Overview

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men, age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan — the women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and Hashem instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, and Aaron and his sons.

Hashem selects Betzalel and Oholiav to be the master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that Hashem made the world.

Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude that left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe’s descent seems delayed, and force Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aaron stalls and tries to delay them.

Hashem tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the orgy of idol-worship he smashes the Tablets, and destroys the golden calf. The Sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for the transgressors, executing 3,000 men.

When the Ten Commandments were engraved on the Tablets, they were also being engraved on the hearts of the Jewish People for all time. Engraved in stone. Engraved on the ‘tablet’ of the heart. The writing was the writing of ‘heart’ — the tell-tale foot-prints in the snow of History — that’s clear for all to see, if we keep our ‘head-lamps’ turned on.

In this world we cannot see Hashem’s ‘face’ — Hashem’s direct control of the world; but His ‘back’ — the tell-tale footprints in the snow of History — that’s clear for all to see, if we keep our ‘head-lamps’ turned on.

Heart and Stone

“And the tablets are the work of G-d, and the writing, the writing of G-d.” (32:16)

Next time you’re in shul, take a look at the Ten Commandments above the Ark. The tops of the two Tablets are curved. Why are the Ten Commandments in this shape? The Talmud describes the Tablets as being cubes. There is not a single classical Jewish source which describes the Tablets in the form with which we are familiar today.

Where did this shape come from?

Another question. If the Children of Israel had already heard the Ten Commandments, why was it necessary for these Commandments to be engraved on Tablets? Wasn’t the overwhelming experience of hearing Hashem speaking sufficient?

When the Ten Commandments were engraved on the Tablets, they were also being engraved on the hearts of the Jewish People for all time. Engraved in stone. Engraved on the ‘tablet’ of the heart. The writing was the writing of G-d, who indelibly engraved them on the heart of the Jewish People for all time.

Take another look at those Ten Commandments above the Ark. Their rounded tops symbolize the shape of the heart, the heart of the Jewish People, where they have been engraved for some three thousand years.
 SPIRITUAL RAYBANS®
“When the Children of Israel saw Moshe’s face, that Moshe’s face had become radiant, Moshe put the mask back on his face, until he came to speak with Him.” (34:33)

Moshe wore a mask to spare the Jewish People the embarrassment of not being able to look at him.

Before the sin of the golden calf, the Torah says that “the appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire before the eyes of the Children of Israel.” After the sin of the golden calf they couldn’t even look at Hashem’s prophet, Moshe.

Such is the power of evil. When we violate Hashem’s will, we muddy up the windows of our soul so that the light cannot come in. We have put on spiritual dark glasses because our souls can no longer bear the light.

THE REST IS EASY
“And on the seventh day, a Shabbos of Shabbosos” (31:15)
There are two kinds of rest.
The first kind of rest is a rest from weariness, a chance to recharge our batteries, to enable us to continue to work. For no one can work indefinitely. Everyone needs a break.
The second kind of rest comes at the end of a project. The last brushstroke of a painting. The final sentence of a novel. The last brick in a new home. Then you take a step back and look at your work. You feel the satisfaction of completion. It’s finished. It’s done. A time to rest and enjoy the fruits of your labors.

“You shall labor for six days and do all your work.”

How can you do all you work in six days? Can you build an entire house in six days?
The Torah teaches us that when Shabbos arrives, even though we’re only half-way through a project, we should think of it as though it was completely finished.

In other words, on Shabbos we should picture ourselves experiencing the rest and satisfaction that comes after a good job well done — not just taking a break.

In a sense, this is what Hashem did when the world was six days old. He looked at the Creation and saw that it was finished. The greatest building project ever, the Heavens and the Earth, were completed.

Our rest on Shabbos is a commemoration of that rest.

This is the essential difference between our Shabbos and the secular idea of a ‘day of rest.’ The secular concept of a day of rest is a break, so that you can return to the week revitalized and refreshed. It’s only a break.

Shabbos, on the other hand, is not just pushing the pause button on life. It’s the creation of a feeling that everything in one’s life is complete. There’s nothing left to do — except to sit back and enjoy the fruits of one’s labor.

Haftorah: Melachim I 18:1-39

Just before the Shofar sounds on Yom Kippur, bringing to a close 25 hours of prayer and fasting, we repeat the closing words from this week’s Haftorah seven times. “Hashem; He is the G-d.”

Eliyahu HaNavi had challenged the idolatrous prophets of ba’al to a public demonstration of Who was really G-d, and who was a fraud. When a miracle happened and Israel saw the truth, they shouted in unison “Hashem; He is the G-d.”

In the same way as the week’s Parsha describes Israel wavering on the brink of idol worship, so too the Haftorah tells of one of the worst kings to rule Israel — Achav. His queen Izavel was a non-Jew who worshipped idols, murdered righteous prophets and filled the palace with idols.

In spite of the danger to his life, Eliyahu successfully challenged Achav and Izavel. The culmination of his victory was on Mount Carmel, where it became clear to all Yisrael who was G-d.

THE VOICE OF APPEASEMENT
“How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, follow Him! And if the ba’al, follow it.” (18:21)

When Moshe Rabbeinu was descending from Mount Sinai with the Tablets, and the Children of Israel were busy making the golden calf, Yehoshua tried to comfort him by saying “The sound of battle is in the camp.” This meant that not all of Israel has been infected by idol worship; there is still a battle between the worshippers of the golden calf and those faithful to Hashem.

Moshe replied to him that it was “Not a sound shouting strength nor a sound shouting weakness.” I don’t hear an ounce of resolve in either the worshippers of the calf or in those loyal to Hashem.

The way you see a real struggle is that one side beats the other!
It seems that even those who were not worshipping the calf were taking the stance of tolerance, of neutrality. They were “open to both opinions.” That was “the sound shouting weakness.” Just a voice, nothing more; the voice of appeasement, devoid of action and expectation of improving the situation.

In the fight against idol-worship, whatever that idol may be, only the “sound shouting strength” must be heard, because then it is impossible to dance between two opinions.

Sources:
- ‘Heart And Stone’ - Stas Ems in Mayana shel Torah, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro;
- ‘RayBans’ - Rabbi, Be’er Moshe, Artscroll Chumash;
- ‘The Rest is Easy’ - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L’Torah U’Moadim; ‘The Voice of Appeasement’ - D var Hemelacha

INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIRO S SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

ASHINU SEUDASAS (Melave Malka)
I SHALL PREPARE THE FEAST(ESCORTING THE QUEEN)...

This is the meal of the holy King David.

King David asked Hashem to reveal to him how long he would live. When informed that there is a Divine decree to withhold such knowledge from any man he asked to at least know on which day of the week he would perish.

Hashem disclosed to David that he would die on Shabbos. When every Shabbos came to an end and David realized that he had at least another week to live he celebrated with a great feast. The meal which we eat after Shabbos in order to accompany the “Shabbos Queen” on her way out is therefore particularly identified with King David for whom it had a special significance.

Parshas Ki Sisa
For the week ending 22 Adar I 5757, 28 February & 1 March 1997