

You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of this Torah. (27:8)

"All the words of this Torah," according to *Rabbenu Saadya Gaon*, is a reference to the *Taryag*, 613 *mitzvos*. In the *Talmud Sotah 32b*, **Chazal** contend that actually the entire *Torah* was written on these stones. Furthermore, they were written in seventy languages, availing everyone the opportunity to study *Torah*. Thus, the **Ramban** remarks that the stones were either extremely large, or a miracle enabled the stones to contain the entire text.

According to one opinion, these words were inscribed upon a layer of plaster that could not defend against the elements for as long as would have been possible had they been engraved in stone. **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, observes that the purpose of these stones was not to serve as a permanent monument. The Jewish people are to keep the *Torah* alive through the power of tradition, by observance and study, not by engraving it in stone. Our tradition has historically kept the memory of the milestone experiences of our people in our hearts and minds. Sterile monuments of stone, facades that are called houses of worship -- which are visited once a year to assuage one's conscience, but serve as social halls throughout the remainder of the year - are neither monuments nor places of worship. No, Judaism is vibrant and proactive, not spectator-oriented. It has been kept alive throughout the millennia because of our devotion to the *Torah* and observance of its *mitzvos*. Regrettably, those that have distanced themselves from the *Torah*, "preserving" it in a sterile environment, have produced a generation completely devoid of our heritage, incapable of transmitting its legacy to the next generation.