

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 34

Eikev, Sicha 1

The Context:

In parshas Eikev, Moshe recounts the events surrounding the sin of the golden calf and the anger it aroused within G-d. Referring to his act of shattering the tablets, Moshe says, “So I grasped the two tablets, cast them out of my two hands, and shattered them before your eyes.” (Devarim 9:17)

The Or Hachaim asks why Moshe reiterates “I grasped the two tablets” if he was already holding them on his descent down the mountain? What does this “grasping” allude to?

Preface to the Explanation:

A more fundamental question is asked about Moshe’s actions. The tablets seemingly belonged to the Jewish community, they were to be placed in the ark in the Mishkan, which is communally owned. How could Moshe destroy the assets of the community? Seemingly, this is

forbidden under the prohibitions of damages and theft?

Therefore, it stands to reason that the tablets did not actually belong to the community but to Moshe personally. The tablets were fashioned prior to the Mishkan and its vessels; they were not part of the Mishkan, but rather a distinct item that was later stored in the Mishkan. When the Torah describes G-d giving the first tablets to Moshe, it says, “When He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, stone tablets, written with the finger of G-d.” (Shemos 31:18) In its simplest sense, this implies that the Moshe was given full ownership of the tablets.

The Tanchuma records one opinion that maintains that the second tablets belonged to Moshe (“fashion for yourself,” in your merit, and they will be yours). Out of his devotion to the people and his generosity, Moshe gifted the second tablets (and the dialectic of Talmud that was given along with it) to the Jewish people.

Regarding the first set, it is seemingly unanimous that they were Moshe's private possession. Thus, when Moshe shattered the tablets, he did not destroy the community's possession, but his own.

The Explanation:

Now we can appreciate why the Torah relates that Moshe "grasped" the tablets prior to breaking them, even though they were already in his hand. Moshe had intended to gift the tablets to the Jewish people, just as he did with the second set. With this intention, the tablets did not fully enter his possession, they already were nominally transferred to the Jewish people. In order to ensure that he was not destroying their property, Moshe had to "grasp" the tablets to complete his acquisition of them and to nullify his earlier intention. Thus, when he broke them, he broke his own possession, not the community's.

On a deeper level, by taking possession of the tablets himself, Moshe ensured that the blame for their destruction would lie with him alone, and not the people. He wanted to remove the people entirely from any relationship with the tablets, so that they would not bear any responsibility.

The Equation:

The sages teach that the passing of the righteous is as difficult for G-d as the breaking of the tablets. This implies that there is a thematic connection between these two events.

The death of the righteous atones for the sins of the generation. But not just for their accidental sins (as a sacrifice would) but even for their intentional sins. The righteous person's influence and love for their people is so powerful that even when their soul departs the world, they insist on intervening for their generation and achieving forgiveness for them.

This is similar to the Moshe's breaking of the tablets: even though he was not implicated in the sin of the golden calf, he insisted on G-d forgiving them and sacrificed himself by taking responsibility for the tablet's shattering and diverting any fault from the Jewish people themselves.

This applies to the passing of the Rebbe's father as well, whose yahrzeit coincides with this reading. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak literally passed away in the prime of his life because of his literal self sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people. Certainly, then, his influence grows greater each year, and the effect he has on our generation continues to deepen as well.
