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TERUMAH

The Broken Luchos

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Terumah - The Broken Luchos & Purim

The Broken Luchos In The Aron: Our Failures In Torah Learning Are Also A Part of Torah

Parashas Terumah describes the making of the *keilim* (the vessels) in the *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle). The most important vessel in the *Mishkan*, as well as in the *Beis HaMikdash*, was the *Aron* (the holy ark), which was stored in the *Kodesh Kodashim* (the Holy of Holies). Inside the *Aron*, the *Luchos* (the tablets) were stored. The *Gemara* explains that the *Aron* housed the *Luchos* as well as the shards of the original set of *Luchos* that were broken. Thus, the *Aron* kept both a complete set of *Luchos* within it, as well as a broken pair of *Luchos*.

This is a hint that the *Aron* (which represents the Torah) contains not only that which is perfect and complete (represented by the second pair of *Luchos*, which was whole). The *Aron* also contains that which is “broken” (represented by the first pair of *Luchos*, of which the broken shards of it were placed as well in the *Aron*).

Chazal teach that “Hashem looked into the Torah, and created the world”. *Chazal* also taught that Hashem built several worlds and then destroyed them, until He kept this world. This can also be referring to the original set of *Luchos*, which were broken and destroyed, which was the original “Torah” that Hashem looked into to create our world. The second set of *Luchos*, which we currently have in our world, is the “world” that Hashem kept and created from the original Torah. Thus the shards of the *Luchos* that were kept

in the *Aron* symbolized that there is still a trace of the original Torah that is found within our world, even though we lost it with the breaking of the original set of *Luchos*.

Therefore, Hashem didn’t simply get rid of the first set of *Luchos*, nor did we lose the words of the original Torah that was contained in the first *Luchos* (even though the letters flew out of the *Luchos* after they were broken). Rather, the first set of *Luchos* remains with us, in the form of these shards. On a more inner level, this refers to all of the “shards” that we go through in our own difficulties in This World, of which there are many.

This is not only referring to a person who was learning Torah and then left it. That is but a superficial understanding. Rather, the “broken shards” of the first set of *Luchos* remains with us, within our Torah learning itself. That means that even when we are weak in Torah learning, this is also part of Torah learning, because the “broken shards” of the Torah are also included in the Torah. One needs to be aware of this as he’s going through a dismal period in his Torah learning, to recognize that these “broken shards” of his Torah learning is still included in his Torah learning.

The broken shards in the *Aron* were from the first set of *Luchos*, and this was the original Torah that Hashem looked into to create the many worlds before this world, which He destroyed before He kept this world. Ever since the breaking of the *Luchos*, the personal

“broken shards” of each person are also included in Torah, for they are like the broken shards of the original *Luchos* that remained in the *Aron*.

The *Aron* gets its name from the word “*ohr*” (light); there was a special spiritual illumination contained in it. Thus, not only were the second, complete pair of *Luchos* illuminated by the *Aron*’s light, but even the broken shards of the first set of *Luchos* were illuminated by the *Aron*’s light.

Purim: The Light Instead of Destruction

This is relevant as well to the approaching day of Purim.

We are taught that the words “*Arur Haman*” (“Cursed is Haman”) has the same *gematria* (numerical value in Hebrew) as the word “*shever*”, “broken”. [The connection is as follows.]

Haman decreed genocide upon the Jewish people, who wanted to kill every single Jew in one day – all Jewish men, women, and children at once; in issuing such a decree, he was really trying to destroy the entire world, for the nation of Yisrael is the foundation of the existence of the world. As the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* explains, if the Jewish people would cease, the universe would collapse, because the entire existence of the universe is sustained through the existence of the Jewish people. Haman’s decree was therefore a decree of destruction of the entire world, not just a decree to get rid of the Jews. Thus, Haman was trying to return the world back to its *shever*/broken state. It was therefore the greatest threat that the entire world ever faced.

A similar situation occurred by the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said to the Jewish people, “If you accept the Torah, good. If not, I will return the world to nothingness.” This was also a threat of “*shever*” (destruction) to the entire world, because if the nation of Yisrael would have ceased, there would be no more world. This possibility of *shever* returned in the times of Haman’s decree, with a threat to annihilate the entire Jewish people.

In the end, that *shever*/destruction never happened. Haman’s thoughts didn’t come to fruition, and instead the opposite happened: “*To the Jews, there was light.*” Instead of *shever*/destruction, there was a revelation of *ohr*/light.

How could it be that *ohr*/light could come in place of *shever*/destruction? The secret to this is contained in the broken shards of the *Luchos*, which were contained in the *Aron*, which received the *ohr*/light of the *Aron*. The “broken shards” of the *Luchos* in the *Aron* show us that no matter how much we become broken – whether in the general sense or in the individual sense – our “broken shards” can reveal light in its place.

This is the depth behind the days of Purim. Purim revealed that just as the broken shards of the *Luchos* are still kept in the *Aron* and they receive the light of the *Aron*, and they can still be in the *Kodesh Kodashim* which is Hashem’s innermost chamber, so could a threat of our destruction reveal a great spiritual light. Instead of being destroyed, instead of being turned into totally broken pieces as Haman intended to do to us, a great light came in its place. This light, which is revealed precisely amidst a situation of imminent destruction, is contained deep in the Torah, and it existed on a more subtle

level as well, in the shards of the *Luchos* which were kept in the *Aron*.

The Proper Way To View Our Failures

The shards of the first set of *Luchos* represent the root of all *shever*/brokenness and destruction, but there are many branches that stem from the root. Those branches are referring to the many different situations of *shever* (brokenness) that people have gone through since the beginning of time until today. These are times when we fail, when we feel down in the dumps, when we have become weakened, and we feel like broken pieces.

Of such times, it is said, “*Much light comes from darkness.*” When a person is going through a difficult period, there are two different ways of how he may view this situation – one of them is and the other is the inner, true perspective.

The superficial perspective on such hard times of life is that they are difficult, and they require hard work to get through them, etc. and if we don't merit pulling ourselves together when the going gets tough, we become broken and we fall apart. The inner, truer perspective to view these situations, though, is to realize that it's a part of our life to sometimes become stuck in struggles and difficulty.

Mistakes In Our Torah Learning

In learning Torah, this is especially the case. As an example, when learning the words of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, you can see that many times when he asks a question, he will have

the answer at times, but other times he will remain with a strong question, and the matter is left unanswered. These struggles with understanding are a necessary part of learning Torah.

The *Gemara* says that “a person cannot arrive at the *halachah* unless he has first stumbled in the words of Torah.” It doesn't say that sometimes a person will stumble when learning Torah. Rather, it says that a person does not acquire Torah unless he first stumbles in it! That means that without stumbling in it, a person won't be able to arrive at the *halachah*.

Let us understand deeply that everything in Creation has its root in the Torah, and therefore a part of each person's personal share in the Torah is to first stumble in it. There is no other way on This World to acquire Torah; it has to be this way, and there is no way around it.

Just as Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, so is every person's Torah the root of his own world, and a fetus learns in the mother's womb all of the Torah that belongs to his own share. This part of one's Torah learning can only be acquired through stumbling in it. This is said especially of knowing the *halachah*, but it is also true in the active sense, that a person will actually stumble.

Just as Hashem originally built several worlds before this one and He destroyed them, so does a person have exertion when learning Torah and he is “building worlds”, he is exerting his mind to arrive at clarity of understanding, and he also stumbles before arriving at knowing the *halachah*. A person will make mistakes when learning Torah as he

is trying to understand it, but he still loves to learn Torah.

When one has such a perspective towards his mistakes in Torah learning, he can view his failings as being a part of Torah learning. When one makes mistakes in his Torah learning, even though he has fallen, he is still within the Torah. He is still receiving the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, and is gladdening Hashem with every word of Torah he learns, even if he doesn't get to the true meaning of what he is learning. The mistakes one makes in his Torah learning are a part of his Torah learning and they are included in the blessing over the Torah that one makes in the morning, and these are the "broken shards" of the *Luchos* in the *Aron*.

The "first set of *Luchos*" represents one's mistakes in his Torah learning, and the "second set of *Luchos*" represents the true understanding in Torah that one reaches after he has gone through the struggles, mistakes, and exertion of getting there.

This is not only true regarding learning Torah. It is also applicable to the many mistakes we make in our life, which we go through on a regular basis. In the times of Purim, the Jewish people had stumbled "big time", to the point that the entire generation deserved death. According to one opinion in the Sages, it was because they bowed the idol by the party of Achashverosh. The entire generation stumbled in this sin, and there was never a time in history like this in which everyone had stumbled. But deep within this terrible and great mistake, the light of their salvation was sprouting, because Hashem was already preparing Haman's downfall.

So whenever a person finds himself within a situation of *shever*, where he has fallen into a

bad mistake, he should know that this is like the broken shards of the *Luchos*, which are also a part of the Torah.

A hint to this is that the word "*shever*" is from the words "*shav ra*", "evil shall go back". Therefore, *shever* is not simply a mistake that one has fallen into. Rather, one must understand as he is going through the *shever* that this is a part of Torah as well.

The *Gemara* says that one should be careful to honor even a Torah scholar who has forgotten all of his Torah learning, for he is like a broken pair of *Luchos*, which still retains the holiness of a *Sefer Torah*. When a person is learning Torah and he is struggling to understand it and he is making mistakes in trying to understand what he is learning, and it is breaking him into pieces, he must know that this is a necessary part of learning Torah, and he resembles the broken shards of the *Luchos*, which must be honored and respected.

But this is only the case if one has this understanding. If one doesn't have this perspective, he thinks that his mistakes while learning Torah are simply his own errors and mistakes! He doesn't realize that they are really a form of the broken shards of the *Luchos*.

The superficial perspective of a person is to focus on the mistake itself, as if it is the "broken shards" caused by a person when he breaks things in anger. We find that both Haman and Achashverosh grew angry, and this was certainly a mistake in the sense of downfall, unlike the mistakes one has when learning Torah.

When a person has this deep perspective, though, he knows that the words of Torah can be found even amongst failure and mistakes.

The Root That Leads To Major Failure: Conceit

What, indeed, is the root of *shever*, to fail and become broken as a result? There is a verse, “*Before being broken, there is pride.*” The root trait that leads to failure is the trait of *gaavah*, pride and conceitedness. The direct result of these failures is anger. The traits of conceit and anger are thus the two traits that result in the “downfall” side to *shever*.

Haman was conceited, and even though he was honored by all, he grew despondent and angry after Mordechai wouldn’t bow to him, saying “*All of this is not worth anything to me.*” From here we can see how conceited he was. And what resulted from all of his conceitedness? “*And Haman was filled with anger*” – he wanted to destroy Mordechai, as well as all of the Jewish people. So it was conceit which caused his downfall, and it resulted in anger.

Holy Gaavah

When a person is in a state of *shever* (when he realizes that he is failing), he can access the holy kind of *gaavah*, which is “*And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem*”. This can be accomplished even though he hasn’t yet fixed his *middos*,

The true *gaavah* stems from the holy element of fire in the soul, which is the fire of the Torah (“*Are my words not like fire, so says Hashem*”). But a person contains a mixture of good and evil, ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil). The *Gemara* says that the *Eitz HaDaas* is the Torah’s allusion to Haman, so there is both good and

evil mixed in a person’s trait of *gaavah*, and this is what leads to all of a person’s failures.

But in spite of this, one should recognize that the root of *gaavah* itself is good and holy, for the soul at its root is exalted. It is just that the good in our *gaavah* is also mixed with evil, and for this reason we also stumble when learning Torah. Whenever we make mistakes when learning Torah, it is actually due to *gaavah* that has become mixed in.

Falling “Within” The Torah, Not Outside

In any situation that a person is in, one should never see himself as apart from the Torah, even when he has stumbled in it. Instead, one should consider himself within the Torah, and then even when he has failings, he will be falling “within” the Torah, rather than “outside” of the Torah. This is how a person with a truthful perspective lives.

Usually when people fall, they think they have fallen “outside” of the Torah. They think that they have become apart from Torah and with this perspective, it is then very hard to recover from the failures. The true perspective towards failure when learning Torah, by contrast, is to realize that these failures are also a part of learning Torah. Although such Torah is still incomplete and it is not like the *Luchos* itself, it is at least like the broken shards of the *Luchos*, which, although not as holy, are still holy.

When one acquires this perspective, he elevates his failures even as he is amongst them. It is nothing but imagination if it ever seems to a person that he can fall “outside” of the Torah. This is a huge problem that the

world has been plunged into ever since the first sin. The Torah fills all of reality, and therefore, even when a person falls and stumbles, it is also from the Torah, and within the Torah.

Purim Vs. Yom Kippur

There is a teaching of our Sages that “Purim is like Yom Kippur”¹ – therefore, just as on Yom Kippur the *Kohen Gadol* entered the *Kodesh Kodashim*, so do we enter the “*Kodesh Kodashim*” on Purim. There are many ways to understand this matter, but one of the ways is because we can access the “*Luchos*” as well as the “broken shards of the *Luchos*” in our own soul, which were both in the *Aron*, in the *Kodesh Kodashim*.

Yom Kippur is a time of forgiveness, and this is but one part of life, which is *kulo l’Hashem*, “entirely for Hashem”. The other part of our life is like Purim, and as the Vilna Gaon explains, “Purim is *kulo lachem*”, “entirely for you”. Purim reveals that we can keep entering the *Kodesh Kodashim*, for it contains the deep perspective that we are never “outside” the *Kodesh Kodashim*. Continuously. This is unlike Yom Kippur, which is the perspective that we can only enter it once a year. Whenever we fail, fall, and stumble, we can still view ourselves as still being within the *Kodesh Kodashim*.

This is the depth of the light contained in Purim. Come what may, we must view ourselves as always being within the *Aron*’s light, and that we are never really “outside” the *Kodesh Kodashim*.

When this perspective is absorbed, a person lives constantly “before Hashem”, as in the *Kodesh Kodashim*. No matter how many failures and mistakes a person will go through, these mistakes don’t have to uproot him from this deep place that he is connected to.

And so, a person needs to internalize that as long as he connects his soul to the world of Torah, even when he fails, his failures will be within the Torah and not outside of it. When one internalizes this perspective in his heart, he is always connected to the light of the *Aron*, and the light of the *Aron* will return him to even the original *Luchos*....

In Conclusion

May Hashem merit us to repair the “broken shards” of the *Luchos*, but in the meantime, before we merit this, may we at least merit that even our failures, the “broken shards of the *Luchos*”, should always be “within the *Aron*”, and never outside of it. Just as we are purified on Yom Kippur, so can we purified through Purim, constantly, whether we are in a situation of “*Luchos*” or “broken *Luchos*” - for we can always be “*nochach pnei Hashem*” - facing Hashem.

¹ *Tikkunei HaZohar* 421