

Text Study **ב** - Bet
Keeping the Broken Tablets

In small groups, after saying the blessing before study, read the following texts and commentary out loud. Ask people to share responses with each other. Keep a list of responses and report results to the entire Task Force when you reconvene.

The Torah tells us that, upon descending the mountain with God’s law written on two stone tablets in his hands, Moses reacted to what the Israelites were doing:

שמות פרק לב פסוק יט

: כַּאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֵּרָא אֶת-הָעֵגֶל וּמַחֲלֵת וַיַּחַר-אַף מֹשֶׁה
 לַדָּ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת-הַלְּחֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם תַּחַת הַהָר:

As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

Exodus 32:19

Much later, near the end of his life, Moses describes how God replaced those original tablets:

דברים פרק י פסוק א-ה

בַּעֲתָהּ הָיָה אֵלֹהִים אֹמֵר יְהוָה אֵלַי פֶּסֶל-לִפְנֵי שְׁנֵי-לוּחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשֵׁי
 וְעַלֶּה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְעָשִׂיתָ לִּי אֲרוֹן עֹץ: וְאָכַתְבָּ עַל-הַלְּחֹת
 אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל-הַלְּחֹת הַרְּאשֵׁי אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ וְשָׁמַתָּם
 בָּאֲרוֹן: וְאָעַשׂ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְאָפֶסֶל שְׁנֵי-לֹחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשֵׁי
 וְאָעַל הַהָרָה וְשְׁנֵי הַלְּחֹת בְּיָדַי: וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל-הַלְּחֹת כַּמְּכַתֵּב הַרְּאשֹׁן
 אֶת עֲשֶׂר־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֵלַיכֶם בְּהַר מִתְּנֶה הָאֵשׁ בַּיּוֹם
 הַהֵוא וַיִּתֶּנֶם יְהוָה אֵלַי: וְאֶפֶן וְאָרַד מִן-הָהָר וְאָשַׂם אֶת-הַלְּחֹת
 בָּאֲרוֹן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי וַיְהִי שֵׁם כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּי יְהוָה:

Thereupon the Lord said to me, “Carve out two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain; and make an ark of wood. I will inscribe on the tablets the commandments that were on the first tablets that you smashed, and you shall deposit them in the ark.” I made an ark of acacia wood and carved out two tablets of stone like the first; I took the two tablets with me and went up the mountain. The Lord inscribed on the tablets the same text as on the first, the Ten Commandments that He addressed to you on the day of the Assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. Then I left and went down from the mountain, and I deposited the tablets in the ark that I had made, where they still are, as the Lord had commanded me.

Deuteronomy 10:1-5

Though we live in a consumer society in which we rarely hold onto things that seem to have outlived their usefulness, we can't help but wonder, What ever happened to the first tablets—the broken tablets—that God gave Moses?

We learn from the Talmud:

תַּנִּי ר' יהודה בר אֶלְעָאי: שְׁנֵי אַרְוֹנוֹת הָיוּ מֵהַלְכִין עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל
 בְּמִדְבָּר, אֶחָד שֶׁהִיְתָה הַתּוֹרָה נְתוּנָה בְּתוֹכוֹ וְאֶחָד שֶׁהָיוּ שְׁבָרֵי
 לוּחוֹת נְתוּנִין בְּתוֹכוֹ. זֶה שֶׁהִיְתָה הַתּוֹרָה נְתוּנָה בְּתוֹכוֹ הָיָה מְנַח
 בְּאֶהָל מוֹעֵד, וְזֶה שֶׁהָיוּ שְׁבָרֵי הַלוּחוֹת בְּתוֹכוֹ הָיָה נִכְנָס וְיוֹצֵא
 עִמָּהֶם.

Rabbi Judah bar Ilai taught: Two Arks journeyed with Israel in the wilderness— one in which the Torah was placed, and the other in which the Tablets broken by Moses were placed. The one in which the Torah was placed was kept in the Tent of Meeting: the other, containing the broken Tablets, would come and go with them.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim 1:1

1. What do you think the broken tablets represented to the Israelites? What would be gained by keeping both sets of tablets with them? What kind of opposition might they have encountered to doing so?
2. Though both were kept, why might the old and new tablets have been kept separate from each other?
3. As you proceed on your journey of re-imagining how your congregation educates children, what is “old” or “broken” in your school that, despite its condition, holds such special meaning for you that you want to have it “come and go” with you?