

Ex. 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.” 2 Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” 3 And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 This he took from them and ^acast in a mold,^a and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, ^b“This is your god,^b O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!” 5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron announced: “Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!” 6 Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance.

RASHBAM: **This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!** Could they really be so foolish as not to understand that this calf, which had just been created, had not brought them out of Egypt? Of course not. All idolaters know that our God in heaven created the world. Their mistake was made because idols have in them an unclean spirit, just as the prophets have in them a holy spirit. Here, they thought that the calf, which could speak by means of an unclean spirit, was speaking by means of a holy spirit from Above. Saying “this is your god” meant: “Since the holy spirit is in it, it is as if the holy spirit is going before us.” In just this fashion, when Rachel stole his idols, Laban challenged Jacob, “Why did you steal my gods?” (Gen. 31:30). It was to test Israel that God put an unclean, magic spirit into the Golden Calf. (Similarly, God puts into ghosts and familiar spirits the power to contradict the heavenly retinue and predict the future.) The purpose of it all was to find out whether they would be “whole-hearted with the Lord their God” (Deut. 18:13), and not have among them “a soothsayer, a diviner, or a sorcerer” (Deut. 18:10), or believe in the signs given by a false prophet. “Even if the sign or portent that he named to you comes true, do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For the Lord your God is testing you to see whether you really love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul” (Deut. 13:3–4). But Moses saw that the people were bent on evil.

NAHMANIDES: **This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!** This too teaches you that they did not worship the calf. For no one in the world could be so stupid as to think that the gold in their ears brought them out of Egypt. They thought that the power of this form had brought them *up* from there, but you will never find them saying anywhere that the calf brought them *out*, for they completely acknowledged the One who said, “I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (20:2).

Q 71:21

Noah said: My Lord! Lo! they have disobeyed me and followed one whose wealth and children increase him in naught save ruin; 22 And they have plotted a mighty plot, 23 And they have said: Forsake not your gods. Forsake not Wadd, nor Suwa', nor Yaghuth and Ya'uq and Nasr. 24 And they have led many astray, and Thou increasest the wrong-doers in naught save error. 25 Because of their sins they were drowned, then made to enter a Fire. And they found they had no helpers in place of Allah.

IBN ARABI: If they had rejected those (gods/ idols), they would have been ignorant of God-the-Truth [al-ḥaqq] in the measure that they rejected them, for in every object of worship there is an aspect of God-the-Truth, which one who knows Him knows, and one who does not know Him does not know. In regard to the Muḥammadans, there came (the verse of the Qur'an), "Your Lord determined that you will not worship other than He" [17:23] meaning: "He established." The one who possesses knowledge knows who is worshipped and which form He manifests so as to be worshipped... So nothing other than God [Allāh] is worshipped in every object of worship.

Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic*, 28

Ibn 'Arabī is here taking the Qur'ānic verse "Your Lord has determined that you will not worship other than He" to mean not that God has commanded that nothing be worshipped other than Him (the intuitive reading and common Muslim creed), but rather that God has established as an accomplished fact that any act of worship is necessarily directed to Him alone, and thus "in every aspect of worship" including idolatry (the very practice to the eradication of which the Prophet Muḥammad had devoted himself) "there is an aspect of God." By this profoundly counter-intuitive and destabilizing reading of the Text of Revelation ... Ibn 'Arabī is able to take an indulgent view of the Qur'ānic presentation of the Prophet Hārūn/Aaron's bootless attempt to prevent the Banū Isrā'īl/Children of Israel from worshipping the Golden Calf (for which his elder brother, Mūsā/Moses, had soundly berated him):

IBN ARABI: The incapacity of Hārūn to restrain the followers of the Calf ... was a wisdom from God made manifest in existence: that He be worshipped in every form.

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