

# Ki Tisa

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Moshe is up the mountain receiving the tablets of stone. Yehoshua is halfway up attending on Moshe, and Aharon and Chur are down below. When Moshe delays returning, panic sets in and "the people" come to Aharon and ask for an idol to represent God.

The delay could surely not have been in itself the cause of the need to create a golden calf. The need for images must have been very deeply ingrained. Hardly surprising, given the many animal gods of Egypt, and the Middle East in general. There must have been a current of discontent running through the camp long before. And of course we know how fractious the people had been even within days of crossing the Red Sea.

And what happened to Chur? He is never mentioned again. The Midrash suggests that he tried to stop the protesters and was murdered. That was why Aharon was so compliant.

When Moshe hears what is going on, he immediately appeals to God to suspend judgment. He gets nearer and sees the calf and smashes the tablets in anger. In anger? Or because the covenant with God had been broken, anyway, by the calf worshippers. He then conducts his enquiry. Decides it was a minority inspired deviation. Restores order and returns to God.

Normality is soon restored. The people in general are not punished. Why is it, therefore, that later on when the ten spies come back with a frightened report on the Land of Israel, and the people are terrified, they are punished as a nation altogether and made to wander for forty years until the fainthearted are all dead?

It seems that having problems understanding the nature of God is not as problematic as actually refusing to follow God and trusting. The Golden Calf people just didn't understand the nature of God. They said, "These are the gods who took you out of Egypt." Sure, they knew they had just made it themselves. In the final, analysis behavior counts. It is not so much what you think, as what you do.