

LET THEM EAT CAKE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 184, You and the Seriously Ill: How Much of a Responsibility? Good Shabbos!

How Can Litvaks With Chassidic Wives Have Shalom Bayis? "Let Them Eat Cake"

In this week's parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "And the Children of Israel observed the Shabbos to keep Shabbos, for all generations, an everlasting Covenant." [Shemos 31:16] This pasuk gives me the opportunity to relate a significant incident.

There are different customs as to which pasuk or pasukim [verses] are recited as the morning Kiddush on Shabbos, known as Kiddusha Rabbah. Some begin at "Therefore He Blessed" (al ken Berach) [which, as we mentioned in a prior shiur, may be problematic because it begins in the middle of a verse]. Some begin with "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" (zachor es Yom HaShabbos l'kadsho). Others begin with this verse from our portion of "And the Children of Israel observed the Shabbos..."

The custom of Jews from Chassidic communities is to eat mezonos, cake or cookies, on Shabbos morning after Kiddush. [Gift stores in Borough Park sell "Challah covers" that are embroidered with the blessing for cake (borei minei mezonos) rather than bread (hamotzi), for use during the Shabbos morning Kiddush.] The Shabbos morning custom of Jews originating from Lithuanian and German communities is to start the meal with the blessing of hamotzi on bread, immediately after Kiddush.

On a regular basis, Rabbi Pessach Diskind, grandson of Reb Yaakov Kaminetsky, tells me stories, practices, and opinions from his grandfather, Reb Yaakov.

One Shabbos morning when Rabbi Diskin was a guest of his grandfather, he noticed that after Kiddush, Reb Yaakov's Rebbetzin [wife] served cake to Reb Yaakov and he made a borei minei mezonos. Afterwards, they went to wash for the meal.

Rabbi Diskin knew that his grandfather was not a chossid. He was, in fact, a dyed-in-the-wool Litvak. Rabbi Diskin asked his grandfather from where he picked up the custom to have mezonos after

Kiddush. Reb Yaakov explained the origin of this custom to his grandson. Rav Yaakov, who had lost his first wife, was now married to his "zivug sheni" (his second wife). Reb Yaakov's second wife came from Chassidic background. Both her father and her first husband were from Chassidic backgrounds. She was accustomed to having mezonos with Shabbos morning Kiddush. If he would not have mezonos after Kiddush, she would feel something was lacking in the Kiddush.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky was 70 years old when he married his second wife. That means that for 50 years he made Kiddush in the morning without mezonos.

How many of us would change after doing something for fifty years, and for what? "Because with my wife, this is how Kiddush is made".

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky changed. To Reb Yaakov, it was worth changing a 50-year-old practice for Shalom Bayis -- for the feelings of his wife. This is an insightful lesson for all of us.

The Need to Protect Oneself In Moments of Despair and Desperation

This week's parsha contains the incident of the Golden Calf. "The people saw that Moshe tarried in descending from the mountain..." [Shemos 32:1]. This is one of the most difficult parts of the Torah to understand. The Jewish people... fresh from the Exodus... fresh from witnessing the splitting of the Red Sea... fresh from receiving the Torah... -- go and make themselves an idol!

There is a very famous Ramba"n that says that this was not real idolatry. The Ramba"n explains that Jewish people felt that now that Moshe Rabbeinu was apparently gone, they needed an intermediary -- someone to act as a go-between, between them and G-d. Until now, Moshe had filled that role. The Ramba"n explains that they wanted an object on which the Divine Presence of G-d could descend and so they fashioned themselves this golden image in the shape of a calf.

The Avnei Shoham asks: if they wanted an intermediary, why did they switch to a Calf? What would have been the most logical thing to do? When the number one man in the company is gone, you turn to the number two man. Why didn't they turn to Aharon or to Chur? Why did they prefer a molten image?

The Avnei Shoham provides an interesting answer. They didn't trust a human being. A human being has freedom of choice. He can go off the true path. The Talmud tells us (Chagiga 14b) what happened when "Ben Zoma, Ben Azai, Elisha ben Avuyah, and Rabbi Akiva entered into the 'orchard' (Pardes) of intimacy with G-d". One died, one went off the correct path, etc.

The Generation of the Wilderness did not want to entrust this role of intermediary to flesh and blood. Who knows what can happen to a man of flesh and blood?

If so, what about Moshe Rabbeinu himself? Moshe Rabbeinu, as Rav Meir Simcha [MiDvinsk, author of the Meshech Chochmal] says in the beginning of Sefer Shemos, was an exception. Since Moshe was entrusted by G-d with a prophecy not to be challenged, this was a Heavenly Guarantee that

Moshe himself would not leave the right path. Moshe had no choice in the matter. In the history of mankind, he was the only human being to lose his freedom to choose. That was implicit in his role of faithful transmitter of Torah to mankind.

The Jews at the time of the Golden Calf wanted an inanimate intermediary. Basically, this desire derived from a noble desire, but was an error. It was in violation of "Molten gods you shall not make for yourselves". It was, as a result of their high spiritual level, a form of prohibited idolatry. The Torah tells us in connection with this sin that "They speedily moved away from the path that I commanded them, they have made themselves a molten god" [Shemos 32:8].

The question can be asked: this seems to contradict the Talmud's description of how a person can come to worship idols. A person does not go to bed one night a religious Jew, and wake up the next morning and suddenly decide to worship idols. The Talmud states [Shabbos 105b] "This is the characteristic of the evil inclination [within a person] -- today it tells him to do this, and tomorrow it tells him to do that, until it finally tells him to go worship idols". "They QUICKLY went away from the path," which we find here in the story of the Golden Calf, flies in the face of the way things normally work.

The Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva says, from here we learn a very important lesson. The verse says "that Moshe tarried in descending from the Mountain" (ki bo'shesh Moshe...). Our Rabbis teach that the word bo'shesh hints at the expression bah shesh (the sixth hour has come).

Moshe told the people he would be on Mount Sinai for 40 days, and that he would return on the 40th day to give them the Torah. When the sixth hour arrived and Moshe had not returned, Satan came and caused confusion. He sent such a thick layer of clouds that it became dark, and the people all thought that it was night. They concluded that the 40th day had passed without Moshe's return.

Satan then made an apparition, showing the people Moshe lying in a coffin -- telling them that their leader had died. They believed Satan, and became distraught and depressed. They were desperate.

When a person is down, depressed, and desperate, anything can happen. That is when "speedily they turned from the path" can happen. Just as there are times when one's physical resistance can be low, there are times when one's spiritual resistance is low. At times of great emotional stress, a person can be susceptible to spiritual threats which would normally not harm him. This is when the evil inclination can come and demand: "worship idolatry today."

Although it is no longer as prevalent as it was some years ago, there was a time when one could not go through a major airport in this country without meeting a representative from the Hari Krishna. Why did they hang out in airports? If they were merely looking for crowds, then they could have gone to the sports stadiums!

Airports are unique because people there are often in flux. People are going to funerals, coming from funerals, going away from a loved one, running away from home. People arrive after fights and

arguments, after breaking up a relationship. There are a lot of desperate people walking around airports, and that is when people are susceptible. That is when they are ready to try anything. Only in such situations can the Yetzer Hara come and command "worship idolatry!"

Our Sages tell us that it says concerning the Blasphemer, "And he went out..." [Vayikra 24:10]. Our Rabbis ask, "Where did he go out from? He went out of Moshe's court, after having been denied his claim to inheritance" [Sifra, Emor Parsha 14]. When the Blasphemer came out he sinned terribly by cursing G-d. Why? Because he was depressed and broken. He was a man without land, a man without a country. In such a state of mind, one can do anything.

If in the hills and valleys that we call life, there are periods when we are depressed, we must never "throw in the towel." We must maintain a semblance of dignity, pride, and honor.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (120b) says that Solomon slowly lost his Kingdom until, in the end, he was "molech al maklo" (merely a king over his own staff). The simple interpretation of the Gemara is that this was all he had left. Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz, however, says that the Gemara is telling us the wisdom of Solomon. Even after he lost everything, and normal people would have been crushed with defeat, he wanted to maintain his dignity so he -- at least -- ruled over his staff. With such wisdom and with such an attitude, a person can inoculate himself against the whims and temptations that come from the Yetzer Hara in times of despair and desperation.

Glossary

Shalom Bayis -- Peace in the house

Kiddusha Rabbah -- the "Great" Kiddush (a euphemism for the fact that the basic recitation of Kiddush consists only of the blessing over wine)

mezonos -- grain products other than bread, such as cakes and pastries

Chossid -- (literally 'pious'); followers of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov and his disciples.

Misnagid -- (literally 'opponents'); followers of the Gaon of Vilna and his disciples.

Litvak -- Lithuanian Jew

Yetzer Hara -- Evil Inclination

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