

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 26

Tetzave , Sicha 2

The Context:

According to well known Midrashim, after Moshe shattered the tablets, G-d conveyed not just his approval, but his pleasure in Moshe's actions.

This is alluded to in the verse, "I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke." (*Shemos 34:1*) In Hebrew, the words *asher shibarta*, "which you broke" can be read as "May your strength be true [*yishar kochacha*] due to the fact that you broke the tablets." (*Shabbos 87a*) This was even more emphatically conveyed by G-d's command to store the broken shards of the tablets alongside the second set in the ark. (*Devarim 10:2; Ritva to Shabbos 87*)

Clearly, this implies that the breaking of the tablets was not only acceptable because of an unrelated outcome, such as the preservation of the Torah's honor or of the Jewish people's lives, but that the breaking somehow enhanced the Torah itself.

How could the shattering of the tablets so to speak improve the Torah itself?

The Explanation?

Another Midrash relates that Moshe was pained at the loss of the tablets. G-d reassured him saying, "Do not be pained at the loss of the first tablets, for they only contained ten pronouncements, while the second tablets which I am giving you contain laws, Midrash, aggados... it is a "double salvation". (*Shemos Rabbah, 46*)

Why would the expansiveness of the Oral Torah only be given in the second set, after the shattering of the first?

Torah is Divine wisdom; it is infinite and inherently beyond the grasp of mortal intellect. G-d has condensed the Torah so that it can conform to some parameters of human wisdom, but that is only on the surface. In reality, it remains Divine wisdom. In order for a Jew to truly assimilate the Divine wisdom of the Torah, he or she cannot use only their mind, because the mind will not grasp the Divinity of the text, only the comprehensible surface. A person must transcend their ego entirely and empty themselves of their preoccupation with their own self. Then there is space within

the soul for the person to receive the Divine essence of Torah. As we recite at the end of the Amida prayer, “let my soul be like dust before all, open my heart to Your Torah.” Only if we achieve absolute self-transcendence can we welcome in Your Torah, G-d’s infinite wisdom.

When the Jewish people received the first tablets they were just chosen from all nations by G-d, elevated to be called a “priestly nation,” and brought to intensely lofty spiritual heights. They were, paradoxically, not receptive to the true infinity of the Divine wisdom, since they were in the thrall of their own spiritual enlightenment. Therefore, the tablets only contained a limited revelation of G-d’s wisdom.

But once Moshe shattered the tablets in front of them, the Jewish people were shocked into humility, into an understanding of their own fallibility and need to transcend their own self-conceptions. Then, they were ready to receive the limitless expanse of G-d’s Torah contained in the second tablets.

This is why both sets of tablets, broken and whole, were preserved in the ark. Torah demands two opposing attitudes: on the one hand, it demands the fullest expression of our independent intellect, our fullest sense of self, to understand and identify with the intellect of the Torah. On the other hand, it demands our utter surrender of our own sense of self and ego. How can both these thrusts be held in one person? The ark alludes to the infinite essence of G-d; it was a physical manifestation of the Divine paradox, as it both existed in space, yet it miraculously did not occupy space. In spiritual terms, the ark is the essence of the soul which is one with the Divine essence. When this dimension of the soul is expressed, it can “hold” both the shards of the tablets — the complete selflessness that opens us to the Divine infinity, and the whole tablets — the confidence and assertiveness that allows us to master the Torah.
