



LT TORAH TO GO

Volume 13 - Issue 29

Edited by Rabbi Mara Nathan on behalf of generations of Torah Learners at Larchmont Temple.

EXPERIENCE TORAH THIS WEEK: April 5-11
EREV SHABBAT 8:00PM
SHABBAT AM SERVICE SATURDAY 10:30AM

SHABBAT PESACH 5769

Exodus 33:12-34:26

pp.657-661 in Torah, a Modern Commentary

PSHAT... *The plain/simple story*

In the aftermath of the Golden Calf episode, Moses requests to see God's presence as a way to bolster his resolve to lead the people of Israel. God denies his request but shows him is "achorai" or back in stead. Moses carves the second set of tablets containing the ten commandments. God commands the Israelites to observe Pesach, Shavuot, and Shabbat.

REMEZ... *Looking for clues*

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt- we do not know what has happened to him. Aaron said to them, "take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me." (Ex. 32:1-2)

KOSHI... Are the Israelites really to blame for the creation of the Golden Calf?

PIRKE DE RABBI ELIEZER...The Israelites found the worship of a God without form, shape, and color very difficult. They wanted a god like the Egyptians— one that could be carried from place to place; one of glistening gold...So they came to Aaron and said, "Come, make us a god..." Because the Israelites sought to imitate the Egyptians and practice idolatry, say the rabbis, they were punished for their sin.

TALMUD...Building the calf was an act of idolatry, and the people's worship of it was nothing less than a signal that they accepted idolatry and were defying the second of the 10 Commandments: "You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image....".

DRASH... *Discovering Meaning...*

HALEVI... These people were not really idolaters. In the absence of Moses, they were simply desperate to have a tangible object of worship like the other nations without repudiating God who had brought them out of Egypt. Having waited so long for Moses to return, they were overcome with frustration, confusion, and dissension....

BUBER...the people were in a state of panic and said to one another: Moses has vanished completely. He said that he is going aloft to the God up there, when we need the God down here just where we are; but he has not come back, and it must be supposed that that God of his has made away with him, since something or other between them was clearly not as it should have been. What are we to do now? We have to take matters into our own hands. An image has to be made, and then the power of God will enter the image and there will be proper guidance.

Yashar Koach to this week's Bar Mitzvah:

ANDREW BARTELL

Come hear him teach Torah this Saturday at 10:30AM

SOD...Finding Ourselves

....When Moses descends from the mountain, he sees what has happened in the camp and shatters the two tablets that G-d gave him. He also enters the camp, destroying the golden calf and punishing those who have not been loyal to G-d. The thing that confused me was that Moses punished the Israelites for trying to build a physical manifestation of G-d. Yet right after the golden calf incident, Moses 'asks' to see G-d as a way to renew his faith and resolve to lead the people forward. When G-d says NO, Moses seems satisfied to see his "achorai" or after effect.

Is there really a difference between Moses wanting to "see G-d," on Mt. Sinai, and the Israelites building the golden calf in order to be able to "see" a manifestation of G-d? I would like to talk about this idea because it has to do with worship and prayer and how we can find ways to connect with G-d.

....Regarding whether the Israelites could maintain their faith in G-d, Nechama Leibowitz says, "miracles, however awe-inspiring, cannot change human nature. They can only momentarily shake the human soul out of its everyday concepts, but they cannot, in themselves, effect a lasting transformation." I think she is trying to say that we shouldn't be so quick to judge the Israelites because keeping faith is harder than it seems. Also, we can imagine that the fear the Israelites felt was real. As Ibn Ezra says: "Moses was delayed. The people did not know how long Moses would be away, but since he left without provisions they expected him to return soon."

It seems that the Israelites felt disconnected from G-d and worried about the future. Their fear and anxiety made them think many thoughts including, "what does this fearsome G-d look like?" Martin Buber says that Moses' disappearance on the mountain struck fear into the people, and it is fear alone that made the people lack faith. They made the golden calf so that the power of G-d would enter the image to give them proper guidance.

The Israelites may have demanded a visible G-d, but idol worship was not the intention when they built the golden calf. As Or Hachayim states, "The objective of the golden calf was to replace Moses with an intermediary between G-d and his people. Their misguided intention was to set up this mediating force in honor of G-d not to replace him. I believe that the Israelites did, in fact, build the golden calf out of the fear that Moses might never return. They built it as an intermediary between G-d and His people, as a replacement for Moses. They needed a way to connect to G-d and, at that point in their experience, the golden calf seemed like the best solution.

While this parsha has been about idols, and particularly the golden calf, what I learned is that it's not about idols alone. It's about finding ways to pray to G-d so that we can connect with him. We usually blame the Israelites for worshipping idols and, even though it's wrong, we can now see that they were trying to fulfill a need.

Some people and religions relied on idols to do things for them. But our G-d of Israel doesn't work that way. Instead our G-d gives us gifts and it's up to us to use them to make the world better. For me, this is an important way to connect with G-d. It is our responsibility to work for Tikkun Olam, repairing the world, and to improve the lives of others around us....

-ANDREW BARTELL

MITZVAH of the WEEK...

ANDREW volunteered at two Veterinary Hospitals here in Larchmont and at the New Rochelle Humane Society where he is training as part of the Family Volunteer Program. "When I'm 14, I'll be able to do more work directly with the animals in the Humane Society. This volunteering relates directly to my drash because I believe animals are G-d's gifts to us as much as any others. It is our responsibility to take care of them with as much love as we give to each other."