

TO WIN THE BAAL GAME!

by Rabbi Dovid Green

One rule, amongst many other rules, to observe when trying to understand events in the Torah and life in general is; "Things usually get tough at the border of something good and holy". Some examples please!

When Adam and Chava slipped from grace, our sages tell us, it was hours before the Holy Shabbos. Had they made it to Shabbos, let it suffice to say; "history would look a lot different."

We are cautioned by the Chofetz Chaim in his commentary on the Shulchan Oruch, to be careful not to get into fights on the eve of Shabbos. It seems that's when stuff can happen. Shabbos is an island of peace and there are sharks swimming furiously around that zone seeking to put a bite into the holy and wholesome Shabbos atmosphere.

When the Jewish Nation was about to receive the tablets, the golden calf reared its ugly head and we took a left turn that has cost us till this very day. The spies came back with a discouraging report on the eve of the putsch to enter the land. It set us back forty years and a whole generation.

Here we are threatening to enter again. The border nations' hearts are melting with fear. The people of Hashem who cakewalked out of Egypt and left it devastated are about to march in and repossess the land.

What happens? The kingdom of priests- a holy-nation are seduced by Midianite women to worship Baal Peor, an idol whose main form of worship was to defecate before it. A tribal leader openly flaunts his relationship and twenty four thousand people die in a plague before Pinchas puts an end to the episode with one fell swoop.

What was the great attraction of the Baal Peor? The Talmud offers us a searing psychological insight. "The Jewish Nation never engaged in idolatrous behavior except as a way of allowing themselves forbidden relationships". That's how they were lead into idolatry. It's one of the oldest tricks in the book, and more chapters are being written even as we E-Mail.

One of the most important moral impulses we possess is something called "a sense of shame." If we could surf through life without being detected almost all would take the liberty to commit a few perfect, seemingly victimless, crimes. There is a "blessed coercion" of community life and general fear of being caught. Then there is also a natural inhibition against violating our own conscience, a self monitored sense of shame that helps keep us from losing too much moral ground too quickly.

What Baal Peor trained a person to do is to lose all inhibition. One of the most punishing aspects of prison life in the facilities that I have visited (as a visitor) is the deprivation of private life. The toilet is placed there in the middle of an open cell. Baal Peor opened the door to new experiences by seeking to destroy this noble human trait. After a few brief courses in Baal Peor Institute of Technology, a new student is capable of tossing away his mother and father, Moshe, his own conscience and G-d, for the twinkling eye of a Midianite woman.

We must be on the boundary of something great, if so many of our youth are parking the football on the one-yard line of history. Now, after having marched almost four thousand years down field, there is such a resistance to entering the land, or being caught holding the ball.

The reasons cannot be traced so much to intimidation by the giant linebackers guarding the border. Rather all is lost for the price of a look from a "Midianite" cheerleader combined with a profound lack of appreciation for the price that has already been paid to arrive Jewish in the 21st Century. Without a past and in a "free for all" present, there is insufficient drive to cross the end zone and to win the Baal game!

Good Shabbos!

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