

For it is where the lawgiver's plot is hidden; he came at the head of the nation, carrying out Hashem's justice and His ordinances with Yisrael. (33:21)

Shevet Gad, the tribe of Gad, selected the area where Moshe *Rabbeinu* was (to be) buried as their portion in *Eretz Yisrael*. The tribe of Gad was among the first to march into battle. The closing words of the *pasuk*, *Tziddkas Hashem asah u'mishpatav im Yisrael*, "Carrying out Hashem's justice and His ordinances with Yisrael," are a tribute to our quintessential leader, the *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael*, Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Chazal* (*Avos* 5:22) derive from here that Moshe was the paradigmatic *mezakeh es ha'rabim*, influenced the masses to become meritorious. His antithesis was the wicked Yaravam ben Nevat who was the archetypical *choteh u'machati es ha'rabim*, someone who sinned and caused others to sin. One who causes his fellow Jews to turn against Hashem has no room for *teshuvah*, repentance/return. (While Yaravam may have been the first, one cannot ignore the early leaders of the secular movements who encouraged their innocent followers to abandon the traditional way of life and turn their backs on Hashem, His Torah and His *mitzvos*. Perhaps there is a difference. Yaravam was simply wicked and did not want competition. These leaders based their theology and principles on reforming and reframing Judaism. I am not sure which is worse. (Certainly, the latter has had a longer term effect.)

Chazal's choice of placing Yaravam against Moshe is an indication that Moshe symbolizes consummate good, while Yaravam personifies evil at its nadir. Moshe attained ultimate good by bringing merit to the masses. Yaravam descended to his ignominy by causing others to sin. Wherein lay the divide between Moshe and Yaravam? We know that, at one point, Yaravam was a Torah scholar of repute, standing way above the level of scholarship achieved by the notable Torah leaders of his generation (*Sanhedrin* 102). How does a person who achieves such an elevated status of Torah erudition fall so low, to the point that *teshuvah* is inaccessible to him? *Chazal* (*Ibid.*) attribute his downfall to *gasus ha'ruach*, arrogance (which leads to vulgarity).

The *Talmud* relates wherein Yaravam manifested his arrogance (born of insecurity). The *halachah* is *Ein yeshivah b'Azarah ela l'malchei Bais David bilvad*, "Sitting (on a throne) in the *Azarah* is forbidden to anyone who is not of Davidic lineage. (The *Azarah* is the main courtyard of the *Bais Hamikdash* which enclosed its primary buildings. Parts of it were off limits to a *Yisrael* – one who was neither a *Kohen* or *Levi*.) Only a king who descends from the Davidic dynasty may sit in the *Azarah*. Yaravam mused to himself, "Since only a descendant of David *Hamelech* may sit in the *Azarah*, I will not be permitted to sit. I, the king of *Yisrael*, may not sit! My counterpart, Rechavam, King of *Yehudah* will sit, while I will stand? Never! I will not permit the people who come to *Yerushalayim* on their pilgrimage (during the *Shalosh Regalim*, Three Festivals) to think that Rechavam is the king, while I am his lowly servant." He decided to prevent the people from coming to *Yerushalayim* by fashioning two golden calves and telling the people that these were their new "Gods" who liberated them from Egypt.

This is mind-boggling! How is it possible for one who was one of the premier Torah scholars of his generation to plummet to such a nadir of depravity? Furthermore, had Yaravam's arrogance not beclouded his ability to think rationally, he would have realized that his standing while Rechavam sat only served to exalt Yaravam's monarchy even more. It demonstrated to the entire nation that he was a man of exceptional humility, who placed the *halachah* above his own glory. He would then have become the paradigm of Jewish monarchy. Did Yaravam not possess a modicum of common sense?

Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl, explains that originally Yaravam's intentions were noble. He acted *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. He felt that no one would be able to influence the nation more than he could. He was erudite and charismatic. He would inspire the nation. This could only materialize, however, if the people were to revere him and his monarchy. If they would view him with disdain, almost as a servant standing at the side of Rechavam, who was seated, it would undermine his ability to garner the people's support. Thus, he felt he must seek another avenue of support. Standing while Rechavam sat would just not work. Once he made the first decree, he just descended lower and lower into the abyss of spiritual and moral depravity.

Rav Elyashiv relates a vignette that sheds light on Yaravam's (and the nation's) descent into idolatry. A king once visited a local prison. He interviewed the prisoners, asking them what unlawful activity had caused their incarcerations. He received a host of responses (probably a number of them false). He stopped at the cell of a prisoner whose appearance, demeanor and manner of speech bespoke someone who did not belong. He asked him, "What offence are you guilty of?" The inmate replied, "I loved to pass by jewelry stores and stare at the precious jewels." The king asked incredulously, "This is why you are incarcerated?" The man replied, "Sure. In the beginning I just stared. However, at a certain point I could no longer simply stare. I had to have the jewels. So, I broke the window and made off with the jewels."

Yaravam's first foray into ignominy was actually an act that he would convince himself was for Hashem's sake. His arrogance, however, would not contain itself, and, in order to satisfy his need to dominate, to assuage his clamoring ego, he went off the deep-end and fell into the gaping desolateness of idolatry. He rendered his actions unforgivable when he took the nation with him.

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, underscores the language of the *Mishnah*. *Moshe zachah v'zikhah es ha'rabim*, "Moshe merited (personally) and (then) brought merit to the masses." In order to be *mezakeh es ha'rabim*, one must first work on himself. Only after he has personally achieved an elevated level of *z'chus*, merit, can he reach out to others. Veritably, it is similar to every vocation. One must study, practice, gain the skill, introspect as to his motivation – then go out and do the job. Otherwise, he will bungle and impair not only himself, but also his intended spiritual beneficiaries.

Hashem rewards one who is *mezakeh es ha'rabim* not only with his own merit, but He records among his positive spiritual achievements every *mitzvah* or good deed which someone or something (which he established) performs. No limit exists concerning how much and for how long

these benefits accrue. We often think that to reach out to another Jew, especially one who is unaffiliated, requires incredible charisma, knowledge, patience, perseverance and labor. Not true. One never knows how he might affect another person. A smile can change a world and alter another Jew's spiritual affinity.

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl (Mashgiach Kaminetz), once traveled to the United States on a fund-raising mission. One of his would-be donors owned a large factory in which he had hundreds of workers working throughout three daily shifts. The man was very proud of his success, and he insisted that *Rav Moshe Aharon* visit him in the factory. He would make it worth his while. The *Mashgiach* was not keen on the idea. It would involve precious time, which he did not have. In the past, this man, however, had been very generous to the *yeshivah*. As he walked through the factory and saw the hundreds working at various stations, he thought to himself, "There is not a single Jew in this place. Surely, Hashem had me come here for a reason. What could it be?"

When he met the owner in his office, he asked him whether anyone working for him was Jewish. The owner replied that one of the secretaries in the office was Jewish by birth, but did not practice anything. She knew absolutely nothing regarding the religion of her birth. *Rav Moshe Aharon* asked to speak with her.

The young lady acquiesced. After all, how often does one meet a distinguished rabbi from the Holy Land? She entered the office, and, after the usual introductions, the *Mashgiach* asked her, "Do you wash your hands every day?" "Of course, I wash up every morning when I wake up." "Would it be an imposition to request that you wash with a cup, and, after you have poured water three times on each hand, you recite the verse, "Hear o Israel, Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is one" (*Shema Yisrael*)? "Sure, I guess I can do that."

End of story? No. The secretary was an intelligent young woman who had to know why she was doing this. She went on the computer and read up about *netillas yadaim*. This led to her need to satisfy her curiosity about Judaism and *mitzvos*. She slowly became observant, married a *ben Torah*, and raised a beautiful family. All of this due to *zikui ha'rabim*. One never knows.