

"THE TABLETS WITHIN"

It is well known that in Judaism we have two Torahs: the תורה שבכתב, the Written Torah, that is, the Bible or Scripture; and תורה שבעל פה, the Oral Torah, the sacred tradition which ultimately was condensed in the literature of the Talmud.

This morning I wish to commend your attention to a subdivision in the category of תורה שבכתב, the Written Law. The difference between the Written and the Oral Law is this, that the Oral Law is expressed in terms of concept and ideas, whereas the Written Law is articulated in the form of letters. Now, Rabbi Shneour Zalman of Ladi, founder of the HaBaD movement in Hasidism, (in his "בחוקותי" to "לקוטי תורה") teaches that the Written Torah comes in two kinds of letters. One he refers to simply as כתיבה, writing or inscription. The second consists of חקיקה, engraving. When we write the words of the Torah on the Scroll of the Law, דיו על גבי קלף, ink upon parchment, that is ketivah. Hakikah refers not to writing with one substance upon another, but to engraving the letters upon the object itself, such as the two tablets Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai bearing the Ten Commandments, or the twelve large stones upon which, towards the end of his days, he was commanded to engrave the words of the

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entire Torah and erect them on the shores of the Jordan River.

What is the difference between ketivah and hakikah, between the kind of letter that is inscribed on the parchment of the Torah and the kind that is engraved up on the stone tablets? It lies in this, Rabbi Shneour Zalman tells us, that in ketivah, no matter how closely attached the letters are to the parchment, they nevertheless remain two separate entities: letters and parchment. They may be close to each other, well-nigh ineradicable, but ultimately they remain distinct and apart. With hakikah, however, the letters are not at all separate from the stone; the letters and the tablets are organically united, they are one and the same substance. One cannot distinguish between the writing and the stone; they are identical. Ketivah keeps the message separate from the scroll upon which it is inscribed, while hakikah has them inextricably bound up as one substance.

There is little doubt which is more significant. It is hakikah. Rabbi Shneour Zalman refers these two to the two categories of spiritual development. The lower one is that of עומד, which characterizes one who has attained a certain spiritual station, no matter how high, but it is stationery, standing, there is no motion upward ^{or} and onwards. The greater level is that of הליכה, going, the ability to progress and grow and develop. Ketivah or inscription leads to the stationery spiritual status of עומד, whereas hakikah or engraving inspires the spiritual progressiveness called הליכה.

Thus we can understand the first several words of this morning's Sidra: **אם בחוקותי תלכו** , "if you will go in my statutes." The word for statutes or laws is here rendered as **חוקות** . Normally, we interpret this particular word for laws as referring to those commandments for which man cannot discover any rational explanation. However, according to the interpretation of Rabbi Shneour Zalman, these now refer to those laws which must become part and parcel of the human personality; they must yield the quality of **חִקְיָה (hakikah)** . What the Torah means to tell us, therefore, is **אם בחוקותי תלכו** -- if you will observe the Torah in such a manner that it will be for you a **hakikah**, organically bound up with your own soul and heart and mind, integrated into your personality, then you will achieve the ability to "walk", the superb spiritual attainment of **הליכה** .

Now this is a powerful idea and crucial insight. There are, essentially, two approaches to Judaism, two orientations towards our tradition. According to the first, it is possible to accept one's Judaism as a kind of additive to the rest of one's life. It is like the vitamin D that is added to milk; the same vitamin could well be added to any other substance and enrich it, without changing and transforming that substance. So, some people take their Judaism only as a kind of medicine or vitamin, but it is not part and parcel of their lives. Here, Judaism has been reduced to a religion like all other religions. Just as a Methodist might

consider himself a human being, a son, a husband, a father, an American, a professional, who happens to be a Methodist or worship in the Methodist fashion, so the Jew is an American like all other Americans, a human being like all other human beings, no different essentially, just that he happens to have a Jewish religion. He and his Judaism remain two separate and distinct entities. This is the way of ketivah. In this case, one's Judaism is ד"ר על גבי

קלף , like ink written upon parchment -- there is a message, it can be read, but the message and the person remains apart from each other.

The greater way is the second, the Judaism of hakikah. Here the message of Judaism is deeply engraved upon the tablets of one's heart. One's Torah and oneself are organically united, they are integrated with each other.

The first way, that of ketivah, is spiritually superficial, whereas the way of hakikah is religiously profound. The way of ketivah is ceremonial and ritual; one leads a "normal" life, and adds thereto a number of interesting observances. The second way, however, that of hakikah, is indeed a "way of life" -- אם בחוקותי

תלכו "if you will walk in my statutes," The way of hakikah leads to הליכה , to going, to a "way," to progress, to growth. The first way is such that it cannot stand up in times of crisis, and Judaism is regarded as excess baggage in times of tension. The way of "engraving," however, is the kind that lasts forever and, like letters etched in stone, can weather all kinds

of storm and inclement circumstances. The way of hakikah is not merely a matter of dramatic or sentimental rituals; it is the kind of "way" on which a man refers to Torah the most real and basic and crucial problems of his life.

This same difference between Torah as superadded and Torah as organically united with the individual, is seen by our Rabbis as accounting for the distinction between Moses and all the other Prophets. The other prophets received a message of God from without. They heard a voice or saw a vision and the voice and the vision came from above, from outside of themselves. They were holy, sacred, noble individuals who acted on the basis of this divine message; but the divine Presence was like ink on parchment: separate from the individuality of the prophet. With Moses, however, the Rabbis told us שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו, it was as if the Divine Presence spoke forth from within Moses, from his very throat! It was not a revelation that came to him from without himself; it was a revelation that issued from within himself. Moses' personality dissolved in the presence of God. His identity was absorbed in that of God. He was organically bound up with the message of the Lord, and integrated with the Shechinah.

In a measure, this must apply to all Jews. An English Gentile, a distinguished historian, Professor MacMurray, once put it this way: whereas other people have a religion, the Jews are the only people who are religious. What he meant, of course, is that for others religion is expressed exclusively in terms of ketivah, whereas Jews seek to attain hakikah. Unfortunately, however, this applies

only to the full and complete Jew -- and he is in a minority. With most of us, regretfully, this is not completely true. Too often our Judaism is just an added element to a life that otherwise is untouched by its sanctity. For too many of us it is unfortunately true that our Judaism could easily be peeled off, like old ink off yellowed parchment.

The differences between ketivah and hakikah, between an allegiance that remains external to a man and the kind of commitment that catches him up in a burning oneness with his ideals, are serious and of the greatest significance. There are clear ways of telling them apart.

For one thing, a ketivah relation to Judaism generally does not last too long. In times of tension and stress, the letters are chipped off the parchment; the Jew loses his Judaism, the message becomes garbled, the letters do not make too much sense, the sentences and the verses do not read in the old cadences. When, however, there is a profound sense of identification with one's tradition and faith, and the word of God is inscribed in one's very heart, then it remains permanent, unexchangeable, and indelible. Then, no matter what the vicissitudes that life bring^s, one's Jewishness remains unimpaired.

Furthermore, as we have indicated, a ketivah relationship to Judaism means that one is an amut, he remains stationary and cannot make progress in his religious life. If, however,

one practices a hakikah type of Judaism, he will constantly grow and develop, he will partake of a life of Halakhah which leads to spiritual halikhah (הליכה), progress and growth.

Moreover, every man must have some kind of commitment with which he can truly identify. Unless one is to live his life totally "alienated," completely without rhyme or reason, lost in the limbo of vacuity, he must have something with which he can feel organically bound up. If the sense of hakikah will not be Torah and Judaism and the Tradition, it must be with something quite different. What a remarkable coincidence that this morning's Haftorah tells us about the other side of that coin. In the first verse of the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah we read the brooding words of the Prophet who tells us that the חטאת יהודה, the sins of Judah "is written with a pen of iron and with a point of a diamond; חרושה על לוח לבם, it is engraved upon the tablets of their heart!" Here is a stark contrast: either it will be חטאת, the sense of loyalty to God's ways will be engraved upon the tablets of our lives; or else it will be חטאת, Jewish failure, Jewish bankruptcy, spiritual disaster, which will become חרושה על לוח לבם, engraved upon the tablets of our hearts! We cannot expect long to remain in that never-never land where the tablets of the heart remain untouched. In the end, some message and meaning must be inscribed "with a pen of iron and with a point of a diamond. " Which shall it be: the hakikah of God's ways and statutes, of Jewish pride and loyalty;

or the hakikah of "the sin of Judah," of Jewish disloyalty and backsliding?

The most important test as to whether a man's Judaism is accepted and lived by him in a sense of ketivah or hakikah is the immediacy with which he identifies himself. Wake a man up in the middle of the night and ask him "who are you?" and demand an immediate answer -- and you will know how that man regards himself, what his sense of identity is. If he says, "a man," or "a stockbroker," or "a Republican," or "a husband," or any one of such answers, you will know the essence of his self-definition. What we must strive for is to become so organically at one with our Jewishness, that our immediate answer will be: "I am a Jew!"

The Torah already told us of this concerning the mysterious figure of Jonah, that ancient Prophet who fled from God and "rocked the boat." He was aboard ship when, because of him, God caused a storm to brew at sea and to threaten the passengers with disaster. When they realized that all this was the fault of Jonah, who had kept apart from the others and was unknown to them, they approached him and said to him: "what do you do and where do you come from? What is your country and where do you hail from?" In other words: "who are you?" And without premeditation, the response came immediately from the old prophet aboard that storm-tossed ship in the eye of the tempest: עברי אני , "I am a Hebrew," and

וְאָתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יִרְאֶה , "I worship the Lord

God of Heaven!" That is how Jonah saw himself and identified himself: I am a religious Jew!

It is precisely this which we must seek to foster within ourselves and our families. Our Judaism must be so engraved into our personalities, that we should immediately identify ourselves as Jews who worship God, as children of Torah, as members of the covenanted community of Israel! The Torah that is written into our souls is not that of ketivah but that of hakikah, not merely that of a Scroll of the Torah, but that of the Tablets of the Law!

This indeed spells the difference between Day School education and other forms of Jewish instruction. The difference is not only in the number of hours that we try to give our children training Jewish law and life. It is the question primarily of whether their Jewishness will be ketivah, merely superadded to an otherwise rich curriculum, or hakikah, part and parcel of their lives, their hopes, their aspirations. This is the problem of integration for Jewish education: can we successfully integrate the sense of Judaism and Jewishness into the personalities of our students?

This indeed, is what should distinguish Orthodoxy from all other kinds of Judaism. Orthodoxy is not merely a matter of more observance. It is not only a question of conscious piety.

One cannot set up a straight yardstick as the criterion of Judaism, and say that if one observes only so much he is Reform, if a bit more he is Conservative, and as one goes higher up the measuring rod of observance, one turns Orthodox. By no means! Orthodoxy or Torah Judaism means hakikah Judaism. It means that, no matter what the degree of one's success or failure in his observance, he must identify himself as a loyal Jew, he must feel at one with his Torah, with his God, with his people. An Orthodox Jew is one in whom the Torah is engraved upon the tablets of his heart, he bears his Torah upon the tablets within.

On this Sabbath before Shavuot, when we celebrate the giving of the Torah at Sinai, that lesson must be repeated and relearned. We must strive to reaccept not only a written Law, but an engraved Law.

The famed Hasidic teacher, a younger contemporary of the Besht, Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, once said the following: Hasidism teaches that there is a spark of Godliness in every human being. God indwells within us. But the Zohar also teaches that God and Torah are mystically identical; therefore, it must be equally true that there is a spark of Torah within each Jewish soul, that Torah indwells in every Jew. Hence, Shavuot means something very special and different from what we usually believe. The first revelation at Mt. Sinai is one in which God gave the Torah from without; we stood below at the foot of the mountain,

and God gave the Torah "from Heaven", from above. But since then we have the Torah within ourselves. Therefore, at Shavuot time, it now becomes our sacred duty and obligation to reveal the Torah to ourselves from within ourselves! We must express the latent Torah that lies within each of us and strives for self-expression.

In a word, we must be inspired to a hakikah-type of Judaism where we shall forever remain bound up with our faith, our learning, our tradition, our Law. As we enter the season of the giving of the Torah, may we achieve this lofty goal; and may we thereby achieve the level of הליכה, of "going" -- from strength to strength, from love to love, from greatness to greatness.