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## **Rosh Hashanah Drash On Truth**

Today's Torah reading tells the story of a golden calf. The recently freed Israelites are gathered at the base of Mount Sinai waiting for Moses who has journeyed to the top. After many weeks of waiting the Israelites began to feel afraid that Moses and by extension G-d had abandoned them because Moses was their connection to G-d. In this moment of uncertainty they looked for something else to give them comfort and command Aaron, Moses's brother, to make them a new god. He does so creating a golden statue of a bull and declares a day of worship for it. In the eyes of G-d this is considered a great sin. The Israelites are both worshipping another god and are worshipping an idol. G-d commands Moses to hurry down to reason with his people but also says that G-d will strike them all down at once. Moses pleads with G-d to rethink the punishment and then goes down to assess the situation in person before returning to the top of the mountain where a new less harsh punishment is decided upon.

There are a number of ways this story can be interpreted but for the purpose of this drash we are going to look at it through the lens of truth and how to stay faithful to the truth. For this lens to work we need to look at G-d and the fact that G-d is not a physical thing as the major truth in this story and the golden calf as the easy lie. By analyzing the story in this way we can start to see a number of things relating to truth that this story demonstrates.

The first is how hard it can be to accept the truth when you have lived most of your life being told and accepting a lie. The Israelites had been conditioned to believe that there were many gods who could all be worshipped through idols when they lived in the land of Egypt. Moses helped them get rid of that way of thinking and see the truth. But when they felt abandoned, they reverted back to an old way of thinking and found an easy lie instead of trying to develop a new understanding of the truth.

Sometimes it is easier to go with a lie or accept the popular opinion of the truth, as Aaron did, rather than challenging it. But in examples of this today and in the story of the golden calf it almost never works out well in the end. In my own life I have had many moments where it was hard for me to accept smaller truths or find a truth in the absence of an apparent one. For example after the election I had a hard time understanding why so many people voted for a white privileged man who promotes sexist, racist, and homophobic thinking but when I find myself in a situation like this I usually try to go through a process to understand. What I do is look at all the facts and evidence and if the situation calls for it I try to do so using as many different perspectives as I can. Only once I did this did I understand the unrest at the time and how Trump used this and

prayed upon many people's fears and ignorance to push them to ignore many large truths about him and the country.

Recently I have been hearing about and seeing more and more examples of people turning to easy lies instead of thinking critically about the truth. This manifests itself in the the targeting of immigrants and the denial of the fact that discrimination still exists and hate groups are accepted in many places throughout the country. At times it even feels like the concept of truth itself is under attack when what seems like blatant truths are ignored and words like "fake news" and "alternative facts" are used regularly.

For me it can sometimes be easy to disregard people who I feel have fallen into the trap of believing an easy lie as hopeless and just accept that they are incapable of looking at the truth. But the story of the golden calf also teaches us a lesson about what to do in these situations. When talking to Moses G-d tells him two seemingly conflicting things. G-d tells him to go down and reason with the people but also that G-d will strike them down from afar instead. Some interpretations have taken this to mean that G-d wanted Moses to talk G-d out of killing all the Israelites and in doing so G-d teaches Moses, and by extension the Israelites, a lesson in not condemning people who who may need some help to see truth from afar and instead trying to understand them and reason with them up close. Sometimes this might mean spending a lot of time to explain a difficult concept to someone while other times it might only take sharing your experiences with them in a simple conversation. The important thing is you remember that they are people too and just like with the Israelites they may have grown up or lived around an easy lie without knowing it and although it may be hard they still have the capacity to see the truth. I'm going to say that again. Just like with the Israelites they may have grown up or lived around an easy lie without knowing it and they still have the capacity to see the truth.

In conclusion everyone can have a hard time finding the truth once in awhile.

Sometimes it can be a large group believing a destructive lie or sometimes it can be a few people or ourselves with a simple misconception. We all have the power to think critically about our own truths big or small and why we believe them. We also have the power to have conversations with each other and talk about our truths and aspects of them that we are unsure about or might vary. I encourage everyone here to do so and go into this new year with truth on your mind so that we can refine our own conceptions of the truth and seek it out together when it is not obvious. Thank you.