

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Descartes thought that animals lacked souls. Therefore you could do with them as you pleased. (See Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, 13-19.) Judaism does not believe that animals lack souls -- "The righteous person cares about the nefesh of their animal," says the book of Proverbs (12:10). To be sure, nefesh here probably means "life" rather than "soul" (neshama in Hebrew). But Tanach does regard animals as sentient beings. They may not think or speak, but they do feel. They are capable of distress. Therefore there is such a thing as animal distress, tza'ar baalei chayim, and as far as possible it should be avoided.

So we read in Parshat Ki Teitze: "Do not muzzle an ox when it is treading grain" (Deut. 25:4). What is intriguing about this law is that it parallels provisions for human beings as well: "When you come [to work] in your neighbour's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you desire to satisfy your hunger... When you come [to work] in your neighbour's standing grain, you may take the ears with your hand" (Deut. 23:25-26). The principle is the same in both cases: it is cruel to prevent those working with food from eating some of it. The parallel is instructive. Animals, not just humans, have feelings and they must be respected.

Another law is: "Do not plough with an ox and donkey together" (Deut. 22:10). The ox is stronger than a donkey, so expecting the donkey to match the work of an ox is cruel. Each animal species has its unique role in the scheme of creation that we must respect.

The most fascinating animal legislation in this parsha is the law of "sending the mother bird away": If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life. (Deut. 22:6-7)

Much has been written on this command. Here I discuss only the analysis given by Moses Maimonides, fascinating in its complexity. There is a law that appears twice in the Mishnah, stating that if a leader of prayer says, "Your mercies extend even to a bird's nest," they are to be silenced. (Mishna Brachot 5:3; Mishna Megillah 4:9) The Talmud offers two

possible explanations, of which one is that such a prayer "makes it seem as the attributes of God are an expression of compassion, whereas in fact they are sheer decrees."

In both his commentary to the Mishna and his law code, (Hilchot Tefillah 9:7) Maimonides adopts this view. He adds: If the reason for sending the mother bird away were Divine compassion towards animals then, in consistency, God should have forbidden killing animals for food. The law therefore should be understood as a decree without an obvious rationale (gezerat hakatuv), and he states that this has nothing to do with compassion, human or Divine.

In *Guide for the Perplexed*, however, Maimonides adopts the opposite approach. There he rejects the very idea that there are commands that have no reason. There is a purpose to killing animals for food is, he says, because meat-eating is necessary for human health. Shechitah (ritual slaughter), however, has been ordained because it is the most painless way to kill an animal. He continues: It is also prohibited to kill an animal with its young on the same day, in order that people should be restrained and prevented from killing the two together in such a manner that the young is killed in the sight of the mother, for the pain of the animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of human beings and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in man but also in most living beings...The same reason applies to the law which enjoins that we should let the mother bird fly away when we take the young. (*Guide for the Perplexed*, III:48)

So Maimonides, contrary to the position he takes in his law code, here states that the law does have compassion as its logic. Moreover, what it seeks to avoid is not physical pain to the animal but psychological distress. Maimonides' view of animals has been confirmed by recent findings in biology that suggest that many species do indeed resemble humans in their ability to form groups, engage in reciprocal altruism, and display a range of emotions. (See on this the many works of primatologist Frans de Waal, including *Good Natured* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); *Chimpanzee Politics* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2007);

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The Age of Empathy (London: Souvenir, 2011); The Bonobo and the Atheist (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2014); and Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are? (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2017).

In most animal species, it is the mother that forms an ongoing bond with the young. Among animals, fatherhood is usually far less developed. So Maimonides' explanation in The Guide is empirically well-founded.

However, elsewhere in his Guide, (III:17) Maimonides takes yet a third position. Divine Providence, he says, extends to individuals only among humans. Amongst animals, it applies solely to a species as a whole. So the reason we must not cause animals pain or distress is not because the Torah is concerned about animals but because it is concerned about humans. We should not be cruel.

There is a rule laid down by our Sages that it is directly prohibited in the Torah to cause pain to an animal. This rule is based on the words [of the angel to Bilaam], "Why have you beaten your donkey?" (Num. 22:32). The object of this rule is to make us better, that we should not assume cruel habits, and that we should not needlessly cause pain to others -- that on the contrary, we should be prepared to show pity and mercy to all living creatures except when necessity demands the contrary.

Maimonides thus seems to embrace three sharply conflicting views: (1) The law of the mother bird is a Divine decree with no reason. (2) This law is intended to spare the mother bird emotional pain. (3) This law is intended to have an effect on us, not the animal, by training us not to be cruel. In fact all three are true, because they answer different questions.

The first view explains why we have the laws we have. The Torah forbids certain acts that are cruel to animals but not others. Why these and not those? Because that is the law. Laws will always seem arbitrary. But we observe the law because it is the law, even though, under certain circumstances, we may reason that we know better, or that it does not apply. The second view explains the immediate logic of the law. It exists to prevent needless suffering to animals, because they too feel physical pain and sometimes

emotional distress as well. The third view sets the law in a larger perspective. Cruelty to animals is wrong, not because animals have rights but because we have duties. The duty not to be cruel is intended to promote virtue, and the primary context of virtue is the relationship between human beings. But virtues are indivisible. Those who are cruel to animals often become cruel to people. Hence we have a duty not to cause needless pain to animals, because of its effect on us. Hence

the third proposition. Interestingly, Maimonides' analysis was repeated almost exactly, six centuries later, by the greatest philosopher of modern times, Immanuel Kant. (Lectures on Ethics)

This is a subtle and nuanced approach. Animals are part of God's creation. They have their own integrity in the scheme of things. We now know that they are far closer to human beings than philosophers like Descartes thought. This would not have been news to the heroes of the Bible. Abraham, Moses, and David were all shepherds who lived their formative years watching over and caring for animals. That was their first tutorial in leadership, and they knew that this was one way of understanding God Himself ("The Lord is my shepherd" [Ps. 23:1]).

Judaism also reminds us of what we sometimes forget: that the moral life is too complex to summarise in a single concept like "rights." Alongside rights, there are duties, and there can be duties without corresponding rights. Animals do not have rights, but we have duties towards them. As several laws in Parshat Ki Teitse and elsewhere make clear, we must not cause them unnecessary pain or emotional distress.

As we saw last week in the case of environmental legislation in Shoftim, Genesis 1 gives us the mandate to "subdue" and "rule" creation, including animals, but Genesis 2 gives us the responsibility to "serve" and "guard." Animals may not have rights but they have feelings, and we must respect them if we are to honour our role as God's partners in creation. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

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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 cited 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*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When you go forth to battle...and you see among the captives a beautiful woman and you desire her.... When a man has two wives, one the beloved and the other the hated.... If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son...” (Deuteronomy 21:10–18) Every once in a while a strikingly semantic connection and allusion helps us to understand how the Bible is truly a magnificently seamless unity, in which a proper reading of a passage in one of the biblical books sheds brilliant light on a heretofore hidden meaning in another one of the biblical books. An example of this may be found in the beginning of our Torah portion.

Ki Tetzeh opens with war and the possibility of an Israelite soldier marrying a captive war bride. He is forbidden to do so, however, until he first brings her home, observes her in her most unattractive state as she mourns her family for a full thirty days – shaven head, long fingernails – and, if at the end of that period his ardor has not flagged, he may have her converted and marry her.

We next read of a man with two wives, a loved one and a hated one; if the eldest son is the son of the hated wife, the father is forbidden to favor the younger son of the beloved wife and bequeath the double portion to him rather than to his firstborn.

The third section concerns the rebellious son, a

glutton and a drunkard, so disobedient to his mother and father that they are required to bring him to the High Court, where he could be condemned to death.

Rashi, citing the Midrash, weaves a profound, psychologically oriented narrative thread connecting these seemingly disparate rulings:

The Torah is making a concession because of man’s evil inclination, for had God not permitted the [gentile war bride] he would have married her nonetheless. However, if he does marry her, in the end he will come to hate her. He will rue the day that he gave up his family and traditions because of her, the excitement he had previously felt would turn to resentment as the Torah writes immediately afterwards: “If a man has two wives, one beloved and another hated,” and ultimately he will parent a rebellious son by her. It is for this reason that these sections are put in juxtaposition. (Rashi, Deut. 21:11)

Three stages: first, overwhelming attraction to an inappropriate woman for the wrong reasons, and then, after the heat of lust turns into a dying ember, you end up hating her and hating the child born of that union. The hapless and despised child, cheated out of his rightful birthright through no fault of his own, will then assume the despicable characteristics of the rebellious son. In effect, Rashi connects these three laws by presenting the dynamics which form a dysfunctional family, leading to criminal behavior on the part of the offspring.

And it seems to me that in addition to the psychological underpinnings of the sequence of the incidents, this biblical passage also resonates with seminal occurrences in the life of our patriarch Jacob back in the book of Genesis, and sheds important light on the tensions and mishaps which shaped our patriarchal forbears and their children. Let us first review the precise words of the second ruling in Ki Tetzeh: If a person has two wives, one beloved and one hated, and both the beloved and hated wives have sons, but the firstborn is that of the hated one, then it shall be when he makes his sons inherit his property, he may not declare the son of the beloved the firstborn before the son of the hated, who is the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the first; the right of the firstborn is his. (Deut. 21:15–17)

Now didn’t Jacob have two wives? And didn’t he love one of them and hate the other, with the Torah itself testifying that Leah felt “hated” (Gen. 29:31)? And didn’t he bequeath to Joseph, the son of the beloved wife, Rachel, a double portion, while overlooking the inheritance due to his first-born, Reuven, the son of the hated wife?

Generally speaking, and most justifiably, the story of Jacob and Rachel is viewed by the world as one of the most magnificent love stories in literature. His very first meeting with Rachel is an expression of

love at first sight, when this unlikely scholar and tent-dweller exhibits superhuman strength by dramatically and single-handedly rolling away the heavy stone covering the well where Rachel had arrived to water her father's flocks. And the seven years of work that Laban asks from Jacob in return for his daughter's hand pass "like a few days" for this man in love. But he is tricked into a marriage with "the other sister, Leah," a woman he married under false pretenses, and who is therefore an inappropriate mate for him. The Bible – and especially the Midrash – helps us to see the terrible tragedy suffered by Leah, which was not unlike what could be in store for the hapless captive woman. After her marriage, "God saw that Leah was hated (*senu'a*) and He opened her womb" (Gen. 29:31). The word "*senu'a*" that appears in Genesis is repeated in our portion which speaks of the eldest son of the hated (*senu'a*) wife. (A wife who is cast aside in favor of another woman always feels herself to be hated if she doesn't feel really beloved.) The Torah goes on to describe the birth: "And Leah conceived and bore a son; she called his name Reuven [literally, behold, a son] because she said, 'God has seen into my affliction (*be'oniyi*), for now my husband will love me'" (Gen. 29:32). But alas, Jacob never grew to love Leah, who suffered silently throughout her marriage.

And remember the third incident in our Torah reading. An inappropriate marriage will lead to a cheated, "hated" son, who will express his resentment by becoming rebellious. Reuven sins with his father's concubine Bilha. To be sure, our sages modified the harsh literal meaning of the biblical text in describing the nature of that sin. "And it came to pass...that Reuven went and lay with Bilha, his father's concubine" (Gen. 35:22). Our oral tradition insists that Reuven did not actually sleep with Bilha, but – when, after the death of Rachel, Jacob moved his couch into Bilha's tent – Reuven switched his father's couch into Leah's tent in order to save his mother from another act of brazen humiliation. "If my mother's sister was a rival to my mother, shall the bondmaid of my mother's sister be a rival to my mother?" cried out Reuven, according to the Midrash. "Thereupon he [Reuven] rose and transposed his couch" (Shabbat 55b). But however we understand the situation, Reuven rebelled against his father Jacob!

Perhaps Jacob understands the positive motivation behind Reuven's rebellious action – that in this perverse way of taking his father's concubine he was crying out to become his father's true heir and continuation, and thus recognizes his own guilt in having rejected his biblical firstborn. After all, despite the egregious sin, the Torah records that "Jacob heard" of the mishap, does not comment, but then our Masoretic tradition leaves an empty space, which apparently hints at Jacob's rage, guilt, and perhaps tears – as well as his ultimate decision to remain silent.

Finally, the story concludes "And the children of Jacob were twelve" (Gen. 35:23). Reuven is not rejected by his father. He is forgiven – and Talmudic law ordains that "if the parents of a rebellious son forgive him, he is forgiven" (Sanhedrin 88a).

Apparently, the Torah recognizes the complexity of relationships of individuals caught in circumstances beyond their control – and the familial suffering which often results. Jacob was Laban's victim, as were Leah and Rachel. Reuven suffers the fallout brought about by the situation of a long-barren favored wife who suffers an untimely death.

And it is even more complex than this. Following the incident of Reuven's sinful act, Jacob finally is able to return to his father's house, to Isaac, "in peace" (Gen. 23:21). Jacob absented himself from his father for more than two decades – and then wanders about in Shekhem even after he leaves Laban – at least partially because he felt guilt-ridden about his having deceived the patriarch in order to receive the paternal blessings. But now he has the courage to confront his father. He now can legitimately expect that just as he forgave Reuven his transgression because Reuven had wrongly been treated as the "hated" son, so Isaac would forgive him – Jacob – because Jacob, too, had been rejected by Isaac as the "hated" or, at least, rejected son.

Hence the legal material in our portion resonates with the previously recounted tragedy of Jacob's family – and attempts to legislate a lifestyle intended to prevent such future occurrences. Our Bible is a magnificent unity from Genesis to Deuteronomy of connections, reverberations and repair between the generations. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's Torah portion deals with many different issues of human behavior and family relations. We are all aware that the relationships between parents and children, as well as between other relatives in the same family are often difficult ones and fraught with potential danger, frustration and even tragedy. People within a family are very capable of disliking and even hating one another despite their biological and social connection. This is because in the basic family structure there exists a bond of love between the members of the family that is natural and quite strong. And any time strong love is present, the possibility of strong hate always lurks in the background.

Precisely because children love their parents, they feel justified in holding them to unrealistic standards of behavior and attitude. And since parents often fall short of such absolute perfection, the resentment towards them can become so great as to lead to awful family disputes. Hard statistics reveal that

most murders occur between perpetrators and victims who are related or know each other well. These family members have experienced disappointment and often complain of severe mistreatment.

There are many current theories as to how to properly raise children and create tranquility and harmony within the family unit. But, as is true in almost all areas of life, one size does not fit all, and it is difficult to fit each separate case into any general rule. Because of this, it is obvious that every family must sort through relationships and affairs individually. Very rarely if ever can any outside source, no matter how wise or professional, solve the problems and workings of the family unit.

From the narrative that appears regarding the rebellious son – a narrative that according to one opinion in the Talmud is to be treated only as a metaphor – it is clear that we are being taught that there are instances when no logical or rational solution is present or possible. It is difficult for us in our time, when we have unlocked so many doors regarding the mysteries of science, technology and medicine to have to admit that there are basic human problems that exist within family relationships that we are powerless to solve on our own.

Later in the Torah we will read that that there are many hidden things in human life that only Heaven can deal with. We can only do the best that we can, to the extent that we are physically, emotionally and intellectually able. There is no question that this limitation upon our omnipotence is very frustrating especially to modern humans who believe that they are capable of everything.

By realizing that paradoxically we can accomplish more than we thought possible in times of difficulty, eventually we know that we must rely upon the God that infuses us with life, to help us solve all difficult situations and to accept God's will. ©2019 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 chuppah (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. ©2019 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 DAVID LEVINE

Forbidden Mixtures

Parashat Ki Teitzei is a collection of laws which seem to be very broad and without any consistent

connection. Many Rabbis have devoted great effort to find relationships behind these seemingly inconsistent sections, but we will not deal with any of these explanations at this time. Instead we will deal with one small section which does appear to have a consistent message and which is important for us to discover.

There are three sentences together in Devarim (22:9-11) that deal with three different kinds of mixtures, three different sets of things which may not be together with the other in its group. The first set of "forbidden" mixtures deals with planting. "You shall not sow your vineyard with a mixture lest you set apart the growth of the seed that you plant and the produce of your vineyard." The mixture to which the Torah refers is a mixture of grape seed with the seeds of wheat and barley. Rashi explains that this is done with the same throw of the hand. In Gemara Brachot 22a, we are told that this applies to any two kinds of seeds of vegetables and grains together with grape seeds that are thrown together when sowing a vineyard. We are also cautioned against a mixture in the field (not including grapes). According to HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch, Hashem reveals Himself through His control of "l'mino, according to its kind". Hashem understands what is best for the distinct qualities of every growing thing that it be separated according to its species. In Vayikra, we were given laws which separate different species of animals in terms of breeding, different species of vegetable growth, and different species of fruits in an orchard. Here, when the B'nei Yisrael are about to enter the land of Israel, the additional laws of "mixtures of the vineyard" come to emphasize the "sanctification of the Jewish Land as the soil of Hashem's Torah."

The second set of mixtures deals with an aspect of planting but actually takes place prior to the planting of seed. "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together". Rashi explains that this law refers to any two species of animal whether they are under a yoke for plowing or for leading them anywhere or for carrying or transporting any object from one place to another. The essential separation here can be because of the physical differences between animal types both in their size and structure. Different kinds of animals may move differently and when yoked together cause strain on one or the other based on these differences. But there are philosophical reasons for this separation also. According to Hirsch, we separate species during the plowing process because we acknowledge to Hashem that we are not combining animals that Hashem has sought to separate. The closer the bond that these two animals will forge during their work may affect their lives after their work. A Jew also must realize that in his own workplace he must adhere to a separate standard than others in the world. It is incumbent on every Jew to follow the Torah laws of business even when he might be tempted to follow the

destructive patterns of those who do not have the Torah as their guide.

Our third set of mixtures is known as "shatnez, the prohibition of wool and linen joined together in the same garment." Here we have the prohibition of using an animal by-product and a vegetable by-product in the same garment. Rashi tells us that the term "shatnez" is taken from the three types of processing that wool or linen will go through in order to make it usable in sewing or weaving. These processes are "shu'a tavui v'nuz, carded, spun, or twined." This separation here partly involves an agricultural process, but occurs at the end of that process. Man is not to interfere with Hashem's laws of Nature. A Jew needs to understand that even in his clothing he is to recognize that our laws differ from the rest of the world. Hashem has differentiated each individual and has designated for him his own task. Hashem separated and differentiated each species for the task which He has deemed to be proper in His creation.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch discusses the difference between animals and Man. An animal uses his qualities of perception, feeling, and motion entirely on the vegetative purposes, namely, the urge for food and reproduction. In Man the vegetative is to be subordinate to his animal qualities and these to his human qualities. Through the human qualities of understanding, distinguishing, and the self-deciding will of Man, Man is able to subordinate himself to Hashem's Will. In Man, his vegetative qualities must be kept separate from his animal qualities. Man must not submit himself to his urge for food and reproduction but must control those animal qualities to uplift himself to the higher ideals of Hashem's Torah. The ability to control these urges is what separates Man from the lower species. A Jew has the Torah to enable him to achieve this goal. The entirety of the Torah helps our fellow Jews to separate from the world, not physically, but spiritually and morally. If we do not succeed, it is because we have had difficulty fulfilling the laws of the Torah, not because there is anything lacking in the Torah itself.

It is not an easy responsibility of Man to submit to the Will of Hashem. We may only approach total acceptance of the halacha, yet we may not be able to accomplish controlling ourselves well enough to fully observe that which we have already accepted. Too often we find ourselves giving in to those animal urges that lower our level of human quality. At this time of year, the month of Elul, we strive to uplift ourselves to a level which is higher than we are presently accomplishing. We must all attempt this "uplifting" even if we are unable to sustain that level, yet we do this in order to strive for a higher level in the future. Hashem is much more concerned that we "attempt" this uplifting rather than whether we are totally successful. Our search to always improve ourselves spiritually and

halachically will eventually accomplish success if we devote ourselves sincerely to this effort. May Hashem grant us all the health and long life that we need to enable us to come as close to Him as we possibly can.

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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Creditors and debtors are on opposite sides of the fence. The debtor, usually strapped for money and barely able to feed his family, wants to keep his creditor at bay. The creditor, on the other hand, wants his money back and seeks to exert whatever pressure he can to force the debtor to fulfill his obligation.

Creditors have different ways to exert pressure on their debtors. One time-honored method is to seize some of the debtor's property and hold it as a surety until the debtor pays up. What kind of property would a creditor take? Logically, one would expect him to take something of value but of little utility. Certainly, one would assume, he would not take the tools of the debtor's trade, since this would render him incapable of earning the money needed to pay off the debt.

Therefore, it seems strange that the Torah found it necessary to forbid a creditor to take the debtor's millstones. Why would the creditor do such a thing? If he wants his money back, he certainly wouldn't shut down the debtor's business.

Furthermore, the Torah juxtaposes this prohibition with the exemption from military service for a newlywed husband for one year so that he can spend more time with his wife. What is the connection between these two concepts?

The commentators explain that the Torah is addressing one of the most powerful yet least recognized human drives. It is the desire to dominate other people, which is rooted in the primal impulse for conquest. History has shown us how this terrible impulse has destroyed civilizations and brought misery and death to countless millions of people, but mankind has not learned his lesson.

A creditor wields power over his debtor. In a real sense, he controls his life. "The borrower is the slave of the man who lends money," King Solomon writes in Proverbs (22:7), and unfortunately, the creditor often enjoys it. In fact, sometimes the sense of power and mastery are sweeter and more important to the creditor than the return of his money. This sort of man will gladly take the debtor's millstones as a surety, thereby effectively making it impossible for him to repay his loan. But he doesn't mind. On the contrary, he prefers it this way, because it will perpetuate his power of conquest.

The generals in charge of recruiting an army for the protection of the homeland may be affected by similar subconscious drives. They may feel inclined to

pull a newlywed away for his young wife, because it gives them a sense of power. The Torah, therefore, lumps the two together, the creditor taking the debtor's millstones and the generals recruiting young newlyweds, and issues prohibitions against them both. No man should exert power and mastery over another.

A boatman was ferrying passengers across a river during wartime. A woman walked up the gangplank carrying two large suitcases.

"Madam, I need to inspect your baggage," said the boatman. "I have to check for weapons."

She opened her bags. "Here, take a look," she said. "There are no weapons."

"Please unpack them. Take everything out."

"What!" said the woman. "I'm letting poke around and look at whatever you want. Why make me take it all apart?"

An old man standing nearby spoke up. "My good man, there really is no need to put her through so much bother. Just take a good look."

The boatman drew himself up to his full height. "It is important that I check thoroughly. That is my obligation."

"Are you sure that you are only motivated by obligation?" said the old man.

"Of course," said the boatman.

"Then why," said the old man, "do you have such a look of pleasure on your face?"

In our own lives, we need to look closely at our relationships with family members, employees and colleagues. What lies behind the demands we make of them? Is our motivation always open and aboveboard or is there sometime a more sinister undercurrent? Are we looking to control the people around us and dominate their lives? Are we trying to be masters? Such behavior is destructive not only to those around us but also to us, because long-lasting, fulfilling friendships and relationships can only be grounded in genuine love and mutual respect. © 2019 Rabbi N. Reich torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"If you go out to war against your enemies..." (Devarim 21:10) It's really quite amazing when you think about it, how the idea of war is such an ACCEPTED part of mankind's history. Not always a WANTED part of history, but accepted, yes.

What can we do? It has just happened so many times in so many ways and in so many places. And the energy that fuels them doesn't seem to be dying down either at this late stage of history. If anything, many are "suing up" for the greatest and latest of all time, the War of Gog and Magog.

War started early with man, right after expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It was a small war, but a deadly one. There was only one casualty, Hevel,

but as Rashi points out, generations of descendants also died that day, when Hevel left this world childless. When a man is killed, all his potential progeny dies with him, and God takes note of that.

Think of all the blood that had been needlessly shed over thousands of years, all the times families have had to deal with the loss of loved ones who only died because of war. It would be one thing if people died immediately. The pain would only be momentary. But so often people don't, and they have had to suffer terribly for extended periods of time.

The suffering is not only on one side of the gun either. Killing people, as quickly and easily as it happens on movie screens, is rarely as easy in real life. Even taking the life of an enemy is still taking a life. It is a very HEAVY thing to take life away from a creation of God. A lot of first-time killers in the army end up needing some kind of therapy.

But even that is not as bad as when a person gets used to killing another living being. I was recently told a story of the Alter of Slobodka, who witnessed a beating up of Jews through the window of his office. He could hear the anti-Semitic slurs being hurled, as the perpetrators beat their victims close-to-death.

"Where do you see Godliness in these bullies?" the Alter asked his student, who saw nothing of the sort.

"By the way they have to first dehumanize a Jew to inflict the damage. Otherwise, they would have a difficult time hurting another human being."

But humans have the capacity to go beyond this point and become so callous that some can even kill for hire. Even animals don't do that, meaning that, if they're not hungry, then prey can walk right in front of them and they won't attack.

And then there is genocide, when some try to obliterate the reality of masses of people. It's one thing if it is commanded DIRECTLY by God, but something else altogether when it is a decision men have made. If God didn't call Amalek the sum total of all evil, and commanded their annihilation, we wouldn't have been able to do it on our own, no matter how much we hate them.

Ironically, the one kind of war that we fight every day and which has the greatest potential to destroy a person, we don't pay attention to, or notice at all. It's actually alluded to in the very word for "war," which is "milchamah." Looking closely at the word, it becomes clear that the root of it is another word, "lechem," which means nothing more than "bread."

What does bread have to do with war? That's an easy one. It has to do with survival, which all of us are obsessed with, because we're programmed to survive. Food is a central part of our survival program, and when that is perceived to be at risk, we fight to protect it.

But there is another level to this discussion as

well. It has to do with what we call "survival," that technically can go WELL beyond what it really is. Though our yetzer haras may convince us, with the help of Marketing and Advertising, that we can't survive without all that extra materialism, the truth may be, and usually is, VERY different.

As the Talmud warns, it is very hard to eat at two "tables" at the same time. Simply put, spirituality comes at the cost of materialism, and vice-versa. You can have BOTH, but whenever you increase one you simultaneously, and not necessarily proportionally, reduce the other. As much as it seems to the contrary, Jews do not get to have their "cake" and eat it too.

Well, not in THIS world at least. This is the world in which we BAKE our cake, and the next one is when we EAT it. And it's a much better cake than any we could ever find in this world. This makes it tragic that people are so willing to "eat" in this world and sacrifice part of their "cake" in the next one.

It's a battle to be sure, now more than ever before. It's like being famished, and then forced to sit in a restaurant of fine food and not being able to eat anything. How hard is that? EXCRUCIATINGLY. This used to be a form of torture in the old days (and kind of is today every time a poor person walks by the window of a restaurant with an empty stomach he has never filled).

It all comes down to how much a person is willing to compromise, how much cake they want to eat in this world versus how much they want to eat in the next one. But that depends upon how much one really believes that the one in the world to come is so much greater than the one they can find in this world. Most people don't even think about it from day to day, let alone feel as if they are at war with their yetzer hara.

This week's parsha, and Elul for that matter, says, "Think about it." Especially in today's world that is so materialistic and immersed in physical pleasures. As if to make matters a lot more complicated, even religious Jews today enjoy financial equality, and can afford many luxuries that once were only available to wealthy gentiles.

It's not about sinning, per se. It's not about eating treif meat to have a better steak, or going places Jews should not because of modesty issues. Countless material pleasures can easily be enjoyed within a halachic framework. It's not even about being a "menuvel b'reshus haTorah," as the Ramban speaks about at the beginning of Parashas Kedoshim.

Rather, it is about doing with less in this world to have a LOT more in the next one, where God REALLY wants us to enjoy ourselves. If it was about sinning, it would be less of a battle even for the average religious Jew. It's about having less of what is permissible, just to avoid using up merit meant for the World-to-Come. And THAT is the biggest battle we have to fight. ©2019 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org