

## **"Go down, for your people have dealt corruptly... they have turned aside quickly from the way... they have made for themselves a molten calf." (32:7,8)**

In its narrative regarding the *chet ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf, the *Torah* paints *Klal Yisrael's* transgression as a truly dark and bleak picture. Aharon *Ha'Kohen* yielded to the demands of the people and made the *eigel*, which was to be used as an *avodah zarah*, idol. The people responded to this idol as if it were some sort of pagan divinity. They sang and danced with excitement at the prospect of "worshipping" their newly found god.

The *Talmud*, on the other hand, does not seem to indict *Bnei Yisrael* in such sharp terms. First, *Chazal* teach us that only a small proportion of the Jews were involved in this iniquitous act. The *erev rav*, mixed multitude of Egyptians who claimed allegiance to Judaism, were the true perpetrators of this transgression. Second, Aharon never intended to create an idol. He wanted only to make some sort of temporary symbol of leadership until Moshe returned. Indeed, the *eigel* was in the image of the ox which is on the Heavenly Chariot of Hashem's throne. If this is the case, why is there such a disparity between the *Torah's* characterization of the incident and *Chazal's* explanation of what really happened?

*Horav Nissan Alpert z.l.*, derives an important lesson from this discrepancy. True, there may have been only a small group of people involved in worshipping the Golden Calf, and possibly their intentions were misplaced. We may add to this a host of other excuses and justifications.

We must look, however, at how this act was perceived. People interpret this to be a dastardly act of idol worship. Until this very day we attempt to explain the rationale behind this "treasonous" act. Describing this perception, the *Torah* suggests that a small group of misguided individuals can bring ruin upon a nation. It demonstrates how a *tzaddik's* acquiescence to the demands of an unruly crowd, his love for promoting peace and harmony, can be perceived as collaboration in treason against the Almighty. We must be vigilant about every endeavor we undertake. We not only must be above reproach, but care must be taken that our actions not be misconstrued. Regrettably, perception invariably clouds the reality of any given situation.