



[Aaron] took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

Exodus 32:4



It might be easy to think of the story about the Golden Calf and blame the Israelites for creating such an idol against their God. But let's consider a few things:

The Israelites did not have a true sense of religion, with traditions and scripture readings and worship. Many of their practices developed after this moment at Mt. Sinai.

The Israelites would have shared stories about a God named Yahweh who was the God of the Ancestors, but since they were in Egypt, they did not feel much connection to their God.

At Mt. Sinai, God declares that he is their God, and they are his people. Up until now, God was someone else's God, they had no real connection to God. So they do not have an idea what God is like. All they know is in Egypt their Gods had symbols, like a bull, which was a symbol used in Egypt to represent El, or the Lunar God.

Moses has gone up to the top of Mt. Sinai and has been there for more than a month. They were told not to follow him. They do not know if he is even still alive on the mountaintop. They want to know what God looks like, so they have something to connect with and to help them understand who God is.

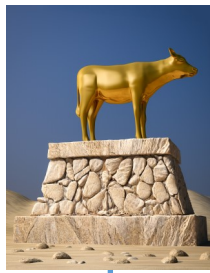
Aaron is Moses' brother, and is responsible for telling a lot of stories about God. The people really think Aaron would know how to represent God for them. They desperately want to praise God for helping them leave Egypt. And the only way they know how to worship God is from what they learned about how the Egyptians worshiped their gods. Song, dance, big golden images, these were all part of those rituals.

After this moment at Mt. Sinai, there will be many verses in the rest of the Torah dedicated to how to worship God, how to set up the worship space, where people stand, and how to be clean when entering God's presence.

Draw a picture of God here.

If you have more space, draw some symbols you commonly associate with God and your faith in God.

**The Golden Calf represents the people's desire to have a sacred image by which to know God.**



**The Golden Calf represents the people being drawn away from the true God and having a focus on something that is not God.**

What is a place you most closely associate with God's presence?

When you come to church, which symbol in the sanctuary do you tend to focus on and when you see it you believe you are seeing God?

A stereotypical image of God may be of an old white male with long flowing white hair and a long flowing white beard. Why is this image not an accurate depiction of God?

God issues a commandment to not make a "graven" image of the LORD. Why is it so hard to capture an image of our God?

God's word offers us a couple images: God's fingerprints are found in God's handiwork, the stars in the sky, the very nature that surrounds us; and, all of humanity is created in God's image. How do these notions help us in picturing God?

If we truly understand that all humanity ... all races, all genders and all gender identities, all sexual orientations, all religions, all ethnicities, all languages, all of humanity is an image of God, how does that create a moral compass in how we treat others?

In our culture, sports and businesses being open on Sundays gets a lot of blame for taking people away from God. These are sometimes identified as Golden Calves of our society. It is not fair that we do that, but we do that.

Let's forget other peoples and what their priorities are. Let's focus only on our individual self.

A Golden Calf can be anything that takes our focus away from God.

In what ways is your own family a golden calf in your life?

In what ways is financial security a golden calf in your life?

What collections or hobbies complete your life, that without them you might be lost?

How might these be golden calves in your life?

Physical property is sometimes more sacred to us than the deity it represents, what is something you would be very upset if it changed at church .... Think about the arrangement of candles, where the altar sits, the brick itself, the doors, what would change that would have you very upset to the point of thinking God is no longer represented by this space?

How can our views about physical property become a golden calf for us?

If we truly understand how we place certain things on a pedestal, like a golden calf, and we understand God forgives us, how should we deal with those who have different golden calves than we do?