

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness...” (Martin Luther King)

"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain." (James Arthur Baldwin)

There is a verse in Ki Tetsei momentous in its implications. It is easy to miss, appearing as it does in the midst of a series of miscellaneous laws about inheritance, rebellious sons, overladen oxen, marriage violations and escaping slaves. Without any special emphasis or preamble, Moses delivers a command so counterintuitive that it that we have to read it twice to make sure we have heard it correctly: "Do not hate an Edomite, because he is your brother. Do not hate an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." (Deut. 23:8)

What does this mean in its biblical context? The Egyptians of Moses' day had enslaved the Israelites, "embittered their lives", subjected them to a ruthless regime of hard labour and forced them to eat the bread of affliction. They had embarked on a programme of attempted genocide, Pharaoh commanding his people to throw "every male [Israelite] child born, into the river" (Ex. 1:22).

Now, forty years later, Moses speaks as if none of this had happened, as if the Israelites owed the Egyptians a debt of gratitude for their hospitality. Yet he and the people were where they were only because they were escaping from Egyptian persecution. Nor did he want the people to forget it. To the contrary, he told them to recite the story of the exodus every year, as we still do on Passover, re-enacting it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread so that the memory would be passed on to all future generations. If you want to preserve freedom, he implies, never forget what it feels like to lose it. Yet here, on the banks of the Jordan, addressing the next generation, he tells the people, "Do not hate an Egyptian". What is going on in this verse?

To be free, you have to let go of hate. That is what Moses is saying. If they continued to hate their erstwhile enemies, Moses would have taken the

Israelites out of Egypt, but he would not have taken Egypt out of the Israelites. Mentally, they would still be there, slaves to the past. They would still be in chains, not of metal but of the mind-and chains of the mind are the most constricting of all.

You cannot create a free society on the basis of hate. Resentment, rage, humiliation, a sense of injustice, the desire to restore honour by inflicting injury on your former persecutors-these are conditions of a profound lack of freedom. You must live with the past, implies Moses, but not in the past. Those who are held captive by anger against their former persecutors are captive still. Those who let their enemies define who they are, have not yet achieved liberty.

The Mosaic books refer time and again to the exodus and the imperative of memory: "you shall remember that you were slaves in Egypt". Yet never is this invoked as a reason for hatred, retaliation or revenge. Always it appears as part of the logic of the just and compassionate society the Israelites are commanded to create: the alternative order, the antithesis of Egypt. The implicit message is: Limit slavery, at least as far as your own people is concerned. Don't subject them to hard labour. Give them rest and freedom every seventh day. Release them every seventh year. Recognise them as like you, not ontologically inferior. No one is born to be a slave.

Give generously to the poor. Let them eat from the leftovers of the harvest. Leave them a corner of the field. Share your blessings with others. Don't deprive people of their livelihood. The entire structure of biblical law is rooted in the experience of slavery in Egypt, as if to say: you know in your heart what it feels like to be the victim of persecution, therefore do not persecute others.

Biblical ethics is based on repeated acts of role-reversal, using memory as a moral force. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, we are commanded to use memory not to preserve hate but to conquer it by recalling what it feels like to be its victim. "Remember"-not to live in the past but to prevent a repetition of the past.

Only thus can we understand an otherwise inexplicable detail in the Exodus story itself. In Moses' first encounter with God at the burning bush, he is charged with the mission of bringing the people out to freedom. God adds a strange rider: "I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbour and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for

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clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters." (Ex. 3:21-22)

The point is twice repeated in later chapters (11:2, 12:35). Yet it runs utterly against the grain of biblical narrative. From Genesis (14:23) to the book of Esther (9:10, 15, 16) taking booty, spoil, plunder from enemies is frowned on. In the case of idolaters it is strictly forbidden: their property is *cherem*, taboo, to be destroyed, not possessed (Deut. 7:25; 13:16). When, in the days of Joshua, Achan took spoil from the ruins of Jericho, the whole nation was punished. Besides which, what happened to the gold? The Israelites eventually used it to make the Golden Calf. Why then was it important- commanded-that on this one occasion the Israelites should ask for gifts from the Egyptians?

The Torah itself provides the answer in a later law of Deuteronomy about the release of slaves: "If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. When you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today." (Deut. 15:12-15)

Slavery needs "narrative closure". To acquire freedom, a slave must be able to leave without feelings of antagonism to his former master. He must not depart laden with a sense of grievance or anger, humiliation or slight. Were he to do so, he would have been released but not liberated. Physically free, mentally he would still be a slave. The insistence on parting gifts represents the Bible's psychological insight into the lingering injury of servitude. There must be an act of generosity on the part of the master if the slave is to leave without ill-will. Slavery leaves a scar on the soul that must be healed.

When God told Moses to tell the Israelites to take parting gifts from the Egyptians, it is as if He were saying: Yes, the Egyptians enslaved you, but that is about to become the past. Precisely because I want you to remember the past, it is essential that you do so without hate or desire for revenge. What you are to recall is the pain of being a slave, not the anger you feel towards your slave-masters. There must be an act of symbolic closure. This cannot be justice in the fullest sense of the word: such justice is a chimera, and the

desire for it insatiable and self-destructive. There is no way of restoring the dead to life, or of recovering the lost years of liberty denied. But neither can a people deny the past, deleting it from the database of memory. If they try to do so it will eventually come back-Freud's "return of the repressed"-and claim a terrible price in the form of high-minded, altruistic vengeance. Therefore the former slave-owner must give the former slave a gift, acknowledging him as a free human being who has contributed, albeit without choice, to his welfare. This is not a squaring of accounts. It is, rather, a minimal form of restitution, of what today is called "restorative justice".

Hatred and liberty cannot coexist. A free people does not hate its former enemies; if it does, it is not yet ready for freedom. To create a non-persecuting society out of people who have been persecuted, you have to break the chains of the past; rob memory of its sting; sublimate pain into constructive energy and the determination to build a different future.

Freedom involves the abandonment of hate, because hate is the abdication of freedom. It is the projection of our conflicts onto an external force whom we can then blame, but only at the cost of denying responsibility. That was Moses' message to those who were about to enter the promised land: that a free society can be built only by people who accept the responsibility of freedom, subjects who refuse to see themselves as objects, people who define themselves by love of God, not hatred of the other.

"Do not hate an Egyptian, because you were strangers in his land," said Moses, meaning: To be free, you have to let go of hate. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“If a man has a wayward and rebellious child, who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they warn and flog him, but he still does not obey them; then his parents may take him out to the judges of the city, telling them that "this our son is wayward and rebellious, he does not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard," upon which all the people of the city pelt him with stones and he dies, so that you rout out the evil in your midst, and all of Israel will take heed and be frightened" (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

What defines a "wayward and rebellious" child? Whose fault is it - his, his parents', or society's? This week's Torah portion deals with these questions with amazing courage and sensitivity -providing important directions for parenting.

The words of the Bible are stark, and even jarring to the modern ear: The Talmud (Sanhedrin 68b - 71a) contends that here is a youngster who is growing into a menacing murderous, monster. They limit the time period of this case to three months following the

onset of puberty, they insist that he must have stolen a large amount of meat and wine from his parents which he himself consumed, and conclude that "this youth is punished now for what will inevitably happen later on; it is better that he die (more or less) innocent rather than be put to death after having committed homicide."

Modern commentaries argue that ancient societies gave parents unlimited authority over their children to the extent of putting their rebellious children to death. Our Torah defines waywardness, limits the time span, and insists that judges be involved in the final decision. Nevertheless, the axiom of "punishing now for what will inevitably happen later" runs counter to judicial system, and is even countermanded by a famous midrash.

The Bible tells us that Abraham's wife Sarah saw that Ishmael, the son of Abraham's mistress Hagar, was a bad influence on her son, Isaac; G-d agrees that both the mistress and her son should be banished into the desert. An angel who sees them wandering and suffering, hungry and thirsty, comforts Hagar: "Do not fear; G-d has heard the (crying) voice of the lad from where he is now" (Genesis 21:9-17). On these words, "from where he is now," Rashi cites the midrash which seems to defy the Talmudic position of the wayward child:

"He is judged in accordance with his present actions and not for what he will eventually do. The angels in heaven began to prosecute (Ishmael), saying, 'Master of the Universe, for someone whose children will eventually slay your children (the Israelites) with thirst, You are miraculously providing a well with water (in the desert)?! And (G-d) responded, 'What is he now, righteous or wicked?' They responded, 'Righteous' (in the sense that he was not yet worthy of capital punishment). (G-d) answered, 'I judge him in accordance with his present actions. I judge him from where he is now.'"

If G-d is explaining the foundations of Jewish jurisprudence, how do we explain the previous Talmudic explanation of "punishment now for what will eventually happen"?

Based upon a very literal interpretation of the verses, the Talmud sets many more limitations upon the case of the rebellious child. The parents must have all their limbs, and full ability of hearing and seeing in order to punish the youth (after all, they "take him" with their hands, "to the judges," with their legs, claim "he does not obey our voice," so they cannot be mute, etc.).

I interpret this as the necessary parental hands to embrace as well as to chastise, the necessary parental legs to accompany him to places of learning, inspiration and fun as he was growing up, the necessary parental ears to hear his dreams, fears and frustrations and the necessary parental eyes to see what he's doing, what he's not doing, and whom he is befriendng. Children deserve to receive time and attention from parents - and quantity time is the real definition of

quality time! If parents are not personally and significantly involved in the development of their child, then, according to the Talmud, the child cannot be blamed, or punished, for becoming wayward or rebellious.

Moreover, the parents must be "equal in voice, appearance and stature": they must provide a single message of values and life-style, and they must act in concert and harmony in providing a unified household. Father and mother must be "fit for each other" - otherwise, mixed parental messages and models will also remove culpable guilt from the child. Finally, if either of the parents demurs, expressing unwillingness to bestow such a punishment, the punishment is not executed.

All of this leads to a ringing Talmudic declaration: "The case of the wayward and rebellious child never was and never will be. Expound the verses and you will receive reward." (B.T. Sanhedrin 71a). Apparently, the limitations were so great that they obviated the possibility of ever actually executing the punishment. Nevertheless, parents have much to learn about the seriousness of parenting by taking to heart, mind and action the rabbinic explication of the verses.

I would merely add a few words regarding Ishmael. There were many reasons for his expiation by the Almighty: after all, Abraham and Hagar were not suited for each other and did not provide unified standards of behavior and values. Ishmael himself repents at the end of his life and it is G-d who ultimately forgives him.

If flesh-and-blood parents can prevent execution, then our Divine Parent must certainly have the right to stay an execution. Only G-d knows that sometimes the genetic make-up of the child is of such a nature, or a traumatic event caused such a rupture in his personality, that neither he nor his flesh-and-blood parents can be held to be culpable. But whatever the case may be, it's crucial that parents do everything they can, to the best of their ability, to give their children the basic three things which every child deserves: love, limits and personal involvement. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Send away the mother, and the children take for yourself, in order that it shall be good for you, and you will have lengthy days” (D’varim 22:7). The reward for sending away the mother bird before taking its offspring from the nest is remarkably similar to the reward promised for honoring parents, as we are told to honor our parents “in order that your days will be lengthy and in order for it to be good for you” (D’varim 5:16). The similarity is so great that our sages (Yerushalmi Pe’ah 1:1, quoted by Yalkut Shimoni 298) teach us to be careful with every mitzvah, as the stated

reward for "the easiest of mitzvos" (sending away the mother bird), is the same as that of "the most difficult of mitzvos" (honoring parents). Yet, despite the purposeful comparison of the reward for these two mitzvos, the order of the two rewards switches, with "lengthy days" being mentioned before "it being good for you" when we honor our parents, and "it being good for you" preceding having "lengthy days" by sending away the mother bird. Chasam Sofer, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger ("Imray Shefer") and Netziv discuss why the order is reversed; I would like to add another possibility.

Targum Yonasan is among the commentators who explain that having "lengthy days" refers meriting the world to come, while "goodness" refers to being rewarded in this world. [It should be noted that according to Rabbi Yaakov's opinion, stated in Kidushin 39b and Chulin 142a, both expressions refer to the next world. I think it is fairly obvious that each, from a literal and literary perspective, can refer to both this world and/or the next world, with the context dictating which one is meant, as well as multiple messages being able to be sent simultaneously, with one "layer" able to use each expression to refer to this world while another "layer" has it referring to the next world. Rabbi Yaakov was "forced" to say that both expressions could be referring to the next world because of the tragedy he witnessed (the death of a son who, following his father's instructions, chased away a mother bird to take its offspring). That doesn't mean that they always have to be referring to the next world; it is possible that even according to Rabbi Yaakov some could get rewarded in this world even if not everyone does, or doesn't every time. His opinion that "there is no reward in this world" (or at least Rava's explanation of his opinion) could mean "there is no guaranteed reward in this world," not that there never is reward in this world. The advantage of understanding Rabbi Yaakov this way is not having to find a way to explain every reference to reward in this world, and not having to say that he argues with every statement that discusses reward in this world. Either way, the approach I am about to suggest follows the mainstream thought said everyday (as part of the "learning" we do immediately after making the blessings on Torah study, which is the first Mishnah of Pe'ah) that honoring parents is among the mitzvos that pays dividends in this world while the main reward awaits us in the world to come.] If "goodness" refers to the reward we get in this world and "lengthy days" refers to the reward we will receive in the next world, explaining the reverse order would entail figuring out why the reward in the next world is mentioned first by honoring parents and why the reward in this world is mentioned first by chasing away the mother bird.

Although the father is mentioned before the mother when it comes to honoring them, the mother is mentioned before the father when it comes to fearing them (Vayikra 19:3). The Talmud (K'risus 28a), Mechilta (introduction to Parashas Bo), Sifra (Vayikra, Dibura

d'Chatas 10:10 and K'do shim 1:9), B'raishis Rabbah (1:15) and Vayikra Rabbah (36:1) and say that the order was switched in order to teach us that the mother and father are equals; if we were to apply that to our verses, the implication would be that, on some level, reward received in this world can be the equivalent of (or substituted for) reward received in the next world. However, all the examples in that Midrash are of people who were considered equals; I don't know that the same "rule" applies to concepts too, and not just to people. The most common explanation (see Yalkut Shimoni 297) for the change in the way parents are mentioned is based on the tendency for the child to fear the father more than the mother (presumably because the father is a stricter disciplinarian) and to give more honor to the mother than the father (presumably because she is more involved in taking care of the children). In order to combat this, the Torah purposely put the mother first regarding the obligation to fear parents and the father first regarding the obligation to honor them.

If we were to apply this to our verses, it would seem that our inclination would be to honor our parents because of the benefit we receive in this world, so the Torah purposely mentioned the reward we will receive in the next world first. Even though the "principal" remains in our "account" for the next world, since taking care of our parents is something obviously beneficial for society, an idea not limited to those who keep the Torah or the nation it was given to (as evidenced by the case of Dama ben N'sina, who wouldn't wake his father despite the financial windfall doing so would have brought), and because setting an example for our children so that they in turn will take care of us provides a powerful incentive to take care of our parents (see Aruch HaShulchan Y"D 250:2-3), the Torah mentioned "lengthy days," which refers to the next world, first; we shouldn't fulfill the mitzvah of honoring our parents primarily because of the benefits we will receive in this world. It is true that we will get rewarded in this world as well (the "good" that is also promised), but we should do it because it is a mitzvah and therefore has loftier benefits.

As far as chasing away the mother bird, it would seem that our initial inclination couldn't be to chase it away for any inherent benefits. After all, if we were interested in getting the most out of this world, we would take the mother and her children rather than just the children. We might have thought that chasing the mother away is only better for us in the next world, where we will get rewarded for fulfilling the mitzvah, something well worth sacrificing a little more of this world for. By mentioning that G-d will be good to us in this world too, and doing so before mentioning the reward that we will receive in the next world, the Torah is teaching us that even when it seems that we are sacrificing something in this world in order to do a

mitzvah, in the long run it will be better for us even in the world. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The idea of the necessity of a fence on one's roof and exposed staircases and high landings is a very logical and realistic one. The Torah itself advances this simple reasoning by stating that otherwise one may fall from that exposed area with painful if not tragic consequences. However halacha and practicality indicate that not everyone is obligated in this mitzvah and that there are physical instances where such a fence is impossible to construct or is even unnecessary.

Nevertheless, the moral imperative that drives the mitzvah seems to be omnipresent and always operative. A house, a home, a family always needs to be protected, both physically and morally. Just as negligence in failing to erect a fence around one's exposed roof is a cause for monetary and even criminal liability, so too negligence in failing to construct the moral fence to protect our home and family from the ravages of a rather depraved society is seen to be a serious transgression.

In raising children, as well as in governing society generally, there can be no doubt that fences have to be fashioned and protected. The rub always is as to how many fences and where they are to be placed and how high the actual fence should be. When it comes to the issue of the physical fences around our rooftops, halacha answers all of these questions for us. But when the issue is regarding the moral fence that we must construct for our family and ourselves, there we find minimal guidance.

Just as every physical fence must be constructed to conform to the dimensions of the roof it protects—a circular fence will not completely protect a rectangular roof—so too there is no one-size-fits-all moral fence that is appropriate for every home and family. Tragically, in today's Jewish world, there are many homes that have no moral fence at all protecting the house and family.

Everyone is allowed, if not even encouraged, to live a life without limits, restraints or moral discipline. And at the other end of the spectrum of Jewish society there are homes where the fence has been constructed too high and is too constrictive as to impede and prevent healthy individual development and constructive discovery and innovation. It is therefore obvious that knowing where, when and how to create this moral fence that will safeguard the Jewish home is the main challenge of parenting and family dynamics.

The Torah in this week's parsha speaks of ben sorer u'moreh—a rebellious, undisciplined youth—who will grow to be a very destructive force in society. Such a child in most cases represents the failure in the family in erecting and enforcing the proper moral fence in the

house. That negligence of safeguarding the home spiritually, emotionally and morally will invariably come back to haunt that family and all society generally.

There are no magical ways to build these necessary fences. Every family and home is different and unique and there is only the common necessity for all families to erect the proper and fitting fences within their home and family. Patience, wisdom, restraint and prayer are key ingredients in accomplishing this vital task. © 2012 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The love between God and His people is often compared to the marital relationship. So the prophet Hoshea describes God, declaring: "And I will betroth you to Me forever." (Hoshea 2:21) The Song of Songs is similarly viewed as an allegory for the relationship between God and Am Yisrael (the Jewish people).

Indeed, throughout the year this imagery prevails. For example, every Friday evening we recite the Lekha Dodi-Come my Beloved (referring to God), let us greet the Sabbath bride.

And the holidays of the Jewish year evoke the picture of God's love for us. On Passover we recall walking through the sea with the help of God, much like bride and groom walking to the huppa (wedding canopy). On Shavuot (the festival commemorating receiving the torah), we reenact our hearing the Aseret Ha'Dibrot (Ten Declarations) which can be viewed as the ketubah, the marital contract between God and His people. On Sukkot (the feast of booths) we eat and some try to live in a sukkah, beneath the skhakh (Sukkah roof), which can be seen as a kind of bridal canopy.

But, of course, this comparison has its limits. This week's parsha records the right of husband and wife to divorce. And if following the divorce the wife marries another, she may never remarry her first husband. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) Taking the analogy to its fullest, does this mean that we, the Jewish people, can permanently separate from God? Doesn't it mean that if we separate from God, and, if you will, "wed" to another albeit false god, that we can never return to God Himself.

It is here during the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that a new picture of love between God and His people emerges. It is the idea that we are God's children and God is a parent figure. Thus, we recite Avinu Malkeinu - referring to God as our Father. So, too, do we speak of God as Hashem Hashem Keil rahum (the Lord is a God of mercy). The word rahum comes from the word rehem which means womb,

conveying the idea of a mother's infinite and endless love for her young.

The difference is obvious. A husband and wife relationship can be terminated. But no matter what happens in life a parent always remains a parent. Similarly, God's love for us is limitless. Even if we separate from Him, even if we "marry another," we can always return- and God will always embrace us.

One last thought. Even the parental relationship has its limits since no one lives forever. God is however, the Eternal Parent. Hence during these days we recite Psalm twenty-seven, in which we proclaim, "Even if my father and mother have left me, God will gather me in." (Psalms 27:10)

Our relationship to God parallels the deep love between husband and wife. It intersects with a parent's love for a child. In fact, it transcends all. It is as deep and deeper than a spousal encounter, and it is beyond the endlessness of a parent's love for a child-it is eternal. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week's parsha, Ki Saitzay, is replete with seventy four different mitzvos. It begins: "Ki saitzay lamilchama ol oyvecha {When you go out to war against your enemies} un'sano Hashem Elokecha b'yadecha {and Hashem Elokecha will deliver them to your hand} [21:10]."

The Ohr HaChaim writes that in addition to the laws stated in regard to an actual, physical battle, this possuk (verse) is also alluding to the spiritual struggle of man. Every moment of our life is a part of the epic saga-our battle to stay focused on why we are here. The Mishna in Avos [4:1] teaches: Who is truly strong? One who conquers his yetzer {personal inclination}. Controlling oneself through maintaining that focus is the only true show of strength.

How can one hope to succeed in this battle? "Un'sano Hashem Elokecha b'yadecha {and Hashem Elokecha will deliver them to your hand}." The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that the "Anochi Hashem Elokecha... {I am Hashem your G-d...}"- the opening words of the Ten Commandments-the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai and our adherence to that Torah-is the elixir for the yetzer. That 'Hashem Elokecha' will give us the necessary strength in order that our 'enemies' will be delivered into our hands. Perhaps, that is a reason why our parsha contains so many mitzvos. If it begins with going out to battle, it must arm us with the necessary weaponry.

This is demonstrated in the following Medrash Rabbah [Ki Saitzay, parsha 6;3]. The possuk [Mishlei 1:9] states: "Ki l'vios chein heim l'roshecha {They (the mitzvos) are accompaniments of grace for your head}."

Rabi Pinchas bar Chama said: Wherever a person goes, the mitzvos accompany him. When you build a new house... a protective gate must be erected on the roof and porches. When you put up a door... a mezuzah must be affixed to the doorpost. When you wear garments... there can be no wool-linen mixtures. When you have your hair cut... do not round off the corners (payos) of your head. If you have a field, when you plow... don't have two different species of animals pulling the plow. When you plant... don't plant kil'ayim {forbidden mixtures}. When you harvest... don't return for forgotten bundles-leave them for the poor. The mitzvos accompany us throughout all of the twists and turns of life, enabling us to maintain that ever-important focus.

The Mishna [Avos 5:1] teaches that the world was created through ten utterances. Each utterance brought us one step further from that initial state of pure G-dliness. We've explained that this was necessary in order to 'distance' this world from Hashem enough to enable us to have free-will. After ten utterances, the world was in a state that didn't show Hashem too clearly, thereby allowing one to sin, yet, it didn't cloak Hashem too thickly, thereby allowing us the choice to connect to Him.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that every time we physically change this world through an act that we perform, we distance ourselves and the world a little bit more from that initial state of pure G-dliness. We run the risk of forgetting our purpose in life, the risk of overinvolvement in this world of illusion and falsehood. Therefore, Hashem, in His compassion, gave us a mitzva at each of these junctures enabling us to retain our focus.

"Ki l'vios chein heim l'roshecha {They (the mitzvos) are accompaniments of grace for your head}." In addition to meaning accompaniments, the word 'l'vios' also means connection. The mitzvos enable each and every one of us to maintain our connection. Our connection to what? "L'roshecha"... To our 'head'. To our life. To our Source. To Hashem Elokecha.

"In the Footsteps of the Maggid" tells of Rav Shammai, the head of the Chevra Kadisha {Burial Society}. Whereas, outside of Eretz Yisroel, the Chevra Kadisha is primarily busy with the taharah {purification} process performed before burial, here in Eretz Yisroel, their duties also include gathering the remains of terror and battle victims and giving them a proper and dignified burial.

The story took place during the Yom Kippur war, when we were caught by surprise and attacked by Arabs on all fronts. For days after Yom Kippur and during Sukkos, Rav Shammai and his assistants would travel throughout the Sinai desert and southward toward Suez where they caringly tended to the bodies of the fallen.

On Sukkos, he had with him in his jeep his siddur {prayer book}, his tallis {prayer shawl}, his T'hilim

{Psalms}, his lulav and his esrog. At every base, soldiers of all backgrounds would beg him to allow them to use these. He would stay as long as he could, sometimes delaying his scheduled departure for hours. Eventually, however, he had to tell the disappointed young men still in line that he needed to move on. He had been summoned elsewhere.

On the last day of Sukkos, Rav Shammai and his assistants were near the Suez. As he approached a newly constructed army base in the wide open desert, it occurred to him that, since he had already prayed with his lulav and esrog on that final day of Sukkos, he could leave them in the army base if he'd be summoned elsewhere.

Shortly after Rav Shammai arrived, a long line of soldiers began to form, awaiting their turn to use his lulav and esrog. As a crowd began to assemble, a young non-religious soldier, driving an ammunition truck, was making his way southward. Noticing a large crowd, he got out of his truck and made his way on foot to where the soldiers had assembled.

He came closer and asked what the commotion was all about. Another soldier explained to him that Rav Shammai had come and the soldiers were all waiting for an opportunity to use his lulav and esrog. The driver didn't seem too interested in waiting around, but when one of the soldiers mentioned that it was the last day to perform the mitzva, he decided to wait in line.

His turn arrived after a short period of time. Just as he was gingerly holding the lulav and esrog, a bomb tore into his truck. It exploded and set off multiple explosions of the ammunition on board. The blasts were so powerful that a crater was formed in the ground where the truck had been parked. Not even a shard of metal could be found from the demolished vehicle.

Three months later, Rav Shammai read a short notice in the army newspaper. This driver's wife had given birth to a girl. The announcement included a statement by the new father. "I believe with every fiber of my being that I am alive today and I merited to see my new daughter only because of the mitzva I was doing at the time that my truck was bombed."

In thanks to Hashem he named his daughter Lulava.

The mitzvos enable each and every one of us to maintain our connection. Our connection to what? "L'roshecha"... To our 'head'. To our life. To our Source. To Hashem Elokecha. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Soup Opera

Love. It is a word that is supposed to explain the feelings that bind two individuals, parent and child, man and wife, G-d and His creations. The love between a man and his wife is the constant symbol used in Shlomo HaMelech's Shir Hashirim (Song of

Songs) to declare the unshakable love G-d has for His nation.

But divorce is also a fact of life and in this parsha the Torah, albeit very succinctly, discusses the method of divorce. It also tells us why marriages end. "It will be if she does not find favor in his eyes for he found in her an ervas davar then he may write a divorce..." (Deuteronomy 24:1). The Mishna in Tractate Gittin discusses the meaning of ervas davar in different ways. Bais Shammai, who is known for a strict opinion in most matters says that divorce should only occur over a matter of immorality. Bais Hillel says, that divorce is permitted "even if she burns his soup." And Rabbi Akiva, whose devotion and gratitude to his wife is legendary, says that "even if he finds a nicer woman, (he may divorce)."

It is most difficult to understand the Mishna. It seems to go against the grain of every teaching. How do Bais Hillel, those who spoke of loving peace and pursuing peace say that one may get divorce over burned soup? Rabbi Akiva once pointed to his wife in front of 24,000 students and announced, "Whatever I have and whatever you have, it is all due to her." How could he say that one could get divorced if he found a more lovely woman? It seems preposterous!

My father, Rabbi Binyomin Kamenetzky, Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore, once told me a wonderful story. Reb Dovid was happily married to his dear and loving wife, Chayka, for nearly half a century. Her sudden death cast him into a terrible depression for which there was almost no cure. His son and daughter-in-law, Roizy, graciously invited him to stay at their home and share everything with them. Reb Dovid's daughter-in-law, cooked every meal for him but Reb Dovid was never pleased. No matter how deliciously prepared the meals were, he would sigh and mutter to himself, loud enough for his son to hear, "this was not the way Momma made the soup."

Roizy poured through her mother-in-law's old recipe books and tried to re-create the delicious taste for which her father-in-law longed. But Reb Dovid was still not pleased.

One day, while the soup was on the fire, Reb Dovid's grandchild fell outside. In her haste to get to the child, Roizy almost dropped in the entire pepper shaker. In addition, by the time the child was washed and bandaged, the soup was totally burned!

There was nothing for Reb Dovid's daughter to do but serve the severely spiced, burnt soup.

She stood in agony as her elderly father-in-law brought the soup to his lips. This time he would probably more than mumble a complaint. But it was not to be. A wide smile broke across Reb Dovid's face. "Delicious my dear daughter," said Reb Dovid with a tear in his eye. "Absolutely delicious! This is exactly how Momma made the soup!"

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, in his sefer Emes L'Yaakov explains the Mishna in an

amazing fashion: it is giving us a sign, when a marriage is disrepair. If a man tastes burnt soup that his loving wife cooked and he is repulsed, then he is missing the love that the Torah requires. Rabbi Akiva, who was separated from his wife for 24 years while he studied Torah, declared that if a man finds a woman whom he thinks is better, then his marriage needs scrutiny! Because a person must think that there is nothing tastier than what his wife prepared, and that there is no one more beautiful than the woman he married.

Reb Aryeh Levin, the Tzadik of Jerusalem, once entered a doctor's office with his wife and spoke on behalf of both of them. "Her leg hurts us," he said.

The Mishna is not defining how to get divorced. That is easy. It is teaching us an attitude that defines love. Because love is a lot more than not having to say I'm sorry. It's always believing that the soup is delicious. Even if it's burnt. © 1998 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

What's Bothering Rashi?

Among the many laws we find in this week's parsha are the laws of returning lost articles to their owner. It should be noted here that the civil laws of other countries rarely if ever include laws that require the citizen to help his fellow man. Their laws revolve around not harming others. Our laws add the positive dimension of helping our fellow man. Let us see how righteous and wise laws are derived from an implied message.

Regarding recovering and returning a lost article we have the following verse: "And if your brother is not near to you and you don't know who he is, then you must take it into your house and it should remain with you until your brother seeks it, then you shall return it to him." (Deuteronomy 22:2)

"And you shall return it to him"-RASHI: "So that there is a [real] returning (restoration). The [animal] should not eat in your house the worth of its own value. And you would then claim this [from the owner]. From here [the Sages] derived the principle: Anything that works and requires food (like an ox) should work and eat. Whatever does not work but requires food (like a sheep) should be sold (and that money returned to the owner)."

Rashi is telling us to understand the spirit, and not just the words, of the law. When a person loses something and someone finds it and returns it to him, he has done him a great service. The man's loss was retrieved. However, if a man finds a sheep and keeps it until its owner seeks it out, this could take weeks, maybe months, before its owner claims it. During all that time the finder must feed the sheep and keep it healthy, otherwise what kind of chesed is it to return an emaciated, sickly sheep to its owner? But feeding the animal costs money. Should the finder pay for this out

of his own pocket? No, Torah law does not require this of a person. To demand such expenditures from a person would probably discourage most people from "getting involved," and they would pass by the lost article, which they saw on the way. So the Sages gave the following advice. If the animal can do work, like an ox, put it to work, until the owner comes; that would more than cover its eating expenses. But if the animal is one that cannot do work, like a sheep, then in order to "return it" to its owner, you had best sell the sheep (the money received from the sale doesn't cost anything to hold), and give that money to the owner when he comes.

This is brilliant advice. This gets at the spirit of the law, which is to help a person retrieve his loss, without causing him other losses in the process.

An example of how serious the Sages took the mitzvah of returning the value of the lost article, and not just the article itself, is the following incident (recorded in the Talmud, Taanis 25a):

"It happened that someone passed the home of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dosa, and left there roosters. His wife found them and Rabbi Chanina said to her 'Don't eat those eggs.' The eggs increased and they sold them and with the money they bought goats. Later the man who had forgotten his roosters passed by Rabbi Chanina's home and said to his friend, 'It is here that I forgot my roosters.' Rabbi Chanina overheard this and said to him 'Do you have identification that the rosters are yours?' He gave him a sign and Rabbi Chanina 'returned' to him 'his' goats!"

We see that the Sages' dedication to living by the spirit of the Torah is no less than their wisdom in interpreting it. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.com

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“When you will go out to war against your enemies and you will see a beautiful woman among the captives" (21:10)

This parashah teaches us the Torah's attitude toward beauty, says R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l. "When you will go out to war against your enemies and you will see a beautiful woman among the captives"--when you fight your enemies--Canaanites, Persians, Greeks, Romans, or Germans--you will undoubtedly see beautiful aspects of their cultures. Therefore, you should know: You are permitted to bring home everything beautiful that you see, but don't be fooled by external beauty. This is symbolized by the Torah's demand that the captive woman change out of her foreign clothes. The Torah demands a waiting period after the captive woman is brought into the home--i.e., examine this newfound culture very carefully. Is it really something that you want in your home? (Yemei Zikaron p.125) © 2003 S. Katz and Project Genesis, Inc.