

Chutzpah, Sin, Loyalty and Rejoicing (Ki Tisah)

Chutzpah: Yiddish for gall, nerve, arrogance-whatever. -Howard Fast

By almost all accounts, the greatest sin of the generation of Israelites who left Egypt was the creation of the Golden Calf.

Moses was absent somewhere in the sky, together with God, receiving the Torah for us. The masses and the rabble, frightened perhaps by Moses' delayed return, became anxious. They pressed his brother, Aaron, the High Priest, to create an idol for them to worship. After collecting all their gold, Aaron put it into the fire, and voila! – out came the Golden Calf.

All of this occurred a mere forty days after the Jews heard the Ten Commandments from the Voice of God Himself. In those very commandments, He states very explicitly: Don't worship other gods. Don't make any idols. So, it would seem to be the height of rebellion, and outright 'chutzpah', to build this idol at the foot of Mt. Sinai, as close as one could physically get to God at that moment in time.

Aaron, in a delaying tactic, after having made the Calf, announces that there will be a general celebration the next day.

Moses finally descends when the party is in full swing, smashes the newly minted Tablets of The Law, destroys the Calf, has the Levite tribe kill the worst offenders, and extensively asks God for mercy (busy day).

We are told that if it weren't for the intervention of Moses, God would have wiped out the fledgling Jewish nation and started anew with Moses as the progenitor of a new Chosen People.

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475–1549) examines these passages in depth and makes a startling statement: Making the Golden Calf was horrible – but it was the festival surrounding it that really incensed God.

Bad enough to sin and show disloyalty to God, but to rejoice and take pleasure in it, to literally dance around the cause of God's wrath – that's really going overboard.

The sages say that every calamity, every punishment, even every minor mishap that happens to every Jew, since the sin of the Golden Calf until this very day, has a component of punishment from that event.

By the same token, every act of loyalty to God, by every one of us, no matter how small, surely absolves us of some of the damage our ancestors committed.

May we always merit doing acts of loyalty to God, and to know at what events and what occasions to celebrate.

Purim Sameach and Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

On the marriage of Pnina Baruch and Cheyn Shmuel Shmidman. Mazal Tov!