

## THE SECOND TABLETS OF THE LAW

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### *Self-Analysis*

On this holy and auspicious day of Yom Kippur we commemorate an important event in the annals of our ancient history. Tradition informs us that it was on Yom-Kippur that Moses, our teacher, descended from Mount Sinai with the second tablets of the Law. Our ancestors were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf and this day was established as a day of forgiveness for the Jewish people throughout the ages.

We may well ask what had the reception of the second tablets by the Jewish people to do with their forgiveness of the cardinal sin of idolatry? Looking at the matter a little more deeply we perceive that there is a great correlation between the two events.

The tendency of people who commit sin is to rationalize their evil deeds; to justify their actions. One way of doing this is to shout loudly that the law which was violated is an unjust one and should be changed or abandoned. Our ancestors after having transgressed the first and second commandments of the decalogue could also have justified their actions by ranting against the Law. They could have claimed that it was difficult for them to worship and perceive a G-d who had no form or shape and one whose ways were hidden to them. How much more inspiring and appealing was it to dance around an image that they could see and touch and at the same time enjoy. The Jews of old could have pursued this path. They

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did not choose to do so. Instead they realized the great iniquity which they perpetrated and sincerely began to atone for it. It was after their sincere repentance, that Moses received G-d's command of כְּרַאשׁוֹנִים לַחַת אֲבָנִים כְּרַאשׁוֹנִים. "Hew out for yourself two tablets like the first ones." It was the same decalogue that our people received; Not a new set of laws. "When they accepted the decalogue again it was truly indicative that they sincerely repented for their former sin. This truly was a day of Yom-Kippor.

Yes, my dear friends, the first step to Yom Kippur is הִכָּרַת חַטָּא, the recognition and admission of sin. It is not the Torah which is at fault; it is we who are weak and sinful. Unfortunately, today we hear Jews complain about the Torah too frequently. The Torah is too difficult; it is outmoded; it is uninteresting and uninspiring. We seek to justify our actions all too much. The clamor and agitation to change the Law comes from the very circles who least uphold it. The Jewish people as well as humanity at large, must observe Yom Kippur in the true sense of the word, by accepting the decalogue. We must adjust ourselves to its sublime teachings rather than seek to rewrite it.

Tradition tells us that the first broken tablets were not discarded but were put into an ark and kept beside the second whole tablets שְׁבָרֵי לַחֹת מוֹנַחִים בְּאֵרוֹן. When the Jews were attacked by barbaric foes and they had to go out to war, the Ark containing the broken tablets were carried by the Kohanim, who preceded the Jewish Army. When the Jews were compelled to shed blood in self-defense they realized that the tablets were being broken; that humanity has not yet risen to the spiritual level of the decalogue. They had the whole tablets, however, in the sanctuary. In the battle for life the tablets

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may from time to time be broken, but as long as people realize that they are broken and that they must hew out for themselves the same decalogue, then they are on the road to forgiveness and salvation. The Torah recognized that man is subject to sin. If this were not so, we would not have Yom-Kippur once a year. Our ancestors also sinned but they sought repentance; for they recognized their sins and blamed their own shortcomings rather than denounce the Torah.

The story is told of a man who once visited a city and was taken to its City Hall. He noticed that his watch stopped and he wanted to know the correct time. He looked at the clock on the tower but found it difficult to see the correct time. He remarked to his friend, "Why is it necessary to have this clock so high up? Would it not be better to have this clock at our reach so that it could easily be seen?" "You don't understand, my friend. If the clock were within everyone's reach, everyone would seek to adjust it according to the time of his watch, and no-one would ever know the correct time."

The same, my dear friends, is true about the Torah. It must be kept high and aloft, so that it will not be changed by mortals. It is the correct time for all to see. We must adjust our watches to this great divine clock. Yom Kippur is the most opportune time to do this. Let us change ourselves, rather than the Torah.