

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter LIII: Haazinu (Deut. 32:1–32:52)

### Essay 3. G-d's doubled jealousy regarding idolatry

“For My people have done a twofold wrong . . .” - Jeremiah 2:13

**"יִזְבְּחוּ לֵשֵׁדִים לֹא אֱלֹהִים"**, פֶּרַשׁ רַש"י פֶּתַרְגוֹמוֹ "לִית בְּהוֹן צְרוּף", אֵילוֹ הָיָה בָּהֶם צְרוּף לֹא הָיְתָה קִנְאָה כְּפוּלָה כְּמוֹ עֲקָשׁוֹ עַכ"ל. מִקְשִׁים הַמְּפָרְשִׁים דָּהָא אֵימָא בְּמִדְרַשׁ רַבָּה עַל פְּסוּק "לָמָּה ה' יִחַרְרָה אַפָּי בְּעַמָּךְ", אָמַר מִלְשָׁה רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים עָשׂוֹ לָךְ סִיּוּעַ וְאַתָּה כּוֹעֵס עָלֵיהֶם? הָעִגְלָה הַזֶּה שָׁעָשׂוֹ יִהְיֶה מְסִיבָה. אַתָּה מְזַרְיִם הַסַּמָּה, וְהוּא הַלְבָנָה. אַתָּה הַכּוֹכָבִים, וְהוּא הַמְזָלוֹת. אַתָּה מוֹרִיד הַטָּל, וְהוּא מוֹשִׁיב רוּחֹת, וְכוּ'. אָמַר הַקַּב"ה, אַף אַתָּה טוֹעֵה בְּעִגְלָה, הָרִי אֵין בּוֹ מִמֶּשׁ. אָמַר לוֹ, אִם כֵּן "לָמָּה ה' יִחַרְרָה אַפָּי בְּעַמָּךְ". דְּמִשְׁמַע מְזָה שָׂאֵם אֵין בּוֹ מִמֶּשׁ, אֵין רְאוּי לְהִיּוֹת קִנְאָה, וְלִפִּי פֶרַשׁ רַש"י אֲדַרְבָּא מִשְׁמַע דָּאֵם אֵין בָּהּ מִמֶּשׁ, יֵשׁ קִנְאָה כְּפוּלָה.

**“They will sacrifice unto demons, no-gods, gods that they didn’t know, new gods that came up of late, which your fathers did not dread” (Deut. 32:17). Rashi explains the words “no-gods”:** **“As the Targum has it: ‘There’s no need for them,’ for if there were need for them, [G-d’s] jealousy would not be doubled as it is now.”** I.e., G-d still would have been jealous, but not doubly so.<sup>1</sup> **The commentators question, “But isn’t it brought in the Midrash Ex. Rabbah on the verse, ‘L-rd, why are You angry with Your people’ (Ex. 32:11), the following:”**

**Moses said, “Master of the Universe, they have made an assistant for You, but You are angry with them? Why, this Calf that they have made will assist You. You will cause the sun to rise, while it will cause the moon to rise. You will look after the stars, and it will see to the constellations. You will cause the dew to descend, and it will cause the winds to blow. You will make the rains come down, while it will be responsible for the growth of plants.” Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, to him: “Moses, even you err regarding the Calf, for there is no substance to it.” [Moses] said to Him: “If this be the case, ‘why are You angry with Your people?’ ”**

- Midrash Ex. Rabbah 43:6

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<sup>1</sup> Rashi’s commentary may be based on Sifrei Devarim 318:13, “If they served the sun, the moon, the stars, the constellations—things which are of need and benefit to the world, His anger would not be ‘doubled,’ but they serve others which are of no benefit to them, but are detrimental to them, ‘to demons,’ a demon enters a man and overpowers him.”

**The meaning of this Midrash is that if there is no substance [to idolatry], there's no need for jealousy from G-d. But according to the explanation of Rashi, to the contrary, the meaning is that if there is no substance [to idolatry], there is doubled jealousy! How do we resolve this?**

ולדידן קושיא ליתא שְׁהָרִי אֵיתָא בְּמִסְכַּת עֲבוּדָה זָרָה פֶּרֶק ר' יִשְׁמַעְאֵל כְּתוּב בְּתוֹרַתְכֶם "אֵל קִנְא", כְּלוּם מִתְקַנָּא אֱלֹא חֲכָם בְּחֲכָם גְּבוּר בְּגְבוּר וְכוּ' מִשָּׁל לְאָדָם שְׁנַשְׂא אִשָּׁה עַל אִשְׁתּוֹ, חֲשׂוּבָה מִמֶּנָּה אִין מִתְקַנָּא בָּהּ, פְּחוּתָה מִמֶּנָּה מִתְקַנָּא בָּהּ. וְהֵינּוּ מִמֶּשׁ כְּדַבְרֵי רַשִׁי ז"ל.

**For us, there's no question, for in the tractate Avodah Zarah, chapter four, which is entitled "Rabbi Yishmael says," there is the following:**

Agrippas the general asked Rabban Gamliel: **"It is written in your Torah** [with regard to idol worship]: 'For the L-rd your G-d is a devouring fire, **a jealous G-d**' (Deut. 4:24). **Doesn't** [jealousy arise] **only** [in the following cases]: **A wise man is jealous of a wise man, and a mighty man of a mighty man, and a rich man of a rich man?** [If so, why is G-d jealous of objects of idol worship, which are not gods?]"

[Rabban Gamliel] **said to** [Agrippas]: I will relate a **parable** to you. To what is this matter comparable? **To a man who married a [second] wife in addition to his [first] wife.** [If the second wife is] **more distinguished than** [the first wife, the first wife] **is not jealous of her.** [But if the second wife is] **less distinguished than** [the first wife, the first wife] **is jealous of her.**

- Avodah Zarah 55a

**This is exactly like the words of Rashi, of blessed memory.** So how do we explain the Midrash?

אֱלֹא וְדַאי צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר דְּמַאי דְּאִמְרִינֵן הֵתָם בְּמִדְרַשׁ שְׁאִמְרַן מִשֵּׁה לְפָנֵי הַמְּקוֹם שְׁאִם אִין בּוֹ מִמֶּשׁ "לְמָה ה' יִתְרָה אֶפֶס בְּעַמֶּךָ", הֵינּוּ דְּוָקָא בְּעוֹן הָעֵגֶל, שְׁלֹא בְּקִשְׁוֹ אֱלֹא שְׁיִהְיֶה לָהֶם כְּמוֹ מְנַהִיג בְּלִבָּד. וְלֹא כְּפָרוּ בְּתוֹרָה וְלֹא הוּדוּ בְּעֲבוּדָה זָרָה, כְּדַאיִתָּא הֵתָם בְּמִדְרַשׁ וְעֵי"ש בְּיַפֵּה תוֹאֵר, וְרַק הָעֶרְב רַב עֲשָׂאוּהוּ לְשֵׁם עֲבוּדָה זָרָה מִמֶּשׁ. וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי הוֹעִילָה טַעְנָה זוֹ לַמִּשָּׁה.

**Rather, it's certain that we need to say that what is said there in the Midrash, what Moses said before the Omnipresent, that if there's no substance to [the Golden Calf], 'Why are You angry with Your people?' was [said] specifically regarding that case. Why? Because regarding the sin of the Calf, [the Israelites] requested that it would be a sole leader for them. The Israelites meant it as a replacement for Moses, not a replacement for G-d. They didn't deny the Torah, and they didn't acknowledge idolatry, as is found there in the Midrash, and see there in the Yafeh To'ar<sup>2</sup> commentary, which asks, "Why are You angry at the sinners, for aren't**

2 Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. Yafeh To'ar was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

there many who fulfill the Torah?” **For it was only the mixed multitude<sup>3</sup> that acted thus explicitly in the name of idolatry. Because of this, Moses’s claim to G-d that the Calf wasn’t meant to replace Him was effective.**

אָבֵל כְּשֶׁעָבְדוּ עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה מִמֶּשׁ אֲדָרְבָּא חֲמוּר יוֹתֵר הֶעָוֹן שְׁלָהֶם לְפִי שְׂאִין שׁוֹם מִמֶּשׁ בְּעֲבוֹדַת זָרָה, וְכֵן אָמַר הַפְּתוּב "אֲתִי עָזְבוּ מְקוֹר מַיִם חַיִּים לְחֻצַּב לָהֶם בְּאֵרוֹת בְּאֵרֹת נְשִׁבְרִים" וְכוּ'.

**But when** the situation would arise on other occasions that [Israel] **actually practiced idolatry**, as is foretold in Deut. 32:17, then **to the contrary, their sin would be greater** than when they wanted to replace Moses with the Golden Calf, **because there is no substance to the idolatry. Thus, Scripture says**, “For My people have done a twofold wrong, **they have forsaken Me, the Source of living waters, and they hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns**, which cannot even hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13). That is, their first wrong was to reject G-d, and their second wrong was to embrace something with no substance. Thus, there is doubled jealousy.

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<sup>3</sup> Ex. 12:38: “Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.” The mixed multitude was a mingling of various nations who had converted to Judaism and who had exited Egypt with Israel.