

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 18 Adar 5786, corresponding to March 7, 2026.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 352 Hz) (p. 540 S) (p. 331 Hi) (p. 484 AS)

KI TISSA כִּי תִשָּׂא

Exodus 30:11

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis, Rabbi Emeritus  
(RED)]

1. The Half Shekel. Some explanation is needed to comprehend why the annual “tax” is a half shekel. Rabbi Hirsch explained that the message is that one person cannot accomplish the required work to build the Mishkan or to sustain the public sacrifices needed in the Holy Temple. It teaches us that we have to unite with our fellow Jews in order to complete the religious demands of our religion. It also puts all of us on the same level. We are all equal in the eyes of Hashem. Nobody can claim superiority in Judaism. Rich and poor alike. The need to be equal in status and equal in our basic obligation to contribute to our religious central institution is important to the concept of religious equality. Wealth does talk in other areas of Jewish life, but in basic terms, we all start equally.

2. The obligation to give Tzedakah is accepted in our daily religious life. How do we teach Tzedakah to our children and to our fellow Jews? Simply talking about it isn’t enough. A nice idea is when you go food shopping each week, purchase one extra item for the poor. At the end of the month, take a bag of food to the Gemach pantry for the Jewish poor. (Take your child (ren) with you when you go.) I have found that the only way to teach Tzedakah is through action, and not just verbally. I recently heard a cute story about a man who had this practice. He took his six year son with him to the grocery store. He took a box of Cheerios, placed it in his cart and announced that this was for the poor. His son took the Cheerios out of the cart and placed it back on the shelf. The boy then took a box of Cocoa Puffs and placed it in the cart. The father asked him why did he do that. The boy responded: there are probably poor children in the house, and kids like Cocoa Puffs more than they like Cheerios! (Get it?)

3. Betzalel was divinely chosen to be the master craftsman assigned to head the construction team to build the Mishkan. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 69b) states that Betzalel was 13 years old when given the assignment. How was it possible that this team could do the tedious work involved in this task? Slaves received no education to know how to work with gold or silver, or with the weaving and the carpentry. Now in the desert they were divinely gifted with this ability to work magic and build like master artists and craftsmen. That is what it took: a gift from Hashem. And the head craftsman was a thirteen year old boy! It was one thing to be liberated from the

harsh labor of being a slave to become a master artist in the specialized crafts needed now. Hashem knew that He would need to plan and create these things to happen. He could have created the Mishkan in a second, but He wanted these Jewish men to work as if it were their creation. They did their work well, but all knew that it must have been Hashem’s handiwork.

4. How could this newly created Jewish nation worship an idol so soon after seeing firsthand the existence of the Almighty? They saw with their own eyes the Ten Plagues in Egypt. They had front row seats for the Splitting of the Sea. They experienced up close the Revelation of the Almighty when they received the Ten Commandments at Sinai. And 40 days later, they worship an idol! Inconceivable! The Beit HaLevi was obviously troubled similarly. He suggests that the people saw the need for a vehicle in which they could worship Him. And they came up with this idea. The point being made is that no Jew can make up his own idea of serving Hashem. What existed then and even exists today were divinely graced by Hashem.

5. The First Tablets were given amidst great fanfare and publicity. Midrashically, the scene was felt even worldwide. Bilaam was approached by his people wondering what was going on in the world at that time. Bilaam informed them that Hashem was revealing Himself to His people. The Second Tablets were given quite quietly, no fanfare, no publicity. Rav Soloveitchik compared this to the Berachah in Havdalah, where we note the different cases of distinction between various items. The separation between Light and Dark is felt by everyone. All humans, animals, and even flowers note the separation between Light and Dark. The distinction between Holy and Profane is not noted by many. When Avraham was leading his son and two lads to the Akeidah, Avraham and Yitzchak saw the cloud enveloping Mt. Moriah, but the two lads could not see it. The separation between Jews and non-Jews is not easily noted. Some Jews even hide their Jewishness in public, but when they enter their homes, they display their Jewishness with sincerity. After the Holocaust, Jews were more likely NOT to display their Jewishness openly. But since the Declaration of the State of Israel, Jews are more likely to proudly proclaim their Jewishness. The Rav saw this distinction in the giving of the Two Tablets.

6. Hashem teaches Moshe the formula for what the people should say when they sin and then seek atonement. These Thirteen Attributes of Mercy became the refrain that we say during Selichot and especially on Yom Kippur. Yet we know that merely saying the right words is not enough. We have to back it up with action. If possible we have to right the wrong that we committed. Tzedakah and Chessed go a long way to help our cause, to prove to Hashem that we mean what we say. All this is to help us avoid the punishment that we should receive.

To erase the sin from our Heavenly Ledger Book would require us to be in the same situation in which we sinned, but this time, not to succumb to temptation. This latter position helps us to gain Taharah, purification. Avoiding punishment is called Kapparah, atonement.

7. A perfect example of requiring the Oral Tradition to define the Written Word of the Torah is the end of 34:26: Do not cook a goat in its mother's milk. The Oral Tradition states that the Torah prohibits cooking this mixture, but prohibits also eating it and gaining any benefit from it as well. It also applies not only to a goat, but to any kosher animal. The Talmud debates whether this prohibition also applies to chicken and other kosher fowl. The Talmud in the beginning of Chulin concludes that the mixture of chicken and milk is prohibited Rabbinically, while the mixture of meat and milk is prohibited Torahically. The difference is that you are allowed to add additional chicken soap or water to nullify the milk. But you are not allowed to do that in a Torah prohibited mixture, as in a meat soup that contained some milk.

8. MIDRASH. When the Jewish people sinned in the debacle of the Golden Calf, Hashem actually commanded Moshe to smash the Tablets containing the Ten Commandments.

#### QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT KI TISSA 5786

##### I. From the Text

1. What will happen if we counted all the people directly? (30:12)
2. What was the anointing oil used for? (30:26...)
3. Who was Betzalel's assistant and from what tribe was he? (31:6)
4. Why didn't Yehoshua get involved to stop the people from worshipping the Golden Calf? (32:17)
5. Who carved the stone to create the first and second Tablets? (34:1)

##### II. From Rashi

6. Under which king was there a plague because he didn't count the people by counting shekels (or some other medium)? (30:12)
7. Why does the Torah repeat the Mitzvah of Shabbat here? (31:13)
8. What miscalculation occurred that led Bnei Yisrael to worship the Golden Calf? (32:1)
9. Who were the people whose idea it was to create a Golden Calf? (32:7)
10. Hashem said that Moshe "will see My back." (33:23). What did Moshe see?

##### III. From the Rabbis

11. Why was there a law to give a half shekel to the Holy Temple right before Adar?
12. How do we know that Hashem was pleased with Moshe when he broke the First Tablets? (Shabbat 87a)

13. When Moshe was atop Mt. Sinai, he didn't eat or drink. How did he sustain himself? (Or HaChaim)

##### Iv. Midrash

14. How was Hashem dressed when He told Moshe about the Thirteen Attributes of Hashem?

##### V. Haftorah. Parah Ezekiel

15. Why do we read about the purification ritual involving the Red Cow at this time of the year?

##### VI. Relationships

16.

- a) Nachor - Lavan
- b) Lemech - Lemech
- c) Tamar - Shailah
- d) Elisheva - Nachshon
- e) Avraham - Rachel

#### ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT KI TISSA 5786

1. There will be a plague.
2. To anoint the Mishkan, its utensils, and Aharon and his sons...
3. Ohaliav ben Achisamach of the tribe of Dan.
4. Yehoshua was at the base of the mountain and did not know about the Golden Calf.
5. Hashem did the first Tablets; Moshe did the second ones.
6. King David
7. To tell Bnei Yisrael that building the Mishkan does not override the Shabbat.
8. Moshe said that he would return in 40 days, but the people counted the day he ascended as the first day.
9. The Eirev Rav, the non-Jews that Moshe allowed to come along with them, out of Egypt.
10. Hashem showed Moshe the knot of Hashem's Tephillin. (As recorded in Berachot 7a)
11. To help purchase the animal sacrifices in the Holy Temple for the upcoming year.
12. Hashem told Moshe Yasher Ko'ach for breaking them.
13. Moshe absorbed the words of Hashem.
14. He dressed in a Tallit.
15. Because we had to bring the Pesach sacrifice very soon.
16.
  - a) Grandfather Nachor
  - b) Mechutanim
  - c) Sister-in-law and then later Stepmother
  - d) Siblings
  - e) Great Great Uncle and she was his Granddaughter-in-law.