

Rebbitzen's Corner



"Difficult Gifts"

This past week, we observed a little known fast day, the Fast of the Shiva Asar B'Tammuz (the Fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz.) This fast day begins a period of three weeks of mourning and introspection, leading to another fast day, Tishah B'Av (the Ninth of Av) the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. Traditional Judaism holds that during these three weeks, no weddings should be performed, no new dresses should be worn for the first time, no fruits not previously

eaten this year should be enjoyed, and hair should not be cut. According to Tradition, five catastrophic events took place on the Seventeenth of Tammuz throughout our history. The most significant was Moses' return from Sinai with the Covenant, only to find that the Israelites had constructed and then proceeded to worship a golden calf. In his pain and anger, Moses cast down the tablets of the Covenant and broke them.

I would like to tell you a little more about the Tablets of the Covenant (the Ten Commandments); what they were like and the consequences of their destruction. We are told that the Tablets were a magnificent creation fashioned by the Hand of G-d. "The tablets were the work of G-d, and the inscription was the Divine Inscription." (Exodus 32:16) The inscription on the tablets was miraculous, because it penetrated the stone and could be read clearly from either side. Because the original tablets were directed by "Divine Revelation," it is said that man could look at the tablets and have a clear understanding of what the Divine Will truly was. While looking at the tablets, Divine Will (G-d's Will) was clear, without distortion or confusion; without question, anyone looking at the tablets knew what G-d expected of them. The destruction of the original tablets took that Divine Illumination away from us. Moses was made to create the second tablets by his own hand (with revelation and guidance from G-d, of course...) Because the second tablets were made by man, we were then left to try to understand the meaning of G-d's Words on our own. That, in my own mind, explains man's constant quest for knowledge and understanding of G-d's Word. When we lost the first tablets, we lost the clarity of preception of the Divine Will. Our struggle for Spirituality is now so much more difficult. Therefore, we grieve for the irreparable loss of the Gift of the Manifest of Divine Will (the original tabets).

Perfection is no longer simply given to us (even though some may be inclined to think it is!) Perfection cannot be given to us by G-d, from our parents, or by virtue of what society has to offer. It is something we must strive to achieve, something

we must earn. Some say humans can never reach a state of perfection, and that may be so, but that must not keep us from trying. We are now faced with the awesome responsibility of making decisions and choices with regard to our own moral behavior. This responsibility, this freedom of choice, in my opinion, is a very precious gift, in-

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