

## Broken Tablets

Tikkun Leil Shavuot 5772

Mayim Rabim

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Ex. 32<sup>15</sup> Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other. <sup>16</sup> The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, incised upon the tablets.

<sup>19</sup> As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

Ex. 34: <sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered.

Deut. 9 <sup>10</sup> And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God, with the exact words that the Lord had addressed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the Assembly.

<sup>17</sup> Thereupon I gripped the two tablets and flung them away with both my hands, smashing them before your eyes.

Deut. 10 <sup>1</sup> Thereupon the Lord said to me, "Carve out two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain; and make an ark of wood. <sup>2</sup> I will inscribe on the tablets the commandments that were on the first tablets that you smashed, and you shall deposit them in the ark."

1) Even the old man who has forgotten his learning must be treated tenderly, for were not the broken tablets placed in the Ark of the Covenant side by side with the whole ones? **Berachot 8b**

2) R. Yosef learned: *Which thou brakest and thou shall put them.* (Deut 10:2) [the juxtaposition of these words] teaches us that both the tablets and the fragments of the tablets were deposited in the Ark. And what does R. Judah make of this verse? He requires it for the lesson enunciated by Reish Lakish, who said Which thou brakest: God said to Moses, Thou hast done well to break.

**Bava Batra 14 b.**

3) Before the eyes of all Israel - This refers to the fact that his heart inspired him to shatter the Tablets before their eyes, as it is said *And I broke them before your eyes* (Devarim 9:17), and the opinion of the Holy One blessed be He, regarding this action agreed with his opinion, as it is stated that God said of the Tablets, *asher shavarta [which you broke]* (Shemot 34:1) *yyishar kohakha [may your strength be fitting]* because you broke them. **Rashi Devarim 34:12, based on Silberman translation**

4) G-d said to Moses: 'Do not be distressed over the First Tablets, which contained only the Ten Commandments. In the Second Tablets I am giving you, you will also have Halachah, Midrash and Aggadah.

**Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 46:1**

5) R. Judah bar Ilai taught: Two Arks journey with Israel in the wilderness – one in which the Torah was placed, and the other in which the Tablets broken by Moses were placed. The one in which the Torah was placed was kept in the Tent of Meeting; the other; containing the broken Tablets, would come and go with them. **The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah, eds. Bialik & Ravnitzky**

6) It was taught: The tablets were broken, yet the letters flew up. **Pesachim 87b**

7) Five incidents befell our ancestors on the Seventeenth of Tammuz, the Tablets were broken, the continual [daily] sacrifice was discontinued, the City [wall] was breached, Apostomos burned the Torah, and placed an image in the Sanctuary.  
**Mishnah Taanit Ch. 4:6**

8) Nothing is more whole than a broken heart.

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk**

### 9) **The Broken Tablets**

The broken tablets were also carried in an ark.

In so far as they represented everything shattered everything lost, they were the law of broken things, the leaf torn from the stem in a storm, a cheek touched in fondness once but now the name forgotten.

How they must have rumbled, clattered on the way even carried so carefully through the waste land, how they must have rattled around until the pieces broke into pieces, the edges softened crumbling, dust collected at the bottom of the ark ghosts of old letters, old laws. In so far as a law broken is still remembered these laws were obeyed. And in so far as memory preserves the pattern of broken things these bits of stone were preserved through many journeys and ruined days even, they say, into the promised land.

**—Rodger Kamenetz**

10) If the two sets of tablets represent developmental stages we go through in our spiritual and emotional development, the first tablets correspond to our youthful dreams and ideals. . . . The second tablets represent our more mature visions and dreams, which perhaps are not as lofty as our youthful visions and dreams but are more viable. . . . Gathering up the broken pieces suggests that we must salvage the essential elements of our youthful dreams and ideals and carry them forward on our journeys so that we can find a way to realize them in a more grounded fashion. For ultimately the whole and the broken live side by side in us all, as our broken dreams and shattered visions exist alongside our actual lives.  
**Estelle Frankel**