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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
Physical Fear, Moral Distress

Twenty-two years have passed since Jacob fled his brother, penniless and alone; twenty-two years have passed since Esau swore his revenge for what he saw as the theft of his blessing. Now the brothers are about to meet again. It is a fraught encounter. Once, Esau had sworn to kill Jacob. Will he do so now -- or has time healed the wound? Jacob sends messengers to let his brother know he is coming. They return, saying that Esau is coming to meet Jacob with a force of four hundred men -- a contingent so large it suggests to Jacob that Esau is intent on violence.

Jacob's response is immediate and intense: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen. 32:8)

The fear is understandable, but his response contains an enigma. Why the duplication of verbs? What is the difference between fear and distress? To this a Midrash gives a profound answer: "Rabbi Judah bar Ilai said: Are not fear and distress identical? The meaning, however, is that 'he was afraid' that he might be killed; 'he was distressed' that he might kill. For Jacob thought: If he prevails against me, will he not kill me; while if I prevail against him, will I not kill him? That is the meaning of 'he was afraid' -- lest he should be killed; 'and distressed' -- lest he should kill." (Rashi to 32:8; Bereishit Rabbah 76:2)

The difference between being afraid and distressed, according to the Midrash, is that the first is a physical anxiety, the second a moral one. It is one thing to fear one's own death, quite another to contemplate being the cause of someone else's. Jacob's emotion, then, was twofold, encompassing the physical and psychological, the moral and the material.

However, this raises a further question. Self-defence is permitted in Jewish law. (Sanhedrin 72a) If Esau were to try to kill Jacob, Jacob would be justified in fighting back, if necessary at the cost of Esau's life. Why then should this possibility raise moral qualms? This is the issue addressed by Rabbi Shabbetai Bass, author of the commentary on Rashi, Siftei akhamim: "One might argue that Jacob should surely not be distressed about the possibility of killing Esau, for there is an explicit rule: 'If someone comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him.' Nonetheless, Jacob did have qualms, fearing that in the course of the fight he might kill some of Esau's men, who were not themselves intent on killing him but merely on fighting his men. And even though Esau's men were pursuing Jacob's men, and every person has the right to save the life of the pursued at the cost of the life of the pursuer, nonetheless there is a condition: 'If the pursued could have been saved by maiming a limb of the pursuer, but instead the rescuer killed the pursuer, the rescuer is liable to capital punishment on that account.' Hence Jacob feared that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men when he might have restrained them by merely inflicting injury on them." (Siftei akhamim to 32:8)

The principle at stake, according to the Siftei akhamim, is the minimum use of force. The rules of defence and self-defence are not an open-ended permission to kill. There are laws restricting what is nowadays called "collateral damage," the killing of innocent civilians even if undertaken in the course of self-defence. Jacob was distressed at the possibility that in the heat of conflict he might kill some of the combatants when injury alone might have been all that was necessary to defend the lives of those -- including himself -- who were under attack.

A similar idea is found in the Midrash's interpretation of the opening sentence of Genesis 15. Abraham had just fought a victorious war against the four kings, undertaken to rescue his nephew Lot, when God suddenly appeared to him and said: "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward will be very great'" (Gen 15:1). The verse implies that Abraham was afraid, but of what? He had just triumphed in the military encounter. The battle was over. There was no cause for anxiety. On this, the Midrash comments: "Another reason for Abram's fear after killing the kings

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in battle was his sudden realisation: 'Perhaps I violated the divine commandment that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the children of Noah, 'He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.' For how many people I killed in battle.'" (Solomon Buber, comp., Tanhuma, Lekh Lekha 19 (Vilna, 1885))

Or, as another Midrash puts it: "Abraham was filled with misgiving, thinking to himself, 'Maybe there was a righteous or God-fearing man among those troops which I slew.'" (Bereishit Rabbah 44:4)

There is, however, a second possible explanation for Jacob's fear -- namely that the Midrash means what it says, no more, no less: Jacob was distressed at the possibility of being forced to kill even if it were entirely justified.

What we are encountering here is the concept of a moral dilemma. This phrase is often used imprecisely, to mean a moral problem, a difficult ethical decision. But a dilemma is not simply a conflict. There are many moral conflicts. May we perform an abortion to save the life of the mother? Should we obey a parent when he or she asks us to do something forbidden in Jewish law? May we desecrate the Shabbat to extend the life of a terminally ill patient? These questions have answers. There is a right course of action and a wrong one. Two duties conflict and we have meta-halakhic principles to tell us which takes priority. There are some systems in which all moral conflicts are of this kind. There is always a decision procedure and thus a determinate answer to the question, "What should I do?"

A dilemma, however, is a situation in which there is no right answer. It arises in cases of conflict between right and right, or between wrong and wrong -- where, whatever we do, we are doing something that in other circumstances we ought not to do.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Terumot 8) describes one such case, where a fugitive from the Romans, Ulla bar Koshev, takes refuge in the town of Lod. The Romans surround the town, saying: Hand over the fugitive or we will kill you all. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi persuades the fugitive to give himself up. This is a complex case, much discussed in Jewish law, but it is one in which both alternatives are tragic. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi acts in accordance with halakha, but the prophet Eliyahu asks him: "Is this the way of the pious? [Vezu mishnat haHasidim]"

Moral dilemmas are situations in which doing the right thing is not the end of the matter. The conflict may be inherently tragic. Jacob, in this parsha, finds himself trapped in such a conflict: on the one hand, he ought not allow himself to be killed; on the other, he ought not kill someone else; but he must do one or the other. The fact that one principle (self-defence) overrides another (the prohibition against killing) does not mean that, faced with such a choice, he is without qualms, especially given the fact that Esau is his twin brother. Despite their differences, they grew up together. They were kin. This intensifies the dilemma yet more. Sometimes being moral means that one experiences distress at having to make such a choice. Doing the right thing may mean that one does not feel remorse or guilt, but one still feels regret or grief about the action that needs to be taken.

A moral system which leaves room for the existence of dilemmas is one that does not attempt to eliminate the complexities of the moral life. In a conflict between two rights or two wrongs, there may be a proper way to act -- the lesser of two evils, or the greater of two goods -- but this does not cancel out all emotional pain. A righteous individual may sometimes be one who is capable of distress even while knowing that they have acted correctly. What the Midrash is telling us is that Judaism recognises the existence of dilemmas. Despite the intricacy of Jewish law and its meta-halakhic principles for deciding which of two duties takes priority, we may still be faced with situations in which there is an ineliminable cause for distress. It was Jacob's greatness that he was capable of moral anxiety even at the prospect of doing something entirely justified, namely defending his life at the cost of his brother's.

This characteristic -- distress at violence and potential bloodshed even when undertaken in self-defence -- has stayed with the Jewish people ever since. One of the most remarkable phenomena in modern history was the reaction of Israeli soldiers after the Six Day War in 1967. In the weeks preceding the war, few Jews anywhere in the world were unaware that Israel and its people faced terrifying danger. Troops -- Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian -- were massing on all its borders. Israel was surrounded by enemies who had sworn to drive its people into the sea. And yet it won one of the most stunning military victories of all time. The sense of relief was overwhelming, as was the exhilaration at the re-unification of Jerusalem and the fact that Jews could now pray (as they had been unable to do for nineteen years) at the Western Wall. Even the most secular Israelis admitted to feeling intense religious emotion at what they knew was a historic triumph.

Yet, in the months after the war, as

conversations took place throughout Israel, it became clear that the mood among those who had taken part in the war was anything but triumphal. (See Abraham Shapira (ed.), The Seventh Day: Soldiers Talk About the Six Day War (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970).) It was sombre, reflective, even anguished. That year, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem gave an honorary doctorate to Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff during the war. During his speech of acceptance he said: "We find more and more a strange phenomenon among our fighters. Their joy is incomplete, and more than a small portion of sorrow and shock prevails in their festivities, and there are those who abstain from celebration. The warriors in the front lines saw with their own eyes not only the glory of victory but the price of victory: their comrades who fell beside them bleeding, and I know that even the terrible price which our enemies paid touched the hearts of many of our men. It may be that the Jewish people has never learned or accustomed itself to feel the triumph of conquest and victory, and therefore we receive it with mixed feelings." (Martin Gilbert, Israel: A History (London: Doubleday, 1998), 395)

These mixed feelings were born thousands of years earlier, when Jacob, father of the Jewish people, experienced not only the physical fear of defeat but the moral distress of victory. Only those who are capable of feeling both, can defend their bodies without endangering their souls. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept." (Gen. 33:4) Years ago, a college classmate provocatively announced that he planned to name his first son "after the most maligned figure in the entire Torah: Esau."

Let's consider Esau's defense. After we are introduced to Esau as Isaac's favorite son since 'the hunt was in his [Isaac's] mouth' [Gen. 30:28], we are immediately taken to the fateful scene where Jacob is cooking lentil soup when Esau came home exhausted from the hunt. The hungry hunter asks for some food, but Jacob will only agree to give his brother food in exchange for the birthright. Who is taking advantage of whom? Is not a cunning Jacob taking advantage of an innocent Esau?

Then there is the more troubling question of the stolen blessing. Even without going into the details of how Jacob pretends to be someone he's not, Esau emerges as an honest figure deserving of our sympathy. After all, Esau's desire to personally carry out his father's will meant that he needed a long time to prepare the meat himself. Indeed it was Esau's diligence in tending to his father that allowed enough time to pass to make it possible for his younger brother to get to Isaac's tent first. Surely, Rebecca must have realized the profound nature of Esau's commitment to his father, for she masterminded Jacob's plan.

On his return from the field, Esau realizes that Jacob has already received the blessing originally meant for him. His response cannot fail to touch the reader. Poignantly, Esau begs of his father, 'Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.' And Esau lieed up his voice and wept. (Gen. 27:38)

But it is the beginning of Vayishlah that clinches our pro-Esau case. Jacob finally returns to his ancestral home after an absence of twenty years. Understandably, Jacob is terrified of his brother's potential reaction, and so in preparation, Jacob sends messengers ahead with exact instructions as to how to address Esau. Informed of the impending approach of Esau's army of four hundred men, he divides his household into two camps, so that he's prepared for the worst. But what actually happens defies Jacob's expectations: Esau is overjoyed and thrilled to see him. The past is the past. 'And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept' [Gen. 33:4].

The defense rests. Thus described, Esau hardly seems worthy of the offcial censure of Jewish history as the personification of the anti- Jew. In fact, my college friend had good reason to name his son after Esau.

So, why are our Sages so critical of him? I would suggest our analysis so far overlooks something central in Esau's character. Yes, there are positive characteristics of Esau to be found in many Jews across the Dias- pora. Many are aggressive, self-made people who weep when they meet a long-lost Jewish brother from Ethiopia or Russia. They have respect for their parents and grandparents, tending to their physical needs and even reciting – or hiring someone to recite – the traditional mourner's Kaddish for a full year after their death. Financial support and solidarity missions to the State of Israel, combined with their vocal commitment to Jewry and Israel, reflect a highly developed sense of Abrahamic (Jewish) identity, just like Esau seems to have. Esau feels Abrahamic identity with every fiber of his being.

But when it comes to commitment to Abrahamic (Jewish) continuity, to willingness to secure a Jewish future, many of our Jewish siblings are found to be wanting – just like Esau. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors in keeping us 'a people apart', and preventing total Jewish assimilation into the majority culture, has been our unique laws of kashrut. Refusing to break bread with our non-Jewish work

colleagues and neighbors has imposed a certain social distance that has been crucial for maintaining our identity. But Esau is willing to give up his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. Hasn't the road to modern Jewry's assimilation been paved with the T-bone steaks and the lobsters that tease the tongues lacking the self-discipline to say no to a tasty dish? Like Esau, the overwhelming majority of Diaspora Jewry has sold its birthright for a cheeseburger.

Esau's name means fully-made, complete. He exists in the present tense. He has no commitment to past or future. He wants the freedom of the hunt and the ability to follow the scent wherever it takes him. He is emotional about his identity, but he is not willing to make sacrifices for its continuity. Primarily, it is on the surface, as an external cloak that is only skin-deep. That's why it doesn't take more than a skin-covering for Jacob to enter his father's tent and take on the character of Esau. Indeed, Esau is even called Edom, red, after the external color of the lentil soup. Esau has no depth; he is Mr. Superficial!

And what's true for a bowl of soup is true for his choice of wives. Esau marries Hittite women. And that causes his parents to feel a 'bitterness of spirit' [Gen. 27:35]. No wonder! The decision of many modern Jews to 'marry out' has reached an American average of 62%! The 'bitterness of spirit' continues to be felt in many families throughout the Diaspora. Even those who marry out and continue to profess a strong Jewish identity cannot commit to Jewish continuity. Perhaps Esau even mouthed the argument I've heard from those I've tried to dissuade from marrying out. 'But she has a Jewish name! She even looks Jewish!' He may have said, 'Her name is Yehudit [literally, a Jewess, from Judah]; she has a wonderful fragrance [Basmat means perfume]' [Gen. 26:34]. But once again, Esau only looks at externals!

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father, Jacob, escapes from the mouth of the lion only to run into the arms of the bear. He leaves, in fact he flees, from the house of Lavan but is immediately confronted first with the angel of his brother Esau and later by Esau himself and an armed band of 400 men. Eventually Jacob escapes even from this trial by means of bribery, appeasement and the affectation of brotherly love exhibited by Esau.

All of this leaves a scar on Jacob's psyche. For his entire life he will be haunted by these confrontations and by the dangers that they represent. Only at the end of days, when the world goes right will he escape from the trauma of being constantly pursued, hated and persecuted. And the fact that it is all so senseless and has really no basis in fact or logic only serves to compound the evil that is involved here. As we know, what occurs to our forefathers really is the harbinger of all later events in Jewish history. The Jewish people, no matter what position or political belief they may or may not espouse, are always in the wrong. They may be persecuted and attacked but they are always seen by Esau as the aggressor and the occupier. They may espouse a capitalistic economy, but they are called communists. In short, they never can win. Because of this there is an overriding sense of unease that always exists within the Jewish world.

This is especially true when less than a century ago over a third of the Jewish people were destroyed simply because they were Jewish. And this occurred in the most civilized and advanced continent that existed then on the face of the earth. The heroic attempts at the revival and rebuilding of the Jewish people that have occurred since have been treated negatively by many sections of the world. It is apparent that the world prefers that the Jews remain subservient and act as appeasers rather than as independent and productive people.

That type of antisemitism, which is so rampant in our time, is really the source of much of the dysfunction that exists in the Jewish world today. The age-old problem of antisemitism has never found any solution, though Jews somehow feel that it is incumbent on them to search for remedies. In reality, there is little if anything that we can do in this regard. It is obvious that there are no simple solutions and that nice speeches and benevolent statements about the need for tolerance and unity have little effect upon the haters and those who wish to do us harm.

The only thing that we can do is to remain firm and strong in our beliefs, our traditions and to confront our enemies in whatever form they may appear. This is the lesson that Jacob taught us after his own difficult experiences. It remains the only valid lesson that has hope and courage for our time as well.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Is public protest an effective means of bringing about change? While many insist on its value, some have argued that demonstrations on behalf of Jewish causes precipitate anti-Semitic backlash. This week's Torah portion offers an insight into this debate.

After 22 years of separation, Yaakov (Jacob), preparing to meet his brother Esav (Esau), is told that Esav is geared up to do battle. (Genesis 32:7) When they meet however, the opposite occurs. Esav embraces Yaakov. (Genesis 33:4) What prompted the change?

Commentators point to a pivotal incident that took place between Yaakov receiving the report of Esav's war preparations and the actual encounter. This is the episode of the struggle between Yaakov and a mysterious being in the middle of the night. Yaakov wins the struggle but in the process is wounded. He leaves the battle limping. (Genesis 32:25-33)

Benno Yaakov, the German Jewish commentator, feels that Yaakov's limping precipitated Esav's change of heart. According to his comments, when Esav saw Yaakov struggling to walk, he felt compassion for him. In Esav's mind Yaakov had been defeated. From Benno Yaakov's perspective, the heart of the adversary is won by bending and ingratiating ourselves by walking wounded. This approach makes sense as Benno Yaakov lived in Germany in the early 20th century--a time in which the Jews were seeking good relations with the German government.

Rashbam sees it differently. He is bewildered by Yaakov's desire to be alone just before the struggle with the mysterious being? (Genesis 32:25) If Yaakov was intent on protecting his family why did he abandon them at that crucial time?

Rashbam suggests that up to this point, when faced with a challenge, Yaakov always ran. He ran after he took the blessings from Esav. He said nothing when he found Leah and not Rachel the morning after his wedding night, and he fled from his dishonest father-in-law Lavan's (Laban) house in the dead of the night. Just hours before confronting Esav it seemed that Yaakov finally had no choice but to stand strong. At the last moment, however, Rashbam insists that he was alone because once again he was seeking to flee. As much as Yaakov had carefully prepared for the inevitable confrontation with Esav, his nature took over – once again he saw fleeing as the only solution.

For Rashbam, the mysterious being was an emissary of God sent to Yaakov. In the end, the emissary wounds Yaakov, making it difficult for him to walk. This was God's way of telling Yaakov that he no longer could run. When facing an adversary, it's important to stand fast.

Thus, when Esav sees Yaakov standing with pride, unwilling to run, he gains respect for him and embraces him. Sometimes, the only way to gain respect from others is if one first has self respect. Witnessing a preparedness to stand tall, Esav gained new respect for Yaakov. He was no longer a brother who could be pushed around. It was that new resolve on the part of Yaakov that earned Esav's respect and caused him to decide to embrace Yaakov rather than fight him. Rashbam, living during the Crusades, may have been offering advice to his own generation of persecuted Jews, letting them know that if you cave in to anti-Semitism you arouse more anti-Semitism.

Interestingly, after struggling with the mysterious man, Yaakov is given another name, Yisrael. No longer was he only Yaakov which comes from the word akev (heel), one who, even as he negotiates, runs on his heels. Now he is also Yisrael, which means the fighter who has the strength to prevail.

We are told that Yaakov retains both names. This is unlike other characters in the Torah, such as Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah whose old names, Avram and Sarai were never used again after the Divine giving of their new identity. The message of the dual name is clear; both the Yaakov approach of behind the scenes discussion with authority and a willingness to negotiate and compromise and the Yisrael component of and outspoken advocacy are crucial. They work in sync, each complementing the other to achieve the goal of justice and tikkun olam.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

A Strained Reunion

Much takes place between Ya'akov and Eisav upon Ya'akov's return, but the actual conversation between the two is limited. The questions posed by Eisav and the answers given by Ya'akov barely cover a few sentences even though the brothers have been apart for more than twenty years. Nothing is said about Eisav's plan to kill Ya'akov which contributed to Ya'akov's exile. Still, the few words which are spoken carry many emotions and messages for us to understand.

Eisav's first words to Ya'akov upon seeing Ya'akov's wives and children were, "Who are these to you?" Ya'akov answered, "The children whom Elokim has graciously given your servant." The Siftei Chachamim explains that the question that Eisav asked was really, "are these your children, your slaves, or your hired help?" The Ramban says that Ya'akov was wise to only answer about the children and left Eisav to deduce that the women were his wives. This paralleled Avraham and Yitzchak who knew that their lives would be in danger if they said that Sarah and later Rivka were their wives. There is a Midrash that Eisav saw Rachel and desired her, thinking that she had no children and would become his if he were to kill Ya'akov. Ya'akov presented his wives followed by their children, and brought Yosef forward before Rachel so that Eisav would understand that he would not have rights of levirate marriage with her since she already had a son.

Eisav then said to Ya'akov, "Who is all this camp that I met to you?" Rashi implies that Eisav is asking the purpose of this camp, not who these people were since this was covered in the previous inquiry. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin quotes a Midrash that clarifies

Eisav's concern. Prior to the arrival of Ya'akov and his family, Ya'akov had sent messengers to Eisav with many gifts. The angels (messengers) approached with the gifts and asked Eisav's four hundred soldiers, "Who is your master?" The men answered, "Eisav." At this point the angels threatened to strike Eisav's men. The men argued that Eisav was the grandson of Avraham Avinu, but this did not placate the angels. They then said that he was the son of Yitzchak, but this also had no effect. Only when Eisav's soldiers said, "he is the brother of Ya'akov," did the angels relent and accept them as brothers. The Midrash clearly implies that the original intention of these four hundred men was war but that it was altered by these gifts as well as the threats from the angels.

Ya'akov told Eisav that he sent these gifts "to find favor in my master's eyes." Eisav answered, "I have plenty, my brother, let what you have remain yours." Eisav did not want to accept these gifts because they would bind his actions in the future and not permit him to attack Ya'akov. Ya'akov, however, answered with an unusual sentence. "Please do not, if I have now found favor in your eyes, then accept my tribute from me, inasmuch as I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of a Divine being, you have been appeased by me." The first part of the sentence is a verbal and psychological trap for Eisav much like the trap of words that Ya'akov said to his father at the blessing, "because Hashem, your Elokim arranged it for me," an answer which Yitzchak could not refute. Ya'akov said that he could see in Eisav's face that Eisav had already forgiven him. Eisav could not deny this statement without appearing to be a horrible person who could not even be appeased by so many gifts. Ya'akov continued his offer to Eisav. "Please accept my homage which was brought to you inasmuch as Elokim has been gracious to me and inasmuch as I have everything." The Kli Yakar contrasts this with Eisav's statement, "I have plenty." An evil person is never satisfied with all the gold and silver that he has. He always feels that he is missing something. A righteous person knows that there is more that he does not have but is satisfied with what Hashem has given him. Only a righteous person can ever feel sated.

Eisav now suggested that Ya'akov relocate to Eisav's land and Eisav would accompany him, "travel on and we will go, and I will walk opposite you." This phrase can be taken two ways; (1) Eisav wanted to accompany his brother in friendship and as protection, or (2) Eisav would keep him close so that if he does not do as Eisav wishes Eisav could rise up against him. Ya'akov again gave an excuse to his brother, "my master knows that the children are tender, and the nursing flocks and cattle are upon me, and they will drive them hard for one day, then all (the flocks) will die." Eisav continued to press Ya'akov: "Let me assign to you some of the people who are with me." Ya'akov basically called his bluff by saying "for what purpose?" We are told in a Midrash that even Eisav's men did not return with Eisav but drifted away one at a time. They were later rewarded by Hashem at the time of King David when he slew the Amalekites (descendants of Eisav) except for four hundred men who escaped.

What is the significance of these few bits of dialogue? We see that although it appears that Eisav was reconciled with Ya'akov, there still seems to be an underlying discord. One must read his words with caution as Ya'akov did. We must also note how Ya'akov's behavior contrasts with Eisav's. We never see animosity from Ya'akov towards Eisav even though Eisav's hatred caused Ya'akov to separate from his parents for such a long time. Eisav, like other wicked people, still had resentment towards his brother for an act which had no significant effect on his own wealth and power. Eisav did not examine his own character to see why Hashem had caused him to suffer. Instead he focused the blame for his downfall on Ya'akov.

We must learn from the mistakes of Eisav. When disagreements and animosities occur, we should not look to assign blame to others. We must, instead, examine our own actions as a source of changing the balance of good in the relationship. This can be devastating in families. Examining our own actions will also aid us in forgiving others as we realize that their actions may be reactions to our own mistakes. With Hashem's help may we learn to forgive.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Monetary Sensitivity

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Righteous people refrain from being tempted to commit robbery. Thus Yaakov crossed the river Yabok in this week's Sedra just to retrieve small jars that he had inadvertently left there. Our forefathers' actions predict the actions of future generations (maaseh Avot siman l'banim). The Torah therefore is also sensitive to the monetary needs of its people when there is a chance of loss of money so that one is not placed in a position where he/she might be tempted to steal.

This sensitivity is paramount in various situations. To site a few- a Kohen when viewing the status of a Negah" (blemish) in one's house ,first instructs the owner to remove all the utensils from the home before he pronounces his judgement whether it is Tamei (defiled) or not, for the Kohen is concerned that the person should not suffer undo financial hardship for should he declare the nega tamei, all the utensils in the house would be Tamei as well. Likewise, in the Holy Temple, the utensils used were not made of expensive metals in order not to spend frivolously the money of the people. Examples of this are the "kalpi" (the

markers) -used on Yom Kippur to designate which goat was sacrificed and which was to be killed -was made from wood not gold or silver, and also the mouth piece of the Shofar and the basket that carried the incense were all made from silver and not the more expensive gold.

Additionally when the Torah instructs a person to offer a sacrifice it does not use the language "everything that he has (kol asher yesh lo) but rather "from all that he has (mekol asher yesh lo-Vayikra 27;28) indicating one should not spend above his means (k'fi missat yado –Devarim16;10) and should not designate for Mitzvot more than one fifth of his wealth.

Yet there are times that we do insist on quality and the more expensive. The axiom that portrays this is- "There is no poverty amongst wealth (ein aniyut bimkom ashirut). As an example, we don't use utensils in the Beit Hamikdash which is "cheap" but rather implements which show wealth and royalty. Therefore in the Temple they did not repair broken utensils but rather replaced them, and the morning Tamid (the first sacrifice of the day) was poured from a golden utensil.

In conclusion therefore, it would seem that whether or not expensive utensils were used was based on the discretion of the sages as they weighed and considered issues such as loss, honor of the service and need.

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

Therefore the Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov's hip-socket on the displaced sinew.

The text is unclear concerning the location and extent of Yaakov's injury. Just how did the angel attack Yaakov? Was the injury bilateral, or only to a single hip? These questions are subject to a dispute in the gemara. (Chulin 90B-91A)

R. Yehuda maintains that the malach (appearing either in the guise of an idolater or a Torah scholar) stood to Yaakov's right, and struck him only on that side. The sinew that is forbidden to us in commemoration of that struggles is therefore only the one on the right side of the animal.

The Chachamim, on the other hand, argue that the malach approached Yaakov from behind, and struck him on both sides. The sinews of both the right and left of the animal are therefore forbidden.

The two positions are sourced in the events of the evening. Where did the malach stand? How did that affect the struggle, and Yaakov's injury. But we also understand that such details are not casual. Nothing in the lives of the avos is casual. From the details that the Torah records about these giants we can read the larger story of the Jewish experience. As Ramban demonstrates, events in their lives propagated through time, and determined conditions and events in the lives of their descendants. If we look for the greater message in the struggle between Yaakov and the malach, we are certain to find it.

According to Chazal, the malach was none other than the yetzer hora, also known as the Angel of Death, aka as the Guardian Angel of Esav. The all night battle led to no one claiming victory. As the incident ripples across time, this would mean that Yaakov would not be defeated by his major enemy. Jewish faith would continue unblemished

This hostile malach would not take no for an answer. If it could not bring Yaakov down, it would at least seek to leave its mark on some of Yaakov's descendants. Here, saro shel Esav had some success. There would be times in history that at least some of Yaakov's offspring would fall prey to the blandishments of the yetzer hora.

We can divide the Torah's mitzvos into two large groups -- mitzvos between man and his fellow man, and mitzvos between man and G-d. These are the two chief areas upon which all Jewish life stands. They took the form of the two tablets at Sinai. The first group of the Ten Commandments -- the right tablet -- governed the relationship between man and G-d; the left tablet described expectations concerning man's treatment of other men. (When the would-be convert asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while "standing on one foot," he meant all of the Torah dealing with interpersonal mitzvos. That is why Hillel could answer, "What is distasteful to you, do not do to your fellow.")

Looking back at the events of the long evening, the malach could approvingly summarize the battle: "You have striven with Elokim and with people, and prevailed."(Bereishis 32:29) In other words, Yaakov's commitment and faith remained fully intact, both vis-a-vis G-d and man. The malach did manage to dislocate the hip-socket sinew. In the course of history, there would be some Jews who would not remain steadfast in their performance of mitzvos.

In modern times, we have seen these casualties. We have witnessed the wholesale abandonment of major parts of the Torah. The worst part of this unfaithfulness concerned the mitzvos between man and G-d. Astonishingly, even among those Jews, commitment to fellow Jews remained strong. These "non-practicing" Jews continued their charitable giving, and continued assuming responsibility for Jews in need around the globe. This is what R. Yehuda meant by localizing the damage to the right sinew, i.e., the part of Torah that deals with mitzvos between man and Hashem. The left side remained unimpaired.

The Chachamim demur. Looks are deceiving, they argue. It may seem that these Jews remain strong

and steadfast in their observance of at least a good part of the Torah. But it cannot be as good as it looks. Mitzvos are intertwined. When people let go of significant parts of the Torah, their emunah and yiras Hashem must suffer in the process. Without that emunah, none of their other observance has a firm foundation. Their performance of the interpersonal mitzvos is laudable while it lasts -- but the long-term outlook is bleak. Without emunah and yiras Shomayim, the vestiges of their observance are without foundation. Changed circumstances and conditions will easily cause them to drop those observances. Their behavior in interpersonal areas may look strong from the outside, but it must be weak from within.

This is why the Chachamim insist that Yaakov was hurt by blows from the rear, and on both sides. Standing in front of Yaakov, one cannot see the damage. Still involved in the interpersonal life of the Jewish people, they seem to be fine, upstanding Jews, despite having discarded many mitzvos. From behind, however, that is in a place hidden from view and a time when no one observes, they are entirely compromised -- without a single leg to stand on. (Based on Be'er Yosef, Bereishis 32:26-33)

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

No News is Jews News

Yaakov's family faced a tremendous crisis. While passing through the city of Shechem, Dena, their sister was attacked and was violated by Shechem, the son of King Chamor, who bore the same name as the city. Shechem later claimed that he desperately wanted to marry her! No one in the entire city brought the prince to justice and Yaakov's sons were not going to ignore that behavior.

They were not ready for open warfare either, and so they developed a ruse. They claimed that they were ready to form a harmonious relationship with the entire population of the city of Shechem. "We will give our daughters to you, and take your daughters to ourselves; we will dwell with you, and become a single people" (Braishis 34:16). However, there was one condition. Every male of Shechem had to circumcise. Yaakov's children insisted that it would be a disgrace for the daughters of Abraham to marry uncircumcised men. Upon direction from King Chamor and Prince Shechem the entire town agreed, and three days later, when the people of Shechem were in painful recuperation from their surgery, Yaakov's children avenged Dina's honor. Despite Yaakov's consternation, they attacked the male population and wiped them out.

The question is simple: Why ask the people of Shechem to circumcise? If Yaakov's children wanted to attack them, why go through a process of converting them? They should have asked them to fast for three days. That would have made them even weaker. They could have asked them to hand over all their weapons. Why ask them to do an act is so blatantly Jewish?

On September 30, 2000, the word intafada was almost unknown to the average American. And then the riots began. On one of the first days of what has now been over three years of unceasing violence, against innocent Israelis, The New York Times, Associated Press and other major media outlets published a photo of a young man who looked terrified, bloodied and battered. There was an Israeli soldier in the background brandishing a billy-club. The caption in everyone of the papers that carried the photo identified the teen as an innocent Palestinian victim of the riots -- with the clear implication that the Israeli soldier was the one who beat him. The world was in shock and outrage at the sight of the poor teen, blood oozing from his temple crouching beneath the club-wielding Israeli policeman. Letters of protest and sympathy poured in form the genteel readers of the gentile world.

The victim's true identity was soon revealed. Dr. Aaron Grossman wrote the NY Times that the picture of the Israeli soldier and the Palestinian on the Temple Mount was indeed not a Palestinian. The battered boy was actually his son, Tuvia Grossman, a Yeshiva student from Chicago. He, and two of his friends, were pulled from their taxicab by a mob of Palestinian Arabs, and were severely beaten and stabbed. The Israeli soldier wielding the club was actually attempting to protect Tuvia from the vicious mob.

All of a sudden the outrage ceased, the brutal attack was almost ignored and a correction buried somewhere deep amongst "all the news that is fit to print" re-identified Tuvia Grossman as "an American student in Israel." It hardly mentioned that he was an innocent Jew who was nearly lynched by Arabs. This blatant hypocrisy in news coverage incidentally help launch a media watchdog named Honest Reporting.com.

Rav Yonasan Eibeschitz, zt"l, explains that Yaakov's children knew something that was as relevant in Biblical times as it is in today's "New York" times. Yaakov's sons knew the secret of society. Have them circumcised. Make them Jews. Then you can do whatever you want with them and no one will say a word. You can wipe out an entire city -- as long as it is not a gentile city. If Shechem had remained a gentile city had the people not circumcised according the laws of Avraham then Yaakov's children would have been condemned by the entire world. But Yaakov's children knew better. They made sure that the Shechemites, went through a Jewish circumcision. Shechem now was a Jewish city; and when a Jewish city is destroyed, the story becomes as irrelevant as an American student attacked by a Palestinian mob in Yerushalayim! Unfortunately it is that simple and that old.