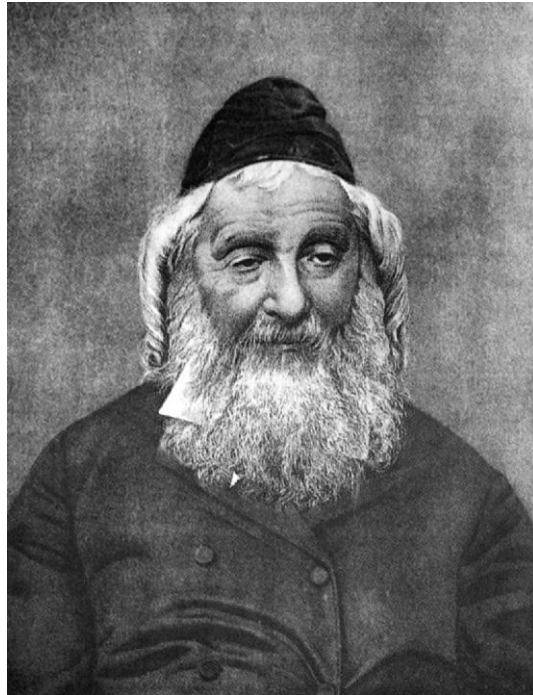


A Man of One World and Many Minds

The Netziv – Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berliner



Suggestions for Further Study:

Epstein, Rabbi Baruch. מקור ברוך, כרך ד (Hebrew). Available for free at <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=48316&st=&pgnum=1&hilite=>

Schachter, Jacob J. "Haskalah, Secular Studies, and the Close (sic) of the Yeshiva in Volozhin in 1892." *Torah U'Madda Journal*, Vol. 2, 1990, 76-133. Available for free at https://www.yutorah.org/_cdn/_shiurim/TU2_Schachter.pdf

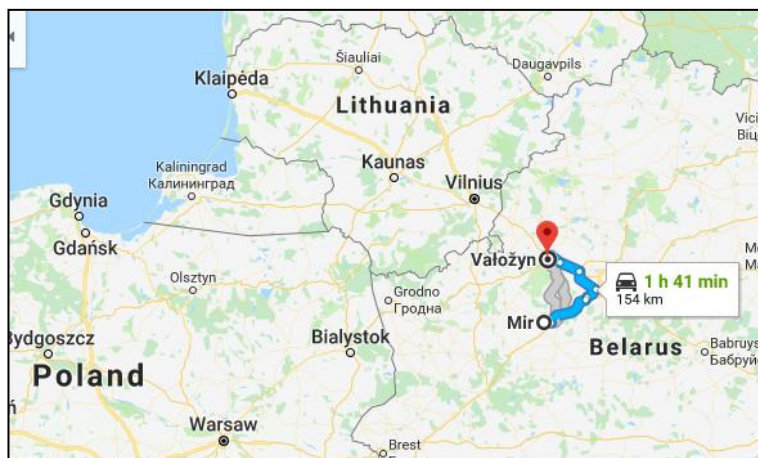
Wein, Rabbi Berel. "Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin: The Fruits of Volozhin." Audio class from "The Biography Series." Download (\$5) at <https://www.rabbiwein.com/R-Naftali-Zvi-Yehuda-BerlinbrThe-Fruits-of-VolozhinbrFrom-the-Biography-Series-P632.html>

"The Closing of Volozhin; Jewish Urban Legend?" Weblog post at <http://muqata.blogspot.com/2008/05/closing-of-volozhin-jewish-urban-legend.html>. Originally dated May 20, 2008. Retrieved July 22, 2018

העמק דבר (*Ha'emek Davar*, Netziv's commentary on Chumash) is available for free at Sefaria.org and Alhatorah.org.

The Netziv's masterful essay on centrism in religious life (על ימין ושמאל): <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=1096&st=&pgnum=48>

Biography



Early Life

Netziv = acronym; nobleman, aristocrat – humility, kindness, greatness

1816 – Erev RC Kislev 5577 (Nov. 20, 1816) – born in Mir, Poland/Lithuania/Russia

- Father – Reb Yaakov Berlin – famous merchant, wealthy
- Grandfather famous Rav
- “Berlin” – family had been there before
- Not a genius as a child – “self-made by hard work, industry” (Wein)

1829 – Came to Volozhin to learn, recluse – studied in private room – concentration

1831 – Married Raina Batya – Daughter of RY Yitzchak Volozhiner, son of Rav Chaim

- Motzei Yom Kippur story
- Strange behavior – Father-in-law didn’t approve; Netziv didn’t reveal himself to father-in-law – Netziv pretended he had nothing to add to Halachic conversation
- Rav Yitzchak found Ha’emek Shaylah manuscript by accident (comm. on Sheiltot of Rav Achai Gaon – 9th Cent.), also saw letter from Dovid Luria complementing him on the manuscript! - Rav Yitzchak Volozhin realizes Netziv is genius

- Rav Yitzchak Volozhin had older daughter married to Reb Elazar Yitzchak Fried

– Talmid Chacham – Netziv always deferred to him in every respect

1842 – Age 26 – Rav Yitzchak Volozhin demands Netziv give classes in the Yeshiva

Career

- Volozhin – central Yeshiva for half a century, existed for 70 years (eventually 90)

- Hasmadah, which was also a hallmark of Volozhin Yeshiva

- Rashash story (wealth/poverty, genius/hard work)

- Straight, slow analysis, orderly, scheduled, homeostasis, slow and steady rain

- Netziv’s granddaughter married Rav Chaim Soloveitchik – Pilpul – Netziv would scorn Rav Chaim’s students, mock them – “what will come of them?”

- Netziv – “Torah is like Moshe – only a staff; Aharon had fancy clothes”

- Taught Chumash in the Yeshiva every morning for ½ hr. – were written down and became העמק דבר

- Also taught Navi, Mishna – many students refused to come, beneath them

- Others said Shulchan Aruch w/o Gemara = fish w/o spices, he said opposite

1849 – Rav Yitzchak Volozhin died; Fried became RY, but ill – Netziv secondary role

1853 – Fried dies

- Yeshiva divides into two camps – one supports Netziv, other Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik, the Beit Halevi – grandson of Rav Chaim Volozhiner
 - Netziv and Rav Chaim were friends – Din Torah (inc. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan)
 - P'sak: Netziv should remain RY
 - Rav Yosef Dov left Volozhin for Slutsk and then Brisk
 - Son Rav Chaim would marry Netziv's granddaughter and become RY anyway
 - Father of student story
 - 500 students at a time; possibly 10,000 Talmidim in 40 years as RY
 - Famous students: A. Y. Kook; Shlomo Polatchek; Shimon Shkop; I. Z. Meltzer
 - "Factory" of Jewish people
 - Son-in-law Rav Rephael Shapiro became RY in Volozhin
 - Daughter married Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, to whom Rav Rephael gave RY job
 - "המאוס בעבודה" – signed letters – weighed down in service
 - Tzedakah story
 - Man from Pinsk story – like soldier on duty
 - "Ben Yeshiva can be anything, but not everybody can be a Ben Yeshiva"
 - Russian government and maskilim (members of Enlightenment) made trouble – decreed many times Volozhin had to include Russian studies and have fewer students.
 - Paid off with bribes
 - Netziv opened axillary school for non-religious students with secular studies
 - Despite institutional failure, Maskilim/Gov't very successful with ind. students
 - Many irreligious students in Volozhin; "dealt with them with soft hand" (Wein)
- but other sources disagree (see Schachter article cited on front page)
- The strange case of Abraham Harkavy
 - Disgruntled student forged letter as if Netziv was against Russian government
 - Baruch Epstein published book on finance and banking *while in Yeshiva*

Later Life

1871 – First wife Raina Batya died

1874 – 2nd wife – Batya Miriam (Mirel) – sister of Baruch Epstein, "Torah Temimah," son of Yechiel Michel Epstein, "Aruch Hashulchan," so Baruch brother-in-law/nephew

- מקור ברוך, memoirs of Torah Temimah – has volume on uncle/brother-in-Law
 - Netziv's oldest son – Chaim Berlin – wealthy – lumber, land – Rav of Moscow
 - Great Jewish library, now in Etz Chaim Yeshiva
 - From second marriage – Meir Berlin – just before Bar Mitzvah when father Netziv died
 - Leader of Mizrachi movement, Bar Ilan U., Teacher's Institute at Yeshiva U.
- Late 1870's-1892 – Everyone in Yeshiva seemed to have a passion project
- Constant personal persecution from Maskilim and Russian authorities
- 1885 – Large fire burns half Volozhin, including Yeshiva; appeals for money to rebuild
- 1887 – Petersburg Congress – 13 Rabbis, inc. Yitzchak Elchanan, Yosef Dov, and Netziv agree to allow spoken and written Russian language learning in Chadarim and Yeshivot (Baruch Epstein adds mathematics [מקור ברוך דף תתריד], but unclear)

1890 – Finally acquiesces to actually carry through on the agreement, selecting 50 out of 250 boys, married and preparing for Rabbanut, to learn Russian 7:30-9:30 pm in a room on bottom floor of the Yeshiva

1891 – Infighting in the Yeshiva; disdain for Batya Miriam among students (inc. violent attack); financial constraints; religious pressure – Netziv decides to move to Israel and appoints Chaim Berlin as RY, students want Chaim Sol. and argue with Netziv

1891 – Decided to retire and leave eldest son Rav Chaim Berlin as RY (not Rav Chaim)

- Students very upset; more infighting

- Rav Chaim Berlin walked away from it, moved to Yerushalayim

- Rav Chaim Berlin – Moscow → Volozhin –raising money for the Yeshiva

Dec. 22, 1891 – Russian gov't issues edict mandating full system of secular studies

nearly entire day for all students, essentially forcing Yeshiva to close

Feb. 3, 1892 – Authorities enter and clear out entire Yeshiva

- Yeshiva dispersed; Netziv banned, forced into exile

- Early supporter of ציון – חובבי ציון – 1860's and on, supported immigration

- Member of executive committee of חובבי ציון, serving with non-religious

- How Israel is the "greatest land" (40 years of peace)

- Opposed Heter Mechirah strongly – can't sell Eretz Yisrael to non-Jews

- Carmel wine story (1882)

- Exiled to Minsk, decided to go to Israel – heart condition, pneumonia

- To Warsaw to regain health, people converged on him there – health suffered

1892 – Last year of life, saw to it works published – מרומי שדה on Gemara, etc.

- Perfect book story

1893 – 23 or 28 Av – Died in Warsaw – over 50,000 people at funeral

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SEFARIA

Exodus 32

Resources

- Bekhor Shor (2)
- Chizkuni (4)
- Chomat Anakh on Torah
- Daat Zkenim (1)
- HaKtav VeHaKabalah (3)
- Haamek Davar (5)**
- JPS
- Kitzur Baal Haturim (2)
- Kli Yakar (9)
- Malbim (1)

LOADING...

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וירא העם כי יבשש משה לרדת מן ההר ויקהל העם עליהרן ויאמרו אליו קום עשה לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי יזה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה יהיה לו

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him."

The Netziv on Secular Learning: Conflicting Views

My Uncle the Netziv, P. 204

Anyone with eyes in his head could see that the students of Volozhin were quite knowledgeable in secular studies: they took an interest in science, history and geography and knew many languages. In fact, those students who desired to pursue these disciplines succeeded in learning twice as much as any student at a state institution. In Volozhin, Torah and Derech Eretz walked hand in hand, neither one held captive by the other. It was the special achievement of the Volozhin student that when he left the yeshiva, he was able to converse with any man in any social setting on the highest intellectual plane. The Volozhin student was able to conquer both worlds – the world of Torah and the world at large. A well-known adage among parents who were trying to best educate their children was, "Do you want your child to develop into a complete Jew, dedicated to Torah and Derech Eretz? Do you want him to be able to mingle with people and get along in the world? Send him to Volozhin! (page 204)

Testimony of Michah Yosef Berdyczewski (copied from Schachter article)

ולפי שבכל זאת ראשי ורובי שקוע בד' אמות של הלכה, לכן הוכרחתי לצמצם העיון והעסק בלשונות ובמדעים. מן הספרים החיצוניים שבאו לידי לא הספקתי לקרוא לפי שעה בלה"ק רק את הספרים "דור דור ודורשיו", "חקר אלוה", ו"קורות הפילוסופיא החדשה", ובלשונות העמים קראתי את ספרי באקל וספענסער, גם חזרתי על ספרי הקלאסיקער האשכנזים והאנגלים, וביחוד נמשך לבי מאד אחרי המלט, יציר דמיונו של שעקספיר, כי לרגלי מצבי הרע הנני עצבן גדול ובעל מרה שחורה מאד כמהו.⁵⁸

Testimony of Hayyim Nahman Bialik (copied from Schachter article)

תחלה לוואלאזין ואח"כ לברלין. ולמה וואלאזין? מפני שכפי השמועה לומדים שם בוואלאזין יחד עם התלמוד גם שבע חכמות ושבעים לשון בגלוי או בסתר.⁶⁵

From the Will (צוואה) of Rav Chaim Berlin, the Netziv's eldest son (copied from Shachter article)

ציוה עלי אבא הגאון וצלה"ה הכ"מ (הנצי"ב) קודם פטירתו, על דבר שמסר נפשו על ענין ישיבה דוואלוזין, שלא להכניס לתוכה שום לימוד חול, ולסיבה זו נסגרה הישיבה, ומזה נחלה בחליו אשר לא עמד ממנו, וציווה עלי באזהרה שלא להסכים לענין זה בשום אופן בלא שום הוראת היתר בעולם, ואמר שהקודש ברוך הוא רמוז כל זה בתורה שנאמר בה "להבדיל בין הקודש ובין החול", היינו שכל עניני חול המתערבים בקודש בלא הבדל, לא די שאין עניני למודי חול מקבלים קדושה אלא אף זו שעניני למודי קודש מתקלקלים מהם, על כן לא ירע לך בני מה שהענין הזה גרם לי לצאת מן העולם ולסגור את הישיבה, כי כדאי הוא הענין הגדול הזה למסור נפשו עליו. כל זה דיבר אלי ביום ג' כ"ז מנחם אב תרנ"ג, בוורשא.⁶

Letter from Lakewood Cheder “Explaining” Ban on “My Uncle the Netziv”

Dear Friend:

The Lakewood Cheder School takes pride in the high standard of education it affords its students. In keeping with this tradition the Cheder has made available to its many friends and supporters, books of interest on a broad range of Jewish subjects, books that serve to promote the lofty ideals of the great Torah luminaries of past generations. Your generous support, in turn, has made it possible for us not only to continue sending such books, but to continue the vital work of providing a level of Chinuch in keeping with the standards Klal Yisroel expects from the children of the Beth Medrash Govoha community. We remain grateful for your help and look forward to your support in the future.

Regretfully, the book you recently received, entitled “My Uncle the Netziv,” does not meet these standards. It does not correctly portray the Netziv, his hashkofos, kedusha, and yiras shamayim as related to us by his revered talmidim, the ones who knew him best.

As an example of the *true* Netziv, his son HaGaon Harav Chaim Berlin zt”l quotes his father regarding his decision to close the doors of the famed Volozhiner Yeshiva rather than introducing secular studies into its program:

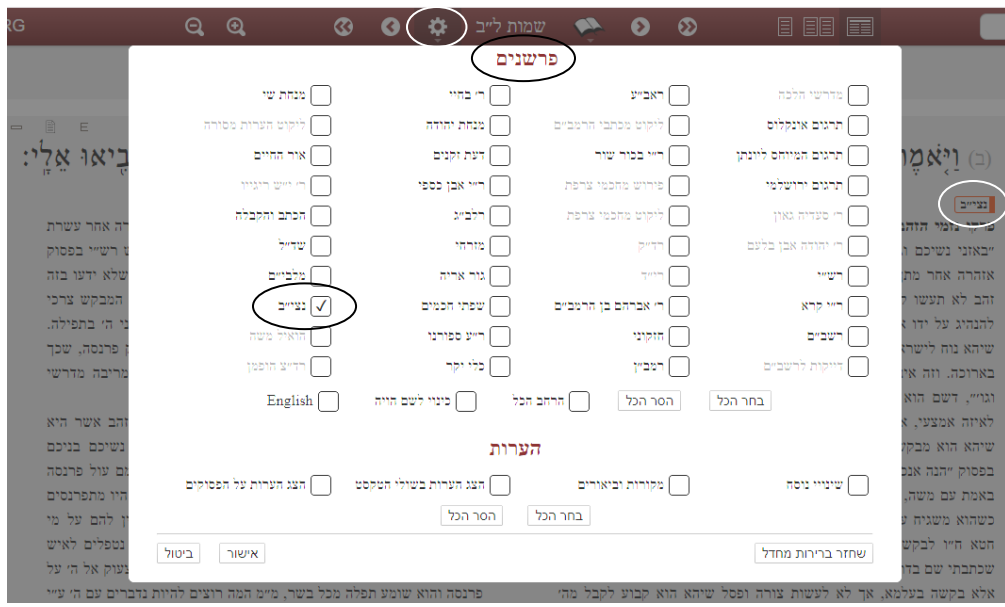
Do not be anguished that this matter brings about my departure from this world . . . for it is well worth the sacrifice of my life.

Such a statement from the heart illustrates the depth of the Netziv’s saintliness, and his uncompromising principles regarding the primacy of Torah, whatever sacrifices it might entail.

True appreciation of the Netziv can only be attained from the study of his monumental writings on all areas of Torah.

Upon consultation with Gedolei Torah, we recommend that the book not be read. If you wish, the Cheder will reimburse you for any donation you may have sent.

Mesorah Publications joins us in sincerely apologizing for this error. We assure you that **בעודות** in the future you may continue to look to the Cheder for books of exceptional quality and educational value, and we look forward to earning your continued confidence and support.



Hallmarks of the Netziv's Commentary on Chumash

- (1) Creativity and originality of ideas
- (2) Interconnectedness within ongoing topic
- (3) Self-referential to other places in Netziv's own commentary on Chumash
- (4) Referential to Gemara, Sifra, Sifri, Mechilta (Midrashei Halacha)
- (5) Not referential (or deferential) to earlier Torah commentaries (Rashi, Ramban, etc.)
- (6) Attention to contemporary psychology, especially to understand characters

ספר דברים – פרשת עקב – פרק י

(ב) וְאָכַתְבָּ עַל הַלְּחָת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלְּחָת הָרִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ וְשִׁמַּתָּם בְּאֲרוֹן:

(2) And I will write on the tablets the things that were on the first tablets, and they will put them in the Aron.

The things – There is a well-known explication on this in Parshat Ki Tisa – “Things,” “**The** things,” “**the** things” – [this includes] even that which a proficient student will innovate in the future, and that is the back-and-forth of Torah. And we explained this there (Shemot 34:1 and 34:27).

את הדברים – ידוע הדרש בפרשת כי תשא, “דברים,” “**הדברים**,” “**את** הדברים,” ואפילו מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד לחדש, והיא פלפולה של תורה. (3) וביארנו שם (לד, א; לד, כז).

That were – And it doesn't say “that I wrote.” And it is also explained there that in truth, this term “guard (the Shabbat)” and other changes were not written in the first (tablets), but they were included in it.

אשר היו – ולא כתיב “אשר כתבתי.” (3) ומבואר גם כן שם שבאמת זה הלשון “שמור” ועוד שינויים לא נכתבו על הראשונות, אלא היו נכללים בהם.

ספר שמות – פרשת כי תשא – פרק לד

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פְּסֹל לְךָ שְׁנֵי לְחָת אֲבָנִים כְּרִאשׁוֹנֵי וְכַתְּבֵתִי עַל הַלְּחָת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל הַלְּחָת הָרִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ:

(1) Hashem said to Moshe, chisel for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on the tablets the things that were on the first tablets that you broke.

And I will write on the tablets the things – This has already been explained: “Things,” “**The** things,” “**the** things” – [this includes] even what a proficient student will innovate in the future. In order to explain this, we must begin with what the Ibn Ezra writes in the name of the Gaon, that the second set of tablets was more worthy of honor than the first. And Ibn Ezra writes on this, “These are like the words of a dream; they have no impact whatsoever.”

וכתבתי על הלוחות את הדברים – כבר נדרש על זה: דברים **הדברים** “**את** הדברים” – אפילו מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד לחדש. ביאור הענין, יש להקדים מה שכתב הראב”ע (הרב אברהם אבן עזרא) בשם הגאון ז”ל, דלוחות שניים מכובדים מן הראשונים. והראב”ע כתב על זה, “ואלה כדברי חלום, לא מעלין ולא מורידין.”

But the words of the Gaon are not empty words, and something similar to this can be seen in what is brought (Shir Hashirim 2:6): “His left are under my head” – these are the first tablets; “And His right I hug” – these are the second tablets. And this is also brought in Shemot Rabba (47:7): “This is what is said (Tehillim 119:71), ‘It is good for me that I was afflicted, so that I could learn your laws’ – for the good of Moshe he was afflicted, for the 120 days that he received the Torah ... Hashem said, ‘You were afflicted, but I swear that you will not lose out. The first tablets only had ten commandments, but now that you have been afflicted, I will give you laws, explanations, and stories,’” etc. And see what we have written about this in Devarim (10:1).

And the intention in all of this is that in the first tablets, the power of innovation was not given, but only what Moshe was given – the exact meaning of the Pesukim and the laws emanating from them, but not the ability to innovate a new legal idea based on the 13 Attributes or the similar methods of the Talmud. The Oral Law was only what had been heard from Moshe, and whatever was not received could only be said if it was exactly the same. But in the second tablets, the power was given to every proficient student to innovate a new law based on the principles of the Talmud, although in the beginning only Moshe and his children involved himself in this, and, in the plains of Moav, Moshe demonstrated to the Jews that they had received this ability, as we explained in the beginning of Devarim (1:3).

And the Golden Calf was the reason for all this, because it was decreed, “And on the day that I make an accounting, I will account for them (for their sin).” Because of this, there came as a result of the spies a decree of exile and being spread out among all the nations, and this is a necessity for the back-and-forth of Torah, for two reasons – both to preserve the nation, and to preserve law among the Jews, as I explained earlier at the end of Parshat Bo and the beginning of Parshat Devarim.

(5) אבל דברי הגאון לאו דברי

ריק הן, ובחזית איתא (שיר השירים ב:ו): “שמאלו תחת לראשי” – אלו לוחות הראשונים, “וימינו תחבקני” – אלו לוחות השניים. והכי איתא גם כן בשמות רבה (מז:ז), “הדא הוא דכתיב (תהילים קיט:עא) ‘טוב לי כי עוניתי, למען אלמד חקיך’ – לטובתו של משה נתענה, ק”כ יום שקיבל את התורה ... אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, ‘נצטערת, חייך שאין אתה מפסיד. בלוחות הראשונות לא היו אלא עשרת הדברות בלבד, ועכשיו שנצטערת, אני נותן לך הלכות, מדרשות, ואגדות” וכו’. (3) ועיין מה שכתבתי בספר דברים (י:א).

והכוונה בכל זה, דבלוחות

הראשונות, לא ניתן כח החידוש, אלא מה שקיבל משה דיוקי המקראות והלכות היוצאות מזה, אבל לא לחדש דבר הלכה על ידי י”ג מדות וכדומה הויות התלמוד, ולא היתה תורה שבעל פה אלא דברים המקובלים מפי משה, ומה שלא היה מקובל היו מדמים מילתא למילתא. אבל בלוחות השניות ניתן כח לכל תלמיד ותיק לחדש הלכה על פי המדות והתלמוד, אלא שמתחילה לא עסקו בזה אלא משה וזרעו, ובערבות מואב הוכיח משה לישראל שיקבלו זה הדרך, (3) כמו שיבואר ריש ספר דברים (א:ג).

והיה העגל סיבה לכל זה, שנגזר

“וביום פקדי ופקדתי” וגו’, ומשום הכי הגיע בגזרת המרגלים גלות ופזור בארצות, (6) והיא סיבה מכרחת לפלפולה של תורה מצד שני טעמים, היינו מצד שמירת האומה, ומצד שמירת ההוראה בישראל, (3) כמו שביארנו לעיל סוף פרשת בא ובריש ספר דברים.

And it was for this reason that Hashem commanded the second tablets to be etched by the hand of Moshe – not because they didn't deserve to be the work of G-d, but rather to show that the law that is innovated through the power of these tablets is a working partnership of man in concert with the help of Heaven, just like the tablets themselves, which were the work of Moshe and the writing of Hashem. (See later in Pasuk 27, that also in the writing there was involvement by Moshe.) This is what the Gemara means that the tablets included “even what the proficient student would innovate in the future;” through the power of the second tablets, everything is included.

And all of this is what the Gaon was saying, that the second tablets were more honored than the first, because even though the Holiness of the first was more elevated – and for this reason, if they hadn't been broken, it would have been easier to arrive at a legal ruling through logic or legal association, more so than after they were broken – but after they were broken, and we now need to work hard and to sharpen the sword of Torah, for this reason the second tablets are more special than the first tablets.

And similar to this is what came after this in the two Talmuds. Yerushalmi is Holier than Bavli, because it was made by earlier authorities, as Rava says in Gemara Shabbat (134b), “I, as compared with the earlier generations – what am I?” He is admitting that the Holiness of the earlier generations is greater in discerning the truth. Also, the Holiness of the Land of Israel is greater. Nevertheless, we know that the power of the Bavli is more honored than the Yerushalmi. For though it says in Sanhedrin (27a) that “in dark places you have settled me” refers to Talmud Bavli, this is not meant as an insult, G-d forbid; rather its amazing power is to light up the law even in dark places – in Bavel and the Diaspora – which do not have the light of Holiness, and were it not for the power of the Talmud Bavli we would not have the light of the law there. And similar to this difference is the sense in which the second tablets were higher than the first. And see Devarim (4:14).

ומזה הטעם עצמו צוה הקדוש ברוך

הוא שיהיו הלוחות השניים בפיסול ידי משה, לא משום שלא זכו למעשה אלהים, אלא להורות דהלכה המתחדשת בכח לוחות הללו היא השתתפות עמל האדם בסייעתא דשמיא, כמו עצם הלוחות שהיו מעשה משה וכתיבת הקדוש ברוך הוא. (3) ועוד עיין להלן פסוק כז, שגם בכתיבה היתה השתתפות משה. (4) והיינו מה שאמר חז"ל ד"אפילו מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד לחדש" היה בלוחות, והכוונה שבכח לוחות השניות היה נכלל הכל.

(5) וכל זה דברי הגאון, דבזה

הפרט היו הלוחות השניים מכובדים מן הראשונים, דאף על גב שקדושת הראשונים היתה נעלה מהם וממילא אילו לא נשברו היה נוח להגיע להוראה על ידי סברא ודימוי מילתא למילתא יותר מכאשר נשברו, אבל כאשר נתקלקלנו והננו נצרכים להיות יגיעים ולשנן חרבה של תורה, לזה מסוגלים יותר לוחות אחרונים.

וכדומה לזה היו אחר כך שני

התלמודים, דהירושלמי קדושתו רבה מהבבלי באשר נעשה על ידי אמוראי קמאי, (4) וכמאמר רבא בשבת (קלד:) 'אנא בהדי תרגימנא דסבי למה לי, הרי הודה שקדושת הראשונים יותר לכיין את האמת, וגם כי קדושת ארץ ישראל היתה מועילה, מכל מקום הרי ידענו דכח תלמוד בבלי מכובד מהירושלמי. (4) ואף על גב שנקרא בסנהדרין (כז.) "במחשכים הושיבני" (איכה ג:ו) זה תלמוד בבלי, מכל מקום אינו לגנאי חס ושלום, אלא כחה הנפלא להאיר הלכה אפילו במחשכים היינו בבבל ובחוצה לארץ שאין בה אור הארץ הקדושה, ולולי כח התלמוד הבבלי לא הגענו לאור ההוראה שם. ומעין זה בבחינה עליונה היה ההבדל בין לוחות ראשונות לאחרונות, (3) ועיין בספר דברים (ד:יד).

(א) וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי בָשַׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְרִדֹת מִן הַהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה הָיָה לוֹ:

(1) The nation saw that Moshe was hesitant from the mountain, and the nation converged on Aharon and they said to him, “Get up – make for us a god who will go out before us, because this man Moshe, who took us out of Egypt – we don’t know what became of him.”

The nation heard – These were the poorest of the nation of the Jews, who, from the time that they had left Egypt, thought that they weren’t worthy of standing in an elevated state, in which they were watched over and sustained from Hashem Himself, and for this reason they didn’t want to leave Egypt at all. But Moshe and Aharon persuaded them through that entire time, and stole their hearts with words, as I wrote earlier (16:3); see there. And this (part of the) nation went back and believed that as long as Moshe was alive with them, they would be protected by his merit (and allowed) to live in a supernatural way by the power of Moshe. After his “death,” however, it would be impossible for them to be sustained except by Hashem’s protection in a natural way, and this was impossible unless they entered a settled country and not in a barren wilderness, and because of this they fell to turmoil and thought thoughts, and from this they came to do real idol worship, as we will explain ...

“We don’t know what became of him – Whether he died, or turned into an angel like Chanoch, and he will no longer return to us.” Now, if they had been living in the Wilderness in a natural state, they wouldn’t have had to wander now, even if Moshe died, because they had already been shown during the war with Amalek that Hashem was among the Jews with a hidden protection also, as I wrote there. But since their entire lifestyle was a miraculous (supernatural) one which came only through Moshe who had brought them up to that state, what were they to do now?!

וירא העם – (1) הם דלת העם
מבני ישראל, אשר מאז יצאו ממצרים חשבו (6) שהם אינם ראויים לעמוד בהנהגה עליונה זו שיהיו מושגחים בפרנסה ממנו יתברך, ומשום הכי לא רצו לצאת כלל, (5) ורק משה ואהרן הוכיחו בכל משך הזמן את ההמון ולקחו לבבם בדברים, (3) כמו שכתבתי לעיל (טז:ג), עיין שם. וזה העם חזרו והאמינו כי כל עוד משה חי עמם יהיו מושגחים בזכותו למעלה מהטבע ככוחו של משה, אבל לאחר מותו הרי אי אפשר שיתפרנסו אלא בהשגחתו יתברך על פי הטבע, וזה אי אפשר אלא בבואם אל ארץ נושבת ולא במדבר השמים, ומשום הכי נתבהלו וחשבו מחשבות, ומהם הגיעו לעבודה זרה ממש, כאשר יבואר ...

“לא ידענו מה היה לו – (1)
(2) אם מת או נעשה מלאך כמו חנוך, ועוד לא ישוב אלינו. (6) ואילו היו מתנהגים במדבר בדרך הטבע, לא היו נבוכים גם אם היה מת משה, שהרי כבר הראו לדעת בעת מלחמת עמלק שהקדוש ברוך הוא בקרב ישראל בהשגחה נסתרת גם כן, (3) וכמו שכתבתי שם. (6) אבל כאשר כל חיותם בדרך נס שבא רק על ידי משה שהעלם למדה זו, עתה, מה נעשה?!

(ב) ויאמר אלהם אהרן פֶּרְקוּ נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלַי:

(2) Aharon said to them, "Remove the golden ornaments that are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me."

Remove the golden ornaments that are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters ...

Only after the giving of the Torah does the warning come in the Ten Commandments, "Do not make alongside Me gods of silver or gods of gold – do not make them." ... Therefore, Aharon said to them to remove the ornaments of gold in order to create a form of gold which would serve as an intermediary which was close to Hashem. And we can make an inference from "the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters." It is the way of women and children to not want to take upon themselves the burden of earning a livelihood, and they rely on the husband/father, notwithstanding that it is possible that, if they wanted to, they could earn a living by their own efforts – as we see that some women and children, when they have no one else to support them, earn a living on their own – still, it is the way of women and children to rely on the man to provide them food. Similarly, this is the way of the nation as a whole – even though they could each themselves cry out to Hashem for sustenance, and Hashem will listen to anyone, they wanted to speak to Him only through an intermediary, which was this "god of gold." Through this Aharon meant to impart to them that this form was merely an intermediary, through which they could request from Hashem, just like women and children rely on the husband/father who in turn turns his eyes to his Father in Heaven for their sake. This was the intention of the righteous Aharon, but he erred concerning a warning that he couldn't possibly have already known (i.e., not to make an intermediary), and this led to the terrible catastrophe which would come.

פרקו נזמי הזהב אשר באזני

נשיכם בניכם ובנותיכם – (2) באה

אזהרה אחר מתן תורה בעשרת

הדברות "לא תעשון אתי, אלהי כסף

ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם" ... על כן

אמר להם אהרן לפרוק נזמי זהב, **(1)**

כדי לעשות צורה מזהב אשר היא

דוגמא לאמצעי שהוא קרוב להקדוש

ברוך הוא יתברך. ודייק "באזני נשיכם

בניכם ובנותיכם," "ללמד, כדרך אשה

וטף שאין רוצים לקבל על עצמם עול

פרנסה ומטילים עצמם על הבעל והאב,

אף על גב שאפשר שאם היו רוצים היו

מתפרנסים על ידי מעשי ידיהם – כמו

שאנו רואים כמה נשים וטפלים כשאין

להם על מי לסמוך מתפרנסים על ידי

עצמם – מכל מקום, כך דרך נשים וטף

להיות נטפלים לאיש שיביא להם אוכל.

כך דרך המון העם, אף על גב שיכולים

בעצמם לצעוק אל ה' על פרנסה והוא

שומע תפלה מכל בשר, **(6)** מכל מקום

המה רוצים להיות נדברים עם ה' על

ידי אחר שהוא "אלהי זהב." **(6)** ובזה

הורם דעת שיבינו שאין זו הצורה אלא

אמצעי, שעל ידה יבקשו מה', **(1)** כמו

שנשים וטף נסמכים על הבעל והאב

שיהא הוא תולה עיניו לאביו שבשמים

גם עבורם. זו היתה כוונת אהרן

הצדיק, ושגג באזהרה שלא היה לו

לדעת עדיין, אלא שיצא מזה קלקול רב

כאשר יבוא.