

## **TorahFax: Ki Sisa**

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Thursday, Adar 16, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / March 9, 2023

This week's Parsha, Ki Tisa, begins, "G-d spoke to Moshe saying, 'When you wish to know the amount of the people of Israel, count them by having each man (between the ages of 20 to 60) give to G-d an atonement for his soul, then there will not be a plague among them when they are counted.'"

G-d tells Moshe that each man shall give a half shekel. The half shekalim were then counted and thus, Moshe knew their exact amount. The half-shekalim totaled 603,550. These half-Shekalim were later used for the foundation of the Mishkan – the Tabernacle which the Jewish people built and used during their forty years in the desert.

This way Moshe also knew the exact number of men who were eligible to be drafted in case of war, as the age of those who fought in the wars was between 20-60.

In this Parsha the Torah also relates the story of how the Golden Calf -- one of the gravest sins which the people of Israel committed in the desert.

G-d wanted to destroy the nation and rebuild the Jewish nation from Moshe. After much pleading by Moshe, G-d forgave them for this sin, withholding his immediate punishment. Yet, our sages tell us that it wasn't forgiven fully. G-d distributes punishment for this sin little by little, over time.

On fast days, when we remember a tragic event in Jewish history, we read from the Torah from this Parsha about Moshe's prayer for his people and G-d's subsequent forgiveness.

Q. Why did G-d command only the men to give the half shekel as an atonement? Also, why only a HALF shekel (not a full shekel)?

A. The Torah commentary, Alshich, has an interesting explanation: The Torah tells us that only the men gave their golden rings to make the Golden Calf. The women refused to have any part in making the Golden Calf. Thus, the women didn't have to atone for this sin, as they had no part in it.

Explains the Alshich, a man and his wife are one complete soul. Each of them is only half. In fact, the numerical value of the Hebrew word shekel is 430, the same as Nefesh (soul) which is also 430.

Being that only the men sinned, only they needed forgiveness. This is why G-d asked for a contribution of a HALF shekel (a half-soul) to show that the women were not involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.

Another reason for the HALF shekel: The "Half-Shekel" was atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. In order to atone for this terrible sin, it was important that Jews stand united. Thus the "half" Shekel teaches that each Jew on their own is only half. As Hillel the Elder teaches in Pirkei Avot, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" Only when the two half shekalim – two Jews are united, they are completed and make a complete shekel. The lesson is obvious: Only united are we complete.

Friday, Adar 17, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / March 10, 2023

This Shabbat we read the third of the four special Torah readings at this time of the year. Two readings are read before Purim (Shkalim & Zachor) and two before Pesach (Parah & Hachodesh).

We remove two Torahs from the ark this Shabbat. In the first we read the weekly Torah portion, Ki Tisa. In the second Torah we read Parshat Parah – the laws of the Red Heifer. It is about the spiritual purification process for someone who became impure as a result of coming in contact with a dead body. Thus, they are prohibited from entering the Beth Hamikdash (Holy Temple) and bringing a sacrifice.

Q. What is the connection between the reading of Parshat Parah and the holiday of Pesach?

A. In the days of the Holy Temple every Jew was supposed to share in the mitzvah of the Passover sacrifice. The process of the Para Aduma was to purify a Jew who was spiritual unclean, so that he too will be able to bring sacrifices. Being that every Jew had to have a share in the Pesach sacrifice and eat of its meat, we read from the Torah about the spiritual purification process.

In the weekly Torah portion, Ki Tisa, we read about the sin of the Golden Calf which the Jewish people made in the desert. This resulted in Moshe's breaking The Tablets when he came down Mount Sinai and witnessed them worshipping the idol. Moshe went back up the mountain to pray for their forgiveness which G-d granted. He told Moshe to bring up another set of Tablets and He once again engraved The Ten Commandments. The broken Tablets were placed in the Holy Ark together with The Second Tablets.

Q. How long after The Giving of the Torah did they make the Golden Calf?

A. Forty days later, because they thought that Moshe was staying on the mountain and not coming back.

Q. How many times did Moshe go up Mount Sinai and for how long did he stay there?

A. Moshe went up three times! The first time was when G-d gave The Torah. He stayed on the mountain for forty days and broke The Tablets on his way down when he saw the Golden Calf. He went up again and stayed for forty days praying for forgiveness, which G-d granted. Then G-d told him to bring up two new Tablets, which he did. He went up with The Tablets for another forty days and came down with them on which G-d engraved The Ten Commandments again. He was up for a total of 120 days.

Q. On what day did Moshe come down with The First Tablets and on which day with the Second Tablets?

A. The First Tablets on the 17th day of Tammuz. The Second Tablets on Yom Kippur.

Q. What were the differences between the first and second Tablets?

A. The First Tablets were completely the work of G-d. The Tablets and the engraving were Divine. The Second Tablets were a mix; Moshe brought up the Tablets with him and G-d fixed His writing on them.