



Breaking the Third Tablets - Living during the Loss of shame Thoughts on Parashat "Ki Tisa"

By: Rabbi Kobi Weiss

The First Tablets were broken by Moses. It was a necessity.

People who worship the Golden Calf do not deserve heavenly tablets. These tablets would have become a "calf", in a sense of worshiping a divine amulet, a sculpture, it is idolatry. People who are in need of a "transitional object" in order to worship God and cannot internalize God inside themselves, will also base God's given Torah and the authority of its values on and outside object only. Without deep and internal human involvement and responsibility, the Torah itself can become an idolatry.

In Moses's obituary it was said: **"When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain"** (Exodus 32, 19).

Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Itzhak) explains in the name of the sages, that breaking the tablets actually saved Israel and the Torah. This is one of the better praises of Moses.

The Second Tablets were made from earthly materials. "Carve your own" said God, carve your own. On one hand, it was viewed as a devaluation of the tablets, but the sages, who were loyal to their interpretive revolution, saw it as an upgrade. The Second tablets symbolize a mixture of earthly materials with human labor in carving them. They have the involvement and the human responsibility of the inclusion of values and words of the Torah: **"God told Moses not to be sorry about the first tablets which were nothing but the ten commandments. The second tablets that I give you are filled with Midrash and many Agadot (tales)"** (Shemot Rabah 46, 1).

The tablets only had the ten commandments of course, but they served as an invitation for human responsibility, which could have been expressed by commentaries, Midrash, Agadot (tales) and their deep connection to people's everyday lifestyle.

A transition process from an external source of authority to an inside one is not yet complete. Handing out the second tablets expressed God's forgiveness for the golden calf. Moses coming down the mountain for the

second time, with the additional tablets, on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei, stands at the core of Yom Kippur being a day of forgiveness. Having said that, there is not even a clue to this fact in the Yom Kippur prayer books or in customs which developed after the destruction of the Temple. The second tablets completed their role with the destruction of the second Temple, after which we moved to the next stage - the Third Tablets.

The Third Tablets are written on the board of our heart. They draw their strength from a deep internalization of values, which does not rely and looks outside towards an external source, divine action of human deeds. They are the allegorical “kavana” (intention) of **“write them on the tablet of your heart”** (Proverbs 3, 3). After the destruction and without having a Temple as an external symbol, our Yom Kippur is based on a deep process of repenting. We are committed to give ourselves and our conscience the answers.

An external source creates an external motivation. That is an inferior drive. Internalization of values and internal drive is the proper level. **“Don’t be like the servants who work hard just so they can receive a prize”** (Mishna Avot, 1).

Whoever understands and identifies with learning and fulfilling the commandments, does so, from a recognition that the learning itself is the prize, it doesn't search for an external drive, they love the wisdom and they follow the commandments because they understand their deep internal values. The one who loves the truth wants to know the reality even if it's hard, because they love the truth, so even those who understand the values of morality act out from a place of solidarity and integrity.

But, and it's a big but, morally and culturally, deep realization of ideas is not enough. In order for the tablets to really be written on our hearts, we need to write them not only in our heads but mainly in our hearts. Not only ideological solidarity but an emotional one. Understanding alone is not enough to prevent us from acting the opposite way from our beliefs at the heat of the moment. Understanding alone cannot create a moral culture.

The “Musal” (moral) book from the 15th century, “Orchot Tzaddikim”, explains how to shift ideas from the head to the heart: by developing the emotion of self shame. The same way, that public shame creates a reality in which people sin in hiding, where they think no one can see them, the same way, self shame, conscious shame, shame of God the almighty - can mediate the inner values into the feeling language, and write on the board of the heart: **“Even though God is unseen, it is present in the hearts of many and is revealed in one's thoughts”**. The desire for being able to look at ourselves in the mirror, our self respect, our integrity, our inner voice that tells us: “aren't you ashamed?” - These are the third tablets, they are the cultural and the moral foundations of our time, creating social and behavioral norms, privately and publicly. Social ethics, in addition to values based education and developing a moral identity.

We face challenging times. Our immediate attention is focused on the public struggle for Jewish and Democratic nature of our country. However, while

examining from a wide range of perspectives, and by looking at it from above, beyond the here and now, the destiny of our entire civilization is at stake. **We live in a period, characterized by loss of shame.** Elected public officials lie and manipulate without even a hint of shame. The ones who sneered, not only don't lower their eyes, but they roll over the shame in order to train the creep. According to "Orchot Tzaddikim": **"The one who shames says: what have I done? So and So did the same... He sins the many, because in such a way his own sin will appear lightly to the eyes of the public, because there will no longer be shame in the sin".**

Removing the shame, drops the grip, which includes the values of the society and knocks them down from the inside. When those who are supposed to be role models only say: "Everyone is doing that...", when lies are being spread without winking even when their true intentions are crystal clear, when there are far-fetched comparisons between the demonstrators for democratic nature of the country and the rioters in Hawara - without an inch of shame, when "Jewish" racist statements that were said until now "of the record" out of fear, are tweeted online, out in the open: the foundations on top of which our entire civilization is based on, are all falling apart. Instead of them looking down they expect us to look down. This is a damage that goes far beyond the political debate, it is not only about the nature of the country, it's about the nature of the entire humanity. Such phenomena don't stop at the borders of a country. In general, it seems that the heroes of our culture, from the celebrities of reality shows in the industrial channels to the elected politicians - they receive the voices of the public and of the citizens exactly for their shameless and immoral activities. Choosing them, even when it is done unconsciously, gives out legitimacy to act immorally.

The temptation in breaking the tablets and acting without moral boundaries and consciousness always exists. The most dangerous way to do that is by breaking the barrier of shame. By doing so, the foundation of the entire society is being broken.

The third tablets, those of consciousness, internal integrity and self respect are in front of us. We must not despair. Unlike the physical tablets, the tablets of the heart that are broken - can be fixed. As long as we continue shouting together "Shame!" "Shame!" Shame!", as long as we strengthen our moral principles and claim them, as long as we at "Rabbis for human rights" will raise our voice in a deep Jewish protest for the events of the hour, we will create small and large islands in which morality, culture and the third tablets exist together. All of that is needed in order to preserve them inside of us, so when this big ugly wave will disappear, the movement of the pendulum will start moving back and bring them to their right place.

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