

"And the people saw that Moshe delayed in descending the mountain, and the people congregated around Aharon and said to him, 'Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us....This is your god, O' Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.'" (32:1,4)

Klal Yisrael's reaction to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* apparent delay returning from *Har Sinai* has concerned *Chazal*. The commentators attempt to explain *Klal Yisrael's* ingratitude. *Chazal* compare the revelation at *Har Sinai* to a wedding between Hashem *Yisborach* and *Knesses Yisrael*. Does such an exalted relationship deteriorate simply as a result of lateness? Why were the people so impatient? Do we expect patience only of others but not of ourselves? The consensus of opinion is that either a misunderstanding existed regarding the time of Moshe's return, or, as *Chazal* relate, the *Satan* "showed" *Bnei Yisrael* that Moshe's body was being carried in Heaven. Either their misunderstanding or their misconception prompted the powers of evil to encourage the people to sin.

The episode of the Golden Calf represents the eternal struggle between good and evil. Confusion is probably one of the most successful tools for undermining the power of good. The demonic elements work constantly to sabotage our most noble attempts at *mitzvah* performance, precisely at the moment of success. One must maintain a clear mind despite the manipulations of the skeptics who stop at nothing to frustrate and ultimately render powerless the forces of *Torah* Judaism. By navigating clear of the obstacles in the sea of confusion, we will arrive safely at our destination.

We should address one particular aspect of the Golden Calf incident. Why did *Bnei Yisrael* need a God altogether? If they were the ones who were managing the situation, what purpose did this form of self-declared leadership serve? **Horav Moshe Swift, zl** suggests a fascinating commentary to the events of that fateful day, creating an attitude which has stalked us to this very day. The people clamored for a God which would "go before us." They sought a leader that will go "*lefaneinu*," before us, a god that will acclimate to the times, changing with the whims and trends of society. If this God cannot go before us, then we will leave him behind. Interestingly, they could have gone on without Moshe, but they could not have proceeded without a god. They needed some kind of religious figurehead - even if it was a calf! They were willing to accept an apostate as leader as long as he served as a "religious" symbol. They would accept the *Luchos*, even if they did not originate in Heaven. In modern times, they wanted a synagogue even if it were not to be kosher. What does this all mean? There is something "Jewish" within every Jew, that *pintele Yid* which every Jew harbors internally. The ambiguity that abounds in their lifestyle, unfortunately has an adverse effect upon their spiritual perspective.

Horav Swift extends this idea further. He cites *Chazal* in the *Talmud Sanhedrin 63a* who comment,

"If not for the 'vav' of the words HHe'elucha, that changes the word from the singular to the plural and transforms the word G-d to gods - "*these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt.*" *Klal Yisrael* would have deserved extermination." In the whole sad story of the Golden Calf there is a single salient redeemable feature. No Jew is foolish enough to attribute any divinity to a molten god. True, the Golden Calf reflected some symbolism, but they used the plural to intimate that Divinity belonged to the Almighty G-d in Heaven. They desired the best of both words. They desired a god that was "*lefoneinu,*" in front of them, whom they could direct. They wanted Moshe to be up above, and th

e calf to be down below. A G-d in Heaven would serve as a symbol of religion, but the god down below was the one to which they would relate. They sought a religion in which everyone could guide its direction.

Moshe's response was emphatic and portentous of our contemporary obligations. He broke the *Luchos!* It was better to shatter the *Luchos* than to hand them over to a people who would not only be unappreciative, but would also distort them. These people were prepared to misguide and deceive others - all in the name of religion. No *Torah* is better than a *Torah* that is subject to the arbitrary whims of man.

We were to learn the lesson of patience and perseverance. Perhaps the *Torah* seemed too high, and Moshe seemed to be suspended in the air. Maybe the sufferings of thousands of years have dulled our spirit, blemishing our conviction. If we just wait a little bit longer, maintain our commitment, and bear the confusion with patience, then we will see clearly how history will demonstrate that the truths of the Divine *Torah*, leading the Jew -- and eventually the world -- to a life of order and sanity, peace and serenity. Only when the truth of religion guides us will our lives achieve fulfillment.