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FEDERATION

Parshah

RE-ENTRY PLAN: A ROUTE TO SALVATION

No doubt, you are all still basking in the afterglow of all the Yomim Tovim. The re-entry into the atmosphere, however, is fraught with danger. When one has become habituated to the rarified spiritual stratosphere, a re-entry plan is vital. The space shuttle needed special solar panels to absorb the intense heat generated upon re-entry. Deep-sea divers need to decompress to avoid 'the bends'. If we attempt to re-engage with the world without having formulated a strategy to do so, it could well all end in tears. The possible disaster scenarios are either to 'crash-and-burn', or to revert to type, to accept mediocrity and the banal, and give up the good fight.

The first few *parshios* of Bereshis seem to offer scant comfort. From the heady delights of גן עדן, Paradise is Lost, and man degenerates all too quickly, ultimately descending into the anarchy which sets the scene for the failed generation that has no redeeming feature, and must ultimately be obliterated.

Yet, there is a critical message in this tale of moral turpitude that signposts a route to elevation and salvation. The fate of the world is sealed, we are informed, not on the basis of the rampant immorality, the ubiquitous עבודה זרה, but rather the carefully cultivated culture of theft.

Hashem informs Noach that He intends to destroy the world, *Ki Mal'ah Ha'Aretz Chamas*. Rashi comments on these words '*Lo Nechtam Gezar Dinam Elah Al HaGezel*', the judgment of the world was finalised on account of the sin of stealing. This, despite the fact that (per Rashi's comments earlier (פסוק י"א) that the generation was guilty of idolatry and immorality, sins which are far more grievous than stealing. Why is it that the decree of destruction was sealed on account of an עבירה which is not as severe as others they committed?

Furthermore, as the Ramban points out, they had not specifically been commanded not to steal! This leads to an astounding observation – how could ה' effectively destroy everything, only to start again, on the basis of

a violation of societal norms which had not been proscribed?!

The Ramban provides an answer that is intuitive, yet sadly, occasionally resisted because its parameters are often misunderstood. והטעם מפני שהיא מצוה משכלת The moral authority to desist from theft derives not from explicit Revelation, a prophetic injunction, rather from a self-awareness that correctly identifies the innate divinity that manifests through the שכל הישר². At its root, this is not even unique to Jews, but אלוקים is. The proof to this is to be found in הלכות תשובה³ when he discusses בחירה and utilises two separate prooftexts, one from אדם הראשון, the other from דברים, clearly indicating the development and acknowledgment of אלוקים that is a prerequisite to accepting the תורה (the ספר הישר) that is בראשית⁴, serving as the חינוך that must necessarily precede תורה.⁵

The tell-tale signs were there, the indication that they were well aware of their degeneracy was their devious practice of carefully avoiding violating any potential threshold of theft, by pilfering tiny, insignificant amounts, clearly being cognisant of the morally odious nature of such activity.

R' Gedalya Schorr *zt"l* explains in the name of the Chidushei HaRim that the basis of all sins is stealing. This can be seen from the fact that the *halacha* of יודיו in the mitzvah of תשובה is derived from נשיא in the section dealing with גזול, stealing from a convert (per the Rambam in the beginning of הלכות תשובה). Why is such a fundamental concept and *halacha* derived from a somewhat obscure topic in the Torah? The answer is because stealing is a fundamental prohibition when understood in its broader sense. Man was created for the purpose of following the word of Hashem and bringing *kavod shamayim* to the world. When man uses the different resources and objects of the world to achieve his own personal desires and goes against the word of Hashem, this is the most objectionable form of stealing. When Rashi says the final verdict for destruction was on account of stealing, it

includes within it the sins of idolatry and immorality. By worshipping false idols and being promiscuous, the Dor HaMabul were stealing from Hashem the opportunity for Him to be manifest through His creatures. They denied their own Divine image, and the cause was indeed lost. At the very height of our lofty עבודה, we acknowledge this by asserting that the תכלית הבריאה itself is - למען נחדל מעושך ידינו⁶ from theft! The most elemental challenge that any human being, let alone a Jew faces, is the acknowledgment that this is His world and that we would do well to foster that constant awareness. Hence the piercing cry of ה' הוא the האלוקים that accompanies ה' back to שמים at the climax of the יום הקדוש. This now becomes our focus and our constant companion even as we 're-enter' the world of the humdrum, the inane. We hear the echoes of that cry, and seek every opportunity to re-affirm for ourselves and all those we encounter – the לנגדי תמיד – שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד – we see in every engagement with this alien world the challenge to highlight His existence through our behaviour, שהכל ברא לכבודו.

1 וע"ע הקדמת רב נסים גאון לתלמוד, ר"מ בשמונה פרקים פ"ו ובמ"ו ח"ג פ"ז, בחיי בראשית ו"ג, אבן עזרא שמות כ"א (ומשקול הדעת שנטע השם בלב האדם וכו') הגהות יעב"ץ גיטין נ"ח. ד"ה ועל אותה, חו"ה שער עבודת האלוקים פ"ג ופ"ה דברים נפלאים, והסכמת הנצי"ב לספר האבות חסד, ותורת אברהם קונטרס תורת שכל האנושי

2 This now becomes the resolution of the Euthyphro dilemma, (often used as an argument against Divine command theory) which sees good and evil as being either Revealed through Divine command (and thus apparently arbitrary) or intuited (and thus holding 'an accountable' to a standard of behaviour higher than Himself, (חי' וע"ל, neither of which are palatable for different reasons. It is posed as a false dichotomy, as in reality 'א טוב, implants into man via the שכל the ability to discern good and evil – the challenge being to attribute this faculty to Him! Bertrand Russell struggled with this, but failed to 'join up the dots' when he said, "I cannot see how to refute the argument for the subjectivity of ethical values, but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it"

3 ע"ש פ"ה ה"א וה"ה וע"ע מש"כ בהל' מלכים

4 ע"ז כ"ה

5 ע"י היטב לשונו הרהב של ר' יונה אבות ג' - ט"ז ובהקדמת הנצי"ב לפירושו העמק דבר לספר בראשית

6 זבוח מובן האהרה של הסמי"ג ל"ת ע"ד ע"ש

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2. How was Horon, Avraham's brother, influenced by him? What was his reward?