

## And Moshe heard and fell on his face. (16:4)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* had heard it all. This was the final straw. As *Rashi* explains, *She'kvar zeh b'yadam sirchon revii*, "This was already the fourth foulness that the Jews had committed." They had worshipped the Golden Calf – after which Moshe prayed for them. They were *misonenim*, complained for no good reason, just for the sake of complaining; again, Moshe prayed for them. They heeded the false and slanderous reports of the *meraglim*, spies, and wept bitterly for no reason; Moshe again prayed for them. This was the fourth time that the nation had defied Hashem. It was too much. Moshe felt that he could no longer plead their case. They had gone too far. This can be compared to the son of the king who acted contemptuously, once, twice, and a third time. When the son disgraced himself and the king for a fourth time, the king's close friend who had interceded the previous three times felt that his ability had weakened: "How many times could he trouble the king? Perhaps he will no longer accept my placation?"

This all might be fine and well if there were no rhyme or reason to somehow justify the first three episodes of disgrace. As **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, observes, however, each sinful event presented itself with what *Klal Yisrael* might excuse as mitigating or extenuating circumstances. During the episode of the Golden Calf, the *Satan* played a leading role in confusing the nation, attempting to convince them by employing a convincing imagery of darkness and cloud, with Moshe's bier being carried through Heaven by the Angels. The complainers were victims of the *eirav rav*, mixed multitude, who joined the Jewish nation as they left Egypt. They were nothing but trouble. Once again, they succeeded in wrongly influencing the nation to complain for no reason. The spies were powerful leaders who had an overriding negative influence on an anxious and troubled nation. If they had an excuse for every episode, why should they now be censured because it is the fourth time? Why count the preceding three?

In his inimitable manner, *Rav* Galinsky takes a practical approach toward resolving this question. He recalls being *Mashgiach* in a *yeshivah* and questioning a student concerning his lack of attendance at *davening*, morning prayers. "Why were you not at *davening* this morning?" was his opening question. "I attended a wedding last night and returned quite late. I was exhausted, so I slept in," the student responded.

"That explains today – what happened yesterday that prevented you from joining us at *davening*?" *Rav* Galinsky asked. "Interestingly, yesterday I arose early and would surely have been on time, had I not been delayed by my stomach. I must have eaten something that disagreed with me" was the young man's reply.

"What about the day before yesterday?" he asked somewhat impatiently. "Yesterday is a different story. I woke up on time, but I noticed that my *negel vasser*, water for washing my hands upon arising, had been moved from my bed. Aware of the *halachah* that prohibits one from walking *daled amos*, four cubits, without removing the spiritual impurities caused by sleep, I felt that I should wait in bed until someone returning from *davening* would move the water to my bed." This was truly a

creative excuse – but an excuse nonetheless.

*Rav Galinsky* told the young man, “Let us together study a passage in the *Talmud Chagigah* 3b. Perhaps we might gain insight into your *davening* issue and how your lack of attendance should be addressed. *Chazal* explain that the *shoteh*, imbecile, about whom *halachah* rules that he is *patur*, exempt from *mitzvah* performance, is defined by specific actions. To rule that one is a *shoteh* has strong ramifications: no *mitzvos*, no punishment for transgressions; his *kinyan*, acquisition, is not acceptable; what he sells is null and void. Thus, *Chazal* were specific in delineating the criteria for declaring one a *shoteh*. They are: he goes out alone at night, with no concern for his well-being; he sleeps alone in the cemetery; he tears his clothes. In other words, he exhibits strange behavior which indicates that he cares about neither himself nor his possessions.

“The *Talmud* explains that one who sleeps in the cemetery might actually be seeking an opportunity for a *ruach ha'tumah*, spirit of impurity, to rest upon him granting him the ability to practice witchcraft or other practices of the occult. One who goes out alone at night might need to get some cool air. Last, tearing clothes could suggest absentmindedness. Each one alone does not irrevocably indicate that one is a *shoteh*. All three together, however, demonstrate that this person has serious issues.”

*Chazal* seem to imply that three occurrences, regardless of the excuses one presents, are an indication which connotes *chazakah*, status quo. Likewise, imagine a man who goes to the doctor complaining of a headache, high fever, and blisters all over his body. A foolish doctor will treat each symptom exclusive of the other, while an astute doctor will realize immediately that one illness, an infection, manifests all three symptoms.

Returning to *Moshe Rabbeinu*: True, each infraction could be justified, but three, one after another, constitutes a *chazakah*, indicating a deeper sickness, one which cannot be ignored. This was no longer opportunity for prayer. They had shown that their spiritual illness was of an extremely serious nature. It had to be expunged in such a manner that radical punishment was the only way to eradicate the spiritual infection that was destroying the nation.