

The next day they rose early, offered up burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and they got up to make merry. (32:6)

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, posits that this *pasuk* offers us a window into the mindset of the idol worshippers. At first, it begins with burnt offerings, which are wholly burnt and offered up to the higher being whom they claim to worship. This step is filled with idealism. After all, the entire animal is offered up, indicating the participants' desire to give up their money and their lives on the altar of idealism. They still think that something will happen; their idol will speak to them.

This step does not last very long, because nothing happens – no response from the idol. Their idealism begins to wane, to sputter. They moderate their position vis-à-vis the idol. Now they offer a peace-offering – a sacrifice which reflects a partnership between the spiritual and the physical spheres. The owner keeps part of the sacrifice, he gives part to on high, and he gives part to the priests. They are being more realistic.

Stage three sees their enthusiasm dwindle to the point that they sit down to eat and drink. It is now all about them. Their deity has not come through for them. No more Heaven; no more Priests. Why waste good meat? We are eating it all.

The digression continues with stage four, the final stage of their infamy. They get up to make merry.

This concept of “making merry” has nothing to do with amusements. It denotes mockery and scorn. They are upset. After supporting their idol through three stages of delusional belief, they publicly mock it and heap scorn on it. The idol which they have so loved is now the object of their loathing and disgust. Their eyes have been opened, and what has been revealed is not pretty. They see the folly of their ways, the foolishness and falsehood their idol represents.

This is the cycle of idol worship, the veneration of the various “isms” that have plagued us. These “isms” are no less false idols than the molten, stone statues that the early pagans worshipped. Do we have any idea how many Jews have fallen on the Altar of this false idealism? Some returned – after they realized the folly of their sham beliefs. The ones who have had the courage and fortitude to return were embraced and welcomed home. The others? They destroyed themselves and their future generations who have assimilated, having traded their Jewish identities and destinies for a misconception which was false from the very beginning. At first, they refused to see the truth – now they are blind to it.

Rav Galinsky relates how one of the most infamous heretics of the pre-World War II era, a heretic whose virulent writings dripped with venom against anything even remotely related to *frumkeit*, religious observance, returned to Jewish observance. It occurred during the war, when he came

face-to-face with the devotion and commitment evinced by a *frummer Yid*. He went by the name Priokin.

The *Ponovezher Rav*, *zl*, met Priokin in America and asked him, "Tell me, what was it that catalyzed your return to *Yiddishkeit*?" Priokin wanted very much to bare his soul and reveal the inner turmoil with which he had dealt during the war. "At the beginning of the war," he began, "I was in Warsaw when it came under siege. Through much suffering, I was able to make it to Vilna where I walked around like a refugee. Gone was my once proud self-esteem. I was like all other Jews, searching for crumbs to sustain myself. My entire world had been destroyed. My soapbox had been the newspaper in which I was free to write what I wanted and heap vitriol against whomever I pleased. The newspaper was gone, my readership, refugees like myself, had nothing. My 'restaurant' was the soup kitchen, where I stood in line like everyone else. My once impressive apparel was now in tatters. I walked through the streets dejected, looking for shelter and a roof over my head.

"Suddenly, a loud explosion rent the air. I knew that I might not be so lucky the next time. The bombs were falling. I had to locate a shelter. I ran to the nearest building. Ironically, it was a *bais hamedrash*, a building I had not entered in years. For some reason, I felt I would be safe here.

"Bombs were exploding outside. Who knew how long the walls of the *bais hamedrash* would protect me? I hid under a table for added protection from both the bombs and the blood-thirsty murderers who were searching for those who had survived the bombing. No one was safe. Hiding under the table, I heard faint sounds. Two *bachurim*, *yeshivah* students, were next to me beneath the table, heads together, learning! They were immersed in a *sugya*, topic, of the *Gemorah*.

"When I saw this, I understood what it is that makes us different. We have access to the eternal wellspring. If two *yeshivah* students can concentrate on their learning while bombs are falling all over, they know the truth. This is where the desire for the truth could be quenched. Then and there, I decided that if I lived, I would become a *baal teshuvah* and spend the rest of my mortal days imbibing from the wellspring of truth."