

JewishTimes

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Ahron's Role in the Gold Calf

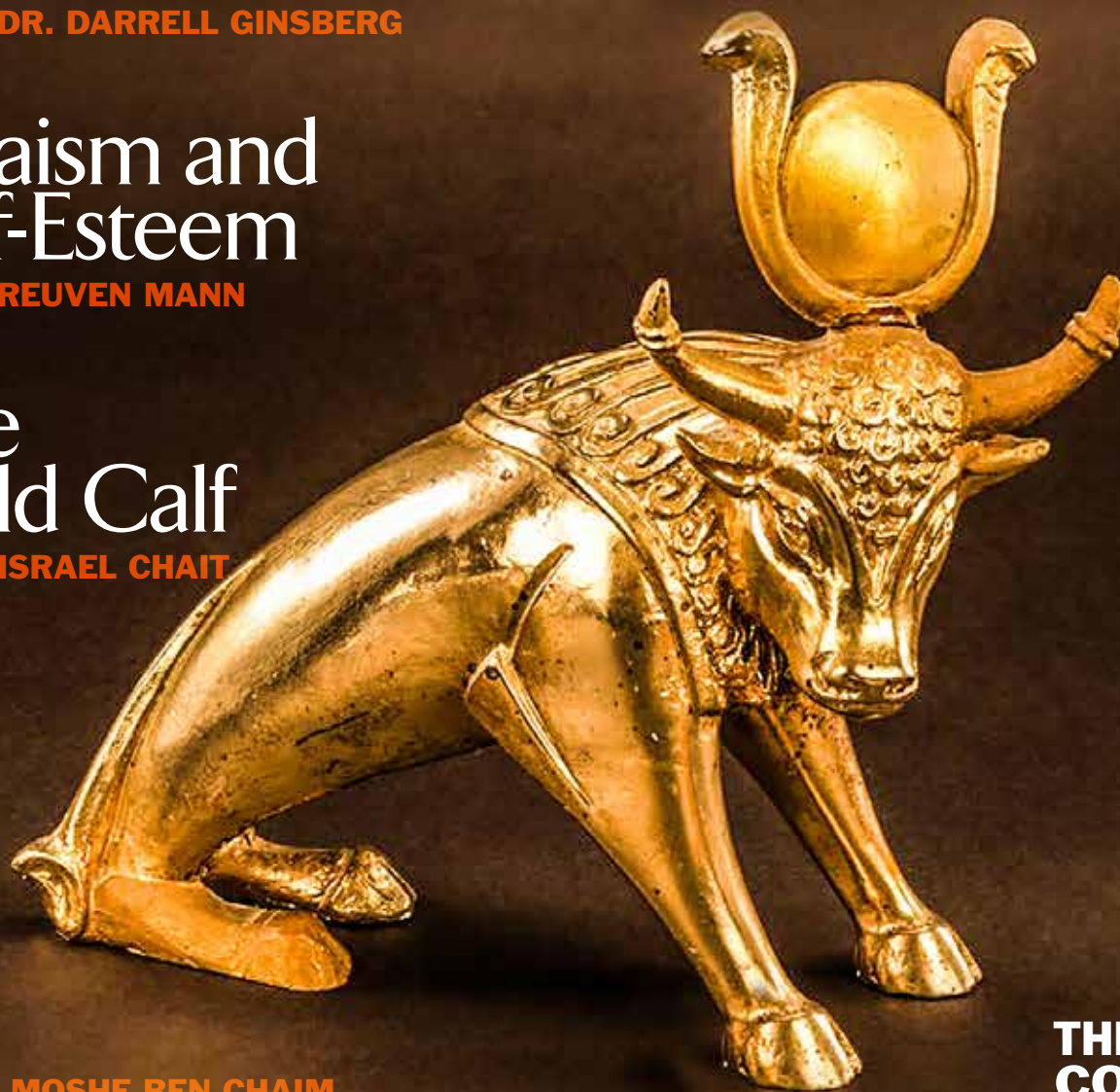
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Judaism and Self-Esteem

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The Gold Calf

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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IDOLATRY

A Sin of the Mind

A study of Maimonides' formulation offers vital insight,
and sheds light on Christianity's error.





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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Christianity: OK for Christians?

Reader: Do Torah prohibitions against idol worship, deifying man (Christianity) and polythesim apply to gentiles?

Rabbi: You must know that all men are created equal. One is not born "Christian." Religion is a choice; it's not genetic. Therefore we must rephrase the question as, "Do laws of idolatry apply to gentiles: people not commanded in the 613?" The answer is yes: almost recognize the one true God and reject all others. At the root of the Bible, the Torah, is the adherence to truth. Both religious and scientific beliefs demand evidence and reason. There is one Creator and He clarified through His prophets that we are to worship Him alone: not intermediaries, not idols, not men, or anything other than Him.

As I explain on the next page, we are not to invent fantasies, but follow reality and our senses alone, and nothing in reality suggests God became a man. God says just the opposite: that He cannot be equated to anything, and the Christian story of God becoming Jesus is a rejection of God's words in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Isaiah, to name a few. ■

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

IDOLATRY

A Sin of the Mind

A study of Maimonides' formulation offers vital insight, and sheds light on Christianity's error.

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Maimonides' Laws of Star Worship 1:1

In the days of a Enosh[1] the children of man made a great error and the council of the wise men of that generation was foolish, and Enosh himself was of those who erred. And this was their error...they said, "Since God created these stars and the planets to guide the world, and He placed them in the heights [heaven] and He apportioned to them honor, and they are servants that minister before Him, they are fitting to praise and to glorify, and to apportion to them honor. And this is the will of God, blessed be He: to make great and to honor those who He makes great and that He honors, just like a king wills those who stand before him to be honored and this is the honor of the king. Since they entertained this thing on their hearts, they started to build temples to the stars and to offer sacrifices to them and to praise them and glorify them with the words and prostration in front of them in order to attain the will of the Creator, as they corruptly thought. And this is the essence of star worship. And similarly spoke the worshippers who knew the core ways of idolatry. It is not that they said that there is no God except for this star...it is as Jeremiah said, "Who would not fear You, O king of the nations? For it befits You; forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their royalty, there is none like You. But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the vanities by which they are instructed are but wood."[2] This is to say that all knew that You are the one God, but their error and their foolishness was that they imagined that this futility [star worship] is Your will.

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From the new book
"Secrets of the Bible"



Maimonides opens his treatment of idolatry with history, describing the very inception of idolatrous practice committed by Enosh, the grandson of Adam the First. How is history appropriate for a book that formulates practical laws?

Citing the initial case of idolatry, we thereby learn that idolatrous practice is not a cultural phenomenon alone: at its core, is a belief generated from man's psyche. Enosh and his generation had no prior idolatry to adopt; they invented it. Perhaps to emphasize this sin as internally-generated, Maimonides refers to mankind as "the children of man." Meaning, it is the human condition of life starting with childhood, that generates idolatrous tendencies. That is, man starts life as a helpless, needy infant, depending on his parents 100%. The infant is completely insecure, and runs to the parents to keep him safe, feed him, carry him, and simply be there in

plain sight, which offers psychological comfort. The infant views his parents as super beings.

As man matures, he learns that his parents in fact are not superior. A healthy individual will then abandon his infantile view of his parents as superior. But many people have difficulty releasing their attachment to the infantile parent image. Such individuals seek a replacement in the form of other physical images, onto whom they can project a pristine and powerful aura, just as they viewed their parents during their infancy. Jesus, Rebbes, amulets, idols, the Gold Calf and even stars are deified in an attempt to replace the very physical parental role. (It is no wonder why celebrities are called "stars.") Human insecurity and the dependence on superior figures is so predominant, numerous Torah commands exist to address this very problem. During the Gold Calf sin, God records the people

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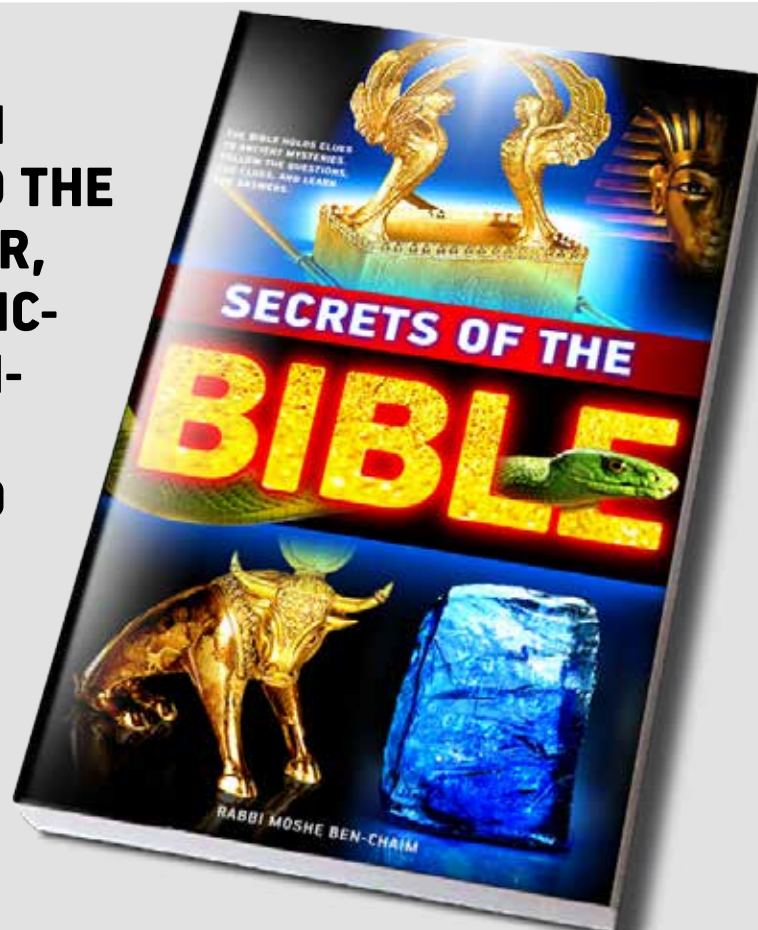
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saying, "Moses the man who took us out of Egypt, we know not what happened to him." [3] Of course Moses is a "man!" But God recorded the Jews' phrase as a lesson of their of their fear: their loss of the "image" of a leader. Relating to the abstract non-physical God was too difficult. Their creation of a Gold Calf intended to replace the physical Moses.

Citing this historical record of man's faulty thinking defines the very violation: this is a sin of mind. [4] The mental acceptance of anything other than God deserving praise, is the core violation. The Rabbis teach that the first and second commands in the 10 Commandments are relegated to the mind: they are accepting God and rejecting idolatry. Thus, the very belief in anything other than God is the crime. But there is more to the writings of a brilliant thinker like Maimonides than history and law. Maimonides uses a code of repetition to highlight his message. What matters did he repeat? Look over that law again before continuing, so you might detect this.

God's Will

Maimonides mentioned the words "will," "error" and that "man said" about 4 times each. He does this to highlight the core issue: man imagined what was God's will. Man did not seek evidence in reality. Herein lies the error. Maimonides states a few times that man misconstrued what God "desires." But man can only determine this based either on God's expressed communication (which they did not receive about stars) or what man witnesses in the universe. And there is no evidence in the universe that God desires man to worship the stars. This was a faulty conclusion: assuming what is in God's mind, without evidence. This, Maimonides teaches, is the "essence" of star worship. To highlight that the error was one of thought, Maimonides also repeats that man "said" something: speaking occurs once man arrives at a conclusion. Man did not follow reality, but instead, he followed his fantasy. Man's fantasy creates things that are not real, luring man to believe in those imaginations. God's will is in direct opposition: man follows his internal fantasies, but God formed man with eyes and ears precisely so we use them to determine what exists, and what does not. When rejecting astrology in his Letter to Marseilles, Maimonides makes this so clear:

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It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things. The first is a thing for which there is a clear proof deriving from man's reasoning—such as arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The second is a thing that a man perceives through one of the five senses—such as when he knows with certainty that this is red and this is black and the like through the sight of his eye; or as when he tastes that this is bitter and this is sweet; or as when he feels that this is hot and this is cold; or as when he hears that this sound is clear and this sound is indistinct; or as when he smells that this is a pleasing smell and this is a displeasing smell and the like. The third is a thing that a man receives from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say, "This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said, "The simple believes everything" (Prov. 14:15)."

Maimonides makes it clear that the star worshippers did not reject God, but they erred about God's will. How much more sinful is it to make an error about God Himself? Yet, today, many believe that God became a man (Christianity), that God permeates all matter (pantheism) and other nonsense. Recently, a Rabbi of a large orthodox shul made this very pantheistic claim. We call this "nonsense" since there is "no sense" that validates such erroneous and heretical thoughts. Worse, is that such beliefs contradict God's words. For He taught us through His prophets that He is not similar to anything: "To what shall you equate Me that I should be similar, says God (Isaiah, 40:25)." Thus,

He cannot be a man, and He does not occupy space, so as to be "everywhere" or "in everything."

Understanding Maimonides' opening remarks, we appreciate the origin of Christianity and pantheism is in man's psyche. Christianity satisfies man with the infantile father image in a tangible form. And pantheism caters to those crippled minds who cannot grasp an existence outside of the familiar time-space universe. So they force a definition of God into a spatial fantasy, claiming "God is everywhere." And those who feel God literally permeates all matter, reject that God created the world from nothing as Torah teaches. They feel God is degraded if something exists "outside" of Him.

We must be thankful to God for keeping His promise[5] that the Torah would never cease to be with us. God's words offer us absolute truth, and His words reject Christianity, pantheism, star worship and all forms of alien beliefs and worship. We are thankful that Maimonides toiled to safeguard for us great truths. He engages our minds with his formulations, borrowed from the Torah's coded methods, such as repetition, which leads us to the essential lesson that idolatry is a sin of the mind. This is why he commenced with "children of man made a great error and the council of the wise men of that generation was foolish." Maimonides immediately conveys the core issue in idolatry to be an "error" and "foolishness;" matters of the mind. Following Maimonides, let us use our intelligence, our senses and our Torah to determine and accept only what is real and true. ■

[1] Adam the First's grandson

[2] Jeremiah 10:7,8

[3] Exod. 32:1

[4] Active worship is needed only to enable courts to mete out punishments.

[5] Isaiah 59:21



PARSHA

The Golden Calf

KI TISA

Rabbi Israel Chait *Written by a student*

Moses ascended the mountain to rendezvous with God and learn first hand the teachings of the Torah, and then to transmit them to the Jewish people. Instead Moses descended to a nation of idolaters rather than a people committed to accept a moral law based upon their intellectual conviction. The Torah explains the reason for this transformation. In Exodus 32:1, the Torah tells us that the people saw that Moses tarried from coming down the mountain and that this precipitated their desire to build a golden calf. Rashi explains that the nation miscalculated the day of Moses' descent. Moses advised the people that he would return in forty days. Moses was not counting his departure as day one. He meant forty complete days, thus his return would be on the forty first day, which is the seventeenth of Tammuz. Therefore their calculations were erroneous by one day. Rashi teaches us that as a result of this miscalculation, on the sixteenth of Tammuz, Satan came and brought confusion to the world, and showed the Israelites a vision of thick darkness. This caused them to say, "Moses is definitely dead," and it ignited their desire to serve other gods.

Upon analyzing this Rashi, two basic questions must be asked: What compels Rashi to utilize Satan as the vehicle for their confusion? Their mistake in determining Moses' return was based upon their erroneous calculations. This alone should have been sufficient justification for their concluding that Moses was dead and was not returning. Furthermore, Aaron devises different schemes to hinder their attempts to serve different God's. Why didn't he simply advise them of their mistaken calculation? Aaron certainly was aware of the proper count or at the very least recognized their mistake.

We must appreciate that the Israelites had recently been liberated from Egypt. In Egypt they were exposed to, and influenced by, the pagan practices of that society. Therefore, they still had an attraction to the primitive, and were still subject to the insecurities of the instinctual part of their personalities. The entire event of Moses ascending the mountain to speak to God was to them, a mystical phenomenon. They were in great awe of this unique experience. Thus, when they saw the thick darkness,

rather than attributing it to bad weather conditions, their emotions overwhelmed them. They had visions of Moses' failed mission, which image was bolstered by their miscalculation. The Satan, as Maimonides teaches us, is the same as the yetzer harah, man's evil inclinations. Their emotions, which were fostered by their insecurities and primitive proclivities, caused them to conjure these fantastic ominous visions. Chazal teach us that they saw an image of Moses in a coffin. This manifests that they were regressing into the depths of their imagination. They were so overwhelmed by the mystical, that Chazal felt compelled to point out this image, to demonstrate that their total perception of reality was distorted.

Upon their concluding that Moses had died, the Israelites expressed their desire to make many gods that would lead them. Their need for a god was simply a need for security to fill the void that Moses' ostensible departure created.

Rashi notes that they desired many gods. This again reflects the primitive emotion they possessed. They had desires for different gods, to cater to each of their diverse needs. Their basic insecurities and trepidation were expressed by their desire for different gods that would satisfy all their personal whims and grant them a sense of security.

The insight the Torah affords us in delineating the story of the Golden Calf is extremely relevant. Modern man might think that these are paganistic emotions to which he is not susceptible. However, one need only observe Christianity to recognize the strong hold the emotion for idol worship has, even today. They idolize a physical statue which represents a human being whom they view as God. Objectively, it may seem absurd, but yet its appeal attests to man's primitive desire for the security of the physical.

Chazal appreciated the strength of these emotions. Rabbi Akiva did not want to learn that the "Et" of "Et Hashem Elokecha teerah" as including Talmidei Chachamim because of this emotion. The deification of man is idol worship. Rabbi Yishmael argues that it includes the Talmid Chacham. The respect the Torah envisions for a scholar is not for the individual per se, but rather the chachma (wisdom) which he acquired. He is the embodiment of an individual who utilized his Tzelem Elokim, intelligence, for its true objective.

It would seem that Aaron also underesti-

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mated the strength of these emotions. Aaron recognized their clamor to create new gods as reflective of their primitive emotions. He recognized the futility in trying to demonstrate the error of their calculations. The nation was no longer operating under their intellectual faculty. The primitive behavioral patterns to which they were subject in Egypt were exerting their influence over the nation. The mixed multitude whom departed Egypt with them provoked much of their regression. Rashi advises us that the Mixed Multitude (not descendants of Abraham) used their “magic”[1] to create the calf. In fact, they initiated this entire service and the Israelites followed. The Mixed Multitude had a greater yearning for the security of the physical as a means to relate to God. They therefore utilized the magic they learned in Egypt. Magic is not some supernatural force. It too requires a discipline, where one learns to switch the apparent relationship between cause and effect to which we are accustomed. It therefore is fascinating because it distracts the observer who is amazed since it does not function in accordance with standard causal relationships.

Aaron took an active role in the making of the Golden Calf. However, the role Aaron played was really a result of careful analysis. In reality he did not try to facilitate its construction but rather attempted to hinder its completion. He analyzed the behavior of the Israelites and tried to deal with them based upon their state of mind. He recognized a step by step regression in their rational faculty as they became under the grip of this overwhelming emotion. Aaron's observations are expressed in a Midrash quoted by Rashi. Aaron observed several things. He saw the Israelites kill his nephew Chur, who tried to rebuke them. He observed and concluded that it would be better if the Israelites transgression was ascribed to him rather than to them. He also concluded that if they built the alter on their own, it would be finished immediately. He therefore undertook its construction hoping to tarry in his work, in order to delay them until Moses arrived. Aaron had recognized that their behavior patterns reflected the powerful sway of their emotions. The first thing the Israelites sought was a substitute leader. This reflected their need for the security of the physical. He requested their ornaments in an effort to appeal to their greed. This was essentially a delay tactic. He assumed that they would be reluctant



because he thought that their greed would deter their actions. However, the Torah teaches us “vayitparku,” they readily removed all their jewelry. He thereby recognized and appreciated the overwhelming and dominating effect of these emotions as evidenced by the alacrity with which they responded to his request for their valuables. Thereafter, he observed that they killed Hur. This represented that they were no longer functioning with even a scintilla of rationality. They could not tolerate Hur's rebuke and their murderous actions evidenced their total identification with the calf. He thus observed and concluded that at best, he could only slow their progress. Any attempt by him to have halted the construction of the calf would have been futile, and surely would have caused them to regress to the depth of their primitivism.

A precursory review of his actions would indicate that he was helping them, however a more scrupulous investigation as articulated, reveals his true intentions. He desired that their guilt be ascribed to him in order to assuage the guilty feelings they would experience upon Moses' return. If the Israelites felt absolute culpability because of their actions, their feelings of guilt would render them incapable of doing Teshuva.

God still finds fault with Aaron's action. Exodus 32:23 states, “And when Moses saw that the people were broken loose, for Aaron had let them loose for a division among their enemies.” This criticism is lodged against Aaron, for one can not make compromises with idol worship. The emotion is so powerful that if one allows it to be expressed in his behavioral patterns, it will ultimately dominate his actions and destroy him. Moses upon his return took extremely drastic measures. He openly expressed outrage and threw the tablets to the ground and shattered them. He thereby gathered to his side the Levites, who killed three thousand men. Moses' extreme actions were purposeful to demonstrate that one can not compromise with nor tolerate the emotion for idolatry. The basic philosophy of Judaism is antithetical to these type of emotions. ■

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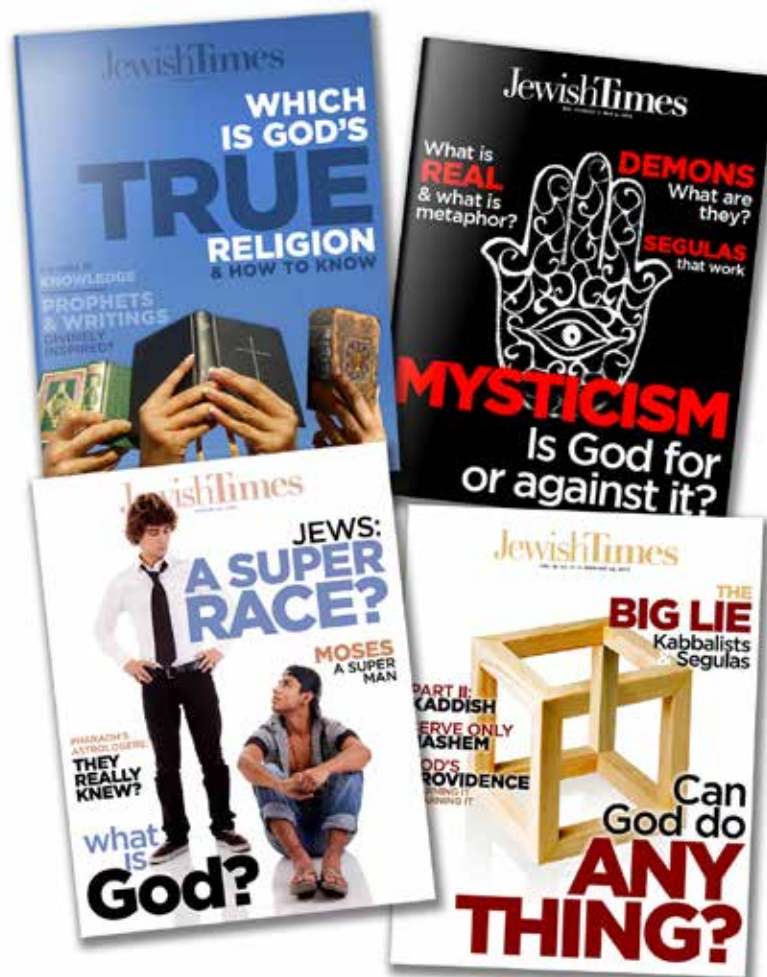
[1] Magic is explained by Saadia Gaon as slight of hand. Judaism accepts there are no other powers but God alone.

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PARSHA

Judaism and Self-Esteem

KI TISA

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's parsha, Ki Tisa, recounts one of the most egregious sins in Jewish history, the Golden Calf. It is difficult for us to comprehend how this could happen. The Jews had just been freed from Egypt with great miracles. They experienced the awesome might of Hashem as He split the sea and destroyed Pharaoh's powerful army.

Even more significant was the gathering of the entire nation at Mount Sinai, where they heard a voice from heaven proclaiming the Ten Statements. The first two outlined the nature of the relationship they were to maintain with G-d.

Every Jew is commanded to believe in the existence of Hashem, Creator of heaven and earth. However, the matter doesn't end there. We must put our faith in Hashem to the exclusion of any other entity. The Torah states it clearly: "You shall have no other gods alongside me."

This injunction precludes the worship of any object, even if it is regarded as a means by which we are paying homage to Hashem. We are therefore stunned to read about the incident of the Golden Calf and wonder how it could happen.

Before proceeding, a note of caution is in order. We must be very careful in judging the behavior of others, as we cannot adequately grasp the nature of the situation they were in. This is important to remember as we study controversial aspects of Jewish history such as the Holocaust. There is



a tendency to criticize the behavior of Jews in being passive and not doing more to save themselves.

We have no right to sit in judgment of people who experienced an onslaught of extreme cruelty that is beyond our capacity to imagine. We should seek to learn from the mistakes of the past, while we scrupulously refrain from morally evaluating the actions of the participants.

The Golden Calf was not built because the Jews sought to renounce their belief in Hashem. They were totally overcome by fear that was

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triggered by Moshe's absence. They believed that, alone in the wilderness, they had no chance of survival without the protection of Divine Providence.

However, they felt that without Moshe's presence, they would not be worthy of Hashem's miracles. Let's take a look at their recent history. They were completely passive in their transformation from slavery to freedom. Pharaoh had been brought to his knees by the plagues Hashem inflicted via the agency of Moshe.

Moshe's leadership was vital to the Jews' survival and wellbeing. In their moment of greatest terror, when they saw the troops of Pharaoh chasing after them, they turned to Moshe. Only he had the ability to intercede with Hashem and activate their salvation.

The Jews' profound trust in Moshe is openly expressed in the Torah, which says that when they saw the dead Egyptians on the banks of the sea, "the nation feared G-d; they believed in Hashem and his servant, Moshe."

Their "belief" in Moshe was reinforced

by the travails they experienced in the wilderness. They felt that only he could solve their problems and redress their grievances. Moshe brought forth water from the rock; quails when they lusted for meat; and Hashem's unique creation, the manna, which provided daily sustenance throughout their sojourn in the wilderness.

The nation had a great reverence for Moshe. Yet sometimes, one's dependence on a person can go too far. G-d performed miracles for the Jews because they were His Chosen People. They had not sufficiently internalized the lesson that Hashem regarded them as worthy of His Providence.

I believe the concept of self-confidence is an integral part of this story. True faith requires a healthy regard for one's own goodness. We sometimes have a hard time believing that we are worthy of Hashem's blessings. We feel worthless and turn to others whom we regard as more righteous and holy.

Because the Jews did not consider themselves deserving of Hashem's protection, they panicked when they found that Moshe was no longer with them. This led to an irrational and sinful attempt to create something that could serve as the medium through which their relationship with G-d would be preserved.

There is an important lesson here for us. We must have great reverence for our exalted teachers and role models. However, our desire should be to learn from them, internalize their teachings, and lift ourselves to a higher level. We must have the conviction that we can become a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation."

Judaism demands that we cultivate a healthy and realistic sense of self-esteem, without which we cannot have an appropriate relationship with Hashem. Let us remember that Hashem converted all the curses of Bilaam into blessings, because "Hashem your G-d loves you."

Shabbat shalom. ■



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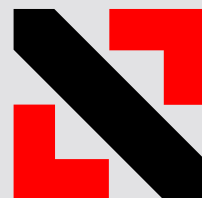
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PARSHA

Aharon & the Gold Calf Sin

KI TISA

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

Tragedy unfolds in this week's Torah portion with an episode so terrible and traumatic in the history of the Jewish people that we still feel the effects of it today. There are many difficult questions raised when studying the story, in particular how to understand Aharon's involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf. After all, its construction almost led to the annihilation of the Jewish people. A complete comprehension of Aharon's mindset during this story is obviously impossible, but a rarely cited Rabbinical law, and a subsequent debate between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, offers a small insight into his involvement and its aftermath.

There is a Rabbinical command that requires the public reading of the Torah to be translated into Aramaic (the Targum) as it is being recited. However, there are certain sections of Torah that are not to be translated during their reading in Hebrew. One of these is the section known as the "Egel Sheini", or the second Golden Calf. Of course, one should immediately ask: wasn't there only one episode of the sin of the Golden Calf? Yes, there was. The Talmud, though, brackets off Aharon's narration of the episode to Moshe, and considers it the second edition, so to speak, of the Golden Calf.

After God relates to Moshe the tragic sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe descends the mountain, breaks the tablets and destroys the idol. Thus begins the second Golden Calf (32:21):

Moses said to Aaron: "What did this people do to you that you brought [such] a grave sin upon them?"

Aharon responds to Moshe (ibid 22-24):

Aaron replied: "Let not my lord's anger

grow hot! You know the people, that they are disposed toward evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us, because this man Moses, who brought us up from the land of Egypt we do not know what has become of him.' I said to them, 'Who has gold?' So they took it [the gold] off and gave it to me; I threw it into the fire and out came this calf."

The sin of the Golden Calf was without question one of the darkest moments in the history of the Jewish people. As mentioned above, the "original" incident is both read and translated. How, then, is this re-telling somehow worse than the original, reflected in the prohibition in its translation?

The Babylonian Talmud offers an explanation (Megillah 25b):

The second account of the Calf is read but not translated. What is the second account of the Calf? — From "And Moses said" up to "and Moses saw." It has been taught: "A man should always be careful in wording his answers, because on the ground of the answer which Aaron made to Moses the unbelievers were able to deny [God], as it says, 'And I cast it into the fire and this calf came forth'."

The implication from the Talmud is that Aharon's description of the calf coming forth from the fire gives ammunition to idolaters, as it suggests a level of reality to this calf, a heretical assumption. If this is the case, how could Aharon be so lax in his description?

Tosfot cites the Jerusalem Talmud in offering an alternate explanation. Rather than being critical of Aharon's unintended implication, the avoidance of translating the second account of the Golden Calf was

due to the honor of Aharon. Referring to the verses cited above, Moshe's reaction to Aharon's recounting of the story is telling (ibid 25):

And Moses saw the people, that they were exposed, for Aaron had exposed them to be disgraced before their adversaries.

The idea of the Jewish people being exposed, according to many commentaries, was that their relationship to God has been severely compromised.

The inference from this verse is that Aharon was responsible for the demise of the Jewish people. The Talmud explains that when contrasting one group to another group or one individual to another individual, the insinuation of disgrace is muted. When contrasting an individual to a group, the disgrace is more poignant and powerful. In this instance, Aharon is being singled out from the group, as if he was the ringleader of the idolatrous enterprise. Aharon should never be thought of in such a context, so the entire episode is not translated. If such a distortion could emerge, how do we understand Moshe's critique of Aharon?

On a technical level, the debate between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud centers on whether the last verse cited above is part of the second account of the Gold Calf. However, on a conceptual plane, the issue is quite simple: what is the desired objective of avoiding the translation of this episode? Was it due to the fodder thrown to the idolaters, hinting at a reality to the calf? Or was it due to sparing Aharon the discredit that could be derived from Moshe's critique?

Prior to analyzing the mistake of Aharon, it is critical to acknowledge a sensitivity required when attempting to comprehend the actions of these great individuals. Without question, Aharon was one of the greatest humans to walk the earth, a personification of righteousness, perfection, and the true love of knowledge of God. It is difficult to imagine the level he occupied. At the same time, he was a human being, and the concept of a human divorced from sin is not a Jewish idea. The Torah presents the mistakes and errors of these great people without any type of censorship. The Sages discuss the problems presented by these people in a manner

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reflecting true intellectual honesty. We must keep this balance in mind as we enter into this analysis.

Clearly, there was a problem with Aharon's involvement in the plan of the Golden Calf, and the focus here will be on one facet of his error. In the unfolding of this tragic episode it states that this idol was crafted with human hands (see verse 4). Yet Aharon chooses to express that the idol has "magically" exited the fire, fully formed. Why would he choose this language? Was he being irresponsible? Upon witnessing the Jewish people's consideration of Moshe's absence, he immediately understood there was a serious problem afoot. He appreciated that there was an underlying attachment to Moshe that was problematic, and underneath this lay a dormant idolatrous need. However, it is possible he failed to truly understand the depth of this problem, the strong primitive desire to worship through the physical. He went along with the plan, stalling for time, but underestimating how powerful the emotion truly was. Upon telling the story over to Moshe, he immediately describes the Jewish people as being evil. It was after the incident ended that, upon reflection, Aharon understood how the present generation were in the grasp of idolatry. He describes the calf as exiting the fire, fully formed. In this description, Aharon was explaining to Moshe just how heinous their sin was. The Jewish people at that time

ascribed reality to this inanimate object, this false representation of God. In their eyes, it was real. This was the clearest way to convey the message to Moshe. Yet while Aharon recognized the flaw that the current generation of Jews manifested, he failed to understand that it was one that was not to be eradicated at that moment. This flaw is part and parcel of man, a constant struggle he would face throughout his life. Whereas today we may not typically witness Jews paying homage to an idol, the idolatrous emotion is just as powerful today as it was then, and unfortunately is constantly present among the Jewish people, albeit sometimes subtly. While his choice of words may have reflected the best momentary method of expressing what the Jews were thinking, these same words reflected his inability to understand just how deep this problem runs through the psyche of man. The fuel to the idolatrous fire emergent from his words was the error here, the failure to understand how powerful and, at times, all-consuming this emotion can be. The Babylonian Talmud, then, focuses on this aspect of Aharon and his involvement.

Moshe responds to Aharon with a damning indictment of the Jewish people. Yet he singles out Aharon, as if he was the "ringleader" of this plan. It is absurd to even consider that Aharon somehow identified with any of the idolatrous emotions of the Jewish people, then or now. On what was

Moshe then criticizing him? As we mentioned before, Aharon was the epitome of righteousness. Moshe was not in any way attacking Aharon on an individual level. Aharon was also a leader of the Jewish people, encumbered with a unique responsibility to direct the nation on the path of perfection. Moshe was isolating this part of Aharon's identity, and how he failed to lead properly. Aharon's involvement in the entire incident, and Moshe's subsequent critique, was in fact a condemnation of his leadership during this period of time. Aharon's flaw was expressed through the prism of his leadership, rather than a flaw in who he was as a person. Thus, Moshe's words were accurate. Yet, with this harsh criticism comes the potential distortion, where Aharon was perceived as the leader of the idolatrous plan, rather than a leader who failed to understand the depth of a problem within his people. Therefore, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, we do not translate this section of the Torah.

Aharon was an essential part of the plan of the Golden Calf – that is not up for debate. Aharon was one of the greatest people to ever live – this is also not debatable. Understanding the nature of Aharon's flaw during this tumultuous event provides us with an important degree of intellectual acuity, expressing how even someone on Aharon's level could miss the powerful force of idolatry and unwittingly help guide his people on the wrong path. ■



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