

On the day I make an accounting (of sins) I will bring their sin to account against them. (32:34)

The sin of the Golden Calf is mind-boggling. *Klal Yisrael* is essentially a holy people. In addition, this outrage occurred shortly after the Giving of the Torah. How could they have fallen to such a nadir, so fast? While a number of expositions focus on the nation's spiritual/emotional level, the simple explanation for their actions is that they really did not perpetrate the sin. It was actually the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude of Egyptians, who joined our people as we were leaving, claiming allegiance to Hashem. They were the ones responsible for making the Golden Calf; they were the ones who acted profligately, who exchanged Hashem for a molten calf of their own creation. Specifically, it was Bilaam's sons, Yonus and Yabrus, who had originally served Pharaoh as his magicians, that had joined the Jewish people along with the *eirev rav*, who made the calf.

If so, why was the entire nation (excluding *Shevet Levi*) held in contempt – until this very day? Why are we still paying for the Golden Calf? The answer is one that goes to the core of much that we are guilty of even today: We watched; we stood there with folded hands; we did not protest the outrage that was happening before everyone's eyes.

Indifference to *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name, is tantamount to committing the sin. One who cares about *Yiddishkeit* will not stand idly by as usurpers who flagrantly violate the Torah egregiously impugn it to suit their fancy. On the other hand, we may not view anyone who violates the Torah as doing so maliciously. In most circumstances, he is acting out of ignorance, as the product either of an upbringing in which he was not taught anything or of living in an environment which was not conducive to *shemiras ha'mitzvos*.

The protest that we might want to register must be well-thought out and carefully mulled over to ascertain that, indeed, the individual had violated the Torah. Quite possibly, to the spectator's view, the individual transgressed a prohibition, while, in truth, he had a very good rationale to justify this behavior. The following story, related by *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, is not only an eye-opener, but it also illustrates the frightening scenario that can occur when we do not judge others favorably and do not look at the big picture before passing judgment.

A *frum* family from Tel Aviv adopted a couple who were recent emigres from Russia. They were both well-educated doctors, and they expressed an interest in wanting to learn and know more about *Yiddishkeit*. The host family went out of their comfort zone to help the immigrants acclimate themselves to the country. Until now, they had lived in a country under the reign of an oppressive regime, which not only scoffed at religion as being the "opiate of the people," but actually forbade it and severely punished anyone who adhered to Torah and *mitzvos*.

All went well. It was an idyllic relationship. The Bnei Brak couple was excited that they had brought a once assimilated family back to *Yiddishkeit*. Then, one Friday night, after parting from one

another in their usually friendly manner, for some reason the host walked over to the window of his third-floor apartment to see his guests flagging down a taxi, entering the vehicle and taking off.

It goes without saying that the disappointment and hurt the host family felt was saddening. Sadness gave way to anger, as they exclaimed, "What *chutzpah* these people have! They exhaust our time, making us believe that they were really interested in learning about *Yiddishkeit*. They joined us for the *Shabbos* meals, as if they cared. They just wanted our food. Did they have to take a taxi right in front of our house? Could they not have walked to the next corner, out of sight, and flagged a taxi there? Furthermore, in order to take a taxi, they would have needed money. So, they had money in their pockets the entire visit. Who knows? Maybe they even came by taxi. How dare they sit at our table, eating our food and singing *zemiros* as if they were observant, while, in truth, they were not."

Their decision was made. They would sever all relationship with the Russian couple. The couple called a number of times and received a cool response. After a while, they took the hint and accepted the message: we are no longer interested in you.

Two months passed, and they received a call from an acquaintance of the Russian couple. The husband had passed away in the prime of his life. Could they make a *shivah* call to the young widow? She was heartbroken and had few friends. They decided they would go. A *shivah* call is not contingent upon a relationship. A Jew is grieving; his fellow is present to comfort him.

They went to the Russian couple's apartment where the young widow, her eyes red from weeping, greeted them. They started a conversation, the way people do at a *shivah* home, first abstract, then talking about the *niftar*, deceased, his sudden passing, and what they could do to help. "What was the cause of death? Had he been sick?" "He suffered a massive heart attack – in the hospital." "Did he suffer from heart disease?" the Bnei Brak couple asked. "He suffered from a heart problem that surfaced a short while ago. The first episode happened when we were leaving your home the last *Shabbos* that we were there. As we were walking down the stairs, my husband suddenly began to complain of chest pains and pain in his arm. Being a doctor, he knew this could be serious. When we reached the street, he immediately flagged down a taxi and went straight to the hospital. We made it in time, and they saved him. This time, his heart just gave out and he died."

We all make mistakes in judgment. We protest and often get carried away. It is prudent to step back, think and analyze the situation and ask ourselves, "Could we be mistaken? Could there be a reason for this behavior which eludes us?" Thinking before we act can spare repercussions for both parties involved.