



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 16 | Ki Sisa | Sichah 3

The Verse:

After the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, G-d told Moshe, “And now... let My anger burn against them and I shall annihilate them.” The Torah records Moshe’s response: “Moshe pleaded before G-d, his L-rd, and said, “Why, G-d, should Your anger burn against Your people, whom You have taken out of Egypt with great power and a strong hand?” (*Shemos* 32:11)

The Rashi:

Why, G-d, should Your anger burn — Is a wise man jealous of anyone other than another wise man? A strong man of anyone other than another strong man?

The Questions:

- 1) According to Rashi, Moshe was questioning G-d’s anger at idolatry itself. Moshe argued that it was unbecoming for G-d to be jealous of a powerless, empty object of idolatrous worship such as a golden calf.

It seems disrespectful, however, to speak to G-d in such a casual, critical manner. Furthermore, the *Talmud* records that the Roman general Agrippas challenged Rabbi Gamliel with the same question! (*Avoda Zarah* 55a)

How could Moshe have asked a disrespectful question, one that was echoed generations later by a crude idolator like Agrippas?

2) Why does Rashi specifically use “a wise man” and “a strong man” in his analogy?

The Explanation:

The wording of Moshe’s response, “Why, G-d, should Your anger burn?” bothered Rashi. G-d had just said, “I shall annihilate them”; shouldn’t Moshe have responded to this assertion before addressing G-d’s anger? The fact that Moshe didn’t do so suggested to Rashi that Moshe was concerned about the manner in which G-d planned to punish the people. It did not surprise Moshe that there would be severe repercussions, even capital punishment, for the sin of idolatry. There was a judicial process, however, that had to be followed. Witnesses were needed and the court had to deliberate. But G-d implied that He wanted to:

- a) “Annihilate” all of the Jewish people, even those who did not serve the Golden Calf, as evidenced from G-d’s conclusion, “I shall make you” — Moshe alone — “into a great nation”; and He wanted to
- b) do so immediately, “and now,” without deliberation or witnesses.

This reaction showed Moshe that G-d was not merely responding to the actions of the individual Jews — if this were the case, G-d would have followed the judicial process. Instead, He was enraged by the presence of the Golden Calf, and that spurred Him to share with Moshe the drastic course of action that He planned.

Therefore, Rashi interprets Moshe’s response as addressing G-d’s anger directed at the idol: “Is a wise man jealous of any but a wise man? A strong man of any but a strong man?”

The particular reason for G-d’s anger at the Golden Calf was the insinuation that it was the calf that had taken the people out of Egypt, as G-d told Moshe, “Go, descend... they have made themselves a molten calf... and they said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.’” (*Shemos* 32:8-9)

To counter this assertion, Moshe responded by saying that the calf had none of the qualities that G-d employed in redeeming the Jewish people from Egypt. To coordinate and devise a plan for Egypt's ruin and the Jewish people's escape required wisdom and strength. The calf had none of these; therefore, Moshe said that G-d had no reason to be angry.

The Deeper Dimension:

In a deeper sense, Moshe also argued that the Jews who served the Calf should also not rouse G-d's anger: "Why, G-d, should Your anger burn against **Your people.**" Every Jew, in their deepest core, knows that G-d is the only true power. Even while bowing down to the Calf, the Jews' souls clung to the truth that only G-d is "strong and wise." Therefore, Moshe argued that G-d should allay His anger, for every Jew was still united with G-d.