

1. Shemot 32:4, 32:24

וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֵׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסֻּכָּה
וַאֲמַר לָהֶם לְמִי זָקָב הַתְּפָרְקוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ לִי וְאֲשַׁלְכֵהוּ בְּאֵשׁ וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה:

And [Aharon] took it from their hands, and he formed it with a mold [or: magic], and he made it a molten calf.
And I said to them, "Who has gold? Remove it!" And they gave it to me. And I threw it in the fire, and this calf emerged.

2. Radak to Melachim I 12:28

אמר להם: הלא אהרן עשה לישראל עגל להשרות השכינה בו במקום משה שלא היה להם. גם אתם עתה שאין לכם מקום השכינה שהוא ירושלים, נעשה עגל במקומו להשרות שכינה בו.

[Yeravam] told them: Aharon made Israel a calf, on which the Shechinah would be manifest, in place of Moshe, whom they lacked. You, too, lack the place of the Shechinah – Jerusalem – so let us make a calf in its place, for the Shechinah to be manifest.

Why a Bull?

3. Dr. Jonathan Frankel, *Why a Golden Calf and not any other symbol?* Times of Israel 2/16/22

One of the most popular and well recognized religious symbols in Egypt throughout its entire history was the cult of Apis, a religious entity that revolved around the deified intermediacy of a bull. The cult of Apis (Hapi in Egyptian) was popular throughout Egyptian history dating back to the earliest dynasties. The Apis bull lived in the temple of Ptah in Memphis and served as the tangible manifestation of an all-powerful god (originally Ptah, later Osiris, then Atum). This intermediate allowed commoners access to divine communication. Egyptians would visit the temple to ask the bull questions and interpret its actions as responses from the god.

The functional comparison between the Apis bull and the Golden Calf are obvious, however a bull is not a calf. If the goal was to recreate a classic Egyptian religious icon, then why make a calf? The following is an excerpt detailing the cult of the Apis Bull which provides a remarkable insight: "Since the Apis Bull was a living creature, it would eventually die, prompting... the search for a new Apis bull.... This new Apis would be a calf.... they took it to Nilopolis for 40 days of feeding after which time it was transferred via a boat inside a gold cabin to the temple of Ptah where it was greeted by the people who came to view their reincarnated god and hoped to have their questions answered." (A Popular Account of the Ancient Egyptians: Volume 1)

4. Mishlei 14:4

בְּאֵין אֱלֵפִים אָבוּס בָּר וְרַב תְּבוּאוֹת בְּכַח שׁוֹר:

Where there are no oxen, the trough is empty – and great produce comes with the strength of an ox.

5. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Yechezkel 1:10

"פני שור" כי הוא בעל התבואות ומרבה אותם וכמו שאמר "ורב תבואות בכח שור" (משלי יד, ד)

"The face of an ox" – the master of produce, increasing it, as in, "And great harvest through the strength of the ox."

6. Midrash, Shir haShirim Rabbah 3:4

ארבע גאים הם, גאה שבעופות נשר, גאה שבחיות שור, גאה שבחיות אריה, גאה שבכלל אדם, וכלן נטלן הקב"ה וחקקן בכסא הכבוד...

There are four great ones: The *neshet* among birds, the ox among domesticated animals, the lion among wild beasts, and Man among all of them. Gd took all of them and engraved them upon the Divine throne.

7. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Maayanei haYeshuah 6:4

אמר דניאל שיאכל עשב השדה כשורים בהיות שבספור החלום לא נזכר שור ביחוד, לפי שמצא דניאל בחלום שיאכל מעשב השדה עם שאר הבהמות ומזה למד שלא ישתנה לבעל חי טורף כי הוא אוכל בשר לא עשב, גם למעלתו לא יהיה כאחד הצבאים ולכן פתר לו שיהיה כשור שהוא מלך בבהמות בעל הזרוע ורב תבואות בכח שור, והוא בילדותו ובבחרותו חזק ולוחם בקרניו בהם עמים ינגח ובזקנתו ישא עול, וכן היה ענין נ"ב.

Daniel said he would eat the grass of the field like oxen, even though the dream as told did not specify an ox. Daniel saw in the dream that he would eat of the grass of the field with other animals, so that he would not change to a predatory creature, which would eat meat, not grass. Also, with his stature he would not be like one of the deer. Therefore, he explained to [Nevuchadnezzar] that he would be like an ox, king of the animals, powerful “and great produce comes through the strength of an ox.” In its childhood and youth it is strong and it battles with its horns, “with which it will gore nations,” and in its older age it carries the yoke. So it was with Nevuchadnezzar.

8. Yeshayah 1:3

ידע שור קונהו וחמור אבוס בעליו...

The ox knows its owner, and the donkey [knows] the trough of its master...

9. Tehillim 106:19-20

(ט) יַעֲשׂוּ עֵגֶל בְּחֶרֶב וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְמַסְכָּה: (כ) וַיִּמְירוּ אֶת כְּבוֹדָם בְּתַבְנִית שׁוֹר אֲכָל עֵשָׂב:

They made a calf at Horeb, and they bowed to a sculpture. And they traded their honour for the form of an ox eating grass.

10. Don Isaac Abarbanel to Yechezkel 1:28

וחז"ל אמרו שבמעמד הר סיני ראו ישראל המרכבה הזאת... ואמרו שפני שור ראו כנגד מחניהם לפיכך עשו העגל.

Our Sages said that at Sinai, Israel saw this *Merkavah*... and they said that they saw the face of an ox opposite their camp, and so they made an Eigel.

11. Yechezkel 10:14, 1:10

וְאַרְבַּעָה פָּנִים לְאֶחָד פְּנֵי הָאֶחָד פְּנֵי הַכְּרוּב וּפְנֵי הַשְּׂנִי פְּנֵי אָדָם וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁי פְּנֵי אַרְיֵה וְהָרְבִיעִי פְּנֵי נֶשֶׁר:
וְדַמּוּת פְּנֵיהֶם פְּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אַרְיֵה אֶל הַיָּמִין לְאַרְבַּעֵתָם וּפְנֵי שׁוֹר מִהַשְּׂמֹאל לְאַרְבַּעֵתָן וּפְנֵי נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעֵתָן:

Each one had four faces. One face was the *cherub*, the second face was a person, the third face was a lion, and the fourth face was a *neshet*.

And their faces were the face of a person, and the face of a lion to the right for the four, and the face of an ox to the left for the four, and the face of a *neshet* for the four.

12. Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 19

ויש אומרים שמיכה היה שנתמכך בבנין מה שהציל משה מן הלבנים נטל הלוח שכתב עליו משה עלה שור כשהעלה ארונו של יוסף השליכו תוך הכור בין הנזמים ויצא העגל...

And some say that “Michah” was because he was crushed (*nitmachmech*) in a building, and Moshe saved him from the bricks. He took a plate on which Moshe had written, “Rise, bull,” when bringing up Yosef’s casket. He threw it in the kiln among the rings, and the calf emerged...

13. Bereishit 49:6

...כִּי בְאֵפֶם הָרְגוּ אִישׁ וּבְרִצְנָם עָקְרוּ שׁוֹר:

For in their rage they killed a man, and at their will they [would have] uprooted an ox.

14. Devarim 33:17

בְּכוֹר שׁוֹרוֹ הָדָר לוֹ וְקַרְנָיו רָאֵם קַרְנָיו בָּהֶם עַמִּים יִנְגַח יַחְדָּו אֶפְסֵי אֲרָץ...

His firstborn ox, glory is his, and the horns of a re'em are his horns. With them he will gore nations as one, even to the ends of the earth...

Aharon's Hidden Message

15. Midrash Tehillim 59:4

ולמה נקרא שמה עגלה, מה העגלה הזאת אינה מקבלת עול על צוארה, כך מיכל לא קיבלה עול מאביה, אלא קינטרה אותו.

And why was she called *Eglah*? Just as a calf does not accept a yoke upon her neck, so Michal did not accept the yoke of her father; rather, she angered him.

16. Shoftim 14:18

...ויאמר להם לולא תרשטם בעגלתי לא מצאתם חידתי:

He said to them: Had you not plowed with my female calf, you would not have found out my riddle!

17. Yirmiyahu 46:20

עגלה יפה פיה מצרים...

Egypt is a pretty calf...

18. Hoshea 10:9-13

ואפרים עגלה מלמדה אהבתי לדוש... תרשטם רשע עולתה קצרתם, אכלתם פרי כחש פי כטחת בדרךך ברב גבוריך:

And Ephraim was a trained calf, loving to thresh... You plowed wickedness, and you have harvested corruption. You have eaten the fruit of rejection [of Me], for you trusted your own paths, your many warriors.

19. Malachi 3:20

ויצאתם ופשתם כעגלי מרבק:

You shall go forth and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

20. Shemot 21:28-29, 21:35-26

וכי יגח שור את איש או את אשה ומת... ואם שור נגח הוא מתמל שלשם והועד בעגליו ולא ישמרנו והמית איש או אשה...

וכי יגף שור איש את שור רעהו ומת... או נודע כי שור נגח הוא מתמול שלשם ולא ישמרנו בעגליו...

And if an ox should gore a man or woman, and they die... And if it has been a goring ox since yesterday or the day before, and its owners were warned and they did not guard it, and it killed a man or woman...

And if a man's ox should strike his peer's ox, and it dies... Or it has been known that this is a goring ox since yesterday or the day before, and the owners did not guard it...

21. Bamidbar 22:4

כלחוך השור את ירק השדה

As an ox licks up the greens of the field.

22. Mishnah, Bava Kama 1:1

ארבעה אבות נזיקים: השור והבור והמבעה וההבער...

There are four central categories of harm: The ox, the pit, the human, and the fire...