

D'var Torah for Parshat Ki tisa  
by Uriel Pavolotzky

After the Jewish people heard the Ten Commandments, Moshe told the nation that he would go up to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights to receive the Tablets and learn Torah with G-d. As Rashi explains, the Jews incorrectly counted the few hours remaining in the day he went up as the first day so that when he had one more day to go, they thought Moshe might not be coming back. So they decided to build a golden calf; an object that they thought could bring G-d's blessings to them and guide them through the desert.

When Moshe returned and saw what the people had done, he smashed (or dropped) the Tablets, and went about to punish the perpetrators. He asked for volunteers to help:

וַיַּעֲמֹד מֹשֶׁה בַּשְׁעַר הַמִּקְדָּשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לְהִיא אֱלֹהִים וַיָּסַבֵּר אֶלָּיו כִּלְבָנִי לוּי:

*"Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said: "Whoever is for the Lord, [let him come] to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered around him."*

Rashi quotes the Talmud which notices that all the tribe of Levi came!

מכאן שכל השבט כשר  
"From here [we learn] that the entire tribe was righteous". -[from Yoma 66b]

This means that the tribe of Levi had nothing to do with the golden calf. They didn't support it, they didn't worship it, they were totally against it. Before I looked at the commentaries for a reason for their opposition, I thought that the explanation must be that they were more serious about worshiping G-d and more knowledgeable about the Torah of the Patriarchs. The Talmud says that the tribe of Levi had not been enslaved. They were the spiritual elite.

But then, I saw that The Baalei Tosafot (French scholars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) gave an entirely different explanation. This is what they say:

ונראה לפ' שהוי שבט לוי קרובים למשה לפיכך לא נתרצה אחד מהם להמיר מנהיג במקומו

*"It appears that because the tribe of Levi was related to Moshe, not one of them would agree to replace Moshe as leader."*

The Baalei Tosafot mean that the relationship between Moshe and the tribe of Levi assured that the whole tribe of Levi didn't do anything wrong. The people who led the making of the Golden Calf must have had very convincing reasons why it was a proper thing to do. The Levites greater dedication to G-d would not have saved them from going along with it. Their personal loyalty to Moshe, their "tribe mate", gave them the strength to say "No" to the project.

This teaches us a very important idea! We all have times of weakness when we are very close to doing something wrong, but, if we have a friend or somebody to whom we feel connected, it will help us get through it. For example, in the *תורה* when Yosef was in Potiphar's house, he wanted to sleep with Potiphar's wife but when he thought of his father, he knew that he wouldn't like it. This helped save him from doing the wrong thing. This shows us how important friendship is. We should make friends with good people so when we don't have the strength to do the right thing, we will choose to make the right choice so we won't disappoint our friends. Our relationships with our parents and teachers can also help us this way. It was these relationships that helped the tribe of Levi and Yosef get through hard times, and they can help us too.