

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Yisrael. (1:1)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* gathered the entire nation (all *Yisrael*) together to speak to them. The primary purpose of this gathering was to deliver words of rebuke to them for the way they had acted these past forty years. *Rashi* explains the necessity for having all of *Klal Yisrael* present, for had he spoken to only part of the people, those who were absent would have said, "Had we been there, we would have rejected him." Therefore, Moshe called them all together, implying to those who had excuses that they should let them raise their voices and dispute him.

We wonder what would those "no shows" have said. Could they dispute the sin of the Golden Calf? Was the murder of Chur for standing in their way a figment of imagination? Did they not complain about a lack of water, meat, food? Did they not express their disdain for the *manna*? Is there a question concerning the *meraglim*'s, spies, slanderous report of *Eretz Yisrael*? Did they not cry and mutiny that night? Perhaps Korach and his rebellion is a myth. Clearly, these people could not deny this verity. They had sinned.

Rashi's commentary is based on the *Sifri* which has a slightly different tone. There, the complainers declared that had they attended Moshe's rebuke they would have responded with four or five excuses to justify their behavior! Not only would they deny the sin, but they would also find up to five reasons to justify it!

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, explains this phenomenon first by quoting Shlomo *HaMelech*, *Kol darchei ish zach b'ainav*, "All ways of a man are pure in his (own) eyes" (*Mishlei* 16:2). No man finds fault in himself. He always has a way of qualifying his errant behavior. Not only does he have an excuse for his sin – he even believes that his excuse holds water; that it is true! With this in mind, let us analyze one sin (possibly the worst infraction): the *cheit ha'eigel*, the sin of the Golden Calf. What would they have said?

First, Moshe did not descend the mountain in a "timely" fashion – as he said he would. Second, *Satan* projected an image of Moshe's bier being carried in the sky by angels. Third, they did not make the *eigel* – Aharon *HaKohen* did! Fourth, they were still under the Egyptian pagan influence. Idol worship was a way of life in Egypt. It was something they had lived with for 210 years. They should be allowed a little latitude. Fifth, *Klal Yisrael* did not initiate the *eigel*. It was the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude. Who asked them to come? Why should they have been permitted to join the Jewish nation in their freedom journey? Similar excuses to justify their sin can be "crafted" with regard to the *meraglim*. This is what those who did not appear for Moshe's rebuke would have said. If so, why did all those who came just listen and not attempt to dispute Moshe?

Simply, those who stood before Moshe and saw the Heavenly aura-- the undisputed, unabashed holiness that surrounded them --were left speechless. No one would have dared render such inane excuses in the presence of Moshe. It would only be the big talkers who did not bother showing up, who would talk. Is this not usual fare? The complainers who dispute, who deride, never do it to

your face. It is always behind your back. It takes courage-- or *chutzpah* -- to confront someone. These people are, for the most part, the spineless and weak-minded who tremble at the "first roar of the cannon." They were all acutely aware of the truth: they had sinned because their *emunah*, faith, in Hashem was not yet concretized. So they sinned. Confronting one's errors requires fortitude, which sinners do not possess. After all, if they were morally strong, they would not have sinned. Indeed, those sinners did not even have the courage to attend the rebuke.