

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion: *Ki Tissa*

BROKENNESS AT THE CENTER

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּסַל־לָךְ שְׁנֵי־לַחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרִאשֹׁנִים וְכָתַבְתִּי עַל־הַלְחֹת
אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל־הַלְחֹת הַרְאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ:

And God said to Moses: "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered." [Exodus 34:1]

AVODAH COMMENTARY: When he saw the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, Moses threw broke the stone tablets he received from God when he smashed them to the ground. Later, when God agreed to forgive the people, he invited Moses to carve a new set of tablets to replace the old ones. These new tablets were then placed into an ark, which in turn, was placed at the center of the tent of worship, in a place so sacred that it was called "the holy of holies."

But what ever happened to the broken fragments of the first set of tablets? In some way, they are a sign of failure and sin. Did Moses leave them behind on the ground at Sinai, to be forgotten? Or perhaps they were buried, hidden from sight so no one would see.

The Talmud suggests a third possibility:

דתני רב יוסף: "אשר שברת ושמתם" - מלמד שהלוחות ושברי לוחות מונחין בארון.

Rav Yosef taught: *Carve two tablets of stone like the first...tablets that you smashed, and you shall deposit them in the ark.* [Deuteronomy 10:1-2] This teaches us that Moses placed the [whole] tablets together with the broken tablets into the ark. [Bavli Bava Batra 14b]

QUESTIONS: When we work on social issues, we immediately confront the fact that there is a great deal of brokenness in the world. Sometimes we want to leave the brokenness behind or bury it so that no one can see. What is Rav Yosef teaching us when he says that the shattered fragments of the first tablets were put right next to the whole tablets and that both the broken and the whole tablets were placed in the center of the holiest place on earth?