

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

Ki Teitzei contains more laws than any other parsha in the Torah, and it is possible to be overwhelmed by this embarrass de richesse of detail. One verse, however, stands out by its sheer counter-intuitiveness: "Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother. Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." (Deut. 23:8)

These are very unexpected commands. Examining and understanding them will teach us an important lesson about society in general, and leadership in particular.

First, a broader point. Jews have been subjected to racism more and longer than any other nation on earth. Therefore, we should be doubly careful never to be guilty of it ourselves. We believe that God created each of us, regardless of colour, class, culture or creed, in His image. If we look down on other people because of their race, then we are demeaning God's image and failing to respect kavod ha-briyot, human dignity.

If we think less of a person because of the colour of their skin, we are repeating the sin of Aaron and Miriam -- "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman" (Num. 12:1). There are midrashic interpretations that read this passage differently, but the plain sense is that they looked down on Moses' wife because, like Cushite women generally, she had dark skin, making this one of the first recorded instances of colour prejudice. For this sin Miriam was struck with leprosy.

Instead we should remember the lovely line from Song of Songs: "I am black but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me" (Song of Songs 1:5).

Jews cannot complain that others have racist attitudes toward them if they hold racist attitudes toward

others. "First correct yourself; then [seek to] correct others," says the Talmud. (Baba Metzia 107b) The Tanach contains negative evaluations of some other nations, but always and only because of their moral failures, never because of ethnicity or skin colour.

Now to Moses' two commands¹ against hate, both of which are surprising. "Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." This is extraordinary. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites, planned a programme against them of slow genocide, and then refused to let them go despite the plagues that were devastating the land. Are these reasons not to hate?

True. But the Egyptians had initially provided a refuge for the Israelites at a time of famine. They had honoured Joseph when he was elevated as second-in-command to Pharaoh. The evils they committed against the Hebrews under "a new King who did not know of Joseph" (Ex. 1:8) were at the instigation of Pharaoh himself, not the people as a whole. Besides which, it was the daughter of that same Pharaoh who had rescued Moses and adopted him.

The Torah makes a clear distinction between the Egyptians and the Amalekites. The latter were destined to be perennial enemies of Israel, but the former were not. In a later age, Isaiah would make a remarkable prophecy -- that a day would come when the Egyptians would suffer their own oppression. They would cry out to God, who would rescue them just as He had rescued the Israelites: "When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, He will send them a saviour and defender, and He will rescue them. So the Lord will make Himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord." (Isaiah 19:20-21)

The wisdom of Moses' command not to despise Egyptians still shines through today. If the people had continued to hate their erstwhile oppressors, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of Egypt but would

¹ Whenever I refer, here and elsewhere, to "Moses' commands," I mean, of course, to imply that these were given to Moses by Divine instruction and revelation, and thusly did he pass them onto us. This, in a deep sense, is why God chose Moses, a man who said repeatedly of himself that he was not a man of words. The words Moses spoke were those of God. That, and that alone, is what gives them timeless authority for the people of the covenant.)

have failed to take Egypt out of the Israelites. They would have continued to be slaves, not physically but psychologically. They would be slaves to the past, held captive by the chains of resentment, unable to build the future. To be free, you have to let go of hate. That is a difficult truth but a necessary one.

No less surprising is Moses' insistence: "Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother." Edom was, of course, the other name of Esau. There was a time when Esau hated Jacob and vowed to kill him. Besides which, before the twins were born, Rebecca received an oracle telling her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the elder will serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23) Whatever these words mean, they seem to imply that there will be eternal conflict between the two brothers and their descendants.

At a much later age, during the Second Temple period, the Prophet Malachi said: "'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the Lord. 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated...'" (Malachi 1:2-3). Centuries later still, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, "It is a halachah [rule, law, inescapable truth] that Esau hates Jacob." (Sifrei, Bamidbar, Beha'alotecha, 69) Why then does Moses tell us not to despise Esau's descendants?

The answer is simple. Esau may hate Jacob, but it does not follow that Jacob should hate Esau. To answer hate with hate is to be dragged down to the level of your opponent. When, in the course of a television programme, I asked Judea Pearl, father of the murdered journalist Daniel Pearl, why he was working for reconciliation between Jews and Muslims, he replied with heartbreaking lucidity, "Hate killed my son. Therefore I am determined to fight hate." As Martin Luther King Jr, wrote, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." (Strength to Love (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1977), pg 53) Or as Kohelet said, there is "a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace" (Eccl. 3:8).

It was none other than Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who said that when Esau met Jacob for the last time, he kissed and embraced him "with a full heart." (Sifrei ad loc) Hate, especially between family, is not eternal and inexorable. Always be ready, Moses seems to have implied, for reconciliation between enemies.

Contemporary Games Theory -- the study of decision making -- suggests the same. Martin Nowak's programme "Generous Tit-for-Tat" is a winning strategy in the scenario known as the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, an example created for the study of cooperation of two individuals. Tit-for-Tat says: start by being nice to your opponent, then do to them what they do to you (in Hebrew, middah keneged middah). Generous Tit-for-Tat says, don't always do to them what

they do to you, for you may find yourself locked into a mutually destructive cycle of retaliation. Every so often ignore (i.e. forgive) your opponent's last harmful move. That, roughly speaking, is what the Sages meant when they said that God originally created the world under the attribute of strict justice but saw that it could not survive through this alone. Therefore He built into it the principle of compassion. (See Rashi to Genesis 1:1, s.v. bara)

Moses' two commands against hate are testimony to his greatness as a leader. It is the easiest thing in the world to become a leader by mobilising the forces of hate. That is what Radovan Karadzic and Slobodan Milosevic did in the former Yugoslavia and it led to mass murder and ethnic cleansing. It is what the state-controlled media did -- describing Tutsis as inyenzi, ("cockroaches") -- before the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. It is what dozens of preachers of hate are doing today, often using the Internet to communicate paranoia and incite acts of terror. Finally, this was the technique mastered by Hitler as a prelude to the worst-ever crime of humans against humanity.

The language of hate is capable of creating enmity between people of different faiths and ethnicities who have lived peaceably together for centuries. It has consistently been the most destructive force in history, and even knowledge of the Holocaust has not put an end to it, even in Europe. It is the unmistakable mark of toxic leadership.

In his classic work, Leadership, James MacGregor Burns distinguishes between transactional and transformational leaders. The former address people's interests. The latter attempt to raise their sights. "Transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralistic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality; in the enmeshing of goals and values both leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgement." (Leadership, Harper Perennial, 2010, pg. 455)

Leadership at its highest level transforms those who exercise it and those who are influenced by it. The great leaders make people better, kinder, nobler than they would otherwise be. That was the achievement of Washington, Lincoln, Churchill, Gandhi and Mandela. The paradigm case was Moses, the man who had more lasting influence than any other leader in history.

He did it by teaching the Israelites not to hate. A good leader knows: Hate the sin but not the sinner. Do not forget the past but do not be held captive by it. Be willing to fight your enemies but never allow yourself to be defined by them or become like them. Learn to love and forgive. Acknowledge the evil men do, but stay focused on the good that is in our power to do. Only thus do we raise the moral sights of humankind and help redeem the world we share. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and*

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

If a man has a wayward and rebellious child, who does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they warn and flog him, but he still does not obey them; then his parents may take him out to the judges of the city, telling them that ‘this our son is wayward and rebellious, he does not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Upon which all the people of the city pelt him with stones and he dies, so that you rout out the evil in your midst and all of Israel will take heed and be frightened.” (Deuteronomy 21:18–21) What defines a “wayward and rebellious” child? How is he to be punished? Whose fault is it – his, his parents’, or society’s?

This week’s Torah portion of Ki Tetze, and especially the Talmudic sages who comment on it, deal with the tragedy of such a problematic situation with amazing courage and sensitivity – and provide important directions for parenting, even today!

The words of the Bible itself, as quoted above, are rather stark, even jarring to the modern ear. However, our Written Torah is defined, expanded upon, and even limited by the Oral Torah and the sages of the Talmud (Sanhedrin, chapter 8, especially pages 68b-71), who initially take the approach that here is the case of a youngster who seems to be growing into a menacing, murderous monster. They limit the time period of the punishment to three months following the onset of puberty, insist that he must have stolen a large amount of meat and wine from his parents which he himself consumed, and conclude that “this youth is punished now for what will inevitably happen later on; it is better that he die [more or less] innocent rather than be put to death after having committed homicide.”

Despite these limitations, the case still seems rather extreme. Many modern commentaries argue that our Bible is actually limiting an ancient practice in which parents had unlimited authority over their children, even to the extent of putting their rebellious children to death, and here the waywardness is defined, the time span is limited, and the judges of the Sanhedrin must be brought into the situation. Nevertheless, the very axiom of “punishing now for what will inevitably happen later on” runs counter to everything else in our entire biblical and judicial system, and is even countermanded by a famous Midrash.

The Bible tells us that Sarah, the wife of Abraham, saw Ishmael, the son of Abraham’s mistress Hagar, “sporting (metzañek)”; she believes that he will be a bad influence on her son Isaac, and God agrees with her that the mistress and her son are to be banished into the desert. An angel sees them wandering and suffering, hungry and thirsty, and

comforts Hagar: “Do not fear; God has heard the [crying] voice of the lad from where he is now” (Gen. 21:9–17). On these last biblical words, Rashi cites the Midrash which seems to defy the Talmudic position of the wayward child: “From where he is now” – He is judged in accord with his present actions and not for what he will eventually do. The angels in heaven began to prosecute [Ishmael] saying, “Master of the Universe, for someone whose children will eventually slay your children [the Israelites] with thirst, You are miraculously providing a well with water in the desert?!” And [God] responded “Now what is he, righteous or wicked?” They responded, “Righteous [in the sense that he was not yet worthy of capital punishment].” [God] answered, “In accordance with his present actions do I judge him, from where he is now.”

If God is thus explaining the foundations of Jewish jurisprudence, how do we begin to justify the previous Talmudic explanation of “punishment now for what will eventually happen”?

An anonymous source cited by the Talmud goes so far as to declare that “the case of a stubborn and rebellious son never existed and never will exist; the only reason for its inclusion is so that we may expound the verses and receive reward” (Sanhedrin 71a). And so, R. Yehuda explicates the biblical words, interpreting the Mishna to teach that “if the mother was not an appropriate spouse for the father, if the parents were not equal in voice and stature” – i.e. if they were pulling in different directions, with each expressing a different lifestyle and set of values – then we cannot condemn the emergent rebellious child. He is merely a product of the mixed and confusing messages, the existential identity crisis, he has received at home.

Moreover, “if one of the parents was without hands or legs, was mute, blind, or deaf, the young teenager cannot be blamed” (Sanhedrin 8:4). Rabbi Joseph Lookstein, spiritual leader of Manhattan’s prestigious Kehillath Jeshurun Synagogue and founder and principal of Ramaz Elementary and Secondary schools (1902–1979), would homiletically explain that parents must invest in their children, must be available for them to observe, to listen, and to informally convey. Despite the school that the child attends, the parent remains the primary educator. Hence if a parent lacks the hands to embrace and to admonish, the legs to accompany the child to where he/she wishes to go, the eyes to see what the teenager is doing, even when he thinks he’s not being observed, the ears to hear what he/she is thinking and planning and dreaming, the voice to enter into true dialogue of give-and-take, then the youngster cannot be blamed, no matter how obnoxious his actions may be. Parenting is an awesome responsibility and a full-time job, in which quantity of time is quality time. Just as babies do not relieve their bodily functions at predetermined times, youngsters cannot be expected to fit into parents’ busy schedules.

It takes at least two parents to share the commitment, guidance, and sensitivity which parenting truly demands.

All of this leads to a ringing Talmudic declaration: "The case of the wayward and rebellious child never was and never will be. Expound the verses and you will receive reward" (Sanhedrin 71a). We must be aware of what tragedy can occur within the context of the family and try to prevent the tragedy by taking to heart, mind, and action the depth of the responsibility. After all, our children are our posterity, our future, and our eternity.

I would merely add a few words regarding Ishmael. There were many reasons for his exoneration by the Almighty. After all, Abraham and Hagar did not provide a unified standard of behavior and values; the two were certainly not fit for each other. Hagar and Ishmael were of lesser status than Sarah and Isaac. And Hagar was far removed from Abraham's monotheism, compassionate righteousness, and moral justice. Moreover, Ishmael himself repents at the end of his life (Bava Batra 16b), and God apparently forgives him, since he makes him into a great nation with twelve princes emerging from his loins (Gen. 25:16).

Finally, the Mishna teaches that even if only one parent forgives the wayward and rebellious son, he is not to be punished (Mishna Sanhedrin 8:4). And our sages maintain that "there are three partners to every individual, the Holy One blessed be He, the father, and the mother" (Kiddushin 30b). Now if flesh and blood parents can prevent execution – in most instances, because they realize that they share the blame – our Divine Parent must certainly have the right to stay the execution. Only God knows that sometimes the genetic makeup of the child is of such a nature, or a traumatic event caused such a rupture in his personality, that neither he nor his flesh-and-blood parents can be held accountable. But whatever the case may be, it's crucial that parents do everything they can to the best of their ability, to give their children the basic three things which every child deserves from his/her parents: love, limits, and personal and sensitive involvement in their development. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The Torah speaks of making war upon one's enemy. Who is this enemy? The simple explanation is that it is a physical or national enemy that wishes to harm the Jewish people or the commonwealth of Israel. To defend oneself from such an enemy, there are circumstances that dictate a type of preventive war that avoids later defeat or catastrophe. This is certainly the simple and literal interpretation of the verse and subject of the Torah reading this week.

There is a rabbinic tradition, running through the works of many of the commentators over the centuries, regarding another layer of meaning to this verse. The enemy described is not so much a physical or national enemy as it is a spiritual or societal foe. In the immortal words of the famed comic strip character Pogo "we have met the enemy and they are us."

We are all aware that many times in life we are our own worst enemy. We engage in harmful practices and commit acts that we know to be detrimental and self-destructive. Yet, we are driven by our desires, and we often allow ourselves to be trapped into a situation that can only lead to disappointment. The Torah as it's wont to do, vividly describes the struggle that we have with ourselves for self-improvement and personal accomplishment. It describes this struggle as a war, a battle against the ferocious and aggressive enemy who must be combated.

This idea, that our struggle in life is to be viewed as an inner battle in the war of life, is meant to impress upon us to develop within ourselves as wholesome personalities. At one and at the same time, we are bidden to deal with eternity and heavenly ideals, and simultaneously, we are occupied with the mundane fact of everyday living.

Caught in this contradiction of circumstances, we are oftentimes prone to succumb to our daily problems and issues, completely ignoring the larger spiritual picture that is present. It is at such moments of self-absorption that temptation translates itself into reality, and we create situations that ultimately prove to be enormously harmful to our well-being.

Great generals oftentimes engage in a tactical retreat, to achieve a strategic victory. War is always a long-term situation, filled with temporary reversals and plans that remain unfulfilled or even abandoned. But the overarching reality is that basic strategy requires tenacity, courage, flexibility, and a stubborn refusal to succumb to the societal, political, and worldly pressures that beset all of us. It is interesting that despite all our pleas and prayers for peace, war is a constant in human history. It may take on different forms, cold, economic, or military, but it is ever present within our world. By reminding us of this fact, the Torah prepares us for victory in the struggles of life. ©2021 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

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Yefat To'ar

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Riddle: Can there be something that is permitted to a Jew but prohibited to a non-Jew?

Answer: Yes. An example is the *yefat to'ar* (captive woman) discussed in Parshat Ki Tetzei.

During war, if a Jewish soldier sees a beautiful woman (one of the enemy), he is permitted to take her captive and later marry her. How can the Torah permit such a thing? Rashi tells us that the Torah is responding to the evil inclination. In other words, "The Torah recognizes the force of the desires awakened in the violence of war. The Torah assumes that these powerful instincts will overpower many soldiers. These warriors will not be able to resist the desire to enter into sexual relations with the captive women. This creates a dilemma. Enforcement of the normal prohibition against relations with non-Jewish women would be impossible. Therefore, a strict legal framework was created for the inevitable relations. In other words, the Torah deemed it preferable for the relations to take place in this framework rather than outside of its laws" (Rabbi Bernie Fox).

The above explains how a normally forbidden sexual relationship is permitted. Doesn't the problem of theft remain? (Kidnapping is a type of theft.) Furthermore, the law of *yefat to'ar* applies even to a married woman. The answer is that the permission is limited to wartime. Just as it is permitted during war to conquer territory and take the property of the enemy nation, so too it is permitted to take captives, both men and women.

However, this permission during war was given only to Jews. While non-Jews acquire property if they conquer it in war, they are not permitted to do so by Jewish law; only if they transgressed and stole property does it remain theirs. For non-Jews, even during war it is forbidden to capture property or people. For this reason, a non-Jew may not take captive a *yefat to'ar* (*Sanhedrin* 57a).

The law of *yefat to'ar* applies only when the enemies are non-Jews. However, in cases of civil war between Jews (as we find in the biblical book of *Melachim*), the dispensation of *yefat to'ar* does not apply, as the verse says, "when you go to war against your enemies" (*Devarim* 21:10). Furthermore, even if the enemies are non-Jews, if an enemy woman is captured who is halakhically Jewish (because her mother was Jewish), the dispensation of *yefat to'ar* does not apply.

Obviously, none of the laws of *yefat to'ar* apply in our times. It was relevant only for a voluntary war (declared by the king or Sanhedrin). Since we no longer have a king or Sanhedrin, we no longer engage in voluntary wars. Today's wars are all obligatory, and a *yefat to'ar* is no longer permitted. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion speaks of the ben sorer u'moreh, the stubborn and rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). The Talmud explains

that the child is killed in the expectation that, in his adult years, he will be evil. In the Mishnah's words: "A stubborn and rebellious son is tried on account of his ultimate destiny; let him die innocent and let him not die guilty" (*Sanhedrin* 8:5).

How is it possible that Jewish law would put to death a child who has not committed a crime?

Here it's important to note that, based on the Torah text, the Mishnah builds into the law many requirements for a child to be declared "stubborn and rebellious" (*Sanhedrin* 8:4):

- Both parents must accuse their child of being rebellious.
- Both parents must be well suited for each other.
- Both parents must be able to see and hear.

Dr. Samuel Belkin gleans from the Mishnah the following principle: "A son can be condemned as stubborn and rebellious only if the entire blame can be thrown upon the son and only if the parents in no way, either directly or indirectly, caused their son's behavior" (In His Image, 172).

The Mishnah's requirements now become clear:

- Parents must be in agreement with each other in declaring the child stubborn and rebellious. Disagreement would reveal different approaches to raising the child, which may have prompted his misbehavior.

- Father and mother must be compatible. An unsuccessful marriage may contribute to a child's rebelliousness.

- That a child cannot be stubborn and rebellious if either parent suffers from blindness or deafness may invoke a metaphysical condition. If either parent does not see the child's needs or hear his words – if the parents are in that sense, rather than in a literal sense, blind or deaf – the child cannot be condemned.

In all of these cases, parents share the blame. Thus, the Talmud posits there will never be a stubborn and rebellious child since parents, on some level, always contribute to a child's conduct. Notwithstanding the apparent impossibility of a child facing this punishment, the Talmud concludes, "Study it [the laws of ben sorer u'moreh] and receive a reward" (*Sanhedrin* 71a). In other words, review the laws to learn the responsibilities parents have to their children.

Hopefully, this analysis of ben sorer u'moreh serves as an example of the rabbis' efforts to convey deep lessons. In this case, what seems to be a critique of a child's character turns out to be an opportunity for parents to increase self-awareness and recognize how their actions and relationships shape their children.

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RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**Migdal Ohr**

"For it is a curse of G-d [if one is] hung; and you shall not contaminate your land that Hashem, your G-d, gave you as a portion." (Devarim 21:23) When a person committed an act that required death by Bais Din, the Jewish court, they carried out the execution quickly, so as not to prolong his suffering and anxiety. Some violators, after their death, were hung on a tree as a further sign of the egregiousness of their sin. (Specifically, "blessing" Hashem (a euphemism) and idolatry.) However, the Torah immediately tells us not to keep them there overnight for it is "a curse of G-d" and will lead to defiling the land of Israel.

Rashi famously compares this to identical twins. One became king and one a criminal. When the criminal was hung, people said, "Look! The king is hanging." This was disrespectful. Similarly, we are created in the image of Hashem and for a Jew to be left hanging would be disgraceful to Hashem. But what does this have to do with contaminating the land?

The meforshim explain there are two different issues. One, leaving him hanging, and two, the fact that a corpse out in the open can bring impurity to those who interact with it. Therefore, the obligation to bury the body is given, but not related to the requirement to hang it.

In what way is the hanging of a body a "curse" of Elokim? As Rashi said, it reflects poorly on Hashem in Whose image Man was created. On the other hand, it reflects poorly on the judges because people may think the person committed a light sin and they were overly harsh in their judgment and treatment of this fellow. However, the Chizkuni adds another dimension.

He says that people will say, "In death, this man got all that he deserved, and it is sufficient that he was hung too." The problem with this is that one who cursed Hashem was in denial of all that Hashem is and does. Believing death to be the end of this man's sin implies that there is no afterlife where the person may need further rectification of his soul, thereby minimizing the spiritual nature and potential of a person. As Rashi said, we are created in Hashem's image. Just as He is eternal, so are we. Just as He created the world, so do we have the power to create; and this is where the risk for contamination comes in.

If we believe ourselves merely mortal, unconnected to the eternity of Hashem, we are selling ourselves short as small creatures without a continuous purpose in the Universe, as Hashem intended. This can lead to people focusing on this brief lifetime as the beginning and end of their existence, and cause them to do things in pursuit of pleasure and "happiness" that are abominable. This would lead people to contaminate what Hashem gave us.

The posuk says, "Do not defile 'admascha,' which Hashem gave you as your portion. Aside from meaning "land," this word can also mean the humanity which is the building block of great things and a symbol of our creativity. Disrespecting this aspect of ourselves would undermine the portion Hashem gave us, which was the ability to partner with Him in creation and eternity.

Forgetting our powers and considering ourselves less powerful than Hashem does, can lead to us failing to reach for our potential, surely one of the greatest possible contaminations.

One Erev Yom Kippur after Mincha in Tiferes Yerushalayim, everybody hurried home to eat the seudah hamafsekas, and finish preparing for Yom Kippur. The Rosh Yeshivah, R' Moshe Feinstein, z"l, however, had other plans. Walking home with his talmid, he suggested that they visit the elderly rav of Boyan. This rav was bedridden, and R' Moshe was aware that most people would be too busy to visit him on Erev Yom Kippur. His talmid agreed and they both hastened to reach his house.

When they arrived, they found the rav lying in bed alone and dejected. The rav's face lit up when he saw R' Moshe and his talmid. They sat down, and R' Moshe talked to the Rav at length, without showing the slightest bit of impatience or worry about the passing time. R' Moshe sat and talked until he saw a discernible change in the Rav's mood. Only then did he arise, and wish the Rav a gemar chasimah tovah. Once he was outside, he quickly hurried his steps to reach home in time to eat the seudah hamafsekas. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN**The War Bride**

The Torah gives the Jewish people the laws which Hashem has deemed to be the proper way of life.

Some of those laws are difficult to understand and others appear to go against what we might believe to be a nicer or more thoughtful way of life. I am not speaking here of a law which is difficult to follow, but instead a law which contradicts what we might think to be proper behavior. One such law is found at the beginning of our parasha this week, Parashat Ki Teitzei. As we examine the law and its ramifications, let us try to understand the explanations of our great Rabbis about this difficult passage. Perhaps it will enable us to see this law in a new light.

The Torah tells us, "When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your Elokim, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture (its people) as captives. And you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, you will take her to yourself as a wife. And you will bring her to the midst of your house, she shall shave her head and let her nails grow. She will remove

the garment of her captivity from upon herself and she shall sit in your house and she shall weep for her father and for her mother a full month, thereafter you may come to her and live with her, and she shall be a wife to you. And it will be if you have not desired her, then you shall send her on her own, but you may not sell her for money, you shall not put her to work, because you have afflicted her.”

Our Rabbis tell us that the case mentioned here is a war outside of the land of Israel to avoid a future war that would be held within its borders. A war which is held within Israel's border would not permit the taking of captives as one would be required to kill all enemies within the borders. The Be'er Mayim Chaim explains that we can learn this from the superfluous use of “and you will capture its captives”. In as war within Israel's borders, no captives could be taken. The Torah here discusses the case of a particularly beautiful captive who catches the eye of one of the soldiers. This woman has already been taken captive as a Canaanite slave. As such, she would be subject to a life of slavery and her offspring would be future slaves.

There is another general occurrence in war that is part of the emotional response of soldiers throughout history. The fear of death or serious injury can paralyze a soldier and threaten his demise. There is a natural hatred which builds in the soldier towards his enemy for hurting his friends or even for placing his life in danger. Soldiers, when victorious, display both superiority and vengeance towards their captives. Women are raped and killed, houses and fields are destroyed, and children are often butchered in the streets. Each of these actions are deplorable, but understandable in light of the evil experience of war. That said, we can now look with greater understanding towards this section.

The Torah uses the phrase “v'ra'ita bashivyah, and you will see her in her captivity”. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that it was the practice of women who were about to be captured to beautify themselves in order to win special favors for themselves and their children. There is a difference of opinion among the Rabbis as to the order of the events as they occur. The Torah understands the immediate passions of the soldier while at the same time calls upon him to exercise control of his actions so as to minimize giving in to his yeitzer hara, his evil inclination. Though many of the Rabbis accept that the soldier's immediate passion causes him to have relations with her one time, Rashi and the Ramban indicate that he is not permitted to be with her even once until the rest of the process occurs. In either case, the soldier must curtail his actions until the other steps in this process are fulfilled. The Or HaChaim asks one of the more compelling questions on this entire process. Why would Hashem permit a soldier to become impure by attempting a marriage with a non-Jewish woman? He answers that

from the beginning of time there have been beautiful souls that were spread among the people of the world, and that many of these souls eventually find their way into the Jewish people as we find with Ruth the Moabite.

The process mentioned here is designed to allow the soldier time to reconsider his decision. He must now place this woman in his house for a period of a month during which he may not be with her. She is to shave her head and let her nails grow. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that these actions make her less attractive. The soldier's passion for her was kindled by her beauty, so the command is to lessen that beauty in his eyes. She also cries openly for her father and mother for an entire month. The Ramban explains that Rabbi Akiva understands this passage allegorically to mean that she mourns her gods which she will never see again. Hirsch explains that the soldier was infatuated with her beauty alone, but beauty is not enough to sustain a marriage. Matchmakers understand that “discord in married life and unsuccessful bringing up of children...can be expected from all unions (which are not based on) reason and suitability but solely on passion.” When this process has been completed, if he still desires her, she is converted to Judaism and the soldier may then marry her.

The Torah explains what will happen if he then chooses not to marry her. “And it will be if you have not desired her, then you shall send her on her own, but you may not sell her for money, you shall not put her to work, because you have afflicted her.” HaRav Sorotzkin explains that this is really a time of great joy, for he has been able to control his passion and is now thinking more clearly. The Kli Yakar explains that the term “if you have not desired her”, is a hint to the soldier that it is inevitable that he will no longer desire her.

We see here that Hashem took a difficult situation and commanded a solution which could have a positive result either way. If this captive truly converts and loves her captor, then she will be welcome in his house and among his people. If she is rejected, she will not become a slave for life to someone else. She will be free to follow her own path and may not be subjugated again. Though the situation is not an ideal one, it is a realistic approach to purify what could be a sin of much greater magnitude. Hashem demonstrates throughout His Torah that He has a complete and realistic understanding of human nature. Hashem did not choose to forbid that which He would have preferred to forbid, but what He understood would be next to impossible for most people to keep. Instead, His Law sought a compromise which both indicated His preferred behavior while at the same time established a process which accepted man's frailty and allowed him to regain his purity and live within the Laws of the

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RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

I Hate to Tell You This

Some form of the word שנא/hate appears quite frequently in Parshat Ki Taytze.

- “If a man has a two wives, one loved and one hated.” (The man is forbidden to favor the son of the loved)

- “If a man marries a woman...and hates her” (and subsequently spreads false stories, lashon hara, about her).

- “And the second man will hate her” (after she had already been divorced from her first husband).

Hate is a terrible feeling. As my mother used to say, hate is perhaps one of the worst, yet most often used, of the “four letter words”.

Baseless hatred has been the cause of wars, suffering, and societal ills since the beginning of time. Even in this parsha, the hatred towards one's wife can lead to raising a מורד ומורה, a rebellious son.

Are all of these instances of “hate” real? Can a person think that he/she is hated by someone when in fact there are no such feelings?

Prior to becoming the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah V'daas, Rav Avraham Pam taught in the younger divisions of the yeshiva. One time, while meeting with parents at the annual PTA conference, Rav Pam was questioned by Mrs. Goldstein, the mother of one of his students.

“Rav Pam, my son would like to know why you hate him. My husband and I are also curious as to why you would have such feelings. Moshe is such a good boy!”

Taken by surprise, Rav Pam answered, “Hate him? I don't hate anyone and certainly not one of my students. Moshe is a wonderful and well-behaved student. Did he express something in particular that I did or said?”

Mrs. Goldstein explained, “Moshe says that you rarely call on him to answer questions even when he raises his hand.”



Rav Pam, who was known to be a very sensitive and caring person took this to heart. He assured Mrs. Goldstein that he had only love and respect for Moshe and would be more attentive from that day and on.

Rav Pam then went on to tell Mrs. Goldstein that this incident helped him understand a difficulty

that he always had in understanding something in the Chumash.

Yaakov was married to Rachel and Leah. Although tricked into marrying Leah, he nonetheless accepted her as a wife, just as he did Rachel.

The Torah in ויצא פרשת says: וירא ה' כי שנואה לאה -“And HaShem saw that Leah was hated. He therefore blessed her with children prior to Rochel.

Is it fathomable that the great Yaakov Avinu hated anyone and certainly his wife?

What did HaShem “see”? He saw that Leah felt hated. It wasn't the actions of Yaakov but possibly the inactions.

Rav Pam went on to say that Leah felt hated because Yaakov favored Rachel. Yaakov didn't harbor an iota of bad feeling. His being more attentive to Rachel created that perception in Leah.

Often someone's perception is her reality. Leah felt unloved by her husband.

The consequence for Yaakov not being more sensitive was that his beloved Rachel did not merit childbirth with the same blessing as Leah.

Rav Pam realized that in fact he might not have been calling on Moshe as much as other students, thus creating the perception in Moshe's eyes, that his rebbe disliked him.

Perception being the reality lies at the heart of what Leah says upon the birth of her second son, Shimon: “ותאמר כי שמע ה' כי שנואה אני ויתן לי גם את זה” – “And she said since HaShem heard that I am hated and (therefore) gave me also this (son)”.

The Torah doesn't here say that HaShem saw (as it states in the earlier pasuk) that I am hated. He heard. Leah felt less in the eyes of her husband and expressed this through her emotions. While one couldn't see any hatred on the part of Yaakov, HaShem “heard” how Leah felt this way.

Relationships are the lifeline of our existence. The connection to our spouse, parents, children, co-workers, friends and others around us are a 2-way street. We must make certain that we are sending the proper signals to all those in our lives.

When ill feelings arise, the healthy way is to work through them rather than let hatred build or fester. While not easy, the efforts expended in mending relationships are a most worthwhile investment.

There are countless directives within the Torah as to how to interact with others, be it family, friends or even the stranger on the street.

All those with whom we co-exist should have the perception that they are loved, appreciated and respected.

By using more thought and consideration we can brighten the lives of all those around us. A smile, greeting or a little bit of tzedaka and kindness can go a long way. © 2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org