

*Parashat Ki Tisa* (Exodus 30:11-34:35)

*Parashat Ki Tisa* contains the story of the Golden Calf, one of the better-known episodes in the Torah. The Israelites panic when Moses is late returning from his 40 days with God on Mt. Sinai. When they beg Aaron to make them a god, he crafts the idol to appease their insecurity (Ex. 32:1-6). This lack of faith is the reason the Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years.

The Golden Calf has become a symbol of various “false gods” worshiped over the ages. The tulip craze of the late 1500s, the South Sea Bubble of 1720, and the Florida Real Estate Boom of the 1920s are all examples of a society gone mad in pursuit of “gold” and demonstrate how “the pursuit of wealth makes us do self-destructive things” (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 117b). Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (1948-2020; Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth) says when gold becomes an end in itself, rather than a means, we focus on the price of things, not the value of things.

That explains a less-noticed aspect of *Ki Tisa*: Both immediately before and after the Golden Calf episode, God commands the Israelites to “make” Shabbat (Exodus 31:12-17; 35:1-3). Sacks claims this placement means God proposes Shabbat as an antidote, or remedy, to the problem of the Golden Calf. Specifically, Shabbat is designed to help us focus on the value of things, not on their price.

Shabbat is a day set apart from the rest of the week to restore balance in our lives. It reminds us that who we are is more important than what we have.

Gut Shabbos/Shabbat Shalom