

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt”l

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Parashas Matos

“AND THEY HAVE WALKED AFTER THINGS OF NAUGHT...”
(YIRMIYAHU 2:5)

THE YALKUT SHIMONI (Yirmiyahu, end of 265) explains the above verse from this week’s *haftorah* with a parable: A man had an outstanding IOU. He was afraid because he thought it was for hundreds of gold coins. The lender reassured him that the debt was in actuality for a *koor* of bran and of barley – a measure of inexpensive grains (a monetary amount that the borrower could easily repay). So too, the Yalkut Shimoni continues, Hashem was telling *B’nei Yisrael*: “My children, the idols that you desire so greatly have no substance – they are emptiness,” and you can easily do *teshuva*.

Why would Hashem try to minimize the perceived gravity of this sin?

At the time Yirmiyahu gave this prophecy, the Jewish nation was so deeply involved in idol-worship that they deserved to be exiled. Do the Jewish people, in such a low spiritual state, so distant from Hashem and His Torah, deserve to be called, “My children” by Hashem? Furthermore, this transgression of *avodah zara* is one of the three sins that every Jew must surrender their life rather than violate – why would Hashem try to minimize the perceived gravity of this sin? One might argue that Hashem was ridiculing the foolishness of idol worship. But the parable implies otherwise – that the collector of the debt was trying to show the insignificance of the debt and how easy repayment could be.

Is idol worship a “nothing”?

The parable seems to describe a case where a debtor feared he owed much more than he actually did – and the collector reassures him that it is a minimal amount. The Jews, on the other hand, were deserving of exile for this serious sin, a sin which represents a direct rebellion and denial of Hashem. One would think a more fitting parable would be a delinquent debtor who is so far behind in his payments that the bank is about to foreclose on his property and evict him from his land and home. How can the parable seem to be the complete opposite of the situation it is attempting to illustrate? Is idol worship a “nothing”?

No distance is too far

Certainly idol worship is a sin of the most grave proportions. But even in such circumstances, despite the depths to which a Jew may have sunk, he still is a beloved child to his Father, his Creator. Even as he rebels and forsakes Hashem, Hashem reaches out and says, “My dear son, forget about the empty statues you worship – I still love you despite your sins and I will make it easy for you to return home to Me.” Like a benevolent creditor who tries to work out a payment plan which allows a foolish debtor to climb out of his financial quagmire, Hashem lovingly appeals to us: “The debt – it’s nothing – I’ll forgive you.” Every Jew – no matter how far he has strayed – is imbued with a soul that maintains tremendous *kedusha* – holiness – under all circumstances. Hashem’s love for that Jew, for every Jew, is that of a father to a son; no matter how far we wander off the path, we remain Hashem’s children. As children of the Almighty, He desperately wants us to return to Him when we lose our way. No distance is too far and no sin too great for Hashem to help us return to Him.

May we appreciate the intensity of Hashem’s love for us, regardless of our spiritual stature and understand that we are never too distant or too tainted by sin to return to Him. He awaits our return, like a parent awaits a child that has violated his curfew, worried and concerned for his well-being. Let us focus on Hashem’s love for us and finally come back home.