

Moshe said to Aharon: “Come near to the Altar...and provide atonement for yourself and for the people.” (9:7)

Aharon *HaKohen* was not prepared to perform the service in the Sanctuary, because he felt undeserving and ashamed as a result of his involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe *Rabbeinu* convinced him to go forward and execute the mission for which he had been selected. Indeed, Moshe addressed his reluctance, challenging him: “Why are you ashamed? Indeed, *I’kach nivcharta*, this is (specifically) the reason you were chosen.”

Why was Aharon reluctant? Why was he ashamed? He had a number of valid justifications for his involvement with the Golden Calf. He was attempting to delay the people from becoming nervous over the loss of leadership. He was resorting to stall tactics. Regrettably, it did not work. Then he thought that by asking the people to give up their gold they would be reluctant, thereby delaying what seemed imminent. Aharon was concerned lest they kill him, as they had killed Chur. Although Aharon would have gladly risked his life to sanctify Hashem’s Name. His apprehension was that the people might add another sin to their list of iniquities. Chur’s murder was sufficiently tragic and another insidious act would surely seal their fate. Last, if the Jews committed idolatry in thought alone, their act of turning against Hashem would remain covert. This would create a furor amongst those who would not be able to witness a segment of the Jewish People being punished without an indication of sinfulness. Thus, Aharon helped create the Golden Calf in order to give their sin a “face,” their iniquity an image.

Aharon could have rationalized away his participation in the sin, but he did not. He took full responsibility. It was all his fault. Thus, he felt a sense of shame upon approaching the *Mishkan*. Aharon felt that he was unworthy. Disregarding the reasons that might have justified his actions, he came forward and took responsibility. Thus, he felt that someone else, a “better man” should be the one to inaugurate the *Mizbayach*, Altar of the *Mishkan*. Aharon was not afraid of accepting responsibility, but would not enter the *Mishkan* while his actions were under a cloud. Moshe told him that this was the attitude that Hashem sought in a person: accepting responsibility for one’s actions, and not rationalizing his behavior.

Aharon teaches us an important lesson in our quest for character development. When one is wrong, he should acknowledge his error. Covering up iniquity only leads to more sin.