

**And the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, "Rise up, make for us gods...The entire people removed the gold rings... He (Aharon) took it from their hands and bound it up in a cloth, and fashioned it into a molten calf. (32:1, 3,4)**

One of the most grievous sins and tragic episodes in the history of our People is the *chet ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf. What makes things worse is Aharon *HaKohen's* involvement in its construction. Indeed, when Moshe questioned Aharon about his role in its creation, he responded that he was overwhelmed by the people. Hoping to create some delay, he had them bring their gold and jewelry to him. Regrettably, their response to his request was incredible. It always seems to be like this when people have the passion of sin in their hearts: nothing stands in their way. Aharon then threw their gold and jewelry into the fire and a golden calf emerged. He was not prepared for this surprising result of his innocuous action. After all is said and done, we still must understand the rationale for Aharon's action. Why did he throw the gold into the fire? What was he trying to prove? Moreover, why did he defer to the people's demands? A man who stood before Pharaoh, unwavering in his demand, should not have feared a group of wild rabble rousers.

In addressing Aharon's enigmatic role in the *chet ha'eigel* the **Shem MiShmuel** first focuses upon *Klal Yisrael's* original demand for a replacement for Moshe. What was Moshe's greatest achievement in regard to this fledgling nation? He provided leadership. He was the focal point around which they all rallied. He was their unifying agent. He transformed a multitude of people, who had previously been subject to slavery and deprivation, into a cohesive unit, ready to serve the Almighty. His stature and prodigious spirituality guided them through their collective experiences, helping them to handle their petty differences. He was their paradigm of selflessness, their beacon of inspiration to overcome their selfish interests. The loss of Moshe, albeit brief, threw the developing nation into a turmoil. They were like a ship without a rudder. They had no direction and no stabilizing force to navigate them. They were no longer unified, no longer cohesive.

They came to Aharon seeking alternative leadership. They stood before him scared, confused, bereft of their leader. They made all kinds of demands, most of them nonsensical and some even rebellious in nature. Aharon understood the source of the problem; he was acutely aware of the stimulus for their spurious demands. They needed unity, a galvanizing force to unify them during their wait for Moshe's imminent return. Aharon realized that a community-wide project would unify the people. The physical act of contributing towards one common goal would meld the individual personalities, represented by their jewelry, into one community, symbolized by the single gold ingot that Aharon would make. Who would be better than Aharon to effect such a goal? He was the *Kohen Gadol*, the personification of peace and harmony. He understood the source of their problem, and he addressed it.

How could this be considered wrong? How was this noble goal transferred into a calamitous sin

whose punitive effect is still felt today? Aharon wanted to create a gold ingot, the symbol of *Klal Yisrael's* unity. Suddenly, to his horror and dismay, there emerged a golden calf, an idol. Aharon did not realize that along with those who were sincerely confused, there joined the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude of non-Jewish "add-ons", who had left Egypt out of fear for their lives. They infused a non-*Torah* oriented seed into *Klal Yisrael*. They undermined their unity. When an alien item is added to a group, the result is complete ruin. Unity can only be effected when all members sincerely seek it. When there are those who have their own agenda, who use the concept and goals of unity as a vehicle to exploit and deter others - it is disastrous. That is precisely what they had intended. Aharon's ingot was poisoned by the infusion of evil forces, whose self-oriented goals destroyed the common good he sought to achieve. In the end, Aharon was rewarded for his virtuous aims. He aspired for the common good, to effect unity until Moshe returned. His intentions were rewarded when he was selected to serve in the *Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash*. The Sanctuary is the focal point for all of *Klal Yisrael* to seek out Hashem, to serve Him through prayer and sacrifice. The *Kohen Gadol's* task is to unify the hearts and minds of *Klal Yisrael* in their service of Hashem. Aharon was eminently suited for this role.