

Ki Tissa

The story is a familiar one:

“When the people saw that Moses was long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.” Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” And the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron announced: “Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!” Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance.” (Exo. 32:1-6)

Among the most difficult notions to accept is the belief in a transcendent God; a God that defies human senses. In rational terms, God cannot be seen nor heard. All the ancient Israelites saw at Sinai was the thunder, lighting, and cloud that covered the mountain. The believable was the concrete, the leadership of Moses. When Moses did not immediately return from Mt. Sinai, the Israelites excitement, resulting from the transcendent God’s revelation, was quickly abandoned. The people fell back on the only gods they could be certain of, those they could see and touch, in this instance a golden calf.

Skip ahead to our time. Have things changed that much? 72% of Jews profess a belief in God. Among the 72%, only 39% maintain absolute certainty in God’s existence. Put simply, 28% of Jews do not believe in God and of those who say they do, 61% are agnostics.

The Danish Christian theologian and philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, introduced the world to the existential notion of a *Leap of Faith*. Kierkegaard taught it takes no faith to believe in a pencil or pen because you can see and touch it. But to understand the transcendent God (what Kierkegaard refers to as the *unrecognizable*) one must make the leap to faith. It doesn’t mean one cannot have doubts of God’s existence, faith is how one deals with the doubts.

On a more human level, this can be compared to an act of love between two individuals. Here, too, we deal with a concept—*love*—that cannot be touched or seen. Every loving relationship is accompanied by a degree of doubt (“can I live with certain characteristics or personality flaws in this person I so care for?”). The act of love is not blinding oneself to their partner’s reality, it is recognizing flaws and yet still willing to take a *leap of faith* in the ultimate goodness of one’s partner. The *leap* is the beginning of true love on both a human and divine level.

No, it is not easy to believe in the One God any more than it is to find the perfect relationship, but the challenge can be rewarding.

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