

Is the Honeymoon Over?

Commentary on Parashat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35) {When You Take}

¹¹יהוה said to Moshe, ¹²When you take (ki tisa) a census of the people of Isra'el and register them, each, upon registration, is to pay a ransom for his life to יהוה, to avoid any breakout of plague among them during the time of the census. ¹³Everyone subject to the census is to pay as an offering to יהוה half a shekel {one-fifth of an ounce of silver} - by the standard of the sanctuary shekel (a shekel equals twenty gerahs). ¹⁴Everyone over twenty years of age who is subject to the census is to give this offering to יהוה - ¹⁵the rich is not to give more or the poor less than the half-shekel when giving יהוה's offering to atone for your lives. ¹⁶You are to take the atonement money from the people of Isra'el and use it for the service in the tent of meeting, so that it will be a reminder of the people of Isra'el before יהוה to atone for your lives" (Ex 30:11-16).

The Torah is never so much up in heaven or far away that it forgets about the realities here on earth. That is why Scripture reminds us: ¹¹For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. ¹²It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' ¹³Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' (Deut. 34:11-14). Soon after יהוה finished instructing Israel about an eternal priesthood, He taught Moshe about the need for money in this "new" family. This is truly the nature of the census which Moshe was instructed to take in Shemot 30:11-16. יהוה Himself instructed Moshe to charge each person over twenty years of age a half-shekel. This was the establishment of a tax which will be repeated many times over—the Temple tax. But note that it was always paid on an equal basis—whether rich or poor—all had to pay only one half-shekel. What seems to be unfolding here is that as necessary as battle may sometimes be, especially when the יהוה commands it, there is still the shedding of the human blood. In this sense, the half-shekel is a ransom (i.e., *atonement*, the Hebrew word is *kippur*) paid by one who is guilty of taking human life in circumstances that do not constitute murder. This is to avoid plague—or alternatively, avoid being defeated in battle (another meaning for the Hebrew word *nagaf* used in verse 12).

The payment of this tax not only served as a ransom for the soldiers of Israel who must take human lives in the discharge of their duties but also provided money in the family budget for the upkeep of the Sanctuary—the physical abode of the Glory of יהוה (the *shekinah*). This is a beautiful Torah picture of a newly formed family unit—Israel, the bride and יהוה the Husband. Undoubtedly, we can learn a few things along the way about our own personal relationships, especially within our homes.

As we explore this *parashah*, we will see how יהוה, the Husband, handles His unfaithful spouse. This is a busy portion, detailing for us things for the home, *Betzalel* (the artist chosen to create His home furnishings), the setting of a weekly date (*Shabbat*), the incident of unfaithfulness (the golden calf), and the interceding by Moshe and the revelation of the character of the Almighty. At the end not only does *Moshe's* face shine, but we also see the shining face of the Faithful Husband who loves His wife perfectly and forgives her.

Without doubt, this is also a reminder to us in *Kol Simcha* that it takes money to provide a budget for the upkeep of יהוה's Sanctuary—His house, and His congregation. To me, this Torah picture depicts beautifully that we all share an "equal" responsibility (especially those of us that are of age), to be financially responsible for the needs of His family. I am of the opinion that tithes and offerings are "a memorial for the Israelites before יהוה, making atonement for our lives" (verse 16). Note that this is listed first among the things mentioned in this *Parashah*. It takes finances to furnish and operate His house! Notice also that יהוה did not spare on His furnishings. They were not to be items from the "dollar" store, but rather items made special by specially anointed and gifted individuals: *Betzalel* and *Oholiab*, et al. This is no ordinary house, with ordinary furnishings—it is to be none other than "The House of G-d" with extraordinary furnishings!

Significant Times of Intimacy

All marriages require special and significant times of communication and intimacy. In this *Torah* portion we are immediately introduced to these “marital appointed times” that is, the *moadim*. יהוה makes a weekly date with His bride—Shabbat. Even though יהוה will provide a complete cycle of these *appointed times* (festivals) in Leviticus 23 (BTW, this is discussed in part at the end of this *Parashah*), the head of the list is Shabbat—which is a weekly *moed*, or a weekly appointed time (that is, a weekly date). It is on Shabbat that the Bride and Groom meet in a special way with each other. Here are the words of the Eternal Bridegroom for His Bride:

¹²יהוה said to Moshe, ¹³‘Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘(verily, KJV) You are to observe (tishmeru, future command form of the verb shomer) my Shabbats; for this is a sign (ot) between me and you through all your generations; so that you will know (yodea, intimate knowledge) that I am יהוה, who sets you apart (sanctifies, KJV, from the Hebrew kadosh) for me. ¹⁴Therefore you are to keep (shomer) my Shabbat, because it is set apart (kadosh) for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death (surely be put to death); for whoever does any work on Shabbat is to be cut off from his people. ¹⁵On six days work will get done; but the seventh day is Shabbat, for complete rest, set apart for יהוה. Whoever does any work on the day of Shabbat must be put to death. [VeShamru Benei Yisrael...] ¹⁶The people of Isra’el are to keep (shomer) the Shabbat, to observe (La-asot, infinitive of the verb to do) Shabbat through all their generations as a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷It is a sign (ot, the ring or covenant sign) between me and the people of Isra’el forever; for in six days יהוה made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and rested. (vayinafash is a vav-conversive future tense verb, it means to animate, or to give life to according to DavkaWriter. It does not mean to rest, i.e., to cease working or cease being busy. It has more to do with refreshing the soul, or nefesh. One will be refreshed.)’” ¹⁸When he had finished speaking with Moshe on Mount Sinai, יהוה gave him the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of Elohim (Exod 31:12-18).

Please note that we are to pull *guard duty* (the job of a *shomer*) over Shabbat (to *shomer* is to do the actions performed by appointed soldiers (guards) in the military whose mission is to protect their assigned posts). One of the things we are told is that it is of the utmost importance that this “*island in time*” (sacred time) is precious and has to be guarded. Soldiers face stiff consequences for neglecting to keep their guard duty properly. The same thing holds true for us (we are the soldiers of יהוה) if we neglect our special guard duty—*shomer* Shabbat. We see an example of this kind of discipline in Exodus 31:14 “Therefore you are to keep (shomer) my Shabbat, because it is set apart (kadosh) for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary (profanes it) must be put to death (surely be put to death); for whoever does any work on Shabbat is to be cut off from his people.” The Holy One may levy such discipline upon those who violate their guard duty and endanger the whole community in the process.

When there is an occurrence in *Torah* of such weighty words as guarding something on a penalty of death we know that what is being taught is based on the most basic *Torah* principles. Something is either life or death, holy or unholy, dean or unclean. There is no third possibility. To step out of the realm of life is to step into the realm of death. How does a person walk in the realm of life? The answer lies in the secret of Shabbat. Where do we find the secret of Shabbat? In Hebrews chapter four.

In the fourth chapter of Hebrews, we find that Shabbat is *Elohim's* portrait of who we are in Messiah and what the Good News is really all about. It teaches us *Elohim's* definition of the real good news: You see, anyone who has believed in Messiah has entered *Elohim's* spiritual rest. That rest is identified as being nothing less than Sabbath rest. “For the one who has entered *Elohim's* rest has himself also rested from his works just as *Elohim* did from His.” (Hebrews 4: 10)

The *rest* being implied here is a *rest* which is the same as *Elohim's* rest. Where do we find how *Elohim* rested? We find it in *Bereshit* chapter two: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, along with everything in them. ¹Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, along with everything in them. ²On the seventh day God was finished with his work which he had made, so he rested (*vayishbot*, from the verb *shabbat*) on the seventh day from all his work (*melachto*, which means work, craft, skill, trade, vocation, occupation, labour according to *DavkaWriter*) which he had made.” (*Bereshit* 2:1)

What was the work He had been doing? He had been speaking forth the Creation of the world, and all of the inhabitants therein. The text says that *Elohim* stopped doing His craft, His skill, His trade and His vocation (working) because the work was completed! Was there anything left to be done? Could anything be added? No! The text declares that creation was completed in all of its vast array. There were only two things left to be done: first, to stop working and then, to enjoy that which had been made, to refresh His soul.

Nothing Left to Do

When we take this understanding back to Hebrews 4:10 we will understand the incredible revelation that our salvation is complete, for we are a new creations, (2 Corinthians 5:17). Is there anything we can do to add to our salvation? Is there anything needed? No! All that is left to do is to stop our own labors and enjoy that which *Elohim* has done—He has made us into completely new creations, holy and blameless in His sight. This is the good (great) news! Our lives up until the day of our salvation were our “six days of labor.” By faith in *Yeshua* we have ceased from our own labors, entered His Sabbath and are now spending the rest of our lives in the “seventh day” of resting in what Messiah has done for us.

When we understand the spiritual picture that Shabbat is painting, we can understand why the discipline from *Elohim* was so severe upon those who did not **guard the Shabbat**. The real issue in Shabbat keeping is that it is a day to be **lived out** as a real *Torah* picture of what Messiah accomplished for us by His atoning death. This is the ‘Good News’ we are to guard when we *keep* (*shomer*) Shabbat. And this is a life and death situation!

If the Good News were defined as a ceasing of our own labor in order to earn merit with *Elohim* instead of resting on the finished work of Messiah, these actions, devoid of grace, can not and will not bring life as we walk on this earth. Instead, such work brings only further bondage, defeat, and death. We abide in *Yeshua's* life in order to bring forth real abundant life. This requires a revelation of grace and of Shabbat—a refreshing in the finished work of Messiah Himself.

The Wedding Ring

There is much more we can glean from this passage about Shabbat but I must move on. But not before we talk about the wedding ring (the sign of the covenant). This concept was hinted at in a previous *Parashah*. In Shemot 31:17 we are told that Shabbat is a sign (*ot*), i.e., a wedding ring. It serves to remind the married couple that they are in a covenant, committed to each other. It is the same with Shabbat. Doing it helps to remind us that we are *Elohim's* people and that He is our bridegroom. Moreover, Shabbat serves as a reminder that the same *Elohim*, who is our creator desires that we *delight* in Him and in who we are in Him: ¹⁰“If you keep my commands, you will stay in my love - just as I have kept my Father's commands and stay in his love. ¹¹I have said this to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy be complete” (John 15:10-11).

The wedding ring is a sign to other potential suitors that one is married. So it is for the body of Messiah—the bride of the One and Only True *Elohim* of Israel. When believers practice Shabbat, others can see and know that when they belong to *Elohei Abraham, Elohei Yitzhak and Elohei Ya'akov* (the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob) {like when someone sees a wedding ring on the finger}, they immediately know that a person is already taken. Thus, as Shabbat is a sign. Shabbat helps guard the bride from intrusion of suitors which could come in attempts to destroy the marriage. It is specifically a message to other nations, "... *to know through it that I am the יהוה who sanctifies you.*" *Elohim* wants the nations who do not have the *Elohei Yisrael* to keep away from harming or preying upon His Bride.

Prepare!

This portion tells us that, among other things, we are to **do** (*la-asot*, to do) Shabbat. In fact, the text implies that we are to make a special effort to do it. If Shabbat were to be a day of "rest," then how would one *do* Shabbat? Do you think it is by physical resting? The *ArtScroll Chumash* directs us to the best understanding when it states, "*It is a token of respect for the Sabbath that one prepares for it ahead of time ... Thus one , 'makes'(la-asot) Shabbat by preparing for it so that it will be observed properly when it arrives.*"

Like so many other things in *Torah*, Shabbat is also a sacred picture. We must carefully guard *Elohim's* sacred pictures! Protecting this particular special picture means that we should do all we can to see to it that the preparations for Shabbat begin on Sunday by readjusting schedules and carefully planning our shopping and work for every week. This helps to insure that when the preparation day (Friday) arrives, we are ready to do what it takes to **do** Shabbat properly!

The First Marriage Difficulty

It is hard to imagine a more exhilarating mountaintop experience than this one. Meanwhile, down in the valley, the children of Israel had become extremely impatient. The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, "*Get busy; and make us gods to go ahead of us; because this Moshe, the man that brought us up from the land of Egypt - we don't know what has become of him.*" (*Shemot* 32:1).

When he descended from the mountain, Moshe had to go from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the heights of fellowship with the Holy One, to the depths of idolatry with his wayward people. They were clearly guilty of this grievous sin and worthy of death. But *Elohim* heeded Moshe's intercession for them and spared their lives.

This whole incident was a very traumatic event for the young nation. The ramifications would affect Israel's history for years to come. A proper conclusion to this whole affair was important for both *Elohim* and Israel. It was as if this young, newly married couple had their first serious marriage difficulty. It left both parties in need of taking precautions to prohibit it ever happening again. Moreover, the closeness and intimacy of the relationship needed to be completely restored.

The only difference between this marriage difficulty and our human ones is that the contributing factor in this one was completely one-sided. Israel was clearly completely at fault. Sad to say that this new bride had already begun to demonstrate a problem which would seriously damage this divine marriage throughout all of their years together –the problem of marital unfaithfulness. It will take millennia to root this sin out, but *Elohim*, the faithful Husband, promised His eternal love for His covenant people. Eventually, when Messiah returns the second time, *Elohim* will have so worked in Israel that He will come to find a completely pure Bride.

Steps of Reconciliation

But back to the immediate problem, we now see יהוה and Moshe take certain necessary steps to make this terrible situation right.

A. Testing the Leader (Shemot 32:7-14)

The first step was to make sure that the leader was properly trained. Hence, *Elohim* gave Moshe a test: He threatened to utterly destroy the unfaithful people. But Moshe, proving himself faithful and loyal, interceded on Israel's behalf (as he will do on other occasions). *Elohim* (whom, I believe, never really was going to do as He threatened because it was a test) responded accordingly and re-affirmed Moshe's leadership and His covenant with Israel.

B. Terminating the Troublemakers (Shemot 32:26-35)

Second, after He re-affirmed the spiritual leadership of Moshe, *Elohim* took punitive measures in order to weed out the troublemakers from the camp. This discipline came through a tough decision making process. Moshe asked the people, “*Whoever is for יהוה, join me!*” (Shemot 32:26) Those who did not, fell victim to the disciplining sword. The rest in the camp also were struck by a plague from יהוה.

The discipline was severe. But the crime was severe. Just as Moshe was receiving the holy Torah, Israel was deep in the midst of practicing unholy idolatry. The severe reaction from יהוה was designed to show Israel the seriousness of their sin and to work repentance in them.

C. Talking in the Tent (Shemot 33:7-11)

Next, Moshe set up a new communication system between the people, himself, and יהוה. The procedure was that Moshe would set up a tent outside the Camp. There he would go to talk with יהוה, who made Himself visible through a pillar of cloud: “*So it was that whoever sought יהוה would go out to the Tent of Meeting, which was outside the camp*” (Shemot 33:7).

Among other things, one idea behind this system was to keep the lines of communication open between יהוה and His people. This would help avoid any future trouble similar to the golden calf incident. If anyone questioned יהוה, or had a question, they could take it right to Moshe who would, in turn, bring it before יהוה.

Moshe called this tent, *The Tent of Meeting, Ohel Moed* (אהל מועד). This was apparently a temporary substitute for the Tabernacle and therefore, “*... draws attention to the alienation of Israel from God. The camp has become spiritually polluted by the impurity produced by the golden calf affair.*”

D. Teaching the Remnant (Shemot 34:5-7)

The last part of this restoration process is where the Thirteen Attributes of יהוה are revealed. The final phase of restoration will only come when Israel truly understands and believes that their *Elohim* is who He is. Hence, they were given a magnificent revelation of יהוה's character. The purpose for this revelation was to let them know how different this יהוה is from the god they made out of gold. Secondly, this revelation helped them to know the extent of forgiveness that יהוה granted to those who truly repent. Thirdly, it taught Israel the truth about יהוה so they could grow in their appreciation of Him. And, finally, this passage provided the basis upon which they will, one day, recognize the Messiah. “*...and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by.*” (Shemot. 33:22) Today, we can surely sing: 🎵 **In Your presence, that's where I belong, in Your presence, O L-rd my G-d...** 🎵