

פֶּרֶקוֹ נִזְמֵי הַזָּהָב

# Break Off The Golden Rings

Torah Musing  
Shemot - Exodus 32:2

Rabbi Malchah

In the curious episode of the golden calf the Israelites are troubled, even to the point of derision, because of Moses' extended absence from the camp. Fearing Moses is dead and uncertain about how to proceed without his guidance, they implore Aaron, the high priest to make a *god* for them. Aaron orders them to break off their golden rings and from the golden rings he constructs a golden calf. The Israelites are a band of ex slaves living in Kadesh Barnea<sup>1</sup>, so where did they get golden rings? Well, just prior to their release from bondage Moses directs them to ask the Egyptians for silver, gold and clothing and God predisposed the Egyptians to act favorably.

Earlier in Exodus the Israelites are given detailed instructions on building the sanctuary. The sanctuary, like the garden in Eden, was intended to be a meeting place for the holy and profane, i.e., God and the people. A major component of the Tabernacle was gold but where did the gold come from? Once again, the answer is Egypt. So, the same gold that was used to build God's dwelling place was also used to construct an idolatrous image!

The gold was neutral until the Israelites designated the use. The same objects can be used for the greater good or for nefarious purposes. Objects have no intrinsic value until we designate the use. Money is neutral but how one utilizes it, is not. It can be used to contribute to charity or to defraud by insider trading and Ponzi schemes. I can use my car to drive to and from work or as a getaway vehicle in a bank robbery. Words are neutral until provided a context. I may say "I am *driving* to the store" or "you are *driving* me crazy!"

In a section of the weekly **הַבְּדִלָּה** Havdalah<sup>2</sup> service we bid goodbye to the Sabbath and also contemplate the distinction between the Sabbath and the other six days. There is phrase in the Havdalah prayer that always captures my imagination.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחוֹל

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the universe, who distinguishes between the sacred and the profane,

Who divides between the sacred and the profane? Yes, God does but so do we. We make those distinction every day in our words and deeds. How do we make the distinction? There is a reason that the Rabbis chose to place another Havdalah recitation at the end of the Sabbath Amidah<sup>3</sup>. It is inserted into the fourth blessing that seeks wisdom:

אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת וּמְלַמֵּד לְאָנוּשׁ בִּינָה. וְחֲנֵנוּ מֵאַתָּךְ חֲכָמָה בִּינָה וְדַעַת: בְּרוּךְ  
אַתָּה יְהוָה, חוֹנֵן הַדַּעַת:

### WISDOM

You grant a person wisdom, and teach understanding to a mortal. Favor us with Your own wisdom, understanding and insight. Blessed are You, Lord, who graciously grants wisdom.

Havdalah (separation) is a component of the wisdom prayer precisely because appropriately separating the holy and profane, correctly dividing between the sacred and everyday, requires wisdom.

Before speaking are you breaking off your golden rings of speech for good or for regret? Are you breaking off your golden rings of money for human advancement or for unnecessary desires? Are you building the Tabernacle or constructing the golden calf? It is my prayer that with wisdom you...

פְּרֻקוּ נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב

Break Off the Golden Rings

שבת שלום מביתנו לביתך

## **Shabbat Shalom From Our House to Your House**

**Rabbi Malchah**

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kadesh Barnea is in the wilderness of Zin, along the border of Edom and Israel

<sup>2</sup> הַבְּדִלָּה Havdalah means separation

<sup>3</sup> BT Berakhot 33a