The Gemara elaborates upon additional aspects of the sin of the Golden Calf. It is stated: "And the Lord said to Moses: Go and descend, for your people whom you have lifted out of the land of Egypt have been corrupted" (Exodus 32:7). What is the meaning of "go and descend"? Rabbi Elazar said: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, descend from your greatness." Isn't it only for the sake of Israel, so that you may serve as an emissary, that I granted you prominence; and now that Israel has sinned, why do I need you? There is no need for an emissary. Immediately, Moses' strength waned and he was powerless to speak in defense of Israel. And once God said to Moses: "Leave Me be, that I may destroy them" (Deuteronomy 9:19), Moses said to himself: If God is telling me to let Him be, it must be because this matter is dependent upon me. Immediately Moses stood and was strengthened in prayer, and asked that God have mercy on the nation of Israel and forgive them for their transgression.

The Gemara says: This is comparable to a king who became angry at his son who had sinned against him, and beat him, administering a severe beating. At that moment, a well-wisher of the king was sitting before him and witnessed the entire event, and was afraid to say anything to the king about the excessive beating. Meanwhile, the king said to his son: Were it not for this well-wisher of mine who is sitting before me, I would have killed you. Upon hearing this, the king's friend said to himself: This is clearly a sign that this matter, rescuing the son from the hands of his father, is dependent upon me. Immediately he stood and rescued him from the king.

Gemara in Berakhot:

R. Abahu said: Were this verse not written in the Torah, it would be impossible to assert. This teaches that Moses seized the Holy One Blessed Is He like a person who seizes his friend by the garment and says before him: "Master of the Universe, I shall not release You until You forgive and pardon them.”

God now presents Moses with a test of leadership. Is Moses a leader only when miracles are at his disposal, when God commands "lift your hand over the sea" to split it? Or can he also display leadership when God threatens to destroy the people? If Moses indeed "leaves God alone," if he does not defend the people, if he only desires to continue the earlier, facile type of leadership, then, indeed: "My anger will burn, and I will destroy them." Under these circumstances, Moses is no leader at all, in contrast to Abraham who even attempted to defend the evil city of Sodom from annihilation. If Moses cannot argue on behalf of the people, if he cannot sacrifice on their behalf, then his leadership is gone.
from Mount Sinai

with the two tables of the testimony
in Moses' hand,

when he came down
from the mount,

that Moses knew not

that the skin of his face sent forth beams

while He talked with him.

30. And (when) Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses,

behold, the skin of his face sent forth beams;

and they were afraid

to come nigh him.

The sages say that when the Master of the Universe promises something good he never retracts it. God offered Moshe the fatherhood of a great nation; how was this promise fulfilled? The entire congregation of Israel became Moshe's nation. Torah laws are considered Halacha l'Moshe miSinai, and a marriage ceremony is completed, according to the Law of Moshe and Israel.* Because he was ready to sacrifice everything on behalf of the nation, the entire Torah is Torat Moshe. (Derashot HaRav, Lusitger, p.92)
On one hand, a passage in Sanhedrin 111a² contrasts Moses unfavorably to the forefathers. After Moses’ initial approach to Pharaoh on Israel’s behalf only resulted in greater oppression of Israel, Moses complained to God and demanded to know why he was sent on this failed mission. God responded:

> הלו אל אבريب אלו תпромות | כמעמגמה גולית | גבעה ברית.
> ירבע כעל אלא מרה ברית | דומת | מתקד עמים.
> באור להאריך להדרכה | לפרס | במעון לקומינו.
> יהושע במעון מבית קשת | הלא הרצוי | דומת.
> מארית בּלע"ז | מארית | בּלע"ז.
> מברך משאני יושב | לפני מנהג | לפני מנהג.

Alas for those gone and no longer to be found [i.e. I miss the patriarchs, whose like is no longer to be found]! On a number of occasions I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who never questioned My ways. [For example, although] I said to Abraham: "Arise and walk the length and breadth of the land, for I shall give it to you," ⁶ he had to search for a place to bury Sarah and could not find one until he was willing to buy [a plot of land] for [the exorbitant price of] 400 silver shekels. ⁷ [Still] he did not question My ways.

It seems from this passage that God placed the forefathers on a higher plane than Moses. To further support this position, consider that in our daily prayers we invoke the forefathers, as we pray to: "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." We do not pray to the Messiah, the God of Moses. In fact, Hazon say that it is forbidden to invoke more than the three forefathers in the first blessing of Shemoned Esrei (Berakhhot 16b).

The Rambam continues:

> ונהתקיים תמיד הפרשים את בראשית ודי תורה יצחקו ומשהו
> משכון על כה כה深い חכמה או שלום שלם דודו האמצה

He was forty years of age when Abraham recognized his Creator. Once he understood, he started to raise questions to the population of Ur Kasdim, and to arrange debates with them and say that their path was not correct.

Verse 7: And Hashem spoke (vayedaber) to Moses, saying: "Go, descend, for your nation that you brought up out of Egypt has become corrupt.

Verse 8: They have strayed quickly from the way that I have commanded them. They have made a molten calf, bowed to it, and sacrificed to it, and they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.'

Verse 9: And Hashem said (vayomem) to Moses: "I have seen this nation, and behold it is a stubborn nation.

Verse 10: And now, leave Me be. Let My anger flare up against them and I will annihilate them and I shall make you a great nation."