

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND TABLETS (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

Rabbi Abahu said, “All the 40 days that Moses was on high, he kept on forgetting the Torah that he learned. He then said, ‘Sovereign of the universe, I have spent 40 days, and yet I know nothing.’ What did G-d do? At the end of the 40 days, He gave him the Torah as a gift” (Shemot Rabba 41:6).

The Sages have also said that on Tammuz 17, Moses descended and broke the first tablets, and on Tammuz 18 he went back up and pleaded for mercy on Israel for 40 days and 40 nights. At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, forgave Israel and told Moses to carve out the second tables and ascend. He descended on Av 28 in order to carve out the second Tables, ascending on Av 29, and the Torah was taught to him a second time.

Moses descended on Tishri 10, which was Yom Kippur, and told the Children of Israel that G-d had forgiven them, as it is written: “You shall forgive our iniquity and sin, and make us Your heritage” (Exodus 34:9). Hence this day has become a law and a memorial for all the generations, as it is written: “This shall be to you an eternal decree” (Leviticus 16:34).

The fact that Moses remained on the mountain for 40 additional days is surprising. Once he had learned the entire Torah and it had been given to him as a gift, why did he need to stay on the mountain for 40 more days to receive the second tablets? He already knew the entire Torah! If we say that Moses had to remain in order to appease the Creator, had he not already done so when the Children of Israel complained, as it is written: “The people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the L-RD and the fire died down” (Numbers 11:2)? When they sinned because of the spies, Moses proclaimed the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy before Him. In light of these things, could Moses not have prayed below, as he had done each time the Children of Israel sinned?

He Risked His Life for Israel

To explain this question, let us first say that when the Children of Israel made the golden calf, the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses: “Go, descend.” The Sages explain that at that point, Moses was judged by the Celestial Court. This means that he was judged by Hashem and lowered from his greatness before having completed 40 days. Since he had been lowered from his greatness, he interrupted his Torah study and forgot what he had learned. This is why he had to remain on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, to relearn what he had forgotten (see Tanhuma, Ki Tisa 22).

What did Moses do during these 40 days and nights? He immersed himself in prayer and asked for mercy on the Children of Israel. At the same time, he reviewed his learning in order to remember all the great concepts that he had understood during the first 40 days. Since

he was completely devoted to the Children of Israel and prayed for them as he studied, he merited for the skin of his face to shine.

Moses’ first ascent – when he studied G-d’s Torah and reviewed it, and when there was only Torah in him – was unlike his second ascent, when he reviewed his own learning while praying that the Holy One, blessed be He, should not destroy the Children of Israel. At that point Moses practiced serving Hashem (avodah) and bestowing good on others (gemilut chesed). Can there be a greater good than devoting your life to your people, to the point that the Sages have said: “ ‘Moses implored [vayechal] the L-RD his G-d’ [Exodus 32:11]. ... This teaches us that Moses stood in prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, until he wearied Him [chala]” (Berachot 32a). The Sages have also said that Moses risked his life for the Children of Israel.

Every Generation Has its Sages

See the greatness of kindness! Before Moses prayed for the Jewish people, even if he had studied Torah with G-d during his initial ascension, his face still did not shine. Yet when he began to pray with wholehearted lovingkindness, the skin of his face instantly began to shine.

The Sages have said, “There is an offshoot of Moses in every generation” (Tikkunei Zohar 114a). Every tzaddik that possesses these three qualities, we know that the world rests upon him and his merit. Likewise Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: “I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment from the day that I was born until now” (Sukkah 45b). This pertains to what kabbalists have explained on the verse, “You ascended on high, you have taken shevi [captives]” (Psalms 68:19). That is, the term shevi is formed by the initial of Shimon bar Yochai, meaning that when Moses ascended on high, he as it were “captured” the souls of the tzaddikim in every generation. Our Sages have said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, showed Moses every generation and its judges...every generation and its leaders” (Vayikra Rabba 26:7), and He gave them the power to support the world by their merit alone.

Since Moses, during his second 40-day stay on the mountain, was busy doing a great deal of chesed, he merited many things. His face began to shine, and the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “I have forgiven according to your word” (Numbers 14:20). He thereby obtained a day of forgiveness and atonement for all the generations. Not only that, but the second tablets contained what the first tablets did not. In fact the Sages say that when Moses felt regret for having broken the first tablets, Hashem said to him: “Don’t regret it, for the first tablets only contained the Ten Commandments, whereas the second tablets that I am giving you contain Halachot, Midrashim, Aggadot, etc.”



The Path To Follow

KI TISA

330

March 6th 2010
Adar 20th 5770

Publication

HEVRAT PINTO

Under Aegis of

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Habitual Speakers of Lashon Harah

If a person has become accustomed to sinning through Lashon Harah – like those who constant talk negatively about others, about what their ancestors did, or what they heard about them, all in a derogatory way – the Sages call such individuals Ba’alei Lashon Harah. Their punishment is much worse, for they are constantly transgressing the Torah and their transgressions seem trivial to them. Of them it is said, “May the L-RD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks boastfully” (Psalms 12:4).

– Chafetz Chaim

AT THE SOURCE

Grind it Thin, Grind it Thin

It is written, “You shall grind some of it finely and place some of it before the Testimony” (Exodus 30:36).

While the incense was being grinded, Rabbi Nathan said in a Beraita, one would say: “Grind it thin, grind it thin,” for the sound was good for the compounding of the spices.

According to the gaon Rabbi Yechiya Tzalach Zatzal in his book Etz Chaim, there are two explanations for this:

The first is that the person grinding the incense would say these words himself, for the heat of his breath would dry up the plants to a certain extent, resulting in a better mixture.

The second is that a person gets tired when grinding, as he does when performing any physically demanding work. Yet by speaking of his work as it is being performed, a person can lessen its difficulty somewhat and reinvigorate himself.

Several Sabbaths

It is written, “Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, ‘Truly My Sabbaths you shall keep’ ” (Exodus 31:13).

One reason why “Sabbaths” is in the plural here, explains Rabbi Aryeh Leib Tzinz Zatzal in his book Melo HaOmer, is the following:

We know that the world is so vast that it may be day in one place, and yet night in another. Hence when some people are observing Shabbat, others are still in the weekday. In truth, everyone is warned according to the place where he finds himself.

This is why the verse states, “My Sabbaths you shall keep,” using the plural term. This is because it encompasses several different Sabbaths, according to where people find themselves.

To Make the Sabbath

It is written, “The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath” (Exodus 31:16).

How can we “make the Sabbath”?

An elegant answer is brought by Rabbi Yosef Lalzer Shlita in his book Nezer Yosef:

As we know, we add mundane time to sacred time at the beginning and end of the Sabbath. The result is that at least 30 minutes of mundane time are added to each Sabbath of the year.

There are roughly 50 Sabbaths in the year, meaning that a person adds at least 28 hours of mundane time to the Sabbath in a year.

The verse therefore says, “To make the Sabbath.” That is, from all the Sabbaths that occur in the year, we make an entire Sabbath by turning mundane time into sacred time.

Losing Nothing

It is written, “Every man venatnu [shall give] the L-RD an atonement for his soul” (Exodus 30:11).

The term venatnu is written the same way backwards and forwards in Hebrew.

This tells us that whatever a person gives to tzedakah will return to him, meaning that he will lose nothing as a result of giving.

– Ba'al HaTurim

You Shall See

It is written, “You shall see [vera'ita] My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:23).

Rashi states, “He showed him the knot of His tefillin.”

The word vera'ita is formed by the initials of the expression Vekesher Tefillin Ra'ah Eich Ihyeh (“and he saw how the knot of the tefillin was”).

– Avnei HaShoham

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA A TEACHING OF THE GAON AND TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

The Consequences of Not Reprimanding Others

It is written, “Go, descend – for your people...have become corrupt” (Exodus 32:7).

Why did Hashem use the expression “your people”? The Sages have said, “Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah’s cow used to go out with a strap between its horns, [but] not with the consent of the Sages” (Shabbat 54b). The Gemara states that this cow did not belong to him, but rather to a female neighbor of his. Yet because he failed to reprimand her, it was attributed to him. The Sages add, “Whoever can forbid his household [from committing a sin], but does not, is seized for his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for the whole world” (ibid.).

Here too, since Moses did not reprimand the Children of Israel, their sin carries his name, even if he could not have reprimanded them because he was in Heaven. He was their teacher, and a teacher cannot ignore the deeds of his students. The Sages have said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, deals strictly with those around Him, even to a hair’s breadth” (Yebamot 121b).

Similarly, the verse states: “The L-RD struck the people with a plague, for they had made the calf that Aaron had made” (Exodus 32:35). Why is this deed attributed to Aaron? Since he had the opportunity to reprimand them, yet failed to do so – even if he did all that he could – Hashem was strict and attributed that sin to him.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA THE WRITTEN AND THE ORAL WORD

It is written, "Write these words for yourself, for according to these words have I sealed a covenant with you and Israel" (Exodus 34:27).

The Gemara states, "Rabbi Yehudah bar Nachmani, the public orator of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, stated the following: It is written, 'Write these words...for according to these words' [Exodus 34:27]. What are we to make of this? It means: The words that are written, you are not free to recite by heart; and the words transmitted orally, you are not free to recite from writing. ... Rabbi Yochanan said: G-d made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of that which was transmitted orally, as it says: 'For according to these words have I sealed a covenant with you and Israel' " (Gittin 60b).

As we know, our holy Torah is comprised of the "written Torah" – which are the 24 sacred books of the Bible – and the "oral Torah" – which begins from the period of the Mishnah and the Gemara. The reason for this division – a written Torah and an oral Torah, both of which were given to Moses on Sinai – is taught by the Sages in the Midrash: "After [Moses] learned it [the Torah] from G-d, He told him to teach it to Israel. Moses said: 'Sovereign of the universe, shall I write it down for them?' G-d replied, 'I do not wish to give it to them in writing, because I foresee a time when the heathen will have dominion over them and take it away from them, and they will be despised by the heathen. Only the Bible will I give to them in writing. However I will give them the Mishnah, Talmud, and Haggadah orally, so that when the heathen enslave them, they will remain distinct from them'" (Shemot Rabba 47:1).

One of the Most Beautiful Mitzvot

The Gemara teaches that in the middle of Yom Kippur, the High Priest would recite the verse, "And on the tenth..." by heart (Yoma 70a). The Tosaphot are surprised by this, noting that the Gemara in Gittin explicitly states, "The words that are written, you are not free to recite by heart." There are several responses to this problem.

The first, write Tosaphot, is that the reading of the written Torah is one of the most beautiful mitzvot. Out of respect for the public, the High Priest is not obligated to go to the trouble of taking out a Torah scroll and rolling it to the desired place. Another explanation is attributed to the Riva: Since it only speaks of the religious ceremony of that day, the High Priest may recite it by heart as a kind of extra prayer that is recited.

The Ba'alei HaTosaphot raise several other surprising issues, and their Halachic conclusion is that it is forbidden to recite the written word by heart in cases where we are exempting the public of its obligation. Yet even in cases when we exempt the public of its obligation, as when we recite praises and thanks such as Hallel, there is no reason to worry that it is forbidden.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 49:1) raises another issue in this regard:

Although we have learned, "The words that are written, you are not free to recite by heart," everything that we normally say and know by heart (such as the Shema, Birkat Kohanim, Parashat HaTamid and the like) may be recited by heart.

On the basis of these words by Tosaphot, the Acharonim have stated that a talmid chacham who gives public classes in which he cites numerous verses from the Torah, and who has a difficult time constantly searching the Chumash for the verses in question, may recite them by heart out of respect for the public. The Acharonim have also stated that a single word that does not make sense on its own may be recited by heart. It is only an expression that stands alone which is forbidden, such as "the tenth of the month." A single word, however, is not forbidden to recite by heart.

The Poskim are divided as to whether psalms may be recited by heart. Responsa Chavat Yair (175) allows psalms to be recited by heart because they awaken Divine mercy and are like a prayer, and also because everyone knows them well. However it is forbidden to recite ma'amadot (which we usually say every day) by heart, even if we know them well. The Chayei Adam writes that as far as he is concerned, it is better not to recite psalms by heart. This is also the view of the author of Chokrei Lev, who goes to great lengths in demonstrating that it is better to study a single chapter of Mishnah by heart and recite it 100 times from memory, than to recite psalms by heart. His grandson, Rabbi Falagi Zatzal, in the introduction to his commentary HaKatuv LeChaim on the book of Psalms, is more lenient with regards to the recitation of psalms by heart.

A TRUE STORY A SIGN

It is written, "For it is a sign between Me and you" (Exodus 31:13).

Emperor Franz Josef of Austria was once in the city of Krakow. Among other places that he visited, he went to the city's great synagogue, where a portrait of the emperor was always kept in the lobby. Yet on that day it suddenly disappeared, for somebody had secretly removed it. In fact word reached the emperor that the Jews had removed his portrait as a sign of their opposition to him.

When the emperor entered the synagogue, he looked in every direction. He then turned towards Rabbi Shimon Sofer Zatzal, who was also a member of the Austrian Parliament at the time, and asked him if it was true that his portrait had always been displayed, and that today it was removed because of his arrival.

Rabbi Shimon, who to his great surprise had just learned that the emperor's portrait had disappeared, did not lose his composure.

He told the emperor, "It is true, your Majesty. It is true that today we removed your portrait, and we did it for the following reason: According to the laws of our religion, every day we must don phylacteries, the symbolic 'sign of the covenant' that we have with G-d. However on the Sabbath, it is forbidden for us to wear them because in the Bible the Sabbath itself is described as 'a sign between Me and you.' On the Sabbath we are so close to G-d that we do not need a sign or a symbol. We have therefore acted in the same way in regards to your visit.

"Your portrait is displayed throughout the year as a sign of our connection to your Majesty. Yet today, when your Majesty has personally agreed to come and visit us, looking at your portrait on a wall would diminish the respect that we have towards you, since we have the merit of having you among us in person."

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI YOSHIYAHU PINTO – THE AUTHOR OF THE RIF ON EIN YAAKOV

The first famous figure from the noble Pinto family is Rabbi Yosef Pinto Zatzal, who left Portugal in 5287 to settle in Damascus, Syria. Although he became quite wealthy there, his heart did not turn away from serving G-d, nor did he grow proud. In fact he was known among his acquaintances for his great generosity.

The son of Rabbi Yosef was a tzaddik and gaon, the holy kabbalist Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, a giant among giants. Rabbi Yoshiyahu was born in 5325 (the same year in which the Maharsha was born). From his earliest years, Rabbi Yoshiyahu was known as a child prodigy, a Torah genius who was aware of every mystery in every Torah field.

When his father Rabbi Yosef saw that his son was faithful to Hashem and His Torah, he began to educate him and teach him the Torah. He also sent him to benefit from the words of Torah scholars and tzaddikim, who taught him the laws of Hashem, laws that rejoice the heart. Until his dying day, Rabbi Yosef invested a great deal of time and effort for his son Rabbi Yoshiyahu.

After the death of his father, Rabbi Yoshiyahu began to study with the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Yaakov Aboulafia Zatzal. He cleaved to the dust of his steps and eagerly drank in his words. Hashem was with Rabbi Yoshiyahu, and he grew.

In 5377, the year that the practice of giving Semichah was renewed in the holy city of Sefat (a practice that was only possible in Eretz Israel), Rabbi Yoshiyahu traveled there and received Semichah from Rabbi Yaakov Aboulafia. From that point on, the great Torah figures referred to him as “Rav Musmach” (incidentally, Rabbi Yaakov Aboulafia gave Semichah to only two people during his lifetime, his son and Rabbi Yoshiyahu).

Rabbi Yoshiyahu was known throughout the Diaspora as “the Rif on Ein Yaakov.” This was because of his book, entitled Maor Einayim, which he wrote on Ein Yaakov regarding the Aggadot of the Talmud. He wrote this book after the death of his son Rabbi Yosef Zatzal in 5386, in order to console himself after his death. (In this way, says our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, the Rav demonstrated the greatness of his love for Hashem, Who for him was more important than his son. He certainly loved his son, but invested all his energy into the study of Torah.)

His Name is Known in Every Gate

Rabbi Yoshiyahu was among the Torah sages of Damascus, where he lived for most of his life, in addition to having lived in Aleppo for a certain time. He was known for his extraordinary understanding in Halachah and Mussar, both as a preacher and a writer who authored several books. Interestingly enough, these books all contain the term kesef in their title: Nivchar MiKessef, Kessef Nivchar, Kessef MezuKak, Kessef Tzaruf, Kessef Nimas, and Kevutzat Kessef.

The reason why he used the term kesef is that it is the root of the word nischaf (“to yearn”): Just as a person yearns for money, he must yearn for Torah and mitzvot.

Our teacher Shlita has explained how a person can know if he truly loves Hashem. After 120 years of life on earth, he is liable to discover that he has not served Hashem sincerely. On the contrary, it may be that everything he did in life to serve Hashem was done only for superficial reasons, and that he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the vanities of this world!

For example, a man who has to catch a plane will get up early in the morning so as not to miss his flight. Yet will he make the same effort to

get up every morning in order to pray at the proper time? Do his personal concerns come first and Hashem’s concerns come later?

A person must always yearn to serve Hashem, eagerly desiring to do His will. As King David said, “My soul yearns, indeed it faints for the courtyards of the L-RD. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living G-d” (Psalms 84:3).

Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto was also related through marriage to the tzaddik and kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital. In fact the son of Rabbi Chaim Vital, Rabbi Shemuel (who followed his father’s footsteps in Kabbalah and wrote Makor Chaim and Beer Mayim Chaim) was Rabbi Yoshiyahu’s son-in-law.

In the year 5380, when the gaon Rabbi Chaim Vital left this world, the Rif was appointed to succeed him as the Rav of Damascus. However in 5385 he left Damascus for Eretz Israel, where he wanted to settle down in Sefat for good. Yet after the passing of his son Rabbi Yosef, the Rif returned to Damascus in 5386, where he remained as its Rav until his dying day.

His Torah Protects Us

The Rif wrote several holy and important works that received the enthusiastic approval of the great Torah figures and scholars of his generation. More than anything else, Rabbi Yoshiyahu became known for his work Maor Einayim, a commentary on Ein Yaakov regarding the Aggadot of the Talmud. This book was published in 5403 in Venice under the title The Commentary of the Rif. Concerning this work, the Chida stated that “its praises are sung in every country.” In fact his commentary became an inseparable part of Ein Yaakov, and it is printed below its text in order for the reader to consult it directly. It is actually a detailed examination of Ein Yaakov, well-explained in the smallest detail, and a true work of art on the Aggadot of the Talmud. His other works include Responsa Nivchar MiKessef and Kessef MezuKak, Kessef Nivchar, which contains sermons on the Torah, Kessef Tzaruf on the book of Proverbs, and Kessef Nimas on the book of Lamentations. He also wrote other important works that were never published.

The works of the Rif were accepted throughout the Jewish world. They received the approval and compliments of the leading Torah figures of the generation, including the Rif’s teacher Rabbi Yaakov Aboulafia, the Torah scholars of Syria, the Torah giants of Damascus, and others.

Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto left this world on Adar 23, 5408. At his funeral, his son-in-law Rabbi Shemuel Vital recited a eulogy for him. Rabbi Yoshiyahu is buried in Damascus. May his merit protect us all.

