

**“Broken Hearts: Broken Tablets, A Visual
Midrash”**

**Texts for Shavuot 2015 Midnight Class
Khal Chasidim, Chicago**

**Thou Shalt Not Kill, diptych, 1970 Samuel Beck Oil on canvas
122x162 cm. each Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum,
Jerusalem Gift of the artist**



God was at last to believe in man: good and strong, but good and strong are still two different people. How to live--someone asked me this in a letter, someone I had wanted to ask that very thing.

Wisława Szymborska, *The Turn of the Century*



On the 8th of December 2009, an exhibition entitled “**An Arduous Road: Samuel Bak—60 Years of Creativity**” opened in Yad Vashem’s Exhibitions Pavilion, in the presence of Ambassador of Lithuania H.E. Mrs. Asta Skaisgiryte Liauskiene, celebrated author Amos Oz, renowned artist Samuel Bak, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalev and Senior Art Curator of Yad Vashem’s Museums Division Yehudit Shendar.

“The interconnected journey of the artist and his burden are not unique to the life of Samuel Bak,”

Explains Yehudit Shendar. “Bak’s work is a paradigm for survivors’ narratives—the men and women who undertook life’s journey after coming face to face with death and its horrors. They carry within them a load that is both personal and collective—the story of the Holocaust of European Jewry.

On reaching Israel in 1948, Bak, like his surviving brethren, first donned the mantle of silence, seeking assimilation into Israeli life. This veneer of silence was gradually shed in a journey that encompasses countries and continents; until he reached the moment he could no longer carry the weight inside him. At that instant, another road began, a road into the depths of his identity; a road that culminated with a head-on encounter with the realization that the burden is an integral part of himself and, therefore inevitably, the crux of his work.”

Samuel Bak was born in Vilna, Lithuania in 1933, and began to draw at an early age. His drawings were first displayed in the Vilna ghetto in 1943. Bak recalls:

“The artists of Vilna who had survived the numerous executions were about to exhibit their works, and a respectable group of my sketches took up an entire wall. My parents and I, holding hands, crossed the square, which looked like a malodorous garbage heap. The ground was strewn with hundreds of refugees driven out of the smaller ghettos near our city. One could hardly distinguish between them and their ragged possessions. Some sat on their suitcases, others were standing, and many were lying on the ground, as if their souls had

fled. This was my very first exhibition, but these creatures, so sunken in their misery, did not care about that one bit. In two more days, they would be shot to death in the forest of Ponary...

“We went through the door, but the putrid smell oppressing the courtyard still haunts me. The memory of that odor has haunted me and caught up with me at most of my exhibitions. Art, life, suffering, and death—the artist’s soul. Looking back, I learned many things from that moment. But at the time, I just seized my father’s hand once more, perturbed and heartsick at the fate of the crowd outside. They, it seemed, would never see my drawings.

“But perhaps now they can. And my knowledge that this might be possible is the only Tikkun (correction of the world) I have to offer—to them and the millions of dead Jews in whose memory this holy place [Yad Vashem] was built.”

Bak’s grandparents were murdered at Ponary, and his father was killed just a few days before the Russians liberated Vilna. After the war’s end, he arrived at the Landsberg DP camp in Germany. Bak immigrated to Israel in 1948, and attended the Bezalel Academy of Art, refining his skills under such celebrated artists as Steinhardt, Ascheim and Ardon. In 1956, he continued his studies at l’Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Since then he has lived and worked in Rome, Israel, New York, Paris and Lausanne, before finally settling in Weston, Massachusetts.

“There is no artist that portrays collective memory better than Samuel Bak,” said Amos Oz at the opening of the exhibition.

“I not only see his works, I also feel, smell and hear them... for shed upon them is a light not of this world, a light unlike both natural and artificial light: a light in of itself – the light that Samuel Bak created to illuminate his world of nightmares.” In advance of the exhibition, Bak reflected upon his life:

“To tell the truth, I am still stunned by the fact that my long and exhausting journey pursuing my art has ended at a finishing line, which could not have any greater meaning for me, here in this exhibition at Yad Vashem... I don’t know if there is any place on earth

that is more appropriate for exhibiting my work. These paintings have been my home during the different chapters of my life and my experiences. If this is not a homecoming, then I don't know what is."

Leah Goldstein¹

Broken Tablets: Broken Hearts, A Visual Midrash

The classical commentaries are summarized in the following Talmudic and medieval references.

In Parashat Eikev, Moshe recounts the events of *cheit ha-eigel* (the sin of the golden calf), including his shattering of the stone tablets upon seeing the people worshipping the calf. He recalls that after these events, God commanded him to carve new tablets and to make a wooden ark in which to store them (10:1).

The commentaries raise the question of how to reconcile this account with God's command in Sefer Shemot that the ark for the tablets be constructed along with the rest of the *Mishkan's* furnishings (Shemot 25:10). From there it appears that the ark was built as part of the general project of building the *Mishkan*, and not specifically by Moshe. In fact, later in Sefer Shemot (37:1), the Torah writes explicitly that the ark was built by Betzalel, the artisan who led the project of building the *Mishkan*.

Rashi, based on one view in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:1), **explains that two arks were constructed.** The ark built by Betzalel remained in the *Mishkan* (and, later, in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*) at all times, and it contained the tablets. The ark spoken of here in **Parashat Eikev was a second ark, which contained the *shivrei luchot***, the broken pieces of the original tablets. This ark, Rashi comments, would be taken with the Israelite army to the battlefield. This theory appears earlier in Rashi's commentary, as well, in Sefer Bamidbar (10:33), in discussing the ark that traveled

¹ http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/newsletter/09/new_yv2.pdf

ahead of the Israelite camp during travel in the wilderness. Rashi clarifies that this was not the ark that stood in the *Mishkan*, but was rather the second ark, which contained the *shivrei luchot*.

It should be noted that in his commentary here in Parashat Eikev, Rashi cites from the *Midrash Tanchuma* that **God commanded Moshe to build a new ark after the sin of the calf for the purpose of storing the second set of tablets.** At first glance, this directly contradicts Rashi's contention that Moshe's ark was used for the remnants of the original tablets, rather than the new tablets. The answer, as the Ramban mentions, is that Moshe's ark housed the tablets temporarily, until the ark built with the *Mishkan* was ready. At that point, the second tablets were transferred to the ark in the *Mishkan*, and the *shivrei luchot* were placed in Moshe's ark.

Why would *Benei Yisrael* take the *shivrei luchot* with them to battle? What message might this be intended to convey?

Rav David Mandelbaum, in his *Pardeis Yosef He-chadash*, proposes several possible theories.

First, the presence of the broken tablets would bring to mind the sin of the golden calf, and thus inspire the soldiers to repent, in the merit of which they would be granted success in battle.

Additionally, the sight of the *shivrei luchot* would arouse a sense of humility to offset the feelings of pride that triumphant armies generally experience.

Thirdly, Rav Mandelbaum suggests, the *shivrei luchot* accompanied the soldiers as a symbolic prayer to God to show compassion for His people even if they are "broken tablets," meaning, currently unworthy of His assistance. The respect accorded to the broken stone pieces demonstrates that an object of sanctity retains its status, at least to some degree, even after it has been shattered. The presence of the *shivrei luchot* at battle was intended as a prayer that the Almighty

assist the nation even if they have fallen from their original status of sanctity, and have become mere “*shivrei luchot*.”

Moshe had shattered the original stone tablets upon seeing the calf, and God therefore instructed him after this event to carve new stone tablets and to construct an ark where the tablets would be stored. Rashi, as we saw, commented that this ark was not the ark that was built along with the other furnishings of the *Mishkan*. The ark built by Moshe, to which he refers in this verse, contained the new tablets only until the second ark was built together with the rest of the *Mishkan*. At that point, the new tablets were transferred to the second ark, which remained permanently in the innermost sanctum of the *Mishkan*. Moshe’s ark then contained only the *shivrei luchot* – the remnants of the original tablets, which he broke – and it would accompany the nation when they went out to war.

The Ramban, in his commentary to this verse, notes that the position cited by Rashi represents the minority view among the *Tanna'im*, as indicated in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:1). Furthermore, the Ramban adds, the Talmud in several places (**Bava Batra 14b, Menachot 99a and Berakhot 8b**) comments,

“*Luchot ve-shivrei luchot munachin ba-aron*” – “*The tablets and the broken tablets are placed in the ark.*”

This clearly indicates that the remnants of the original tablets were stored together with the new tablets in a single ark. In fact, Rashi, in his commentary to Bava Batra (14b), writes explicitly that the tablets were placed on top of the remnants of the original tablets. The Ramban thus contends that according to the **majority view of Chazal, Benei Yisrael used only one ark**. God instructed Moshe to build an ark for storing the *luchot* (tablets) temporarily until the new, permanent ark would be constructed along with the rest of the *Mishkan*. Once the permanent ark was built, the Ramban speculates, Moshe’s ark was buried, insofar as it was endowed with the halachic status of *tashmischei kedusha*, sacred articles which must be buried once it falls into disuse. After its burial, only the second *aron* was used.

After presenting this theory, the Ramban then proceeds to suggest an entirely different approach, **which he claims follows “*derekh ha-peshat*” (the plain, straightforward reading of the verse). Namely, according to the Ramban, God’s command, which Moshe recalls here, actually refers to the command to construct the *Mishkan*.** In the aftermath of the golden calf, God informed Moshe that the original command to construct a *Mishkan* with an *aron* at its center still applied, despite the sin of the calf. When God commanded Moshe to make a wooden ark, He referred to the ark built along with the rest of the *Mishkan*, indicating to Moshe that *Benei Yisrael* must proceed with the construction of the *Mishkan* despite the sin of the calf. **Thus, according to the Ramban, only one ark was built; there was never a second ark.** This is also the position taken by **Ibn Ezra**, in his commentary to Sefer Shemot (25:15).

In Parashat Eikev, Moshe recalls the tragedy of *cheit ha-eigel* (the sin of the golden calf), which resulted in his breaking the tablets containing God’s commands. In the aftermath of this calamity, as Moshe recounts, God commanded him, “Carve two stone tablets like the first ones...and I shall write upon the tablets the things that were on the first tablets, which you broke” (10:2).

The Gemara in ***Masekhet Bava Batra (14b)*** famously interprets the words “*asher shibarta*” (“which you broke”) to mean, “*yyasher kochakha she-shibarta*,” an expression of approval and congratulations saluting Moshe’s bold decision to break the tablets in response to the sin of the calf. The Sifrei suggests it derives from “*ishur*” as in permission...a pun on “*asher*”.

Where did Chazal find an allusion in this verse to God’s approval of Moshe’s breaking of the luchot?

The simplest explanation, perhaps, is that the Gemara saw within the word “*asher*” an allusion to the word “*yyasher*,” or perhaps the congratulatory expression “*ashrei*.” The Ramban, however, in his commentary to Bava Batra, suggests that the Gemara arrived at its interpretation from the juxtaposition between this phrase and the

subsequent phrase – “and you shall place them in the ark.” Although this instruction clearly refers to the new tablets, which Moshe was ordered to carve, the Gemara there infers from this juxtaposition that the remnants of the shattered tablets were also to be placed in the new ark (“*luchot u-shivrei luchot munachim ba-aron*”). The Ramban comments that had God disapproved of Moshe’s decision to break the tablets, He would not have commanded him to place the broken tablets in the ark together with the new tablets. The stone pieces would have symbolized Moshe’s offense and would have thus had no place in the ark alongside the permanent tablets.

We should note, however, that the Ramban’s comments seem difficult in light of the fact that he combines two different opinions recorded in the Gemara. It clearly emerges from the Gemara that the view which interprets “*asher shibarta*” to mean “*iyasher kochakha she-shibarta*” does not infer from this verse that the broken tablets were stored in the ark. The Gemara clearly ascribes these two readings of the verse to two different schools among the Talmudic Sages. It thus seems difficult to understand how the Ramban explained one reading based upon the other.

In any event, **Rav Shimon Diskin**, in his *Mas’at Moshe*, suggests an entirely different approach to explain the Gemara’s comment. Quite simply, he writes, God would not have made unnecessary mention of Moshe’s breaking the tablets had He deemed that action sinful. *Halacha* strictly forbids reminding somebody of his inauspicious past, or transgressions that he had committed. We may thus assume that when God instructs Moshe to carve new tablets, He would not have emphasized “*asher shibarta*” to underscore his guilt. The Gemara therefore concluded that God must have approved of Moshe’s bold decision to break the stone tablets in response to the grave sin of the golden calf.²

² <http://etzion.org.il/vbm/english/archive/salt-devarim/46-12eikev.htm>

Sources:

A. DEUTERONOMY 10:1-4

“At that time the LORD said unto me: 'Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto Me into the mount; and make thee an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets which you smashed, and place them in the ark.'

So I made an ark of acacia-wood, and hewed two tables of stone like unto the first, and went up into the mount, having the two tables in my hand.

And He wrote on the tables according to the first writing, the ten words, which the LORD spoke unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them unto me.”

B. TALMUD BAVLI BAVA BATRA 14B

Rav Yosef taught: “The tablets which you broke and place them in the ark” – this teaches that the Tablets and the broken tablets are placed in the ark.

C. TALMUD BAVLI MENAHOT 99A

Rav Yosef taught: “The tablets which you broke and place them in the ark” – this teaches that the Tablets and the broken tablets are placed in the ark.

From here we learn that a scholar who has forgotten his learning out of force, we do not treat him disrespectfully.

D. RESHIT HOKHMA, R. ELIYAHU DEVIDASH, GATE OF HOLINESS 7

The Zohar teaches that the human heart is the Ark. And it is known that in the Ark were stored both the Tablets and the Broken Tablets. Similarly, a person’s heart must be full of Torah... and similarly, a

person's heart must be a broken heart, a beaten heart, so that it can serve as a home for the Schechinah. For the Schechinah [divine presence] only dwells in broken vessels, which are the poor, whose heart is a broken and beaten heart. And whoever has a haughty heart propels the Schechinah from him, as it says, "God detests those of haughty hearts".

E. R. YITZHAK ARAMA, AKEIDAT YITZHAK, 15TH CENTURY SPAIN

Why didn't God sculpt the second tablets, the way He sculpted the first ones? Because that which is totally divine is not sustainable in the hands of humans. Therefore the first tablets, which were "made by God and written by God", were not sustainable. Therefore God told Moses "sculpt [the second Tablets] for yourself" – you make them and I will shape them, thus retaining both the shape and image of the first ones, but these will be sustainable.

F. Reb Zadok Takanot Hashavim, Os 8

The heart is like a document written with ink. The two tablets represent the two chambers of the heart. Sin is the writing of the "Sefer" of the wicked. Just like water can wash away the ink on the paper so too repentance can effectively "wash away" the sins written on the tablets of the heart.

Sin and its opposite are located in the heart in this dramatic parable. The heart becomes the location for desire causing sin and therefore true heartfelt penitence washes away the very desire and cause for sin, also washing away the sins of the past.

A truly dazzling redefinition of sin.

ואמרו בראש השנה (שם) גזר דין דיחיד
אינו נקרע והיינו כמו שנאמר
(מלאכי ג', ו') אני ה' לא שניתי, כי הנה לשון
נקרע וכן תשובה שמקרעת וכן לשון הכתוב
ורפא מעצמו היינו דהתשובה מעצמה היא
הקודעת ומרפאת, כמו דרך משל שנפל מים
על נייר כתוב ונמחקו האותיות כי אותיות
הגזר דין הוא ממעשה העבירה עצמה כי
חטאים תרדף רעה ומזה נעשה נייר של
הגזר דין דהיינו ספרן של רשעים, דידוע
שהספר של צדיקים ושל רשעים ושל
בינונים הוא לב האדם עצמו וכששובר לבו
ועשה תשובה ונשבר לבו בקרבו הרי נקרע
הספר של גזר דין, רק מכל מקום צריך עזר
ה' יתברך שיוכל להשלים כל מדריגות
התשובה בשלימות ולא ימנעו יצרו
המתגבר בכל יום וכמו שאמרו (סוכה נ"ב):
דאלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו וזהו
לענין להבא דעל זה נאמר ארפא:

“For behold the language of tearing up the decree and all aspects of repentance that is a tearing up implies that the very process of t’shuvah is itself a tearing up and a healing.

“For instance when water falls on paper with writing on it, then all the lettering will be washed away, so that in the process of t’shuvah the letters of the decree are from the wicked act itself, ...the sin causes the ink on the paper of the decree which then gets washed away ...so that when a person breaks his heart then the decree gets washed away (presumably by his tears).”

G. Reb Noson, Hilchot Halvaa.

Reb Nosson in separate places equates the idea of sin with the heart and the need for a broken heart as a prerequisite for any kind of divine access. This also refers to the Oral Law, which must accompany the opaque sense of the written law. There can be no comprehension of the Written Law without the lens of the interpreting Oral Law. Also, the smashing of these tablets was in fact, designed to protect Israel from other nations appropriating the Written Law for themselves.

בכל הנחמות ישעיה וירמיה וכו'. וזהו שמסיים
ולכל היד החזקה ולכל המורא הגדול אשר עשה
משה לעיני כל ישראל ופירש"י ששיבר את
הלוחות לעיניהם. ולכאורה תמוה מה ענינו
לכאן שרוצה להזכיר גדולת משה וישראל
שמזכיר שבירת הלוחות אך באמת ע"י שבירת
הלוחות הראה משה גדול מעלת תורה שבע"פ
שאינ שום שלימות לתורה שבכתב כ"א ע"י
תורה שבע"פ. כי הם עשו את העגל ועבדו ע"ז
ופגמו באמונה ועיקר הפגם שלהם היה בבחי'
אמונה הפרטיו' שהוא בחי' תורה שבע"פ שזהו
הפגם של כל ע"א כי באמונה הכלליות בחי'
תורה שבכתב הם מודים קצת בבחי' בכל מקום
מוקטר ומוגש לשמי וכו' כנ"ל וכמו שמוכן שם
מענינו בפ' העגל שאמרו קום עשה לנו אלהים
אשר ילכו לפנינו כי זה משה האיש לא
ידענו וכו' שאמרו שצריכין אמצעי בין הש"י
וביניהם כמובא בדברי אדמו"ר ז"ל בהתורה
ויסב (בסי' סב). וע"כ עיקר טעותם היה
בפירוש דברי משה שאמר לסוף שש אני בא
וטעו בין שש לשבע כשארז"ל היינו שטעו ופגמו
בבחי' תורה שבע"פ שהוא פי' תורה שבכתב
וע"כ טעו אז בהפירוש של דברי משה שהיו
צריכין לפרשו בדרך האמת של בחי' תורה
שבע"פ והם פגמו בזה ופירשו כדעתם הרעה
של הער"ר ועי"ז עשו מה שעשו. נמצא שעיקר
הפגם שלהם הי' בבחי' תורה שבע"פ כנ"ל
וע"כ כשירד משה וראה את המעשה הרע הזה
שנמשך להם ע"י שפגמו בתורה שבע"פ כנ"ל
ע"כ מיד שיבר את הלוחות לעיניהם להורות
להם שמאחר שכפרו בתורה שבע"פ שוב אין
קיום לתורה שבכתב כי אין שום קיום לתורה
שבכתב כ"א ע"י תורה שבע"פ כנ"ל וע"כ מיד
היו הלוחות כבדים על ידו ושכרם מיד להורות
שלפי דבריהם שכופרים בתורה שבע"פ כל
התורה נתבטלה ח"ו אפילו שבכתב כי אין
קיום לזה בלא זה וכנ"ל. ובזה תיקון משה תיקון

צחו המלחמה
מאני קרבא
עמו וכו' כי
כמובא בזוהר.
שבע"פ מר"ה
יבות ישראל
וש"ת שאז
אותה מחדש
דין ומתחילין
וזכינו לחזור
והעיקר הוא
ת אור בבחי'
שניתן לכתוב
לא ניתן לכתוב
ניכר חשיבות
וזאת הברכה
י. מותו והזכיר
האומות לעין
לה בנו אפילו
קבלה רק אנו
כה ה' מסיני
זר פארן וכו'.
ועיר וישמעאל
בלה רק אנחנו
מידו לידינו.
ה קהלת יעקב
הם ואין להם
ש ולבאר שום
ניתנה רק לנו
כפי קבלתינו
וצריכין לקבל
ז לבא אלינו
תורה שבכתב
אשריך ישראל
ת ישראל על
מותימו תדרוך
תחתינו כי כל

להסט"א והקליפות יניקה מתורה שבכתב שלא
 יוכלו להתגבר ח"ו. ואזי אח"כ מיד כשהתפלל
 לפני הש"י וחזר ופייסו שימחול לישראל אמר
 לו הש"י שיחזור ויפסול לוחות שניות ויחזור
 ויכתוב עליהן מחדש דהיינו שעתה צריכין
 לחזור ולקבל גם תורה שבכתב מחדש כי צריכין
 לחדש. הכל לחזור ולהמשיך התורה בבחי' תיקון
 הנ"ל בבחי' שלימות תורה שבכתב ותורה שבע"פ
 לידע מה ליכתוב וכו' כדי לחזור ולהמשיך
 בחי' אמונה הפרטיית כדי להכיר חשיבות
 ישראל ולא יתערבו עוד עם הער"ר ולא יטעו
 אחריהם וע"כ לא ניתנו הלוחות אחרונות עד
 יוה"כ שאז נגמר תיקון זה כנ"ל ונקבע לנו
 לכל שנה ושנה לחזור ולהמשיך התורה בתיקונים
 הנ"ל שעיי"ז נמתקין כל הדינים ונתתקן הכל
 כנ"ל. ועתה נכון היטב מה שאנו מסיימין התורה
 בזה ששבר משה הלוחות כי זהו שבח משה
 וישראל כי עיי"ז סילק וביטל יניקת האומות
 מתורה שבכתב שלא יוכלו למשול על ישראל
 כי גילה שאין שלימות לתורה שבכתב בלא
 תורה שבע"פ וכנ"ל. וע"כ עתה דייקא אנו
 חוזרין ומתחילין התורה מחדש בראשית ברא
 אלקים וכו' כי עתה שנתגלה מעלת תורה שבע"פ
 עתה יש להתורה שלימות ועתה אנו חוזרין
 ומתחילין התורה בתוספת אור שקבלנו בר"ה
 ויוה"כ כנ"ל. ועתה דייקא נתגלה האמונה בשלימות
 כי הש"י ברא הכל מראש ועד סוף ברצונו
 הטוב בחי' בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים
 ואת הארץ והולך ומבאר כל מעשי בראשית
 וכל מה שנועשה אח"כ הכל על נדון נתי' שמנהיג

H. Reb Nathan Nemirov, Likutei Halachot: SHABBAT 6

*“And this is the meaning of the verse “Which you broke and place in the Ark”, about which our Sages said: “the Tablets and the Broken Tablets are placed in the Ark”. By means of the aspect of broken tablets, **broken faith**, by means of that brokenness itself the faith returns and amends itself, which is the second tablets.*

Because thanks to the existence of a shard of the broken faith, by keeping that shard he is fulfilling the advice of the faith itself which was broken – and he can return and repair that faith which is the aspect of receiving second tablets.”

In this remarkable passage Reb Nosson is connecting the broken tablets with the broken heart of faith. Here he fully realizes the impact of modernity on naïve faith and faces the philosophical challenges realistically. He equates the broken tablets with the broken faith we all experience. We cannot will heresy away or hide in the luxury of simple faith. We must struggle to resist the intellectual attraction of modern ideas and philosophies.

I. Yismach Moshe (Parshat Eikev 105a)

The Satmar Rov derives an insight by working directly with the Talmudic analogy between the broken Tablets and the scholar who no longer can study cited above. The Rebbe contends that while forgetfulness is definitely a scourge for the individual who wishes to know and to come to conclusions based upon comparing and contrasting the various bits of information and concepts that he has accumulated over the years, nevertheless it has a silver lining as well. He states that were one not to forget, this would paradoxically impair his/her ability to come up with new ideas and avenues of thought!

“Im Kein HaShichecha Tova Gedola SheGoreim Chidushim BeYisrael SheChaviv Lifnai HaShem Yitbarach Yoteir MeiHaKol”

If so, forgetfulness is a great goodness that causes innovative thought amongst the Jewish people, something that is beloved before HaShem, May He Be Blessed, more than anything else.

It is therefore what is represented by the broken “Luchot”, a breaking down of what is already known **to allow for a reconstruction that may even improve upon what had been originally thought and understood, that holds the key to not only moving on through the desert, but also repentance and reconciliation.** As long as people think that they know all that there is to be known, that there is nothing more to think, say or do, then the possibility for change for the better and rapprochement, the sense that one needs to study and increase understanding will be virtually non-existent. But sometimes it is important to wipe the slate clean, to begin again, to revisit what is known and what has been done, in order to determine whether there may be additional paths as yet uncharted, and new directions that can lead to greater harmony and spiritual wholeness. It is a tragedy that Tablets had to be smashed, just as it is sad to consider someone who was once at the cutting edge of knowledge but who now no longer can contribute on such a level.

However, a benefit that inevitably results is that there is room to reconsider, a new generation will have its opportunity to make its contribution, and hopefully just as the Jewish people ultimately reaches its Promised Land, so will each generation in its time, and each individual in his/her place.

J. Ha’Emek Davar, commentary to Num 10:33 and Deut 31:26.

The NETZIV He suggests that the phrase “*Aron Brit HaShem*” (the Ark of the Covenant of God) which appears in Num. 10:33; 14:44; Deut. 10:8; 31:9, 26, cannot refer to an Ark containing the second Tablets, since the covenant was made in connection with the original “*Luchot*”. (He concedes that rather than being exclusively a reference to an “*Aron*” containing Tablets, it could refer to one in which the entire Sefer Torah, which also is a manifestation of the covenant between HaShem and the Jews, is placed; however such an explanation is relevant only for the two latter verses in Deut. in light of the Sefer Torah not coming into existence until that point.)

Paradoxically, at least from one perspective, the Ark containing the remains of the original "*Luchof*" is holier than the one in the center of the encampment, since the broken pieces are associated with a more intense stage of the relationship between God and His People, a relationship that we have continually been striving to regain ever since the debacle of the Golden Calf. In addition to whatever metaphysical assistance may have been provided by means of the "*Shivrei Luchof*"—was it only the "Clouds of Glory" that leveled the road ahead and killed snakes and scorpions that lay in the Jews' path? (See Rashi Num. 10:34)—the positioning of such an "*Aron*" containing such contents at the forefront, subtly suggests to us.

Which brings us to the visual Midrash of Bak's painting:



What does it represent, this tomb made of two pillar shaped stones like the tablets of Moses?

The fragments of the commandments, normally five on either side are now reduced to two, on the left "*anochi*" and on the right "kill" "*tirzach*" repeated 4 times, with the lamed and the aleph towering over them.

It looks like the commandments have been reduced to the two, the 'I' of *anochi* is all that is left, as if the ritual laws of Sabbath, honoring of parents, idolatry and taking the name of God in vain have vanished in this post modern consciousness. On the left all the "Thou shalt not's" have also gone, stealing, adultery, bearing false witness etc. pale into insignificance before the overwhelming command that has been

ignored in the last century of genocide.

The broken tablets, looking like tombs, in the shape of Moses' tablets Reflect the artist's midrashic revisiting of the broken tablets and harks back to Midrashim and Chassidic masters we have cited.

In his visual Midrash we see the brokenness of humanity as well as the very moral imperative command not to murder that has lasted millennia until modernity. As if (like Adorno) modernity ends in Auschwitz. Coming after the Tremendum, as a survivor, Bak is uniquely postured to comment both on his ethical tradition as well as his faithlessness in the ability of the divine command to be heard and followed again. In the nightmarish post Holocaust world of absent moral values, where genocide is now the norm, his visual attestation to the shattered tablets of ancient wisdom as a pair of tombs, comes as a commentary and a critique of postmodern life.

The solitary granite piece in the left tomb lies relatively intact and clear in its visual presence with few other stones around as opposed to the busy stone fragment filled left tomb. The Divine remains clear in its directive, the "I"ness of anochi has survived to indict whereas the holographic repetitions of "*tirzach*" "kill, kill kill" implies the obsessive and compulsive need to shed blood.

In the end the piece lies shattered like our hearts and broken faith, as we scan the landscape of memory and lost connection to the divine. It used to be an issue with ritual that slipped away in modernity leaving behind the broken fragments of morality now.