



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5785 The Three Weeks
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**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.***

Thank you for joining us!

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

תשפ"ה The Three Weeks

This past Sunday, July 13th, was the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, and on Sunday, August 3rd)three weeks from then,(we will observe “Tisha b’Av” the fast of the 9th day of Av. These two fasts are associated with the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples. On the 17th day of Tammuz in the year 70 CE, Jerusalem’s walls were breached; and on the 9th of Av, 586 BCE and 70 CE, both Holy Temples were respectively destroyed. During the three weeks between these two fasts, the Sages have instituted some laws of mourning to help us feel this great, indeed, overwhelming, loss. These laws include not conducting marriages and not listening to music, and not taking haircuts, things that bring happiness to a person. Because of the special laws pertaining to this period, it is referred to as “The Three Weeks.”

Based on the verse in the Book of Lamentations (1:3) written by the Prophet Jeremiah, in Jewish literature this period is referred to as בין המצרים (“between the walls”).

כָּל רִדְפֶיהָ הַשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים

3) *all those who pursued her (the Jewish Nation) 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 17th of Tamuz and Tisha B’-Av.

These two days represent two confining walls, like bookends, representing the boundaries of a field, imply that they mark the beginning and end of something. They are not two unrelated events that happen to come three weeks apart; rather, they are deeply related and one is the cause of the other. Indeed, the events that transpired on the 17th of Tammuz began the process of destruction, which culminated on the 9th of Av. 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 calamities that happened on the 17th of Tammuz, and five calamitous events that occurred on the 9th of Av.

The five events that occurred on the 17th of Tammuz are:

1. Moshe broke the first set of 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. Apostumus (a Roman official) burned a Sefer Torah.
5. Menashe (according to one opinion), one of the Kings of Judah, brought a graven image into the sanctuary of the Holy Temple.

The five calamities that occurred on the 9th of Av are:

1. The decree was given that our forefathers who left Egypt would not enter the Land of Israel. (This was the day that the spies returned from reconnoitering Israel and presented their negative report.)

2. The first Holy Temple was destroyed
3. The second Holy Temple was destroyed
4. The city of Beitar, a city with millions of Jewish people, was captured
5. The Temple site was plowed over until it looked like a field

To properly understand the foregoing, we must know that the Torah looks at time differently than does the rest of the world.

The conventional understanding of time is that it has no beginning and no end. It is an endless continuum without purpose or goal that just marches relentlessly along, going nowhere and waiting for no one. We wake up one day to find ourselves alive, dangling somewhere in the middle of nowhere in time and not knowing exactly what time is or what to do with it.

The Torah teaches us the opposite. The world had a beginning and it has an end, and so does time. Indeed, time itself was the very first thing created, along with space to provide the appropriate environment for the human being, the purpose for Creation. The Sages teach us that the world was created for 6,000 years, and the seven thousandth year will be a Shabbat. This corresponds to the six days of Creation and the seventh day of Shabbat - rest. The world was created with a purpose, and *time* is the medium through which we accomplish that purpose. The word for *time* in Hebrew is זמן, which comes from the root meaning *to prepare*, because we are to use every moment of time to prepare for our purpose in Creation.

Our Sages moreover teach us that time is not linear, rather it goes in yearly cycles. Every year another cycle of time begins. Imagine a bicycle wheel with 365 spokes, each spoke representing a specific day of the year. As we proceed through the year, we

come to the same point in time that we and all the world were for the last 5785 years, only 5785 revolutions later.

What is the difference between the two perspectives? According to the Torah's perspective, seminal events that occurred on a specific day of the calendar year create an immense amount of holy energy from Heaven that becomes embedded in that day for all future time. Hence, when we return to that very date in the calendar year, we are greatly influenced by the holy energy that was put there many years earlier.

This is why our Sages teach us that when the month of Adar comes, we should increase our happiness, and when the month of Av comes, we should decrease our happiness. These months have an innate character that influences the month's events.

The events that occurred in the formative first years of the Jewish nation were especially impactful and have imprinted their mark on the Jewish calendar until the end of time.

The very first formative event to occur on the 17th of Tamuz Moshe's the smashing of the Tablets. This pivotal event set the 17th of Tamuz as a day of calamity and destruction for all of Jewish history. This, the first of the five calamities, takes on special importance because it can be understood as the basis for the other four.

This event unfortunately also played a significant role in the first sin that occurred on the 9th of Av.

The Jewish nation had arrived at Mount Sinai on the first day of the month of Sivan. Five days later, 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, remaining there 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, that day 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 when 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 in the morning as promised. Without Moshe, the mixed multitude, whom Moshe allowed to join the Jewish people as they left Egypt, panicked and made the golden calf. Although the Jewish people themselves did not worship the golden calf, they were held responsible because they did not protest.

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 they considered the calf an idol, they did not. They never wanted or requested any god 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 17th 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) קְשִׁירָם עַל אֶצְבְּעֹתֶיךָ כְּתִיבֵם עַל לִוּחַ 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. 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 heaven-made, represented the then pure and holy state of the hearts of the Jewish people. 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 never forget 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 our connection to the Torah would have freed us of any oppressors. The Jewish people would have been at such a high spiritual level that the nations of the world would have been unable 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 smashing the tablets, Moshe 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 unsuitable 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 that 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 Ten Commandments' holy words. 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!

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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 17th 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 17th 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. Apostumus (a Roman official) burned a Sefer Torah

The commentaries do not tell us exactly who he was or when this happened, but it is approximated to be about sixteen years before the great rebellion against the Roman Empire, about 135 BCE. 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 decline in holiness that the people experienced also precipitated the sin of the Spies. The reason that they saw the Land of Israel so negatively was because they did not want to enter Israel for they had prophetically seen that they would lose their leadership positions once they entered Israel. To avoid this eventuality, they gave a negative report hoping to remain out of Israel and retain their leadership positions. Had they not fallen from their lofty level of spirituality, they would not have had selfish thoughts of leadership, and this would not have happened. However, once they lost their high level of spirituality, they were prone to selfish thoughts, and this sin paved the way for the next wave of sins, the five that occurred on the 9th of Av.

This is the significance of the Three Weeks. These weeks are designed to give us pause to think about the lack of spirituality in the world due to the destruction of the Holy Temples.

And so, as we reflect on the chasm between the heavenly tablets to earthly stone, we must ask ourselves; what does this mean for us now in this moment of mourning and return? Because we did not receive the heavenly tablets and our hearts are like hearts of stone, we must work harder and more honestly, to make

the Torah part of our inner lives. In a world clouded by confusion and distance it feels as though our connection to holiness is dimming, as though the spiritual light that once shined so brightly at Sinai now flickers.

But the second tablets carry a message of profound hope. Though they were hewn from the dust of this world, Hashem still chose to engrave His eternal words upon them. He showed us that even in a fallen world, even with hearts no longer pure, Torah can still live. Not because we are perfect, but because we are willing.

This is the enduring message of the Three Weeks. Even when the ideal is shattered, even when we fall far from where we once stood, Hashem will not abandon us. He invites us to return. He asks for our hearts, not in their perfection, but in their *sincerity*. And if we bring them to Him, flawed and fragile as they are, He will inscribe His Torah upon them once more.

We mourn during these weeks not only for what was lost, but for how close we once were. Yet, we continue to hope, because closeness is still possible. The gates of return are *never* closed. The Torah is still waiting to be written within us.

If we offer our hearts to Hashem, He will meet us there. He will write again. And from **our** tablets of stone - softened by longing and shaped by humility - the light of redemption will begin to shine.