

Parshat Ki Tisa

Summary

- Everybody is to give half a shekel to help build the mishkan
- Bezalel and Aholiav are tasked with constructing the mishkan
- Due to miscounting, the people see that Moshe is delayed in descending Mount Sinai so they decide to create a golden calf and worship it
- Moshe comes down with the first set of luchot and breaks them after seeing the idolatry
- The tribe of Levi execute all the idolaters
- While the second set of luchot is being reinscribed, Moshe is shown the thirteen attributes of mercy
- Moshe returns with the second set of luchot. Upon return Moshe's face glows prompting him to wear a veil and cover his face at all times unless he is speaking to G-d or teaching Torah

Commentary

Rashi: 1050-1105, France

These are your gods: But it does not say, "These are our gods." -[from here [we learn] that the mixed multitude who had come up from Egypt were the ones who gathered against Aaron, and they were the ones who made it [the calf]. Afterwards, they caused the Israelites to stray after it.

אלה אלהיך: ולא נאמר אלה אלהינו, מכאן שערב רב שעלו ממצרים, הם שנקהלו על אהרן, והם שעשאוהו, ואחר כך הטעו את ישראל אחריו:

your people...have acted corruptly: Heb. שִׁחֲתֵעֲמָךְ. It does not say, "The people have acted corruptly," but "your people." Those are the mixed multitude whom you accepted on your own initiative, and whom you converted without consulting Me. You said, "It is good that converts cleave to the Shechinah." They have acted corruptly and have corrupted [others].

שחת עמך: שחת העם לא נאמר אלא עמך, ערב רב שקבלת מעצמך וגירתם ולא נמלכת בי, ואמרת טוב שידבקו גרים בשכינה, הם שחתו והשחיתו:

Both Rashi's here seem to have similar messages: It wasn't really some of the faithful Jews that began the sin and had the idea of the golden calf, rather, it was Egyptians that converted and came up with the Jews. In classic Rashi fashion he seems to put a positive spin on a negative situation, or at least here, minimize the wickedness and corruption of the scene. What makes the scene so bizarre is that after all the miracles Hashem has done to save the Jews how could they so easily forget and return to idol worship? These Rashi's were notable to me as they were able to provide at least some rationale to such a baffling scene.

Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 10

וְמָה רָאָה שִׁיגְדֵל לְאַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו לְקַדֵּשׁ אוֹתָם? אָמַר רַבִּי מְנִי דְשָׁאֵב וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ דְּסַכְנִין בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לִוִּי: בְּשַׁעָה שֶׁבִקְשׁוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתוֹ מַעֲשֶׂה, אָמְרוּ לְאַהֲרֹן, קוּם עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים (שמות לב, א). עָמַד חוּר בֶּן כָּלֵב וְגַעַר בָּהֶן, מִיָּד עָמְדוּ עָלָיו וְהִרְגוּהוּ. רָאָה אַהֲרֹן וְנִתְיָרָא מַעֲצָמוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֵּרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לִפְנָיו (שמות לב, ה). הָיָה קוֹרָא בּוֹ, וַיֵּרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לִפְנָיו. תַּדַּע לָךְ שֶׁהֲרֹגוֹ לְחֹר, שֶׁבְּשַׁעָה שֶׁעָלָה מֹשֶׁה לְהָר מָה אָמַר לָהֶם: הִנֵּה אַהֲרֹן וְחוּר עִמָּכֶם מִי בַעַל דְּבָרִים יִגֹּשׁ אֲלֵיהֶם (שמות כד, יד). כְּשִׁירֵד, אֵין אַתָּה מוֹצֵא שֶׁהִזְכִּיר לְחֹר לֹא בְּחַיִּים וְלֹא בַּמּוֹת. וְמָהוּ אוֹמֵר: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן מָה עָשִׂה לָךְ הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי הִבֵּאתָ וְגו' (שמות לב, כא) הָיָה, שֶׁהֲרֹגוֹ לְחֹר.

Why did He elevate Aaron and his sons to that holy station? R. Mani of Shaab and R. Joshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi: When the Israelites pleaded with him to erect the golden calf, they said to Aaron: *Up, make us a god* (Exod. 32:1). Thereupon Hur the son of Caleb arose and rebuked them. They attacked him and killed him. Aaron beheld what had happened and feared (*vayir'a*) for his own life, as it is said: *And when Aaron saw (vaya'r) he built an altar before it* (ibid., v. 5). You know that they killed Hur, for Moses told them before he ascended the mountain: *Behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whosoever hath a cause, let him come near unto them* (ibid. 24:14), but after he descended, you find that he did not refer to Hur either as living or as dead. What does Scripture say: *And Moses said to Aaron: "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought a great sin upon them?"* (ibid. 32:21). Obviously they must have killed Hur. (sefaria)

Another surprising part that the text does not address specifically is Aaron's role in the organizing and construction of the golden calf. It simply states that the people said "Up, make us a God" and Aaron helped do so without any hints of reprimand or hesitation. This is the issue that the midrash addresses. The common and correct explanation that most of us have probably learned is that Aaron helped in an attempt to stall. This midrash uses the text to prove Aaron's real motives and provide more clarification on the story. It explains that Hur the son of Caleb first rebuked the Israelites and was immediately killed. How do we know this? When Moshe ascended he mentioned both Aaron and Hur's name yet when he comes down from Har Sinai he only talks to Aaron and does not mention Hur's name. Furthermore, we know Aaron was afraid for his life after seeing Hur killed because it says "And when Aaron saw he built an altar before it," meaning after he "saw" what they did to Hur.