

“And he (Moshe) saw the calf and the dances, and Moshe’s anger flared up. He threw down the Tablets from his hands.” (32:19)

The sin of the Golden Calf is viewed as the worst, most reprehensible transgression against the Almighty. Indeed, *Chazal* compare it to a bride who proves herself unfaithful on her wedding night. It is such a difficult sin to understand. *Klal Yisrael* had reached the zenith of holiness, the apex of spirituality. They were privy to an incredible Revelation. Yet, they fell; they quickly descended to the nadir of depravity. How did a nation that had experienced the miracles of the exodus from Egypt and had stood at *Har Sinai* to receive the *Torah* amidst an unprecedented revelation of Hashem’s glory, decline so abruptly? Their rapid descent into the abyss of idolatry is beyond belief.

The following answer is given in the ethical discourses of *Yeshivas Bais Shalom Mordechai*. Shlomo *Ha’melech* says in *Shir HaShirim* 4:9, “You captured my heart with one of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace.” Hashem says He would have loved *Klal Yisrael* even if they had only possessed one of their virtues. How much more so is His heart drawn to them now that they have so many virtues. The *Midrash* comments that the *pasuk* means something quite different. “What does one eye refer to?” asks the *Midrash*. “It means that with one eye they looked to Hashem when they accepted the *Torah*, while with the second eye they were “looking” at the Golden Calf.” This indicates that even as they stood at the foot of *Har Sinai* ready to accept the *Torah*, their devotion was half-hearted. They already had thoughts concerning the Golden Calf. We derive from *Chazal* that unless one accepts the *Torah* with “both eyes,” a euphemism for total commitment, he is apt to stray. When there is an admixture of “yes” and “no,” of light and darkness, it is a fusion of good and evil which produces an odious form of evil in which the light itself can be corrupted by the darkness.

This is what *Eliyahu Ha’navi* meant when he challenged the false prophets of the *Baal* idol. “How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, go after Him! And if the *Baal*, go after it!” (*Melachim* I 18:21). Mixed allegiances are worse than evil alone. When evil feeds upon, and is sustained by, the sources of good, it is especially pernicious. The worship of *Baal* alone is not as bad as “sharing” it with the worship of the Almighty. The “light” of *Torah* does not mitigate the *Baal*’s evil. On the contrary, the evil feeds on the light, spinning greater iniquity. One must first root out the evil, so that the light within can function.

The Golden Calf was the result of an ambivalent allegiance to Hashem. They wanted the *Torah*; they could not, however, take their mind off the Golden Calf. Both of their eyes were not focused on the same objective. This can be devastating. It was.