



Carnegie Shul Chatter

February 21, 2019



Light Candles 5:46pm Shabbat Services 9:20am

Not our Finest Moment

This week's parshah, Ki Tisa, tells the story of the Golden Calf.

There are many explanations for why the Children of Israel create and worshiped this idol, and the one I have chosen to share with you comes from the Connecticut Jewish Ledger and was written by Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, an ordained rabbi, a qualified psychotherapist and the Executive Vice President Emeritus of the Orthodox Union, the largest Orthodox Jewish organization in North America; a position he has held since 2002.

I hope you find it informative.

We've Still Got Idols

Abraham's father was an idol maker. Our ancestors built a golden calf, an idol, even though God had just rescued them from bondage in Egypt. Why this fascination with idols?

Even today, people worship idols. Perhaps not as gods, but nonetheless, we turn people into idols and place them on pedestals. We don't pray to them, but we refer to them as "superstars."

Wasn't there someone, an athlete or a movie star, or a rock singer, or a musician, that you once said, "He/she is my idol?" Did that person really deserve to be placed on that high a pedestal? Are they really any better than anyone else? Would you really vote for a President, or buy a car or some other expensive item because this "idol" says to?

The fact of the matter is that all of these "idols," these "superstars" are human just like everyone else. They may have wonderful talents, but they make human mistakes, sometimes run afoul of the law, and suffer the same joys and pains as you and me.

I certainly do not let them tell me how to live my life. They are not gods. They are not even close.

There is only one God, the God of our forefathers, the God who delivered us from Egypt, and who gave us the Torah. He is the only one that I worship.

Torah Portion – Ki Tisa

By Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

When people achieve great accomplishments, having put great effort and toil into them, they experience a sense of exhilaration and excitement. A “high.” Soon afterwards, and often very soon afterwards, there is a “comedown” from that “high.” It is as if, now that the goal with which one had been long preoccupied was reached, life had become meaningless. There is nothing further to do, no ongoing purpose. A pervasive sense of emptiness ensues.

The struggle to fill that emptiness is fraught with danger. Often, it passes in short order, with no harm done. But other times people attempt to fill that emptiness in ways which result in great, and sometimes tragic, difficulties.

The psychological mechanism I have just described helps to explain the episode of the Golden Calf, which is discussed in this week’s Torah portion, Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35).

Just a few short weeks ago, in the Torah portion of Yitro, we read of how the children of Israel experienced the most momentous occasion in human history. The Almighty revealed Himself to them at Mount Sinai in an awe-inspiring atmosphere of thunder and lightning. They heard the voice of God, and they were spiritually elevated by His revelation. They were, almost literally, on a “high.” Moses then ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for 40 days and 40 nights. During that time, the people come down from their “high.” His disappearance mystifies them, they become impatient and irritable.

“When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people came together unto Aaron, and said unto him: ‘Up, make us a god...’ And all the people broke off all the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron...he...made it a molten calf and they said: ‘This is thy god, O Israel...’ He built an altar before it... And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry.” (Exodus 32:1-6)



How can one explain a process of spiritual deterioration as drastic as this? Just weeks ago the Jewish people were on the highest possible level of religiosity and commitment to the one God. Now they are dancing and prancing before a golden idol.

Their reaction is inexplicable, but a common human phenomenon nonetheless. People are capable of attaining greatness, but they are not as capable of sustaining greatness. They can achieve “highs” of all kinds, but there is an inevitable comedown.

This concept is very well expressed in the following verse: “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?” (Psalms 24:3)



Homiletically, this has been interpreted to mean that even after the first question is answered, and we learn “who may ascend the mountain,” the question still remains: “Who can continue to stand there?” It is relatively easy to ascend to a high level; much more difficult is remaining at that high level and preserving it.

One of the most insightful spiritual thinkers of our age, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, believes that the best example of deterioration following an exciting climax is the experience

of childbirth: the phenomenon known as “postpartum depression.” A woman has just experienced what is probably the highest of all “highs,” the emergence of a child from her womb. That experience may be followed by a sense of depression, which is sometimes incapacitating, even disastrous.

The physiological process of giving birth calls upon the utilization of every part of the mother’s body, from her muscles and nervous system to her hormonal fluids. In the process she has achieved the greatest of all achievements, the production of another human being. But soon afterwards, when the body, as it were, has nothing left to do, she feels depleted and empty. She can easily sink into a depression, sometimes deep enough to merit a clinical diagnosis of “postpartum depression.”

This presents an important lesson in our personal spiritual lives. Often we experience moments of intense spirituality, of transcendence. But those moments are brief, and transitory. When they end we despair of ever returning to those precious experiences. We must take hope in the knowledge that almost all intense human experiences are transitory, and are followed by feelings of hollowness. We can ascend the mountain, but we cannot long stand there. We must accept our descent, our frustrating failures and limitations, and persist in climbing the mountain.

This is the lesson of this week’s parsha. Our people ascended a spiritual mountain. They then descended into an orgy of idolatry. But then they persisted and with the assistance of God’s mercy and, as we read later in the Torah portion, received this divine assurance: “And he said, behold, I make a covenant: Before all Thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth...And all the people... shall see the work of the Lord...” (Exodus 34:10)

Honor Your Loved Ones

Commemorate a loved one by **dedicating a yahrzeit plaque** in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one’s yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur.



Or **sponsor a kiddush** in honor or in memory of a loved one; your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. **To purchase a plaque, for only \$175 or sponsor a kiddush for only \$36**, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.