

The people saw that Moshe delayed in descending the mountain. (32:1)

The egregious sin of the Golden Calf was precipitated by a tragic error on the part of the people. This, of course, does not mitigate their sin. Had their *emunah*, faith, been without reservation, they would not have fallen prey to misconception. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* ascended *Har Sinai*, he said that he would return forty days later – in the morning. The people thought that the day he ascended the mountain was included in the count – when, in fact, it was not. Thus, on the fortieth day, which was the sixteenth of *Tammuz*, (Moshe ascended on *Sivan 7*), they expected him to return. This was their error. Furthermore, *Satan* seized upon their fear and uncertainty by conjuring up an image of Moshe's bier being carried through Heaven by Angels. As a result of their nascent faith, which was yet to be concretized, they erred and became putty in *Satan's* hands.

It is well-known that as *Rav* of Pressburg, and by extension, the primary Torah leader of Hungarian Jewry, the *Chasam Sofer* was a great believer in the concept of Secession. Consequently, the Orthodox community of Pressburg was encouraged to secede from having any religious affiliation with members of secular Jewish movements. He felt strongly that to influence others, one must himself be strong, and this could happen only if they maintained their own community – unmarred and untainted by alien religious philosophies.

This position was not accepted by all. Indeed, liberal leaders felt that Jewish outreach could only be achieved when one was a part of the greater community. Once one separated himself, his chances for achieving his intended goals were greatly diminished. The *Chasam Sofer's* position was later accepted by many of the spiritual leaders in Poland and Lithuania. Once, at a meeting to discuss either joining the ranks of the secessionists, or continuing to maintain strong diplomatic relations with the secularists, each side presented its position and arguments. **Horav Meir Arik, zl**, *Rav* of Tarno and a primary student of the *Chasam Sofer*, asked to speak. A powerful orator and brilliant scholar, he said: "I think our question can be elucidated by delving into the *Chumash* and *Rashi* of *Parashas Ki Sisa*.

"The day that the people assumed Moshe was supposed to return, was a day filled with ambiguity. On the one hand, Moshe had given them his word that he would return, and he had never lied to them. On the other hand, he was not yet back, and they had just seen an image of Moshe's funeral. What should they think?

"Aharon *HaKohen* was acutely aware of their error, but he did not know how to convince them that Moshe was coming back – tomorrow. Aharon figured that by remaining in opposition to them, he had no chance of convincing them to halt the creation of the idol. Only by joining with them and establishing a relationship could he somehow convince them to wait another day.

"When Moshe descended from the mountain, the first order of business was to shatter the *Luchos*,

Tablets. Following this definitive action, he burned the Golden Calf and had the people drink the ashes mixed with water. He then called out *Mi l'Hashem elai*, 'Who is for Hashem, stay by me.' It was not until the next day that Moshe reproved the people, admonishing them for the great transgression which they had committed. Why did he wait until the next day to give them *mussar*, rebuke? Why did he not immediately chastise them – and then afterwards burn the Golden Calf and feed them the ashes?

“The answer is that as long as people have before them an idol which they created through sorcery and witchcraft – *mussar* has no place. It will not be effective. The words of rebuke will fall on deaf ears. At such a point, one calls out, 'Who is for Hashem come to me.' It is only after one has been rid of the idol and the people are shocked backed into reality that they now realize their iniquitous actions. Then one can reach out to them, by appealing to their hearts to repent their actions.”

“Aharon acted unintentionally, since he was uncertain how to rule in such a case: Does he join them and work from within to stave off the sin; or does he maintain a strict opposition from without – and hope for success? The actions of those who follow Aharon's path of inclusion are no longer considered unintentional, since the *Halachic* ruling follows Moshe, who intimated by his actions that one does not comingle with those who are under the influence of *Satan*. There is no room for discussion. One who thinks that he will succeed by including himself with the non-believers and working with them from within, is greatly mistaken.”