

D'var Torah
Parashat Ki Tisa

By Rabbi Moshe Swartz

The Man Who Couldn't Say No

I've been listening to our High School students rehearsing for their forthcoming play "Oklahoma." There is a well-known song from the musical whose words are "I'm just a girl who can't say no." This reminds me of the disturbing conduct of Aaron, brother of Moses in the Torah portion this week. While there is great debate amongst the sages about what exactly was the sin of Aaron (I wrote about the technicalities of the sin in my *D'var Torah* for this *parashat* last year), one has to wonder how Aaron could consent to such idolatrous behavior on the part of the Israelites without even taking a stand against it.

Many commentators argue that it was the very wonderful character trait of Aaron, namely being *ohav shalom*, loving peace, that caused him to become "a man who couldn't say no" –even to idolatry. Aaron allowed his love and pursuit of peace to become his greatest weakness, a passion that kept him from saying no at the most critical of moments for the Israelite nation.

This message is certainly relevant today. Our ancestral homeland, the State of Israel, struggles with whether to pursue peace at any price or whether such pursuit will only lead to further trouble. One could also argue that our current economic climate was caused by credit-hungry consumers and lender-happy banks who just couldn't say no. We also see this in the recent articles (led by The Jewish Week) that have brought to light the situation of parents who simply can't say no to one-day-a-week Hebrew School offered for nearly one-third the price of established local synagogues. Some families will say yes to any easy, inexpensive and fast resolution. It often follows that these same families then say yes to end their formal Jewish education after the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

The reasons we, as humans, can't say no are wide-ranging and well-known. When it comes to why parents can't say no to children, Ann Landers, once wrote "parents who try to win a popularity contest wind up with irresponsible, disrespectful kids who are problems to themselves and to everyone else. Children want discipline [to hear "no"] –even though they resist it."

Aaron was a leader who couldn't say no. The result was a Golden Calf and a great disaster for the Children of Israel. May each of us have the strength to say "NO" when "NO" should be said and may each of us have the strength to say "YES" when our action will enrich ourselves and the community. This week, I join many Schechter families, and invite those who haven't done so already, to say "YES" to Oklahoma (see our website for ticket information).

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Moshe Schwartz