

The Turning Point of The Jewish People

Category: Devarim, Ekev

We all know the story of the broken Tablets. What happened to them? And what lesson do they teach us?

The Two Bumper Stickers

Right after the Six Day War, a new bumper sticker in Israel was seen on the streets.

The words printed on it were, *"Yisrael Btach BTzahal"* - Israel puts its faith in Tzahal (the Israeli Defense Forces). Years later during the Yom Kippur War, a second bumper sticker appeared. This one read, *"Yisrael Btach BaHashem"* - Israel puts its faith in G-d.

Believing in oneself too much is a common disease. Most successful people catch it. They begin to think that they are successful because they are the smartest businessmen in the world.

Success has a way of getting to your head and G-d warns us about this in our Parsha: "You will say to yourself, 'My strength and the might of my hand has accumulated this wealth for me. But you must remember the L-rd your G-d, for it is He that gives you strength to make wealth.'"

We should never make the mistake of thinking that we brought about our own success.

The Broken Tablets

This week we read how Moses, upon descending from Mt. Sinai, finds the Jewish people worshipping the Golden Calf and, in his own words, "I grasped the two tablets, cast them out of my two hands, and shattered them before your eyes."

Did you ever think about what happened to the broken pieces?

The Talmud says that a special ark was built for them. They were kept in that ark until the Holy Ark of the Covenant was built a few months later. It was this ark with the broken tablets that preceded the Jewish camps in the desert to seek good camping grounds. It was also this ark that accompanied the Jewish armies into battle while the Holy Ark of the Covenant remained in the Holy of Holies.

[Only once was the Holy Ark taken into battle in the days of the high priest Eli. The Jewish people were punished for that, and the ark was captured by the Philistines.]

The Rebbe asks: why would the Jews take the broken pieces of the first tablets with them into battle? Wouldn't they be a jinx rather than a blessing? After all, they are the outcome of the gravest sin, idol worship. The worst possible time to remind G-d of that is during battle!

Look at Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur many Jews have the custom to not wear gold. This stems from the High Priest's special Yom Kippur attire that was specifically designed without all the golden ornaments he usually wore. The reason is that we don't want to remind G-d of our sins at a time when we are seeking G-d's approval and forgiveness. Gold would quickly bring to mind the Golden Calf and that memory would be disadvantageous to us.

This is also one of the reasons why we don't use a cow's horn as a Shofar on Rosh Hashanah — because this too, brings to mind the sin of the golden calf.

In light of the above, why would the Jews take the broken tablets with them to war?

Perhaps the answer is this: When Moses did come down off the mountain, no one stood opposed to him. All those men who just minutes before had been dancing around the Golden Calf in an idol worshiping stupor stood silent. And when Moses commanded the tribe of Levi to strike down all the instigators, no man raised his voice in protest.

How does such a transformation happen so quickly? How does a fanatical mob, that just hours earlier killed Chur (the one man who dared to reproach them), suddenly become completely submissive?

A Jewish Heart

The breaking of the Tablets was a turning point for the Jews as a nation. When Moses shattered the Tablets before their eyes, something within the heart of every Jew broke. The Jewish heart was forever changed. Jews now have permanently broken, humble hearts.

The Kotzker once said, "There is nothing as complete as a broken heart."

When the Jewish armies went to war, they would take the broken pieces with them, because these pieces stood as a constant reminder that success comes from G-d alone. When the army humbly recognizes that victory is in His hands, G-d provides that victory.

These pieces didn't remind G-d about the sin the Jews committed. Rather, they reminded Him that his people are not only completely righteous Tzaddikim but they are on the level of Baalei Teshuvah, because, from the moment the Tablets broke, the entire nation performed a Teshuvah that will last forever.

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