

PARSHAS KI SISA – AVI FRIEDWALD

The second Aliya in this week's sedra discusses the famous story of the Golden Calf. There are a number of questions that can be asked on this story:

Q1. "קוּם עִשָּׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים (לב:א) – Rise up and make for us gods."

Even if the Jewish people believed that Moshe was no longer alive, why do they now need new gods – did they really doubt the existence of Hashem?

Q2. "אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלוּךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (לב:ד) – This is your god, O Israel, which took you out from the Land of Egypt. "

How could the Jewish people believe that the golden calf that was just made took them out of Egypt 3 months ago? They weren't foolish. Chazal refer to the generation of the Midbar as a דֹּר דַּעָה – a generation of understanding.

R. Nebenzahl (the Rav of the Old City) quotes numerous Rishonim (Ramban and Ibn Ezra Shemos 32:1, Kuzari 1:97) who explain that the mistake wasn't as straight forward as we might think. The Bnei Yisrael knew that they didn't need a new god. What they did think is that Moshe was the conduit for Hashem to rest his Shechinah on the Jewish people. They therefore needed someone or something to replace this and guide them.

They also knew that in the vision of Yechezkel (1:10), Hashem is described as having a throne with a number of images – including an Ox. They understood that in the wilderness they were under the Hashgacha of Hashem represented by the face of the Ox (see Ramban Shemos 32:1) – and therefore they needed to make a conduit in this image.

This answers both questions. They didn't want to create a god – just a conduit to rest Hashem's shechinah on. When they said – "these are your gods who took you out of Egypt" – they meant that Hashem took the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, but now they are in the Midbar, Hashem will rest his Shechinah on the Ox.

What was the mistake in this? We know that the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash were built as a place for Hashem to rest His shechinah. True – He can rest it anywhere, but a designated place allows us to feel closer and focus our thoughts. So prior to the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash, why couldn't they create another place/object to rest Hashem's shechinah on?

R. Nebenzahl suggests that the mistake was that the Bnei Yisrael never consulted the *Daas Torah* to check if they were right in deciding that the Shechinah should rest on the Golden Calf. In fact, when Chur objected to the calf, they killed him. Had they consulted with Aharon, he would have advised them that their choice of conduit was not correct. Although the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash are conduits for Hashem's shechinah, they are based on Hashem's guidelines. There was no architect involved in designing these places. Hashem told Moshe how to construct the Mishkan. The first Beis Hamikdash was designed based on traditions handed down from Shmuel, to Dovid to Shlomo (c.f. Divrei Hayomim 1 28:19). The second Beis Hamikdash was designed through a combination of descriptions of the 1st Beis Hamikdash and descriptions in Yechezkel around the 3rd Beis Hamikdash (c.f. Rambam Hil' Beis Habechira 1:4).

R. Nebenzahl points out that the Aveira of the Jewish people in the Purim story was following the same vein. Achashveirosh made a feast, which he invited all his citizens to. The Jewish people decided to go, despite the fact that Mordechai told them not to. They decided on their own, that this needed to be done, to ensure good relations with the monarchy – and chose not to follow Mordechai's advice. Ironically, this backfired – and was the cause of more anti-semitism.

However, in the Purim story – the Jewish people realized their mistake – and then heeded Mordechai and Esther's request to fast and do Teshuva. As a result, they were saved.

Written in honour of my Bar Mitzva parsha.