

This Week at
Temple Israel of Long Beach
Experiencing the Warmth of Tradition



March 2, 2024
22 Adar I 5784
Shabbat Ki Tissa



PARSHAT KI TISSA HOW LEADERS FAIL

Leaders can fail for two kinds of reason. The first is external. The time may not be right. The conditions are unfavorable. There may be no one on the other side to talk to. The second kind of failure is internal. A leader may simply lack the courage to lead. Sometimes leaders have to oppose the crowd. They have to say no when everyone else is crying yes. That can be terrifying. Crowds have a will and momentum of their own. That is when courage is needed, and not showing it can constitute a moral failure of the worst kind.

That, on a plain reading of the text, was the fate of Aaron in Parshat Ki Tissa. Moses had been up on the mountain for forty days. The people were afraid. Had he died? Where was he? Without Moses they felt bereft. He was their point of contact with G-d. He performed miracles, divided the sea, gave them water to drink and food to eat. The Torah describes what happened next:

"....they gathered around Aaron and said "come, make us a God who will go before us..." So the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and he fashioned it with a tool and made it into a molten calf. Then he said, "This is your god, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt".

G-d becomes angry. Moses turns to Aaron his brother and says, "What have you done"? Aaron blames the people. It was they who they who made the illegitimate request. He denies responsibility.

It is easy to be critical of people who fail the leadership test when it involves opposing the crowd. When a crowd gets out of control, there is no elegant solution. Tradition dealt kindly with Aaron. He is portrayed as a man of peace. Perhaps that is why he was made high priest. There is more than one kind of leadership and priesthood involves following rules, not taking stands and swaying crowds.

The fact that Aaron was not a leader from the same mold as Moses does not mean he was a failure. It means that he was made for a different kind of role. There are times when you need someone with the courage to stand against the crowd, others, when you need a peacemaker. Aaron and Moses complemented one another. No one person can do everything.

Excerpt from:
"Lessons In Leadership"
by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Candle Lighting Shabbat 5:30 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat— 5:40 pm
For week of 03/02/24 - 03/08/24



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