



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Ki Tisa** (כִּי תִשָּׂא, “when you take”)
- **Chapters: Exodus 30:11-34:35**



בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

In our last two Torah readings (Terumah/Tetzaveh), Moses was upon Mount Sinai receiving the vision of the Sanctuary (i.e., the Mishkan or “Tabernacle”) and its various furnishings. In this week’s portion, God commanded that all Israelites over the age of twenty must pay a half a shekel tax to help support of the worship in the Mishkan. After this tax was explained, God described some additional elements that would be required for the priestly service at the Sanctuary: a copper washstand, sacred anointing oil, and incense for the golden altar in the Holy Place. The Lord then named Betzalel, a man “filled with the Spirit of God” to be the chief architect of the Mishkan. Before the construction would begin, however, the Lord reminded Moses to warn the people to be careful to observe the Sabbath day. Immediately following this admonition, God gave Moses the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, which were inscribed directly by the hand of God.

Before Moses returned to the camp, however, the people had talked Aaron into making an idol which they began to worship. God told Moses of their treachery and threatened to destroy the Israelites, but Moses interceded on their behalf. As he rushed down the mountain, with the tablets in hand, he saw the people dancing about the idol and smashed the Tablets in anger. Moses then destroyed the idol and led the Levites in slaying 3,000 of the ringleaders.

The following day, Moses returned up the mountain and begged God to reaffirm the Covenant. After a 40 day period of intercession and repentance, the Lord finally told Moses to carve a second set of Tablets and to meet him at the summit of Sinai, where He would show Moses his glory and reveal to him the meaning of His Name. After this dramatic encounter, God reaffirmed the Covenant along with all its ritual and ethical implications.

When the people saw Moses coming down the mountain with the second set of Tablets, they understood they were forgiven and that the Covenant had been renewed. When they approached Moses, however, they drew back in fear, because his face was radiant with the glory of God. Moses reassured them, however, and then reported all that the Lord had commanded while he was on the mountain. When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. From that time on, Moses wore a veil in the camp, though he removed it whenever he went before the Lord for further instructions.



Basic Questions

1. Why did God call for a census of the people? ¹
2. Why was the tax the same amount for everyone? ²
3. What were the priests and Levites required to do before they went into the tent of meeting (i.e., the Holy Place of the Mishkan)? ³
4. The chief architect of the Tabernacle was Betzalel, the grandson of Hur (of the tribe of Judah and ancestor of King David). How did he know how to make all the intricate details of the Tabernacle and its furnishings? ⁴
5. When the people thought Moses had died upon the mountain, what did they do? ⁵
6. Who designed and built the Golden Calf (*egel ha-zahav*)? For what purpose? ⁶
7. What were the three appeals Moses made to God to save Israel from destruction? ⁷
8. How did Aaron describe how the Golden Calf was made to Moses? ⁸
9. What does the idiom “stiff-necked” mean? ⁹
10. What did Moses do with the Golden Calf? ¹⁰
11. When Moses demanded the people to decide whether they would serve God or continue in apostasy, who pledged their loyalty to God? What were they told to do? ¹¹
12. When he went up the mountain to appeal for God’s forgiveness, what did Moses say? ¹²
13. What physical change happened to Moses after he came down from Sinai after receiving the second set of Tablets? ¹³

¹ It was a sort of “tax” for the people that was paid to prevent plagues among them. At first, the half-shekels were used to literally support the Tabernacle (the silver was used to make sockets for the posts); later they supported the livelihood of the Levites.

² To teach that everyone had equal value and everyone had equal responsibility to the ministry of the Tabernacle.

³ Wash their hands and feet from the copper laver (*kiyyor*).

⁴ The Spirit of God gave him special wisdom and revelation.

⁵ They panicked and asked Aaron to be their leader. They set up a counterfeit religion and had Aaron make them an idol to which they offered prayers and sacrifices.

⁶ Aaron, who took the people’s gold, melted it down, and “fashioned it (i.e., the calf) with a graving tool” (32:4). According to midrash he sought to pacify the mob and asked for gold for the idol to “buy time” before Moses would return (Aaron understood that Moses would be back in 40 days, though the people miscalculated the time).

⁷ 1) He appealed to God’s program of salvation itself (32:11); 2) he appealed to God’s reputation among the nations (32:12), and 3) he appealed to God’s promises to the patriarchs (32:13).

⁸ He said he threw the gold into the fire and – presto! – out came this calf. Was Aaron being honest? (32:21-24) Israel’s first High Priest (of the Sinai Covenant) was the one who made Israel’s first idol (32:35).

⁹ Stubborn. Unwilling to “move the head” to listen to those who would guide and help. The neck is the “corridor” between the head and the heart, and having a “stiff neck” suggests an inflexible way of thinking and feeling.

¹⁰ He burned it with fire, ground it to powder, and threw its dust into water which he made the people drink (32:20).

¹¹ The tribe of Levi. They were told to take up swords and go kill all those who had been involved with the golden calf, even if it was a friend or family member.

¹² He confessed the sin of the people and then said that if God would not forgive them, he would be willing to die for their atonement.

¹³ His face was radiant with the Shekhinah glory.



Discussion Topics

1. After the Covenant had been renewed and God had revealed His Glory by proclaiming the Sacred Name, Moses' face is described as "beaming" or radiant. When he returned to the camp, the people were afraid of his appearance, so Moses was forced to cover his face with a veil. Discuss why you think Moses did this...
2. In his second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul argued that the veil worn over Moses' face concealed the "end of the law" (i.e., its eventual abolishment), since eternal righteousness would be given in the New Covenant. Apparently Paul was referencing a midrash that stated that the glow from Moses' face faded over time, and the veil was meant to hide this fact, though the text of the Torah itself gives no indication of this. What do you think Paul's reasons were for arguing this way?
3. Paul seems to suggest that the glow on Moses' face was the glow from encountering God as the morally perfect Lawgiver, whereas a case could be made that it was also the glow from encountering the LORD as the forgiving Savior. Read 2 Cor. 3:1-18 in light of Exodus 34. What sort of glow do you think was upon Moses' face?
4. The image of a veil over the hearts of the people was used by Paul to suggest a blindness to the truth of the gospel message. What connection do you think there is between the veil over Moses' face and the veil over the hearts of those who are blinded? (ref: 2 Cor. 3:1-18)
5. Why did Moses become so angry when he saw the Golden Calf, causing him to smash the Tablets? After all, God had already told him what was happening, so Moses should not have been surprised. Some of the sages say that Moses did this to deflect God's anger on to himself. Others state that Moses smashed the tablets for "shock value" and to emphasize the abhorrence of apostasy. Still, the question remains as to why Moses would desecrate such a holy object, especially since it was no fault of God's that the people had turned to idolatry. Discuss what you think Moses' motives might have been.
6. The Sin of the Golden Calf is a great mystery. How could the people who experienced the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt, the Clouds of Glory and Fire, the parting of the sea, the gift of the manna, the water from the rock, the defeat of the Amalek, and the astounding direct revelation of God at Sinai fail so completely by lapsing into idolatry?
7. How are we to understand Aaron? He was a chosen instrument from the time of Moses' commission who raised his staff to perform miracles in Egypt, and yet we find him collaborating with the idolatry of the Israelites. He appears to have lied to Moses when confronted about the Golden Calf, claiming that it came out of the fire by itself, when the text clearly states that Aaron fashioned the idol and erected an altar to it. Why were some of the people executed for idolatry, but Aaron was given a slight reprimand. Indeed, Aaron became the first High Priest of Israel and was honored among the people. How does any of this make sense?



For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Vayakhel**
(i.e., Exodus 35:1-38:20)
- Read the Haftarah (I Kings 7:40-50)
- Read the New Testament
(2 Cor. 9:6-11; 1 Cor. 3:11-18)

שַׁבָּת שְׁלוֹמִים

S h a b b a t S h a l o m !