



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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A Permanent Bond with the Torah

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman who loved and supported Torah learning.

Mishpatim

A Permanent Bond with the Torah

Good Shabbos!

Not too long ago, there was a firestorm of controversy in the United States after a YouTube video popped up showing a ceremony arranged at some congregation in Atlanta belonging to some famous “preacher.”

At a certain point in the ceremony, they took a real Torah scroll and physically wrapped it around this person, thus crowning him as a “king.” Then they put him on a chair, put the Torah scroll in his arms, and lifted him in his chair like a Bar Mitzvah boy at his party. And, to our chagrin, this entire event was presided over by... a fellow Jew.

Protests immediately came from all sides over the desecration of the Torah. Jewish organizations said that it was a frightful idea to take a Torah scroll and wrap a human being in it. Rabbis were interviewed, explaining the gravity of such an act—that Jews are careful not to touch a Torah scroll’s parchment sheets with the fingers, etc.

And that brings us to the reading of the Torah.

Last week, we read the Ten Commandments and the Revelation at Mt. Sinai. This week, however, we continue with what happened immediately *after* the Giving of the Torah (according to the opinion of the Ramban, that is).

We read, “And Moshe inscribed all the words of Hashem... and he took the book of the covenant and read in the ears of the nation, and they said, ‘All that Hashem has spoken, we shall do and we shall listen’ ” (Shmos 24:4, 7).

After the Jewish Nation had heard the Ten Commandments from G-d Himself, Moshe was not satisfied, and wrote them down in a scroll. Then we continue reading how G-d says to Moshe, “Go up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone tablets” (24:12).

Here for the first time, the Jewish Nation is notified that besides the fact that they heard the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai from the Mouth of the Almighty, they are also going to get those same Ten Commandments engraved on stone. These were the “Tablets of the Covenant” that G-d gave Moshe.

The Rebbe asks that this is apparently not understood. After all, at the Giving of the Torah, the entire Jewish Nation heard the Ten Commandments to the point “that their souls flew out—meaning that it was a tremendous experience that you don’t forget so quickly. Additionally, says the Rebbe, it’s logical to say that the Jewish Nation, out of the love they had for the words they had heard at Mt. Sinai, went ahead and wrote them down in stone for themselves—and if so, why did G-d see a need to give them the same words engraved on stone tablets?

In plain English, what did the Two Tablets add to what the Jewish Nation already knew and had received before?

The story is told about the Maggid of Mezritch, the student and heir to the Baal Shem Tov (the founder of the Chasidic movement), that he had one very gifted student, and perhaps even the most gifted student, who was his *chozer*.

What’s a chozer? In those days, there was no such thing as tape recorders or video, etc. Even in recent times, it was not possible to record the Rebbe during his Shabbos afternoon talks. And so the chozer—literally, the “reviewer” or “repeater”—is a very important job in the Chassidic world.

The chozer is a person gifted with a very good memory, besides a deep understanding, whose job it is to memorize and repeat the Rebbe’s entire sermon.

Now this student of the Maggid, named Rabbi Volf, was the Maggid’s chozer, and all the students would come to him to hear reviews of the Maggid’s speeches.

But it so happened that, for whatever reason, Rabbi Volf abandoned Chasidic philosophy and became a wanderer—he simply drifted from place to place and from city to city.

The story goes that one of the Maggid’s Chasidim was once in some synagogue in some town, where he saw someone lying on the floor next to the synagogue oven muttering deep words of Chasidic philosophy to himself. Judging by his behavior, the Chasid identified him as the same famous Volf that everyone talked about.

When Rabbi Volf went out for a minutes, the Chasid opened his bag and started searching inside. Maybe he’d find Chasidic writings that hadn’t yet been publicized? Or so he thought to himself—if the man had been the Maggid’s chozer, he certainly had a few Chasidic essays in his bag!

But in the meantime, Rabbi Volf came back inside and caught the Chasid red-handed.

Rabbi Volf asked him, “What are you looking for in my bag? Did I steal something from you?” The Chasid admitted that he was looking for Chasidic writings, and that he had thought that perhaps he’d find something in his bag that had never before been seen or heard.

Said Rabbi Volf to him, "To you guys, Chasidim are a separate entity in their own right and the Rebbe and Chasidic philosophy are also a separate entity in their own right. And so you need writings which contain the Rebbe's teachings. But as far as we are concerned, we and the Rebbe and Chasidic philosophy are literally one thing, and we didn't need written words."

This is the reason why it was not enough to simply hear the speaking of the Ten Commandments or even see them written in ink on parchment, but also to have them engraved on stone tablets—because something only heard can easily be forgotten, and something written down in ink on parchment, while harder to forget, can fade from the parchment, as we see with Torah scrolls that need to constantly be inspected.

But words engraved on stone are words that can never be erased. Sometimes they can get covered in dust, but the words remain written forever.

The Rebbe explains that by giving the stone Tablets, G-d wanted to inscribe the Ten Commandments not only on the stones but primarily to engrave them on the heart of every Jew. This engraving symbolizes the bond between the Jew and the Torah, a bond that cannot be forgotten and cannot be erased. For just as a letter engraved in a stone is a part of the stone, so too the Torah is a part of the essence of the Jew—the Jew can never erase his or her connection with the Torah; the Jew and the Torah are one entity.

The lesson, my friends, is this: If you want to forge a connection with the Torah, wrapping yourself in a Torah scroll won't help. What will be far more effective would be to study the Torah and to live with it—until it's engraved on one's heart and in one's soul, making the person one entity with the Torah.

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