



Text:

The Jews have sinned by making a Golden Calf. Moses' prayer narrowly averts destruction.

G-d said to Moses, "Go, ascend from here – you and the nation that you have brought up from Egypt – to the Land that I have promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... I shall send an angel before you...for I [Myself] will not ascend amongst you [on account of your sins]..."

And the People heard these bad tidings and mourned, and did not don their adornments.

And G-d said to Moses, "Say to the Children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked People...'"

[Exodus 33:1-5]

When the People 'heard these bad tidings' – the departure of Divine Providence from them – they mourned what they had lost, and 'did not don their adornments' [i.e. the teaching of Torah] which are an adornment.... When they saw that they had lost [their Divine closeness] they thought they had no use for Torah. And this was a second rebellion [after the Golden Calf]. And that is why G-d said to Moses, "You are a stiff-necked People."

[Commentary of Ralbag]

Question:

If the Jews were saddened by their spiritual losses, shouldn't they have done their utmost to *embrace* what was left? Why did grief make the Jews *lose* their appreciation for Torah's riches?

Answer:

The Jews were so focused on what they had lost that they failed to appreciate what they still had. Their grief over what had been, caused the Jews to view what remained as valueless by comparison.

Message:

The Jews' yearning for spirituality – a positive drive – actually caused them to reject spirituality. We all suffer setbacks, sometimes unavoidable and sometimes self-inflicted; if the perfection we seek blinds us to the good that we have, we compound our losses. But if we do the best we can in the present, there is never cause for despair.

Please see other side...



Ki Sisa begins with several instructions pertaining to the Tabernacle:

- 1) Counting the Jews – Moses is to take a population census; the process symbolizes the value of each individual. The People are not to be counted directly, but are to contribute a half-Shekel each, which will be tallied to give the total. The silver coins will be melted down and used in constructing the Tabernacle.
- 2) The construction of a copper washstand, for the Kohanim (priests) to wash their hands and feet before Temple service.
- 3) The ingredients of the perfumed Anointing Oil, used for the consecration of the Tabernacle and the Kohanim, and for the appointment of future High Priests and Jewish kings.
- 4) The ingredients of the Ketores – incense, offered daily in the Tabernacle sanctuary.

The Torah now returns to the narrative of the Revelation. Moses ascends Mount Sinai and spends forty days in Heaven, absorbing the wisdom of the Torah, which he is to teach the Jews. Alas, the Jews now fail a crucial test:

Knowing that Moses is to be gone forty days, the Jews count the day of Revelation as Day One; actually, the forty days begin the following morning. When Moses does not return as expected, the people panic. They turn to Aaron, Moses' older brother and interim leader of the Jews, demanding a replacement for Moses. The people are well-meaning but desperate, and their search for an intermediary with G-d crosses a fine line into idolatry. Aaron cooperates with the people, seeking to stall for time and mitigate the disaster; but he underestimates the Jews' alacrity. The simple question, "Who has gold?" quickly leads to the formation of a Golden Calf, which the people view as Divine.

Up in Heaven, G-d informs Moses of the Jewish People's faithlessness – and His plan to destroy them. G-d hints that prayer is the only hope; Moses prays and averts destruction. Moses descends the mountain and publicly smashes the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. He restores order, destroys the Golden Calf, and punishes the perpetrators.

Moses ascends the mountain for another forty days to seek atonement for the Jews. "If You [will] not [forgive them] erase me, please, from Your book!" he demands. G-d agrees to pardon the Jews, but there will be consequences: an angel will lead the Jews to the Holy Land, not G-d Himself. This decree, too, is eventually repealed through Moses' prayer.

Finally, G-d commands Moses to carve a second set of tablets and ascend the mountain for a third and final time. G-d engraves the new tablets with the Ten Commandments. He also teaches Moses the Attributes of Mercy – thirteen descriptions of Heavenly compassion, to be invoked by the Jews in prayer when they wish to arouse G-d's mercy in the future. Moses descends Mount Sinai with the news that G-d has forgiven the Jews wholeheartedly; the joyous day is designated a Day of Atonement for all time – Yom Kippur.

Please see other side...