



Parshas Ki Sisa

For the week ending 18 Adar 5759
5 - 6 March 1999

**Dedicated by Jerrold Greenberg and Toby F. Block in memory of
Avraham Leib ben Chaim v'Chana z"l (Abraham Balter) on the first yahrzeit**

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 spree of idol-worship, he smashes the tablets, and destroys the golden calf. The tribe 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 SMILE YOU SEND OUT

**“And Hashem spoke to Moshe face to face.”
(33:11)**

Many years ago I saw a cartoon whose name escapes me now. I think it might have been Bambi or some other landmark of Western civilization. Anyway, in this cartoon a lovable Disney fawn with eyes as big as saucers approaches a silent still lake in a deserted forest and, for the first time in its life, sees its reflection. Startled by seeing another creature in this totally quiet landscape, the fawn jumps back in alarm. However, its curiosity piqued, the fawn gingerly approaches the glassy surface of the lake once again. It stares at its reflection. It smiles. It frowns. Its *doppelganger* faithfully mimics

every move. A whole cartoon ballet of emotions follows: Surprise. Indignation. Friendship. Love. Until finally the fawn plunges a paw into the lake and the apparition vanishes, much to its chagrin.

If the eyes are the window of the soul, the face must be the mirror of the heart. It's amazing how people know exactly how we feel about them, even when we're sure that it's our secret.

But more than this, when we look at someone, we see in their face not just the way they feel about us, but also the way we feel about them. Just as water reflects, so too the heart of man is reflected in the face of his fellow. To the extent we feel love for our fellow man, so too will he reciprocate that love. As they used to say, "The smile you send out returns to you."

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☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

☎ 972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

☐ info@ohr.org.il

☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

☎ 1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

☐ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

☎ 1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

☐ Somayach@MSN.com

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Eli Ballon

Parshas **Ki Sisa** - 18 Adar 5759, 5 - 6 March 1999

The reverse is also true. When we feel antipathy towards someone, we will see our own negative feelings written across their features like a billboard.

The same is true in our relationship with G-d. If we want to know how G-d feels about us, the surest sign is to check the pulse of our own feelings about Him. If our heart yearns for G-d, to serve Him and to do His will, there is no surer sign that He loves us.

HEADLIGHTS ON

(Moshe said to G-d) "Show me Your Glory"... (G-d said to him) "You will see My back, but My face cannot be seen." (33:18;23)

Have you ever driven down a country road on a moonless night and turned your headlights off? I wouldn't advise you do it for more than a second because it's like driving into nothingness. It's amazing how those two small pencil-beams of light allow you to navigate a tortuous county road, even in the blackest night. "Why can't they just make this road straight?" you might think to yourself.

This world is like night. The world-to-come is like day.

It's possible to see at night, if you turn on your headlights. But there's a difference: At night, your vision is restricted to what's illuminated in the beams. It's local. By day, you can see the whole picture.

In daylight it becomes clear why the road twists and turns so much, why sometimes you go up, and sometimes down: Over here, there's a hill; there, a river; over there a chasm.

In this world, a person sees but through a glass, darkly. He catches a few brief excerpts of reality, mere flashes of the way the Creator runs His creation.

The rest is night.

With only the few chapters of world history at our disposal, we can't visualize the whole of existence, from where it comes and to where it's going. That's why this world is like night. But in the world-to-come everything becomes as clear as day. Distance lends perspective and comprehension. We are able to understand the reasons why G-d does what He does: Why the road had to have this bend, why we had to go down there so far...

That's what G-d was telling Moshe when he said "My face — you cannot see." In this world we cannot see G-d's "face" — G-d's direct control of the world in the bright light of day. But His "back" — the tell-tale footprints in the snow of History — that's clear for all to see...if we keep our head-lamps turned on.

HEART AND STONE

"And the tablets are the work of G-d, and the writing, the writing of G-d." (32:16)

Next time you're in *shul*, take a look at the Ten Commandments (*luchos*) above the holy ark. The tops of the Two Tablets are curved. Why are the Ten Commandments this shape? The Talmud describes the Tablets as being cubic. There is not a single classical Jewish source which describes the Tablets in the form with which we are familiar today.

Where did this shape come from?

Another question. If the Jewish People had already *heard* the Ten Commandments, why was it necessary to engrave them on tablets? Wasn't the overwhelming experience of hearing G-d speaking sufficient?

When the Ten Commandments were engraved on the Tablets, they were also being engraved on the hearts of the Jewish People. Engraved on the Tablet of the heart. The writing was the writing of G-d indelibly engraved on the heart of the Jewish People for all time.

Take another look at those Ten Commandments above the holy ark. Their rounded tops symbolize the shape of the heart, the heart of the Jewish People where they have been engraved for more than three thousand years.

THE REST IS EASY

"And on the seventh day, a Shabbos of Shabbosos" (31:15)

There are two kinds of rest. The first kind of rest is a rest from weariness, a chance to recharge our batteries, to enable us to continue to work. For no one can work indefinitely. Everyone needs a break.

The second kind of rest comes at the end of a project. The last brushstroke of a painting. The final sentence of a novel. The last brick in a new home. Then you take a step back and look at your work. You feel the satisfaction of completion. It's finished. It's done. A time to rest and enjoy the fruits of your labors.

"You shall labor for six days and do all your work."

How can you do all your work in six days? Can you build an entire house in six days?

The Torah teaches us that when Shabbos comes, even though we're half-way through a project, we should think of it as though it were finished completely. On Shabbos we should picture ourselves experiencing the rest and satisfaction that comes after a good job well done, not just taking a break. In a sense, this is what G-d did when the world was six days old. He looked at the Creation and saw that it was finished — the greatest

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For the week ending 18 Adar 5759, 5 - 6 March 1999

building project ever — the heavens and the earth were completed. Our rest on Shabbos is a commemoration of that rest.

This is the essential difference between our Shabbos and the secular idea of a “day of rest.” The secular world understands the day of rest as a break so that you can return to the week revitalized and refreshed. It’s a only a break.

Shabbos, on the other hand, is not just pushing the pause button on life. It’s the creation of a feeling that everything in one’s life is complete. There’s nothing left to do except sit back and enjoy the fruits of one’s labor.

Sources:

The Smile You Send Out - Ohr HaChaim, Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Rabbi Nachy Brickman

Headlights On - Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, “Moser Derech” - Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, Rabbi Yaakov Niman, Rabbi Meir Chadash

Heart And Stone - Sfas Emes in Mayana shel Torah, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro

The Rest is Easy - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L’Torah UI’Moadim

Haftarah: Parah - Yechezkel 36:16-38

This week’s haftarah is the haftarah of Parshas Parah, the third of the four special Parshios.

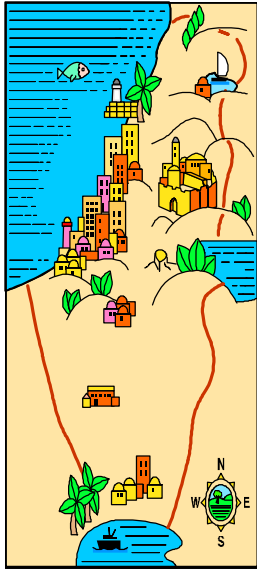
Just as Parshas Parah concerns the laws of spiritual purity, so its haftarah contains the words “and I will sprinkle upon you the waters of purity.” Its prophecy consoles the exiled Jewish people, relating to the reasons of the exile and to the future restoration and establishment in the land of Israel. In the future, spiritual purity, together with a “new heart and new spirit,” will be bestowed from above upon those who repent (*ibid.* 26).

A NEW HEART

“**A**nd I will remove the heart of stone from within you and give you a heart of flesh.” When a person sins he is actually harming himself; his suffering soul introverts within his conscience, his feelings become numb and his emotions phlegmatic. This state not only hinders spiritual elevation but lures him to deepen his depression with additional sin. This is the meaning of the statement in Pirke Avos “a sin motivates a sin,” (Avos 4:2) as the spiritual harm caused by the first decision to sin strengthens his desire for future sin. Our Sages compared this situation to a thirsty sailor drinking salt water; the more he drinks the more he thirsts, never to quench his thirst. Nevertheless, when a person is determined to repent, the Merciful One removes his heart of stone and furnishes him with a new, sensitive heart of supple flesh, enabling him to embark on a new beginning.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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



AFULA

Afula is an important development town which serves as the market center of the Jezreel Valley. It was founded in 1925 on what is presumed to be the site of the tower ("Ophel") mentioned in the Biblical account of an Aramean General's visit to the Prophet Elisha (*Melachim II 5:24*).

The tower persisted as a symbol of the city for visitors, who can see among the ruins of the ancient settlement the remains of an Arab tower which serves as an historical landmark, at this important crossroads of the Jezreel Valley.