

"The people saw that Moshe had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, 'Rise up, make for us gods... for this man Moshe... we do not know what became of him.'" (32:1)

In the *Yalkut Shimoni*, Chazal relate a dialogue that transpired between the *Satan* and *Bnei Yisrael* on the fortieth day after Moshe went up the mountain. "Where is Moshe your teacher?" asked the *Satan* of *Bnei Yisrael*. "He went up the mountain," they responded. Undaunted by the people's faith in their leader, the *Satan* attempted to convince them that he was late in returning and had probably died. After all, could a human being survive forty days without bread or water? Yet, they maintained their devotion to Moshe despite the *Satan's* efforts to dissuade them. In a final attempt to penetrate their vulnerability, the *Satan* conjured up an image showing that Moshe was dead and his bier was being carried by the angels. The shock was too great for *Bnei Yisrael* to confront. Stranded in a barren desert, their leader presumably dead, they had nowhere to go -- and no one to whom to turn. The *Satan* confused them, and they broke down.

Let us return to the beginning and analyze the circumstances which led to *Bnei Yisrael's* spiritual disintegration. The *Satan's* question made sense. How could Moshe -- a human being -- survive so long in Heaven? Also, if he was truly still alive, how could he possibly be late? Does a leader of Moshe's calibre not always keep his word? Therefore, he must be dead! Their response, which exhibited remarkable trust, was that Moshe said he would be here -- and we believe that he will return shortly. *Bnei Yisrael* remained undaunted by the *Satan's* scurrilous attempts to undermine their faith in their leader.

The *Satan* had conjured up an image which was too overwhelming for this confused nation. Moshe is dead -- we see him laying upon a bier. We have lost all hope. The *Satan* had succeeded with his imagery. What happened? How did such indomitable faith suddenly crumble?

Horav Boruch Eizrachi, Shlita, infers a profound lesson from this *Midrash*. Man must be cognizant of the *Satan's* capacity to conjure up an image or even to create an illusion that seems real. Man must believe in the truth and stand firmly in his commitment to the truth. The truth penetrates and prevails over the *Satan's* imagery. Had *Bnei Yisrael* just waited for a few more moments, had their faith been just a bit stronger, had they been able to hold onto the truth, they would have succeeded. They would have seen through the *Satan's* illusion.

We find a similar occurrence when Avraham *Avinu* went to the *Akeidah*. Seeing that he was not succeeding in preventing Avraham from reaching his destination, the *Satan* turned himself into an impassible river. Undaunted, Avraham went into the water. When the water reached up to his mouth, he cried out to Hashem, "You sent me on a mission. The water is threatening its fulfillment." Immediately the river dried up, enabling Avraham to continue on his way. Avraham knew that the

Satan would present obstacles. One can drown in an imaginary river created by the *Satan*, as well as in a real river. If one truly believes in Hashem and His promise, however, then the *Satan's* river fades away as if it does not exist.

Our lack of conviction lends veracity to the *Satan's* illusion. Conversely, our faith transforms all obstacles into obscurity.