

Valley Beit Midrash

The Leadership of Aaron and Moses – A Look at Differing Styles

Our Tradition feels really good about both Aaron and Moses as examples of great human beings. Aaron is called 'Pursuer of Peace, Lover of all Creatures' while Moses is known as 'Moshe Rabbeinu' – our rabbi Moses, with all of the positive implications that come with calling someone 'our rabbi'.

How did these two great men fare when called upon to exercise exemplary leadership? The Torah shares with its readers various episodes of strife within the Israelite camp during their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness, and both Aaron and Moses are called upon (sometimes together as a team and sometimes individually) to exhibit leadership traits as they address the challenges.

This afternoon, we will take a close look at a number of those episodes and you will have the opportunity to evaluate the leadership characteristics of both of these great men.

The Call to Leadership – Exodus 3:10-14 – Moses Hears From God

<p>10. Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt.”11. But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?” 12. And He said, “I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”13. Moses said to God, “When I come to the Israelites and say to them ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14. And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.” He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’”</p>	<p>י. וְעַתָּה לֵךְ וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אֶת-עַמִּי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם. יא. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אָנֹכִי כִּי אֵלֶּךְ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם. יב. וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי-אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה-לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אָנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ: בְּהוֹצִיאֶךָ אֶת-הָעָם מִמִּצְרָיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה. יג. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים הַנֵּה אָנֹכִי כָּא אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ-לִי מָה-שְּׁמוֹ מָה אֹמַר אֲלֵהֶם. יד. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם.</p>
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The Call to Leadership – Exodus 4: 27-31 – Aaron Hears from God

<p>27. The Lord said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” He went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him. 28. Moses told Aaron about all the things that the Lord had committed to him and all the signs about which He had instructed him. 29. Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. 30. Aaron repeated all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people, 31. and the people were convinced. When they heard that the Lord had taken note of the Israelites and that He had seen their plight, they bowed low in homage.</p>	<p>כז. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵךְ לִקְרַאת מֹשֶׁה הַמִּדְבָּרָה וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ בְּהַר הָאֱלֹהִים--וַיִּשְׁק-לוֹ. כח. וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחַו וְאֵת כָּל-הָאֲתֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוְּהוּ. כט. וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֵּאסְפוּ אֶת-כָּל-זִקְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. ל. וַיְדַבֵּר אַהֲרֹן--אֵת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעַשׂ הָאֲתֹת לְעֵינֵי הָעָם. לא. וַיֵּאֱמֶן הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי-פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת-עֲנָנִים וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ.</p>
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Initial indications are that Moses is going to be resistant when commanded to lead the Israelites to freedom, and that Aaron will be able to take on the task assigned to him coolly, calmly and convincingly.

Check out Exodus 4:10-13. Moses Resists.

<p>10. But Moses said to the Lord, “Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” 11. And the Lord said to him, “Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12. Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and will instruct you what to say.” 13. But he said, “Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent.”</p>	<p>י. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה בִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אָנֹכִי גַם מִתְּמֹל גַּם מִשְׁלָשִׁם גַּם מֵאִז דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵל-עַבְדְּךָ: כִּי כֹבֵד-פֶּה וְכֹבֵד לְשׁוֹן אָנֹכִי. יא. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מִי שֵׁם פֶּה לְאָדָם אוֹ מִי-יִשׁוּם אֱלִים אוֹ חֵרֶשׁ אוֹ פֶקַח אוֹ עִוֵּר--הֲלֹא אָנֹכִי יְהוָה. יב. וְעַתָּה לֵךְ וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם-פִּיךָ וְהוֹרִיתִיךָ אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר. יג. וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי שְׁלַח-נָא בְיַד-תְּשַׁלַּח.</p>
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Things began on a rather precarious note, with Moses being hesitant (to say the least) and Aaron being the obedient soldier, following directives immediately without disagreement or push-back. Nevertheless, this set up of Moses and Aaron working together succeeded in bringing about the final outcome of the Israelites leaving Egypt following ten devastating plagues that

overwhelmed Pharaoh and the Egyptians to the point of capitulation to the demands of the God of Israel.

Once in the Wilderness, just like any move away from the familiar, people began to complain about the lack of food, water and probably poor internet access. Moses and Aaron continue to work together and as co-leaders of the people, they are able to bring the complaints to God and mollify the Israelites by providing them with quail and manna.

We can conclude (somewhat simplistically, of course) that Moses and Aaron are a great team when it comes to leading the community together. But what happens when they are left to their own devices to make decisions and lead the people by themselves? This test came about for Aaron when Moses went up Mt. Sinai at the behest of God to receive the Ten Commandments. He was atop of the Mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, and the people became impatient. Recall that at this point Aaron has been left to lead the people by himself while Moses is away, and the manner in which he alone deals with this unrest is quite revealing.

Let's look at the episode of the Golden Calf and see if we can find leadership characteristics emerge by way of an analysis of Aaron's handling of the situation, followed by Moses' reaction to the crisis. This is found in Exodus 32:1-35. In the interest of time, we are going to read only bits and pieces of the story of the Golden Calf – sections that are directly relevant to our question of leadership.

The Sin of the Golden Calf – Exodus 32:1-35.

<p>1. When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.” 2. Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” 3. And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4. This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!” 5. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron announced: “Tomorrow shall be a festival of the Lord!” 6. Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance.</p>	<p>א. וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי-בִשֵׁשׁ מִשָּׁה לָרַדְתָּ מִן-הַהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּמָה עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ--כִּי-זֶה מִשָּׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה-הָיָה לוֹ. ב. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַהֲרֹן פָּרְקוּ נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלָי. ג. וַיִּתְּפְרוּ כָל-הָעָם אֶת-נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל-אַהֲרֹן. ד. וַיִּקַּח מֵיָדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֵׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסֹּכָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ--אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלֵנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם. ה. וַיֵּרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו וַיִּקְרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר חַג לַיהוָה מָחָר. ו. וַיִּשְׁכְּימוּ מִמִּתְחַרֵּת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּגְשׂוּ שְׁלָמִים וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וּשְׂתוֹ וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק.</p>
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7. The Lord spoke to Moses, "Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely.

[God wants to destroy the people and Moses implores God not to, lest the Egyptians and others say, 'What kind of God brings a people from slavery only to kill them in the Wilderness?']

15. Thereupon Moses turned and went down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, tablets inscribed on both their surfaces: they were inscribed on the one side and on the other.

19. As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. 20. He took the calf that they had made and burned it; he ground it to powder and strewed it upon the water and so made the Israelites drink it.

21. Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?" 22. Aaron said, "Let not my lord be enraged. You know that this people is bent on evil. 23. They said to me, 'Make us a god to lead us; for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.' 24. So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off!' They gave it to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this calf!"

25. Moses saw that the people were out of control—since Aaron had let them get out of control—so that they were a menace to any who might oppose them. 26. Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come here!" And all the Levites rallied to him. 27. He said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Each of you put sword on thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and

ז. וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר--כִּי שָׁחַת עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

טו. וַיִּפֹּן וַיֵּרַד מֹשֶׁה מִן-הָהָר וּשְׁנֵי לַחַת הַעֲדוֹת בְּיָדוֹ לַחַת כְּתָבִים מִשְׁנֵי עֲבָרֵיהֶם-- מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה הֵם כְּתָבִים.

יט. וַיְהִי כַאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֵּרָא אֶת-הָעֵגֶל וּמַחֲלֹת וַיַּחַר-אָף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֹךְ מִיָּדוֹ אֶת-הַלַּחַת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֹתָם תַּחַת הָהָר. כ. וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הָעֵגֶל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ וַיִּשְׂרֹף בְּאֵשׁ וַיִּטְחֵן עַד אֲשֶׁר-דָּק וַיִּזֶר עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׁק אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

כא. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן מָה-עָשָׂה לָךְ הָעָם הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם כִּי-הִבֵּאתָ עָלָיו חַטָּאת גְּדוֹלָה. כב. וַיֹּאמֶר אַהֲרֹן אֶל-יַחַר אָף אֲדֹנָי אַתָּה יַדְעָתָ אֶת-הָעָם כִּי בָרַע הוּא. כג. וַיֹּאמְרוּ לִי--עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי-זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם--לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה-הָיָה לוֹ. כד. וַאֲמַר לָהֶם לְמִי זֶהב הַתְּפָרָקוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ-לִי וְאֲשַׁלְכֶהוּ בְּאֵשׁ וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה.

כה. וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הָעָם כִּי פָרַע הוּא כִּי-פָרַעַה אַהֲרֹן לְשִׁמְצָה בְּקִמְיָהֶם. כו. וַיַּעֲמֵד מֹשֶׁה בְּשַׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לַיהוָה אֵלָי וַיֵּאֱסָפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל-בְּנֵי לֵוִי. כז. וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימוּ אִישׁ-

<p>slay brother, neighbor, and kin.” 28. The Levites did as Moses had bidden; and some three thousand of the people fell that day.</p> <p>30. The next day Moses said to the people, “You have been guilty of a great sin. Yet I will now go up to the Lord; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin.” 31. Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold. 32. Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!” 33. But the Lord said to Moses, “He who has sinned against Me, him only will I erase from My record. 34. Go now, lead the people where I told you. See, My angel shall go before you. But when I make an accounting, I will bring them to account for their sins.”</p> <p>35. Then the Lord sent a plague upon the people, for what they did with the calf that Aaron made.</p>	<p>חָרְבוּ עַל-יָרְכוּ עֲבָרוּ וְשׁוּבוּ מִשְׁעֵר לְשֵׁעֵר בַּמַּחֲנֶה וְהָרְגוּ אִישׁ-אֶת-אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת- רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת-קָרְבוֹ. כַּח. וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי- לְוִי כַדְבַר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל מִן-הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כַּשְּׁלִשִׁת אֶלְפֵי אִישׁ</p> <p>ל. וַיְהִי מִמַּחֲרַת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אַתֶּם חָטֵאתֶם חֲטָאָה גְדוֹלָה וַעֲתָה אֶעֱלֶה אֶל-יְהוָה אוּלַי אֶכַּפְּרָה בְּעַד חֲטֵאתְכֶם. לֹא. וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי חָטָא הָעָם הַזֶּה חֲטָאָה גְדוֹלָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִי זָהָב. לֵב. וַעֲתָה אִם-תִּשָּׂא חֲטֵאתָם וְאִם- אֵין--מַחֲנֵי נָא מִסְפָּרָה אֲשֶׁר כְּתִבְתָּ. לֵג. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה: מִי אֲשֶׁר חָטָא-לִי אֶמְחִנּוּ מִסַּפְרֵי. לֵד. וַעֲתָה לֵךְ נַחֵה אֶת- הָעָם אֶל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ--הַיְנֵה מִלְּאֲכֵי יִלְךָ לַפָּנִיָּה וּבְיוֹם פְּקוּדֵי וּפְקוּדֵי עֲלֵהֶם חֲטֵאתָם.</p> <p>לֵה. וַיִּגַּף יְהוָה אֶת-הָעָם עַל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת- הָעֵגֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַהֲרֹן.</p>
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- How did Aaron the leader handle the unrest? Did he have a strategy?
- How did Moses the leader handle the sin of the Golden Calf, perpetrated by portions of the Israelite nation? Did he have a strategy?
- How did Aaron and Moses work as a team (as they were wont to do in earlier episodes)?
- Who do you think is a better leader in this episode? Why do you think that?
- Can we learn from these two Biblical characters something about leadership in our lives? Can we determine what to do or what NOT to do based on our analysis of how they handled this situation?