

Parsha Ponders

Ki Sisa | Feb 29, 2024 | 22 Adar I 5784

*Independence day*¹

וירא העם כי-בשש משה לרדת מן-ההר ויקהל העם על-אהרן ויאמרו אליו קום עשה-לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי-זה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה-היה לו

The people saw that Moshe tarried from descending the mountain, and the nation congregated upon Aharon, and they said to him: “Get up and make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe, who took us out of Egypt, we don’t know what happened to him”²

The sin of the Golden Calf is considered one of the worst mistakes of the Jewish people in our history. Forty days after the National Revelation at Mount Sinai, where every Jew heard G-d Himself speak, they resorted to making and worshipping an idol. How could this have happened? What was the cause root of their mistake? Yes, they thought something happened to Moshe, and were looking for some sort of replacement. But, was it something deeper?

When the Jewish people were first fleeing Egypt, they were blocked by the Reed Sea. Until that point, the Jewish people were following Moshe like sheep follow their shepherd. The verse tells us³ that there was an Angel which was walking in front of the camp, and Hashem commanded it to walk behind them. Who was this Angel? Some say⁴ this refers to Moshe himself. While until now Moshe was leading the people, Hashem decided that the people should take the lead into the sea. In the merit of their faith in Hashem, it split for them⁵.

Hashem wanted the people to learn a lesson. While it’s important to have a leader, sometimes, they need to learn to be independent. They need to learn to connect to Hashem on their own, without an intermediary. Similar to teaching a child to walk, sometimes the parent has to let go. If the people become overly dependent on Moshe, what will they do when he’s not around? How will they go on?

Unfortunately, it would seem the Torah is telling us that they didn’t learn this lesson. Moshe told the people he would be gone for forty days, and when he didn’t show up at the exact moment they were expecting, panic ensued. Instead of acting independently with confidence, they immediately jumped to replacing him. They couldn’t live without a leader, or an intermediary to connect with Hashem. They resorted to creating a Golden Calf, something whose ramifications are still felt today. Although the damage was done, when Moshe returned, he made sure to set them straight.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on a *devar Torah* heard from my friend [Rav Mattias Amster](#), Chief Rabbi of Sweden

² [Exodus 32:1](#)

³ [Ibid 14:19](#)

⁴ See [Vayikra Rabbah 1:1](#)

⁵ [Meshech Chochmah](#) to [Exodus 14:15](#)