

## A Muse: Ki Tisa

This week's parsha is riveting because of the drama surrounding the "sin" of the Golden Calf. I have purposely put into quotation marks the word "sin" because it isn't at all clear that the design and construction of the Golden Calf was actually a sin. Clearly this week's parsha treats the erection of the Golden Calf as a sin, but if we examine this episode and related episodes many questions remain unanswered.

There is disparity between this version of the Golden Calf, Exodus 32, and the version related in Deuteronomy 9. In our text it isn't not only the "people" who are punished, but Aron too bears some of the blame in allying with the "people" to construct the Golden Calf. In Deuteronomy 9 it is the people who are blamed for the sin; Aron is briefly mentioned in passing only once in verse 20. From Deuteronomy it is abundantly clear that Aron didn't play a central role as depicted in Exodus 32.

The story of the Golden Calf repeats itself almost identically in Kings when Yeravam breaks away from the united kingdom which was under Rechavam's rule. While it is true that Yeravam was being labeled a rebel and idolater in Chronicles it is unlikely that this characterization is accurate. One would have to question the likelihood of Yeravam during a crisis would institute Gods that were foreign to his own history and tradition. Those whom negated the kingdom of Yeravam were from the Kingdom of Yehudah who wanted one central kingdom with one central religious doctrine and address which was to be the Temple in Jerusalem.

It would appear that in reality the Northern Kingdom were not instituting a religious reformation as the Kingdom of Judah were insinuating but rather a restoration, a return to the religion of the Hebrews in the desert. It would mean the construction of the Golden Calf, not as an expression of rebellion, but as part of the ritual. Most of the prophets didn't find anything wrong with the Golden Calf of the Northern Kingdom. Eliyahu the prophets whose reputation was made in his fights against the worshippers of Baal didn't

object to the Calf, nor did his student Elisha. The only prophet on record who objected was Hoshea. It appears that the Golden Calf of the Northern Kingdom was a symbol as was the Cherubim ensconced on the Kaporet of the Ark.

Thus it would appear that Yeravam was reinstating customs that had been part of the nation of Israel from inception. The Kingdom of Judea which sought hegemony negated the practice of the Northern Kingdom insinuating that the practice of the Golden Calf even at the time of Moses was evil in the eyes of God; those participating in its construction and worship were guilty.