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WEEKLY SHMUESS

DEVARIM MONEY DESTROYS

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Money Destroys

The Roots of the Destruction of The Beis HaMikdash

Parshas Devarim begins with Moshe rebuking *Klal Yisrael* for the episode that took place by “*Di Zahav*”, which *Rashi* and *Targum* explain as referring to the episode of the *eigel hazahav*, the sin with the Golden Calf.

The days we are in, the days of mourning the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, known as “*Bein HaMitzarim*” (in between the sorrows), which begins with the 17th of Tamuz and which end on the 9th of Av, is a tragic period in history which did not actually begin with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* itself, but with an earlier root.

In the beginning, “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”.¹ Thus, the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* did not first happen to the *Beis HaMikdash*, but to the Torah. On the 17th of Tamuz, the *Luchos* were broken², and later in history, *sefer Torah* scrolls were burned on this day. The destruction of the *Luchos* was the root of the eventual destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

“*For from Zion, comes forth Torah, and the word of Hashem shall go from Jerusalem.*”³ The Sages state that the entire world depended on Zion when it was in its full glory⁴, and this

was when Zion was a place of Torah. But when there was no longer “*For from Zion comes forth Torah*”, there could be no more Zion, enabling the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Even more so, the *Beis HaMikdash* not only depended on the situation of Zion, it also depended on the state of what happened at Har Sinai, which was the root of the Torah that enables Zion. Therefore, when the people sinned with the golden calf at Har Sinai, the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* became possible. If not for the sin with the golden calf, there could never be a destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* minimized the general spiritual level of the nation’s Torah learning, and this ruination already began to occur by the sin with the golden calf.

Let us reflect into the roots that caused the destruction, which is our *avodah* during these days of mourning.

The Golden Calf - The Antithesis of Moshe Rabbeinu

By the sin with the golden calf, the people grew afraid that Moshe wasn’t returning to them, and in the place of Moshe, they made the calf. Moshe personified the concept of *da’as* (understanding), so the golden calf was the total opposite of this holy power of *daas* of Moshe. What exactly was the concept behind

¹ *Zohar parshas Shemos 161b*

² *Taanis 4:7*

³ *Yeshayahu 2:3*

⁴ *Yoma 54b*

the golden calf, and how was it the opposite of Moshe, or *da'as*?

Moshe's power of *daas* gave him the power of *hanhagah*, leadership, over the Jewish people. Just as there was a Moshe Rabbeinu who led the people on a collective level, so is there a private level of "Moshe Rabbeinu" in each person's soul, which leads him as an individual.

The power of *daas* in a person is what leads the entire person. Chazal state about *daas* that "everything is in it".⁵ The power of *daas* leads *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, and it also leads the individual on a private level. An adult is called a *bar daas* whereas a child is not, because a child cannot be a *manhig* (leader) over himself, whereas an adult has the power to guide himself.

The opposite of the power of *daas* is represented by the "*eigel hazahav*", the golden calf. Clearly, the golden calf was not just an object of idol worship that the people served. It was a lot more than just an idol. It represented a different leading force that the people wanted, in which a person is leading himself by whatever the golden calf represented - which was not the power of *daas*. It was a completely opposite power than *daas*. And just as there is a Moshe\daas which leads the people as a whole and the person as an individual, so is there a power opposite than this, an "*eigel hazahav*" which the people made as their leader and which also exists on the individual, private level.

At Har Sinai, when the Torah was revealed, we received the power of *daas* as our guiding force. When there is Torah, there is *daas* that leads us. But when the "destruction"

began with golden calf, the power that began to lead us was this golden calf.

When man first sinned with the *Eitz HaDaas*, a curse was placed onto mankind, of "*By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread*".⁶ At Har Sinai, the people returned to the level of Adam before the sin, as the Sages state that the "impurity of the Serpent" left them when they stood at Sinai⁷. But once again, with the sin of the golden calf, they fell to the level where they are being led by some other [outer] force.

The Golden Calf = Money

That other, outer force is otherwise known as....**money**.

Money is a force that now rules the world, in place of the holy power of *daas*. We can all see that those who have a lot of money are the ones who are running the world – as a whole, as well as each individual.

Here are some examples to make this concept more tangible.

Example 1- Living In A Place Which Is Better Financially, But With Less Torah

Man has a soul, which goes through certain times and places on this world. If a person lives truthfully, he chooses to live in a place where his power of *daas* will be at the forefront of things. As the Sages state, "I will not live except in a place of Torah."⁸ One who lives truthfully will choose to live in a

⁶ *Beraishis* 3:19

⁷ *Shabbos* 146a

⁸ *Avos* 6:9

⁵ *Nedarim* 41a

place that is true to the values of the Torah, and his soul there is bound with Hashem and His Torah.

But when money is the deciding and ruling factor of things – and with most people, this is the case – then a person’s decision to live and stay in certain places is based on various financial considerations, as opposed to truth, Torah, and Hashem. The money is often the deciding factor in things. Whatever will benefit the person financially - that is what ends up being the determining factor that decides everything for the person....

If a person would live truthfully, the only place he would be interested in living in is a place where he can dwell in Torah, day and night, and with no other considerations. All he would be interested in, “*To know Your ways.*” He would be ruled by the holy power of *daas*. But when a person lives a life that is ruled by money, he will instead live a life depicted by the verse, “*Man goes out to work, from morning until eve.*”

Example 2- When Making A Livelihood Becomes Central Priority In Life

When Torah learning does not occupy a person’s mind from morning until night, the result will be that his making of livelihood will occupy his schedule, from morning until night. Most people, who do not merit to sit and learn Torah all day, but who go to work to make a living, are doing so from morning until night, literally. And what is the force that leads them? Money. Their entire schedule is spent on being concerned with money!

This does not simply mean that they are found all day in their workplace. It is that they are being led entirely by the lure of money.

There is a verse, “*With his soul, shall he bring bread*”¹⁰ – and with most people, they are very connected in their souls to making money. This is especially true about people who have a lust for money, who have grandiose dreams of making lots of money and who live in delusions of what they will do with the money. But even if a person is not that money-hungry and he lives frugally, and he is just simply trying to make an ample amount of livelihood so that his family can be fed and supported, the problem is that he may be involved all day with the pursuit of money, and this makes his soul connected to nothing else but money.

The *Mishnah* in *Avos* states, “It is good to have Torah with *derech eretz*”¹¹, and many commentators explain “*derech eretz*” to mean “livelihood.” Rav Chaim Volozhiner¹² explained that this is true if a person works to make a living and it is just his physical body which is involved in the work, but in his mind and soul, he is found in Torah and with thoughts about Hashem. But if a person is not on this level, working to make a living for him will not only be physically involving, but it will involve his entire mind and soul. His soul will be found in a place of monetary concern, and not in a place of Torah.

Any sensible person understands that today, a person working to make a living is not able to be on the level that Rav Chaim Volozhiner is describing. Rather, most people

⁹ *Tehillim 104:23*

¹⁰ from the “*U’Nesaneh Tokef*” prayer recited on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

¹¹ *Avos 2:2*

¹² *Ruach Chaim (ibid)*

today, when being involved with making money, become very connected in their souls to this concern for money; it is where they are found. The meaning of “*With his soul, shall he bring bread*” is fully realized – the person in his entire soul becomes connected to the pursuit of money. That is where his soul feels a pull towards, due both to the external errands he needs to take care of, as well as an inner desire to make money in order to support his family. The person becomes very connected, in his soul, to money.

When financial considerations are the main, determining factor in a person’s life, the ultimate deciding factor is always about the money involved.

Example 3 – The Factor of Money In Shidduchim

The following is another example.

The *Rema* rules that when choosing a *shidduch* (a marriage partner), it is not the proper path for a person to seek that he should be given money. Instead, whatever is given to him, he should accept, with joy and with a good eye, according to the Divine Providence of the Blessed One.” But most people, when pursuing a *shidduch*, will do the opposite of this, and they look for those who have more money.

Even more so, we find that in the past, it was more difficult for an older girl to get married, but today, there are people who intentionally seek to marry an older girl, if she has a steady job and good income –and based upon this factor, they pursue the *shidduch*. Look how far it can go, of how money can control a person’s life!

A marriage partner is determined 40 days before conception, but if a person isn’t being controlled by his *daas* and instead he is being controlled by money, this can change the decree of Heaven upon him regarding whom he will marry. It is then no wonder that there are so many divorces today. Certainly there are other reasons as well, but one of them is because the main, determining factor in the *shidduch* was the money involved. When that is the case, the *shidduch* is not being led by *daas*, and instead it is being led by factors that are not truthful.

The Eitz HaChaim Represents Torah, The Eitz HaDaas Represents Money

We should understand, clearly, that money can rule a person’s life and lead him. This is not simply a spiritual failing, but a world which is ruled by money, and therefore it is difficult to come out of it.

It is a fall from the level of the *Eitz HaChaim*, the Tree of Life, which represents Torah, and when one falls from there into money, he is not just falling into the *Eitz HaDaas Tov* – the good part contained in the *Eitz HaDaas* - but into the *Eitz HaDaas Ra*, the evil part contained in the *Eitz HaDaas*. When Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, Hashem’s complaint on him was, “*For you listened to the voice of your wife*”.¹³ The word for “voice” in Hebrew is *kol* (קול), which is equal in *gematria* to the word *מזון*, money [a hint that the *Eitz HaDaas* symbolizes the pursuit of money]. Thus, when man falls into a lifestyle where money becomes the main concern, this is the source of all ruination.

¹³ *Beraishis* 3:17

In the ideal way of living, a person is ruled by *daas*, the power of Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal state that “Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world. All [forty-nine] of them were given to Moshe, except for one.”¹⁴ Since there was one remaining “gate of understanding” that wasn’t given to Moshe, the force of money is enabled to have a hold in the world. The Aramaic word for money, “*mamon*” (ממון) is a hint to the letter nun (נ) 15 (which corresponds to the number 50), which represents the “50th gate of understanding” that wasn’t given to Moshe - which runs the world.

Even more so, though, when money is allowed to run a person’s life, his entire changes, from beginning until end – for the worse.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that man makes effort to make a living by working at a trade or job which personifies his nature. If he chooses a trade that does not personify his nature, he is trying to overdo his effort [and he lacks *bitachon* in Hashem], and he will not gain livelihood in this way. But if a person is not leading a life of *daas*, and instead it is money that leads his life, he will not choose a job that fits his nature; rather, he will choose any job that can offer him more money, whether it suits his personality or not. As a result, he will go to work in certain places which his *daas* is not fine with, but which are fine with his financial considerations....

The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that making livelihood is a penalty placed on mankind, as a result of the sin. It is something we must deal with, but a person must attribute his actual source of livelihood to Hashem, Who controls

and is in charge of everything. But if money is ruling a person’s life, a person will become completely immersed in its pursuit, from morning until night, in his entire soul – in his *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*.

The False Honor Accorded To The Wealthy

Even more so, money is not only a factor that affects people merely in the individual sense; it is a factor that runs the world in general.

Here is an example. In *chutz l’aretz* (countries outside *Eretz Yisrael*), people who donate a lot of money are the ones who are accorded special honor, and they are assigned specially designated seats in *shuls*, and they are considered to be of the most prominent people in *Klal Yisrael*. Here in *Eretz Yisrael*, this honor is reserved exclusively for Torah scholars, but in *chutz l’aretz*, the honors are reserved for people who have a lot of money. There is a superficial, external kind of honor that dominates there.

A Modern-Day Eigel HaZahav: The Subservience To Money

The Sages said that the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was caused by the wealthy. That is what happens when people with money are the ones who are leading everyone. *Baruch Hashem*, here in *Eretz Yisrael*, they are not the ones leading. But it’s still possible for a person today to become subservient to them, because wherever a person is today, he can receive financial funding from all kinds of sources – and many times, the money doesn’t come from a source that is holy.

¹⁴ *Rosh HaShanah 21bl*

Money is donated to certain places of Torah learning, and many times there are all sorts of “obligations” and various “honors” that must be accorded to these donors, in return for all of the money that they provide.

Being subservient to them has changed the **entire** way the world of Torah learning looks like! This is what it means to be ruled by people who wanted the *eigel hazahav* to rule them, as opposed to Moshe Rabbeinu ruling them. It is not simply a spiritual fall, but the same attitude that led to shaping the golden calf.

When money is ruling people’s lives – and money can hide under many different “names”, it doesn’t matter what title we give it – this is not money coming from nowhere; it is definitely coming from somewhere - from a force [of the side of evil] that is trying to lead people and dictate how they should lead their lives.

Modern-Day “Erev Rav”

This is the “*Erev Rav*”¹⁶.

The *Erev Rav* were the same people who made the golden calf. Moshe agreed to take them out of Egypt [because he thought he could convert them to holiness], but all they did was rebel against his rule. They gave the idea to make the golden calf¹⁷, because they represent the very force of evil that opposes the holy rule of Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the power of *daas*.

They have always been governing and ruling the Jewish people throughout the exile, but they are an especially dominant rule in the final generations. They use money to rule and lead the lives of people.¹⁸ They represent the very idea of the golden calf, the matter of the “*Di Zahav*” (the *eigel hazahav*) which Moshe Rabbeinu rebukes the people about in *Parshas Devarim*.

Holy Wealth Vs. Evil Wealth

In the ideal kind of life, the root of all abundance comes from the Torah, who is represented by Moshe. Chazal state that Moshe became wealthy from the sapphire stones in the *Luchos*.¹⁹ The depth behind this is that Moshe’s wealth came from the Torah itself. Moshe’s wealth did not come from any attitude of wishing to lead and control the people. He was totally removed from any such motivations, and his entire power to lead the people came from the power of holy *daas* which he personified.

There were also very wealthy sages throughout the generations, who merited both greatness in Torah as well as prestige, honor, and enormous wealth; they “merited to partake of two tables” [spiritual success, as well as financial, worldly success]. Examples included Shlomo HaMelech, and the Rabbeinu HaKadosh (Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi). But the root of their wealth came from the Torah, from Moshe Rabbeinu, whose wealth and whose power to lead the

¹⁶ *Erev Rav* – “*The Mixed Multitude*.” For more research on this topic, refer to the collected talks of the Rav about the evils of the *Erev Rav*, in *Erev Rav Talks*.

¹⁷ *Shemos Rabbah* 42:6

¹⁸ See Vilna Gaon’s Words On *Erev Rav* [*Gra to Tikkunei HaZohar* 41a] that there are five kinds of “*Erev Rav*” who will become dominant in the era preceding *Moshiach*, and one of these groups are “those who have a lust for money.”

¹⁹

people came solely from the enormous wealth that comes from the Torah.

But when the power of wealth is nursed from the side of evil, and not from the side of holiness, it becomes wealth for its own purpose, divorced from any notion of the *daas* of the Torah. Such wealth is not stemming from the wealth that Moshe obtained from the *Luchos*. When financial and material abundance is seen as a power unto itself, this becomes the depths of all destruction.

The Choice

Every single individual has the choice, to decide between truth and falsity. Each person can wonder: “From where is all abundance (*shefa*) supposed to come from?”

If a person understands that it is *daas* which must be the leading force in his life, and that all abundance should come from there, he is choosing truth. But if, *chas v’shalom*, one does not choose truth, and instead he follows the environment around him and the people of this generation, he will fall into the abysses of destruction. He will fall into the rule of the wealthy people who are controlling this generation, and into whatever

that will entail for him. That is only natural for people living in this generation, when they let the money of the wealthy become the main influence of how they will lead their lives.

The true choice of *bechirah* which each individual has is: to choose who and what is leading his life.

One should choose to follow Hashem and His Torah as the leading force in his life, and to submit himself to that inner, truthful world. If he does so, of him Chazal say that “It is as if the *Beis HaMikdash* was built in his time.”²⁰ And when it comes to the influence of money, a person should run from it as he would run from fire.

In Conclusion

Whenever we make important decisions in life, the very first factor that affects our decisions should be stemming from a life of purity, holiness, truth, Torah, and a desire for closeness with Hashem.

May Hashem let us merit the day when the *Beis HaMikdash* will be rebuilt, Amen.²¹

²⁰ *Berachos 33a*

²¹ For related material to this *derasha*, see *Tefillah #0163 – False Values*