

PARASHAT KI TISA



חרות על הלוחות Engraved on the Tablets

■ The Tablets of the Covenant

The People of Israel received a tremendous shock following their sinful worship of the Golden Calf: Moshe smashed to the ground the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, and G-d threatened to destroy the nation and replace it with another. Moshe stood in pleading prayer for many days before he was informed that G-d had repealed the decree. Moshe was then immediately commanded to prepare new tablets:

פֶּסֶל לָךְ שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים...

Sculpt yourself two stone tablets like the first ones... (Sh'mot 34,1)

Externally, the two sets of tablets were the same in every respect: They were both made of stone, and, as the verse continues, they were written by the same Divine Writer and included the same words:

וְכָתַבְתִּי עַל הַלְּחֹת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלְּחֹת הָרֵאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ.

*And I will write on the tablets the words that were
on the first tablets that you broke.*

The only difference between them was the manner in which they were fashioned. The second set was hewn by Moshe Rabbeinu, as the above verse tells us, while the first ones were sculpted by Hashem:

וְהַלְּחֹת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱ-לֹהִים הָמָּה וְהַמְּכֻתָּב מְכֻתָּב אֱ-לֹהִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלְּחֹת.

*The [first] tablets were the work of G-d, and
the writing was that of G-d, engraved on the tablets.* (32,16)

Was there an intrinsic difference between the stone tablets made by G-d and those that were man-made? We must find the reason why the Torah takes the trouble to emphasize that one set was fashioned by Hashem and the other by Moshe.

■ Two-Way Writing

G-d's creations are designed in a very specific manner. Consider, for example, the human body. Its development is programmed and encoded in the nucleus of each of its billions of cells. The genetic code within dictates the singularly unique development of each and every person, making him totally inimitable in the world.

We know that an embryo's hand and fingers are not sculpted out of a flesh-and-blood glob; rather, the fingers *grow from* the hand, according to an inner plan. The same is true for the eyes, eyelashes, and every other part of the body. The entire world, too, was created in the same way. It developed from a tiny point, according to a pre-set Divine plan that produced the mountains and valleys, the river beds and the oceans, and every other feature of the Earth's surface. The Talmud teaches (Chagigah 12a):

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One created the world, it went on expanding like two unraveling strands of thread, until He scolded it and brought it to a standstill... This is what Resh Lakish said: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'I am G-d Sha-dai' (B'reshit 17,1)? G-d is saying, "I am He Who said to the world: Dai, Enough!"

In short, the world developed from within. The first stone tablets, as well, follow this pattern. They are among the few things that the Mishna tells us were created during the first Sabbath eve in history:

Ten things were created on Sabbath eve at twilight. [Among them were] the letters, words, and the Tablets. (Pirkei Avot 5,6)

The Tablets of the Law and their embedded letters were fashioned according to the above specific method of growth: from within a nucleus that continued to develop according to a Divine plan concealed within. This plan dictated how the stone would expand in certain parts and recede in others to form the letters of the Ten Commandments.

The second set of Tablets was quite different, however. Moshe took a hunk of stone from the mountain, which he hammered, chiseled and carved

until it became a flat surface upon which G-d would engrave the Ten Commandments. Moshe took these actions *upon* the stone, that is, from the outside to the inside – while G-d’s sculpting of the original tablets was a developmental process from within.

■ Two-Way Hearing

Also following this pattern is human hearing, of which there are two types: External and internal. Our “regular” hearing comes from outside in, and the brain then interprets the vibrations and translates them into sounds and tones. This is similar to the manner in which G-d wrote on the second Tablets after Moshe sculpted them: from the outside, onto an already existing article. This is also how Israel chose to receive the Torah: via Moshe Rabbeinu’s voice, which cut through the air and caused the eardrums of every listener of Israel to vibrate.

The second type of hearing, the “prophetic” type, is very different. It comes from within, as if from a dream, towards the outside. This type is like a Divine creation, designed according to an inner program that comes from deep inside.

The great intensities involved in prophetically hearing G-d’s voice were too much for the Nation of Israel. Instead, they chose to hear “externally,” via Moshe’s voice, as Moshe later recounted to them:

וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַעְכֶּם אֶת הַקּוֹל מִתּוֹךְ הַחֹשֶׁךְ וְהָהָר בֵּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וַתִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי ... וַתֹּאמְרוּ...

When you heard the Divine voice from the darkness and the mountain aflame, you [plural] approached me and said:

לָמָּה נָמוּת כִּי תֹאכְלֵנוּ הָאֵשׁ הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת,
אִם יִסְפִּים אֲנַחְנוּ לִשְׁמַע אֶת קוֹל ה' אֲלֵהֵינוּ עוֹד וּמָתָנוּ.

*“Why should we die when this great fire consumes us,
by continuing to hear the voice of Hashem our G-d?”*

קִרְב אֶתָּה וּשְׁמַע ... וְאֵת תִּדְבָר אֵלֵינוּ אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבֵר ה' אֲלֵהֵינוּ אֵלֶיךָ
וּשְׁמַעְנוּ וְעָשִׂינוּ.

*You, Moshe, should approach and listen to what G-d tells – and then
relay to us all that Hashem has spoken to you,
and we will hear and we will fulfill.”* (D’varim 5,20-24)

This is the background for our Sages’ Talmudic teaching: “If the First Tablets had not been broken, Israel never would have forgotten the Torah” (Eruvin

54a). The First Tablets were introduced with the Divine Prophetic voice, which sprouted forth an inner spiritual structure of man's will; had this structure remained, anything imbibed through it could never be erased, just as a person's organs never change.

This is not the case with an external voice, heard via the ears and impressed onto the brain in a non-permanent manner, whose message can ultimately disappear.

■ The Limits of Free Choice

Using terms employed by the world of Kabbalah, we can say that when the first Tablets were handed down, the light of *Keter*, crown, appeared. This represents the absolute Divine will, that which dictates to man his desires and greatly restricts his free choice. When these Tablets were broken, this light did not again appear; instead, the second Tablets brought with them the light of *Hokhmah*, wisdom: logical and easily acceptable principles that Moshe Rabbeinu explained to Bnei Yisrael. The Torah's first main section of laws begins with these words:

וַאֲלֵהֶם הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תָּשִׂים לִפְנֵיהֶם.

These are the laws that you [Moshe] shall place before them. (Sh'mot 21,1)

Rashi explains that Moshe was commanded as follows: "Do not think that you should teach them the chapter or law twice or three times until they simply know it by heart, without teaching them the reasons for it. Rather, you must '*place [it] before them*,' like food is placed on a table, ready to eat." Moshe, of course, fulfills this command precisely as G-d told him:

זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

This is the Torah that Moshe placed before Bnei Yisrael. (D'varim 4,44)

He also emphasizes this point in his parting speech to Israel:

וּמִי גוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים צְדִיקִים
כָּל הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לִפְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם.

And which great nation is it that has correct and just statutes and laws, as this entire Torah that I place before you today? (verse 8)

The verse uses the word *tzadikim*, "correct and just," to refer to the laws, meaning: "You can easily see that G-d's laws are totally reasonable and just." This is not an absolute advantage, however; it can easily boomerang. For if we can "easily see" and understand something, what guarantee is there that we will not begin to feel differently one day and adopt different systems of

logic! If this happens, the basis on which the wisdom of Torah is based is liable to be undercut, and Torah could be abandoned, Heaven forbid.

We must therefore delve deeper into the fact that Moshe had to teach the Torah to Israel. When Israel requested that G-d not speak to them directly, but rather have Moshe tell them the commandments, Hashem agreed:

הֵיטִיבוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרוּ.

They have spoken well in all that they said. (D'varim 5,25)

At first, this is practically incomprehensible. Why would G-d praise Israel's weakness and their inability to accept the prophetic voice directly from the Source?

The answer is rooted in our understanding of the changeover from the First Tablets to the Second Tablets. Just as the Tablets “descended” from the level of *Keter* to that of *Hokhmah*, wisdom, there was a similar descent from G-d's voice to that of Moshe – in keeping with G-d's desire to found the world on the basis of Free Choice.

When the First Tablets were given, G-d's voice burst forth in direct prophecy, essentially forcing itself on man and restricting his ability to choose freely. Hearing G-d directly, man can barely resist, as the prophet states:

וְאִמַּרְתִּי לֹא אֶזְכְּרוּ וְלֹא אֶדְבֵּר עוֹד בְּשֵׁמוֹ
וְהָיָה בְּלִבִּי כְּאֵשׁ בִּעֶרְתִּי עֶצֶר בְּעֶצְמֹתַי וְנֹלְאִיתִי כִּלְכֵּל וְלֹא אוּכַל.

If I were to say, “I will not mention Him and I will no longer speak in His name,” the prophecy would remain in my heart like a burning fire, confined in my bones, and I would tire in trying to contain it without success. (Jeremiah 20,9)

But Israel requested to hear from Moshe instead, providing them with more room to make their own decisions as to whether or not to adhere. Yes, the changeover from “the Divine will” to “human wisdom and choice” increases the risk that they will not listen; but when they *do* choose to follow G-d's word, their decision will be even more valuable and precious – and Hashem therefore approves. This is why He says:

מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה לָהֶם לִירְאָה אֶתִּי וְלִשְׁמֹר אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי כָּל הַיָּמִים
לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָהֶם וּלְבָנֵיהֶם לְעֹלָם.

Would that their heart [remain] like this for them, fearing Me and keeping all My commandments forever, so that it will be well with them and with their children forever! (D'varim 5,26)

Why is this phrased as a prayer? Because Hashem has just removed His own authority to determine man's actions, leaving it up to man himself.

This raises another question: Will man forever have Free Will in its current form? The Prophet Jeremiah answers in the negative. He says that when the End of Days arrives, the boundaries of our Free Choice will be greatly reduced. This diminution will be necessarily linked with a transformation from “external hearing” to “internal hearing,” that is, from the familiar type of teaching between a teacher and his students, to prophetic instruction emanating from within each person.

כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרַת אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם נְאֻם ה' .
נִתְּתִי אֶת תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם וְעַל לִבָּם אֶכְתָּבֶנָּה...

*For this is the covenant that I will forge with Israel after those days,
says G-d: I have placed My Torah within them,
and on their heart I will write it... (Jeremiah 31,32)*

This writing is clearly not of the regular type, but rather a prophetic, inner voice that designs a person's will in accordance with G-d's laws. Yes, some Free Will remains, but it will be like that of a prophet. What will schools look like in those upcoming days? The Prophet Yirmiyahu has a succinct description:

וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו לֵאמֹר, דַּעוּ אֶת ה' .
כִּי כֹלָם יֵדְעוּ אוֹתִי לְמִקְטָנָם וְעַד גְּדוּלָם נְאֻם ה'...

*A man will not teach his friend, nor will a man teach his
brother, saying, “Know G-d!” For everyone will know Me,
from their youngest to their oldest, says G-d. (verse 33)*

Apparently, schools will no longer be needed, nor teachers...

■ Do It Yourself – Actively

The concepts presented above will serve us well as we try to understand a fascinating law of the Sukkot holiday: the law of “*taaseh, v'lo min he'asui*”, which literally means, “Make it, and not have it be made.” One must actively build a Sukkah – specifically, the *s'chach* – and not simply enable it to be built of itself. For instance, one might build a Sukkah easily by digging into the side of a large pile of grain, and presto!, he will have a room with walls of grain topped off by *s'chach*. But this is precisely what is not allowed, for he did not place the *s'chach* atop the walls himself.

This law, mentioned in the Mishna (Sukkah 1,8), is derived from the following verse:

חג הסוכת תעשה לך שבועת ימים...

Make yourself the Sukkot festival, seven days... (D'varim 16,13)

The main part of a Sukkah is the *s'chach*, and the Torah commands us to “make it,” that is, to take direct action to place the *s'chach*; we may not merely indirectly bring about a situation in which the *s'chach* is already there.

Similarly, we must tie the strings of our *tzitzit* directly onto each corner of our four-cornered garments, as is written:

גדלים תעשה לך על ארבע כנפות כסותך...

*You shall make yourself twisted threads,
on the four corners of your garment...* (22,12)

This means that if a corner of the *tallit* was torn off with its fringes, it cannot be sewn back on to the garment – for this would be a violation of “make it, and not have it be made.” Rather, the fringes must be untied from the corner, the corner must be sewn back on, and the fringes can then be retied onto it.

This Halakhah also applies to the writing of Torah scrolls and mezuzot. The letters must be inked directly, and not fashioned via scratching out parts of an ink stain so that what remains is the letter.

These examples parallel the fashioning of the Tablets of the Covenant. Our actions must follow the pattern of the second set of Tablets, and not that of the first set. The letters must be actively written on the stone, and not be formed on their own in a developmental process.

Let us conclude with a prophecy of Ezekiel regarding the End of Days:

ונתתי לכם לב חדש ורוח חדשה אתו בקרבכם
והסרתי את לב האבן מבשרכם ונתתי לכם לב בשר.

*I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put within you,
and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh,
and I will give you a heart of flesh.*

ואת רוחי אתו בקרבכם ועשיתי את אשר בקחי תלכו...

*And I will put My spirit within you and bring it about that
you will walk in My statutes...* (Yechezkel 36,26-27)

