

Parshat Ki Tissa (תשפ"א): Use Your Brains

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וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי־בָשַׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרֶדֶת מִן־הַהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם | עֲשֵׂה־לָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים יִסְּרֵנוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי־זֶה | מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מַה־הָיָה לוֹ (כי תשא לב:א)

And the nation sees that Moshe is delayed and he is not coming down from the mountain; so they come to Aharon and they say to him, “Make us a god that will go in front of us, cause we do not know what happened to Moshe, the man who took us out of the Land of Mitzrayim.” (Shemot 32:1)

Rashi explains the backdrop for what caused what is perhaps the most terrible event that happened to Klal Yisrael, and how the *Eigel HaZahav*, the Golden Calf, impacted the lives of the Jewish people for over a millennium. Rashi quotes the Midrash to explain that when Moshe went up the mountain [Har Sinai] Moshe said to the People, “At the end of forty days I shall return within six hours of the day.” The nation thought that the same day he went up was included as part of the counting, but Moshe had said to the nation, “**whole** days, and their nights’ together.” Therefore, Moshe’s ascent up Har Sinai could not be included in the count for it was not a whole day including its night. What happened here? Am Yisrael, comprised of intelligent people who had just been at the Revelation at Har Sinai did not think it over or contemplate!

Rav Hirsch points out that the people who could not overcome the absence of their Moses for forty days, were the very same people who were still under the impression of the flaming lightning which showed them with elementary clarity לא תעשה לך פסל - “Do not make for yourself idols.” These are the very same people that make for themselves the Golden Calf! These people who had stood at the base of Har Sinai were still at such a distance away from the truth and the demands of the Torah. G-d gave you brains -- use them! Think over Moshe’s words in an intelligent manner. And yet, we see that at the time, Bnei Yisrael didn’t. Instead, there was foolishness, self-deception, frivolous and selective stupidity. The people did not fulfill what had been commanded of them: what was demanded of this nation that had accepted to live by the Torah was truth, clarity, precision, using their intelligence in a sensible and rational way. G-d gave you brains!

As we go through the COVID-19 pandemic and read about what occurs in Eretz Yisrael, America, and throughout the world, we see that in many locations there is deviation from across the board from the simple commands. Like Klal Yisrael at *Ma'amad Har Sinai* -- use your brains and think intelligently! Why are you so foolish? We see so many people and so many groups of Jews, non-Jews, Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Chareidi, non-Chareidi, and Chareidi-Lite, acting in a foolish manner -- are they deceiving themselves? What is happening?

We have to make ourselves into *Am HaSefer*, the People of the Book. In order to understand the Book (ie Torah) and to live by the Book, one needs clarity and the Emes. This is what Rav Hirsch mentioned: the people involved in the *Cheit HaEgel* were so distant from the truth! We need to understand what Hashem demands from us, both in the study and in our living comprehension of Torah; we need to understand what makes up the *Torat Chaim* and the *Derech HaChaim*. Hopefully, we should live through this virus and survive in the best of health; we should be able to deal with it intelligently and stop being foolish. As the Ralbag explains the words פְּתִי יִאֲמִין לְכֹל דְּבָר in Mishlei 14:15, מזולת, “A person can be deceived by everything, instead, think over your actions and decide if this is the way you should act and behave.” Klal Yisrael should reach this level, and be faced with the *Geula Sheleima* and *Refuah Sheleima* for כל ימות עולם. Amen!