

THE BIRTHPLACE OF IDOLATRY

by Rabbi Label Lam

When the people saw that Moshe was late in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron, and they said to him: "Come on! Make us gods that will go before us, because this man Moses, who brought us up from the land of Egypt we don't know what has become of him."

That Moshe was late: Satan (the opposing force) came and brought confusion into the world and showed a semblance of darkness, [even] pitch darkness, and confusion, [as if] indicating [that] Moshe had surely died and therefore, confusion had come upon the world. He [the Satan] said to them, "Moshe has died, for six hours have already passed, and he has not come, etc.," (Rashi)

because this man Moshe: Satan showed them something resembling Moses, being carried in the air, high above in the sky. (Rashi) because this man Moses: Satan showed them something resembling Moses, being carried in the air, high above in the sky. -[from Shab. 89a, Midrash Tanchuma 19]

When the people saw that Moshe was delayed in returning the most terrifying images started to dance in their minds. Can we blame them? Moshe had been missing for more than forty days! Sure he had led them out of Egypt but they were now an entire nation stranded in the wilderness. They were lost without Moshe. So what's the crime?

Imagine an airplane gliding smoothly over the Atlantic Ocean on its way to Israel and suddenly a rumor spreads that the pilot is dead. It was a grand misunderstanding and their intentions seemed to be good. They wanted something like Moshe's leadership to take them the rest of the way. It doesn't sound that outrageous when understood from ground level.

Did you ever wait patiently at an appointed time on a street corner for someone and that someone is failing to show up!? What does it feel like? What thoughts run through your mind? Is this the right time? Is this the right place? Is he or she OK? After a while panic may set in! What's so terrible that we are still picking up the pieces from the fallout of the Golden Calf till this very day?

The answer might just be there revealed in the very words they spoke to justify the making of the Golden Calf. Rashi based on Gemorah Sanhedrin finds the real intent embedded in their own words: "that (they) will go before us": יִלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ [The word יִלְכוּ is in the plural form.] They desired many gods for themselves. (Rashi)

They did not want only a replacement for Moshe and in search of a creative means to communicate with HASHEM ended up making a Golden Calf No! The harsh reality is that deep down inside there

was a part was perversely in search mode for liberation from the pressure of living a consistent life in the presence of a that will go before us: אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ [The word יֵלְכוּ is in the plural form.] They desired many deities for themselves. -[from Sanh. 63a] Singular G-d!

Like a group of students who perceive that their Rebbe is late, there's a part of the class that appeals to a part in each boy that takes a special delight in the thought, and even begins to hope that perhaps there will be no class that day. So they already grant themselves premature permission to be dismissed. When the Rebbe finally arrives they groan with a renewed disappointment, because their heart was already sold on stupidity! The loss of Moshe then becomes a cause for celebration and not national mourning. That corrupt process of thinking is in fact **the birthplace of idolatry**.
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