

**Parashat Eikev  
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Boker Tov.

A Jew, a Minister and a nun walk into a room. No, this is not the start of a joke but a part of my weekly experience this past year, as I had the opportunity to study Theology at Oxford University in England as part of a year abroad.

For two of the three terms, I took courses in Protestant Theology and in Mysticism, both taught by the Reverend Andrew Teal, an Anglican Minister. Sister Helen, a Carmelite monastic, was a classmate.

Though a bit uncomfortable at first being the only Jew in a room of devout Christians studying Christianity, those labels designating differences in religion soon fell away so that we could see each other not as Christians and a Jew but as humans. We all had similar, different, and always complex beliefs inherent in our humanity.

As a part of our studies, we read a story about the Medieval Christian massacre of Jews in the Northern English city of York. In the year 1190, in the context of the broader Christian anti-Jewish riots of the Crusades, the King of England, Richard I, incited such riots throughout England; Christian clergy led these riots. In attempt to escape the riots, the Jews of York took refuge in the city's fort, Clifford's Tower. Surrounded, and without food or water, these Jews had two choices: kill themselves or be killed—most chose to participate in mass suicide. Urged on by the Christian clergy of York, the rioting townspeople burned the few who did not commit suicide inside the tower

Immediately after reading this story, a reflective silence fell among the three of us; we did not quite know how to relate to each other. If I, a Jew, had been living 900 years ago, the Christian clergy sitting across from me, of the same tradition as those of York, would have killed me in a brutal fashion. As a Jew with the same Jewish blood as the Jews of York, I would have been helpless to the attacks of the persons sitting next to me. The crash of history broke down the mutual recognition



of humanity that the three of us had forged leaving in its wake the raw truth of violence perpetrated against us Jews. After a short while, we all snapped back to our present moment. I felt that on one level our mutual recognition of humanity was restored; but at the same time the broken bonds needed regeneration.

Reverend Andrew resolved that the three of us should make the four-hour car ride up to York to experience the history of Clifford's tower for ourselves. His courageous criticism of his tradition and claim to the violent history in his own heritage helped generate trust and forge new, stronger, bonds between us. This trip demonstrated to me that by working hard, we can regenerate the broken bonds between two humans. In these regenerated bonds I felt the divine.

This week's *parsha*, Parashat Eikev, is the third *parsha* in the book of Dvarim. In it, Moshe continues his speech recounting the Israelite journey from Egypt through the Sinai desert. Eikev gives us a most unique perspective on the renewal of broken bonds in its telling of the story of the broken *luchot*, tablets, of the Ten Commandments. This perspective differs from that of the story as told in Shmot. Both stories agree that after Moshe received the *luchot*, the tablets, from God, he returned to the Israelite camp at the foot of the mountain only to find the Israelites dancing about a Golden Calf that they had forged. This *avoda zara*, idol worship, broke a bond that God had worked so hard to forge between Himself and the Israelites. In his anger and frustration, Moshe smashes the *luchot*; God, however, granted the Israelites another chance, a renewal, a regeneration, of the broken bond. God does this by granting Moshe a new set of tablets, *luchot*.

Before understanding Moshe's perspective on this story in his speech in Dvarim, it is important to see the story as the narrator in Shmot saw it—perhaps the closest version we can have to the actual happenings. The narrator in Shmot explains that after fasting for forty days and forty nights, God finally forges for Moshe the first tablets.

ויפן, וירד משה מין ההר ושני לוחות העדות בידו, לוחות כתבים משני עבריהם מזה ומזה הם כתובים.  
והלוחות, מעשה אלקים המה, והמכתב מכתב אלקים הוא, חרות על הלוחות

“And Moshe turned and descended from the mountain, and the two tablets of testimony were in his hand, tablets which had writing on both sides; on this side and that they were written. The tablets, they were *God's* work, and the writing, it was *God's* writing, graven upon the tablets.” (Shmot 32:15-16).

By telling us twice that the *luchot* were forged by God, the Torah goes through great pains to make sure that we know that God Himself chiseled these first *luchot*.

When these *luchot*, forged by God, were smashed by Moshe upon seeing the Israelites' sins, Moshe symbolically breaks the bonds between God and the Israelites. God then grants the Israelites a renewal of the bonds by commissioning Moshe to forge new *luchot*, new tablets. The narrator in Shmot makes clear that Moshe, *not* God, forged the second set of *luchot*.

This new, second, set of *luchot* that Moshe wrote, this symbol of a renewal of God and Israel's bonds, were of a different quality:

ויאמר ה' אל משה, כתב לך את הדברים האלה, כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי איתך ברית ואת ישראל

“And God said to Moshe: write for *yourself* these words for it is with these words that I make a covenant with you and with Israel.” (Shmot 34:27).

With each of Moshe's strenuous strikes of hammer upon chisel upon stone tablet, he physically toiled to re-forged a bond of paramount importance—one that had not been obviously renewable—the bond between God and Israel. In fact, the *luchot* that Moshe himself created would become highly valued by the Israelites; they were stored in the Holy of Holies up through the destruction of the first Temple. The first set of *luchot*, forged by God, represent God's action to bond with Israel, the second set, forged by Moshe, represent the human capacity to forge our own bonds: Humans can labor to renew broken relationships.

The regeneration of once broken bonds, such as those between the Minister, the Sister, and myself, requires a humanistic labor, and a recognition of the capacity for humans to regenerate our own bonds. The Minister understood that the regeneration of these human bonds would require spending his day-off driving me and Sister Helen to York; it would involve climbing Clifford's tower to face and claim the history as *his* own while allowing me to process the history as *my* own. Reverend Andrew did not ask to regenerate our bond; his actions spoke for themselves and built a trust between us.

However, the concept that human bonds once broken can be renewed through action is not so obvious in Parashat Eikev. Moshe, giving us his view of the story says,

ויכתוב על הלוחות כמכתב הראשון את עשרת הדברים אשר דיבר ה' אליכם בהר

“And *God* wrote on the tablets the same writing as the first, the ten commandments that God spoke to you on the mountain.” (Dvarim 10:4). In Moshe's view, *God* forged the second *luchot*. The medieval commentators Ibn Ezra and Ramban

agree, saying that *God* wrote the second tablets as He did the first. I do not think that Moshe and these commentators misread God's command in Shmot:

כתב לך את הדברים האלה

“write for yourself these words.” To Moshe and the commentators, this language conveys that only after we as humans labor, toil as Moshe did forging the tablets to regenerate human bonds, will God enter into our relationships.

During our trip of regeneration to York, I was moved to see a plaque at the base of Clifford's Tower commemorating the events there. As I approached the plaque, the Minister came upon my side and the Sister upon the other. Noticing the Hebrew, they asked for me to translate. I translated this verse from Isaiah:

ישימו לה' כבוד, ותהילתו באיים יגידו

“Let them do honor to God, and pronounce His glory in the islands.” (Isaiah 42:12). Suddenly, I realized that I was sharing Torah with two Christians.

A short passage from Masechet Brachot came to mind: “from where do we know that the Shechina, the divine presence, is among two who sit and learn Torah? As it says: ‘Those who revere the Lord have been talking one to another.’” (Berachot 6a/Melachi 3:16). By allowing me, by encouraging me, to engage with the living words of the Jewish prophet, Isaiah, “to pronounce his glory in the islands,” the Minister and Sister forged a bond with me that allowed us to *be* in the fullness of our humanity. Through their work to regenerate the bonds that had been broken, they made space for God to enter into our relationship.

Only through labor, through working on ourselves such that we can exist in all of our complexity as proud human beings in genuine conversation, and by creating space for other human beings to exist with the same wholeness, will God dwell among us. In our Parsha, Moshe leaves us with a message of hope: that we all have the drive to work on our relationships such that God will always dwell among us. Shabbat Shalom.