

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Kedoshim, 5782
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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman

Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg

Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766

Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה

Ekman (Santiago, Chile)

Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769

ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF

Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתחיל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY

Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Kedoshim

REMOVING G-D'S FIERCE ANGER

Theft is compared to idolatry. G-d's fierce anger remains as long as there are wicked people – thieves. Idolatry also angers G-d. All other sins can be corrected by a positive action, restoring the original situation. Theft requires more; it requires teshuvah.

This week's Torah reading contains one of the two admonitions against stealing. As our Sages explain, in the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not steal" means kidnapping. In this week's Torah reading, "Thou shalt not steal" prohibits the theft of money.

Regarding such theft, our Sages declare that stealing is comparable to idolatry. A thief is like an idol-worshipper. When the Sages use such an expression, it's not just a metaphor to indicate the seriousness and severity of the transgression. Rather, it indicates a similarity between the essential nature of such a violation and that of idolatry.

Why, of all transgressions, is monetary theft akin to idolatry? What unique feature do they share? The question has a practical urgency: when Moshiach comes, all forms of idolatry will be removed. Indeed, removal of idolatry is a prerequisite for Redemption, as we acknowledge thrice-daily in the Aleinu prayer: ". . . therefore we hope to You, L-rd our G-d, that we may speedily behold the splendor of Your might, to banish idolatry from the earth – and false gods will be utterly destroyed . . . Then all the inhabitants of the world will recognize and know that every knee should bend to You . . . and they will all take upon themselves the yoke of Your kingdom . . . And it is said: The L-rd shall be King over the entire earth; on that day the L-rd shall be One and His Name One."

Of course, when Moshiach comes thievery and other such activities will also cease. In a general sense, this is understandable, since every transgression is a violation of G-d's Will, and thus idolatry in miniature. In the era of Redemption, when "all eyes will see" and "the whole world will be filled with knowledge of G-d," fulfilling G-d's commandments will be the automatic and natural thing to do. Recognizing and feeling G-d's presence will prevent such violations.

Idolatry is the paradigm, the beginning of all transgressions. In a sense, all others are simply parts, greater or lesser segments of idolatry. At this level, every moment we **don't** violate a commandment, we destroy a little piece of idolatry, and thus bring Moshiach closer. By negating the negative, so to speak, we bring the positive: by not stealing, we reveal G-dliness.

Still, since the Sages declared there to be a direct correspondence, there must be a special connection between theft and idolatry. Stealing, an act between one person and another, parallels idolatry, an act between man and G-d. This point of comparison, this essential aspect that theft and idolatry share, emerges from the prohibition to steal from a condemned idolatrous city: When an entire city is enticed into idolatry, Torah commands that the inhabitants be killed and its contents burned. Since there might be a temptation to save some of the valuables, the Torah warns us not to take anything belonging to the condemned city. Even though the death penalty applies to the inhabitants, their possessions are not like lost objects.

Here, the prohibition against stealing is very specific: one may not take any object from a city condemned for idolatry. One might think that such objects are ownerless, and thus free. But the Torah ordained differently: all the items of a condemned city are prohibited. Since we are prohibited to take them, taking them would be stealing.

The Sages also provide a reason: such a theft keeps G-d's "fierce anger" in the world. "As long as there are wicked people in the world, there is fierce anger in the world." The wicked people referred to cannot be the idolaters themselves, since they have already been killed. Rather, the wicked are those who would take the possessions of the idolaters, the contraband of the condemned city. Thus, the Sages conclude, "When the wicked are removed from the world, G-d's fierce anger is removed from the world. Who are these wicked? Thieves."

We now have the following correspondence: just as idolatry inhibits Redemption, so stealing, specifically from an idolatrous city, inhibits the removal of G-d's fierce anger from the world. On the other side, just as removing idolatry is a prerequisite for Redemption, as we acknowledge in the Aleinu prayer, so too, removing the wicked – the thieves – is the prerequisite for removal of G-d's fierce anger. (Obviously, only the severest transgression brings G-d's "fierce anger" into the world in the first place. The greatest sin against G-d is idolatry. Idolatry arouses G-d's fierce anger, but stealing keeps it in existence, preventing Redemption.)

What differentiates stealing from other sins? Generally, a sin exists only as long as a person is sinning. For example a person who eats non-kosher food violates the laws of kashrus only while he is eating. When he's not eating treif, he's not violating a commandment. Similarly, a person who hits someone else has transgressed only at the moment he strikes the other person. But so long as a stolen object has not been returned, the thief is still and continuously stealing. Once the stolen object is returned, the thief no longer transgresses. From then on, the individual no longer violates the prohibition. *But he has not retroactively repaired the past.* That requires *teshuvah*.

In most cases, the sin has a limited lifespan, so to speak. When

one stops violating the mitzvah, the sin ceases to exist. Therefore, G-d's anger ceases when the transgression ceases. With most transgressions, G-d's anger depends on the action, stopping when the sinful action stops. True, from the moment of the violation, the individual is obligated to do *teshuvah*. But the sin itself, having ceased to be, has no lingering effect on the world.

But theft, like idolatry, is different. Even when one stops acting in a sinful manner, the sin continues to exist. A thief's resolve to never steal again, by itself, does not remove or correct the sin itself. As long as he does not do *teshuvah*, G-d's fierce anger remains in the world. Similarly, one does not have to be worshipping idols every moment of the day to provoke G-d's fierce anger. That idolatry exists, that one in fact worships idols, even if that isn't happening right now, is sufficient to arouse G-d's fierce anger. The effect of theft or idolatry continues even when the individual is no longer stealing or worshipping idols. G-d's fierce anger remains so long as the wicked remain. And there's only one way to remove or transform the wicked: *teshuvah*.

What is true about theft is also true in a more limited sense about every transgression: until we do *teshuvah*, G-d's displeasure persists. With every sin comes the imperative to do *teshuvah*. As important as *teshuvah* is in general, it becomes ultimately significant in bringing Moshiach; as the Rambam rules, the Jewish people will eventually do *teshuvah* and immediately they will be redeemed. When considering other transgressions, a person may reason that, since he will definitely do *teshuvah* anyway, it's acceptable to delay it. The delay may seem especially justified if one becomes involved in other good things.

Or, one can resolve to do something good, a mitzvah. But there's no urgency to fulfill the resolution; we may become busy with other interests. However, since delaying *teshuvah* sustains G-d's "anger"

in the world, such conduct is improper. G-d's displeasure stays beyond the moment of transgression; it remains continuously; delay affects not just the individual, but the entire world.

Our *teshuvah* becomes responsible for removing G-d's displeasure and transforming the world. Doing good benefits not only the individual, but the entire world. And once one does *teshuvah*, its effect also continues onward. Everything depends on our actions. We, through our *teshuvah* and positive actions, can bring the ultimate Redemption one moment sooner.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 17:205-214)

IN HONOR OF

Dr. Margalit 'תחילת Leaderman

On the occasion of her birthday,
Shabbat Parshat Kedoshim, 6 Iyar, 5782

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