



Ki Tisa: Remember the Good Times

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

No matter how many times we read it, it is still difficult to comprehend. On the heels of the most dramatic, inspirational, and transformative experience, we hit rock bottom. We panicked. We thought Moshe died on the top of Mount Sinai leaving us leaderless and alone. What would we do? Where would we go? How can we move forward without Moshe at our helm? A plan was devised.

Aaron said to them, "Remove the golden earrings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them [those earrings] to me." And all the people stripped themselves of the golden earrings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took [them] from their hand[s], fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into a molten calf, upon which they said: "These are your gods, O Israel, who have brought you up from the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw [this], he built an altar in front of it, and Aaron proclaimed and said: "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord." On the next day they arose early, offered up burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and they got up to make merry (Exodus 32:3-6)."

Aharon needed to buy time; he knew Moshe would return. Never did he imagine the people would part with their wealth so quickly. Never did he imagine that the Golden Calf would turn into a deity and form of idolatry, sparking the worst national rebellion against God in the history of our people. Moshe is ordered to leave the mountain. He descends, and upon seeing the decadent behavior of the people, smashes the *luchos* (tablets). God tells Moshe of his intention to destroy the Jewish nation and begin to rebuild through Moshe. Moshe responded:

Moses pleaded before the Lord, his God, and said: "Why, O Lord, should Your anger be kindled against Your people whom You have brought up from the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand? (Exodus 32:11)"

What does this mean? How could Moshe ask why God was angry? The Rabbis in the Talmud compare the sin of the Golden Calf to a bride who commits adultery underneath her bridal canopy. Sinaitic revelation represented the pinnacle of Divine closeness and spiritual intimacy, and yet amid this special moment, we turned our attention to a Golden Calf. God's wrath and displeasure are warranted and understood. Yet, Moshe asks, "Why should Your anger be kindled against Your people?" How are we to understand Moshe's question to God?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) provides an incredible insight. Moshe was urging God to look at the people in their totality. *Don't only see the sin of the Golden Calf; remember their good and holiness as well. Remember, these are the same people, "Your people whom You have brought up from the Land of Egypt." These are the same people who followed You out into the desert, the great unknown. They barely knew You yet embraced You as the God of their forefathers. Don't solely view them through the lens of their failure. See their successes, accomplishments, and commitment as well.*

The Rebbe teaches us an incredible lesson. When people fail and hurt us, we only see them through the lens of the current failure, often ignoring all the good which came before. When those who we love and cherish fail us, there are often feelings of hurt and betrayal. Before we discard or unravel the relationship, we must take a moment to reflect on the good and moments of commitment my relationship partner has exhibited. God's ability to view us in totality saved our relationship. May we find the courage to do the same for one another.