

Aharon is very involved in the sin of the eigel. The Torah tells us of his involvement.

וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בְּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסַּכָּה וַיִּאמְרוּ אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלִינוּךָ  
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

“And he took from their hands and he formed it with an engraving tool and made them a molten calf and they proclaimed: ‘these are your Lord, Yisroel, that lifted you up from the Land of Mitzrayim.’ (Shemos 32:4).

Aharon appears to be very involved in the sin of the eigel. What was the sin exactly? What was Aharon’s actual involvement? And why was HaShem to upset that He wanted to destroy the entire nation?

Gemara Avoda Zara 53b says, *but it was not only with regard to the Molten Calf that the Jewish people were amenable to idolatry. “And they said: These are your Lords (pl), O Yisroel.” (Shemos 32:4). This teaches that they desired many gods.*

This question on this Gemara though is how can the Gemara translate אֱלֹהֵי as plural? Then the entire Torah would have that translation and HaShem would then be referred to as plural. However, Gemara does make a point: *elokecha* and *elokim* do not always means HaShem or a god. Also, the man gods can mean HaShem as one and the eigel as another.

Gemara Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:2 also makes my point: *So what did Yerovoam do to commit a new kind of sin? He made two Molten Calves. But did Bnei Yisroel not make many calves? (Our verse says plural). Rabbi Shimon ben R’ Yochai stated it was just one calf. “This is your Lord.” I. e., one common property for all of the tribes. Gemara Bavli Sanhedrin 63a clarifies this point stating that Rabbi Shimon ben R’ Yochai means they made one calf but they desired more than just HaShem. They wanted a second Lord.*

Gemara Avos D’Rebbi Nosson 20:1 points out the contradiction in the Bnei Yisroel’s behavior. *This is Yisroel, who made the Molten Calf. At first, they said (Shemos 24:7), “Everything the Eternal has said, we will do and we will understand.” And then they went back and said (Shemos 32:4), “These are your Lords, Yisroel!”*

Rashi says that ‘formed with engraving tool’ means not putting it together from already made pieces (passive) but forming it actively. This is how Onkeles translates it, too.

Ibin Ezra also says *it was actively formed.*

Chizkuni learns *it was more passive, as if making a bundle of some sort. Just put the pieces together.*

Midrash points out *that the reason it was a calf is because Aharon threw the gold into the melting pot and the magicians that came up from Mitzrayim with the Bnei Yisroel used their spells. They threw in the stone that Moshe wrote “arise ox” on it—when Moshe wanted the bones of Yoseph to come up from the river—and the gold turned into the calf. We learn that it was not Bnei Yisroel that sinned but the erav rav (mixed multitude) that came up with Bnei Yisroel. We learn this from words “these are your Lord” and not “our Lord.”* (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Sisa 19).

Ramban says *it was not that the Bnei Yisroel thought this Molten Calf was their Lord who brought them out of Mitzrayim. That is why they did not say ‘brought you out’ but instead say ‘up.’ This takes the place of the hand that split the sea and gave them all of the gold on the embankment of the Yam Suf. They still believed in HaShem but thought this was now the messenger.*

Chizkuni likewise says *no one is foolish enough just a few months after yetzias Mitzrayim to think that an idol will replace Hashem. It was substitute for Moshe, His messenger.*

Rashbam asks the same question and has a different answer, based on the powerful enticement of idol worship. *See there.*

Ohr Chaim’s answer to this question is based on the Midrash we quoted above. *See there.*

Sforno says, *this will serve henceforth as your elokim, for you to address in your prayers for all your needs; you will serve it in order to obtain your needs.*

Chizkuni says *the reason it was a calf is because they wrongfully gazed up at Hashem by Har Sinai (Shemos 24:10). What they saw were the angels’ feet and they looked like hooves. So they thought HaShem was a calf. They wanted to glorify HaShem as Moshe said by the Yam Suf “this is my Lord and I will glorify him.”*

Chizkuni is saying that though this was a misunderstanding the sin here connects to the wrongful gazing by the Revelation.

Ohr Chaim says *the calf is contributed to Aharon because he accepted the gold and he put the gold in the fire. However, he did not make it as an idol or even make it—it just came out (see Ibid 32:24).*

In order to decipher what took place we must look at the surrounding pessukim carefully. At first, the Bnei Yisroel did not know when Moshe was coming back. They were told to wait (Shemos 24:14) but did not know when he would return (Ibid v. 18). “And to the elders Moshe

said, ‘Wait for us—Yehoshua and I—here until we return to you, and here Aharon and Chur are with you.’” (Ibid 24:14). They were instructed to go to Aharon and Chur while Moshe was away. And they were not told it would be forty days. The passuk says, “And Moshe came within the cloud, and he went up to the mountain, *and Moshe was upon the mountain forty days and forty nights.*” (Ibid 24:18). It happened that he was on Har Sinai for forty days but there is no passuk stating there was prior instruction.

After some time, the Bnei Yisroel got restless. They followed Moshe’s instruction and went to Aharon. “When the people saw, because Moshe was late in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered on Aharon, and they said to him: ‘Get up. Make us *elokim* that will go before us, because this man Moshe, who brought us up from the Land of Mitzrayim we don't know what has become of him.’” Breaking down this passuk we see (1) it was because Moshe tarried in coming down from the mountain (2) they wanted an *elokim*, and (3) the purpose is to replace Moshe who brought them up from Mitzrayim.

The Bnei Yisroel’s guides through the desert were the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night. (See Shemos 13:22). Moshe and HaShem were both on Har Sinai. Why the rush to go?

Elokim does not always mean a god or the Lord. It also means judge or chief. See ibid 21:6 (the master brings his slave to the judges), Ibid 22:7 (the thief is brought to the courts), Ibid 22:8 (monetary disputes go to judges)<sup>1</sup>, and also in Shmuel 1 2:25 (when man sins against man he goes to the judges). Further, Moshe did not take them *out* of the Land of Mitzrayim he took them *up*. Moshe has guided them through the desert, but not strictly in navigation.

The purpose of Moshe going onto Har Sinai was to get HaShem’s Law. As HaShem said, “Come up to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets, the Law and the commandments, which I have written to instruct them.” (Shemos 24:12). When Moshe delayed in coming down, they thought themselves unworthy of the Torah. They went to Aharon—whom to Moshe said they should come with their legal disputes and questions. They said *make for us judges that can now go before us because the honorable Moshe who has taken us up from Mitzrayim—took us from the depth of slavery to a now civilized nation—we do not know what happened to him.* They did not presume Moshe died. However, the longer they encamped by the

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<sup>1</sup> All of these laws and the use of *elokim* as judge was already told to the Bnei Yisroel before Moshe ascended Har Sinai. (See Shemos 24:3).

mountain the more disputes and questions there were. Moshe had already appointed judges for them. (See Ibid 18:21). They wanted / needed judges now.

Looking at Aharon's response to the Bnei Yisroel, he asked for the gold rings that the nation adorned themselves with. (Ibid 32:2). He fashioned it into a Molten Calf. (Ibid 32:4). Later, he tells Moshe "I threw the gold into the fire and out came this calf." (Ibid 32:24). The nation's response to the calf was: "This is your judge Yisroel, who brought you up from the Land of Mitzrayim." (Ibid 32:4).

Aharon heard the response so he said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to HaShem." (Ibid 32:5). "On the next day they arose early, [the first born] offered up burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the entire people sat down to eat and to drink, and they got up to make merry." (Ibid 32:6). No real mention of idol worship.

It is at this point that "HaShem said to Moshe: "Go, descend, for *your people* corrupted, that *you* have brought up from the Land of Mitzrayim." Then HaShem further explains the sin: "They have quickly turned away from the path that I have commanded them; they have made themselves a Molten Calf. And they have prostrated themselves before it, slaughtered sacrifices to it, and they said: 'These are your Lord, Yisroel, who brought you up from the Land of Mitzrayim.'"

Notice that HaShem does not put the blame on Aharon. *They turned away. They made.* Here, HaShem says something that was not stated previously. *They prostrated themselves before it.* In passuk vav it did not say *they bowed to it.* Now it is clearer what occurred.

The longer Moshe was away the more disputes the people had. They realized that Aharon and Chur could not resolve all of them by themselves. They would need HaShem's help just like Moshe needed HaShem's guidance. The Bnei Yisroel also realized that while Moshe did not come down from the mountain with the Torah, they were sitting at the base of the mountain cut off. They felt helpless.

*We need judges. We need those to guide us.* They brought this "עֲלֵ-אַהֲרֹן" on Aharon (Ibid 32:1) because the responsibility was on his shoulders. Aharon realized the source the complaints. It was not lack of faith in life, sustenance, or food. They already "had faith in HaShem and Moshe His servant." (Ibid 14:31). This was not like the previous complaints about fear of dying in the desert or not sitting around cooking pots with meat. This one was about guidance. The people wanted to get closer to HaShem. They lost their patience waiting. *It was 'ki' because Moshe delayed in coming down.* (Ibid).

Aharon knew the answer. There are so many disputes because of the money. The parts of the Torah the Bnei Yisroel did know was the civil law and the Aseres Hadibros. The longer Moshe was away the more civil disputes there were. Aharon knew the answer was the gold. The same gold the Bnei Yisroel took out of the Land of Mitzrayim (Ibid 12:35) was now causing these disputes. Aharon took away their source of evil. If they can rid themselves of the sudden excess in wealth then they would see money as not so important. There would be peace. "And all the people stripped themselves of the golden earrings that were on their ears and brought them to Aharon." They took off their earrings, the same earrings that are a symbol of slavery. (See Shemos 21:6). They rid themselves of it. Aharon then built the mizbeach so that they can once again turn to HaShem. "When Aharon saw, he built a mizbeach in front of it, and Aharon proclaimed and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a festival to HaShem.'" (32:5). He built the mizbeach *before it*. The most important thing was the mizbeach. He also proclaimed the Holiday to HaShem. Not to *elokim*. The people still believed in HaShem.

We see this is the case in how Aharon defends himself. Aharon tells Moshe *they saw that you who guided them up from the slavery of the Land of Mitzrayim to be a civilized people were delaying in coming down. They needed judges who could guide them from their ever-growing disputes. I asked them to divest themselves of their gold.* "So they removed the gold and gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire and out came this calf." *The goal was never to make a calf. I was just forming the gold into something else so that it would symbolize a unified nation. Gold that belonged to the klall and not to each individual.*

The next day, it seems, the people simply then brought up offerings to Hashem, as Aharon proclaimed it a Holiday. However, in their heart, the people never divested themselves of the gold. They gave it, but only to worship it. Aharon saw: *On the next day they arose early, offered up burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and they got up to make merry.* (Ibid 32:6). HaShem knew the intentions in their hearts: "They have made themselves a Molten Calf. And they have *prostrated* themselves before *it*, slaughtered sacrifices to *it*." (Ibid 32:8). The offerings were not to HaShem. The intention is discovered in: *These are your judges, Yisroel, who have brought you up from the Land of Mitzrayim.* (Ibid 32:4 and 32:8).

HaShem repeats the words because they mean *This gold is your new Lord, are your judges, Yisroel. It is the gold that brought you up. It is not the Laws of the Torah that makes you civil. It is the gold. The wealth makes you no longer a slave and makes you a great nation.* They were

saying the wealth makes them civilized, not the Torah. That is why they kept saying *your* and *you* instead of *our* and *us*. The initial impression is that the one calf bound them in achdus, unity. It didn't. The symbol of wealth divided the nation even further. *Your* wealth makes *you*. Then did HaShem's anger kindle.

The lesson here is simple. It is not wealth that makes a society civilized. History is fraught with rich nations that lacked the basics of humanity. Some nations even build gold (or brass) bulls in their central business district to symbolize their wealth. It is the Torah, it is just Law that makes man different from slave and beast.

## BONUS SHTIKEL

The giving of the Torah was so important. Yet, it is shrouded in mystery. In our parsha it says, “And you shall make for yourself a Festival of Weeks, the first of the wheat harvest, and the festival of the ingathering, at the turn of the year.” (Shemos 34:22). It does not call it the anniversary of the Revelation or Festival of the Torah. Instead it ties it into the agricultural celebration and ties it closer to Succos.

Immediately after the Revelation on Har Sinai the Torah gives the three regalim. “And the festival of the harvest, the first fruits of your labors, which you will sow in the field, and the festival of the ingathering at the departure of the year, when you gather in of your labors from the field.” (Ibid 23:16). This seems to be repeated in our passukim in our parsha. The reason can well be that HaShem was *regiving* the Torah so Hashem repeated a lot of what was to be recorded with (or on) the Luchos. Idol worship, Shabbos, first born animals, these festivals; are all repeated. And even though the regalim are given at Har Sinai, there is no mention of the giving of the Torah.

Indeed, the actual date of the Revelation and HaShem giving over His Torah on Har Sinai is also not recorded in the Torah. “In the third month of the Bnei Yisroel’s departure from Mitzrayim, on this day they arrived in the desert of Sinai.” (ibid 19:1). Some time in the third month. It may be deduced it was the first day of the month. However, it is not explicit.

Moshe then ascends to HaShem and receives instruction. (Ibid 19:3). Then Moshe summoned the zekeinim. (Ibid 19:7). “And all the people replied in unison and said, ‘All that HaShem has spoken we shall do!’ and Moshe took the words of the people back to HaShem.” (Ibid 19:8). Then HaShem begins the preparations. “And HaShem said to Moshe, ‘Go to the people and prepare them today and tomorrow, and they shall wash their garments.’” (Ibid 19:10). There was to be two-day preparation. “And they shall be prepared for the third day, for on the third day, HaShem will descend before the eyes of all the people upon Mount Sinai.” (Ibid 19:11). These three days added to the first day makes this day four. Moshe, then, added a day and a commandment. “He said to the people, “Be ready for three days; do not go near a woman.” (Ibid 19:15). So then now we have five days (day of arrival, three days of prep, day of Revelation). Then Moshe goes up and down the mountain again two more times. (Ibid 19:17 (went down), 20 (went up), 25 (went down)). None of this is clear that the Torah was given on the sixth (or according to Gemara Shabbos actually on the 7<sup>th</sup>) of the Third Month.

Later, when teaching more about the regalim it says, “On the day of the first fruits, when you offer up a new meal offering to HaShem, on your festival of Weeks; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall not perform any mundane work.” (Bamidbar 28:26). And later on, Moshe repeats the regalim and says, “And you shall perform the Festival of Weeks to HaShem, your Lord, the donation you can afford to give, according to how HaShem, your Lord, shall bless you.” (Devrim 16:10). Neither mentions the Torah.

While Pesach is consistently about the redemption and leaving Mitzrayim, Shavuos is about counting the omer weeks, the first fruits, and initial ingathering. It is more tied to Succos as the gathering festival. Why this mystery?

The celebration of Shavuos is definitely about ingathering of first produce in an agricultural society. It is also tied to Pesach as we count from the redemption to this next regel. Later on, when Klal Yisroel was removed from the incidences at Har Sinai, including their great failings while Moshe was getting the Torah from HaShem, it became more. At the time, Klal Yisroel could only see their own failures. They stood from afar (Shemos 20:15), and they asked that Moshe give over the Law. (Ibid 20:16). The Bnei Yisroel did not feel confident enough to hear it from HaShem directly. “And all the people saw the sounds and the flames, the sound of the shofar, and the smoking mountain, and the people saw and trembled; they stood from afar.” (Ibid 20:15). They were very frightened. At a time when HaShem came down to them (Ibid 19:20 – HaShem descended onto the mountain) they were too frightened. Instead of coming closer they said, “You, Moshe, speak with us, and we will hear, but let the Lord not speak with us lest we die.” (Ibid 20:16). Instead, they feared for their lives.

Moshe had to then come down with the second Luchos and that is the Torah that has lasted. Accordingly, at the time, the sixth of the Third Month was not a time for celebrating the Torah as it also would reveal their failures. With the clarity of history and with distance in time, it is clear what a special day and time it is, and Chazal enacted it as a celebration of the Giving of the Torah.