

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay # 53—Parshat Ki Tisa & Purim 5762

This week is truly special; the week of Purim, our rejoicing over our good fortune to be saved from annihilation, as well as witnessing our enemies' downfall. And the week's Shabbat Torah reading contains the ignominious passage of the golden calf - idolatry built by the Jews scant weeks after the Revelation at Sinai. Nothing in the Bible is random; neither is anything in a Jew's life or calendar. Thus there must be a strong connection between the two - and it must be very relevant to today.

The golden calf was straightforward idolatry, made from an abundance of wealth, and brought about because of a lack of faith in Moshe and a lack of patience on behalf of the nation. A miscalculation by some about Moshe's return date from Mount Sinai caused them to say to Aharon, "Arise! Make us a god to go before us, for this man Moshe we do not know what happened to him." Had they waited just one more day, none of the idolatry or other "shtick" - e.g., the murder of Hur - would have taken place. So, patience and faith have a lot in common. If one truly believes that salvation and redemption, i.e., the coming of Mashiach, will take place, he will wait it out, no matter how pressured and stressed out he may be. No matter what the Hamans, Amalekites and Palestinians try to do. Let us examine the history of just the past century.

The Nationalist Socialists of Germany worshipped their idolatry as a form of "superman" in themselves. It led them to build an Aryan nation of Nazis, committing genocide, killing some 6,000,000 of our people (as well as almost an additional 20,000,000 people, including many of their own). Their attempts at annihilating the Jews was nearly successful, at least in Europe, for in the aftermath of the war only a mere fraction of Jewish communal life remained there. Still, the Jewish nation was "reborn" and has thrived since the Second World War.

The Marxist-Lenin idolatry led to the birth of communism, which enslaved several hundred million people and was nearly successful in eradicating any trace of Judaism in Eastern Europe. "Nearly successful," for despite its efforts the spark of Judaism remained and is now, like the physical rebirth after the war, in the miraculous process of rebuilding.

Rebbe Nachman equates avarice and the pursuit of money with idolatry (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #23). Unfortunately, nowhere has this idolatry taken such root, and been so successful in causing the eradication of Jewish life, thought and tradition, as in Western "civilization." The arrival of the Jews in North America heralded "emancipation" from the pursuit of Godliness and led them into the pursuit of the "godly." The result, as we see clearly today, is that the vast majority of North American Jewry is far removed from its roots, lacking even basic knowledge in what Judaism has to offer. Even worse, it has led to mass assimilation among the nations. This is an idolatry which has unsurpassed results. It is also what happened during the story of Purim.

"Why was a decree to destroy the Jews during Haman's time put into effect? Because the Jews partook of Achashveirosh's feast; they served idolatry during Nevuchadnezzar's reign" (*Megilah* 12a). The story of

Purim and the Jews' deliverance took place just when the Jews were preparing to leave the Babylonian exile and return to the Holy Land. As recorded in the Book of Ezra, many Jews during the exile succumbed to assimilation and Ezra had his hands full separating non-Jews from Jewish families, prior to their ascent to the Holy Land. We see that what happened - idolatry, the "good and easy life of parties and feasts," and assimilation - were just some of the symptoms which world Jewry suffered from then. Sound familiar? We have the symptoms now. The more one becomes steeped in idolatry, the further one goes away from God.

In Israel this past week, the chief justice of the Israeli supreme court, Aharon Barak, signed a law that any type of conversion to Judaism is acceptable. One only need to declare before certain bodies that he wants to be a Jew and he will be considered Jewish. We have stooped to the lowest levels possible. The secular Mr. Barak claims to be totally objective when considering religious issues, yet his past is replete with negative statements about God and Judaism. The cycle of idolatry is complete; the golden calf made, the idol worshipped and the pathways opened for mass assimilation. Imagine! There are some 15,000 Israeli women married to Israeli Arabs, even before the law permitting non-Jews to be registered as Jews. Who will be left from the Jewish nation to inherit the Holy Land if this cycle continues? Yet, the Torah tells us that after making the golden calf God forgave the Jews and led them to the Promised Land. It happened again after the miracle of Purim, when the Jews, even though they were assimilated, were permitted to return to the Holy Land. What's going on and how can we apply this to our lives, today?

When examining the story of the golden calf, we find it truly amazing that it even happened. The Jews witnessed miracle after miracle in Egypt, then the Splitting of the Red Sea and then a tête-à-tête with God, the revelation at Sinai. Were they are capable of making a golden calf just weeks later?! Rashi explains (32:7), that it was really the *eirev rav* (mixed multitude) who made the golden calf. The Jews, the "silent majority" who stood idly by and did not protest such an abomination, were guilty by association. Today too, we find ourselves battling all kinds of opposition, within Judaism (each claiming the "true path"), with concepts of human rights, and certainly within our borders. Will we again be found guilty by association? Yet who can battle on so many fronts at once?

Our Sages teach that because of Moshe's prayers God forgave the Jews. However, that forgiveness was not complete, for the gravity of such a deed right after the Revelation was too great. So instead of their having to suffer then, the punishment for their sin was spread out over ALL future generations. Whenever suffering befalls the Jews, part of that suffering is atonement for the sin of making the golden calf (Rashi, *Exodus* 32:34). Thus, today, with all the suffering we are enduring here in the Holy Land (as well as everywhere else), we are feeling the results of the golden calf. Were it to stay limited to the one golden calf it might have been over with already. But, unfortunately, the "stiff-necked people" (*Exodus* 33:5) haven't learned their lessons. We continue making more "golden calves," and we continue to see terrible suffering. Is this to be forever? Are we never going to learn the lesson?

Notice that immediately after making the golden calf, Moshe prayed. God accepted his prayers. The Jews were forgiven. Then and **ONLY THEN**, right after committing such a dastardly act, Moshe's prayers aroused such Divine Favor, that God revealed to Moshe the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. God told Moshe that these attributes are so powerful that they never cease. One can always invoke these Attributes, even in the worst of times, even under the worst situations. For God's compassion will never cease. One can always invoke it.

We thus find that at that moment of Divine Favor, God promised the Jews to lead them to the Holy Land,

to implant them in their own Land. So even if we have committed the worst of errors, the worst of sins, we can still return to God, He will still show us compassion, and we can still merit inheriting our Land. Reb Noson points out that just as God is Infinite, there are infinite levels to His Thirteen Attributes of Mercy (cf. *Likutey Halakhot, Beheimah v'Chayah Tehorah* 4:34). Thus, even if we descend to depths lower than making the golden calf - as in this generation when we've made so many golden calves - we must realize that there are infinite levels of God's compassion waiting to be aroused - by us. Yes, by us! We can do it. We will do it. It will happen. History is a great teacher. Just as it happened with Moshe and the golden calf, just as it happened with Mordekhai and Esther in Shushan on Purim, it will happen again today. Now. Soon. Very soon. It's up to us. But how?

In order for this to happen we need patience. And faith. (To be continued in the next essay, #54.)

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