

PARSHAT KI TISA

16-22 Adar 1 5783
25 February - 2 March 2024

Torah: Exodus 30:11-34:35
Haftorah: Kings I 18:20-39

Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Psalms Daily

Grape Juice & Matzah

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



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Two Equal Tablets

Moses comes down from Sinai forty days after G-d proclaimed the Ten Commandments. In his hands are the "two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of G-d." The biblical commentator Rashi, noting the distinctive Hebrew spelling of "tablets," comments that both were of equal proportions.

There are two common attitudes toward religion, neither representing the outlook of Torah. There are two common attitudes toward religion, neither representing the outlook of Torah. Ethereal religion concerns itself with abstractions like the essence of G-d and the nature of evil. It thrives in the rarefied atmosphere of the seminar on theology and philosophy. Man is little involved in its processes. The mundane world of business, for example, has little place in this religion and faces neither challenge nor guidance from its conclusions. The two worlds are separate. The philosopher and businessman operate independently.

For others religion is a code of etiquette, a set of maxims on how to get along with people and be a nice guy. Be honest, give charity, don't kill, these represent religion. ("I'm a good Jew. I give charity.") This religion, even in its finer forms, exists primarily in terms of men — G-d need not enter the picture. Here are opposing views of religion: one looks to G-d and disdains the "materialistic" world; the other is so concerned with men and society that it forgets G-d.

Now let's see the Ten Commandments. The first five are: "I am the L-rd," which is the positive statement of G-d and Providence; the prohibition of idolatry; taking His Name in

vain; the Shabbat; honoring parents. There seems to be a pattern, the stress on man's relations with G-d. The next five, on the second tablet, concern murder, robbery, adultery, false witness, covetousness. All these affect man-to-man relationships. Rashi declares both equal. The good Jew is "good" toward G-d and men, or else he is half a Jew, so to speak. He will keep the Shabbat, have honest scales, wear tefillin, pay employees promptly, observe the laws of Kosher, give charity — because each of these is a Torah commandment. All are equally important.

By Zalman Posner

The Fiery Coin

"The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: '...Let each [Israelite] give to the L-rd an atonement for his soul... This they shall give, everyone who goes through the counting: half a shekel'" — Exodus 30:11-13

"G-d took a coin of fire from under His throne of glory and showed it to Moses, saying: 'Such as this they shall give'" — Midrash

A total of 611 commandments were transmitted to the Jews through Moses. Many of these mitzvot involved various physical objects and creatures, but only five times was it necessary for G-d to give Moses a visual presentation of the subject matter he was to teach. These were complex instances which were very difficult to transmit verbally. For example: G-d showed Moses the crescent new moon, showing him the precise dimensions of the moon at the moment the new month is to be consecrated. However, this case of the half shekel is puzzling: what is so difficult about this mitzvah that necessitated G-d to put on a "show and tell" for Moses?

How can a mere half Shekel atone for the egregious sin of idolatry,

Moses wondered? The medieval French sages of the Tosafot explain Moses' puzzlement. The donation of the half Shekel was intended to bring atonement for the gravest of sins, the sin of the Golden Calf. How can a mere half Shekel atone for the egregious sin of idolatry, Moses wondered?

Furthermore, it is quite obvious that not all the Jews shared equal guilt in the making of the Calf. Some were more enthusiastic than others, and others participated more actively than others. How then can the means of achieving atonement be a standardized "one size fits all" half Shekel? And shouldn't a more rigorous repentance be expected of the scholars and leaders, who were certainly guiltier than the masses who couldn't fully grasp the severe implications of their actions? G-d responded by showing Moses a fiery coin. In short, G-d's answer to Moses was: Never judge a book by its cover... There could be a coin made of gold or silver, and there could be a coin made of fire. Externally they may look alike, both are worth a half Shekel, but one is a cold piece of metal, whereas the other is aflame with passion and love. There's much more to a mitzvah than the act, the body, there's a soul of fire which animates it — and no two fires dance alike. The mitzvah of donating a half Shekel teaches us a valuable lesson. Humans, who with their eyes of flesh can only perceive the physical act of a mitzvah, tend to judge others' deeds based on quantity. But G-d sees beyond the surface — and He judges based on the fire which was injected into the mitzvah. And at the end of the day, who is it we are trying to impress anyway?

By Naftali Silberberg

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 Geferlich. 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 Yossy Goldman

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, February 26, 2024-17 Adar I, 5784

Code of Jewish Law Completed (1565)

Rabbi Yosef Caro published the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law. This concise codification of all Jewish law which is germane today was an extension of his Beit Yosef commentary (see entry for the 11th of Elul). The Shulchan Aruch is divided into four sections: Orach Chaim details the laws pertaining to daily life, lifecycle events, and holidays. Yoreh De'ah. laws which a practicing rabbi must be proficient in, such as complex nuances of the kosher laws, laws of mikvah, and laws of slaughtering. Even Ha'ezer, laws of marriage, divorce, reproduction, and the like. Choshen Mishpat, monetary and judicial laws; required study for a member of a rabbinical court. To this very day, the Shulchan Aruch serves as the primary halachic guide for Jewish life.

Thursday, February 29, 2024-20 Adar I, 5784

Purim Vincent (1616)

In 1614, the evil Vincent Fettmilch organized an attack on the Jewish quarter of Frankfurt, and the Jews were subsequently expelled from the city. Thanks to the Emperor's intervention, two years later the Jews were allowed to return to the city in honor, and Vincent and his cohorts were hanged. The Jewish

community marked the date of 20 Adar as a yearly day of celebration, naming it "Purim Vincent." (Yosef Ometz §1109)

Passing of R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1995)

R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was a renowned halachic authority who lived in Jerusalem. Many of his rulings pertain to modern technological advances as they apply to Jewish life.

Passing of "Bach" (1640)

Adar 20 is the Yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Yoel Sirkes (1560?-1640), Rabbi of Krakow and author of the Bayit Chadash ("Bach") commentary on the great Halachic work, the Arba'ah Turim.

Friday, March 1, 2024-21 Adar I, 5784

R. Elimelech of Lizhensk (1786)

The great Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1786) was one of the elite disciples of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch, and a colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. He is also widely known as the No'am Elimelech, the title of the renowned Chassidic work he authored. Rabbi Elimelech attracted many thousands of Chassidim, among them many who, after his passing, became great Chassidic masters in their own right. Most notable amongst them was Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer of Lublin." Many of the current Chassidic dynasties trace themselves back to Rabbi Elimelech.