכַּח תְּלִמּוּדוֹ מִחֻמַּת
אוֹנָסוֹ. דְּאִמְרֵינָן: לוֹחֹת וְשִׁבְרֵי לוֹחֹת
מוֹנְחֹת בְּאָרוֹן.

From Dena Weiss, “Carrying and Carrying On” at <http://hadar.org/torah-resource/carrying-and-carrying#source-6450>

The first luchot are not discarded, but neither are they reassembled; they are to remain forever broken. And they are recognized as valuable, as worth keeping, in their broken state. If any being could turn back time and restore the luchot, it would be God—who heals the sick and revives the dead—but here God chooses not to restore. Instead of telling Moshe to fix the broken tablets, God tells Moshe to hold on to them, to carry them.

The first lesson to be learned from the way that Moshe carried is actually a lesson derived from this choice that God makes. God does not promise Moshe that He is going to fix what is broken, nor does He provide Moshe with instructions to fix the tablets. Instead God says, “These tablets are broken. That is what they are now. Your obligation to them is to carry them.”

Often, when we are confronted with difficult situations and the people who are suffering through them, our first inclination is to try to resolve the problem. We want to troubleshoot, provide advice, go back to the source, and address the issue. God’s choice to keep the luchot broken teaches us that sometimes, the right path is simply to acknowledge when things are broken, to look at the pain, and to suffer with those who are suffering. Sometimes the right approach is to leave things as they are, to listen instead of to speak, to hold rather than to fix.

This approach is particularly critical for three reasons. First, even when we’re able to fix the problem, even when we know exactly what to do and how to help, we first need to acknowledge the brokenness. The shattering itself is traumatic, even if the brokenness is later made whole.

Second, when we don't rush in to fix the problem ourselves, we create the space and the opportunity for the person who is suffering to solve their own issues. When we're silent but affirming, we can say, "What are you going to do about it and how can I support you?" instead of, "This is clearly too much for you. I'll take care of it." Not only did God not restore the original luchot, He told Moshe to make the replacement luchot himself [Exodus 34:1, "God said to Moshe, craft for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones. And I will write the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke."] Indeed, Moshe does construct the second tablets, and when he comes down with the finished product, he is literally beaming.

The final reason why cultivating a more hands-off approach is essential is that more often than we might like to admit, we aren't qualified to fix the problems with which we are presented. We need to train ourselves in holding, in being present, and being attentive so that when the time inevitably comes when holding is all that we can do, we will do it well and appreciate its value.

Golden Calf

Rabbi Jill Hammer

I confess it didn't look like God
to me, but maybe it looked like God
to someone. One never knows what that one
looks like, as seen behind a cloud
on the top of a mountain, or hiding
in a scraggly thornbush among sheep,
or in the howl of wind moving the sea,
slipping children out of a womb
into freedom, or maybe tucking a blanket
into a floating basket.
And when they later said: no, that's not what
God looks like; you deserve to die
for making such an error;
how could you mistake a gold monstrosity
for God? I thought: you too mistake things for God—
priests and prophets with staves and snakes,
laws engraved in stone,
the way your household is organized,
who's on top and who isn't.
You too grope toward the ineffable,
weaving cherubim into a curtain that screens nothing.
If it was a mistake, it's one among a thousand mistakes
like a straw among piles of hay. Perhaps
before we point fingers, before we shatter tablets

and set kin against kin, we should sit in the silence
one more minute. We all give our earrings
to make something. What's it going to be?



Made with the Sefaria Source Sheet Builder
www.sefaria.org/sheets