**[The Wayfarer – Parshat Ki Tisa](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-wayfarer-parshat-ki-tisa)**

The Maggid of Mezritch taught: “Today the holy spirit comes upon us more easily than when the Temple was standing. Once there was a king of a country that was conquered by a foreign power, and the king was driven into exile. In the course of his wanderings, he came upon the home of some poor people who recognized him as king. They took him in, offered him modest food and shelter, and treated him as honored royalty the best they could. The king deeply appreciated their hospitality and chatted intimately with his hosts, as he had once done in his court with those closest to him.

“Now that the Holy One is in exile from His Holy Temple, He does the same with us.”

The secret of realizing the Presence of the Divine is a spirit of hospitality from the heart. Welcome this moment as it is, in all its fullness, in its beauty and ugliness, in its orderliness and chaos, and you welcome the Divine Essence that is the Presence of all things, that is the Presence within you, reading these words right now. That Presence is a gift – you cannot manufacture It, you cannot generate It, but you can do your part to open to It, to reveal Its Reality through you.

There is a hint in the *parshah:*

זֶ֣ה יִתְּנ֗וּ כָּל־הָעֹבֵר֙ עַל־הַפְּקֻדִ֔ים מַחֲצִ֥ית הַשֶּׁ֖קֶל... תְּרוּמָ֖ה לַֽיהוָֽה
*This shall be given by all who pass through the counting – a half shekel, an offering to the Divine…*
(Exodus 30:13)

The “half” we bring in the building of the sanctuary of this moment is ourselves; we, meaning our bodies, our feelings, our thoughts, are “half” – the other half is the Divine, the Reality behind all forms. Make yourself hospitable to That Reality, and the Divine appears,*barukh Hashem.*

How do we do it?

וַיַּעֲבֹ֨ר יְהוָ֥ה עַל־פָּנָיו֮ וַיִּקְרָא֒ יְהוָ֣ה יְהוָ֔ה אֵ֥ל רַח֖וּם וְחַנּ֑וּן אֶ֥רֶךְ אַפַּ֖יִם וְרַב־חֶ֥סֶד וֶאֱמֶֽת
*The Divine passed before his face and called out, “Being! Being! Compassionate and Gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in Lovingkindness and Truth!”*
(Exodus 34:6)

These Divine qualities that God reveals to Moses are a practical instruction:

*Hashem! Hashem! – Being! Being!* The Divine Name that means “Being” is said twice, indicating the realization that whatever is before you is a form of the Divine, and your own consciousness is also the Divine; through the meeting, The Divine becomes One with Itself. This is the fundamental knowledge that brings the felt connection with the Divine Presence.

*El Rakhum V’Hanun – Compassionate and Gracious God…* that is, make the qualities of compassion and grace “God” over all your other qualities. You may not feel like it, but you can bring forth these qualities if you decide that they are “God” to you.

*Erekh apayim v’ravhesed ve’emet – Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Lovingkindness and Truth…* You have the ability to not get caught by your anger and to act from the impulse of love. It says *Emet –Truth –* because it is not about “faking” it; it is about finding these qualities within and bringing them forth.

Then, the prophesy of Purim will be fulfilled:

לַיְּהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשָׂשׁוֹן וִיקָר
*For the Jews there was Light, Joy, Gladness and Essence…*
(Ester 8:16)

כֵּן תִּהְיֶה לָנוּ – *So may it be for us!*

***More on Parshat Ki Tisa...***

[**Offering – Parshat Ki Tisa**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/offering-parshat-ki-tisa)

My father-in-law once commented that when he attended minyan daily to say kaddish for his father, he would finish putting on his tefillin by Aleinu.

(The tefillin are ritual objects worn on the body, and the Aleinu is one of the very last prayers. He was joking that it took him the time of the entire service to get his tefillin on, which are supposed to be put on before you begin the service.)

It’s true that for many Jews who attend synagogue, the Aleinu is the most familiar prayer, since all the latecomers are present by the time it happens. And it’s appropriate, since Aleinu is the great equalizer:

Aleinu leshabeiakh Ladon Hakol – It is upon us to praise the Master of All.

It doesn’t matter if you’re early or late, if you put on your tefillin quickly or slowly – in the face of the Divine, in the face of the Mystery of Existence, we are all equal. As the Divine name proclaims, Reality unfolds however it unfolds:

Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh – I will be What I Will Be

We all equally have this supreme task: to harmonize ourselves with What Is:

Va’anakhnu korim umishtakhavim umodim lifnei… HaKadosh Barkhu Hu – We kneel and prostrate and surrender before the Holy Blessed One…

A disciple asked Rabbi Yekhiel Mikhal, the Maggid of Zlotchov: “Why is it that humility is the most important virtue, yet the Torah doesn’t command us to be humble? It only says that Moses was the most humble of men, but it doesn’t ever say that humility is a mitzvah.”

“That’s because,” replied the master, “if humility were a mitzvah, we wouldn’t be able to accomplish it; we would end up having pride in our humility!”

Once there was a rabbi who was davening with great intensity toward the end of Yom Kippur, when he suddenly became overwhelmed with the realization of his own insignificance. Before he knew what he was doing, he spontaneously cried out, “Ribono Shel Olam! Master of the universe! I am nothing! I am nothing!”

When the hazzan – the cantor – saw him do this, he too became inspired, and suddenly realized the same thing. “Ribono Shel Olam! I am nothing! I am nothing!” cried the hazzan.

Suddenly, Shmully the shoemaker also became deeply moved and cried out as well: “Ribono Shel Olam! I am nothing! I am nothing!” When the hazzan saw Shmully’s enthusiasm, he turned to the rabbi with incredulity: “Look who thinks he’s nothing!”

The essential quality of authentic spirituality involves meeting Reality as it appears – which is to say, meeting the Divine in the fulness of the present. The opposite of this is ego, which instead is concerned with one’s own identity, with the “me.” To accomplish the task of transcending ego and meeting the Divine, religion gives us all kinds of traditions and devices, but the irony is that the ego can co-opt all of that for its own self-bolstering purpose. Thus, according to the maggid, humility must remain free from being a mitzvah; it is a level higher than any particular religious practice.

כִּ֣י תִשָּׂ֞א אֶת־רֹ֥אשׁ בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֘ לִפְקֻֽדֵיהֶם֒ וְנָ֨תְנ֜וּ אִ֣ישׁ כֹּ֧פֶר נַפְשׁ֛וֹ לַֽיהֹוָ֖ה בִּפְקֹ֣ד אֹתָ֑ם וְלֹא־יִֽהְיֶ֥ה בָהֶ֛ם נֶ֖גֶף בִּפְקֹ֥ד אֹתָֽם

When you take a census of the children of Israel according to their numbers, let each one give to the Divine an atonement for their souls when they are counted; then there will be no plague among them when they are counted.

 זֶ֣ה יִתְּנ֗וּ כָּל־הָֽעֹבֵר֙ עַל־הַפְּקֻדִ֔ים מַֽחֲצִ֥ית הַשֶּׁ֖קֶל בְּשֶׁ֣קֶל הַקֹּ֑דֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִ֤ים גֵּרָה֙ הַשֶּׁ֔קֶל מַֽחֲצִ֣ית הַשֶּׁ֔קֶל תְּרוּמָ֖ה לַֽיהֹוָֽה

This they shall give… a half a shekel … an offering to the Divine. ​
The ego wants to “count” – there is a self-image to maintain; this is the negef, the root plague of being human. The ego is insatiable, never satisfied for long, because it is by nature incomplete; it is only a “half shekel.” The only way to become complete and avert the “plague” is to make it תְּרוּמָ֖ה לַֽיהֹוָֽה – an “offering” to the Divine.

How to do that?

Simply notice the impulse to “be” something – to be recognized, to be validated, to be seen in a certain way. Let that impulse be there, but don’t buy into it; don’t give the ego any reality. Recognize that it is just a bundle of thoughts and feelings. Offer it up: “Oh Hashem, I am only here to serve your purpose; only in aligning with You can there be wholeness.”

In that letting go of the incomplete self into the One, there can arise a completeness that is not any particular thing, that is not dependent on anything, but it emerges and blossoms when there is openness to the truth of this moment.

“Ribono Shel Olam! I am nothing!

[**The Plague of Separation – Parshat Ki Tisa**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-plague-of-separation-parshat-ki-tisa)

**Exodus 30:11-13
​**
This week's Torah reading begins with instructions to Moses on how to take a census of the Israelites. Everyone who is counted has to give a half shekel as an "atonement" to prevent a plague:
​
​**יא**וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶל־משֶׁ֥ה לֵּאמֹֽר

**11**The Divine spoke to Moses, saying:

**יב**כִּ֣י תִשָּׂ֞א אֶת־רֹ֥אשׁ בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵל֘ לִפְקֻֽדֵיהֶם֒ וְנָ֨תְנ֜וּ אִ֣ישׁ כֹּ֧פֶר נַפְשׁ֛וֹ לַֽיהֹוָ֖ה בִּפְקֹ֣ד אֹתָ֑ם וְלֹא־יִֽהְיֶ֥ה בָהֶ֛ם נֶ֖גֶף בִּפְקֹ֥ד אֹתָֽם:

**12**"When you take the sum of the children of Israel according to their numbers, let each one give to the Divine an atonement for their souls when they are counted; then there will be no plague among them when they are counted.

**יג**זֶ֣ה יִתְּנ֗וּ כָּל־הָֽעֹבֵר֙ עַל־הַפְּקֻדִ֔ים מַֽחֲצִ֥ית הַשֶּׁ֖קֶל בְּשֶׁ֣קֶל הַקֹּ֑דֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִ֤ים גֵּרָה֙ הַשֶּׁ֔קֶל מַֽחֲצִ֣ית הַשֶּׁ֔קֶל תְּרוּמָ֖ה לַֽיהֹוָֽה:

**13**This they shall give, everyone who goes through the counting: half a shekel according to the holy shekel. Twenty gerahs equal one shekel; half of [such] a shekel shall be an offering to the Divine. ​
But why would there be a plague for being counted in a census?

To be "counted" means to be discerned as a separate entity. This is the "plague" of the ego – the felt sense of being something separate, driving your life through a separate universe. Ordinarily, this is how we think of ourselves; there's "me in here" and "that out there." This is the basic duality of the egoic perspective.

But consider: whatever you perceive to be "out there" is always perceived within ​your consciousness. So when you think of yourself as being within your body, looking out at something separate, you've actually split yourself in half. You've identified with the half that's in your body, and exiled the part of your own awareness within which "out there" is perceived.

So to heal this rift and escape the "plague" of separateness, the two halves have to rejoin one another. That's the makhatzit hashekel – the half shekel. Give your awareness fully to whatever you perceive in the present moment, and the self-contracting activity of ego can relax and you merge back into Oneness. This is meditation, also called Presence.

But, sometimes there are powerful emotions that can become blocked. In that case, you may not be able to relax into Oneness through meditation alone. That's where prayer comes in. Through prayer, you ***invite your emotions to be fully*** **felt** by putting them into words or chants or even just sounds, crying out from the heart. In this way, previously exiled feelings can be released and an inner alchemy can take place, transforming negativity into love...

***love,
​reb brian Yosef***

[**Is Your Motivation Disrupting Your Meditation?  Parshat Ki Tisa**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/is-your-motivation-disrupting-your-meditation-parshat-ki-tisa)

***​“Ki tisa et rosh b’nei Yisrael lifkudeihem..."

"When you take a census of the children of Israel to count them- every person should give an atonement for their souls to the Divine when you count them- so that there won’t be a plague among them when they’re counted.”***

This is a super strange passage. First God is telling Moses to take a census of the Israelites- not so strange- Moses is leading thousands of Israelites through the desert so it makes sense that he would want to keep track of them all. But then it says something strange- that every Israelite should give a kofer- an atonement or a ransom. This word kofer is the same as in Yom Kippur- the Day of Atonement. In the next line it explains that the kofer they give should be a half shekel, which is a kind of coin, and they should give this coin to prevent a plague from breaking out.

But why do they have to atone for being counted, as if being counted is some kind of sin that would bring on a plague?

But if we look more deeply at the words, the idiom for “When you take a census” is “Ki tisa et rosh”- which literally means, “When you lift up the head.” What is lifting up the head? It is elevating consciousness- meaning, the disentanglement or dis-identification of consciousness with thoughts, feelings, personality- all that stuff that normally makes up the sense of “me” or ego. That process of ki tisa- of transcending the ego and experiencing the freedom and bliss of pure consciousness is, of course, the aim of meditation.

And normally, when we decide to meditate, we’re motivated by wanting to experience something like that- maybe we want less stress, maybe we want to stop feeling the burden of our problems, or whatever. And these are all totally valid motivations, but the problem is, they’re all rooted in the experience of “me” wanting to get “something.” But since the thing you’re trying to get is to let go of the “me,” it doesn’t work- it turns your meditation into a kind of plague, because you’re chasing after something you can never get with that approach. The only way you can get it, is by changing your approach- changing your motivation- don’t do it from that drive to get something.

Instead, do it as an act of giving- an act of love for its own sake. And that’s the donation of the half shekel. It’s only a half shekel because there’s of course the acknowledgment that meditation is good for you- that’s the other half of the coin so to speak- but what’s good for you is also good for others. You have to put on your own oxygen mask before helping your children, otherwise you might not be able to help your children. So the donation of the half shekel means that you’re dedicating your spiritual work that you do on yourself toward the service of others.

So this Shabbat Ki Tisa- the Sabbath of Elevation, is a good time to rededicate yourself to your meditation practice, through the intention of love.

Good Shabbos!
love,
​brian Yosef

[**The Coconut Oil- Parshat Ki Tisa**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-coconut-oil-parshat-ki-tisa)

Here in Costa Rica, it’s hot. How hot is it?

Here’s a good way to understand it:

When I was back in Berkeley last week, I was staying with some friends in their warm and cozy home. One morning, while the heat was on in the house due to the cold outside, I took out my jar of coconut oil to make my “bullet-proof” coffee (ask me about this if you don’t know what it is). I was surprised to find that the coconut oil was completely hard and white, even though the house was so warm.

That’s because in Costa Rica, the coconut oil is always clear liquid, even at night when the air seems cool in relation to how hot it was during the day.

That’s hot.

And, because it’s so dang hot, it’s pretty common to take not one, but two showers per day.

Before Costa Rica, I would take a shower to go out and do something, or, I would take a shower when I returned home from somewhere.

But in Costa Rica, everything is hot, everything makes you sticky and filthy, so you’ve got to shower before going out and shower when you come in.

It reminds me of the mitzvah to repeatedly cleanse your inner space, chanting the affirmation of the Unity of Being with the Sh’ma, which is to be said-

“… when you sit in your house, when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up…”

In other words, there’s a rhythm of inwardness and outwardness, of activity and rest, and staying present applies to all those times.

This week’s reading, Ki Tisa, has it’s own version of the “two shower” practice:

The parshah describes the construction the Kiyor- a special basin of water for the kohanim (priests) to wash themselves with. Whenever they entered the Sanctuary or burned offerings on the altar outside the Sanctuary, they would use the kiyor:

“V’asita kiyor n’khoshet bein ohel mo’ed uvein hamizbe’akh v’natanta shama mayim-

“You shall make a basin of copper between the Tent of Meeting and the (outer) altar, and you shall put water there.”

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M Shneerson z’l, taught that the outer altar represents the sanctification of ordinary life. The inner Sanctuary represents your avodah- spiritual practice- that you do separate from mundane life.

The fact that the kiyor- the water basin- was between the inner and the outer indicates that you need to inwardly “cleanse” your intentions before doing either one. Without the right intention, both outer and inner life will be expressions of ego, of the energy of self-enhancement rather than self-transcendence.

It makes no difference if you’re praying, earning a living, enjoying some food, helping someone out, whatever. Without right intention, anything you do- holy or mundane- will have an ensnaring quality.

But with right intention, both inner and outer life become the arena of transformation, as the rhythmic movement between the two gently wears away at the substance of ego.

What is right intention?

It’s being in service of the moment.

Whether it’s inner or outer life, being in service of the moment means letting the movement around you and the movement within you be one thing. It means not opposing yourself to what is, but being what is. It means being fully yourself, as you are, here in this moment, as this moment is, without resistance.

What’s the key to right intention?

It’s knowing that your existence right now is fully an expression of Truth, of Reality, of God- just as it is.

Can you accept that ultimate Truth right now?

In the beginning of the reading from which the parsha gets its name, the Israelites are told they must all donate a half-shekel when they’re counted in the census, in order to prevent a plague-

“Ki tisa et rosh b’nai Yisrael…

“When you take a census of the children of Israel… they shall give a half-shekel for atonement, so there won’t be a plague…”

Being “counted” means being part of community life, part of the chaotic push and pull of multiple agendas and intentions. This life becomes a “plague” if you forget your essential unity with all that is, if you forget that you’re ultimately here to serve the One, and that your very existence is already a service of the One.

Why a half-shekel?

Because your existence is half the equation- the piece that everyone brings equally. The other half is your unique task, the task that only you can do. But it begins with the “half-shekel”- it begins with knowing your own existence as non-separate from this moment.

Then, in this open embrace of Being, there can be balance between the inner and the outer. No need to run after external experiences, and no need to close yourself off to find internal holiness- though sometimes the moment requires one and sometimes the other.

Night and day, Hasidim of all ages and types knocked on the door of Reb Pinkhas of Korets. Some wanted spiritual guidance, others wanted wisdom, others sought special blessings.This disturbed Reb Pinkhas from his inward devotions so much, that he prayed he should become disliked by people.

“That would solve everything!” he thought. “If people hated me, they would leave me alone to my meditations and I’d be able to enjoy the Divine Oneness in peace.”

His prayer was answered-

From that day onward, he lived a secluded life in blissful aloneness, and was never seen in the company of others, except at synagogue.

As the festival of Sukkot drew near, he had to build his sukkah all by himself, for nobody would help him (which was fine by him). On the first night of the holiday, the rabbi sat in his sukkah all by himself (which was fine by him), and he began chanting the invocation to Avraham, inviting the spirit of the ancient patriarch into his sukkah.

Reb Pinkhas looked up in wonder- the spirit of Avraham had appeared, and was standing just outside!

At first, Reb Pinkhas fell into an ecstatic wonder at the apparition before him, but soon became anxious because the spirit wouldn’t enter the sukkah, despite Reb Pinkhas’ invitational invocations.

“Master, why do you not enter my sukkah?” cried Reb Pinkhas.

Avraham Avinu replied, “It is not my custom to enter a place where there are no guests.”

Avraham then disappeared.

Sad and regretful, Reb Pinhkas made Kiddush by himself, then took the special water vessel to cleanse his hands before the blessing over bread.

As he washed his hands, he prayed- “Ribono Shel Olam, cleanse me from my reclusiveness- may I accept the holiness of being with people as well as being alone. Please, Ribono Shel Olam, take away the hatred people have for me.”

From that time onward, Reb Pinkhas was restored to his rebbe-hood and Hasidim began visiting him once again.

On this Shabbat Ki Tisa, the Sabbath of Raising Up, may we raise up the Reality that includes others and includes ourselves, for there’s only One Reality, and we're all part of it. Let’s remember the supreme middah of hospitality, honoring whomever we’re with, allowing this moment to be a welcoming home for all we encounter... and may our hearts and minds flow with this moment... like the liquid coconut oil in Costa Rica!

Good Shabblisss!!

[**The Plumber- Parshat Ki Tisa**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-plumber-parshat-ki-tisa)
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I have a friend who told me an amazing story about how she used to earn a living. She is a particularly handy person, with a knack for things like plumbing, light carpentry, and so on. Several years ago, she discovered that most people (myself included) don’t have such a knack and often need a handy person, so she started to take little fix-it jobs to earn extra money. For a while the jobs were easy for her. One day, she was asked to do a job that baffled her.

What did she do?

Did she say, “Sorry, I can’t do that” and go on to an easier job? No. She pretended she knew how to do the job, went home and watched You Tube videos on how to fix that particular thing, then went and fixed it. That was just the beginning. Eventually, she was learning and growing by taking on harder and harder jobs. Her work became her school.

There is an analogue here to spirituality. Just as the basic point of work is to receive physical sustenance in the form of money, so the basic point of spirituality is to receive spiritual sustenance- the Inner Light of bliss and oneness that manifests as wisdom, joy, love and many other wonderful qualities.

The most direct way to connect with your spiritual sustenance is to remove outer distractions and do your avodah- spiritual work such as meditation, chanting, and so on. If you really just want that spiritual sustenance, you should involve yourself with as few other things as possible. Do what you need to do to eat and have basic necessities, then devote yourself to spiritual practice. That would be analogous to my friend taking the easy handy jobs she already knew how to do.

But if your intention is not merely to get the sustenance,  rather to learn and grow in your ability to stay connected to the Source of that sustenance even in the midst of life, then you can bring your spiritual Light into the chaos and complexity of life.  Then, distractions are really not distractions anymore. They are what you need to train. They are your helpers on the path of becoming spiritually masterful.

Many folks tend toward one side or the other. Some get so caught up in the drama of life that it is impossible remain present and bring forth the Inner Light when things get stressful. Others tend toward the other direction, seeing the drama of life as a distraction and withdrawing into solitude. And, there are times in life when it’s good to lean toward one side or the other.

The truth, however, is that these two sides are not really separate or opposed to each other. The Inner Light that flowers within wants to express Itself; it wants to connect with life and bring its power of healing and wisdom. But to balance the rhythm between the Eternal and the temporal, the Silent and the noisy, requires attentiveness and intention. It takes a special effort to create the boundaries you need to have the space in the day for spiritual avodah. And, no matter how complete your realization of the One is in solitude, life will generate challenges for you when you get back in its game. Receiving those challenges as your spiritual training, and not merely distractions, takes a tremendous effort; but it is ultimately an effortless effort.

This week’s reading, Ki Tisa, contains instructions for constructing a special basin of water that the kohanim (priests) were to wash their hands and feet with whenever they entered the sanctuary space or brought offerings onto the altar that was outside the sanctuary: “v’asita kiyor n’khoshet-  you shall make a basin of copper…bein ohel mo’ed uvein hamizbe’akh- between the Tent of Meeting and the (outer) altar…v’natanta shama mayim- and you shall put water there.”

The late Lubavitcher rebbe Rabbi Menachem M Shneerson z’l taught that the outer altar represents the sanctification of ordinary life activities. The inner sanctuary represents one’s spiritual practice and connection with Eternal, separate from mundane life. The fact that the kiyor- the basin- was between the two indicates that you need to inwardly “cleanse” your intentions before entering into your avodah, on one hand, and before entering into ordinary life activities as well. Having the right intention is the key to unifying the life of Being with the life of Doing.

Having right intention with your avodah means to approach it in the spirit of service. You meditate and davven not just to “get” something from it but also to serve as a conduit- to bring the Spirit into form. Similarly, you don’t enter into mundane life only to derive material benefit from it, but also to receive its lessons, to be a student and become more and more adept at bringing the Spirit into expression.

What is the key to right intention? It’s knowing you are here to serve. We are all constantly receiving, taking so much in so many different ways, but it must be for the sake of giving. That’s why, in the beginning of the reading, the Israelites are told they all must donate a half shekel when they are counted for the census, in order to prevent a plague- “Ki tisa et rosh b’nai Yisrael- when you take a census of the children of Israel… v’natnu ish kofer- they shall give for atonement… v’lo yiyeh vahem negef- so there won’t be a plague…makhazit hashekel- a half shekel…”

Being “counted” means being part of community life, part of the chaotic push and pull of multiple agendas and intentions. This life becomes a “plague” if you get stuck in it, if you forget right intention, if you forget that you are ultimately here to serve the One.

How do you serve the One? By being connected to the One and bringing Its Light and Bliss and Love into the mundane, into the chaos. And how do you do that? By taking time to separate from the mundane and doing your daily spiritual practice… not to mention the one full day of the week that is all spiritual practice- Shabbat.

May this Shabbat be a full immersion into the Eternal and may our world drink of Her healing power-

Good Shabbiiiisssss!!!!