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is unable to identify any עבירה that would justify and explain the depths of the suffering endured by generations of his brothers and sisters in the Golus of Mitzrayim. Until he is challenged with the words 'are you going to kill me, as you did to the Egyptian'? Now he is pacified, he is able to justify the inhumane subjugation of a nation, the state-backed infanticide.

Parshah

'אכן נודע הדבר' – verily the matter is known' is understood by Chazal to refer to the rationale for the Golus. משה רבינו is mollified by the knowledge that לשון הרע is endemic. This surely requires our attention.

Upon being asked what his views were on British democracy, Gandhi is said to have responded that he thought it was a splendid idea! Perhaps the same could be said of the Information Age that is the term often used to define our times. Instead of the ready availability of truth that the age promised, we seem to be more manipulated than ever. The harnessing of the digital revolution for the purposes of the dissemination of misinformation, fake news, information overload, niche news, superficial sound-bites that take pole position ahead of reasoned analysis, have sadly made it genuinely more difficult to know where the truth lies, buried somewhere under the rubble of the global village it was supposed to have constructed.

The mind-set that it has generated, is that of the right and the need for information to be disseminated instantaneously, preferably live, to anyone who wishes to access it. Public interest trumps the interests of individuals and decency, and the boundaries that used to delineate public and private space are increasingly becoming blurred and eroded. We witness the bizarre spectacle of a President of the most powerful nation on Earth, bypassing the conventional channels of communication to spew forth his thoughts, in real-time, commenting on other world leaders, spurning the traditions of diplomacy, the statecraft that was the mainstay of assuring stability in a fragile world, and all in the digestible format of 140 characters.

The relevance of all of this for us cannot be overstated. Shlomo Hamelech, in characterising the toxicity of slander and Loshon Hora takes us down a surprising route, challenging us to think of it in entirely new terms.

“The talebearer reveals a secret, whilst the faithful of spirit, covers the matter”

The unwillingness and/or the inability to keep quiet is at the heart of the problem. There is a world of פנים, an inner world, where careful evaluation is needed before exposure to the world of חוץ is justified. This inner space is pristine, unsullied by the accommodations and compromises that are the hallmark of the realities of the world of חוץ.

Judaism is concerned with the world of פנים, challenging us to construct ourselves, and our perspectives in line with this reality. Once achieved, external expression of, and connection to, this inner dimension is appropriate.¹

One needs to appreciate the סוד מרע, before one can give full expression to the טוב עשה טוב.

And that is the real tragedy of our world, where the true beauty and value of restraint and יראת שמים is not appreciated, or valued.

Golus Edom is characterised by the emphasis on image over substance.

עשו, in his hunger, opts to recognise only the most external and superficial details of a meal laden with significance. The shape of the lentils, the mourning for his grandfather all wilfully spurned in favour of the colour of the soup, the very first thing to hit the eye, and his need for immediate self-gratification. It becomes the very first fast-food meal in history, and the price of his birth-right absolutely justified from his perspective.

From that point on, the veneer of respectability just about covers the inner hypocrisy of the institutions venerated by Western democracies. It is therefore, truly ironic to see that very ability to reach a global audience anonymously, being used to expose the sham of those institutions on a massive

scale². The true clash of civilisations, is the battle for the existence and supremacy of the world of חוץ & פנים. One has to choose between the descent into superficiality and the validation of the external, versus the still, silent voice that populates and animates the world of the spirit.

עבודת פנים is the paradigm of יוסף הצדיק, he lays the foundation³ of the descent into Golus (and indeed the pathway needed to reverse it – hence the משיח בן יוסף⁴) by demonstrating his ability to retain his connection to his inner core, despite being utterly alone, though having no external support network. Alone in Mitzrayim, he is able to conjure up an image of his saintly father, chiding him for discarding his future should he fail this enormous test. His inner world is so real that it defines him – את האלוקים – אני ירא⁵.

This is a world that brooks no compromise⁶ – the inner world of aspiration and ambition, of who we really want to be. The two extra words that Yosef uttered that were out of line with his inner reality earned him two extra years of incarceration⁷.

Our challenge to extricate ourselves from this Golus of the external and superficial, manifests in one very practical realm, the ability to exercise restraint and preserve the world of that which ought to be private. The imperative to refrain from Lashon Hara is the benchmark against which we are assessed to ascertain whether we are inhabitants of an inner dimension, or citizens of the crass, shallow, virtual world of the flashy, superficial emptiness that is Edom.

¹² Wikileaks, the Panama Papers, etc

¹³ מידת היסוד

¹⁴ The apparent involvement of Yosef in Lashon Hara which appears to be the catalyst for Golus is beyond the scope of this article, but needs to be addressed. The Lashon Hara of the עני can now be seen as part of the subtext of Golus.

¹⁵ The Maharal sees ריאה as the product of real vision – the letters of ריאה rearranged.

¹⁶ עני ספר מחשבות הרויח אות א

¹⁷ שאלו באחת ועלתה לו וכו' (יומא כ"ב)

¹¹ Until that point is reached, special licence is granted to perform Torah and Mitzvos – שלא לשמה – which now mandates such sub-optimal performance.

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2. Rashi (2:14) brings that Moshe killed the Mitzri with Hashem's Name. How then did Doston and Aviom then know that Moshe and not someone else had killed him? What evidence is there by simply seeing someone's lips moving?