

"And all the people broke off the golden rings which were in their ears." (32:3)

Did "all the people" break off their earrings? Weren't the sinners only a small group of malcontents? Indeed, the *Midrash* in *Koheles* expounds on the pasuk, "*One man from a thousand I have found*" (*Koheles 7:28*). The *Midrash* states that this is a reference to the sinners involved in the Golden Calf. Only one out of every thousand of *Bnei Yisrael* was really involved in the sin! Why does the *Torah* exaggerate the number of sinners?

Horav Mordechai Ilan z.l. explains that the entire *Klal Yisrael* suffered a "*yeridah*," spiritual decline. Had they remained on the pinnacle of faith and observance, even one Jew out of a thousand would not have dared to sin! When a member of a group transgresses and he demonstrates no fear or shame before the others, it is because the others have similarly fallen. Our brethren's spiritual decline is, unfortunately, a reflection of our own spiritual shortcomings.