



Torah Reflections on *Parashat Ekev* Deuteronomy 7:12 - 11:25

18 Av 5769

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In the middle of Moses' monologue before the Israelites in this week's Torah reading, the aging prophet reminds the assembly of a shameful incident. He recalls (Deuteronomy 9:11-12): at the very moment God was turning the stone tablets over to Moses atop Mt. Sinai, the Israelites had begun worshipping a golden calf at the base of the mountain. A few weeks after being shepherded out of Egypt, the anxious community lost faith in its spiritual promise and began to stray from its covenant with God.

Moses notes that at this pivotal moment in their journey, the Israelites were on the verge of self-destruction. However, God turns toward the chastened community and offers a second chance—Moses is instructed to carve and inscribe a new set of stone tablets and bring them into the camp as a sign of the covenant which is to be perpetuated between God and the People.

What a powerful image to preserve and carry within our sacred narrative! Even after our ancestors humiliated themselves so profoundly, they are given the opportunity to reconnect with God and with their future. At the same time, they—and we—are not allowed to forget this critical moment. For it holds many lessons—or at least poses many questions for us—about the limits of our ability to control our world, about humility, about reconciliation and spiritual realignment (*teshuvah*), about how we may carry the legacy of our past misdeeds and acknowledge our brokenness. Later (according to a common interpretation of Deuteronomy 10:2) we learn that the fragments of the first, broken set of tablets—which Moses shattered at the scene of the golden calf—were to be kept in the sacred ark alongside the new set of tablets Moses inscribed when he re-ascended Mt. Sinai. From that time on, the Israelites preserved—in the heart of camp—a physical reminder of perhaps its most difficult day, together with the record of its enduring covenant.

Now may be a fruitful time to reflect on a significant place of brokenness or regret in your life, and also to reflect on the enduring covenant or commitments you keep. As we look into our hearts or share with a companion in this sacred work, may we find renewed purpose, comfort, and blessing.

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