

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt”l

18 Adar, 5769 Vol. 10, No. 21

Parashas Ki Sisa

“AND THEY SAID [TO AHARON], ‘ARISE AND MAKE FOR US A LEADER.’” (SHMOS 32:1)

It was only fashioned as a replacement for the leadership of Moshe

ONE OF THE MOST CATAclysmic events in Jewish history was the episode of the golden calf. Just a few weeks after the Jews heard and saw Hashem reveal Himself to them at Har Sinai, they seemingly “worship” idolatry. It is difficult to fathom how the Jewish nation could plummet from the heights of greatness to the abyss of idol worship in such a short span of time. Our sages explain that the Jews miscalculated the time that Moshe should have returned from speaking with Hashem. The Satan took advantage of their mistake by creating an environment of confusion, and showing the Jews an image of darkness, gloom and chaos, which tricked them into assuming that Moshe had died atop the mountain (Rashi *ibid.*). The Da’as Zekaynim further explains that the creation of the golden calf was not at all intended as an idol. Rather, it was only fashioned as a replacement for the leadership of Moshe, whom they assumed was not returning. The Da’as Zekaynim continues on to quote a verse in Tehillim (106:20) that takes *B’nei Yisrael* to task for exchanging Moshe – the man who had been the vehicle for so many of Hashem’s miracles – for a golden calf.

Dovid HaMelech, describing the tragedy of the Golden Calf from the perspective of hundreds of years later, focuses on the fact that Moshe had done so many miracles for them as Hashem’s messenger. How could they have traded such a leader for a statue? If this point had been of minor importance, Dovid would not have emphasized it, out of all the factors that impacted on *B’nei Yisrael’s* decision. Apparently, had they properly understood who Moshe was and what he represented to them, that appreciation would have stopped them from stumbling with the sin of the golden calf. Had *B’nei Yisrael* fully appreciated Moshe, they would have seen through the Satan’s trickery.

All the evidence pointed to one conclusion

How could this seemingly small difference in viewing Moshe properly have changed the outcome of their reaction? They had a strong proof in Moshe’s delay in returning from *Har Sinai*. The Satan was given free reign to display images of Moshe’s deathbed. All the evidence pointed to one conclusion: Moshe was no longer alive and they were leaderless in the barren desert. What difference would it make if they had grasped a greater appreciation of Moshe?

While confusion is one of the most powerful weapons in the *yetzer hara’s* arsenal, we have a defense system: We can look deeper into what we already know and gain a deeper understanding with more clarity and more feeling. *B’nei Yisrael* surely loved Moshe with all their hearts and profoundly appreciated all the miracles he had done. Yet, had the Jews felt that awareness just a slight degree more, that love would have sharpened their vision to recognize the antics of the Satan. All the darkness, confusion and visual images of deathbeds would have vanished like so much smoke and mirrors. This shortcoming led to the sin of the golden calf, which has caused all the pain and anguish our people have suffered through these past two millennia.

When we view the people in our lives, do we fully appreciate them?

When we view the people in our lives, do we fully appreciate them? If we stop to contemplate who they are and what they have done for us, we can reach deeper levels of love and loyalty. Let us pause to properly evaluate our fellow Jews and all that we have received from them, and use that appreciation to see through the *yetzer hara’s* illusions in our quest for truth and spiritual growth.