

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Ki Tisa / Shabbat Parah

[Ki Tisa in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2833/jewish/Ki-Tisa-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2833/jewish/Ki-Tisa-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Ki Tisa," means "When you take" and it is found in Exodus 30:11.

The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given regarding the making of the Sanctuary's water basin, anointing oil and incense. "Wise-hearted" artisans Betzalel and Aholiav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat.

When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a golden calf and worship it. G-d proposes to destroy the errant nation, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the tablets, destroys the golden calf, and has the primary culprits put to death. He then returns to G-d to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written."

G-d forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first G-d proposes to send His angel along with them, but Moses insists that G-d Himself accompany His people to the promised land.

Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends

the mountain, where G-d reinscribes the covenant on these second tablets. On the mountain, Moses is also granted a vision of the divine thirteen attributes of mercy. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with G-d and to teach His laws to the people.

[Parah in A nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/73199/jewish/Parah-in-aNutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/73199/jewish/Parah-in-aNutshell.htm

In preparation for the upcoming festival of Passover, when every Jew had to be in a state of ritual purity, the section of Parah (Numbers 19) is added to the weekly reading this week. Parah relates the laws of the Red Heifer with which a person contaminated by contact with a dead body was purified.

[Haftarah for Shabbat Parah in a Nutshell: Ezekiel 36:16 - 36:38](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/655981/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/655981/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's special haftarah mentions the "purifying waters" that G-d will sprinkle upon us with the coming of Moshiach. This follows the theme of this week's additional Torah reading — the purifying qualities of the "Red Heifer." The prophet Ezekiel transmits G-d's message: The Israelites have defiled the Holy Land with their idol-worship and immoral ways. As a result, they will be sent into exile. "And they came to the nations where they came, and they profaned My Holy Name, inasmuch as it was said of them, 'These are the people of G-d, and they have come out of His land.'" So G-d will take them out of their exile — but not by virtue of the Israelites' merits: "Not for your sake do I do this, O house of Israel, but for My

Holy Name, which you have profaned among the nations." G-d will bring the Israelites back to the Holy Land and purify them with the waters of the Red Heifer. The people will feel ashamed of their actions, and after they will have undergone the process of purification and repentance, G-d will rebuild the country and bestow upon it prosperity and bounty. "I will resettle the cities, and the ruins shall be built up. And the desolate land shall be worked, instead of its lying desolate in the sight of all that pass by. And they shall say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden, and the cities that were destroyed and desolate and pulled down have become settled as fortified [cities].'"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Two Types of Religious Encounter – Ki Tissa
by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5767)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tissa/two-types-of-religious-encounter/>

Framing the epic events of this week's sedra are two objects – the two sets of Tablets, the first given before, the second after, the sin of the Golden Calf. Of the first, we read:

The Tablets were the work of God, and the writing was God's writing, engraved on the Tablets. Ex. 32:16

These were perhaps the holiest objects in history: from beginning to end, the work of God. Yet within hours they lay shattered, broken by Moses when he saw the Calf, and the Israelites dancing around it.

The second Tablets, brought down by Moses on the tenth of Tishri, were the result of his prolonged plea to God to forgive

the people. This is the historic event that lies behind Yom Kippur (which falls each year on the tenth of Tishri), the day marked in perpetuity as a time of favour, forgiveness, and reconciliation between God and the Jewish people. The second Tablets were different from the first in one respect. They were not wholly the work of God:

“Carve two Tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe on them the Words that were on the first Tablets that you broke.” Ex. 34:1

Hence the paradox: the first Tablets, made by God, did not remain intact. The second Tablets, the joint work of God and Moses, did. Surely the opposite should have been true: the greater the holiness, the more eternal. Why was the more holy object broken while the less holy stayed whole? This is not, as it might seem, a question specific to the Tablets. It is, in fact, a powerful example of a fundamental principle in Jewish spirituality.

The Jewish mystics distinguished between two types of Divine-human encounter. They called them *itaruta de-l'eylah* and *itaruta deletata*, respectively “an awakening from above” and “an awakening from below.” The first is initiated by God, the second by humankind. An “awakening from above” is spectacular, supernatural, an event that bursts through the chains of causality that at other times bind the natural world. An “awakening from below” has no such grandeur. It is a gesture that is human, all too human.

Yet there is another difference between them, in the opposite direction. An “awakening from above” may change nature, but it does not, in and of itself, change human nature. In it, no human effort has been expended. Those to whom it happens are passive. While it lasts, it is overwhelming; but only while it

lasts. Thereafter, people revert to what they were. An “awakening from below”, by contrast, leaves a permanent mark.

Because human beings have taken the initiative, something in them changes. Their horizons of possibility have been expanded. They now know they are capable of great things, and because they did so once, they are aware that they can do so again. An awakening from above temporarily transforms the external world; an awakening from below permanently transforms our internal world. The first changes the universe; the second changes us.

Two examples. The first: Before and after the division of the Red Sea, the Israelites were confronted by enemies: before, by the Egyptians, after by the Amalekites. The difference is total.

Before the Red Sea, the Israelites were commanded to do nothing:

“Fear not. Stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you. You stay silent.” Shemot 14:13-14

Facing the Amalekites, however, the Israelites themselves had to fight:

Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us, and go out and do battle with the Amalekites.” Shemot 17:9

The first was an “awakening from above”, the second an “awakening from below.” The difference was palpable. Within three days after the division of the Sea, the greatest of all miracles, the Israelites began complaining again (no water, no

food). But after the war against the Amalekites, the Israelites never again complained when facing conflict (the sole exception – when the spies returned and the people lost heart – was when they relied on hearsay testimony, not on the immediate prospect of battle itself). The battles fought for us do not change us; the battles we fight, do.

The second example: Mount Sinai and the Tabernacle. The Torah speaks about these two revelations of “God’s glory” in almost identical terms:

The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the Cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day, He called to Moses from within the Cloud. Ex. 24:16

Then the Cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Ex. 40:34

The difference between them was that the sanctity of Mount Sinai was momentary, while that of the Tabernacle was permanent (at least, until the Temple was built, centuries later).

The revelation at Sinai was an “awakening from above”. It was initiated by God. So overwhelming was it that the people said to Moses, “Let not God say any more to us, or we will die” (Ex. 20:16). By contrast, the Tabernacle involved human labour. The Israelites made it; they prepared the structured space the Divine Presence would eventually fill. Forty days after the revelation at Sinai, the Israelites made a Golden Calf. But after constructing the Sanctuary they made no more idols – at least until they entered the land. That is the difference between the things that are done for us and the things we have a share in doing ourselves. The former change us for a moment, the latter for a lifetime.

There is one further difference between the first Tablets and the second. According to tradition, when Moses was given the first Tablets, he was given only Torah shebichtav, the “Written Torah”. At the time of the second Tablets, he was given Torah she-be’al peh, the Oral Torah as well:

R. Jochanan said: God made a covenant with Israel only for the sake of the Oral Law, as it says: “ ...for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (Ex. 34:27).

The difference between the Written and Oral Torah is profound. The first is the word of God, with no human contribution. The second is a partnership – the word of God as interpreted by the mind of man. The following are two of several remarkable passages to this effect:

R. Judah said in the name of Shmuel: Three thousand traditional laws were forgotten during the period of mourning for Moses. They said to Joshua: “Ask” (through ruach hakodesh, the Holy Spirit). Joshua replied, “It is not in heaven.” They said to Samuel, “Ask.” He replied, “These are the commandments,” implying that no prophet has the right to introduce anything new. (B.T. Temurah 16a) “If a thousand prophets of the stature of Elijah and Elisha were to give one interpretation of a verse, and one thousand-and-one Sages were to offer a different interpretation, we follow the majority: the law is in accordance with the thousand-and-one Sages and not in accordance with the thousand prophets.”

Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishneh, Introduction
Any attempt to reduce the Oral Torah to the Written – by

relying on prophecy or Divine communication – mistakes its essential nature as the collaborative partnership between God and man, where revelation meets interpretation. Thus, the difference between the two precisely mirrors that between the first and second Tablets. The first were Divine, the second the result of Divine-human collaboration. This helps us understand a glorious ambiguity. The Torah says that at Sinai the Israelites heard a “great voice *velo yasaf*” (Deut. 5:18). Two contradictory interpretations are given of this phrase. One reads it as “a great voice that was never heard again”, the other as “a great voice that did not cease” – i.e. a voice that was always heard again. Both are true. The first refers to the Written Torah, given once and never to be repeated. The second applies to the Oral Torah, whose study has never ceased.

It also helps us understand why it was only after the second Tablets, not the first, that “when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two Tablets of Testimony in his hand, he was unaware that the skin of his face shone with light because he had been speaking with God” (Shemot 34:29). Receiving the first Tablets, Moses was passive. Therefore, nothing in him changed. For the second, he was active. He had a share in the making. He carved the stone on which the words were to be engraved. That is why he became a different person. His face shone.

In Judaism, the natural is greater than the supernatural in the sense that an “awakening from below” is more powerful in transforming us, and longer lasting in its effects, than is an “awakening from above.” That was why the second Tablets survived intact while the first did not. Divine intervention changes nature, but it is human initiative – our approach to God – that changes us.

[Kept By Shabbat – Ki Tissa by Amy Kalmanofsky \(2018\)](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/kept-by-shabbat-2/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/kept-by-shabbat-2/>

Ahad Ha'am famously said: "More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." Pretty remarkable coming from the founder of cultural Zionism!

Parashat Ki Tissa either supports or challenges Ha'am's words. This week's parashah relates one of the lowest moments in Israel's story—the sin of the golden calf—in which Israel dances before a god of their own making. Coming down Mount Sinai with the stone tablets inscribed by God's finger (Exod. 31:18), Moses sees Israel's frenzy and smashes the tablets. Moses spends the rest of the parashah picking up the pieces and working to restore Israel's relationship with God. The parashah ends with God giving a new set of tablets to Moses. The holy covenant between God and Israel is restored.

The great sin (חטא גדולה, Exod. 32:21) of the golden calf is packaged tightly within the magisterial details related to the building of the Mishkan, Israel's portable temple. In Exodus 25–31, God outlines the plans for the Mishkan, replete with precious metals and incense recipes. Exodus 35–40 chronicles the building of the Mishkan. Notably, at the core of this sumptuous description are laws related to the observance of Shabbat, Exodus 31:12–17 and 35:2–3. In this literary way, holy time appears to lie at the center of holy space. The Rabbis suggest that the Torah's structure prohibits labor on Shabbat by revealing that even God's house cannot be built on Shabbat (Mekhilta Derabi Yishma'el 35:1).

The sin of the golden calf and its aftermath rests between the laws of rest. Why? Why is this shameful story framed by the

laws of Shabbat? Its placement could challenge Ahad Ha'am's message by showing that Shabbat, in fact, cannot keep the Jews. In this reading, Israel's shocking apostasy is a disruption that shatters sacred time and proves it to be too abstract a concept for young Israel to embrace. Israel needs hard shiny objects like the golden calf to worship.

I suggest that the framework of Shabbat encompassing the great sin supports Ha'am's words. I don't see the sin as a disruption of sacred time. Rather, I see sacred time, Shabbat observance, as a means to contain the sin. The Torah frames Israel's sin in this way to convey how Shabbat can protect us from our basest selves and comfort us when we are our basest selves. Even when we behave terribly, as Israel did with the golden calf, Shabbat reminds us of God's holiness and our holiness. It is a sign of who we can be, as the Torah says: "It is a sign between Me and you for all generations that you know that I, God sanctified you" (Exod. 31:13).

Of course, Shabbat does more than prevent us from being base. It also elevates us, as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel beautifully wrote: "It is one of life's highest rewards, a source of strength and inspiration to endure tribulation, to live nobly . . . The Sabbath is the inspirer, the other days the inspired" (A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 22).

I offer this reading because it reflects my experience of Shabbat. I did not grow up observing Shabbat. It was a struggle when my husband and I decided not to cook or travel on Shabbat, and it still is. Let me say loudly and clearly, Shabbat is not entirely restful. Beating the Shabbat clock, hosting family and friends, is work. But it's work with great personal rewards:

Shabbat sensitizes me to the rhythms of the natural world. I

live in New York City where I cannot see the night sky, and yet I know precisely when the sun sets and feel the seasons change as Shabbat grows shorter and longer.

Shabbat connects my family and friends. I host a party once a week, complete with bread, wine, and chocolate. Family and friends enjoy hours of meaningful and frivolous conversations, laughter, and some song and heated debate. My children have grown closer through Shabbat. They talk to each other, enjoy one another and, amazingly, have learned to talk to people of all kinds and opinions. Oh, and did I mention the chocolate?

Shabbat provides me with precious time for self-reflection and self-indulgence. I go for walks and, now that my kids are older, even take naps. Shabbat is also the only day that I spend hours reading for pleasure.

Shabbat sustains my spiritual life. As Rabbi Heschel writes: “The Sabbath is the presence of God in the world, open to the soul of man” (The Sabbath, 60). On Shabbat, I think about and pray to God, and am more aware of God’s presence in the world, in my life, and in myself.

As the world around us digitalizes and anxieties and rage increase, I am more and more grateful for what Shabbat gives me. I need Shabbat. I think the Jews need Shabbat. In fact, the world may need Shabbat.

Dying from cancer, neurologist and author Oliver Sacks remembered observing Shabbat as a child and wrote in the New York Times: “The peace of the Sabbath, of a stopped world, a time outside time, was palpable, infused everything, and I found myself drenched with a wistfulness . . . I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one’s life as well, when one can feel that one’s work is done, and one may,

in good conscience, rest” (“Sabbath,” Aug. 14, 2015).

As it did for Israel in the Torah, even at its darkest moment, Shabbat frames my life. Shabbat provides me with fellowship, family memories, and intimacy. It centers me, rests me in good conscience, and restores me. It opens me to the holy and reminds me of my holiness. It inspires me to live a noble life. I am grateful that I keep Shabbat because I know the ways that Shabbat keeps me. *(Amy Kalmanofsky is Dean of List College and Kekst Graduate School, and Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor of Bible at JTS)*

[Ki Tisa: Finding Your People by Rabbi Ruven Barkan](https://truah.org/resources/ki-tisa-finding-your-people/)

<https://truah.org/resources/ki-tisa-finding-your-people/>

It is ironic that I have finally found my people in prison. As a Correctional Chaplain, I work with kindred spirits, among staff and Inmates, who are striving to live meaningful lives, confronting negativity within and without, and transforming themselves and their society. In one of my classes, an interfaith study, studying Abraham Joshua Heschel’s lecture, “No Religion is an Island,” we created a unique culture of understanding and affirming each person’s unique faith identity, developing a common language of personal and communal transformation. To anchor this consciousness, we wrote a holy text that we named The Shadow Wrestlers, crafted in the unique language of our day and setting, with the assistance of AI. We read this manifesto at the beginning of each class, welcoming newcomers by telling our story. It is an honor to share it here for the first time with the general public. Like a number of people in my class, Moses also killed a man

as a young adult trying to find his people. Moses, like the people I have encountered in prison, struggled with his act of taking another man's life. The Torah never tells us that Moses regretted this act. But Moses' struggle is highlighted in this week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa, as Moses persuades God to reconcile with first himself and then the people after the people's capital sin, worshipping the Golden Calf.

The removal of God's direct presence is the ultimate rupture in the relationship between God and the people: "The Lord spoke to Moses, 'Get up from this, you and the people who you brought up out of the land of Egypt to the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...I will send an angel before you...but I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiffnecked people, lest I destroy you on the way.'" (Exodus 33:1-3)

It seems like God is not just expressing to Moses his anger about the people, but is actually rebuking him. Perhaps this recalls the rebuke he received when he confronted the two Hebrews fighting the day after he killed the Egyptian man: "Who put you as a man of authority and judge over us? Are you planning to kill me like you killed the Egyptian man?" (2:14) God's threat of the removal of God's presence from the people and perhaps from him, leaves Moses vulnerable to this question. Is Moses, who killed a man, qualified to lead the people? Hence, Moses focuses on his own relationship with God:

Moses said to the Lord, See You say to me, 'Lead this people forward,' but You have not made known to me whom You will send with me. Further, You have said, 'I have singled you out by name, and you have, indeed, gained my favor.' Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and

continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this nation is Your people (33:12-13).

Even after he took the life of another man, Moses remembers that God singled him out by name, finding favor in him. Here, Moses builds on this by seeking reassurance of God's forgiving nature once again. The exchange between God and Moses builds in intensity culminating in the revelation of God's loving nature to Moses, known as God's 13 attributes of Mercy (34:6-7). By seeking God's mercy for himself, Moses is forged into the paradigmatic prophet, ready to stand up for the people. "Let the presence of my Lord go in our midst, even though it is a stiffnecked people. You shall forgive our trespass, our sin, and you shall take us as your own." (34:9)

In prison, I have witnessed many people who have directly faced the consequences of their crime. By doing so, they find the will to continue forward in the midst of such darkness, distinguishing themselves from the negativity of their present internal and external circumstances, seeking God's forgiveness and their own, restoring themselves and their relationships with their families, accepting full accountability for the harm they inflicted upon their victims and their community of care, and, ultimately, working to repair their society. We call this process Restorative Justice.

On Yom Kippur, the rabbis place the 13 attributes throughout the services of the holiday, making Moses the model each of us is to emulate — personal teshuvah and restoration that lead to communal responsibility and advocacy. I invite you to join me in looking inside prisons to find your people — leaders like Moses who embody accountability, divine mercy, and human reconciliation.

(Ruven Barkan has served as a Correctional Chaplain at the Arizona

Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry for the past five years. He has developed multiple curricula that he teaches at the prison, including a Restorative Justice Dialog Group, Hebrew Bible in Hebrew, and an Interfaith Text Study.)

Ki Tissa: Hidden Faces, Revealed Connections by Lilinaz Evans (2025)

<https://www.yeshivatmaharat.org/post/ki-tissa-hidden-faces-revealed-connections>

One of the most striking moments in parshat Ki Tissa is the intimate, direct communication between God and Moshe. The Torah describes their encounter as “**face-to-face, as two friends speak**” (Shemot 33:11). This imagery evokes a deep and authentic connection, where each party is fully seen, and understood in their uniqueness, reciprocating that recognition in return.

Jewish existentialist philosophers of the 20th century, such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, expand on this idea. Buber frames the face-to-face encounter as a model for genuine human relationships, wherein individuals recognize and respond to each other’s full humanity. Levinas, writing in the wake of the Holocaust, emphasizes the vulnerability of the Other, seeing the face as an ethical summons, an undeniable demand for responsibility. Yet, for Levinas, this ethical call is one-sided; the Other demands, and we are obligated to respond.

In our own world marked by both overwhelming conflict and unprecedented digital connection, the face of the Other is inescapable. Even when we are alone, suffering and injustice appear on our screens. And yet, paradoxically, authentic

human connection and a commitment to caring for the vulnerable seem increasingly rare, slipping further out of reach.

When reading Ki Tissa this year, I was struck not only by the face-to-face encounter, but also by the hidden faces that follow. After the Torah tells us that Moshe and God spoke face to face, the narrative quickly shifts to moments of concealment. Moshe, yearning for deeper revelation, pleads to see God's glory, but God shields him, allowing him to see only His back: **“For no one can see My face and live” (Shemot 33:20-23)**. Later, when Moshe descends from Har Sinai, his face radiates a dazzling light, a remnant of divine revelation. But this very illumination overwhelms Bnei Yisrael, leading Moshe to veil his face, revealing it only when he returns to speak with God.

These moments of hiddenness are challenging. If face-to-face encounters signify authenticity and truth, do veiled encounters signify distance or superficiality? One might interpret this concealment as a punishment, a withdrawal in response to the sin of the Golden Calf, mirroring the relocation of the Ohel Moed outside the camp. Is hiddenness a rupture in the relationship? A pulling away?

Megillat Esther offers another perspective on divine concealment. God's name is famously absent from the text, making it the only book in Tanakh where this is the case. The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on Esther 1:1, explains that in Esther's story, God's presence is not simply hidden; it is so deeply concealed that people may not even realize it is missing. And yet, this absence is not abandonment. Instead, it is an invitation: to seek God in the details of history, in the unfolding of human events, and in moments where His

presence is not immediately obvious.

Returning to Ki Tissa, it becomes clear that God's hiddenness (and by extension, Moshe's) may not be an act of separation but rather one of care. In a world overwhelmed by divine revelation, concealment becomes an act of protection. God does not pull away to punish but rather to create the conditions for Bnei Yisrael to engage with the divine in a way they can stand.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch articulates this idea beautifully in his commentary on Devarim 31:18: **“God's face is hidden, not to cast us away, but to awaken in us a longing for His presence.”** In moments when we feel distanced, whether from God, from others, or even from ourselves, perhaps we might frame the hiddenness not as a rejection, but as an invitation to seek, to long, and ultimately, to reconnect. *(Lilinaz was born and raised in South London but her learning has taken her to study in Stockholm, at Paideia-The European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden as an Amos Oz Fellow where she found the beauty in small community life, in Jerusalem at Nishmat the Alisa Flatow Post-College Program where she learned Torah is for everyone, and now to New York, where she is excited to learn much more.)*

Yahrtzeits

Bob Woog remembers his uncle Ralph David Fertig on Tues. Mar. 10.

Sarah McNamera remembers her father Edward K. Zuckerman on Wed. Mar. 11

Bobbi Ostrowsky remembers her father Buddy Edelman on Wed. Mar. 11

Rabbi Len Levin remembers his brother Joseph Levin on Thur. Mar.12

