THE FIRST COMMANDMENT and the Golden Calf

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When the people of Israel thought that Moses was not returning from Mount Sinai, they made an idol, a golden calf. At the official opening of the new “religion”, which was similar to the religion of the Egyptians who worshiped animals, the people said: “Ele ELOQEJA Israel,” “This is your God, Israel.”

It is interesting to note that, consciously or unconsciously, the mob used the same expression that HaShem used in the First Commandment when He said “Anokhi HaShem, ELOQEJA” I am HaShem, your God. ”

Obviously, their intention was NOT to replace HaShem by a golden calf. The Jewish people still believed in God. But not everyone was satisfied with the fact that HaShem was also “ELOQEJA”. A God that one must “serve” behaving with integrity and with a blameless moral conduct …

The Golden Calf was an entirely different type of “ELOQEJA”. To “serve” the calf the people got drunk and indulged in lust and promiscuity. That was the way pagan idols were worshiped.

This detail is revealing and very relevant to understanding the nature of our Emuna or Jewish faith. Beyond the obvious, the main difference between serving HaShem and serving the calf is that the golden calf does not speak, it demands nothing, and it does not get involved in what I do or do not do. While HaShem requires that we practice *qedusha*, obeying His commandment controlling our impulses, the golden calf is worshiped by obeying one’s own basic instincts. The Golden Calf did not meddle in people’s private life. It had no ethical or spiritual demands. Like the Greek or Roman gods, the calf only asked that occasionally its worshippers would offer it some sacrifice to satisfy its own appetites.

I read a little bit about the life of Albert Einstein, the greatest scientist of last century. I was always interested in understanding the religious philosophy of this great man. What I learned is that Einstein believed in God, but in his own way. He did not believe in the God of Abraham Itshaq and Yaaqob, a “personal” God, i.e., a God that tells us what we

should do with our lives. The God of Einstein, and of many progressive or liberal individuals, might be the wise Creator of the world, but he would not get into what I do or do not do. Like the god of Aristotle, who created the world and then abandoned it to its fate. Or the passive God of Spinoza, who is everything (= nothing) , but does not have a specific will, or if he has, he did not reveal it to humankind. Millions of people might believe in God, but they relate to Him □"□ as if He was a golden calf: an entity which we do not need to obey, or listen to.

The first commandment, on the other hand, makes it clear that HaShem is not only the Creator of the world. He defines what is right and what is wrong. The Jewish way of relating to God passes first through the obedience of His commandments. Observing the code of conduct that He has established. Our relationship with HaShem, as the relationship between spouses or between parents and children, is a series of rights *and*obligations.

Following the First Commandment, we, the people of Israel demonstrate our belief and love for God by obeying His will.