

PARSHAT KI TISA  
EXODUS 30:11-34:35  
18 ADAR 5782/17 FEBRUARY 2022



*L'Arc de Triomphe, Wrapped*  
Temporary Installation, Christo and Jeanne-Claude

THE ARC OF TRIUMPH:  
PUBLIC ART

1. “When you elevate (lit., “raise up the heads of”) the Israelites according to their enrollment, each shall pay...a half-shekel as an offering to Adonai.” (Exodus 30:12-13)

The arc of the parsha’s narrative: Elevation – Collapse – Shattering – Reconstruction

2. Moses took the tablets and went down the mountain, and the letters were carrying themselves and Moses. When the letters saw the golden calf, they flew off the tablets and became heavy. Moses could no longer carry them, so he threw them out of his hands. (Pireki D'Rebbe Eliezer 45)
3. Scripture says that the words were “incised [*harut*] on the tablets” (Exodus 32:16). The rabbis comment: “Freedom [*heirut*] from the evil urge, from the Angel of Death, from death itself.” But what does “incised on the tablets” really mean? Only as the light of Torah is incised on the hearts of Israel are the letters incised on the tablets as well. The real writing is on the heart, of which Scripture says: “Write them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:3). Torah depends on the preparation of Israel, on the readiness of those who are supposed to receive Torah. (Sefat Emet)

Israel clearly had fallen into disunity before the calf was made. On the rung where they then stood, on the rung of separation, they indeed received nothing.

4. Why are matters of Torah compared to a goad [Ecclesiastes 12:11]? To tell you that just as a goad directs the cow to her furrow to bring forth sustenance for life to the world, so too the words of Torah direct those who study them from the paths of death to the paths of life. ...Just as this goad is movable and not rigid, so too matters of Torah are movable [in accordance with circumstance and are not permanent].

...Make your ears like a funnel and acquire for yourself an understanding heart to hear the statements of those who render objects ritually impure and the statements of those who render them pure; the statements of those who prohibit and the statements of those who permit; the statements of those who deem items invalid and the statements of those who deem them valid. (Chagigah 3b)

5. Moses loved the whole community of Israel even more than he loved the tablets. By this act of joining himself to Israel. (Sefat Emet)
6. ...and he wrote down on the tablets the terms of the covenant, the ten utterances. (Exodus 24:28)

“Yasher koach for having shattered the tablets.” (Rashi on Deuteronomy 34:12)

7. “Our work of art is a scream of freedom...I have always liked the comparison with nomadic tribes. They build their tents, their houses, move in the desert. Their tents are very strong because they have to resist the wind and the forces of nature.” (Christo)