

The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, “Rise up, make for us gods!” (32:1)

One error, one simple mistake was all that was needed to precipitate *Klal Yisrael's* tragic rebellion, their egregious demonstration of infidelity-- the construction of the Golden Calf. How did a people who had recently received the Torah under circumstances that were unreal become so faithless, almost overnight? It was all due to a mistake, an error in judgment. They thought that Moshe was to have been back, but they erred. Once they exhibited fear, *Satan* was certain that he had ensnared them. They were putty in his hands. He seized the opportunity and created an illusion of a deceased Moshe being carried in Heaven. This is all that was needed to break their resolve. I could understand this, had this not occurred after they had witnessed the greatest Revelation in history. After being privy to hearing the *Shechinah* and seeing such an unparalleled display of Heavenly-orchestrated miracles and wonders, they should have maintained their faith. An error, regardless of its magnitude, should not have been able to sway them.

In his commentary, *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*, quotes *Horav Moshe, zl, m'Kobrin*, who says, “A moment of *yishuv ha'daas*, serenity, calm/relaxation, is worth more than all of the money in the world.” The ability to have a settled mind, to think rationally concerning the issues confronting a person, is invaluable. First and foremost, it is difficult to serve Hashem unless one's mind is tranquil and at peace. Anxiety undermines the ability to cogitate properly before Whom one stands. Without serenity, one is hard-pressed to maintain *middos tovos*, proper character traits, or success in Torah study. Furthermore, it is only when one is at peace that he may properly introspect and clarify what is truly important to him in life and the steps he must take to achieve success.

Obviously, today's society with its advanced technology does not lend itself to *yishuv ha'daas*. Life is fast-paced, and we are weighed down with obligations; the drive to earn a living sits heavily on all of us. Is it any wonder that one who, despite all of these impediments, is able to achieve a sense of quietude; has a treasure of greater value than material wealth?

Having said this, let us return to our question: How did the Jewish people, who had just received the Torah, fall under the nefarious influence of the *erev rav*, mixed multitude, to rebel against Hashem, who had just-and continued-to do so much for them? The *Lelover Rebbe (Horav Biderman)* quotes an insightful observation from the *Nesivos Shalom*, which I feel explains much of the failure of our People to stand resolute upon being confronted throughout history with the challenge of anti-Semitism. This insight explains why many (following the French Revolution) absconded and fell prey to the malevolent *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, which laid the groundwork for the scourge of the German Reform movement.

In *Megillas Esther* (9:24), we find that Haman *ha'rasha*, the wicked, sought *l'humam u'l'abdam*, “to

confuse and to destroy them (the Jews).” The *Nesivos Shalom* explains that Haman knew quite well that he could not obliterate the Jewish People when they had *yishuv ha'daas*. When they were calm and relaxed, they were a formidable enemy whom he could not touch. Therefore, his first attempt was *l'humam*, to confuse and frighten them with his evil decrees. Then – and only then – once they were not in control of their minds, when they were not thinking rationally due to the external pressure – could he effectively try to annihilate them.

One final note. The *Lelover* cites *Chazal* (*Bereishis* 61) who compare the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, aka the *Satan*, to a fly. A fly disturbs a person's serenity and peace of mind by flying into their faces and buzzing in their ears. This, too, is the *yetzer hora's* goal – to disturb our peace of mind, to agitate and create anxiety, so that we are unable to properly think.

Furthermore, flies also tend to feed on open wounds. They carry filth and disease, transmitting the germs to the wound, causing an infection, which can be debilitating. The *yetzer hora* follows a similar pattern. Once a person sins, the *yetzer hora's* goal is to see to it that the person does not repent of his sin. The *Chassidic* Masters teach, “The *yetzer hora* is not concerned with the sin – it is the accompanying melancholy that he generates that is important. Thus, the *yetzer hora* is like a fly that steals peace of mind from a person.”

The Jewish nation was not a candidate for rebelling against Hashem until the *yetzer hora* confused them with a vision of Moshe's death. This brought on fear and depression. True, they were on a spiritual high, but such a high works only when the person is at ease with himself, when he is calm and serene. Once depression and melancholy set in he is fodder in the hands of the *yetzer hora* – as evinced by the *cheit ha'eigel*. Their *aveirah*, transgression, was the result of a loss of serenity, leading to an inability to think cogently.