DVAR TORAH PARSHAT KI TISA
EXODUS 30
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Summary

- Moses on mountain for 40 days
- Israelites get restless they think he has died because he did not return when they thought he would
- Moses comes down after being with God and receiving the 10 commandments from Gods hand
- On his way down before he sees the golden calf god tells him what they have done and that he will destroy them and get Moses new people to lead
- Moses argues with God, even though this people has already complained about his leadership, disobeyed him, lost faith, and accused him of liberating them only so they could die in the desert he does not take the offer.
- God relents, the people are spared God's wrath but must face the wrath of Moses, he is incensed with their actions and makes them eat the ashes of the golden calf.

THE QUESTION:

Why didn't Moses take God's offer, why not abandon the people and start over, they don't have any real love for him or confidence in him; they abandon him because he is a few hours late?

The great rabbis of the Torah Commentaries had the same question. Why doesn't Moses abandon the people and start over as God offers him.

R. Huna in Exodus Rabbah, a collection of midrashim, or folktales about this second book of the Torah from which our reading comes this week explained Moses' loyalty to the people this way.

[God] is like a father who helps a son open a store on a crime infested street and then gets angry at his son for engaging in crime and evil. A friend says, you are guilty too, for you put him on the street and surrounded him with

evil, did you expect the environment to have no influence on him?

In other words, according to this teaching of R Huna, Moses intervenes on the people behalf because he blames god for surrounding them with idol worshipers for so long. It's the nature vs nurture argument, these people who not long again spent 435 as slaves in Egypt have only known the world of paganism and idolatry, of course they reverted to that practice the moment Moses left them alone as he went up the mountain, what else would you expect? They were incapable of over coming their circumstances and conditions in which they had been raised. Moses like a parent who recognizes that children without sleep, or amped up on "screen-time" or sugar will exhibit irrational behavior which is totally rational to the parent that considers the underlying circumstances understands the process and challenge of rehabilitation, knows there will be setbacks and intervenes. In this case not just to save a child from the ill effects of a temper tantrum but to save God

from performing an injustice because of God's own temper tantrum.

Commentators also point out that what really upset Moses was the language God used to describe the actions of the people. Where previously God had always called the Israelites MY people, now in announcing the divine punishment God says to Moses YOUR people, as if to imply it was Moses fault alone. When they are good they belong to God and when they are bad they belong to Moses. Again, the rabbinic commentaries offer a helpful analogy explaining that the situation is like the grower and the vineyard owner. When the wine is good credit is given to the vineyard, the grapes, the soil, the climate, the seasons, when the wine is bad the grower is at fault. Moses is upset with God that God is trying to have it both ways. In essence Moses says to God, "These people, they belong to both of us, we are on the hook for the good and the bad they do and neither of us can abandon them."

Abraham Joshua Heschel, the great modern Jewish philosopher and theologian wrote, “in a free society some are guilty, all are responsible.”

Protecting others from harsh judgments, by pleading there case (perhaps why we have so many Jewish lawyers) and urging understanding of those pressures and conditions over which they may have little or no control (perhaps why we have so many Jewish psychologists and mental health professionals) is judged within Judaism as a high moral obligation, as a mitzvah, commandment worthy of the likes of Moses, perhaps why so many Jewish parents their argumentative and oppositional child is in fact the messiah.

Moses argued with God not over who was guilty but over who would be responsible. Moses was first a foremost a shepherd, indeed that basic work experience is listed by God as a fundamental reason why God chose him to lead the people, shepherds, parents, teachers, coaches, rabbis and each of us when we take the time to really understand a situation not just react our of anger or resentment recognize

that as WH Auden famously wrote, “There’s always another story. There’s more than meets the eye.” A lesson as old as this ancient biblical story but one that we so often forget.

When we live in relationship, no one is an Island, Moses is in relationship with God, both are in relationship with the Jewish people, we are in relationship with each other whether we entered into it under the chuppah, at the voting booth or because we are both waiting for the light to change.

Assigning guilt as to who is to blame for our problems, our failures, our misdeeds is to sit in passenger seat holding a map and argue with the driver for getting you lost. When you are in relationship, covenantal, romantic, platonic, social or any other you are on the journey together. Maybe one is more guilty than the other, someone turned left while the other said right, but now that you are lost what is to be gained by only making one responsible for finding the way back home? We can stand there assigning blame all day

long, but at the end of the day we are stuck in the desert together, so we have to find a way out, we have to move past the Golden Calf moment, the fight we had over this or that, if we value each other, if we value the relationship we have created together, then together we are responsible for fixing it.

But who will be Moses, who will argue for the relationship to continue? In this case its easy to be God, its easy to get angry, give up and want to start over, the harder thing, the holy thing is, in spite of all that has been said and done, to remember what brought you together in the first place; move beyond the Gold Calf and get on with the journey to the promised land.

A few verses later Moses smashes the 2 tablets of the 10 commandments that God had written, his anger wells up and bursts forth, but then after some time, he goes back up the mountain sits down with God and they write them together, God dictates and Moses transcribes – they work out their differences through collaboration on repairing the breech. Moses then does the same with the Jewish people, after forcing them to repent for the Golden Calf he appoints judges and tribal leaders to help lead the people, calming their fears, reassuring them they will not be abandoned. In

response the people, at least for a period of time work together with Moses to establish a civil and just society. They leave the Golden Calf in the rear-view mirror and focus on the promised land over the horizon and how they will get from here to there.