



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego-Los Angeles**  
**Study Guide**

***The Three Weeks***  
***תשפג***

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***Partners Detroit***

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## *Partners In Torah*

### *Mission Statement:*

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

*Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.*

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming!**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

This coming Thursday, July 6, we will observe the fast of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, and, in three weeks, on Thursday, July 27<sup>th</sup>, we will observe “Tisha b’Av” the fast of the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av. These two fasts are associated with the destruction of the Holy Temples. On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of Tammuz, Jerusalem’s walls were breached, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, 490 years apart, both Holy Temples were destroyed. During the three weeks between these two fasts, the Sages have instituted laws of mourning to help us feel this great, indeed, overwhelming, loss. Because of the special laws pertaining to this period, it is referred to as “The Three Weeks.”

Based on the verse in Lamentations (1:3) written by Jeremiah the Prophet, in Hebrew, this period is called בין המצרים - “between the barriers.”

כָּל רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים

3) *all those who pursued her (Klal Yisroel) caught up to her between the walls.”*

Rashi’s commentary on Lamentations explains.

המצרים - גבולים של שדה וכרם. ומדרש אגדה: בין שבעה עשר בתמוז לתשעה באב:

*The boundaries of a field or vineyard. The Midrash adds that this also refers to the three weeks between the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz and Tisha B’-Av.*

These two days represent two confining walls, like bookends, that mark the beginning and end of this tragic and difficult time. Indeed, when we look back in Jewish history, we notice an inordinate number of tragedies that occurred on, and within, these two dates.

The Mishna in Tractate Taanit (26a) lists five calamitous events that happened on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, and five calamitous events that occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av.

The five events that occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz are:

1. Moshe broke the tablets containing the 10 commandments.
2. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were breached during the first and second Holy Temples.
3. They stopped bringing the daily morning and afternoon sacrifices.
4. Apustumus (a Roman official) burned a Sefer Torah.
5. Menashe, one of the Kings of Judah, brought a graven image into the sanctuary of the Holy Temple.

The first of these calamities, *the breaking of the tablets*, takes on special importance, because it can be understood as the basis for the other four.

The Jewish nation had arrived at Mount Sinai the first day of the month of Sivan. On the Sixth day of Sivan, they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments. They heard the first two commandments directly from Hashem, and then asked Moshe to relate the remaining eight to them. The next day, the seventh of Sivan, Moshe went back up the mountain for forty days to receive the two tablets from Hashem and to learn the remaining 603 commandments with all of their details and particulars - the Oral Torah.

Upon ascending the mountain, Moshe told the Jewish people that he would return with the tablets in forty days, early in the morning. Since Moshe scaled the mountain on the *morning* of the seventh day of Sivan, it was not considered a full day and could not

be counted as “day one” of the forty, which needed to be full days. Moreover, because the Jewish day starts with sundown, the first day of the forty was actually the *eighth* of Sivan.

The Jewish people, however, started counting from the day that Moshe went up the mountain, not realizing that that day did not count. Hence, they reached the number forty a day early and were thrown off when Moshe did not return with the tablets early in the morning as promised. Without Moshe, the people panicked and made the golden calf, the repercussions of which we are still feeling.

Counted correctly, the fortieth day fell out on the seventeenth day of Tammuz. When Moshe descended the mountain and saw the Jewish people with the golden calf, he threw down the tablets and smashed them. (The Talmud informs us that Hashem supported Moshe’s decision to break the tablets.)

Although from the verses it seems like the Jewish people worshipped the calf as an idol, they did not. They never wanted or requested an idol to worship. All that they wanted was a substitute for their leader Moshe. A few people did slip into their old ways and actually worshiped the calf as an idol, but that number was miniscule, only 3,000 out of at least 600,000 adult males; a very small percentage indeed. The reason that the entire nation was nevertheless punished is that since all Jews are responsible for one another, and they did not object or try to stop the problem, they became accomplices.

There is an interesting observation here. Why, when listing the events that occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, does the Mishna cite the *breaking of the tablets* as the calamity and not the sin of the golden calf? Wasn't that really the problem? Additionally, Hashem gave us a second set of tablets, so what is so problematic about the breaking of the first?

To answer these questions, we must understand the difference between the first and second sets of tablets.

When Moshe went up to receive the first set, he ascended the mountain empty handed. Hashem created the tablets in heaven, engraved the ten commandments on them, and then handed them to Moshe to deliver to the people below. Both the *tablets and the writing* were from heaven.

The second time around, Hashem commanded Moshe to hew a set of tablets similar to the first ones from a mountain and to bring those tablets with him to heaven. Hashem then engraved the ten commandments on those tablets and gave them back to Moshe to bring to the Jewish people.

What is the significance of this change? Our Sages explain that the word לוח means a slate or a tablet. There are verses in scripture that compare a heart to a slate.

(ג) קִשְׂרָם עַל אֶצְבְּעֹתֶיךָ כְּתָבָם עַל לֹחַ לִבְךָ

King Solomon says in Proverbs (7:3), "*Tie them on your fingers, write them on the **slate of your heart.***"

Based on this idea, the tablets on which the ten commandments were engraved represent the hearts of the Jewish people. When the first tablets were given, the hearts of the Jewish people were as pure and holy as Adam's soul was when Hashem gave it to him before his sin.

One of the most enjoyable parts of the Haggadah to which everyone looks forward singing, is *dayeiynu* (It would have sufficed for us to give thanks). We all spiritedly sing the song, but the list contains a most puzzling line. We say, "*Had Hashem only brought us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, dayeinu.*" What was the achievement of reaching Mount Sinai without having received the Torah there? How do we say "*dayeiynu*" for just *having been at* Mount Sinai?

One of the many answers given to this question is that at Mt. Sinai the Jewish people reached the very highest spiritual level that a person can reach. The verse says (Exodus 19:2):

וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הַהָר

2) *And (he) Yisrael camped opposite the mountain.*

When referring to the Jewish nation the Torah uses the singular form of the verb, ויחן - and **he** (camped) - instead of the plural form ויחנו - *and they* (camped). Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to use the plural form since it is the description of a few million people?

Rashi answers the question: כאיש אחד בלב אחד - They camped "*like one man, with one heart.*" They were perfectly unified.

This was the absolute highest level that a person could reach. Every person had succeeded in elevating himself above his own selfish, personal interests. There was no "me," and no "you;" it was

we. In their hearts, there was only the pure desire to do Hashem's will and nothing else. Their material self with its selfish desires was completely neutralized and exerted no influence on them. Their whole *raison d'être* was to serve Hashem.

In the words of our Sages, they reached the completely spiritual state of Adam in the Garden of Eden before he sinned. By eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he brought materialism into himself and created the condition that we have today. At Mount Sinai, the Jews returned to a state of purity, similar to that of Adam before the sin.

Thus, the first set of tablets, which were from heaven, represented the pure and holy state of the hearts of the Jewish people at that time. Their hearts were like the tablets: created by Hashem and given from heaven, as pure as they could be with no earthly contamination. In this state, their hearts were completely compatible with the holy words of the Torah that Hashem was giving them.

For this reason, Rabbi Elazer in the Talmud (Eruvin 54a) teaches us that had the first tablets not been broken, we would have never forgotten a word of Torah that we learned.

ואמר רבי אלעזר : מאי דכתיב, חרות על הלוחות? אלמלי לא נשתברו לוחות  
הראשונות לא נשתכחה תורה מישראל

The Torah and the Jewish heart were completely spiritual and perfectly compatible. When the holy words of the Torah would fall on the pure Jewish heart, they would join seamlessly to be one, never to be separated.



Our Sages also teach us (ibid.) that had the first tablets not been broken, no nation in the world would ever have been able to subjugate us.

רב אחא בר יעקב אמר אין כל אומה ולשון שולטת בהן שנאמר חרות אל תיקרי חרות אלא חירות  
על הלוחות - בשביל הלוחות היו בני ישראל בני חורין :

Rashi explains that through our connection to the Torah, we would have been free of any oppressors. The Jewish people would have been at such a high spiritual level that the nations of the world would not have been able to get near us.

This is the reason why Moshe felt he had to break the tablets. Upon seeing the state of the Jewish people, he realized that they were no longer fit for such holy tablets. They would be unable to relate to them coming from where they were at that time.

The day after Moshe broke the tablets, he went back up Mount Sinai, for another forty days, to beseech Hashem for forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. At the end of the forty days, Hashem told Moshe that He had forgiven the people, and Moshe went down to tell the people that he had successfully achieved forgiveness for them. The next day Hashem told Moshe to return with a new set of tablets hewn from a mountain. Hashem would not be giving Moshe a set of tablets created in heaven; Moshe would have to bring up the tablets himself. The sin of the golden calf had ruined the pure state of their hearts, and, now, they were no longer suitable for such a holy set of tablets. This stone set of tablets that Moshe brought with him represented the earthly hearts of the Jewish people who had fallen from their great spiritual height of the original Mount Sinai. The second tablets hewn from a mountain, which we received on Yom Kippur, are the tablets that the Torah we have today is based on.

Because of our earthly hearts, we forget what we have learned almost as soon as we have learned it. Because we are trying to infuse the spiritual Torah into an earthly heart of stone, spirituality comes with great difficulty and with much effort. And, as a result of our low level of holiness, the nations of the world were able to subjugate us and exile us from our land. This subjugation continues until today.

We now have a small clue as to what was lost with the first set of tablets. The breaking of the Tablets represented the destruction of a spiritual level that would have made the Jewish people one with the Torah. We would have been forever bound together. Because we did not receive those heavenly tablets, instead receiving only the stone tablets hewn from a physical mountain, our hearts are like hearts of stone, and it is very difficult to write the Torah on them. This loss of holiness will not be restored until the משיח comes.

There is, however, an inspiring silver lining to the difference between the first and second tablets.

Although the second tablets were made of stone cut from an earthy, material mountain, Hashem still engraved the holy words of the ten commandments on them! In spite of their physical and earthy nature, Hashem saw them as a suitable substrate for the holy words of the Ten Commandments. That being the case, it is as if Hashem is telling us, *“Bring Me your earthly hearts, and I will engrave My holy Torah on them! If you are willing to give Me your whole heart, and dedicate it to Me, even though it is earthly, I will engrave my Holy Torah on it and make it holy. If you want My Torah, all you need to do is give me your heart.”* What an amazing

gift! Hashem is ready to engrave His holy Torah on our lowly, earthly hearts. What a privilege!

When we contemplate the chasm created between the first and second tablets, we can see a connection between the five calamities that occurred on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz.

The other four are:

2. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were breached during the first and second Holy Temples.

As we learned, had the first tablets not been broken, the Jewish nation would not have been subject to the oppression of any other nation. We would have been on such a high spiritual level that the world's nations would have looked up to us and followed our example of how to lead a holy life. The breaking of the tablets lost for us this high level of spirituality, and hence we are subject to other nations' control, and they were able to break through the wall and exile us from Israel.

3. They stopped bringing the daily morning and afternoon sacrifices.

The walled city of Jerusalem was under siege during the first Holy Temple, and no one could exit or enter. Thus, the Jewish people were unable to purchase sheep for the daily sacrifice. When they ran out of animals in the city, they lowered two baskets of gold over the wall, and one of the enemy guards would replace the gold with the two sheep necessary for the daily sacrifices. When someone tipped him off and told him, "Don't you understand? As long as they bring these daily sacrifices, there is no way you will be able to conquer them." The next day they put two pigs in the baskets instead of the sheep.

The Talmud relates that as they pulled the baskets up, the pigs dug their nails into the walls, causing the walls to start to crumble. This symbolized the beginning of the destruction, for without the daily sacrifice we were vulnerable.

The daily sacrifice was something that had started at Mount Sinai, and continued uninterrupted since then. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, because the tablets were broken and the connection to Sinai had been broken in a way, this connection to Sinai was also able to be broken.

#### 4. Apustumus (a Roman official) burned a Sefer Torah

The commentaries do not tell us exactly when this happened, but it is approximated to be about sixteen years before the great rebellion against the Roman Empire, about 135BCE. Nevertheless, the idea is clear. This was a terrible disgrace to the Torah and something that demoralized the Jewish people. If the first set of tablets were not broken, it would have been impossible to burn a Sefer Torah. A Sefer Torah would have been so hallowed that a non-Jew would never be able to lay a hand on it, let alone burn it. But, because the first tablets were broken, and the level of the Torah was diminished, the Torah was no longer untouchable.

#### 5. Menashe, one of the Kings of Judah, brought a graven image into the sanctuary of the Holy Temple.

Our Sages teach us that the Holy Temple was a carry-over from Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai, the Jewish people clearly witnessed Hashem's divine presence, and the Holy Temple was to preserve the lessons that they had learned at Sinai. How was that? In the Holy Temple one clearly saw Hashem's divine presence. Ten miracles were continuously present in the Holy Temple, and

anyone who visited would see them and his belief in Hashem would be strengthened. If the first tablets had not been broken, the Temple's holiness would also have been so much greater, and it would have been impossible to breach its sanctity by bringing in an idol.

The breaking of the tablets on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz continues to impact us to this day. Since we did not receive the heavenly tablets, we must work very hard to make the Torah a part of our souls. It seems that our level of holiness gets weaker and weaker as time goes on.

We must remember the silver lining in the second tablets. Hashem still wrote his Ten Commandments on those stone tablets, *and He will write His Torah* on our hearts of stone. The secret to getting it is to offer our hearts to Hashem. If we sincerely wish to have Hashem's Torah, He will give it to us as a gift.

As we fast on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, and contemplate the loss of the Holy Temples, we can begin the construction of the Third Holy Temple by studying Hashem's magnificent Torah, and restoring the connection to Sinai that we lost.