

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



Parsha: Ki Tisa

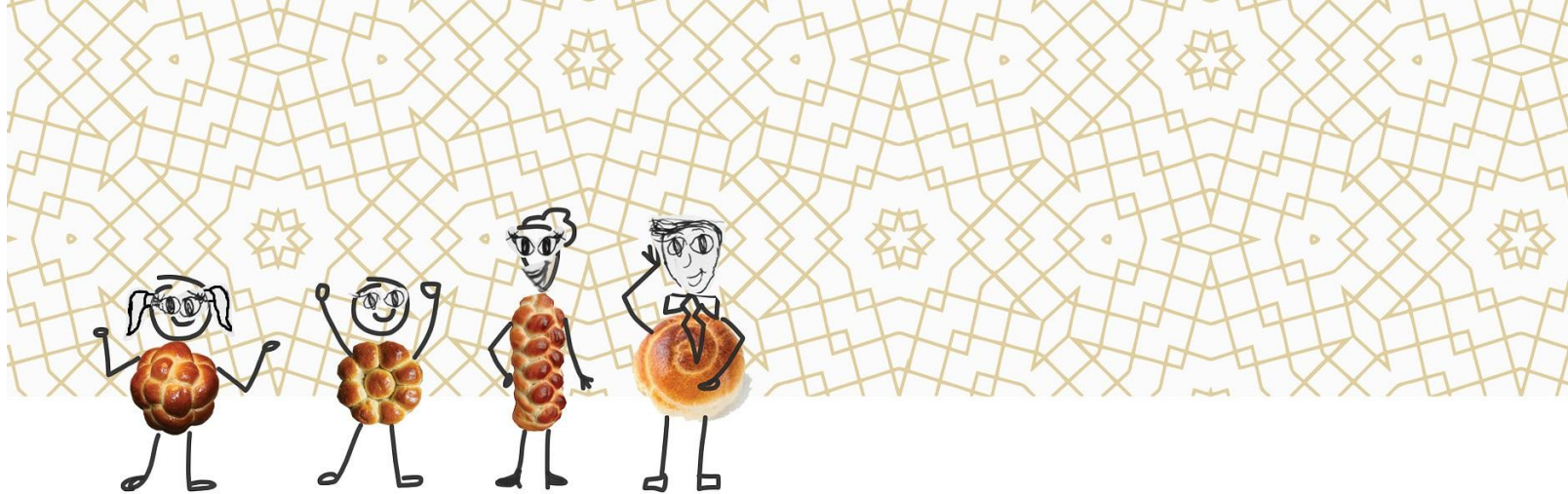
Title: Are Good Intentions Good Enough?

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The Parsha at First Glance

Spotlight on the Parsha:

There is a lot going on in this week's *parsha*... the biggest news, of course, is that while Moshe is up on Mt. Sinai getting the *luhot* (tablets), *Bnei Yisrael* are down below feeling anxious about the length of Moshe's absence. The people approach Aharon in order to create an '*elokim*' - and Aharon, the one in charge while



Moshe is up on the mountain - actually helps them commit this terrible sin of idolatry! When Moshe comes down from the mountain and sees the people worshipping the golden calf, he gets so angry that he smashes the holy tablets, which took 40 days to inscribe, down on the ground! Talk about dramatic! Luckily, after Moshe's pleading, only a small portion of the nation is punished and God allows Moshe to inscribe a second set of tablets.

Zooming In:

Let's take a closer look at Aharon's role in this troubling episode. After all, he was second-in-command, Moshe's brother, and was named the first *kohen gadol* (high priest). We would expect him to make good decisions and be a strong role model for the people! And yet, when Bnei Yisrael approached Aharon about making an **אלוקים** (elokim) to go before them, he immediately responded with a plan of action to collect jewelry in order to make the idol! See for yourselves in the verses below.

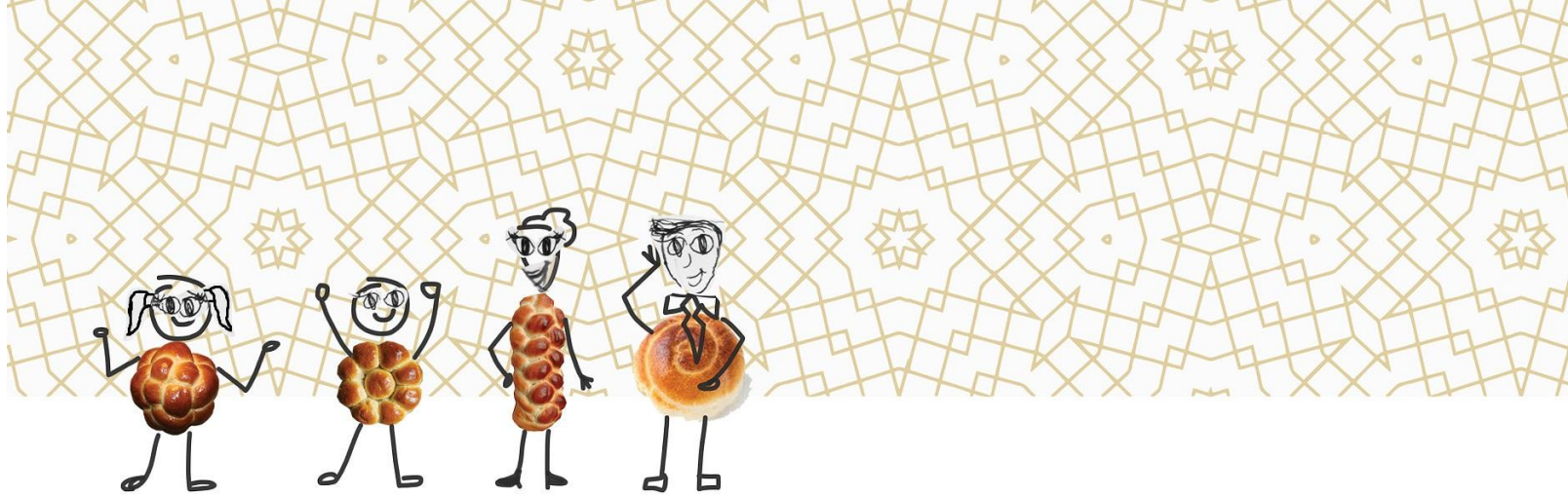
1. And when the people saw that Moshe delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aharon, and said to him: 'Get up, make us a *elohim* who will go before us; for as for this Moshe, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

2. And Aharon said to them: Take off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.'

3. And all the people took off the golden rings

וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי-בִשֵׁשׁ מִשָּׁה
לָרֶדֶת מִן-הָהָר; וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם
עַל-אַהֲרֹן, וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם
עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ
לְפָנֵינוּ--כִּי-זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם,
לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה-הָיָה לוֹ.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַהֲרֹן, פְּרִקוּ
נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי
נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם;
וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלָי.



<p>which were in their ears, and brought them to Aharon.</p> <p>4. And he took them from their hand, and shaped it with a carving tool, and made it a molten calf; and they said: 'This is your god Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.'</p>	<p>וַיִּתְּפְּרוּ כָּל-הָעָם, אֶת-נֹזְמֵי הַזָּהָב, אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם; וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל-אַהֲרֹן.</p> <p>וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם, וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֲרֹט, וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסֶּכֶה; וַיֹּאמְרוּ--אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלוֹךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.</p>
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Questions for Consideration:

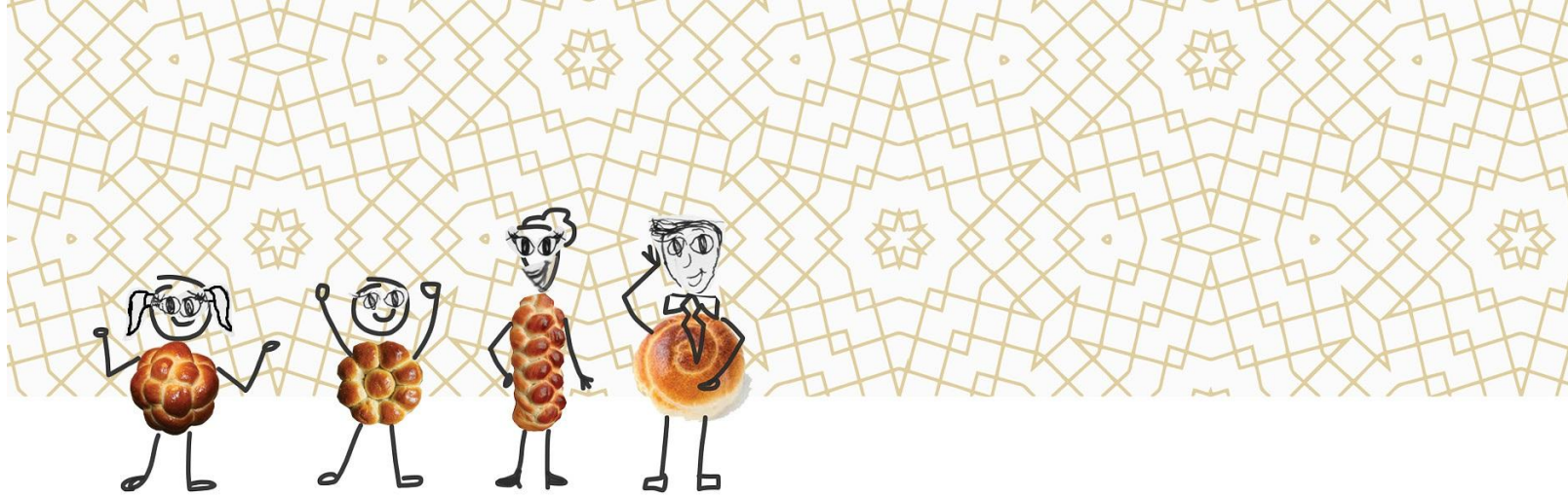
- Why would Aharon be so quick to fulfill the people’s sinful and disloyal request?
- And, if Aharon - the leader - was so quick to obey the people, why doesn’t God punish him? (After all, Moshe isn’t allowed into the Land of Israel as punishment for hitting some rocks, and Aharon isn’t punished at all when he helps build an idol!?)

The Parsha Through Another Lens

Do Motivations Matter?

[PLEASE NOTE: This activity requires a few minutes of preparation – cutting out the ‘motivation cards’ below.]

Before trying to answer these questions about Aharon, consider the following scenario:



You just got on the back of the line for the new jumbo tube slide at the school playground (or imagine any other line you might have to wait on). After waiting for over five minutes and with only two more kids in front of you, Zoey cuts to the front of the line and slides down the slide before you without waiting for even one minute!

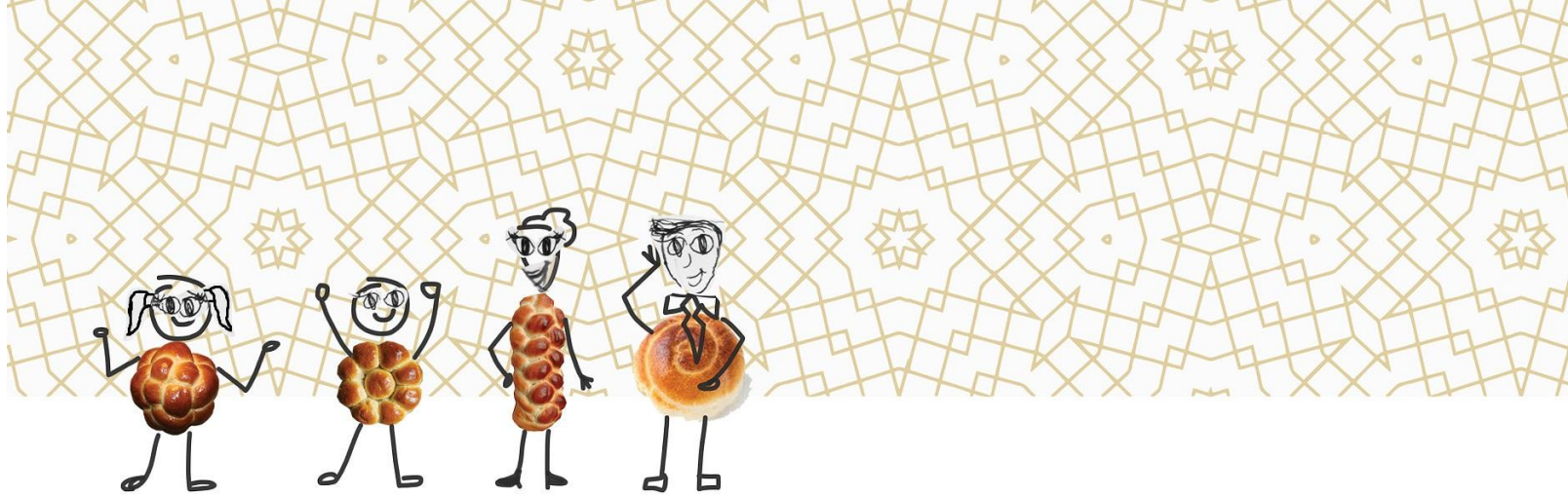
- What do you think of Zoey's behavior?
- What do you think a fair consequence would be for Zoey's actions?

After passing out and reading the 'Zoey motivation cards,' discuss the following questions:

- How does your opinion of Zoey's behavior change?
- Do you think different consequences might be appropriate depending on her motivation?

Now - a lot of commentators and rabbis have tried to help us better answer our questions about Aharon (reminder: What was Aharon thinking when he agreed to help the people and why didn't God punish him?). Basically the commentators do this by offering several different possible motivations or explanations for Aharon's behavior (which might also explain God's seemingly strange reaction). On each of the 'Aharon motivation cards' there is one commentator's attempt at explaining what they think Aron was up to and why. After reading the commentator's explanation, consider the following questions:

- Do you think this is a reasonable explanation for Aharon's behavior?
- Given this possible explanation for Aharon's intentions, do you think he was acting as a good leader? Should Aharon have gotten off 'scot free' for helping to build the calf or should there have been a punishment or negative consequence?



Shabbat Shalom!

Zoey Motivation Cards

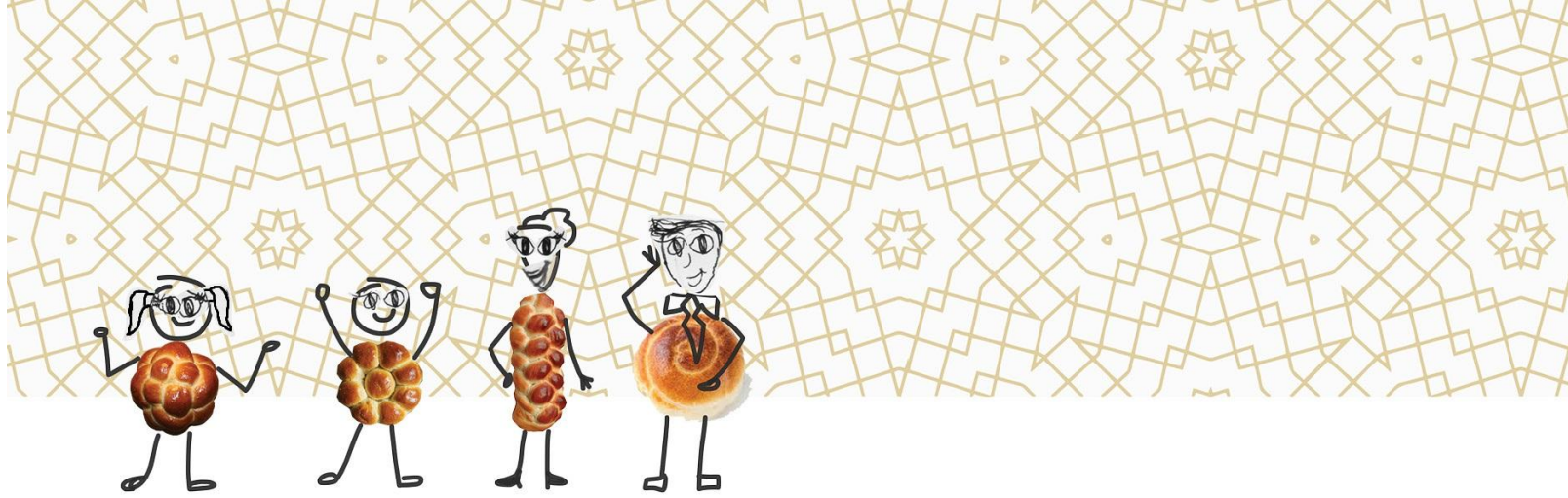
<p>Zoey cuts the line because she knows that she is about to be picked up early for an appointment. If she didn't take a turn now, she wouldn't get to use the slide at all, while you and all the other kids still had another 20 minutes of recess.</p>	<p>Zoey has been absolutely terrified of the giant slide since it was installed and has been teased terribly by her older siblings for being too scared to go on it. After a few minutes of her friends cheering her on and giving her courage, she quickly runs to the ladder, climbs up and slides down as fast as she can without thinking, before she loses her will and chickens out of sliding down the slide.</p>
<p>Josh, who was next in line, was actually saving Zoey's spot. Zoey had gotten in line in front of Josh but had to get out of line when her teacher needed to speak to her. Zoey asked Josh to hold her spot and he had agreed.</p>	<p>Zoey has a sprained ankle and she can't do most of the activities in the playground, except go down the slide. It would be very difficult and painful for her to stand in a long line.</p>



Aharon Motivation Cards

Rashi: When Aharon told the people to collect gold jewelry from their wives and children, he was thinking to himself that the women and kids, who really like their gold jewelry and trinkets, wouldn't willingly or quickly hand them over to be melted down. And so, Aharon thought, while the people are taking a long time to gather enough gold, Moshe will return from Mount Sinai and there will be no need to create the idol.

Rashbam: The verse clearly states that the people approached Aharon in response to Moshe's delay. So, the people were looking to replace Moshe - their intermediary to God - not God Himself. They feared that if Moshe didn't come back they would no longer have a means to communicate with God. And so, what they were asking for from Aron was something more like *terafim*, statues which were believed to be able to express God's will, not an idol to worship which would replace God.



Vayikra Rabba 10:3 (a midrash):

Actually, by agreeing to create the golden calf, Aharon was trying to save the people from committing an even greater sin. According to this midrash, Hur, who had been placed as co-leader with Aharon in an earlier chapter, was murdered by Bnei Yisrael when he refused to help them create an idol for them. (This claim is drawn from the fact that Hur is suspiciously absent from this story and never mentioned again afterwards - which is strange for someone with such a prominent position). Aharon believed that the people would likely murder him too, if he did not help them. In order to prevent the people from committing the terrible sin of murder again, he agreed to help them.

Da'at Mikra: As a leader, Aharon thought that it was important that the people change their own mind about building an idol. And so without saying whether he thought this was a good idea or bad idea, he began to provide Bnai Yisrael with practical help. However, along the way Aharon said and did things which he hoped would help the people realize the error of their ways. For example, the reason he asked for the gold from the wives and children was so that it would take the men a long time to gather enough gold, providing them with a chance to reconsider (similar to Rashi). Also, Aharon was hoping that by asking for the jewelry that the people got from Egypt, they would be reminded of the miracles God performed to take them out of Egypt - which would help them realize they shouldn't create the idol.