



Ki Tisa: See Where They Came From

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

We were confused and overwhelmed. Moshe was gone for over forty days (according to our ancestors' calculations) and our nation feared the worst. We built the Golden Calf, proclaimed it as our god, and committed one of the most severe relationship trespasses in the history of our people. Hashem, in His divine wrath, ordered Moshe to descend the mountain. But before Moshe left, God told him of His plan to destroy the Jewish people. Moshe, the loving advocate of the Israel, begged and pleaded for Divine mercy for the fledgling Jewish nation.

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 exactly was Moshe saying to God? *Why are You so angry?* Did Moshe not understand God's anger and pain? Had Moshe somehow missed the severity of this act? How could he minimize what his beloved nation had just done? Furthermore, why does the Torah convey this exchange? What are we to learn from it? How are we to grow from this episode?

Rabbi Moshe Alshech (born in Turkey in 1507, and died in Safed in 1593) answers this question with a simple phrase, "*HaBeyt U'Reeh Mey'Heychan Ba'u, look and see from where they came.*" When someone we love makes a mistake, we have two options. We can focus exclusively on the misdeed and mistake or we can take a step back and look at the person in totality, reminding ourselves of his/her positive traits and deeds. Moshe says, "*Hashem, I know you are upset and I understand Your feelings of betrayal and sadness. But look how far they have come. This nation left Egypt just a few short months ago and in that short amount of time they have accomplished so much. They followed You into the desert. They followed You into the sea. They sang the magnificent words of Az Yashir with a united soul. They said Naaseh V'Nishma (we will do and we will listen) as one people with one heart. I know they messed up but don't just look at their mistakes look at their accomplishments as well. Don't just dwell on their failures, be cognizant of their successes.*" Moshe was not minimizing God's pain – he was trying to frame it appropriately and put it into a proper perspective.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov explains that we are obligated to be "*Dan Es Kol HaAdam L'Kaf Zechus, judge every person favorably.*" We generally understand this to mean that we should try our best to give every person the benefit of the doubt. But we're being asked so much more. We must try to find the good in every person. We must seek out the redeeming qualities within the other – even when the other is profoundly compromised. We must condition ourselves to not only judge favorably; but to see that which is favorable within the other. The Rebbe explains that this is not only true with others – this is true with ourselves as well. We must strive to see the good we possess despite the multitude of mistakes we have made. The ability to see the good in others and the ability to see the good in myself requires one very important thing – perspective. We are able to judge both others and ourselves favorably when we are able to not only see the negative shortcomings but the beautiful qualities as well.

In Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter 2 Mishna 13) Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai asked his students, "*What is the proper path a person should choose for himself?*" In other words what is the most important trait to possess? Rabbi Elazar responded, "*Ayin Tova, a good eye*". Rabbeinu Yonah explains that a "*good eye*" refers to proper perspective. The ability to maintain proper perspective in life allows one to navigate all of life's tumultuous circumstances and maintain relationships with all kinds of people.

It is in this gripping exchange between Moshe and God that the Torah teaches us the all-important need for proper perspective. Don't just see the calf, see all of the holiness. Don't just see the mistakes; look at all of the accomplishments. We don't control many of the situations and circumstances in life – but we absolutely control the way we choose to look at ourselves, at others and at life itself.