

# GOLDEN CALF

Exodus 32:1-35; Leviticus 8:22-30

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites

**Key-location:** Sinai

### Key-repetitions:

- Moses away for a long time: Moses stayed on the mountain top for forty days (Ex 24:18); he stayed a long time (Ex 32:1); Israelites complained that they didn't know what happened to Moses (Ex 32:1, 23).
- Golden calf: Aaron used an engraving tool to make an idol in the shape of a calf (Ex 32:4); God told Moses the Israelites made an idol in the shape of a calf (Ex 32:8); Moses saw the gold calf (Ex 32:19); Moses took the calf, melted it, ground it to powder, scattered it on water, and forced the Israelites to drink it (Ex 32:19-20); Aaron claimed he threw gold into the fire and out came the calf (Ex 32:24).
- Israelites shouted, "These are your gods who brought you out of Egypt": after Aaron made the golden calf (Ex 32:4); God told Moses what the people were saying (Ex 32:8).
- Anger: God was angry with the Israelites and wanted to destroy them (Ex 32:10); Moses pleaded with God not to let his anger destroy his people (Ex 32:11-12); Moses was angry at the people because of the golden calf (Ex 32:19); Aaron pleaded with Moses to not be angry with him (Ex 32:22).
- Moses pleaded with God not to destroy the Israelites (Ex 32:11-14, 30-34).
- Consecrated: the tabernacle (Lev 8:10-11, 15); the priest (Lev 8:1-2, 12-13, 22-28, 30).

### Key-attitudes:

- Israelites' insecurity when Moses was absent.
- Aaron's instability and vulnerability to the influence of others.
- Israelites' joyful celebration of the golden calf.
- God's anger over the golden calf.
- Moses' anger over the golden calf.
- Moses' desperation when he pleaded with God not to destroy the Israelites because of the golden calf.

### Initial-situation:

God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. The Israelites traveled in the desert where God provided for their basic needs: the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire guided them; God provided them with water, food, and protection from their enemies. God led them to Mount Sinai, where he gave them the Ten Commandments and other laws to obey. The Lord promised rewards if the Israelites obeyed his laws, and punishment if they disobeyed them.

The Israelites answered, "Everything the Lord said, we will do."

**Initial-problem:**

Moses returned to the mountain top and stayed there for forty days.

**Final-situation:**

Moses consecrated the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and he consecrated Aaron and his sons as priests.

## BIBLE STORY

**The Golden Calf**

After giving the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, Moses returned to the mountain top and stayed there for forty days (Ex 24:12-18).

God gave Moses detailed instructions on how to construct a tabernacle and its furnishings, how to make priestly garments, and how to consecrate the priests (Ex 25 - 31).

The Israelites saw that Moses stayed on the mountain top for a long time. They confronted Aaron, "Make us gods who will go before us. We don't know what happened to Moses, who led us out of Egypt."

The people took off their earrings. Aaron took the gold, melted it, and used an engraving tool to make an idol in the shape of a calf.

The people shouted, "Oh Israel! These are your gods who brought you out of Egypt."

Aaron saw the people's reaction. Aaron built an altar in front of the idol and said, "Tomorrow, we'll have a festival in the Lord's honor."

The next day the people offered animals as burnt offerings. They sat down to eat and drink, and got up to dance and engage in sexual activity (Ex 32:1-6).

The Lord told Moses, "Get down there! Your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They've turned away from what I commanded them. They made an idol, cast in the shape of a calf. They bowed down to it, sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, oh Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.' These people are a stubborn, hard-headed people! Now give my anger free reign to burst into flames and destroy them. Then I'll make you into a great nation."

Moses begged, "Oh Lord, don't let your anger destroy your people. You brought them out of Egypt with your great power and strength. Why let the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out, to kill them in the mountains?' Stop your anger; abandon your harsh intentions; don't bring disaster on your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. You gave them your word, telling them, 'I'll make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. I'll give your descendants all this land that I promised them, and it will be theirs forever.'"

The Lord reconsidered and decided not to destroy the people (Ex 32:7-14).

Moses descended the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. The tablets were the work of God; the engraving on the tablets was written by God (Ex 32:15-18).

Moses approached the camp and he saw the gold calf and the dancing. Moses' anger flared. Moses threw down the tablets, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. Moses took the calf they had made, melted it down with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and forced the Israelites to drink it (Ex 32:19-20).

Moses asked Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"

Aaron answered, "Don't be angry. Master, these people said to me, 'Make us gods who will lead us. We don't know what happened to this Moses who brought us up out of Egypt.' They gave me their gold jewelry. I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (Ex 32:21-25).

The next day, Moses returned to the mountain and pleaded with God to forgive the Israelites for making gods out of gold. The Lord did not destroy them, but he sent a plague that killed many people because they had Aaron make the calf (Ex 32:30-35).

### **Construction of the Tabernacle**

God had given Moses detailed instruction on how to construct a tabernacle and all its furnishings (Ex 25:1 - 27:21). The people made the tabernacle just like the Lord instructed. Moses set up the tabernacle. The cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night (Ex 40:34-38).

Moses consecrated the tabernacle and all its furnishings. Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons as priests (Lev 8:22-30).

### **GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### **SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. When Moses returned to the mountain and remained forty days, what did the Israelites do?
2. What happens when a spiritual leader follows Aaron's example and does whatever his followers desire?
3. Why was God unhappy with the religious festival that was supposed to honor the Lord?
4. How did Moses confront Aaron?
5. What excuse did Aaron give for making the golden calf?
6. What was Moses' reaction when the Lord threatened to destroy the Israelites?
7. What tends to make people insecure and vulnerable to temptations to abandon God's instructions?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. **People can only arrive in God's presence by accepting God's plan.** God instructed Moses to guide the Israelites to build a tabernacle where he would inhabit with them, where they would bring their sacrifices and where they would worship him (Ex 25:1-8). Everything in the tabernacle should be built exactly as the Lord commanded Moses (Ex 25:9).
2. **The spiritual leader who seeks to please his followers instead of pleasing God, becomes guilty of these things: he is unfaithful to God, those who are his responsibility get out of control, his followers are without God's orientation, and he makes it easy for them to sin.** Aaron accepted the people's request and made the golden calf. Aaron allowed them to get out of control and to commit a horrible sin (Ex 32:1-6, 21-25).
3. **Often the decision of the majority is the wrong decision.** The majority of the Israelites were wrong when they wanted a golden calf to worship (Ex 32:1-2).
4. **The sinner usually excuses himself for his wrongdoing by shifting the blame to someone else.** After Aaron made the golden calf, he blamed the people. His attempt to deflect blame shows that Aaron knew that making the golden calf was wrong (Ex 32:22-24). Beginning with Adam, the sinner seeks to make excuses and blame another for his sin (Gn 3:12).
5. **The person who obeys God has the ability to intervene in prayer on behalf of other people.** Moses was faithful in obeying God. Because Moses prayed, the Lord decided not to bring the threatened disaster on the Israelites (Ex 32:7-14).
6. **People, who love God, become angry at the same things that make God angry.** God was angry at the Israelites for making the golden calf (Ex 32:7-10). When Moses saw the calf, his anger flared and he destroyed it (Ex 32:19-20).

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Role-playing Drama:

The storyteller tells the story once. Then the storyteller designates four people to stand in front of listeners and dramatize the story while he retells it.

- One dramatizes Moses.
- One dramatizes Aaron.
- Two dramatize the Israelites.