

## **For they are a stiff-necked nation. (34:9)**

When the Torah describes the sin of the Golden Calf, we observe Hashem referring to the Jewish People as “a stiff-necked nation.” It almost implies that it was this character trait – that seems to be inherently Jewish – which is blamed for their capitulation to the Golden Calf. It, therefore, begs elucidation why Moshe *Rabbeinu* uses this very same character trait as a defense for saving the Jews? How can a trait which appears to have played a pivotal and negative role in the catalyzation of such an egregious sin, actually be the reason that Moshe presents to Hashem for our forgiveness?

**Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita**, explains that as *Klal Yisrael's* quintessential leader, Moshe was presenting the very reason for remaining with the Jewish People – despite their present indiscretion. Moshe turned to Hashem, and said, “*Ribono Shel Olam*, You are castigating the nation because of their stiff-necked nature. Is this really a negative trait? Is this a reason to find them guilty? Indeed, I think that this very trait is what distinguishes the Jewish People from the rest of the world. This indicates that they have a backbone, an ability to withstand outside pressure and numerous difficult challenges to their faith. On the contrary, ‘Let Hashem walk in our midst.’ Let us look to the future. Every nation caved in under various pressures. All of the supposed “faithful,” when under pressure, wavered and resorted to a host of other beliefs, including Islam or Christianity. Why? Because they had no backbone – were not stiff-necked – were weak!

“True, my nation sinned gravely against You. But, because of their strong, stiff-necked nature, they will repent and cling to You, and never renege on their commitment to Hashem. We are Jews because we are stiff-necked and have been able to triumph over life’s challenges to our faith.”