

Torah Weekly

March 5-11, 2023
12-18 Adar, 5783

Ki Tisa: Exodus 30:11 - 34:35
Parshat Parah: Numbers 19:1-22
Haftorah: Kings 1 18:20-39

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 Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org



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No One Forgotten.

Heresy Cloaked in Piety

How did the Jews, who had just weeks earlier personally experienced the Revelation at Sinai and the Ten Commandments, justify their demand for an idolatrous golden calf?

Well, on the face of it, it did seem as if it might have been a genuine expression of a need for leadership. What was their argument? *Make for us gods who will lead us, because this man Moses who took us out of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him* ([Exodus 32:1](#)). Moshe was still up on the mountain, appeared to be late in returning, and they feared he wasn't coming back at all. The people's demand for a visible, tangible leader to replace Moses appeared reasonable. Arguably, it seemed to be a sincere call for religious guidance and for a means of better identifying with the One G-d.

But where did it end? Not only in blatant idolatry but also in adultery and even murder. The verse (*ibid.*, verse 6) reads "*And they arose to rebel*". Commentary interprets the word *litzachek* --"to revel"--as depraved merry-making which included wild orgies of unbridled immorality and the killing of Hur, son of Miriam, who tried to stop them.

Here we find a profound message as relevant today as in days of old. It sometimes occurs that people make demands cloaked in piety or religious fervor. But, beneath the surface lies a selfish desire and sinister motivations. Often, people ask for G-d, when what they

really want is sin!

Where was G-d during the Holocaust? This most disturbing question may be asked in a variety of ways. It could be out of a genuine desire to understand the most challenging philosophical issue of the day. On the other hand, it might also be asked almost flippantly as a convenient excuse for one's own religious inadequacies.

A good test of where the question is coming from is this. If I gave you a watertight answer for the question of G-d and the Holocaust (assuming I had one), would you begin living a G-dly life? Would you start putting on *tefillin* today? Will you be in Shul tomorrow? If not, then the fact that you don't do so now cannot be attributed to your having a gripe with G-d. Either you weren't raised with that important tradition or you aren't sure how to do it, or perhaps you just couldn't be bothered and are using the Holocaust as a convenient rationalization.

Do you know how expensive it is to keep Kosher? Again, this may be a passionate cry of religious zeal, or perhaps a real concern to make kosher food more accessible to the masses. Unfortunately, it might also be a cheap excuse for someone who has no intention of keeping kosher at any price.

I once heard a story about three Jewish apostates in Russia of old. They met for drinks in the local tavern and were discussing the reasons why each of them left the faith. One says being a Christian opened new doors

for him in business. The next said he fell in love with the squire's daughter and had to convert to marry her. The third says he had philosophical difficulties with the Torah and Talmud and was inspired by the theological doctrines of Christianity. Whereupon his friends told him in no uncertain terms that he was bluffing. "That story you can tell the goyim," the other two turned scoffed. "Us Jews you can tell the truth..."

Let us be honest. Why blame our own inadequacies on a mysteriously inexplicable G-d or on a Judaism we find fault with? Why say we are looking for G-d when we are really looking for the path of least resistance? Let us not abuse that which is holy for purposes of self-justification. Even if we are not prepared to live a holy life, at least let us be honest.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Shining Soul of Failure

One of the most important practices in Judaism, the fourth of the Ten Commandments, is to refrain from work on the seventh day, to sanctify it and make it holy. Yet, the exact definition of rest and forms of labor prohibited on Shabbat are not explicitly stated in the Torah.

The Sages of the Talmud explain that the Torah alludes to there being 39 categories of prohibited labor. Whenever the Torah discusses the commandment to build the Tabernacle, the sanctuary constructed in the desert, the Torah also reiterates the commandment of Shabbat.

Case in point is this week's Torah portion. After more than two full portions dedicated to the intricate details of the sanctuary, the Torah concludes with the theme of Shabbat:

... The children of Israel observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant. Between Me and the children of Israel, it is forever a sign that [in] six days the L-rd created the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested.

From the juxtaposition of Shabbat and the commandment to build the [Tabernacle](#), we derive that the Tabernacle may not be constructed on Shabbat. This implies that any labor that was needed for the construction of the Tabernacle is considered "labor" according to Jewish law and is prohibited on Shabbat.

This derivation may seem far from straightforward. Why does the Torah communicate its definition of labor through the seemingly unrelated Tabernacle? What does the prohibition of working on Shabbat have to do with building a sanctuary?

The Torah is teaching us a profound lesson about the purpose of labor. The conventional understanding is that we spend six days of the week working and pursuing our physical needs, and on the seventh day we rest from the pursuit of the physical and dedicate a day to our family, our soul and our spiritual life. Yet the Torah is signaling to us that we should think about labor in the context of the work necessary to construct the sanctuary.

Thus, the halachic definition of "labor" is derived from the labor used for the construction of the sanctuary because the spiritual purpose of all our labor is to create a metaphorical sanctuary, a home for G-d. We do so by using our physical possessions and experiences to enhance our soul and advance the purpose for which we were created, namely, to transform this earth into a vessel for G-dliness by filling the world with goodness and kindness.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Monday, March 6, 2023 --- 13 Adar, 5783

War Against Persian Jew-haters (356 BCE)

On the 13th of Adar of the year 3405 from creation (356 BCE), battles were fought throughout the Persian Empire between the Jews and those seeking to kill them in accordance with the decree issued by King Achashveirosh 11 months earlier. (Achashveirosh never rescinded that decree; but after the hanging of Haman on Nissan 16 of the previous year, and Queen Esther's pleading on behalf of her people, he agreed to issue a second decree authorizing the Jews to defend themselves against those seeking to kill them.) 75,000 enemies were killed on that day, and 500 in the capital, Shushan, including Haman's ten sons (Parshandata, Dalfon, Aspata, Porata, Adalia, Aridata, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizata), whose bodies were subsequently hanged. The Jews did not take any of the possessions of the slain as booty, though authorized to do so by the king's decree. (The Book of Esther, chapter 9).

Tuesday, March 7, 2023 --- 14 Adar, 5783

Moses' Brit (1393 BCE)

According to tradition, Moses was born on the 7th of Adar I, today was the 8th day of his life and the day on which he was circumcised in accordance with the Divine.

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.

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 --- 15 Adar, 5783

Purim Victory Celebrated in Shushan (356 BCE)

The battles fought between the Jews and their enemies, which took place on Adar 13 throughout the Persian empire, continued for two days -- Adar 13 and 14 -- in the capital city of Shushan, where there were a greater number of Jew haters. Thus the victory celebrations in Shushan were held on the 15th of Adar, and the observance of the festival of Purim was instituted for that day in Shushan and all walled cities.

Ezekiel Foretells the Downfall of Israel's Enemies (1991)

On this date, in the year following the [Holy Temple's](#) destruction, G-d tells [Ezekiel](#) to take up a lamentation for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and for the Jewish nation's other enemies, foretelling their ultimate downfall.

Thursday, March 9, 2023 --- 16 Adar, 5783

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.

Shabbat, March 11, 2023 --- 18 Adar, 5783

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.