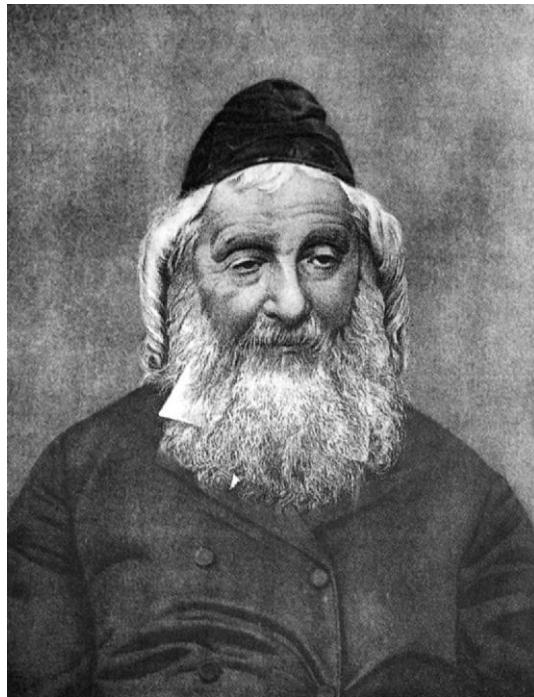


A Man of One World and Many Minds

The Netziv – Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berliner



Suggestions for Further Study:

Epstein, Rabbi Baruch. *מִקּוֹר בָּרוּךְ כָּרְךָ 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

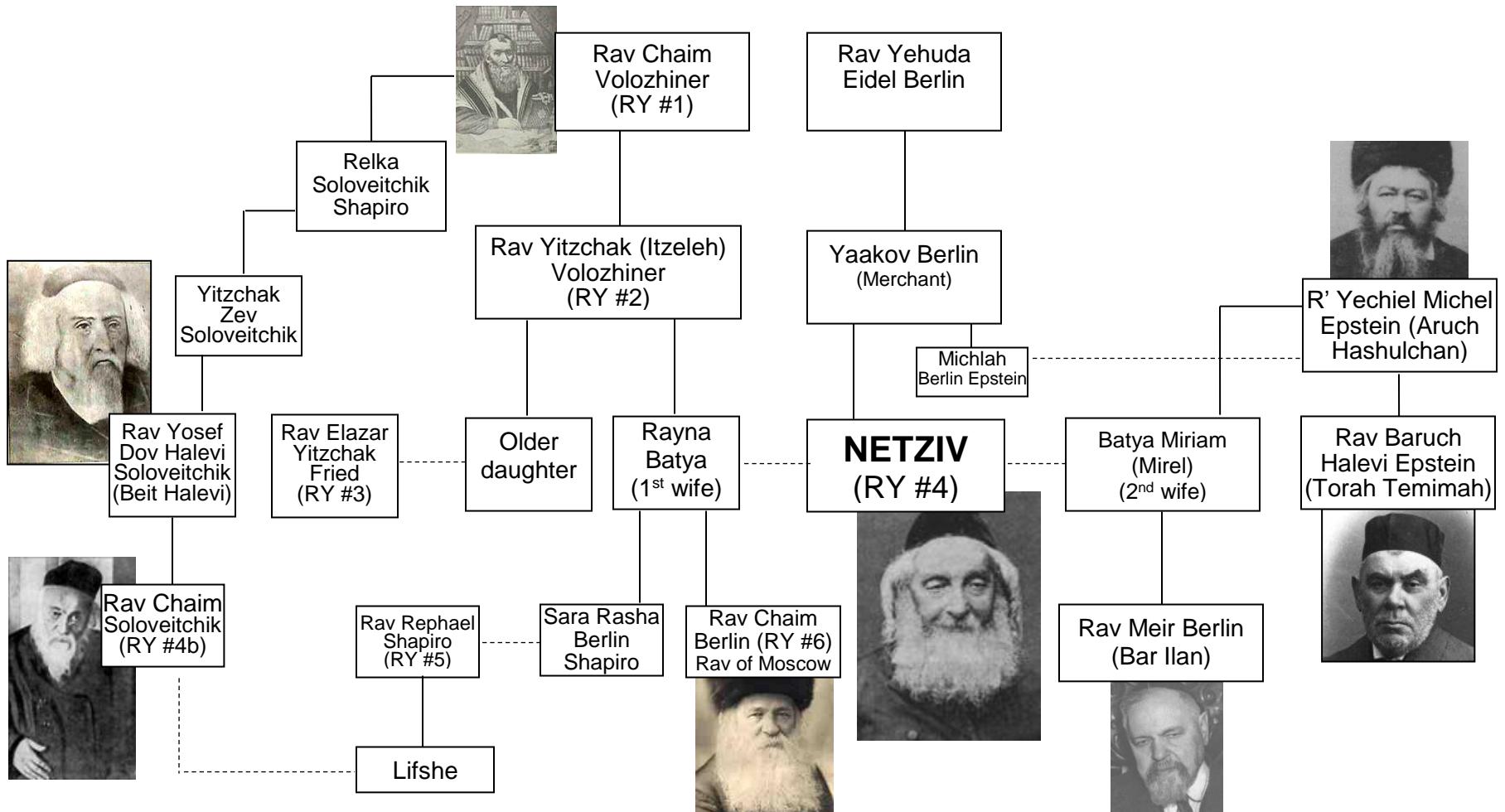
Wein, Rabbi Berel. "Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin: The Fruits of Volozhin." Audio class from "The Biography Series." Download (\$5) at <https://www.rabbiwein.com/R-Naftali-Zvi-Yehuda-BerlinbrThe-Fruits-of-VolozhinbrFrom-the-Biography-Series-P632.html>

"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.

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

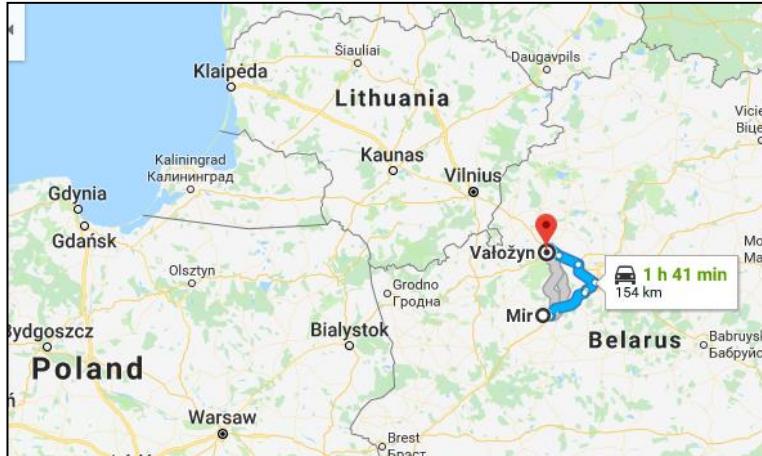
At the Apex of Four Dynasties: The Netziv's Family Tree



Parent-Child

Marriage

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 Slutzk 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 Raphael Shapiro became RY in Volozhin
- Daughter married Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, to whom Rav Raphael gave RY job
- "המאות 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 auxiliary 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 **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 – on **מזרמי שדה** etc.

- Perfect book story

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

The screenshot shows a digital interface for the Torah portion Exodus 32. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Sefaria logo. Below the navigation bar, the text "Exodus 32" is displayed, with a dropdown arrow indicating more options. The main content area shows the beginning of Exodus 32, with the Hebrew text in a large, clear font and an English translation in a smaller font below it. The English translation reads: "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.’" To the right of the main text, there is a sidebar titled "Resources" which lists various sources: 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), and Malbim (1). The "Haamek Davar" entry is highlighted with a blue oval.

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 שככל זאת ראשי ורובי ש��ע בד' אמות של הלכה, لكن הוכחה זו לצמצם העיון והעסק בלשונות ובמדעים. מן הספרים החיצוניים שבאו לידי לא הספקתי לקרוא לפיו שעה בלה"ק רק את הספרים "דור דור ודורשייו", "חקר אלה", ו"קורות הפילוסופיה החדשה", ובלשונות העמים קראתי את ספרי באקל וספענסער, גם חורתה על ספרי הקלאסיקער האשכנזים והאנגלים, וביחוד נmarsך לבני מادر אחורי המלט, יציר דמיונו של שakespear, כי לרגלי מוצבי הרע הנני עצנן גדול ובבעל מריה שחורה מادر במו⁵⁸.

Testimony of Hayyim Nahman Bialik (copied from Schachter article)

תחלה לוואלאוין ואח"ב לברלין. ולמה וואלאוין? מפני שכפי השמועה לומדים שם בוואלאוין יחד עם התלמוד גם שבע חכמויות ושביעים לשון בגלוי או בסתר.⁵⁹

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

ציווה עלי אבא הגאון וצלה"ה ה"כ"מ (הנצי"ב) קודם פטירתו, על דבר שמסר נפשו על עניין ישיבה דוואלאוין, שלא להכנס לתוכה שום לימוד חול, ולסיבה זו נסגרה הישיבה, ומזה נחלה בחליו אשר לא עמד ממנה, וציווה עלי באזהרה שלא להסכים לעניין זה בשום אופן ללא שום הוראת הדיור בעולם, ואמר שהקדוש ברוך הוא רמו כל זה בתורה שנאמר בה "להבדיל בין הקודש ובין החול", היינו שככל עניין חול המתערבים בקדוש בלבד, לא די שאין עניין למודי חול מקבלים קדושה אלא אף זו שעניין למודי קדוש מתקלקלים מהם, על כן לא ירע לך בני מה שהענין הזה גורם לי לצאת מן העולם ולסגור את הישיבה, כי כדי הוא הענין הגדול הזה למסור נפשו עליו. כל זה דבר אליו ביום ג' כ"ז מנחם אב תרנ"ג, בורשה.⁶⁰

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:

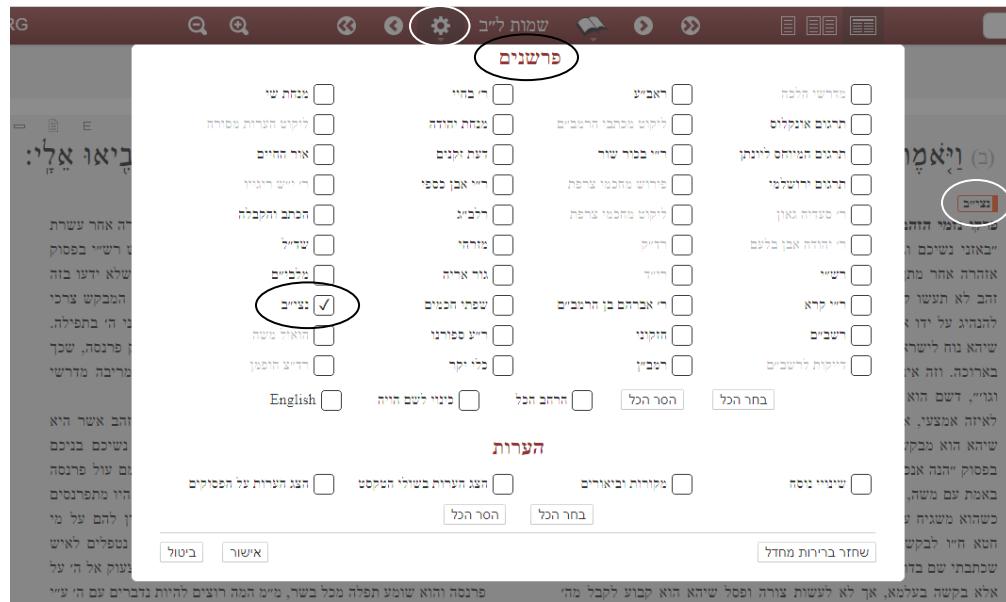
Do not be anguished that this matter brings about my departure from this world . . . for it is well worth the sacrifice of my life.

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 **בבוקי** 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) וְאָקַטְבָּן עַל הַלְּחָתָה אֵת הַקְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיו עַל הַלְּחָתָה הָרָאשָׁנִים וְשָׁמְתָם בְּאָרוֹן:

(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,” “הָנָה 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).

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.

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

אשר היו – ולא כתיב “אשר כתבת.” (3) ומובואר 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 הָאֱלֹהִים מֹשֶׁה פְּסֻל לְךָ שְׁנַי לְחָתָה אֶבֶןִים וְכַמְּתָפִי עַל הַלְּחָתָה אֵת הַקְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיו עַל הַלְּחָתָה הָרָאשָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁבְרָתָ:

(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,” “הָנָה 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.”

וכתבת夷 על הלוחות את הדברים – כבר נדרש על זה: דברים הדברים “את הדברים” – אפילו מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד לחזכיר. ביאור העניין, יש להזכיר מה שכתב הראב”ע (הרבי אברהם בן עזרא) בשם הגאון ז”ל, דلوוחות שניים מכובדים מן הראשונים. והראב”ע כתב על זה “ואלה בדברי חלום, לא מעליין ולא מוריין.”

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

rik ha, ובחזיתו איתא (שיר השירים ב:ו): “שמאלו חחת לראשי” – אלוلوحות הראשוניות, “זימינו תחבקני” – אלוلوحות השניות. והכי איתא גם כן בשמות רבה (מז:ז), “הדא הוא דכתיב תהילים קיט:עא) טוב לי כי עונייה, למען אלמד חקיך’ – לטובתו של משה נתענה, ק”כ יום שקיבל את התורה ... אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, ‘נצחערת, חייך שאין אתה מפסיד. בلوحות הראשונות לא היו אלא עשרת הדברות בלבד, וכשישו שננצחערת, אני נתן לך הלכות, מדרשות, ואגדות” וכור. (3) ועיין מה שכתבתי בספר דברים (יא:א).

והכוונה בכלל זה, דבלוחות

הראשונות, לא ניתן כה החידוש, אלא מה שקיבל משה דיויק המקראות והלכות היוצאות מזה, אבל לא לחדש דבר הלכה על ידי י”ג מדות וכדומה להיות התלמוד, ולא היה תורה שבבעל פה אלא דברים המקבילים מפי משה, ומה שלא היה מקובל היו מדמים מילתא למילתא. אבל בلوحות השניות ניתן כה לכל תלמיד ותיק לחדש הלכה על פי המדות והتلמוד, אלא שמתחלת לא עסקו בזה אלא משה וורען, ובערבות מואב הוכיה משה לישראל שקיבלו זה הדרך, (3) כמו שיבואר ריש ספר דברים (א:ג).

והיה העגל סיבה לכל זה, שנגזר “וביום פקדי ופקדתי” וגוי, ומשום הכי הגיע בגורות המרגלים גלות ופזור בארץות, (6) והיה סיבה מכרח לפלפולת 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
הו שיהיו הלוחות השניים בפיסול ידי
משה, לא משומש שלא זכו למעשה אלהים,
אללא להורות דהלהה המתחדשת בכח לוחות
הלולו היא השתתפות عمل האדם בסיעתא
דשמייא, כמו עצם הלוחות שהיו מעשה משה
וכתיבת הקדוש ברוך הוא. (3) ועוד עיין
להלן פסוק כז, שגם בכתיבת היתה
השתתפות משה. (4) והיינו מה שאמרו
הוזל ד”איפלו מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד
לחדרש” היה בלוחות, והכוונה שכח לוחות
השניות היה נכלל הכל.

(5) וכל זה דברי הגאון, דבזה
הפרט היו הלוחות השניים מכובדים מן
הראשונים, דאף על גב שקדושות הראשונים
היתה נعلاה מהם ומילא אילו לא נשברו
היה נוח להגיע להוראה על ידי סברא ודימוי
AMILTA L'MILTA YOTER MACHSHER NASHBRO, אבל
כאשר נתקלקלנו והננו נצרכים להיות יגעים
ולשנן הרבה של תורה, זה מסוגלים יותר
לוחות אחרים.

וכדומה לזה היו אחר כך שני
התלמודים, זה ירושלמי קדושתו רבה
מהבבלי באשר נעשה על ידי אמוראי קמאי,
(4) וכמאמיר רבא בשבת (קלד): ‘אנא בהדי
תרגימנא דסבי למא לי’, הרי הוזה שקדושת
הראשונים יותר לכזין את האמת, וגם כי
קדושת ארץ ישראל היתה מועילה, מכל
מקום הרי ידענו דכח תלמוד בבבלי מכובד
הירושלמי. (4) ואף על גב שנקרה
בסנהדרין (כז). ”במחשכים הושיבני“ (איכה
ג:ו) זה תלמוד בבבלי, מכל מקום אינו לגנאי
חס ושלום, אלא כחה הנפלא להאריך הלהה
איפלו במחשכים הינו בבבבל ובוחזה לארכז
שאין בה אור הארץ הקדושה, ולוליכח
התלמוד הבבלי לא הגענו לאור ההוראה
שם. ומיין זה בבחינה עליונה היה ההבדל
בין לוחות ראשונות לאחרונות, (3) ועיין
בספר דברים (ד:יד).

(א) נירא העם כי בשש משה לרדת מון הָרָן ויקח העם על אהרן ויאמרו אליו קום עשה לנו אלhim ואישר יילכו לפנינו כי זה משה האיש אשר הָעָלָנוּ מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו:

(1) The nation saw that Moshe was hesitant to descend 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 דלהת העם מבני ישראל, אשר מازו יצאו מצרים חשבו (6) שהם אינם ראויים לעמוד בהנהגה עליונה זו שייהיו מושגחים בפרנסתנו ממן יתברך, ומשום הכי לא רצוי לצאת כלל, (5) ורך משה ואהרן הוכיחו בכל משך הזמן את ההמון ולקחו לבבם בדברים, (3) כמו שכחתי ליעיל (טז:ג), עיין שם. וזה העם חזרו והאמינו כי כל עוד משה חי עם יהיו מושגחים בזכותו למעלה מהטיבע ככוחו של משה, אבל לאחר מותו הרי אי אפשר שיתפרנסו אלא בהשגתנו יתברך על פי הטבע, וזה אי אפשר אלא בכוואם אל ארץ נושבת ולא בדבר השם, ומשום הכי נתבהלו וחשבו ממחשבות, ומהם הגיעו לעובדה זורה ממש, כאשר יבואր ...

”לא ידענו מה היה לו – (1)
(2) אם מת או נעשה מלאך כמו חנוך, ו עוד לא ישב אלינו. (6) ואילו היו מתהנגים בדבר בדרכ הטיבע, לא היו נבוכים גם אם היה מת משה, שהרי כבר הראו לדעת בעת מלחתה שלקשה נסתרת ברוך הוא בקרוב ישראל בהשגחה נסתרת גם כן, (3) וכן שכחתי שם. (6) אבל כאשר כל היותם בדרכ נס שבא רק על ידי משה שהעלם למדה זו, עתה, מה נעשה!
!

(ב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלָּהֶם אַהֲרֹן פְּرֹקֶנוּ נְזִמי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵינוּ נְשִׁיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְנֹתְרֵיכֶם וְהַבְּיֹאָו אֲלֵינוּ:

(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.

פרקנו נזמי הזהב אשר באזני נשיכם ובנותיכם – (2) באה
ازהרה אחר מתן תורה בעשרה הדברות “לא תעשו אתי, אלהי כסא ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם” ... על כן אמר להם אהרן לפרק נזמי זהב, (1) כדי לעשות צורה מזהב אשר היא דוגמא לאמצעי שהוא קרוב להקדוש ברוך הוא יתברך. ודיק “באזני נשיכם בנייכם ובנותיכם”, ללמד, בדרך אשה וטף שאין רוצחים לקבל על עצם עול פרנסה ומטילים עצם על הבعل והאב, אף על גב שאפשר שאם היו רוצחים היו מתפרנסים על ידי מעשי ידיהם – כמו שאנו רואים כמה נשים וטפלים שאין להם על מי לסמך מתפרנסים על ידי עצם – מכל מקום, כך דרך נשים וטף להיות נטפלים לאיש שיביא להם אוכל. כך דרך המון העם, אף על גב שכוכלים בעצם לצזוק אל ה’ על פרנסה והוא שומע תפלת מכל בשר, (6) מכל מקום מהה רוצחים להיות נדברים עם ה’ על ידי אחר שהוא “אלهي זהב.” (6) ובזה הורם דעת שיבינו שאין זו הצורה אלא אמצעי, שעל ידה יבקשו מה’, (1) כמו שנשים וטף נסמכים על הבעל והאב שהיא הוא תולה עיניו לאביו שבשמים גם עבורם. זו הייתה כוונת אהרן הצדיק, ושגע באזהרה שלא היה לו לדעת עדין, אלא שיצא מזה קלקל רב כאשר יבוא.