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Under Aegis of

Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א
11, rue du plateau - 75019 PARIS

Tel: (331) 42 08 25 40 • Fax (331) 42 08 50 85

www.hevratpinto.org

Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF AND THE RUT OF THE ROUTINE

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

One can say that the sin of the golden calf was prompted by the rut of routine. If the Children of Israel had not performed the Divine commandments by habit – if they had been filled with wonder each time that the Eternal performed a miracle for them – they would have forced themselves to get even closer to G-d. They would certainly not have come to the point where they renounced His existence.

The Mishnah instructs us: "Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die" (Perkei Avoth 2: 4). Any separation from our Creator, be it even the most minimal, is capable of making us fail. Examples are not lacking. We should be content to recall the case of Yochanan the High Priest, who became a Sadducee after serving as a priest for 80 years (Berachot 29a). It was, no doubt, because he wasn't filled with awe regarding his priesthood for as long as he practiced it.

The strength of the evil inclination's trick lies in trying to make a man perform as many mitzvot as possible, all while trying to make him lower, if not to completely freeze, his fervor.

Consequently, we should be careful to attach ourselves constantly to G-d. Let us apply ourselves to observe the least important precepts as well as the most important commandments, for we don't know what is the recompense associated with each of them. In other words, we just don't know if our attitude concerning accomplishing a mitzvah comes by way of Divine help or the evil

inclination, the latter which wants us to fall into its trap (G-d forbid). If we reconnect ourselves to G-d, we will dispel all these worries and doubts. Let us be careful, above all, to perform those "easy" mitzvot with a maximum of concentration (cf. Tanhuma, Eikev 1).

Instead of being wonderstruck by the numerous miracles that each person saw before them – instead of strengthening themselves every day and getting closer and closer to the Eternal – the Children of Israel remained complacent. They were already so used to it! Even Mount Sinai, entirely engulfed in flames, didn't overly impress them!

This indifference and complacency were also unfortunately introduced into the religious world. Torah scholars can engage themselves in long talks during prayer instead of responding "Amen" when they should. Have they forgotten that the one who responds *amen yehei shemei rabba* with all his strength annuls all strict sentences pronounced against him for 70 years (Shabbat 119b)? It is because the evil inclination has accustomed them to pray and study without concentration. Our Sages teach that the more one spiritually elevates oneself, the more the evil inclination attacks (Sukkah 52a). These people should not forget, even for an instant, before Whom they stand while praying (Berachot 28b). They should be aware of the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, studies with them when

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they study (Tamid 32a). When one studies and performs mitzvot, it is best to imagine oneself at Mount Sinai receiving the Torah and hearing the Children of Israel proclaiming in unison with all their heart, “We will do and we will hear” (Ex 24:7).

As we have seen, the evil inclination was removed from their hearts when they heard the words, “I am the L-RD your G-d. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:15). How did the evil inclination manage to get them into the rut of routine? The answer lies in the fact that they were, after all, only beings of flesh and blood. Adam, who was devoid of the slightest trace of the evil inclination, ended up sinning. The Zohar teaches that G-d showed Adam the paths of good and evil, and Adam chose the one of evil. He did this because the injunction against eating from the Tree of Knowledge (which he was in the habit of seeing all the time) was not firmly anchored in his heart, or Eve’s, and also because he had not taken to heart to listen to G-d’s commandment. If Adam and Eve had done these things, they would never have come into contact with the snake. Rather, they would have dismissed the snake without mercy, and it would not have had any influence on them at all. Yet the very fact that they began to speak with the snake shows that they had been dominated by the influence of routine. For if Adam had been refraining from eating of the tree up to that point, it was not because he wanted to comply with the Divine Will, but rather because he had gotten into the simple habit of doing so. This is exactly what happened to the generation in the desert was well. They were so used to miracles that they couldn’t even sense their presence anymore. In this way they reintroduced the evil inclination into their hearts.

The performance of mitzvot by simple rote can lead to disgust and even to exile. To this end the prophet declares, “For what reason did the land perish ... because of their forsaking My Torah” (Jer 9:11,12). The Sages explain that they didn’t recite the blessing of בתחילה (“at first”) on the Torah (Nedarim 91a). In other words, they didn’t concentrate on it enough, but rather did it by simple rote. What’s more, the numerical value of

ההרגל בעלמא (“first”) is equal to that of תחילה (“the habit in the world”). It is precisely this sin that caused the destruction of the Temple. For the Divine Presence is made distant through routine, and the one who doesn’t make an effort to be affected by the Shechinah, the Shechinah assuredly moves away from him. In throwing the tablet on which was inscribed, “Rise, O Ox”, the *erev rav* (mixed multitude), obtained an עגל (calf), which alludes to the געל (disgust) with which they performed the mitzvot by rote, and by which they distanced themselves from G-d.

The sin of the עגל (ע: 70; גל: *galut* [exile]) drove them to galut, their dispersion and exile in the midst of the ע (70) nations. They finished by being mocked (לעג) and derided everywhere they went. If, therefore, the Children of Israel didn’t reprimand the mixed multitude for the sin of the golden calf, it was because at the beginning they themselves worshipped idols (Shemot Rabba 16b). In seeing the mixed multitude worshipping the golden calf, the Children of Israel kept quiet because they assumed that the mixed multitude were just following the customs they had acquired in Egypt. Their silence, however, constituted a real sin, even if they felt contempt for the golden calf itself (Yoma 87b). In the final analysis, it was really the grind of normal routine that prevented the Children of Israel from rebuking the mixed multitude, for instead of the former being in awe each time they experienced a miracle, they instead became used to them.

All sin therefore originates, in the final analysis, from a life lived out of routine. Having refrained from reprimanding the mixed multitude for the sin of the golden calf, the Children of Israel have continued to pay for this over the span of the generations, as we have seen (Sanhedrin 102a).

It is therefore fitting that we study Torah and perform all the mitzvot with great fervor, doing so in such a way that, in the words of the author of *Sefat Emet*, the Torah enters into our heart and into our blood. We should completely run away from routine and reprimand those who perform mitzvot without any enthusiasm. In this way we will elevate and greatly strengthen them in their study of Torah.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI MOSHE KALFON HACOHEN

At the age of 40, Rabbi Shalom Hacoen had the joy of having a son born in a miraculous way. On the day of the boy's *brit*, an enormous crowd gathered in order to partake in his joy. The prevailing custom dictated that the person who had delayed in having children should "sell" his newborn. Rabbi Shalom Hacoen therefore symbolically "sold" his son for a few dollars to Rabbi Moshe Idan (a very great Sage and renowned Kabbalist) in order that he be considered as his son. The child received the name of Moshe Akiva Reuven, and his mother added the name Kalfon for a reason that only she was privy to.

From his earliest age one could recognize his extraordinary sanctity, a person in whom the thirst for Torah knew no bounds. His father sent him to study under Rav Yosef Berrebi, and at the age of 10 he began to study the laws of Shechita. It didn't take long for him to be made responsible for Shechita in the town of Zarzis.

The conditions under which Shechita was carried out in that town were very difficult at the time. There was still no slaughterhouse to use, and the slaughter of fowl (as well as cattle) was performed in the fields under the hot sun.

Rabbi Moshe Kalfon was not up to the challenge of this work, and so he fell gravely ill and was forced to stay in bed for several months. Unfortunately, his eyes had been affected by his illness and he lost some of his sight. Upon returning to his native town of Jerba, he could no longer study his books, suffering greatly as a result. He therefore traveled in search of a cure for his eyesight.

Upon his return at the age of 21, he married and plunged himself into his cherished studies. It is surprising to note, despite the urgings of his doctors, just how many books and articles he wrote; the light of the Torah had illuminated his sick eyes. He was still quite young when asked to sit upon the Rabbinical Court of Jerba. He had trouble taking upon himself such responsibility, preferring instead to discretely study Torah. One day, he dreamed of a hand that was pointing to him and ordered that he leave the Beth Midrash and join his future colleagues on the Rabbinical Court.

Never did he look for wealth or honor, and what's more is that he only accepted a very small salary. Everyone, including Muslims, would sing his praises. Everywhere, people would recount just how much he loved peace and how true and fair his judgments always were.

We tell of many stories regarding people who wanted to disobey or show disrespect towards him: They would unfortunately be struck or warned in a dream, then come back to him trembling and asking for forgiveness.

One day a man who had been declared guilty displayed an arrogant disposition towards him. He had barely turned his back on Rabbi Moshe when he was hit by blindness and had great difficulty getting back home. "Woe to me," he sighed, "that I acted arrogantly towards Rabbi Moshe!" From that time on, the man learned to respect the Chachamim. A few years later, this same man was again

summoned before Rabbi Moshe. This time he again had difficulty accepting the verdict. Rabbi Moshe attempted to settle things as best he could, but the man persisted in his views and didn't change his position.

"No, my son. Don't continue to rebel," Rabbi Moshe told him. "I advise that you not refuse in any way. Know that it's your good that I want."

"Certainly Rabbi," the man responded. "In my bones I still feel the punishment that you inflicted on me a few years ago when I disobeyed you."

"G-d help me!" Rabbi Moshe cried. "I have no power to punish! Who gives man his speech, and Who gives him his sight? Let's not try to understand Divine decrees!"

"But Rabbi," the man replied, "my eyesight completely died out when I left this place!"

In 1943, the state of the Jews in Tunisia was very difficult. The Nazis had invaded northern Africa and wanted to apply the "final solution" there as they had in conquered parts of Europe. Thousands of Jews were saved because of the efficient action of Rabbi Moshe Kalfon Hacoen. The end of the war was approaching and the city of Jerba was still besieged. The Jewish population of the city suffered terribly. The Passover holiday was approaching and wheat had been rationed. It was forbidden to purchase it directly from farmers, and it could only be gotten in quantities that had been fixed by the government. How were people going to buy flour to make matzot?

Hashem never abandons the Children of Israel. Even before this problem arose, G-d had already cleared the way for a happy solution. At that time, Rabbi Levy Yitzchak Rabinovitch was serving as the Jewish military chaplain in the French garrison at Jerba (Tunisia was at that time a French colony), and he took a great liking to Rabbi Moshe Kalfon.

One day, the chaplain sensed that Rabbi Moshe was beset by a heavy heart.

"What's the matter Rabbi," he asked. "I get the feeling that your worries never leave you."

Rabbi Moshe shared his anguish with him: "Passover is near and the faithful don't have enough flour for the holiday."

"I'll think it over," the chaplain replied. "Perhaps I can convince the French government to be generous."

Rabbi Moshe blessed the chaplain and wished him success in his endeavor. Rabbi Levy quickly arrived at the military camp and presented his request to the governor. He explained that the Jews would soon be celebrating Passover, and that to do so they needed a large amount of wheat.

"Fine," responded the governor. "But I wish that the Rabbi would come here himself, and I will give him the necessary authorization."

Rabbi Moshe learned of the news with great joy and didn't delay in arriving at the military camp. That year, the Jews of Jerba didn't lack any matzot.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

THE HEALER

A teaching from the Maguid of Dubno

Moses returned to the L-RD and said, 'I implore! This people has committed a grievous sin and made themselves a god of gold'" (Ex 32:31).

The people of Israel had committed a very grave sin. Only forty days after having received the Torah on Mount Sinai, the Jews made a golden calf to worship it. Hashem was prepared to destroy them all – with the exception of Moses – from whom He would have founded a new people. Yet Moses our teacher, the faithful shepherd of the Children of Israel, attempted with all his strength to avoid the destruction of his brethren. Just as he had implored Hashem to save them from the hands of Pharaoh, so too did he pray to Him to have pity on the Jews and save them. Nevertheless, a question arises: Why did Moses say, "This people has committed a grievous sin"? In fact, he should have *minimalized* their sin!

The Maggid of Dubno explains Moses' odd remark by means of a parable.

Chaim and Meir, two beggars who were friends, roamed from town to town and door to door begging for a piece of bread or a place to sleep. The healthy and robust appearance of Meir made people want to help him. On the other hand, Chaim's appearance was a bruising spectacle. Potential hosts were loath to welcome a person who was so unfit to be seen.

Meir advised his friend to stand up straight and to hide his ills behind a smile. He prayed that his friend Chaim would completely recover from his malady.

When they were far from the next town, the descending nightfall forced them to stop at a Jewish inn.

"Now remember," Meir whispered in his friend's ear, "stand up straight and smile, because if your appearance displeases the innkeeper, we'll have spend the night under those lovely stars outside!"

Chaim forced himself to put up a good front. The innkeeper gave them a quick look and showed them to a table. Not long after they sat down, they began savoring a bowlful of soup with great appetite.

Meir watched the patrons of the inn with great interest. He shared his impressions with Chaim, who for his part kept his eyes lowered so as not to be noticed.

"Look at the Jew who's at that table," Meir remarked. "He's certainly a very important individual. And next to him is Doctor Gainzberg, the King's physician! Don't miss this chance! Ask him to examine you to find out

what you're suffering from. Show him your ills and describe your pains so he can help you."

Thus Moses our teacher wasn't asking for Klal Israel's forgiveness, but rather for their healing. "Look," he said, "and see how Your people is sick. See what a terrible sin they committed. Their Neshama is truly afflicted. Hashem, only You can heal them. I beg You, make it such that my family and friends become upright, good and pious."

Moses our teacher didn't consider the sins of the people as a crime that had to be punished, but rather as a sickness that had to be cured. He therefore addressed himself to the Healer of All Life, to Him who heals all creatures, to Hashem. He showed Hashem all the ills that His people were suffering from, just as Chaim was to show the doctor in the parable. Hashem replied to Moses that He wouldn't destroy the nation, but rather that He would cure them until they were completely healed.

EISHET CHAYIL

SOME "COOKING" REGULATIONS FOR SHABBAT

1. On Shabbat, it is forbidden to boil water or milk. It is equally forbidden to fill a container with water and place it next to a flame or electric burner in order to warm it.
2. It is forbidden to place on a flame or electric burner any food that was half-cooked before Shabbat began.
3. Food that is cold yet entirely cooked before Shabbat (i.e., cooked and then kept in the fridge), and is dry, can be warmed up on Shabbat on an electric burner. One can therefore place in a pan pieces of meat, chicken, or fish and put them on an electric burner or a covered flame on Shabbat in order to warm them up before a meal.
4. On Shabbat it is permitted to use water that has been heated by a solar water heater in order wash dishes, hands, or feet.
5. It is forbidden on Shabbat to use water that has been heated in an electric water heater in order to wash dishes.
6. It is forbidden on Shabbat to pour boiling water on tea in order to make a tea mixture. One should boil tea before Shabbat.
7. It is permissible to pour boiling water directly onto instant (powdered) coffee in a glass