

Derech Harif

Excerpts from the Torah discourse delivered by The great Rabbi Yoshiyahu Yosef Pinto Shlita

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First Shabbat Meal

Negative traits don't appear out of nowhere, but develop from one's youth.

This week's Torah portion recounts the sin of the Golden Calf and the giving of the second set of Tablets. Towards the very end of Moshe's forty day stint receiving Torah in heaven, Hashem commanded Moshe to descend and attend to the nation (the Erev Rav, mixed multitude of nations who accompanied the Jewish nation out of Egypt) as they have come to sin- "they've rapidly swayed from the path which I have commanded." These very particular words require additional explanation as to what they were referring to.

In the passage which describes the punishment for the sin of adultery committed by a woman of Cohen descent, the Torah remarks: "The daughter of a Cohen, who begins to commit adultery has disgraced her father - (thus) with fire she shall be burned (Vayikra 21:9)." This passage too requires additional explanation: what connection does her father have in her adulterous behavior? Why is her father mentioned at all in connection with her sin?

In truth, her father played an important role in her degrading sinful behavior she displayed as an adult. Negative behavior does not appear out of nowhere. Rather, its source is connected to some point in a person's youth. The seeds of that behavior were created many years earlier in that person's life, but they only revealed themselves with time. That person didn't have the courage to manifest their inappropriate desires or behavior at the very beginning of their arising, but its seed was present since an earlier time. For example, a child who one day begins to steal or fib can't be described as having begun their negative behavior that very day. Rather, at some earlier point in time, the seeds of that negative behavior was planted in them and only later did they begin to reveal themselves.

Similarly, the woman of Cohen descent who commits adultery, it shouldn't be said that she came out of the blue to such a grave sin.

Rather, the seed to that sin developed in "her father's house," when she was a young girl, but it was concealed until the moment when she sinned.

It must be true about the sin of the Golden Calf as well. When Hashem remarked to Moshe that "the nation has rapidly come to sin (with the Golden Calf)," it can only be so if they had that negative trait present within their character from an earlier time.

A person doesn't come to commit such a sin in one change of thought, in a brief moment. Like the Cohen's daughter who committed adultery, the source of the sin developed within the person over time. The negative behavior was present within the nation from an earlier period in time, but only appeared then.

This teaches us a very important lesson in life. We must be alert to any negative or sinful behavior that arises within us, to eradicate it then and there. We must make every effort to annihilate that negative behavior at its very root lest it inevitably develops into- Heaven Forbid- more grave behavior.

In regards to child education it applies as well. When one notices a negative behavior in a child, every effort must be made to correct it then, because it can only develop into worse behavior at a later stage in life. The issue must be dealt with at its root.



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Soul Of the Rif

A person's words have great power and meaning, for a person with words can overturn his life and the entire universe from end to end. Indeed "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Mishlei 18, 21). One should consider that the same matter communicated in a different manner, or under different circumstances, may lead to very different outcomes.

A person may be able to tell his friend something that is very difficult to accept, and his friend will accept it, by telling it to him in a warm and amicable manner. Conversely, through adopting a hard-line approach, making a scene and shouting, a person could deliver the same message and distress and emotionally destroy that person.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"Moshe turned and descended from the mountain, with the two Tablets of the Testimony in his hand."

Dealing with an issue and thereby having a great problem and resolving it, is preferable to leaving it as a constant small problem.

When the Jewish people worshiped the golden calf, Hashem said to Moshe "Go, descend- for your people have corrupted"- Moshe was commanded to descend from Heaven because the Jewish people had sinned. Moshe Rabenu, in response, took the Tablets of the Covenant and descended with them. The following difficulty is raised- Although the Jewish people had sinned and so Moshe Rabenu had to descend to them, why did he need to bring the Tablets of the Covenant with him down to Earth and destroy them? Why couldn't Moshe Rabenu leave the Tablets in Heaven, and descend to the Jewish people without the Tablets?

We may resolve this difficulty with the following principle. Just as Hashem created man of two spiritual levels: a *guf* (body) and *neshama* (soul), with the *neshama* having a higher spiritual level than the *guf*, similarly, the stone of the Tablets was like a *guf*, and the engraved writing of the Tablets were like a *neshama*. When the Jewish people had sanctified themselves prior to the sin of the calf, they elevated the level of the stone of the Tablets from the status of *guf* to the status of *neshama*, just like the engraved writing which had the level of *neshama*. Thus, both the stone and the engraved writing of the Tablets were at the high spiritual level of *neshama*.

Through the sin of the golden calf, the Jewish people caused the spiritual level of the stone of the Tablets to fall back from the level of *neshama* to the level of *guf*, whilst the engraved writing remained at the level of *neshama*. Moshe Rabenu was concerned that if he would descend without the Tablets, the

Tablets would remain forever in Heaven as a permanent criticism of the Jewish people- For the Tablets, that were at the very high spiritual level of being entirely *neshama*, were reduced in spirituality through the Jewish people's refusal to accept the Torah and worshiping of the golden calf. Those Tablets would serve as a daily testimony of the Jewish people's sin.

In order to erase this passing of judgment against the Jewish people in Heaven, Moshe Rabenu brought the Tablets down with him and destroyed them. He did all that was in his power to ensure the Tablets would remain on Earth, and not to give power to the ministering angels to pass judgment daily against the Jewish people over the sin of the calf and their refusal to accept the Torah. Moshe Rabenu destroyed the Tablets and caused apparent ruin to prevent the greater ruin of constant passing of judgment against the Jewish people in Heaven.

It is often preferable to deal with an issue and thereby have a great problem and resolve it, than to leave it as a constant small problem that will remain for life. Moshe brought the Tablets down and destroyed them, and thus resolved the problem. If he were to leave them in Heaven and not destroy them, although the ruin of the destruction of the Tablets would not have occurred, there would have been a constant passing of judgment over the Jewish people. Therefore Moshe Rabenu, Hashem's trusted servant and the Jewish people's trusted messenger destroyed the Tablets and saved the Jewish people from the greater ruin of daily passing of judgment.



Q & A with the Rif



Dear Rav, I've heard that the Rav speaks strongly of the severity of the transgression of disparaging Talmidei Chachamim. I deal with charity and the dissemination of Torah, and during my work I wasn't careful and hurt someone who is a great Talmid Chacham and author of religious works. I am sure I have hurt him, but I feel it would hurt my honor if I apologize. What should I do?

Answer:

Apologize! What is our honor? We are all mere "dust and ashes" (Bereshit 18, 27).

A person shouldn't busy himself thinking about potentially "being hurt". If you think you hurt a Talmid Chacham- Go and apologize. This is dangerous!

You are concerned it would "hurt [your] honor". We say at the end of the Amida "May my soul be like soil to all". Why is soil eternal, and remains constant through time and the elements, come what may? It is because it is always trampled upon. Something which allows itself to be trampled upon is eternal. "May my soul be like soil to all"- soil is eternal.





3rd Shabbat meal

"And Aharon called to the people saying: 'Behold, tomorrow is a holiday for Hashem'."

When one repents, even for the gravest sin, Hashem rejoices and makes out of it a holiday.

The Torah recounts that the nation came Aharon with a request to form - Heaven Forbid - an idol, because "we don't know what happened to Moshe." The Talmud (Shabbat 89a) details that the satan created a fictitious scene at the top of the mountain of Sinai of Moshe's casket- as if to show that he had perished in heaven. It was this particular scene which led the people to present their request to Aharon for a replacement leader.

Aharon realized that the nation was in a very precarious position and attempted to stall for time until Moshe returned. He thus asked that the people bring the jewelry of their wives, hoping that they wouldn't give in and the sin could be averted. However, when the women refused, the men themselves removed their jewelry and brought it to Aharon. What followed is history: Aharon, against his will, gathered the jewelry, tossed it into a blaze of fire and out emerged the Golden Calf.

There is a very astounding verse found in the passage of the Golden Calf. After Aharon gathered the gold from the people, he remarks: "... because tomorrow is a holiday for Hashem." What was Aharon referring to? How is such a remark suitable for the context the Jewish people were present at that moment? The sin of the Golden Calf was the gravest sin equivalent to Adam's sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The gravity of the sin is as such, the Sages teach, that its punishment was broken up into small portions for all future generations and is found in every difficulty or pain that befalls a person. A simple toothache, part of the pain, is there as punishment for the sin of the Golden Calf; the punishment of the Golden Calf is present in every pain. How then does Aharon remark, in the very middle of the nation's committing such a grave sin, that "tomorrow will be a holiday for Hashem?"

The answer teaches us a very important lesson. The Talmud (Shabbat 88b) describes the sin of the Golden Calf as a bride who commits adultery during her very own wedding ceremony. Hashem was coming into covenant with the Jewish nation and then and there, they committed that grave sin. Elsewhere (Avodah Zara 4b), the Talmud reveals that the entire sin of the Golden Calf was committed only to prove to later generations the possibility and power of Teshuva, repentance, that even if an entire nation errs, Hashem will forgive them entirely when they repent.

In context of this latter passage, Aharon's statement makes very much sense. Aharon surely realized the gravity of the situation as it was playing out. But he knew that Moshe Rabbenu was soon to return from his time in heaven receiving the Torah, and would redress the nation back to the proper path. And when they will repent, Hashem will rejoice and it will be a holiday for Him. This is the holiday that Aharon was referring to.

One must know well the power of Teshuva, repentance; even the gravest of sins has repentance. And with sincere repentance, Hashem rejoices and makes it into a holiday.



Treasure charms from the Rif



Every year when we read the portion of the red heifer, and thereby fulfill the verse "and we shall substitute with our lips for (the sacrifices of) bulls", we should consider that the red heifer is coming to atone for the sin of the golden calf. This atonement for the golden calf is an extremely great and powerful remedy.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Stories from the Rif

The following wondrous story is told of the Noam Elimelech, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk.

Once there was a Jew who was destitute. He had no money and no livelihood. He heard of the great rabbi the Noam Elimelech, and went to request a blessing, as he had no livelihood and had children to marry off.

This person came crying to the Rabbi: "Rabbi, bless me, save me. I am in distress and have no livelihood." Poverty is the most difficult matter of all. The Gemara says that "The daughters of the Jewish people are beautiful. It is only poverty that makes them appear unsightly." Furthermore, the Gemara says that poverty may lead a person to lose faith in Hashem. The Gemara says that the following categories of people are considered as if dead: those who are childless, those who are blind and those who are poor. Poverty is an extremely severe matter.

This person asked the Noam Elimelech for a blessing, and asked him what he should do. The Noam Elimelech gave him three gold coins, and told him "Take these gold coins and go on your way." The person rejoiced- Three gold coins would be enough to sustain his family for a month but not to marry off children. He nevertheless left with a glad heart- at least he had sustenance for a month, and went on his way.

When he was about to leave the city and enter the forest, he suddenly heard the Noam Elimelech's attendant hurrying towards him. The attendant told him: "You received three coins. The Rabbi has asked that you return one coin, and keep two coins." That person became saddened and said to himself "Just as I finally received some money to sustain my family for a month, I'm made to return one coin." He wondered why the Rabbi had requested him to return one coin. Despite this, he returned the coin to the attendant and continued on his way.

As he entered the forest, he noticed some peasant children playing with a case that had a valuable appearance. He approached them and asked what they were doing. They told him they had this case and were willing to exchange it for three gold coins. He asked them what was in the case, so they opened the case, and showed him that it was full of banknotes.

These peasant children had never seen banknotes before and didn't know their worth, and so demanded three gold coins for the exchange of the case. When the poor person told them that he only had two gold coins, they responded that he would only be able to have the contents of the case for two gold coins but not the case itself. He agreed, exchanged the two gold coins for the banknotes and left the peasant children with the case. The person hid the bank notes in his pockets, and his heart filled with joy- He now had enough money to marry off his children and live comfortably.

The person was curious as to what the children would do with the case and so stationed himself at a vantage point, some

distance away from the children, to see what they would do. He saw the children start to squabble with each other as they had the following dilemma: they had stolen the case, and they were worried that they would be punished if they were to be found with the case. The children decided they would burn the case to destroy the incriminating evidence. As they started gathering wood to burn the case, a horseman rode swiftly toward them and caught them with the case. This person was clearly the wealthy owner of the case. He struck the boys, and took them to the police, whilst berating them for stealing his large sum of money.

That person thought to himself: the Rabbi gave me three gold coins. If I would have kept all three coins, the children would have given me the case with the money. I would have been discovered with the case, accused of theft and punished severely. The Rabbi took back one coin, leaving two coins. This is what saved me, as for two coins the children only gave me the banknotes that were in the case but not the case itself, and so I was saved from being severely punished.

There is a great principle in life: If a person sees himself apparently incurring damage, or losing out from something related to Torah and good deeds, he should not become saddened, as there may be something deeper underlying this apparent loss.

That person, of whom the Rabbi took back one coin, was at the time greatly saddened, and couldn't understand why Hashem arranged that the coin be taken away from him. But underlying his loss of that one coin was the fact that it prevented him from being caught, and he was left with abundance and blessing.

A person should remember this principle: when you see an apparent problem, you must accept it with love. You do not know what is underlying the apparent problem. The verse in Tehillim (55, 23) states "Cast on Hashem your burden".- You should leave the burden with Hashem, for Hashem can see exactly what is good for you, and when it is good for you, and will ensure that you receive the good in the way that is best for you.

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