

D'var Torah for Brotherhood Shabbat – Ki Tissa 33:12 – 34:35

Today we read the final third of Parashat Ki Tissa. That means I don't get to talk about census and taxes, which is frankly a relief in this election year; and I don't get to talk about the incident of the golden calf. No I get to talk about a number of negotiations Moses has with G-d and their results. So it's Brotherhood Shabbat and I want to somehow tie that to brotherhood. Well, Aaron's mentioned in the last couple verses and he and Moses are brothers, so ... done.

I think there is a key lesson from this final third of the Parasha, which is that G-d is not just an abstraction but a part of everything we do and have. To this point G-d and Moses have a pretty exclusive relationship. G-d doesn't pay much direct heed to anyone else and to everyone but Moses G-d is pretty much an abstraction. G-d is real enough – they've seen the pillar of smoke and so on but there's no direct contact, no direct relationship, and as a result, no confidence that G-d cares about them at all. After forty days and nights with no contact at all, it's not all that surprising that doubt would start to creep in.

Moses, I think, realizes this and tries to get G-d to be closer to the people. Moses gets right in G-d's face, figuratively, of course given that he can't actually see G-d's face – more on that in a bit. But Moses is challenging G-d, telling G-d that He is being inconsistent. To paraphrase, Moses says, “You **say** I've gained your favor but you're sure not acting like it. What's up with sending someone else to lead us around? That's got to be you so everyone else, including your own people, knows that the Israleites are distinguished. And if we're not, don't bother having us move at all!” It is a convincing argument because G-d agrees to go in the lead.

Moses then asks to see G-d's face. G-d won't allow that but does the next best thing, showing his back, and in the process recites the thirteen attributes ... Adonai Adonia El Rachum vChanun etc. that we recite many times over the course of Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. That leads to a number of commandments from G-d that are not very abstract at all – such as observance of Shabbat and festivals, some of the Kashrut rules, and that G-d will drive out their enemies. Further the core of these, the ten commandments, is rewritten on tablets that Moses carves, not some magically produced stone that G-d pulls out of the air. Finally there's the physical changes Moses undergoes. All those together, along with other artifacts produced earlier in the Parasha, provide the Israelites with a much stronger sense of G-d's presence and they are ready to move forward.

Shabbat Shalom.