

# The Golden Calve(s) of Modern Times

by Pat Adamson

In parashah Ki Tissa (Exodus 30:11 thru 34:35), many things are going on which make this section of Scripture all the more exciting. The use of incense and anointing oil in the Tabernacle; the Tablets of Stone are given; the Tablets of stone are destroyed; Moshe pleads with HaShem to spare Israel; the Tablets of stone are replaced; and the Sabbath is given as a sign of the Covenant. But perhaps the most significant event is when Israel collectively turns away from HaShem during the Golden Calf incident. This event in Israel's history highlights the fragile condition of faith back then and it also highlights the fragile condition of our faith today. This condition is not exclusive to Israel – it shows the innate corruption of the human heart.

In Exodus 32:11 Aaron instructs the people to “Strip off their golden earrings” and he melts the gold down into the shape of a calf – a golden calf which was one of the deities they left behind in Egypt. This example of regression from Aaron and the people of Israel, although grievous, was not unexpected – it did not come as a surprise to HaShem. Why? Because He knows very well the difficulty of our struggle and the tendencies of our human nature to repeat history.

Have you ever noticed that that which is most familiar can oftentimes drag a person away from following G-d if it is allowed to keep re-surfacing? The people wanted a “tangible” god. They were not looking for the transcendent G-d who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt. Even following a miraculous deliverance from the Egyptian army, rather than trusting Moshe and waiting on HaShem, they began looking for a "convenient" god – one that could be seen and touched and passed around. Remarkably, they wanted an idol much like the ones left behind in Egypt! G-d delivers His people from the pernicious deception of false deities in Egypt, but still the people of Israel cling to their familiar past rather than trusting HaShem to guide them into an unknown future.

Whenever one attempts to “do religion” based on their own ideas, in effect, that person is rejecting G-d and may as well be shaping his/her own “golden calf.” This is the struggle we face – it exists in even the best of us. We have a strong tendency to revert to “familiar” things in our attempt to relate to the divine. Therefore, even the believing community is subject to compromise, rationalization and watering-down what G-d has clearly communicated in His Word. We all remember the words that Rav Sha’ul wrote in Romans chapter 7 . . .

*<sup>14</sup>“For we know that the Torah is of the Spirit; but as for me, I am bound to the old nature, sold to sin as a slave. <sup>15</sup>I don't understand my own behavior – I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate! <sup>16</sup>Now if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the Torah is good. <sup>17</sup>But now it is no longer "the real me" doing it, but the sin housed inside me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that there is nothing good housed inside me – that is, inside my old nature. I can want what is good, but I can't do it! <sup>19</sup>For I don't do the good I want; instead, the evil that I don't want is what I do! <sup>20</sup>But if I am doing what "the real me" doesn't want, it is no longer "the real me" doing it but the sin housed inside me. <sup>21</sup>So I find it to be the rule, a kind of perverse "torah," that although I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me! <sup>22</sup>For in my inner self I completely agree with G-d's Torah; <sup>23</sup>but in my various parts, I see a different "torah," one that*

*battles with the Torah in my mind and makes me a prisoner of sin's "torah," which is operating in my various parts.*" (Romans 7:14-23 CJB)

Sha'ul struggled with the dual nature of his existence. He struggled with fleshly desires that persistently encroached into his new creation identity. To what extent and what was the nature of Paul's struggle? We're not told. Why is this nature still present in believers? We have been created in the image of G-d, but as a result of the fall, by nature, we remain sin-filled wretched creatures. We are born "self-centered" rather than G-d-centered (SELF-actualization; SELF-realization, etc.) If you doubt this, just put a couple of 2-year-olds together with one toy and see what happens! Or, put two infants together each with a toy – each will want what the other has! In other words, like Aaron, we are prone to sin – even from birth we are prone to making "golden calves" that merge with our level of comfort. I believe this is the struggle that Paul faced. I believe this is the struggle we all face at times. We revert to what's familiar and comfortable rather than what may take some cooperative effort with HaShem.

To one degree or another, society has recreated G-d into an image that fits our ways of thinking – and our own ways of living.

Perhaps this is a strong indictment on many in the believing community today. But here's the good news: Even though this struggle is part of our human existence, it does not have to end with ultimate and repeated failure. In our new creation status, HaShem has injected something into you that the rest of the world does not have – His Ruach, the Ruach HaKodesh (the Holy Spirit). At the end of Romans chapter 7 and on into chapter 8, Paul explains that:

*<sup>6</sup>"Having one's mind controlled by the old nature is death, but having one's mind controlled by the Spirit is life and shalom. <sup>7</sup>For the mind controlled by the old nature is hostile to G-d, because it does not submit itself to G-d's Torah – indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup>Thus, those who identify with their old nature cannot please G-d."* (Romans 8:6-8 CJB)

If the "old nature" is hostile to G-d and the things of G-d, then at one time, we were opposed not only to HaShem, but also to His Torah. We were opposed to the Torah-centered lifestyle He provided for living victoriously as His followers. Clearly, our struggle is to NOT revert to the old nature (the old man) that would pull us away. And just as clearly, our commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) involves first becoming disciples ourselves.

We are called to study to show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15) and that . . .

*. . . "All Scripture is G-d-breathed and valuable for teaching the Truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living; thus anyone who belongs to G-d may be fully equipped for every good work."*

(2 Timothy 3:16-17 CJB)

The word of man is never eternal – only the Word of HaShem is eternal (Isaiah 40:8).

Today, we don't pour golden molds of all those things from our former life that served to pull us away from HaShem. We don't embrace golden calves or erect shrines because those things were

formed and shaped and maintained for many years in the hidden recesses of our own hearts. We don't need to physically tear down these things. What we need is a new heart (Psalm 51:10).

Friendship to the world is hostility to G-d (James 4:4). Let us therefore keep our hands to the plow, never looking back to those things that pleased our old nature. Let the "golden calves" of yesterday remain in the past. And may we not be controlled by the elemental principles/philosophies of this world that would rationalize; water down, or compromise our walk as righteous followers of The Way. Rav Sha'ul (the Apostle Paul) said it best:

<sup>16</sup>*“What I am saying is this: run your lives by the Spirit. Then you will not do what your old nature wants. <sup>17</sup>For the old nature wants what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is contrary to the old nature. These oppose each other, so that you find yourselves unable to carry out your good intentions. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism.”* (Galatians 5:16-18 CJB)

I exhort you dear mishpocha, to be led by the Torah for it is from the teachings in Scripture that we hear HaShem's voice most clearly. Even so, please don't allow any church or rabbinic traditions to become another "golden calf" whereby our identity with HaShem is no longer based on Scripture but rather on the extra-biblical and legalistic interpretations of men (Mark 7:7-9). Don't allow any form of legalism to become some kind of a pious trademark of your relationship with HaShem.

One day we will be glorified with Yeshua. The dead will be raised imperishable; and then this perishable flesh of our mortality will be changed to the incorruptible existence of shalom in the kingdom of G-d (1 Corinthians 15:53). As we live and breathe today, we must occupy our time by accepting that which is good; challenging the traditions we have inherited; and holding everything to the light of Scripture. If we truly do this, and live out with conviction what we say we believe, then we have within us the ability to turn the world upside down to the glory of G-d.

*“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the [Messianic community] and in [Messiah Yeshua] to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”* (Ephesians 3:20-21 NASB)

Baruch HaShem!