

D'var Torah: Parashat Ki Tisa

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In this D'var Torah, my focus is on the building of the golden calf. Moses has been on Mount Sinai for 40 days trying to communicate with God. But down below the Israelites feel lost without their leader. They soon turn to Aaron for guidance, but he is unable to reassure them. Aaron is not a born leader like Moses. He is also scared without Moses and God's presence.

The Israelites present Aaron with the idea of building a golden calf to pray to while Moses is gone. This goes against the Israelites' value of having faith and praying to only one God. But the Israelites do not know how long Moses will be gone for and start to go astray from the teaching that there is only one God and that they must have faith. In the commentaries, it states that at first Aaron refuses because in his mind this would be an unacceptable action in God's eyes and they would surely be punished for their doings. But maybe Aaron also wanted a god to pray to, like he had done his whole life. It seems Aaron's faith wasn't strong enough to overcome his fear; maybe he didn't have enough faith in God to wait for Moses to return.

I'm interested in understanding why Aaron broke under pressure, since he did not originally want to build the golden calf. Aaron was taught by Moses to be faithful but he wasn't able to maintain his faith when tested. Prior to the disaster of the golden calf, it was very meaningful to Aaron to uphold all the values that Moses shared with him. But when Aaron was confronted by the Israelites, his fear overcame his faith. It's possible that his fear caused him to abandon his value of praying to only God.

In the parsha, God trusts Moses and puts much faith in him that he will guide the Israelites. Moses is a strong leader and encouraged the Israelites to have faith in God. He taught Aaron these same principles, but Aaron could not uphold them when Moses disappeared for 40 days and the people panicked. It's possible Aaron panicked too and that's why he might have built the golden calf instead of having faith while Moses was gone for so long.

Aaron's faith was challenged in the face of his fear. Sometimes something can be very important to somebody, but they give it up due to desperation and fear. It seems like Aaron was in just as much fear as the Israelites with Moses being gone so long and that's why he lost faith and made a golden calf. Aaron might also have lost faith in himself as a leader. His fear over not being able to lead the Israelites in Moses' absence might also have contributed to him building the golden calf.

The commentaries show fear as the root problem which leads to the Israelites and Aaron building the golden calf. When people are in a state of fear, they don't always uphold their values. The Israelites and Aaron are in fear when Moses is gone so long and look outside of their value of not worshipping idols to feel less fearful. When in a place of fear people tend to not take responsibility, like Aaron when he is confronted by Moses. Aaron claims he simply threw the gold into the fire and out came the calf. This is obviously not true because earlier in the parsha it states that Aaron did indeed build the calf under pressure. In one of the commentaries, it states "Fearing for his life, Aaron gave into their demands, took their gold, and coated the calf. Instead of taking risk, speaking out, and providing strong guidance in the absence of his brother, Aaron capitulated to the demands of the mob." This quote explains that instead of taking the

risk of being true to God, Aaron folded under pressure. He was fearful and didn't defend Moses, wasn't a strong leader, and built the golden calf.

I agree with the commentaries. It answers my question about why Aaron gave in and built the golden calf. Aaron was fearful, didn't believe in himself as a strong leader, and didn't follow his value of praying to only one god. This topic is especially meaningful to me as it aligns with my service project on developing self-esteem and not living in fear. This topic relates to my life today because living up to your values is difficult. There have been times when I haven't upheld my value of honesty when under pressure because of fear of the consequences. I've learned that one way to handle fear is to talk about what's scary. Sometimes when I've shared what challenged me I've found the support I need to get back to my value of honesty. Talking about it is also helpful to make sure the same situations don't happen in the future and to create solutions. This came up in my life when I tried paintball. It turns out paintball is not for me. Instead of just quitting because it was scary to get hit, I spoke up and found an alternative, which was the shooting range. That was a lot of fun. If Aaron was able to share his fears, maybe he would have been able to have more faith in himself, Moses, and God. Maybe then he would have found an alternative to address the people's fear and he wouldn't have chosen to build the golden calf.