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### COMPLICATED PEOPLE

**T**HE TABLETS OF THE LAW ARE THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE SEDRA<sup>1</sup>. We learn about the forty days and nights that Moses spent on Mount Sinai, and how at the conclusion of this time, G-d gave him the two Tablets of stone on which were engraved the Ten Commandments. Then, coming down the mountain, when he saw the Golden Calf and the Jewish people dancing round it, he broke the Tablets.

Later the Sedra describes how Moses again ascended the mountain, pleading with G-d to forgive the people. As a sign of this forgiveness, he was given the second set of Tablets. Moses now returned to the people, bringing them the Second Tablets of the Law. Eventually, when Solomon built his Temple in Jerusalem, both sets of Tablets were placed in the Golden Ark in the Holy of Holies<sup>2</sup>.

The Sages tell us that if the Jewish people had not sinned with the Golden Calf, all Torah teaching would have been expressed in very simple and direct terms. We would have been given the Written Torah with the basic 613 Commandments and the rules of how to divide up the Land of Israel, but nothing more<sup>3</sup>. There would not have been the many and varied teachings of the Sages, collected in books such as the Talmud and the Midrash. We have these only as a result of the fact that the First Tablets were broken and that we received the Second Tablets of the Law.

How do these teachings of the Sages relate to the sin of the Golden Calf and the breaking of the Tablets?

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If we had not sinned we would have shown ourselves to be pure, very straightforward people who are able to accept Divine guidance in simple and direct terms. However, the fact that we fell, that we succumbed to the intoxication of the Calf, showed that we are not so simple. We fall into sin - and then we repent. We therefore need Torah teachings which can deal with this complexity.

Further, the fact that we sinned and then repented gave us a more exalted relationship with G-d. Our repentance gave us the power to discover and comprehend multiple levels of explanation of the Torah<sup>4</sup>. These levels are expounded at great depth by the Sages, in the Talmud and Midrash and other fascinating works of Jewish thought.

Through the ages, the Sages in each generation have continued to explain the Torah, in all the multiple ways that we, the complicated Jewish people, require. They do this not just as wise individuals and original thinkers, but as links in a chain of holiness which goes back to Sinai.

There was also another difference between the First and Second Tablets. The Torah tells us that when Moses came back to the Jewish people carrying the Second Tablets, his face shone with spiritual radiance. He had gained this through the intensity of closeness with G-d while pleading on behalf of the Jewish people, asking G-d to forgive us.

The Sages tell us that Moses' face shone like the sun; that of Joshua, his disciple, shone like the moon. The spiritual radiance of the great teachers of the Torah continues through the generations. Through their teachings we the complex Jewish people can discover our own fulfilment, and also help the confused world around us to find its way.

1. Exodus 30:11-34:35. 2. Talmud Bava Batra 14a-b. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Reshimat HaMenorah*, 104, n.357, and *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 9, 201 n.31. 3. Nedarim 22b. 4. Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 9 p.242, vol.26 p.250.

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*SEDRA KI TISA*

***ROSH CHODESH***

Rachel came into the kitchen to ask her mother for help with some maths homework, but found her busy on the phone, with a long list of names in front of her which she ticked off as she completed a call. "What are you doing?" Rachel asked her mother.

"I'm having a Rosh Chodesh meeting here on the 6th March, and I have to call up people and let them know about it in good time," her mother explained.

"What is a Rosh Chodesh meeting?"

"It's a Jewish women's group the Rabbi's wife runs on the New Moon, Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the Jewish month. We usually study some Torah and have a speaker - it's very good."

"Why is it called the Rosh Chodesh Group?" Rachel asked.

"Well, that's because Rosh Chodesh is a special day for Jewish women. It's a custom for women not to do any laundry or sewing on Rosh Chodesh. That's in addition to saying Hallel and so on, like the men do."

"Why do the women have more rules than the men on Rosh Chodesh?", asked Rachel.

"Well," said her mother. "This is because of something

that is actually in this week's Sedra, Ki Tisa. After the Torah was given, Moses went up Mount Sinai to get the Tablets with the Ten Commandments. He told the Jews he would be back in forty days.

"After a while, the people began to get impatient, thinking, wrongly, that the forty days were up, and complained. 'Where's Moses? Why isn't he back yet? Isn't the time up? He must have died up on that mountain.'

"Then someone suggested that since Moses had obviously died, they should make a Golden Calf to act as a messenger of G-d, who would show them what to do instead of Moses".

"Sounds funny to me," said Rachel. "How could a calf made of gold tell them what to do?" She giggled.

"You're right," said her mother. "This is a kind of idolatry. Of course it was wrong. But, unfortunately, everyone was very excited by this idea - except for the women. They refused to have anything to do with it. The men tried to get them to contribute their jewellery for the project, but they said 'No!'".

"Good for them!" said Rachel.

Her mother continued. "Because of the women's refusal to serve an idol, as a reward Rosh Chodesh is a mini festival for women. That's why they have a few more rules - and also why this meeting takes place on this day."

"That's really fascinating," Rachel said. "I didn't know Rosh Chodesh was such a special day for women - but now I know, I'll make sure to remember it. At the very least - I will say Hallel!"

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