

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV LERNER

Two Miracles: Faith and Hope

[This dvar torah was delivered on Parshas Shoftim in 2014, at KINS in West Rogers Park - Editor]

Pirkei Avot (5:5) plainly states that the Temple exhibited ten consistent miracles, one of which as follows: עומדים צפופים ומשתחוים רווחים - "They stood congested but bowed with ease."¹

Jerusalem somehow gave way to immense pilgrimage crowds—despite the crush of dense streets and competing feet, rows of prodding elbows and echoed sighs of irritation, when kneeling down each face had space, each leg had room, each soul prostrated in relief. This miracle is something of which we'll read in the coming weeks in connection with the prostrations of the עשרת ימי תשובה. Beyond the convenience and spatial necessity, what can we make of such a miracle?

To unpack its spiritual import we first plunge into the imagination of a Nobel laureate, a fellow Chicagoan, Saul Bellow. In his novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet* we meet Arthur Sammler, a one eyed holocaust survivor, who lives grumpily on Manhattan's West Side in a time before Trump Towers and Starbucks. He lives in constant pain, immersed in the smells of a polluted and grimy city; he faces daily robbery and continual discomfort; Mr Sammler lives in an age of ideological bankruptcy and moral decay. Bellow describes, early in the book, a ride on one of the New York city buses:

Mr. Sammler was intensely hot and sweaty; hanging on his strap, sealed in by bodies, receiving their weight and laying his own on them as the fat tires took the giant curve at 72nd street with a growl of flabby power.

In a scene with which some of us may empathize, Bellow superbly captures the squeeze of city life, the nausea of New York's summer humidity, and the way in which the self fades into a colossal specter of inseparable bodies. Life's commotion can cramp our freedoms, its bustle can congest our airways—the pace and bulk of the human cluster can cloud the clear vistas of our best intentions—it can

leave us 'עומדים צפופים'—crowded, crushed, and confused; gasping for air, desperate for room.

And according to our sages, it is the act of surrender that miraculously creates a clearing. This miracle reveals far more than extraordinary topography, it touches on the deep truth that faith—as expressed in a bow—affords a calm often absent in ordinary life; 'משתחוים רווחים'—many commentaries described the four cubits square each person would have to themselves. Yielding to G-d's supremacy does not bind or constrain, it creates space to think, to aspire, to breathe and to hope—it provides what Virginia Woolf touted as central to human flourishing, 'room of one's own.'

This is the miracle of the Temple—the structural metaphor for spiritual surrender—a place divested of human possession; it cultivated conditions which do not cramp our lives but expands them. Based on a verse in קהלת, one Midrash teaches as follows:

"כָּל-הַנְּחָלִים הַלְכִים אֶל-הַיָּם, וְהַיָּם אֵינָנוּ מְלֵא (א: ז)
כל ישראל אינם מתכנסין אלא לירושלים...

ירושלים אינה מתמלאת לעולם (קה"ר א:ח)

As we mirror the meandering of rivers and rapids, Jerusalem swells to comprise every soul that flows, every mind that wanders, ever heart that beats to the pace of the divine presence. We all have our own tributaries—we weave our own spiritual paths, but our final repository and collective destination is Jerusalem—the city of peace that, when we bow, frees us all.

But this is not all—the Mishna in Pirkei Avot continues and lists what appears to be a conflicting miracle.

"לא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום שאלין בירושלים."

We've just learnt that עומדים צפופים—they were cramped together—so how can our sages now claim that there was plenty of space?

Rav Baruch Epstein—the son of the Arukh HaShulchan—was a Lithuanian Rabbi of the late 19th Century. In his commentary to Pirkei Avot—Baruch



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¹ .רגלים 3 regarding the יומא כא.

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She'amar—he suggests what may seem a humorous interpretation. According to him, our sages do not claim there was plenty of space—there was צר, discomfort; what is important to this formulation is not Divine intervention but an altogether human feat. This miracle was that despite standing צפופים no one said that there was no room—the miracle was that Jews didn't complain.

This may sound sarcastic, but there is something profound at play. Two weeks ago we read 's promise in the הפטרה that, despite calamity, someday things will improve—

"עוד יאמרו באזניך בני שכליך צר לי המקום(מט:כ)

Against the backdrop of destruction Isaiah hails an age of Jewish vibrancy where Israel's cities will bulge from the mass of pilgrims. Of course aware of this prophetic passage, our sages claim that despite the force of Isaiah's predictive capacity—no Jew ever complained about lack of space in Jerusalem—there wasn't room, it did bulge and swell, but no one whined. This second miracle, where human impulse is repressed and foretold fault-finding is stifled, completes the picture of spiritual freedom.

Complaining can give us voice, position—it allows us to report our mistreatment and neglect. And of course positive protest can change the world, but gloom invades the room to improve, dejection and empty dissent, crowds out the very possibility of advance. Complaint will crush our spirits and leave us, like Mr. Sammler, hot and sweaty, on a bus to nowhere.

Three weeks ago we expressed our pain and complaint—on Tisha B'Av we protested against the catastrophes of Jewish history. We performed a public hunger strike and refused comfort, we sat on the floor and relived dreadful memories. We moaned and we groaned—we echoed 's words—איכה!—How could it be? We have much to lament, a history so stained with blood and tears, but our sages instituted the שבועה דנהמתא — the seven weeks of consolation. We have read

”נחמו נחמו עמי”, וישם מדברה כעדן”, ורב שלום בניך”,
and this morning we continue

“אנכי אנכי הוא מנחמכם”—”עורי עורי...התנערי מעפר קומי”.

We have still a way to go, not yet half way there—but we must alter our poise, persist in acquiescence, build equanimity. With the now daily blasts of the shofar—the sound that freed slaves—we liberate a little of our soul.

It is these two things—the ability to bow and repress pessimism, in other words, faith and hope—that will set us free. If we are to strive we must have faith, we must surrender to our responsibilities—some have a practice to *daven* bowed throughout the coming weeks to physically embody that surrender. And if we are to strive we must equally have hope; the daily news can depress, but there is much we can be grateful for and look forward to.

We must chase out the demons of rusted dreams, the pessimism that rises from past misdeeds; *Ellul* has begun, and it is time to attune ourselves, to cement our commitments, to repress cynicism and self-pride; it is time to surrender to our better angels.

Over the coming weeks let us come together, pray together, and hope together—and, please G-d, next year we shall all be together in the city that never ends—ירושלים. © 2014 Rabbi D. Lerner

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is by any standards a strange, almost incomprehensible law. Here it is in the form it appears in this week's parsha: Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land He is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under the heaven. Do not forget. (Deut. 25:17-19)

The Israelites had two enemies in the days of Moses: the Egyptians and the Amalekites. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They turned them into a forced labour colony. They oppressed them. Pharaoh commanded them to drown every male Israelite child. It was attempted genocide. Yet about them, Moses commands: Do not despise an Egyptian, because you were strangers in his land. (Deut. 23:8)

The Amalekites did no more than attack the Israelites once², an attack that they successfully repelled (Ex. 17:13). Yet Moses commands, “Remember.” “Do not forget.” “Blot out the name.” In Exodus the Torah says that “God shall be at war with Amalek for all generations” (Ex. 17:16). Why the

² Of course, there were subsequent attacks by Amalek (including, according to tradition, in Bamidbar 21:1) but the decree to obliterate Amalek was issued after their first attack.

difference? Why did Moses tell the Israelites, in effect, to forgive the Egyptians but not the Amalekites?

The answer is to be found as a corollary of teaching in the Mishna, Avot (5:19): Whenever love depends on a cause and the cause passes away, then the love passes away too. But if love does not depend on a cause then the love will never pass away. What is an example of the love which depended upon a cause? That of Amnon for Tamar. And what is an example of the love which did not depend on a cause? That of David and Jonathan.

When love is conditional, it lasts as long as the condition lasts but no longer. Amnon loved, or rather lusted, for Tamar because she was forbidden to him. She was his half-sister. Once he had had his way with her, "Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her." (2 Sam. 13:15). But when love is unconditional and irrational, it never ceases. In the words of Dylan Thomas: "Though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have no dominion."

The same applies to hate. When hate is rational, based on some fear or disapproval that – justified or not – has some logic to it, then it can be reasoned with and brought to an end. But unconditional, irrational hatred cannot be reasoned with. There is nothing one can do to address it and end it. It persists.

That was the difference between the Amalekites and the Egyptians. The Egyptians' hatred and fear of the Israelites was not irrational. Pharaoh said to his people: 'The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us. We must deal wisely with them. Otherwise, they may increase so much, that if there is war, they will join our enemies and fight against us, driving [us] from the land.' (Ex. 1:9-10)

The Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were numerous. They constituted a potential threat to the native population. Historians tell us that this was not groundless. Egypt had already suffered from one invasion of outsiders, the Hyksos, an Asiatic people with Canaanite names and beliefs, who took over the Nile Delta during the Second Intermediate Period of the Egypt of the pharaohs. Eventually they were expelled from Egypt and all traces of their occupation were erased. But the memory persisted. It was not irrational for the Egyptians to fear that the Hebrews were another such population. They feared the Israelites because they were strong.

(Note that there is a difference between "rational" and "justified". The Egyptians' fear was in this case certainly unjustified. The Israelites did not want to take over Egypt. To the contrary, they would have preferred to leave. Not every rational emotion is justified. It is not irrational to feel fear of flying after the report of a major air disaster, despite the fact that statistically it is more dangerous to drive a car than to

be a passenger in a plane. The point is simply that rational but unjustified emotion can, in principle, be cured through reasoning.)

Precisely the opposite was true of the Amalekites. They attacked the Israelites when they were "weary and weak". They focused their assault on those who were "lagging behind." Those who are weak and lagging behind pose no danger. This was irrational, groundless hate.

With rational hate it is possible to reason. Besides, there was no reason for the Egyptians to fear the Israelites any more. They had left. They were no longer a threat. But with irrational hate it is impossible to reason. It has no cause, no logic. Therefore it may never go away. Irrational hate is as durable and persistent as irrational love. The hatred symbolised by Amalek lasts "for all generations." All one can do is to remember and not forget, to be constantly vigilant, and to fight it whenever and wherever it appears.

There is such a thing as rational xenophobia: fear and hate of the foreigner, the stranger, the one not like us. In the hunter-gatherer stage of humanity, it was vital to distinguish between members of your tribe and those of another tribe. There was competition for food and territory. It was not an age of liberalism and tolerance. The other tribe was likely to kill you or oust you, given the chance.

The ancient Greeks were xenophobic, regarding all non-Greeks as barbarians. So still are many native populations. Even people as tolerant as the British and Americans were historically distrustful of immigrants, be they Jews, Irish, Italian or Puerto Rican - and for some this remains the case today. What happens, though, is that within two or three generations the newcomers acculturate and integrate. They are seen as contributing to the national economy and adding richness and variety to its culture. When an emotion like fear of immigrants is rational but unjustified, eventually it declines and disappears.

Antisemitism is different from xenophobia. It is the paradigm case of irrational hatred. In the Middle Ages Jews were accused of poisoning wells, spreading the plague, and in one of the most absurd claims ever – the Blood Libel – they were suspected of killing Christian children to use their blood to make matzot for Pesach. This was self-evidently impossible, but that did not stop people believing it.

The European Enlightenment, with its worship of science and reason, was expected to end all such hatred. Instead it gave rise to a new version of it, racial antisemitism. In the nineteenth century Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor; because they were capitalists and because they were communists; because they were exclusive and kept to themselves and because they infiltrated everywhere; because they were believers in an ancient, superstitious faith and because they were rootless

cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

Antisemitism was the supreme irrationality of the age of reason.

It gave rise to a new myth, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a literary forgery produced by members of the Czarist Russia secret police toward the end of the nineteenth century. It held that Jews had power over the whole of Europe – this at the time of the Russian pogroms of 1881 and the antisemitic May Laws of 1882, which sent some three million Jews, powerless and impoverished, into flight from Russia to the West.

The situation in which Jews found themselves at the end of what was supposed to be the century of Enlightenment and emancipation was stated eloquently by Theodor Herzl, in 1897: We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country . . . If we were left in peace . . . But I think we shall not be left in peace.

This was deeply shocking to Herzl. No less shocking has been the return of antisemitism in parts of the world today, particularly the Middle East and even Europe, within living memory of the Holocaust. Yet the Torah intimates why. Irrational hate does not die.

Not all hostility to Jews, or to Israel as a Jewish state, is irrational, and where it is not, it can be reasoned with. But some of it is irrational. Some of it, even today, is a repeat of the myths of the past, from the Blood Libel to the Protocols. All we can do is remember and not forget, confront it and defend ourselves against it.

Amalek does not die. But neither does the Jewish people. Attacked so many times over the centuries, it still lives, giving testimony to the victory of the God of love over the myths and madness of hate. *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Do not withhold the wages due to your hired hand...that very day shall you give him his payment" [Deut. 24:14–15]. This Shabbat, the Eleventh of Elul, marks 47 years to the day of one of the most transformative moments in my life, in the most

unlikely of places and circumstances. It was on this date in September 1970 that I was in the synagogue of Riga, Latvia, in the former Soviet Union, carrying out a mission personally requested of me by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, to establish four underground yeshivas.

These yeshivas were to be established under the radar of a regime that had made every aspect of Jewish life forbidden. Owning a Hebrew primer was punishable by exile to Siberia. Thank God, I had succeeded in Moscow and Leningrad, but when I left my hotel in Riga that Shabbat morning I noticed that I was being followed by four very tall and burly individuals who barely gave me breathing space.

These KGB agents literally surrounded me in the sanctuary where I was seated in splendid isolation in the extreme corner of the right side. The other twenty-eight congregants, each clearly over the age of sixty-five, were sitting together on the extreme left side of a large sanctuary built for six-hundred.

The cantor and choir chanted the service as if they were performing before thousands. The gabbai, a short man with white, wispy hair, whispered to me in Yiddish, "We are thirsty for Torah. We have a Kiddush after the service downstairs. We expect you to teach us. Please come down after the davening – but without your friends."

The interminable service ended at exactly Noon. The four goons miraculously disappeared, and I went down into a pitch black room where fifteen people were seated around a table. The table was set with many bottles of clear white liquid and slices of honey cake. A chair of honor was set for me with a large Kiddush cup.

The gabbai repeated, "We are thirsty for Torah," as he poured me a full glass of liquid, which he told me was vodka. I chanted the Kiddush, gave a D'var Torah, they sang a niggun, they did a dance, and then poured me another vodka. Another D'var Torah, a niggun, a dance, and again more vodka – nine times!

At that point, I asked the Torah reader from the synagogue, Yisrael Friedman, a Chabadnik, to give a D'var Torah, and his words literally changed my life.

He related that Elisha ben Avuya was a great rabbi of the Mishna who became a heretic upon witnessing the tragedy of a boy who had climbed a tree to bring down a pigeon for his father after sending away the mother bird. In doing so, the child had performed two commandments that promise the reward of long life, yet he had fallen from the tree and died. "There is no judge and no judgment!" was Rabbi Elisha's defiant reaction [Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 39b].

Elisha's grandson, Rabbi Yaakov, noted that had his grandfather understood a major axiom of Jewish thought he would never have left the Jewish fold: "There is no reward for the commandments in this world" [ibid.].

Yisrael looked out at the basement assemblage with blazing eyes and then looked Heavenward. "But God, that's not fair! How can You expect Your Jewish servants to pay the day laborer on that very day when you withhold our reward for the commandments till after our lifetime, in the world to come?!"

He answered his own question: The Talmud [Bava Metzia] differentiates between a day laborer and a contractor. Yes, a day laborer must be paid at the end of the day, but a contractor is to be paid only at the end of the project. We, vis-à-vis God, are not day laborers; we are contractors. Each of us, given his/her unique gift and the time and place in which he/she lives, must do his share in helping to complete the world with the Kingship of God.

Whether we have fulfilled most of our mission or just a little of it can only be determined at the end of our lifetimes. For us contractors, there is no reward for commandments in this world.

I was moved to tears. After witnessing firsthand the persecution of Soviet Jewry, I was overwhelmed by thinking of God's great gift of a newborn State of Israel, and felt deeply in my heart that I could not possibly have been born in a free country in these most momentous times in order to fulfill my mission in New York.

And so in the basement of Riga I made an oath: I will bring my family to the State of Israel and hopefully there realize my true calling. And when I get to Israel I will make Kiddush on vodka every Shabbat day in memory of this experience. I am thankful to God to report that I indeed arrived with my family in Israel, and to this day, 47 years later, I still make the Shabbat day Kiddush using vodka, forever reminding me of that moment, and the lesson I learned from a refusenik in Riga. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah deals with temptation in this week's reading. Temptation is a constant factor in human existence. Usually we do not carry out the acts that tempt us simply because of lack of opportunity and not necessarily because of our piety. People are watching, the police are in the vicinity, the circumstances currently conspire against us being successful in this tempting but illicit venture. However there are times when these outside inhibitions are not present to deter one from succumbing to the temptation presented.

At such times the Torah seems to imply that it will be very difficult to deny the temptation completely. During war and battle, the soldiers' inhibitions are released. The Torah therefore proposes to channel the fulfillment of this temptation rather than attempt to deny it completely. Because of this unusual set of circumstances, occasioned by war and its attendant violence and human callousness, the temptation of a

defenseless attractive woman captive will be so overriding that the Torah restricted it but did not deny it completely.

There is too much opportunity present here. The Torah is well aware of the frailties and weaknesses of human behavior. It never demands the impossible from God's creatures. But it does impose a set of rules and a sense of discipline regarding all area of life's activities. The set of circumstances posed by the Torah at the onset of this week's reading is a paradigm example of the Torah's attitude and instructions in all other like matters.

Yet in spite of all of the above, the Torah warns the Jewish soldier that there are unpleasant results and sad consequences to one's succumbing to temptation even in "permissible" circumstances. No stable and lasting family life can be built upon such wanton initial behavior. Even acts that cannot be initially categorized as being forbidden or illegal can engender dire results later for the person who perpetrates them.

This is true in commercial life as well as in personal affairs. One should always restrain one's self from pushing the envelope too far. Every act of human behavior potentially carries with it unseen and far reaching consequences. The rabbis always advocated caution in all matters in life – in speech, in behavior and in decision-making. One should never stand too close to the edge of any precipice, whether moral, physical or spiritual.

Everyone's life experiences validate this wisdom of the sages of Israel. Don't sit too close to the fire lest one be singed by it. Don't lean over the fence lest one may fall. Don't always justify giving in to convenient temptation for there will always be unforeseen and in most cases very negative consequences.

In a world that somehow overvalues risk taking, prudence and caution are not especially favored. Yet this week's Torah reading illustrates, in a graphic fashion, the wisdom of restraint. The advent of the month of Elul only serves to reinforce these ideas in our hearts and minds and most importantly, in our behavior. ©2017 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

One of the most esoteric laws in the Torah is yibum, the law of the Levirate marriage. The Torah forbids a man from marrying his brother's wife, but if one brother dies childless, one is obligated to marry his deceased brother's widow. (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

The Torah offers a rationale for this command.

The marriage takes place so that the deceased name will continue on. In truth, the words of the Torah: "The first born (from the Levirate marriage) shall succeed to the name (shem) of his dead brother, so that his (the dead brother) name not be blotted out...from Israel." (Deuteronomy 25:6)

In truth, this law is saturated with the principle of chesed—kindness. The greatest kindness may be helping the dead who are after all, unable to help themselves. Through yibum, the deceased leaves a legacy in the world—a child born of those closest to him who carries the name of the deceased.

It is, in fact, a conscious decision of the living brother and the childless widow to keep the name of the deceased alive that permits what is otherwise an incestuous relationship—the marriage of a man to his sister in law.

Rabbi David Silber notes that three cases in Tanach of yibum follow an interesting pattern.

In the first, Lot has relations with his daughters. Of course, this is not the exact case of yibum. Still, the intent of the daughters was the same—to continue their father's seed. But in this case of yibum, Lot who is drunk, has NO consciousness of the act being performed. (Genesis 19:30-38)

In the second, Yehudah (Judah) has relations with his daughter in law Tamar. This too is not the exact case of yibum. Still, Tamar's intent was to have a child from Yehudah. Here, Yehudah is originally unaware that he was engaging in an act of yibum, as Tamar was dressed as a harlot. In time, however, Yehudah comes to recognize what he had done. And, AFTER the fact, he realizes that he had continued his seed through Tamar. (Genesis 38)

In the third, Boaz has relations with Ruth. This too is not the exact case of yibum since Boaz was the second redeemer in line. Still, the goal was to continue the line of Ruth's deceased husband. In this case, Boaz engages in the Levirate marriage with full intent and consciousness BEFORE the act. (Ruth Chapter 4)

The pattern of yibum in Tanach is clear. From lack of consciousness, to consciousness after the act, to consciousness before. Not coincidentally the Messiah comes from Lot and his daughters, Judah and Tamar, Ruth and Boaz. Individuals engaged in acts of kindness on behalf of others are destined to redeem the world. ©2017 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Almighty, your God, will give him into your hand..." (Deut. 21:10).

The Arizal, a great Kabbalist, noted that the

verse refers to the Jewish people in the singular. However, regarding our enemies, it starts out in the plural ("enemies") and the verse ends referring to them in the singular ("give him" -- instead of writing "give them"). Since this is not a case of poor editorship, what is the lesson that the Torah is coming to teach us?

The Arizal elucidates: The Torah is telling us that if we have unity and are as one when we go out against our enemies, then even though our enemies are very numerous, you will be victorious as easily as if they were just one.

The importance of unity for accomplishment applies not only during times of war against an enemy. It is just as necessary during times of peace. When a group of people will work on any project with a spirit of togetherness, they will accomplish much more than if they would each be doing things as separate individuals. Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Beautiful Woman

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Is there a situation when something that is permitted for a Jew is prohibited for a Non-Jew? This is the case of the "Eishet Yefat Toar" sited in this week's portion. When a soldier during war sees a beautiful woman he may take her for a wife. The reason offered is that the Torah addresses the evil inclination of a man during war and charges him in such a situation to show restraint as opposed to the throws of war when restraint is more difficult.

This law of "Eishet Yefat Toar" is only applicable during war and does not incur a penalty for stealing (he is stealing this woman) and applies even if the woman is married. The reasoning behind this is, since it is during war, the victor is entitled to all the spoils of war, which include physical possessions as well as humans.

In contrast, according to Torah law, when a non-Jew enters into war he is not permitted to take possession of this "Eishet Yefat Toar" since for him it would be stealing which is one of the seven prohibitions of a Non-Jew ("Ben Noach").

The law of "Yefat Toar" is only applicable in a war against Non-Jews. However in a civil war of Jewish people, as we find in the book of Melachim, the law of "Yefat Toar" does not apply. As well, if the war is between Jew and Non-Jew and a Jewish woman from the non-Jewish side is taken captive, the law of "Eishet yefat Toar" also does not apply.

This law as sited in this week's portion would only be applicable in a time when we have a Sanhedrin, however in our times these laws are only theoretical, and are not germane to our present time, and are only

for discussion value. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

DR. ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Vort from the Rav

"You shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens." Devarim 26:19 Our faith in man's goodness should not blind us to the latent demonic in man. Civilized men can become the personification of evil. The thin veneer of social restraint can suddenly be lifted, exposing the ugly, brutish potential of man. Created "in the image of God," man can also assume a satanic identity. He is capable, from time to time, of going berserk, of turning into a monster.

"The emissaries went forth in haste to carry out the king's bidding. The edict had been announced in the capital city of Shushan. The king and Haman were dining, but the city of Shushan was cast into bewilderment" (Es. 3:15). Their bewilderment was due to the traditional naivety of the Jew who cannot believe that human beings may act like predatory beasts of the jungle. This was a traumatic discovery for the Jews of Persia. The Jew believes intuitively in man's inherent goodness, that a Divine spark inhabits every human being, even the habitual sinner and criminal. This is the basis of teshuvah, that the kernel of man's soul ever remains uncontaminated, and may yet induce a moral regeneration. The sudden confrontation with total "Amalek-style" cruelty was, therefore, a painful and rude awakening.

Amalek is obviously more than a nomadic tribe. He is more than a particular group, nationality or people. He is Everyman gone berserk, who has shed his Divine image for that of Satan. Any nation which declares that its policy is to destroy the Jewish people is Amalek, for it has emblazoned on its banner the slogan of impassioned hatred: "Come, let us destroy them as a nation, that the name Israel may no more be remembered" (Ps. 83:5). This is the persistent villainy that the Lord bids us combat and against which He has sworn eternal enmity. It is for this reason that there is a positive Torah commandment: You shall (perpetually) remember what Amalek did to you...do not forget"

Hitler and Stalin were clearly Amalek personified. Jews in Germany, and even in concentration camps, discounted rumors of mass killings until it was too late. In Communist Russia, many Jews continued to support Stalin, despite his demonstrated tyranny and anti-Semitism. The Jew is naive in his faith in man and is therefore particularly vulnerable. "Can it happen here?" the Jews of Persia probably asked themselves, incredulously.

Jews everywhere, even those dwelling under benign conditions, must answer decidedly: "Yes, it can happen here and elsewhere, as it has occurred in the past." The ethical sensitivity and respect for man, which

was so successfully imprinted upon the Jewish personality by the Egyptian experience and reinforced by the preachings of the Prophets, should not blind Jews to stark realities. A sober awareness of dire possibilities will, hopefully, lead to vigilance and to precaution. Amalek is an historic phenomenon; Lo tishkach--the lesson must never be forgotten. (Reflections, Vol. 1, pp. 179-181). (See commentary on Ex. 17:8-16) ©2017 Dr. A. Lustiger & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

There is a Passuk (verse) in Parshat Ki Tetzei that reads "And if you desist from vowing, no sin (fault) will be found with you." This implies (and confirmed in a Gemara in Nedarim) that one that does vow will be found at fault, even if he/she fulfills the vow. Why is this true? What if someone vows to do a good deed, what could possibly be wrong with doing that?

Jonny Gewirtz in his weekly publication Migdal Ohr offers an insightful answer: Since one could have fulfilled the mitzvah without the vow, the vow merely serves as a potential obstacle because if they do not fulfill the act they have committed a sin by transgressing their vow. On a deeper level, though, one who desists from making vows will not be found sinning because they are aware of the power of the tongue. They know that speech, once uttered, cannot be retracted, and thus is careful about what they say. This awareness applies not only to vows but lashon harah, hurtful words, falsehood, etc. which encompass so many other sins they will be able to avoid.

At the culmination of Elul on Erev Rosh HaShana, and again at Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur, we annul any vows we have taken and declare our intention not to vow again. This is the hope of the new year, that it will be one in which we will be cognizant of the power we have in our tongues and in our actions, and speak/act appropriately. This undertaking to be careful with vows is not the ultimate goal, it is just the beginning. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Benevolent Association

In this week's portion, the Torah commands us with quite a tall order. Because of flagrant ingratitude, in which Ammonites and Moabites forgot the kindness of our father Avraham toward their forebear Lot, we are commanded not to allow them to join in marriage into our nation. The directive does not preclude Ammonites and Moabites from converting or marrying other Jewish converts. It also does not prohibit Ammonite women converts from marrying into the fold. It does prohibit the direct descendants of Avraham, who epitomized kindness and gratitude, from marrying Lot's male descendants who were so cruel to the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us in the exact way their

ungraciousness manifested itself. "Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt, and because he hired against you Bilaam son of Beor, of Pethor, Aram Naharaim, to curse you" (Deuteronomy 23:5). But in an atypical deviation from the initial narrative, the Torah inserts the following verse: But Hashem, your G-d, refused to listen to Balaam, and Hashem, your G-d, reversed the curse to a blessing for you, because Hashem, your G-d, loved you" (Ibid v.6).

The Torah then continues to conclude the directive: "You shall not seek their peace or welfare, all your days, forever" (ibid v. 7).

Why does Hashem interject the story of His compassionate intervention into the prohibition? The Torah previously detailed the story of the talking donkey, the interceding angel and Balak's subsequent failure to curse the Jews. Why interject G-d's love in halting Bilaam's plans when the Torah is presenting a reason not to marry Moabites? It has no bearing on the prohibition.

A classic story of a new immigrant's encounter with the American judicial system involved an old Jew who was called to testify.

"Mr. Goldstein," asked the judge, "how old are you?"

"Keyn ayin horah, eighty three."

"Just answer the question, Mr. Goldberg. I repeat. How old are you?"

Goldberg did not flinch. "Keyn ayin horah, eighty-three."

"Mr. Goldberg," repeated the judge, "I do not want any prefixes or suffixes. Just answer the question."

But Goldberg did not change his response.

Suddenly Goldberg's lawyer jumped up. "Your honor," he interjected. "Please allow me to ask the question. The Judge approved and the lawyer turned to Goldberg.

"Mr. Goldberg. How old are you, Keyn ayin Horah?"

Goldberg smiled. "Eighty three."

In what has become a tradition of the Jewish vernacular, perhaps originating with the above verses, no potential calamity is ever mentioned without mentioning or interjecting a preventative utterance of caution.

"I could have slipped and chas v'sholom (mercy and peace) hurt my leg."

"They say he is, rachmana nitzlan, (Heaven save us) not well."

"My grandfather tzo langa yohrin (to longevity) is eighty-three years old," of course, suffixed with the ubiquitous "keyn ayin horah!"

An ever present cognizance of Hashem's hand in our lives has become integrated into traditional Jewish speech patterns. Thank G-d, please G-d, and

G-d willing pepper the vernacular of every Jew who understands that all his careful plans can change in the millisecond of a heavenly whim. And so, beginning with Biblical times, there are no reference to occurrences of daily life found in a vacuum. They are always surrounded with our sincere wishes for Hashem's perpetual protection and continuous blessing. © 2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (25:21-22), "If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink--for you will be 'choteh' coals on his head, and Hashem will reward you." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; 14th century) initially rejects the popular translation of the word, "choteh," i.e., "scooping." He writes: G-d forbid that King Shlomo would suggest that one perform kindness for his enemy for the purpose of taking revenge on him. Rather, the word means, "removing." One who performs acts of kindness for his enemy "removes" burning coals--i.e., anger--from the enemy's heart and promotes peace. Alternatively, if the word does mean, "scooping," the intention would be that one may perform acts of kindness for his enemy so that his enemy will be ashamed to continue hating him.

We read in our parashah (22:1), "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother." In Parashat Mishpatim (Shmot 23:4), this same mitzvah is worded differently: "If you encounter the ox of your enemy or his donkey wandering, you shall return it to him repeatedly." The commandment in our verse, writes R' ibn Shuiv, is of general applicability, while the commandment in Mishpatim, i.e., to return the lost animal of one's enemy, is an act "lifnim m'shurat ha'din" / beyond the letter of the law, applicable to a person who wants to conquer his yetzer hara. R' ibn Shuiv adds that the "enemy" spoken of here is a person that a righteous Jew hates because of the other's sinful deeds.

Otherwise, it is forbidden to hate another Jew. Even so, Hashem does not completely despise even a wicked person, and there is therefore a mitzvah to assist him, for one should not try to be "more religious" than G-d Himself. (Derashot R"Y ibn Shuiv) © 2013 S. Katz & torah.org

