

## **The sins of Israel**

### **Does wealth lead to lack of observance?**

Devarim always before Tish'a B'Av.

Theme: We are responsible for the fall of the two Temples, the first because of lack of observance, the second because of senseless hatred (too much observance?)

### **Torah Text**

Deut. 1:1. These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on that side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Hazereth and Di Zahav.

### **Commentary**

If purpose of verse is simply to identify a place, why does it need nine separate scattered markers? Answer in Sifrei Devarim:

'These are the words'. Words of rebuke, listing all the places where Israelites angered God. Does not mention sins, only alludes to them, out of respect for Israel.

-'To all Israel'. If he had rebuked only some of them, those who were absent might have said, "You heard from Moses and did not answer a single word regarding this and that; had we been there, we would have answered him!" Therefore, he assembled all of them, and said to them, "See, you are all here; if anyone has an answer, let him answer!"

-'In the desert'. At that time they were in the plains of Moab, so why 'in the desert'? Rebuke for their having angered Him in the desert by saying, "If only we had died [by the hand of God]" (Exod. 16:3):

Exodus 16:2. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness;

3. And the people of Israel said to them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, and when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

- 'In the plain'. Sin with worship of Baal-Peor at Shittim in the plains of Moab (Num. 25:1-9).

Numbers 25:1. And Israel stayed in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab.

2. And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods; and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods.

3. And Israel attached himself to Baal-Peor; and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

- 'Opposite the Sea of Reeds'. First, they sinned when they arrived at the Sea:

Ex. 14:11. And they said to Moses, Is it because there were no graves in Egypt, that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt so with us, carrying us out of Egypt?

12. Did we not tell you in Egypt, Leave us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than to die in the wilderness.

Second, they sinned when they traveled from the middle of the sea, as it is said, "and they were rebellious by the sea, by the Sea of Reeds" (Ps. 106:7):

Talmud, Arachin 15a

It was taught: R. Judah said, With ten trials did our forefathers try the Holy One, blessed be He: two at the sea, two because of water, two because of manna, two because of the quails, one in connection with the golden calf, and one in the wilderness of Paran,

- "Two at the sea": one at the going down, the other at the coming up.

- "At the going down", as it is written: 'Because there were no graves in Egypt [have you taken us away to die in the wilderness]? [Ex. 14:11]

"At the coming up": That is in accord with what R. Huna taught, for he said: The Israelites of that generation were among those of little faith; as Rabbah b. Mari expressed it; for Rabbah b. Mari said: It is written: 'But they were rebellions at the sea, even at the Sea of Reeds; nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake.' [Ps. 106:7.] This teaches that Israel were rebellious at that very hour, saying: Just as we go up from this side, so will the Egyptians go up from the other side. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Prince of the Sea: Cast them out on the dry land! He answered: Sovereign of the Universe, is there a slave to whom his Master gives a gift and then takes it away from him again? He said to him: I shall give you [afterwards] one and a half times as many of them. [There were nine hundred war chariots at the brook Kishon (Judg. 4:3), one and a half times as many as at the Red Sea, where there were only six hundred, thus

making true the promise.] He said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, is there any slave who can claim anything against his master? He said: The brook of Kishon shall be surety. At once he cast them on the dry land, as it is written: 'And Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.' [Ex. 14:30]

- 'Between Paran'. The spies left for Canaan from the desert of Paran. [Num. 13:3]

- 'and Tofel and Lavan'. Rabbi Yochanan said: We have reviewed the entire Bible, but we have found no place named Tofel or Lavan! However, they said foolish things (taflu) about the manna, which was white (lavan):

Num. 21:5. And the people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, nor is there any water; and our soul loathes this light bread.

- 'and Hazereth'. The insurrection of Korach took place in Hazereth. Also, He said to them, "You should have learned from what I did to Miriam at Hazereth because of slander; [nevertheless,] you spoke against God."

- 'and Di-Zahav' (lit., enough gold). The golden calf. "and I gave her much silver and gold, but they made it for Baal" (Hosea 2:10).

Talmud, Berachot 32a

The school of R. Jannai learnt it from here: And Di-Zahab. What is "And Di-Zahab"? They said in the school of R. Jannai: Thus spoke Moses before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, the silver and gold [zahab] which You showered on Israel until they said, Enough [dai], that it was which led to their making the Calf.

- They said in the school of R. Jannai: A lion does not roar over a basket of straw but over a basket of flesh.

- R. Oshaia said: It is like the case of a man who had a lean but large-limbed cow. He gave it lupines to eat and it started to kick him. He said to it: What led you to kick me except the lupines that I fed you with?

- R. Hiyya b. Abba said: It is like the case of a man who had a son; he bathed him and anointed him and gave him plenty to eat and drink and hung a purse round his neck and set him down at the door of a house of ill-repute. How could the boy help sinning?

- R. Aha the son of R. Huna said in the name of R. Shesheth: This bears out the popular saying: A full stomach is a bad sort, as It says, 'When they were fed they became full, they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore they have forgotten Me'. [Hos. 13:6].

- R. Nahman learnt it from here: 'Then your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord'. [Deut. 8:24]

-The Rabbis from here: 'And they shall have eaten their fill and waxen fat, and turned to other gods [Deut. 31:20] -Or, if you prefer, I can say from here. 'But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked'. [Deut. 32:15]

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R. Abbahu said: ... Moses took hold of the Holy One, blessed be He, like a man who seizes his fellow by his garment and said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, I will not let You go until You forgive and pardon them.

## Discussion

-Do good times and good fortune turn people AWAY from God?

-Most observant frequently poorest

-People turn to religion in adversity, not when times are good

-Experience of American Jews, poverty to wealth, observance to secularism

-The more you have the more you complain?

-Did disasters befall Jews to keep them observant?

-But many Holocaust survivors turned away from Judaism

-But overall, did Holocaust lead to more observance?

-Rav Avraham (Israel): "I am afraid that my grandchildren will become wealthy. The dangers of wealth far surpass the dangers of poverty."

-Rabbi Yonatan said: He who fulfills the Torah in poverty shall in the end fulfill it in wealth. He who disregards the Torah in wealth shall in the end disregard it in poverty. (Pirkei Avot 4:11) (perpetuum mobile?)

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch:

-Wealthy people are self-confident, have high self-esteem, are expansive, arrogant, and ridicule the poor

-Poor people have little self-confidence, are contrite, broken, disheartened and self-deprecating.

-Among these ten characteristics are the finest of virtues and the worst of faults.

Ben Zoma: Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot. (Pirkei Avot 4:1)