

Torah Weekly

March 8-14, 2020
12-18 Adar, 5780
First Torah:
Ki Tisa: Exodus 30:11 - 34:35
Second Torah:
Parshat Parah: Numbers 19:1-22
Haftorah:
Ezekiel 36:16-36
PARSHAT KI TISA

Calendars
We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs
Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah
We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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Picking Up the Pieces

It's too late. I'm too far gone. It'll never be the same. How many times have we heard those words? Or, worse still, said them? This week's Parshah tells the story of the Golden Calf, the worst national sin in the history of the Jewish people. Frankly, if I were the editor of the Bible I'd have left that part out. How humiliating to the Jews! Just weeks after the greatest revelation of all time, when they saw and heard G-d up front and personal, they go and bow down to a cow?! How fickle can you get? But the Torah is unflinchingly honest and records this most unflattering moment of ours in all its gory detail. Why? Perhaps the very important lessons we need to draw from this embarrassing episode are, firstly, that people do sin, human beings do make mistakes, and even inspired Jews who saw the divine with their own eyes can mess up — badly. And, secondly, that even afterwards there is still hope, no matter what. In the very same Parshah we read how G-d tells Moses to carve a second set of tablets, to replace the first set he smashed when he came down the mountain and was shocked by what the Jews were up to. (Sort of "You broke them, you fix them" — like the guy who fell asleep during the rabbi's sermon and the rabbi tells the *shamash* to go and wake the fellow up. The *shamash* says, "Rabbi, you put him to sleep, you wake him up!") The Torah does not intend to diminish our respect for that generation, but rather to help us understand human frailty,

our moral weakness and the reality of relationships, spiritual or otherwise. G-d gave us a perfect Torah. The tablets were hand-made by G-d, pure and sacred, and then we messed up. So is it all over? Is there really no hope now? Are we beyond redemption? After all, what could possibly be worse than idolatry? We broke the first two commandments and the tablets were shattered into smithereens because we were no longer worthy to have them. It was the ultimate infidelity. So Torah teaches that all is not lost. As bad as it was — and it was bad — it is possible for man to repair the damage. Moses will make new tablets. They won't be quite the same as G-d's, but there will be Tablets nonetheless. We can pick up the pieces. I once heard a colleague speak about the significance of breaking the glass under the *chupah* (wedding canopy). Besides never forgetting Jerusalem and praying for her full restoration, this ceremony teaches a very important lesson about life to a bride and groom who are about to embark on their own new path in life. What happens immediately after the groom breaks the glass? Everyone shouts "Mazel Tov!" The message is clear. Something broke? Nu, it's not the end of the world. We can even laugh about it and still be happy. *Nisht gefeherlich. Lo nora.* This too shall pass. A very practical, peace-keeping tip for the new couple.

There are most definitely second chances in life. At my Shul we run an adult education program called

CAJE, the College of Adult Jewish Education, and the by-line we use in the CAJE logo is *Your Second Chance to Know*. There are second chances and third chances too. Many Hebrew school dropouts have passed through our classes and, as adults, learned to read Hebrew from scratch. Today, some of our graduates can even lead the Shul service and I am very proud of them and our program. It is possible to pick up the pieces in life. Whether it's our relationships with G-d, our marriage partners, our kids or our colleagues, we can make amends and repair the damage. If the Jews could recover from the Golden Calf, our own challenges are small indeed.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman
Thank You, Moses, for Smashing the Tablets

It was his most courageous act. But what did it achieve? He had always been known as the faithful servant. But this time his words were brash. Brazen. Almost impudent. Dangerously so. "If You won't forgive them, leave me out of this. Leave me out of this covenant, leave me out of this Torah, leave me out of the entire story." "If this Torah won't allow You to forgive them, I want no part of it." Until now, everything had been about Torah. He had rescued the people and brought them to the mountain only to enter into this covenant. The entire world had trembled as he brought heaven to meet earth, Creator to creation. For 40 days and 40 nights he sat in another world to absorb the words of this Torah and bring it to the people. That is how he saw



himself: As a teacher. He had rescued the people, he had carried them towards the promised land, fought for them and provided for them. But in his mind, it was all only in order to teach them. So that there could be this people, a special people, who would enter into a covenant with G-d. And keep it. But they did not keep it. When he descended from the mountain, carrying the two hewn stones, a divine work, a miraculous work, and he saw the people dancing about a golden calf in revelry, he realized to his horror that he had one of two choices: He could hold onto the Torah. Or he could hold onto the people. If this Torah would arrive in the people's hands, they would be judged. They had received this Torah, and they had defied it. They would be destroyed. If this Torah would not arrive in the people's hands, there would still be time. There would still be a chance to plead on their behalf. Perhaps they could be saved. He smashed that which until now had been the most precious thing in the world to him. All for which he had ascended to the greatest heights and toiled over with all his soul. And now, he pleaded. "You want to forgive," he said. "I know that. When they were in Egypt, they were idolaters, yet You called them 'My child, My firstborn.' Your love was unconditional." "But now You have given them this Torah, and it is this Torah that won't let you forgive. And if that is the case, I want no part of it." "I understand that this is the most perfect law, the most ideal covenant, a teaching that surpasses all. But I don't want to lead a people that exists for the sake of fulfilling a perfect Torah. I want a Torah that is there for the sake of the people, to make their souls shine. To bring them to You." "What kind of a Torah is that? One that allows for human failure. For bad, wrong choices. For impudence and even defiance—all those things that human beings do. And then for reconciliation. And forgiveness." "I want a Torah that includes You within it. And if You are there, forgiveness is always at hand." G-d answered with a Torah that includes forgiveness. A Torah whose purpose is to connect the people to Him and to bring out their love. A Torah whose heart was where the heart of Moses lay—with the people, unconditionally, even if the Torah itself had to be shattered in order to save them. When Moses died, the rabbis say, G-d eulogized him. What was the greatest praise He could say of His faithful servant? That he rescued the people? That he gave them His Torah? That he led them through the wilderness for forty years? He said, "Moses, you broke the tablets. Thank you, Moses. Thank you." By *Rabbi Tzvi Freeman*

March 8, 2020 --- 12 Adar, 5780

Herod's Temple Dedicated (11 BCE)

After 334 years, the 2nd Holy Temple in Jerusalem was in disrepair. In the year 19 BCE, King Herod I floated the idea of rebuilding and renovating the Temple. Though many Jews were wary of Herod's motives, the renovation was completed eight years later. The new structure was magnificent, causing the Talmud to state: "He who has not seen Herod's edifice has not seen a magnificent edifice!"

March 9, 2020 --- 13 Adar, 5780

Maccabee victory (135 BCE)

The Maccabees defeated the Syrian General Nicanor in a battle fought four years after the Maccabee's liberation of the Holy Land and the miracle of Chanukah.

March 9, 2020 --- 13 Adar, 5780

Passing of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1986)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was one of the major leaders of American Jewry in the 20th century. Born in 1895, he came to New York in 1936 in order to escape the oppressive Soviet regime.

In addition to the students in the *yeshivah* he headed, he guided rabbis and lay people with his insightful and definitive responsa on virtually every area of Jewish law. Many of them have been collected in the multi-volume *Igrot Moshe*.

March 9, 2020 --- 13 Adar, 5780

Passing of R. Yehudah the Pious (1217)

R. Yehudah HaChassid—the pious—was held in high esteem for his piety and saintliness. He authored *Sefer Chassidim*, a collection of ethical and halachic teachings that is widely studied to this day. The kabbalistic instructions included in his so-called "testament" are accepted and practiced in many communities.

March 10, 2020 --- 14 Adar, 5780

Moses' Brit (1393 BCE)

Moses was born on the 7th of Adar of the year 2368 from creation (1393 BCE); accordingly, Adar 14 was the 8th day of his life and the day on which he was circumcised in accordance with the Divine command to Abraham.

March 10, 2020 --- 14 Adar, 5780

Purim Victory Celebrated (356 BCE)

The festival of Purim celebrates the salvation of the Jewish people from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day."

The events of Purim extended over a period of several years, culminating in the victory celebrations of Adar 14-15 of 356 BCE.

March 12, 2020 --- 16 Adar, 5780

Rebuilding of Jerusalem Wall Begun (c. 41 CE)

Agrippa I, appointed by the Roman Emperor to rule over Judea, was pious and kind to his subjects. During his reign, the Jews began to prosper and live comfortably. The Sages of the time accorded him great respect. Agrippa I started construction to repair, broaden and heighten the walls around Jerusalem. The Romans, wary of the Jews' rising prosperity, placed many obstacles in his way. Nonetheless, the wall was completed, though the finished product was not as magnificent as originally planned. The 16th of Adar, the day when the construction commenced, was instituted to be a joyous day.

March 15, 2020 --- 19 Adar, 5780

Salvation of Yemenite Jewry (1722)

The Jews of Sana'a, Yemen, were saved from a decree plotted against them by the king's anti-Semitic ministers, in which they were accused of killing the grand prince. Yemenite Jewry celebrated this day each year with feasting and rejoicing.