

and gods of gold.¹

This prohibition on making silver “gods” refers to the *keruvim* in the *Kodesh Kodoshim*. The Torah commands to make them of gold. If we would make them of silver instead, it would be considered as if we made “gods,” in other words, idols. Why? Because we didn’t do what *Hashem* said, the way He said to do it. So it was with *Egel Hazahav*. It was considered idolatry because it was not in accordance with a command from *Hashem*.

Every holy, Divine matter that we do without a

¹ *Shemos* 20:20.

command from *Hashem* is tantamount to idolatry, because Divinity that is detached from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is idolatry. This is why the Golden Calf was considered *avodah zarah*.

The way to rectify this is by doing a *mitzvah* that has no apparent reason or logic to it. We do it only because *Hashem* so commanded. Thus, *Parah Adumah* atones for *Egel Hazahav*.

We can see how important it is to do all the *mitzvos* only because *Hashem* so commanded. This applies also to *mitzvos* that make sense to us. When we fulfill these *mitzvos*, we should intend that we are doing so only because *Hashem* commanded us to. ●



What Did I Do Wrong?

הָמָּה מִי מְרִיבָהּ אֲשֶׁר רָבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת ה' וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם: (במדבר כ, יג)

They are the waters of contention, that the Israelites contended with *Hashem*, and He was sanctified among them. (*Bemidbar* 20:13)

It doesn’t say anywhere that *Moshe Rabbeinu* did *teshuvah* for the sin he committed at Mei Merivah with the rock that he struck.

What if he would have done *teshuvah*? We may assume that his *teshuvah* would have been accepted by *Hashem*. Nothing stands in the way of *teshuvah*. However, *Moshe* merely prayed for the decree against him to be annulled, and this prayer

was not accepted.

Teshuvah is greater than *Tefilah*, because all the prayers that *Moshe Rabbeinu* prayed were not accepted, that he should enter *Eretz Yisrael*. But *Rachav Hazonah* was accepted by doing *teshuvah*.¹

¹ *Tanna d’Vei Eliyahu Zuta* 20.



This shows that *teshuvah* is greater than prayer. Had Moshe done *teshuvah*, it would have been accepted.

Furthermore, *Chazal* say² that Bilaam was cunningly wicked, and he knew that if a person sins, and says, “*Chatasi*,” no angel is permitted to harm him.

It is thus very surprising that *Moshe Rabbeinu* did not act accordingly, to repent for his sin. Why would Moshe not do *teshuvah*?

Rashi makes an enlightening comment. He writes that Moshe said to *Hashem*:

בעלילה באת עלינו – You falsely accused us. It could be said that I sinned, but what did Moshe and Aharon do? Why did they not enter *Eretz Yisrael*?³

From *Moshe Rabbeinu*'s perspective, the “sin” was a false accusation. Only from *Hashem*'s perspective it was a sin. This may be compared to looking at something through a microscope. Things look completely different than they do to the naked eye. Similarly, that which does not appear to us as a sin at all, might still be a sin in *Hashem*'s eyes.

This explains why Moshe did not do *teshuvah*. A person can't do *teshuvah* for a sin that he doesn't understand. He cannot say, “I sinned,” if he doesn't know what he did wrong.

We see that the Commentators struggle to explain Moshe's sin. Rashi says it was because Moshe hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Rambam says it was because he got angry with the people. There are many other approaches.

The *Ohr Hachayim*, in his commentary on the *parshah*, enumerates no less than eleven approaches to Moshe's sin. He discusses them at length and finds difficulty with each one of them.

² *Bemidbar Rabbah* 20:15.

³ *Rashi, Devarim* 33:8.

This put Moshe in a very difficult situation regarding *teshuvah*. Surely, he wanted to do *teshuvah*. But he couldn't determine what the sin was, so how could he repent for it?

This also explains why Moshe did not pray for Aharon and Miriam that they should be allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He had no idea what they could have done wrong.

Regarding his own sin, he understood that he did something that was considered wrong, although he didn't know what was wrong about it. But he couldn't see where Aharon and Miriam did anything that might be considered wrong, so he couldn't even pray regarding it.

How are we to explain the expression בעלילה באת עלינו, *Hashem* “falsely accused” them? This seems to be harsh language.

The following allegory explains the point. A man wanted to divorce his wife. She had acted unfaithfully, and it was the right thing for them to terminate their marriage relationship. But he lacked absolute proof.

What did he do? He asked her to pour him a cup of hot water from the kettle and she poured him lukewarm water. He knew that the kettle had lukewarm water in it. He was just looking for a legal pretext to divorce her. Technically, she did not do as he asked her to. But this act would have been insignificant, if not for the fact that he wished to divorce her.

Applied to the case of Moshe and the rock, it comes out like this: Moshe argued that *Hashem* was just looking for an excuse not to let them enter *Eretz Yisrael*. [Early Torah sources say that if he would have entered the Land, this would have made future *galus* impossible, and a worse punishment would have taken its place.] So *Hashem* found a sin like this to punish him for; a sin that otherwise would not have called for punishment at all. ●



יֵעַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם. הִמָּה מִי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר רָבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת ה' וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם: (במדבר כ,
יב-יג)

Since you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given to them. They are the Waters of Contention, that the Israelites contended with Hashem, and He was sanctified in their midst. (*Bemidbar* 20:12-13)

“To sanctify Me” – If you had spoken to the rock, and it would have brought forth its waters, I would have been sanctified before the eyes of the congregation. They would have said, “If this rock – which doesn’t speak and doesn’t hear and doesn’t need sustenance – fulfills the word of *Hashem*, surely we should do so.” (*Rashi*)

Friends Don’t Hit Each Other

One of the central subjects of this *parshah* is the sin of Moshe at the rock, as a result of which *Moshe Rabbeinu* was not allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. This greatly changed the course of Jewish history. If Moshe had entered the Land, *Beis Hamikdash* would never have been destroyed, and everything would be different.

Moshe’s sin was thus a monumental event. But what was his sin? What did he do wrong?

Rashi has a certain way of explaining it. *Hashem* told Moshe to speak to the rock, and instead of speaking to it, he hit it. He struck the rock with his staff.

This communicates a very basic point. It is basic to Judaism that we fulfill *Hashem’s* commands because He tells us to do so, not because He forces us. Judaism is built on the concept of *הבוחר בעמו*, “He chooses His people Yisrael out of love.” *Hashem* loves us, and we, too, need to love Him. Those who love each other don’t hit each other. If they need to hit each other, it is a different kind of relationship altogether.

Standing at the rock, Moshe presented a metaphor to the Jewish people. He said to them, *שמעו נא* – “Listen, now, you rebellious people.” Are you watching? When I communicate with the rock, it will fulfill my will. Why don’t you do so? And then he hit the rock. He struck it with his staff.

But he should have spoken to it, thereby demonstrating that even a rock, when you speak to it, reacts and gives water. And the message is: Why, when *Hashem* speaks to *you*, don’t you listen?

This is how Rashi explains the matter. According to his approach, we indeed learn from this story a very important lesson.

Other commentators offer additional explanations. The *Ohr Hachayim* presents eleven possible interpretations of the event. Clearly, there are profound matters here, but we will focus on the messages that are particularly relevant to us.

One such message emerges from the Rambam’s explanation.

Written Torah and Oral Torah

The chain of tradition is a key point in the Jewish outlook. It is an important and sensitive subject.

Judaism's opponents, both inside and outside, direct their attacks to this point.

The Torah has two parts. There is the *d'oraisa* part, the "Biblical" part, and there is the *d'rabbanan* part, the "Rabbinical" part. The strictly "Biblical" *mitzvos* are those that are stated expressly in the *Chumash*, in the Written Torah. *Hashem* gave us *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*, and it says in them to dwell in a *sukkah*, to put on *tefillin*, to eat *matzah* on Pesach, and so forth. However, in addition to that, there is the Oral Torah. It is what *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave over to Moshe, but not in written form. It contains the explanation and the details of all the *mitzvos*.

This issue of the chain of tradition is not a new one. It existed way back in early Talmudic times. So we see from the story of the non-Jew who came to Hillel and asked Hillel to convert him to Judaism, but requested that Hillel teach him only the Written Torah, not the Oral Torah, as he did not trust the chain of tradition.

This is a very deep subject. The Oral Torah is not just a commentary on the Written Torah. The Oral Torah, the Talmud, constitutes the basis of all the *halachos* and it is composed of several parts.

One part is that in which the Sages derive *halachos* from the Written Torah by means of the Thirteen Homiletical Principles, the *י"ג מידות שהתורה נדרשת בהן*. In this part, we find a lot of disagreements. R. Akiva says like this and R. Yishmael says like that, R. Meir says such and such and R. Yehudah has a different view. And there are rules for determining the *Halachah* in such cases.

Just how strong is the authority of *Chazal*? To what extent may we rely on them? What is the answer to all of Judaism's opponents who claim that *Chazal* acted on their own accord, that they made up *mitzvos* such as reading the *Megilah* on Purim and lighting Chanukah candles, the prohibition of *muktzeh* on *Shabbos*, and others. How do we know that we can rely absolutely on what *Chazal* said?

To strengthen the question: we see that between the Sages of the Talmud themselves, there were thousands of disagreements. Almost every *daf* of

Gemara has at least one *machlokes* in it. Thus we utilize various methods to decide the *Halachah*. Here we say the *Halachah* is in accordance with Abaye's view, and there we say it accords with his rival, Rava. And so forth.

After the *Gemara* came the *Rishonim*: Rashi says like this, Tosafos say like that, Rabbeinu Tam has such and such a view, while the Rif takes a different approach.

Until this day, there is hardly a question in *Halachah* that a person won't get different answers for if he goes and asks different *Halachic* authorities.

This is one of the main points that our ideological enemies use to attack us. And many faithful Jews are confused about the matter themselves. It is thus a crucial subject so let's go into it.

The Pure Thing

One of the principles of our faith, as stated in the *Siddur*, is as follows:

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שנבואת משה
רבינו עליו השלום הייתה אמיתית, ושהוא אב
לנביאים לקודמים לפניו ולבאים אחריו – I
believe with perfect faith that the prophecy
of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, may peace be upon
him, was true, and that he was the chief
prophet, both for those who preceded him
and those who followed him.

We believe that there is a fundamental difference between the prophecy of *Moshe Rabbeinu* and that of other prophets. This difference is illustrated by the following allegory.

Let's say a certain rabbi delivers a *shiur*, a Torah lesson, and he has two students. Both are knowledgeable, honest and intelligent. And each repeats the *shiur* to someone else. Although they both heard it from the same rabbi at the same time, and will attempt to repeat the *shiur* exactly as they heard it, there will inevitably be some differences between their renderings. This is because each one absorbs what he heard into himself, into his personality, and from there he transmits it to others,

in his own unique way.

The same applies to prophecy. *Chazal* say that no two prophets prophesize in the same style.¹ Two prophets that receive the same prophetic message from *Hashem*, when they come to transmit it to their listeners, the message will not be exactly the same. Each one will transmit it in his own style and with his own personality.

This is how it worked with all other prophets, but it was not that way with *Moshe Rabbeinu*. He did not have his own style and personality when it came to prophecy. If there would be another *Moshe Rabbeinu* in the world, and both of them would prophesize, the words would come out exactly the same. Both of them would say **בראשית ברא אלקים** **את השמים ואת הארץ** and so on with the rest of the Torah. The words of Moshe's prophecy had nothing of Moshe's personality or understanding in them. It was *Hashem's* word in its purest form.

This is one of the Torah's basic tenets. *Moshe Rabbeinu* transmitted *Hashem's* Word exactly as it is. If we would hear those words directly from *Hashem's* mouth, they would sound the same and be the same. It would be the identical **בראשית ברא אלקים**.

The Sin Was Anger

This concept is fundamental to understanding Moshe's sin at the rock, according to the approach of the Rambam, as we will explain.

The Jewish people gathered before Moshe and complained that they don't have water, because Miriam passed away and the miraculous well has disappeared. This was not just a complaint that Miriam is sorely lacking. It was a claim against Moshe. They came with claims against Moshe. When Moshe heard this, he got angry, and said to them: **שמעו נא** – "Listen, now, you rebellious people!" You are stubborn people, he told them. He then said **המץ המים** – "Shall we extract water for you from this rock?" and thereupon picked up his

staff and struck the rock.

According to Rashi, the sin was hitting the rock instead of speaking to it. But according to Rambam, the sin was getting angry.

What was so terrible about that?

Moshe Rabbeinu, as we explained, was like a clear mirror, **אספקלריא המאירה**. He had no hue of his own to color *Hashem's* Word. Everything Moshe did was reflective of *Hashem's* Word. He was a pure expression of *Hashem*. In other words, if someone would get up in the morning, and *Moshe Rabbeinu* would say, "Good morning," to him, it meant that *Hashem* Himself, so to speak, is saying to him, "Good morning." If Moshe would reprove someone, and say, "I think that the time has come for you to learn with a little more *hasmadah*," it meant that this word of reproof is coming straight from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

So when *Moshe Rabbeinu* got angry, the Jewish people understood that *Hashem* is angry. But *Hashem* was not actually angry. *Hashem* does not get upset when someone asks for water. People need water. However, the Jewish people understood from Moshe's reaction that *Hashem* is angry with them for requesting water, and they claimed that they indeed have the right to ask for water.

This was Moshe's sin. Everything that Moshe did reflected *Hashem's* Word, but here there was a mistake. It was an exception to the rule. *Hashem* did not want the people to think that He is angry with them. That is a *chilul Hashem*; it desecrates *Hashem's* Name if it appears that He is angry at those who ask for water.

Only Honest Prophets

This brings us to a very important point.

As we explained, everything *Moshe Rabbeinu* did reflected purely *Hashem's* deeds, but one time, he did something that was not *Hashem's* deed, and this caused destruction.

The question is like this: if, one time, Moshe acted not in the name of *Hashem*, how can we know

¹ *Sanhedrin* 89a.

that all the rest of the time, it was in the name of *Hashem*? This brings us back to the question of how much authority does the Torah have, since it is ultimately based on human beings.

A person could argue that he wants to hear *Hashem's* Torah, not a human being's Torah; however, we received most of the Torah from people. We might try to answer him by saying that these people were perfected human beings. But then he will reply that if they are perfect, why do they argue so much? If each claims that the other is mistaken, perhaps in truth they both are mistaken?

The answer emerges from the following teaching of R. Saadia Gaon, who asked like this: A prophet comes along, such as Yirmeyahu, for instance, and prophesizes, saying, "So spoke *Hashem*..." How do we know that Yirmeyahu is in fact a prophet of *Hashem*? Because it was handed down to us by tradition that he was. Yeshayahu declared that Yirmeyahu was a true prophet, and Hoshea declared that Yeshayahu was a true prophet, and Shmuel declared so about Hoshea. Thus we have an unbroken chain of testimony that Yirmeyahu was a true prophet of *Hashem*. And Yirmeyahu tells us that *Hashem* said such and such.

But that just brings us to the niggling question of whether a true prophet can speak falsely. Does his innate nature force him to always say the truth, like a machine that spits out information, or is he capable of speaking falsehood?

If we say he can't speak falsehood, then he is a machine; he is not a human being. Because a human being, by definition, has free choice to do right or wrong. Thus, even a prophet is capable of speaking falsely. If so, how can we know that he spoke the truth?

The Rambam gives us signs by which we can test whether a prophet is a true prophet or not.² Nevertheless, it is clear that even such a prophet is capable of speaking falsely. So how can we be sure that what he says is the Word of *Hashem*, since he is

capable of falsehood?

R. Saadia Gaon answers as follows. Past, present and future are all the same for *Hashem*. He knows the future like He knows the past. And He promised us that if He knows that a certain person will speak falsely, He will not send him to us as a prophet in the first place. *Hashem* promised us that He will send us only people who will speak truthfully. This explains the whole matter.

When Yeshayahu says things in the name of *Hashem*, we don't believe in his words because he is Yeshayahu, but because of *Hashem's* promise regarding prophets. *Hashem* commanded us: אֱלֹהֵינוּ תִשְׁמָעוּן – "You shall listen and obey [the prophet]."³ This command is also a promise. *Hashem* promises that He will examine the prophets, and if He sees that they won't tell the truth, He will not allow them to prophesize in the first place. Those who do prophesize will be only the ones who will speak the Word of *Hashem* in absolute truth and honesty.

In other words, when *Hashem* commanded us to listen to the prophets, this is a promise that the prophets will be reliable, and when we embrace the words of the prophets, it is not because we know the prophets to be godly and infallible. Indeed, they were tremendously perfected and uplifted human beings. Nevertheless, we want to receive the Torah from *Hashem*. To that end, *Hashem* promised that the Torah will be transmitted to us in a true and accurate manner.

This applies to *Moshe Rabbeinu* as well. Moshe taught us, in *Hashem's* name, that *tefillin* need to contain certain specific passages written on parchment, and he also transmitted to us that *tefillin* need to be black and square. And that a *mezuzah* needs to fit such and such requirements. And that the other *mitzvos* need to be as they need to be.

Is *Moshe Rabbeinu* capable of speaking falsehood? Definitely. Because if not, he is not a human being; he is a machine. So how can we know

² *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah ch. 10.*

³ *Devarim 18:15.*

that he spoke the truth? Because *Hashem* promised us, וגם בך יאמינו לעולם – “They will believe also in you, [Moshe,] forever.”⁴ *Hashem* declared that everything that *Moshe Rabbeinu* says is 100% correct.

Once in history, it happened that *Moshe Rabbeinu* acted like a human being when

transmitting *Hashem's* Torah. Moshe got angry, like a human being, and this anger did not accurately reflect the word of *Hashem*.

As a result, Moshe forfeited his role as the leader of the Jewish people. It was decreed that he will not bring the people into *Eretz Yisrael*.

This was Moshe's sin at the rock, according to the Rambam's approach. ●

4 *Shemos* 19:9.

STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF RAV SHIMSHON PINCUS ZT"l



Miracles of Creations

One day, Rav Shimshon had just exited Bnei Brak toward Ofakim when he was suddenly struck by a brilliant thought that illuminated a complex *sugya* in *Maseches Kesubos*. Anxious to crystallize his train of thought before he lost it, he desperately scanned the highway for a place to stop, yet where, exactly, could he pull over on the busy Geva Highway?

This episode might have been buried alongside countless others attesting to Rav Shimshon's greatness in Torah, *avodah* and *yiras Shamayim*, yet *Hashem* apparently wanted to teach his children and followers a lesson in *abavas Torah* and the compelling obligation to toil in it even “*b'lectecha baderech*, on the way...”

Several weeks or even months passed before one of Rav Shimshon's sons accompanied him in the car on a short ride. Sticking his hand into the glove compartment in search of an item, he was surprised to find a one-day ticket to the Ramat Gan Safari.

His father? At the safari? The boy was puzzled, yet he assumed that his father had accompanied a brokenhearted Jew on a day trip, or that one of

hundreds of hitchhikers who joined Rav Shimshon in the car had dropped it. Still, his curiosity was piqued, and he asked his father about it.

“Oh, that?” Rav Shimshon chuckled. “It wasn't a *chesed*. One day, I bought myself a ticket to the safari.”

“You?” His son ogled him in disbelief. “You went to the safari?!”

“I did, but not to see the animals...” Rav Shimshon confessed, recalling the day that he'd passed the junction on the way out of Bnei Brak and been struck by a thought that clarified an entire *sugya*. Driving down the congested highway in search of somewhere to stop and collect his thoughts in peace, he hadn't found anywhere suitable, but determined that he wouldn't continue home and risk losing this priceless train of thought.

Several long moments passed before he spied the tall gated entranceway to the Ramat Gan Safari. On a whim, he turned the steering wheel toward the zoo, deciding that it was an ideal location as any to analyze his epiphany and reevaluate the entire *sugya* in *Kesubos* based on it. Thus determined, he drove to the reception booth, doled out the cost of a ticket,

and found a quiet, peaceful spot to sit at the far edge of the park under a group of eucalyptus trees. He spent the next two hours meticulously arranging his thoughts and crystallizing his understanding of the thorny *sugya*.

Who knows? Perhaps *Hashem* planted the thought of building this safari in central Ramat Gan in the mind of its creators just so, one day, Rav Shimshon Pincus would find himself a haven — not to gaze upon the miracles of creations, but to create them...

Wherever We Go

“We must take the *beis midrash* with us wherever we go!” he once declared in a *shmuess*. Indeed, Rav Shimshon Pincus was the paragon of a Jew who carried the *beis midrash* on his shoulders, in his car, and even in his briefcase. *Chavrusos* and *talmidim* from assorted eras in his life unanimously attest to his outstanding ability to focus on a single thought in Torah without distraction, whether he was in a *beis midrash* facing a *shtender* or not. Whether traveling on a plane or sitting in the comfort of his house, he would get caught up in Torah thoughts and spent many an hour in silence examining it from every angle. He was often so deeply engrossed in his thoughts that when someone approached him with a question or remark, he would literally shake himself awake to return to reality.

When a *talmid chacham* with whom he was acquainted once griped about the long, boring hours wasted on transatlantic flights, Rav Shimshon replied, bewildered, “What do you mean? My best hours are those ten hours when I can just learn uninterrupted, either from a *sefer* or reflecting on the *sugya*!”

On another occasion, Rav Shimshon was once

compelled to wait a very long time in line to submit documents to the municipality. An *avreich* standing right near him was clearly impatient and exasperated. When the man expressed his deep annoyance aloud to Rav Shimshon, the latter replied, “What’s the problem? Whatever you do in the *beis midrash*, you can do here just the same...”

Learning Under Every Circumstance

Rav Shimshon often repeated a lesson that he’d absorbed in Brisk regarding Rav Chaim Brisker’s method of educating his son Rav Yitzchak Zev. Even in his early adolescence, Rav Yitzchak Zev attained extraordinary levels of diligence, investing all his faculties into his learning. To challenge and further hone the *bachur*’s remarkable *hasmadah*, his father would impose assorted jobs and seemingly extraneous duties upon him, while he was engrossed in learning, beginning from asking him to bring him a *sefer* from the library to sending him out of the house to purchase or deliver an item. Once, while Rav Yitzchak Zev was the midst of resolving a *kushya*, his father instructed him to head to the post office to deliver a letter, all in order to train him early on to focus on learning in every situation and circumstance, under any condition or hardship.

Rav Shimshon likewise quoted his *rebbe*, Rav Leib Malin, who remarked that anyone who was privileged to frequent the home of Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik knew that the *gadol* did not require a *sefer* in order to learn with all his might. He fulfilled a central aspect of the *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah* in the recesses of his brilliant mind, drawing from the skills that he’d attained in his youth when trained to surmount all distractions. Indeed, the Brisker Rav had honed his power of concentration to almost miraculous levels. ●