

Shemot Rabbah 46:1

The Lord said to Moses: Carve two tablets of stone like the first (34:1). Thus it is written, And that He would tell you the secrets of wisdom (Job 11:6). You find that when God said to Moses: Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely (Ex. 32:7), Moses still grasped the Tablets in his hand, refusing to believe that Israel had sinned, and saying: "Unless I see it [with my own eyes], I cannot believe it," as it says, As soon as Moses came near the camp (ib. 19). He did not break them before he had actually seen with his own eyes. Woe betide those who give testimony on what their eyes have not beheld! Was it then likely that Moses refused to believe God when He told him Your people have acted basely? [Of course not;] but Moses intended thereby to teach Israel a useful lesson, namely, that even when one hears a thing from the most trustworthy source, he must not accept the testimony and act on his word until his own eyes have witnessed it.

Another explanation: Moses broke the Tablets because the words flew away from them, for it says, *And I looked, and, behold, you have sinned against the Lord your God (Deut. 9:16)*. Moses saw that they had sinned, and he broke the Tablets. It can be compared to a prince who took for himself a wife, and wrote for her a marriage document that he gave to one of her intimate friends to keep for her in trust. In the course of time, evil rumors circulated concerning her. What did that friend do? He tore up the marriage document, saying [to himself]: "Far better for her to be judged as an unmarried woman than as one married." This is also how Moses reasoned to himself: "Unless I break the Tablets, Israel will have no further existence, for it says, *Whoever sacrifices to a god other than the Lord alone shall be proscribed*" (Ex. 22:19). For this reason did he break them, saying to God: "They did not know what was written on them."

Another explanation of *And I looked, and, behold, you have sinned against the Lord your God*. When he realized that there was no future hope for Israel, he linked his own fate with theirs and broke the Tablets, saying to God: "They have sinned; well, I have now also sinned in breaking the Tablets. If You will forgive them, forgive me also," as it says, *Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!*" (ib. 32:32). R. Aha said: He did not budge from there before he had cleared away their sin, as it says, *And Moses cleared away [their sin], and went down (Ex. 32:15)*. After he had removed their sin, Moses said: "Israel now has had one to plead for them, but whom have I to plead for me?" And he began to feel remorse for having broken the Tablets, but God reassured him, saying: "Do not grieve about the first Tablets. They only contained the Ten Commandments, but in the two Tablets I am about to give you now, there will also be Laws, Midrash, and Aggadot." That is the meaning of, *He would tell you the secrets of wisdom, for there are many sides to sagacity (Job 11:6)*. "What is more, you are now informed that I will pardon your sin," as it says, *And know that God has overlooked for you some of your iniquity (ib.)*.