

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXI: Ki Tisa (Ex. 30:11–34:35)

Essay 10. Two equal tablets

This essay concerns the same verse as the last essay, “He gave Moses—when He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai—two tablets of the Covenant, **tablets of stone** inscribed with the finger of G-d” (Ex. 31:18).

עוד פרש רש"י "לחת אבן" "לחת" כתיב שהיו שתייהן שוות. קשה דאיך אפשר שיהיו שתייהן שוות, והלא איכא שלשה עשה ושבעה לא מעשה, והעשה ולא מעשה אינם שווים.

Rashi also explained on the words “**Tablets of stone**”: “**‘Tablets of’** [לחת] [*luchot*] **is written** [defectively, without a *vav*] **for the two of them were equal.**” That is, the full spelling of the word would be לוחות. Instead, it is spelled לחת, which (without vowels) could be read as a singular word, *luchat*, “a table of.” [Of course, the verse explicitly says that there were two of them, so we know that it is to be pronounced *luchot*.] The interpretation is that the spelling is coming to tell us something, and Rashi, based on Ex. Rabbah 41:6 (which quotes Rabbi Chanina), says that it teaches that the two tablets were equal. Most commentators interpret “equal” to mean they were of the same size, but the Zera Shimshon goes in a different direction.

A question is how is it possible that the two of them were equal, for aren't there three positive [commandments] and seven negative [commandments], and the positive [commandments] and negative [commandments] are not equal?

ונרסינו בסוף פרק ב' דפסחים (דף מ"ב) דאליבא דר' יהודה כל היכא דכתיב בתחלת הפרשה "לאמר" לימד על הפרשה כלה שהיא בלא מעשה, דלאמר בי רב אמרי דמשמע לאו אמור. והכא נמי נימא שהואיל דכתיב בתחלת עשרת הדברות "ונדבר אלהים את כל-הדברים האלה לאמר", הני כאילו כתיב לאו בכל הפרשה, ונהו שתייהן שוות, דאית בכלהו לאו.

We learn at the end of the second chapter of tractate Pesachim (page 42a) that according to the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, that wherever it is written at the beginning of a passage the word לאמר [*leimor*] [“saying”], it teaches that the entire passage concerns a negative [commandment].

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Of *leimor*, the school of Rav say that the meaning is “say a prohibition.” In other words, Moses was instructed to inform the Jewish people of a prohibition. Thus, any mitzva introduced by the word *leimor* should be treated as a prohibition.

Here too, let us say that since it is written at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, “G-d spoke all of these words, saying [לאמר] [*leimor*]” (Ex. 20:1), that it is as if the entire passage concerns a negative [commandment], and this is the meaning of “the two of them are equal,” that all of them are negative [commandments].

ואף שלכאורה עדיין יש הפרש ביניהם, שבלום ראשון יש בו שלשה עשה והלום השני אין בו שום עשה. יש לומר דלפי דעת הזהר הקדוש דהפסק שיש ב"לא תרצח. לא תנאף. לא תגנב" אתא למימר שהדינאיים יעשו דין רציקה, וכן הבעל ינדקק לאשתו, וכן התלמיד לרב שישתדל לגנוב דעתו כדי שיתחכם וכו' ועיי"ש. אף בלום השני הכי נמי יש בו שלשה עשה, וישפיר קאמר שתיקו שוות.

But apparently there is still a difference between them, for in the first tablet there are three positive [commandments], and in the second tablet there are no positive [commandments].

It can be said that according to the thinking of the holy Zohar (II:93b), the pause that there is between the clauses of the verse, “you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal” comes to tell us that the judges will render judgment for murder, and a husband will be able to make demands upon his wife, and also the student of a teacher who will strive to mislead him (literally, “steal his thinking”) in order to grow wise, and see there.

That is, the Zohar says that if not for the pauses, we would take an absolutist view of each of these commandments. Thus, “you shall not murder” would mean that judges could not sentence a murderer to death; “you shall not commit adultery” would mean that a husband could not have relations even with his own wife; and “you shall not steal” would mean that a student could not be a “Devil’s advocate,” taking a position in a debate that he does not really believe in order to develop his own intellect, for that would be *geneivat da’at*, “stealing one’s thinking,” i.e., misleading someone.

But because of the pause in the reading, these three commandments are viewed as being both forbidden and permitted, depending upon the circumstance. **Thus, the second tablet indeed has three positive [commandments],** if one interprets “you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal” permissively, **and it is fine as it says, that the two of them are equal.**

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