

הַמַּדְרָשׁ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF - "REBUKE YOUR NEIGHBOR" (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "The people saw that Moses had delayed in descending the mountain, and the people gathered themselves together" (Exodus 32:1) and "The L-RD said to Moses, 'Behold, I come to you in the thickness of the cloud so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever'" (ibid. 19:9).

Rabbi ibn Ezra writes: "Just as Hindus and the Egyptians that descended from Ham did not believe that one can speak with G-d and remain alive, a certain number of the Children of Israel, enslaved in Egypt, believed the same. This is why it is written that 'they had faith in the L-RD and in Moses His servant' (Exodus 14:31). The verse does not say that they all had faith, but only a certain number of the Israelites. On the other hand, concerning the giving of the Torah, it is written, 'and they will also believe in you forever' (Exodus 19:9) and 'this day we saw that the L-RD will speak to a person and he can live' (Deuteronomy 5:21)."

However the Ramban explains that G-d said to Moses, "The Children of Israel will also reach the level of prophets and will hear My word directly." They would thus understand that Moses is a prophet and that he is the faithful servant of G-d.

Concerning Rabbi ibn Ezra's view, we may add that if the Children of Israel did not believe in the prophesy of Moses (who delayed in coming down from on high), why would they have waited 40 days to commit the sin of the golden calf? In actuality, they believed in Moses but had erred in calculating the number of days after which he was to come back to them, and in addition the Satan had shown them Moses' coffin (Shabbat 89a). They believed that having reached the level of an angel, he was no longer to come back to them. Therefore they built a golden calf that was to serve as an intermediary between the Eternal and themselves. Yet when Moses descended from the mountain, they were seized with fright. Where then was their bravery and their insolence, they who did not hesitate to kill Hur the son of Miriam (Tanhuma Ki Tisa 24)? They had also threatened to kill Aaron if he did not build the golden calf for them (ibid; see Exodus 32: 21). So Moses descended from the mountain, broke the golden calf into pieces, reduced it to powder, made the sinners drink it with water, and broke the Tablets of the Law. And the Children of Israel kept quiet! It was because they completely believed in Moses after the giving of the Torah. After all, did they not see him speaking with G-d?

If we hold by the Ramban's opinion, how can it be imagined that they had committed the sin of the golden calf after having reached the level of prophets on Mount Sinai? Let us not forget that the Eternal had categorically ordered them not to make "a carved image nor any likeness" (ibid. 20:4). Even according to Rabbi ibn Ezra, how could they have the merit of holding the title of "the generation of knowledge" and to believe in Moses and his prophesy? How could they have made the 49 gates of impurity crumble, and how could they have passed through the 50th gate of holiness? How could they have eaten the Manna? How could they have seen Moses speaking face to face with G-d in the middle of the thick cloud, and how could they have believed in G-d and in Moses His servant? How could they have dared to kill Hur, the son of Miriam? And were they not afraid of Aaron, who himself was also a great prophet and leader, and who had performed great miracle, most notably the plagues of blood and frogs?

It was because, as we have seen, all the sins had been committed by the erev rav, the mixed multitude (Tanhuma Ki Tisa 26), who Moses wanted to shelter under the shadow of the Shechinah. It was they who could not understand that the one born of a woman could speak to G-d and remain alive (according to Rabbi ibn Ezra). They, who had not reached the level of faith and prophesy, believed that G-d had killed Moses when he dared to speak to Him face to face. Did the Satan not show them that Moses was dead? It was because of this that they killed Hur, threatened Aaron, and made the golden calf. This is why the Eternal told Moses, "Go, get down, for your people have become corrupt" (Exodus 32:7 – according to Rashi, this consists of the erev rav). It is possible that a certain number of Israelites followed them, but they repented after having received the Torah.

Why then were the Children of Israel punished? Why were they deprived of the two crowns that had been placed on their head (Shabbat 88a), as it is written, "And now remove your jewelry from yourself" (Exodus 33:5)? If the tribe of Levi had, in accordance with Moses' order, killed the erev rav, why were the Children of Israel punished? G-d wanted to wipe them out, as He told Moses: "Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them" (ibid. 32:10) and "on the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them" (v.34). Concerning this, our Sages teach that the sin of the golden calf

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permeates all other sins and all suffering over the course of the generations (Sanhedrin 102a). Let us recall, finally, that during the giving of the Torah, the evil inclination was removed from the heart of the Children of Israel, who from that point on rid themselves of the Angel of Death (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:15). Yet because of the mixed multitude, the entire situation was then reversed. “If,” as the Talmud explains, “Tuvia sinned, why should Zigud be punished?” (see Pesachim 113b). Why did the Children of Israel pay for the sins committed by the mixed multitude?

We could criticize the Children of Israel, who represented the majority, for not having fought against the mixed multitude. If the Children of Israel had attacked them, they would have certainly won. Their silence makes them accomplices (Bava Metzia 37b), for G-d commands us, “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him” (Leviticus 19:17), doing so until the other is ashamed or hurts us. Our Sages oblige us to reprimand the person whose behavior is inappropriate (Erchin 16b). Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you brought a grievous sin upon it?” (Exodus 32:21). In other words, “Why did you hesitate to rebuke them, even if it cost you your life? If you had rebuked the Children of Israel, they would have done nothing to you, and they would not have killed Hur.”

The Midrash teaches that someone who can reprimand his fellow, yet refrains from doing so, pays for the sin committed by him (Shabbat 54b). He as well as his descendants will be punished. As we saw above, up until this day we are being punished for the sin of the golden calf, a sin committed by our distant ancestors.

The mixed multitude said to Aaron, “Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us” (Exodus 32:1). Did idols have the ability to lead them? Had the Israelites forgotten all the miracles that G-d had performed for them? Did they not rid themselves, as we have seen, of idolatry?

The reason for this is that a person who repents through fear, not through love, sees his fear melting away in the end and goes back onto the bad path. Teshuvah done through love is thus more important than when done through the fear of G-d (Yoma 86b). This is what happened to the mixed multitude: They desired to reintroduce the idolatry of Egypt and act as they pleased without being punished.

The mixed multitude therefore said to the Children of Israel, “These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt” (Exodus 32:4). In other words, “These gods will not punish you if you sin; they don’t watch that you study Torah and perform mitzvot. Don’t you see that we have enriched ourselves? It is just like we did in Egypt, without being punished [Shemot Rabba 16:2]. Therefore come and join us, and together we will worship these idols.”

The Children of Israel should have attacked them head-on. Instead they refrained from defending the Eternal’s cause and were punished. They nevertheless finished by vanquishing the mixed multitude and serving the Eternal, not through fear but by love, as the Prophet recalls: “Thus says the L-RD, ‘I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land’” (Jeremiah 2:2).

Let us not, therefore, behave like those people that wanted to be like the mixed multitude, seeking pleasures and benefits and

going to the Tzaddikim without taking to the Divine path. In other words, they asked for Divine blessing without serving their Creator; they asked that G-d send His abundance in the world yet refused to recognize Him. Moreover, we see that sometimes “the way of the wicked prosper[s]” (Jeremiah 12:1). They mistakenly believe that the Eternal is on their side, and they themselves admit to not believing or relying on Him. “Their heart was not constant with Him, and they were not steadfast in His covenant” (Psalms 78:37). They fail to realize that all this is the work of the Satan, who aims only at deceiving them.

Let us therefore conduct ourselves like the Children of Israel, not like the mixed multitude. Let us believe in Him “with the mouth and the heart.” Let us rebuke our neighbor when we see him sinning. The sin of the golden calf will then be rectified, and we will reach the level of prophets, as did the Children of Israel after they left Egypt and received the Torah.

THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE - PART XIII

Having reached this point in our study of pride, let us listen to the words of the Sages with regards to this subject. One Sage said, “Who is the one who has never escaped torment? The one who tries to reach a level that is too lofty for him.” The Sages also say, “The one who thinks he knows everything, people consider him as a fool.” They also said, “Wicked deeds are not far from arrogance. The one who harbors a tendency for wicked deeds, people hate and depart from him.” One Sage declared, “In the same way that a pleasant face is the light of the body, so too are pleasant character traits the light of the soul.” Furthermore he said, “If the king has no interest in boasting, how much more so should men not be with respect to one another.”

That same Sage recounted the following story:

There was once a king who was seated on his throne, and before him were nobles seated on chairs of different height. The king asked them, “How did you dare seat yourselves, one above the other, without my permission?” The noble seated on the highest chair answered, “My family lineage places me above my colleagues.” The second highest noble declared, “I dominate my subordinates by my wisdom.” The third said, “The humility of my soul and the contributions of my heart have placed me below them.” The king decided to elevate and honor this last noble.

Concerning this subject, it is written, “It is better that it should be said to you, ‘Come up here,’ than that you be demoted before the prince” (Proverbs 25:7). If a man realizes that pride is increasing in him, he should go as far as to contemplate things that frighten him – that he stems from a putrid drop, that he returns to dust and worms, and that he will have to give an accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. He will think about all the proud men that became boastful, that left this world and were forgotten as if they had never existed. What good did their arrogance do for them?

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI YEHIA LAHLO

Near Tefilalet, on the high peaks of the Atlas Mountains, can be found the tiny village of Ktsar-el-Souk. There rests the venerated Tzaddik Rabbi Yehia Lahlo.

About 400 years ago, Rabbi Yehia Lahlo was an emissary to Morocco from Israel. He settled in the village of Ktsar-el-Souk, and there he taught Torah and ethics to children, developed teachers and shochatim (ritual slaughterers), and was preoccupied with improving the material and spiritual lives of Jews in the region. The name of Rabbi Yehia became famous as a great Tzaddik and benefactor, and his home was the center of attraction for numerous crowds. If a resident was suffering from any illness, the first thing that he did was to go see Rabbi Yehia, for he had the conviction that because of the Tzaddik's prayers, which moved the heavens, his recovery would not delay.

Rabbi Yehia passed away on the day of Purim and was laid to rest where he had lived, in Ktsar-el-Souk. Since then, the Jews of Morocco celebrate the Hilloula of Rabbi Yehia on Shushan Purim.

One day, a Jew from Marrakech went to pay a visit to his relatives who lived in the vicinity of Tefilalet. On the way he was attacked by thieves, who tied up his hands and feet and dragged him along to their secret hideout near Ktsar-el-Souk. In the middle of the night, the poor Jew murmured a last prayer of penitence, for he was convinced that his final hour had come.

The thieves traveled on the route by which Rabbi Yehia Lahlo had been laid to rest, and when the Jew noticed the tomb of the saint, he raised his eyes towards the sky and said, "Master of the world, by the merit of the Tzaddik Rabbi Yehia, deliver me from the hands of these thieves!" He also vowed to make a Seuda for the poor at the gravesite of the saint if he managed to escape.

Several hours later, in the middle of the night, a company of French soldiers suddenly appeared. When the thieves noticed the soldiers, they saved themselves and thus abandoned the Jew, hands and feet tied up. Because they could not see well in the dark, during their escape the thieves fell into a ravine that was in their path.

The Jew stayed this way all night, hands and feet tied up, for the French soldiers had not seen him. It was only in the early morning that some Jews who were passing by freed him from his bonds. He arrived at the village of Ktsar-el-Souk and made a great meal for the poor as a sign of thanks. His mouth did not cease thanking and praising the Holy One, blessed be He, for having delivered him by the merit of Rabbi Yehia Lahlo.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

Reprimanding by Deeds

One Shabbat, some Jews of the community came to tell Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim that a Jew had dared to open his shop in plain daylight, a shop that was located in a suburb of the city.

The Rav listened, and the following Friday night he announced to the members of the community that they should not wait for him to come to the morning service. Instead of going to synagogue, he enveloped himself in his Tallit and went to the distant suburb where the man who had dared to desecrate Shabbat had his shop.

It was still early, and the shop had not yet opened. Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim asked for a chair from one of the neighbors and seated himself, book in hand, near the shop's front door.

The owner quickly arrived with the intention of opening the shop as he had done the previous Shabbat. As he approached, he noticed the Rav sitting there with a book. He jumped back and told himself, "It's not right to open the shop in front of the Rav. No doubt a circumcision is taking place nearby and someone asked him to be the Sandek. I'll therefore wait until he leaves before opening."

Imagine the great surprise of the man when he noticed that one hour passed, then another, yet the Rav was still sitting on a chair in front of his shop reading a book. The thought then entered his mind: "Maybe he's come here precisely because of me?"

It was true that this shopkeeper had been very distant from Torah and mitzvot, but Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel was loved by all the Jews of the town, including those who had distanced themselves from the path of Torah. Consequently, the man did not want to upset the Rav, who had been sitting there for many hours already. He approached him hesitantly and, with a trembling voice, said, "Perhaps the Rav would like to go home and rest? Perhaps he would like to eat? I promise him by everything that is dear to me that starting today my shop will remain completely closed on every Shabbat and holiday."

Without saying a word, Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel got up, gave the shopkeeper a thankful look, and began slowly returning home.

The next Shabbat, the Rav was able to go pray without any thoughts at the back of his mind. The shopkeeper kept his word, and the shop remained closed on every Shabbat and holiday!

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, “For all peoples will go forth, each man in the name of his god, but we go forth with the Name of the L-RD our G-d” (Micah 4:5).

This verse contains a difficulty. Already when Hanania, Mishael, and Azariah had decided not to acquiesce to Nebuchadnezzar by prostrating themselves to his idol, he pointed out to them that there was still more idolatry in Israel than with the other peoples. We therefore find it difficult to see how the Children of Israel could justify themselves in the future to the other peoples that their idolatry led them to stray from the right path, since the Children of Israel were themselves not exempt from the same sin. However when we examine the text more closely, we realize that it contains a response to this question.

A man took a wife that already had children from a previous marriage. His new wife behaved badly with him, doing good only for her own children, who for that matter were not too well behaved themselves. The man eventually understood that he would only get lies and deception from them, and told himself that if he argued with his wife the house would be in perpetually conflict. It would be better to win her over and act pleasantly than to poison the atmosphere of the home in which they lived.

He therefore did all he could to speak to her tenderly and to show extreme gentleness in dealing with both herself and her children, exactly as if they had been his own. He lived like this for a long time, but there was something like a fire that burned within him. He therefore decided to get a divorce. At that point, the wife tried hard to have her friends intervene on her behalf, but to no avail. One

of her neighbors tried hard to convince her husband not to divorce her, speaking to him as follows: “Believe me, I also have a mean wife, but that doesn’t prevent me from continuing to live with her!”

“You, you can’t send your wife away,” replied the man, “you’re obliged to keep her because you love your children.”

“But I clearly see that you love her sons exactly as if they were your own. How then could you send them away as well?”

“Don’t be foolish! You’re speaking without making any sense. Do you actually think for an instant that I really love them? I certainly don’t intend to sit on the eggs of another like a cuckoo bird. However, out of necessity, I concealed my real feelings and pretended to love them, and all for her! Now that I’ve decided to get a divorce, what more do I have to do with these children? May the wind carry them away!”

The interpretation is clear.

The peoples of the world love their idolatry because they belong to the same root, in accordance with the imagery of the verse that states, “Your mother is very shamed” (Jeremiah 50:12). However Israel only transgressed because of the evil inclination. As long as that alien force dominated them, it seemed that they loved idolatry because they did not muster the courage to fight against their own desires day after day.

But on the day where the divorce will be written up, the Holy One, blessed be He, will completely uproot the evil inclination from the heart of the Children of Israel. In that one stroke, idolatry will disappear, for in reality their soul was always disgusted by it, and asks only to find its true love once again.