

"And Moshe said Aharon, what did these people do to you that you have brought upon it great sin?" (32:21)

The extent of Aharon's involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf is ambiguous. Moshe seems to blame him for "causing" the calf to be created. Indeed, before his own death, Moshe recounts how he prayed on Aharon's behalf to effect forgiveness for him. Moshe's prayers were only partially answered; Aharon lost two of his four sons. On the other hand, in contrast, we note that Aharon was appointed to the venerable position of *Kohen Gadol*. He was privileged to enter into the *Kodshei Ha'Kodoshim*, Holy of Holies in order to attain penance for *Klal Yisrael*. This notion seems to challenge the famous *Talmudic* axiom that "a prosecutor may not become a defender." Indeed, the *Kohen Gadol* was not permitted entry into the *Kodshei Kodoshim* when clothed in golden vestments, since they represented the sin of the Golden Calf. One does not enter into a place of "atonement" garbed in clothing which symbolizes sin. If this was the case, how could Aharon be the *Kohen Gadol*? This in itself is the foremost contradiction!

Chazal, nonetheless, seem to imply that Aharon's actions specifically during the sin of the Golden Calf evidenced his suitability for the position of *Kohen Gadol*. During that terrible period Aharon demonstrated his unique love for *Klal Yisrael*. *Horav Boruch Sorotzkin z.l.* explains that Aharon's sense of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, was his distinction. His love for *Klal Yisrael* compelled him to risk not only his physical well being; he was even prepared to relinquish his spiritual development. He said, "It is better that I be censured than *Klal Yisrael* be held accountable."

Rashi writes that Aharon feared the sinners would kill him just as they killed Chur. This fear, however, was singular. Aharon did not fear death. Rather, he feared that if he were to be killed, the sin would be so awesome that *Klal Yisrael* would not merit atonement! This remarkable form of *mesiras nefesh* distinguished Aharon. His acquiescence to remain spiritually blemished, as long as *Klal Yisrael* was spared, was the hallmark of his *gadlus*, greatness. *Mesiras nefesh* in *ruchnius*, spirituality, evinces a loftier level of commitment. When one is inclined to relinquish eternity to help another Jew, he truly deserves to be rewarded with it.