

Dec. 18

92. The Kuzari said: "Be careful, Rabbi, that you do not overstate the praise of your people and overlook the well-known account of their rebellion during this period of miracles. For I have heard that in the midst of all this they made a Golden Calf and worshipped it instead of God."¹⁰¹

93. The Rabbi said: "The severity of their sin was magnified because of their greatness."¹⁰² Great indeed is one whose sins are enumerated."¹⁰³

94. The Kuzari said: "You say this only out of your favorable bias toward your people. What greater sin is there than idolatry? What greatness could possibly remain after that?"

96. The Kuzari said: "I grant you that they inherited their greatness from Adam, and that Adam was the most perfect of all creatures, and that your nation was worthy of achieving more greatness than anyone else in the world. But still — how could there be any remnant of greatness after this sin [of the Golden Calf]?"

97. [1] The Rabbi said: "In those days, every people worshipped images. Even if philosophers had been able to prove to everyone the existence of the one omnipotent God, they still would not have relinquished their images. This is because they would focus their attentions upon the image, and

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[2] "[During this period in history,] Israel was waiting for that which Moshe had promised to bring down to them from God — something that they could see and focus upon, just as they had focused upon the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire when they left Egypt. They would gaze and concentrate upon the pillars, and would exalt them by bowing down to God's presence in front of them. They behaved the same way with the pillar of cloud that descended upon Moshe when God spoke with him."¹²⁷

[3] "The nation heard the Ten Commandments, and Moshe ascended the mountain to bring down the engraved tablets and place them in an Ark. The objective was to have some tangible item that they could focus upon — something that would contain [a record of] the covenant between God and Israel,¹²⁸ and a Divine [new] creation, namely, the tablets themselves. Additionally, there was a cloud of Divine glory that hovered above the Ark, and the Ark was continually associated with miracles."¹²⁹

[4] "The people patiently waited for Moshe to descend from the mountain, and they retained their holy status all this time. They did not change in their appearance, their jewelry, or their clothes from their first day at Mount Sinai; they stayed where they were, awaiting Moshe's return. Moshe tarried for forty days, without having taken any provisions with him. And when he had first left them to ascend the mountain, it was with the understanding that he would return that very day¹³⁰ — they therefore assumed that he was dead]. It was then that an evil thought overtook

וְאֵשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ הָעָם דְּבַר יְעֲשֶׂה
הַדְּבָרִים וְעֵלָּה מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָהָר לְהוֹרִיד
לָהֶם הַלְוָחוֹת כְּתוּבִים, וְלַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם
אֲרוֹן לְהִיּוֹת לָהֶם דְּבַר נִצָּחַן שֶׁיִּכְוֶנוּ נִגְדוֹ,
שֶׁכֵּן יִהְיֶה הַפָּרִיט לְאֱלֹהִים וְהַכְרִיאָה
הַרְבּוּבִימָה, רוּצָה לִזְמֶר: הַלְוָחוֹת, וְזֹלַת מֶה
שֶׁדָּבַק בָּאֲרוֹן מִהַעֲנֹן וְהַקְבֹּד וּמֶה שֶׁנִּצָּחַה
בְּעֶבְרָתוֹ מִהַמּוֹפְתִים.

וְנִשְׁאָרוּ הָעָם כֹּמְצִים לְדַת מֹשֶׁה
וְהֵם עַל עֵינָם, לֹא שֶׁנֹּעַ הָאָרֶץ וְעָדִים
וּבְגָדֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר עָמְדוּ בָּהֶם יוֹם כְּעֶמֶד
הַר סִינַי, אֵד נִשְׁאָרוּ בְּתַכּוּנָתָם מִתְּחִילָה
לְמֹשֶׁה, וּבִשְׁשׁ מִקָּם אֲרֻבִּים יוֹם, (וְהוּא
לֹא לָקַח צִידָה וְלֹא נִפְרַד מֵהֶם אֵלָּא עַל
מִנַּת שִׁשׁוּב לְיִצְחָק. אִם נִגְרָה הַפְּחִיטָה

[6] "Their sin, therefore, was the making of an image which was forbidden to them. They further sinned by ascribing Divinity to something which

they themselves had constructed without the sanction of God.¹³⁴ Their defense is that all this arose as a result of a mass confusion [due to Moshe's apparent death]. Furthermore, the number

[8] "This sin was not a departure from worshipping the God Who took them out of Egypt; rather, it was a revolt against a fraction of His commandments. For God had commanded them not to make images [representing Him], and they proceeded to make an image. They should have

continued waiting instead of [relying on their own intellects and] making something to concentrate upon and follow. Nor should they

בְּיָדָם וְרִצּוֹנָם מִבְּלִי מִצּוֹת הָאֱלֹהִים. וְיֵשׁ
לָהֶם הַתְּנַצְלוֹת בְּמֶה שֶׁקָּדַם מִהַמַּחֲלָקָה
בִּינֵיהֶם, וְלֹא הִגִּיעוּ עוֹבְדָיו אֶל שְׁלֹשֶׁת
אֱלֹהִים אִישׁ מִכָּלל שֶׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אֱלֹהִים שֶׁהָיוּ.
אֲבָל הַתְּנַצְלוֹת הַגְּדוֹלִים שֶׁסִּיעוּ בְּעֲשׂוֹתוֹ

לְהַמְתִּין שְׁלֹא יִקְבְּעוּ עֲצָמָם דְּבַר שִׁיקְבִּילוּהוּ
וְיִשְׁכּוּ אַחֲרָיו, וּמִזֶּכֶם וְנִרְבְּנוֹת, וְזֶה
הָיָה מַעֲצָתוֹ מִי שֶׁהָיָה בִּינֵיהֶם מִן הַחוּזִים