



Parshas Ki Sisa

For the week ending 16 Adar 5758
13 & 14 March 1998

Overview

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men, age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the *Mishkan*. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and Hashem instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the *Mishkan*, its vessels, and Aharon and his sons. Hashem selects Betzalel and Oholiav to be the master craftsmen for the *Mishkan* and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that Hashem made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the ten commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls and tries to delay them. Hashem tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the orgy of idol-worship he smashes the tablets, and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and Hashem accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the *Mishkan*, and Hashem's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks Hashem to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. Hashem tells Moshe to hew new tablets, and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke his mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage, and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbos, Shavuos and Succos are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

Insights

THE INK OF ETERNITY

“Hashem said to Moshe: Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones...” (34:1)

Would you rather be the Holy Ark in which the Torah is kept, or the ink with which the Torah is written?

After the Jewish People heard the Ten Commandments at Sinai, Moshe ascended the mountain to receive the rest of the Torah from Hashem. He came down on the 17th of Tammuz.

The two Tablets of stone that Moshe brought down with him contained not just the Ten Commandments but the whole Torah. Everything. The Talmud, the Aggada, etc. Everything necessary to carry out The Maker's instructions were embodied in the first Tablets. Not only the commandment to wear *tefillin*, but also what *tefillin* were and how to make them. All the minutiae of Shabbos. Everything later given to Moshe as the Oral Torah was written on those first two Tablets.

When Moshe came down from the mountain and saw the people cavorting in front of a golden calf, the words that were written on the Tablets flew back up to Heaven. The Tablets then became heavy. Moshe could no longer hold them and they smashed to the ground.

The Tablets became heavy because the words that flew away were the words of the Oral Torah. What was left was a “heavy” Torah. A Torah that had a commandment to wear *tefillin* without any precise instructions as to what *tefillin* were or how to fulfill the mitzva. A Torah that was “heavy” because it left so much unexplained. All the minutiae took wing and flew back to whence they came.

G-d forgave the Jewish People for their infidelity with the golden calf. On Yom Kippur, Moshe brought down a second set of Tablets. These Tablets were both less and more than the original Tablets. They were less in that the original Tablets were the work of G-d Himself, whereas the second Tablets were hewn by Moshe. However these second Tablets gave the Jewish people a new elevated status.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

The entire Torah had been contained in the first Tablets; thus, the Jewish People and the Torah had been two separate entities. Israel was the creation charged to keep and guard the Torah. They were like the ark in which the Sefer Torah is kept.

However, the second Tablets did not contain the entire Torah. On the second Tablets Hashem only inscribed the written Torah. The detailed instructions of the Oral Torah were given to Moshe as a verbal tradition to be passed down from teacher to pupil throughout the ages. Unlike the first Torah written just on the Tablets, part of the Torah was now to be written in the hearts and minds of the Jewish People themselves.

When the Jewish People received the second Tablets, we ceased being just the container of the Torah. We became part of the Torah. We became the very parchment of the Torah itself. The ink of eternity, the Torah's Holy words, the instruction book of Maker, written in the mind of the Jewish People, passed from "rebbe to talmid" in an unbroken chain.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

"It (Shabbos) is an everlasting sign between me and the Children of Israel." (31:17)

A shoemaker's shop — the door is barred, all the windows are shuttered; not a crack of light can be seen from within. One would think the shoemaker has moved out of town. Only the sign above the door — "Shoemaker" — gives any clue that the shoemaker is still in business.

Similarly with the Jew: However far he wanders from the faith of his fathers, and even if all the mitzvos that should lighten his home are like darkened windows — but if he still keeps Shabbos then there is yet a sign that Jewish life is smoldering within; that the light of Yiddishkeit has not gone out completely.

But when that sign — "Shabbos" — comes down, it is as though the Shoemaker has left town for good.

A VALID VISA

"HEW FOR YOURSELF TWO TABLETS OF STONE." (34:1)

Once, there was a traveler who wanted to visit an exotic and remote country on the roof of the world. This country had the reputation of being almost impossible for tourists to enter. So, when our traveler was granted his tourist visa, it came to him as something of a surprise. However, in spite of this, he was convinced that he would be stopped at the border and refused entry to his destination.

He had set his heart on the trip, so he enlisted the services of a "special agent," a certain Mr. Shaker, who had contacts in high places in the government of the country. Shaker was able to magically open "locked doors." All of this came at a price. Quite a tidy sum was deposited in a numbered bank account. And then the word came. All clear. He would be met at the airport by an official who would usher him through the customs and immigration formalities. He needed to bring nothing with him. Not even his visa. He would be recognized immediately and whisked through the airport in a flash.

On arrival, our traveler bounded off the plane and presented himself at the immigration desk. "Visa please!" asked a uniformed official. "I'm sorry?" said the traveler. "I said: Visa Please!" repeated the official, somewhat irritated. "But, don't you recognize me?"

"If you gave me your visa, maybe I'd be able to recognize you," said the official, sarcastically.

"But Mr. Shaker said..."

"Look" said the official, "I've no idea who this Mr. Shaker is, but all you need to enter the country is a valid visa. Without that, there's nothing I can do."

Why was it that the first Tablets of the covenant were hewn by Hashem himself, whereas the second Tablets were hewn by Moshe?

The sin of the golden calf was not real idol worship, but it was based on a mistake: That, because Hashem himself had made the first Tablets, it was impossible to fathom their depths without the assistance of lofty spiritual powers. For this reason the people fashioned the likeness of an ox to worship, for the ox is one of the mystical creatures surrounding the heavenly throne. By worshipping a calf, they thought, the mystical powers of the ox would help them transcend the boundaries of human reach and be close to Hashem and to understand His Torah.

While Moshe was still with them, they relied on Moshe to bring them close to Hashem and did not seek other means. However, when they thought Moshe was dead, they turned to other ways of elevating themselves.

The truth is that every Jew has his own passport to spirituality. It's called the Torah. It contains all the visas we need to reach out of this world. We need no special agents or intermediaries. With our own human abilities we can achieve the sublime.

It was for this reason that Hashem commanded Moshe to hew the second Tablets: To demonstrate that human hands were involved in their making; that through our own efforts, we can earn the help of Hashem to understand all of the words of the Holy Torah and to climb to great heights. For that reason the Torah is called *Toras Moshe* — the Torah of Moshe. It's possible to gain entry to its most esoteric and remote regions via the visa of human effort alone.

THE GOLD STANDARD

"Aaron said to them: Remove the golden earrings that are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me." (32:2)

Aharon's part in the incident of the golden calf is difficult to understand. It cannot be that he deliberately incited the people to make an idol to worship. Rather, his intention was the reverse.

A person's will is represented by the heart. And the heart is expressed through the "pocket." By gathering gold from all the Jews and making it into a single unit, Aharon was trying to create a tangible symbol of the unity of the will of Jewish People. The gold would be cast into the fire and the fire would remove the impurities of the latent tendency to idol worship.

What would be left would be pure and united, a symbol of the unity of the Jewish People and Hashem.

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However, the "mixed multitude" who came up from Egypt with the Jewish People, and whose intentions were truly idolatrous, introduced the powers of spiritual impurity into the

gold. The Jews were then drawn after this, and what resulted was the golden calf.

Haftorah: Melachim I 18:1-39

Just before the *shofar* sounds on Yom Kippur, bringing to a close 25 hours of prayer and fasting, we repeat the closing words from this week's Haftorah seven times: "*Hashem; He is the G-d.*"

Eliyahu HaNavi had challenged the idolatrous prophets of the *Ba'al* to a public demonstration to see who was really G-d and who was a fraud. When a miracle happened and the Jewish people saw the truth, they shouted in unison "*Hashem; He is the G-d.*"

In the same way that this week's *Parsha* describes the Jewish People wavering on the brink of idol worship, so too the Haftorah tells of one of the worst kings to rule Israel — *Achav*, whose wife, *Izavel*, worshipped idols, murdered righteous prophets and filled the palace with idols.

In spite of the danger to his life, *Eliyahu* successfully challenged *Achav* and *Izavel*. The culmination of his victory was on Mount Carmel, where it became clear to all the Jewish People who was G-d.

THE VOICE OF APPEASEMENT

"How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, follow Him! And if the Ba'al, follow it." (18:21)

When Moshe *Rabbeinu* was descending from Mount Sinai with the Tablets and the Jewish People were busy with the

golden calf, Yehoshua tried to comfort Moshe by saying "*The sound of battle is in the camp.*" He meant that not all the Jews were infected by idol worship; there is still a battle between the worshippers of the golden calf and those faithful to Hashem.

Moshe replied to him that it was "*not a sound shouting strength nor a sound shouting weakness,*" meaning: "I don't hear an ounce of resolve in either the worshippers of the calf nor in those loyal to Hashem."

Even those *not* worshipping the calf were taking the stance of tolerance, of neutrality. They were "open to both opinions." That was "*the sound shouting weakness.*" Just a voice, nothing more; the voice of appeasement, devoid of action and expectation of improving the situation.

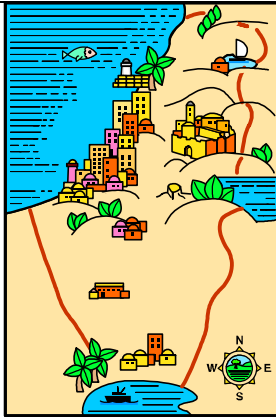
In the fight against idol-worship, whatever that idol may be, only the "*sound shouting strength*" must be heard, because then it is impossible to dance between two opinions.

Sources:

The Ink Of Eternity - Beis Halevi, Drasha 18
Sign Of The Times - Chafetz Chaim
A Valid Visa - Rabbi Moshe Feinstein
The Gold Standard - Rabbi Shmuel M'Sokhachov
The Voice of Appeasement - D'var Hamelacha

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



REMEMBERING THE LAND

Purim is not celebrated on the same day everywhere. In walled cities, we are told in Megillat Esther, the celebration is on the 15th day of Adar, while in cities without walls it is on the 14th.

The reason for this is that in the unwalled cities, the Jews overcame their enemies on the 13th of Adar and celebrated on the 14th, while in the walled capital of Shushan the battle still raged on the 14th and the Jews there could not celebrate their victory until the 15th. Therefore, all walled cities celebrate Purim on the 15th because of their similarity to Shushan.

The designation "walled city" does not depend on a city's present situation, but rather on whether it had a wall at the time Joshua led the Jewish nation in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. But why is Joshua's time the criterion for the designation "walled city?" Wouldn't it have been more logical to make this determination based on the time of the Purim miracle?

The answer is found in the Jerusalem Talmud where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi declares that this was done in order to accord honor to Eretz Yisrael which lay desolate at the time the Persian miracle.

Rabbi Nissan ben Reuven (Ran) explains this as follows: At the time of the Purim miracle there were hardly any cities in Eretz Yisrael with their walls still intact. Had the determination of "walled city" been made according to the situation at that time, almost all cities in Eretz Yisrael would have the status of unwalled cities. To avoid this disgrace, it was decided to base the status "walled city" on the situation of the city at the time of Joshua. This made many more cities in Eretz Yisrael eligible for this distinction.

Rabbi Yosef Karo (Beis Yosef) has a different approach. Our Sages wanted some memory of Eretz Yisrael in the celebration of this miracle which took place in a foreign land. In the spirit of "zecher lemiqdash" — those laws and customs we follow to recall the Beis Hamikdash — the Sages linked the determination of "walled city" to Eretz Yisrael so that the Jews living abroad would not forget their holy land.

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