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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

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

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

To be free, you have to let go of hate. That is what Moses is saying. If they continued to hate their erstwhile enemies, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of Egypt, but he would not have taken Egypt out of the Israelites. Mentally, they would still be there, slaves to the past. They would still be in chains, not of metal but of the mind-and chains of the mind are the most constricting of all.

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

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

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

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

Only thus can we understand an otherwise inexplicable detail in the Exodus story itself. In Moses' first encounter with God at the burning bush, he is charged with the mission of bringing the people out to freedom. God adds a strange rider: "I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward this people, so

that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbour and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters." (Ex. 3:21-22)

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

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

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

When God told Moses to tell the Israelites to take parting gifts from the Egyptians, it is as if He were saying: Yes, the Egyptians enslaved you, but that is about to become the past. Precisely because I want you to remember the past, it is essential that you do so without hate or desire for revenge. What you are to recall is the pain of being a slave, not the anger you feel towards your slave-masters. There must be an act of symbolic closure. This cannot be justice in the fullest sense of the word: such justice is a chimera, and the desire for it insatiable and self-destructive. There is no way of restoring the dead to life, or of recovering the lost years of liberty denied. But neither can a people deny the past, deleting it from the database of memory. If they try to do so it will eventually come back-Freud's "return of the repressed"-and claim a terrible price in the form of high-minded, altruistic vengeance. Therefore the former slave-owner must give the former slave a gift, acknowledging him as a free human being who has contributed, albeit without choice, to his welfare. This is not a squaring of accounts. It is, rather, a minimal form of restitution, of what today is called "restorative justice".

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

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

"Do not hate an Egyptian, because you were strangers in his land," said Moses, meaning: To be free, you have to let go of hate. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l*

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 Tetze 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 Tetze: "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'onyi), for now my husband will love me'" (Gen. 29:32).

Leah emerges as a dignified heroine, bearing in silence the brunt of her husband's rejection. She publicly fulfills the role of matriarch, bearing and raising the founders of six tribes of Israel and dutifully catering to and advising her husband whenever she is approached by him. God has seen "into her affliction," has heard the stifled sobs into her pillow at night, has glimpsed the river of silent tears which has been her only comfort. God Himself tries to make up for her unearned misery by making her fruitful and, conversely, by blocking the womb of the beloved Rachel.

And what of Reuven? He is the dignified son of a dignified mother, who sees but does not speak; who understands but does not complain. He feels his mother's pain and therefore he gathers the aphrodisiac mandrakes for his mother as a gift (Gen. 30:14). And later on, when his rival Joseph – his younger brother, son of Rachel, who has unfairly been given favorite son status – is cast into a pit, it is Reuven who attempts to extricate him and save him from death. But just as his mother Leah was rejected by his father, he, Reuven was rejected by his siblings! (Reuven initially wanted Joseph to be freed entirely, and apparently, they refused to listen to him. See 37:21–22, Nahmanides ad loc., and 42:22.)

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. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Devarim: Moses Bequeaths Legacy, History and Covenant, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinDevarim.*

RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"L

Wein Online

The parsha of Ki Teitzei contains the second most numerous count of mitzvoth in the Torah, topped only by the count of mitzvoth in the parsha of Kdoshim in Chumash Vayikra. The commentators to the Torah discuss why these mitzvoth that first appear in Ki Teitzei, all of whom are ultimately derived from the granting of the Torah at Mount Sinai almost forty years earlier, find their place in the Torah here in Moshe's final oration to the Jewish people.

Their approach to the issue differs. Some are of the opinion since many of these mitzvoth are related to war, settling the land, domesticated human life and the like they appear here because of the impending life altering change for the Jewish people. from a miraculous existence in the desert to a more natural and normal society living They were now in their own land with all of the changes and problems that such a radical shift of circumstances implies.

Others merely say that this is an example of the Talmudic dictum that the Torah is not bound in its teachings and text to any narrative time line; there is no chronological order to the Torah. Even though these mitzvoth appear to us in writing here for the first time in the Torah text, they were essentially already taught to the Jewish people in the desert long before by Moshe.

There are other explanations to the placement of these mitzvoth here in our parsha advanced by many of the great commentators to the Torah. All possible explanations are valid and they are not mutually exclusive.

If I may be bold enough to add my insight to this matter as well, I would say as follows: The Jewish people are now about to become a nation and to establish their own government in the Land of Israel. They will have to fight many battles, bloody and painful, to establish their right to the Land of Israel and to establish their sovereignty over the territory that it encompasses.

They will need an army, a civil government, a judicial system, an economy and labor force and all of the other necessary trappings that accompany nation building and establishing a territorial entity and effective government. In the face of these demands it will be likely that they will think that they may discard the spiritual yoke of the mitzvoth imposed upon them at

Sinai.

It will be easy to say that mitzvoth were necessary in the Sinai desert where no other demands on our time, energy and service existed for us. But now we have more pressing business at hand and therefore the punctilious observance of mitzvoth is no longer required of us.

Moshe comes in this parsha, in the midst of his valedictory oration to the Jewish people, to remind them that mitzvoth and Torah are the only effective guarantee of Jewish success and survival even while engaged in building and defending Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel.

Moshe in effect says to them: "Here are some more mitzvoth that will help you succeed in building the land and your sovereignty over it." Moshe's message is as germane to our time as it was to the first Jews who arrived en masse to settle in the Land of Israel thirty-three centuries ago.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Captive Woman

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 remains 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.

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Chazal describe the judgment meted out to a ben sorer u'moreh, the boy who, at the tender age of 13, demonstrates indulgences and worse, as being merited because he is judged al sheim sofo, based on what his "end" will likely be: a murderous mugger (Devarim 21:18).

Several years ago, I noted how an incongruity seems to lie in the case of Yishmael. Although his descendants, as Rashi notes, will prove to be cruel tormenters of his half-brother Yitzchak's descendants, he is judged "ba'asher hu shom": where he is at the current moment (Beraishis 21:17).

The Mizrachi and Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin address the problem by noting that the ben sorer u'moreh has already himself acted in an ugly manner, whereas Yishmael's cruel descendants lay generations in the future. (I suggested, based on a question, another approach, that internalizing materialism and luxuries, like the ben sorer has done, is a particularly weighty indicator of hopelessness.)

Rav Zevin, based on his approach, also reveals a different dimension of the law of ben sorer u'moreh, which is virtually impossible to happen, given Chazal's requirements for prosecution (see Sanhedrin 71a), and, according to Rabi Yehudah, indeed never did, and exists only to edify us.

He explains that just as the boy's harsh judgment is based (as above) on his having demonstrated the seeds of criminality already, so are

all of us responsible for whatever bad we've done, and for its implications for our futures.

But, he continues, when Rosh Hashanah arrives, we are able to engage in doing teshuvah, which removes our past sins from the divine calculus. And, thus, even though we may indeed -- like Yishmael's descendents, lihavdil, did in their horrible way -- lapse in our own ways in the coming year, at the moment of judgment, we are judged "ba'asher hu shom." Where we stand at the moment of din.

Which, Rav Zevin, suggests, is why the parsha about Yishmael's life being saved by Hashem is read on Rosh Hashanah. *© 2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Obligations: Interest and Vows

Parashat Ki Teitzei is a collection of important Laws from Hashem, some stated in a long paragraph and others in what appears to be a disjointed series of single-sentence Laws. Many of these single-sentence Laws are placed one after the other in several separate sections of our parasha. It is not clear why some Laws were organized together, yet others were organized into a different grouping. Sometimes, however, there is a connection between one set of Laws and another. To make this more comprehensible in the section that is discussed, the two sets of Laws, which appear together, will be shown under a numbered label.

The Torah states: "(1) You shall not cause your brother to take interest, interest of money or interest of food, interest of anything that he may take as interest. You may cause a non-Jew to take interest, but you may not cause your brother to take interest, so that Hashem, your Elokim, will bless you in your every undertaking on the land to which you are coming to possess it." [And] "(2) When you make a vow to Hashem, your Elokim, you shall not be late in paying it, for Hashem, your Elokim, will demand it of you, and there will be a sin in you. If you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you. You shall keep what emerges from your lips and do [it], just as you vowed a voluntary gift to Hashem, your Elokim, whatever you spoke with your mouth."

Rashi explains that there are really two Laws that speak about charging interest. The Law written here is a negative commandment for the borrower. The borrower is forbidden to try to convince his brother to lend him money by promising to pay back the loan with interest. Later the Torah specifically forbids the lender to loan money to his brother for the promise to return the loan with interest. This is a negative commandment on the lender. One is only permitted to lend to a non-Jew or accept a loan from a non-Jew with a promise of interest, as he may feel no obligation to lend without that additional payment. The Gur Aryeh explains that the Torah does not obligate a Jew to request that a non-Jew lend money with interest, but the Torah gives permission for a Jew to pay interest on a loan from a non-Jew.

The Ramban explains that the way in which this Law is stated in the Torah indicates that the borrower can also be guilty if he suggests or accepts a loan from a fellow Jew that includes interest. The Ramban states: "interest of any thing that is lent upon interest, meaning even building blocks and other articles which are lent," are forbidden even though one might think that interest only applies to money. He reports that one is forbidden to lend a pound of flour for a pound-and-a-half, even if, by chance, at the time of repaying the loan, a pound-and-a-half of flour is worth the same amount as a pound was worth at the time of the loan. Even the appearance of interest is considered forbidden because it might lead others to misunderstand the Law. The Talmud even speaks of avoiding borrowing a cup of sugar because the price might change before one returns it to the lender.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that "the laws concerning vows comes in close connection with the preceding (laws concerning loans without interest). The Prohibition of interest rests on the recognition of the fact that everything that we call our own really belongs to Hashem, as the real Owner and Master Who has the right to dispose of it as He wishes." Vows (to Hashem) are even more the special right of Hashem to possess at His Will. While the fulfillment of any vow is obligatory since it is a promise to Hashem, it is preferred to give a gift to Hashem without preceding the gift with a vow.

The vow used in this section of our parasha deals with a promise to bring a korban, a sacrifice or offering to Hashem. A vow is a promise made using the name of Hashem. One must be very careful before one states a vow because of the prohibition to take Hashem's name in vain. And yet, the Torah states, "When you make a vow to Hashem, your Elokim, you shall not be late in paying it." The Torah gives one permission to make a vow but does not encourage one to do so. The Torah does state: "If you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you." In other words, one may bring an offering to Hashem without first making a vow to bring it. The Torah cautions, "Beware of your vows, for although they serve as encouragement in bringing offerings to Elokim which will be accepted favorably on your behalf, yet you may come to sin if you vow and do not fulfill, or you delay fulfilling it." Rashi explains that a delay refers to the passing of the three Pilgrimage Festivals (Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot)." The Bal HaTurim says that this should read four festivals, as three festivals might constitute only half a year instead of a full one.

HaAmek Davar suggests another reason for

avoiding making a vow to bring an offering to Hashem. One should note that these sentences are specifically dealing with an offering, a gift, to Hashem. This does not speak of an obligation to Hashem, such as an offering after committing a sin. Such an obligation would never require a vow, as it already carries an obligation without invoking Hashem's name. Just as using the name of Hashem creates a situation in which "something promised to Hashem is still wrongfully "with us," in our possession, so, too, the obligation to bring an animal for an offering to atone for a sin, is a situation in which "something promised to Hashem is still wrongfully "with us."

The Kli Yakar also brings still one more reason to avoid making a vow on a voluntary gift to Hashem. He states that the yeitzer hara, the evil inclination of Man, will cause him to procrastinate and even second guess his obligation to fulfill this vow. The longer he maintains possession over the object which he has obligated himself to give because of that vow, the greater will be his temptation to listen to the yeitzer hara. Since it becomes increasingly more difficult to avoid that temptation, it is better that one should avoid making a vow using Hashem's name, which, if one does not fulfill, will be a sin.

As HaRav Hirsch explained, both interest payments and vows indicate Hashem's ownership of the world. Hashem has allowed us only temporary possessions. How one deals with his possessions should indicate that he understands this concept. This can be accomplished without invoking Hashem's name. May we gain understanding through the commentaries to guide us. *© 2025 Rabbi D. Levin*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And you see in captivity, a beautiful woman, and you long for her, and you take her for yourself for a wife." (Devarim 21:11) The concept of the beautiful war bride is one that boggles the mind. A Jewish soldier, who witnesses miraculous success in his battle against the enemy, where no men are lost, should be on a very high spiritual level. How then, when witnessing Hashem's direct involvement in his life, does he succumb to the physical desire of such a woman? More than that, how does the Torah permit such a union?

Chazal tell us, "The Torah only spoke against the Yetzer Hara," meaning to say that since we are afraid, he will marry her anyway, Hashem, in His kindness, permitted it so he doesn't transgress. The understanding of the great urgency of his desire is clear to Hashem, and He therefore gave a dispensation for it.

However, even though in this specific case Hashem made an exception, we shouldn't get it into our heads that any time we really want something, we can do it and Hashem will let it slide. On the contrary, from the fact that Hashem made this explicit exception, we should recognize that what we do very much matters, and He does very much care. Additionally, in these pesukim, we are taught another very important lesson to help us fight against the Yetzer Hara, as our Sages say.

The word for desire, here, is 'cheshek.' It is stronger than a simple desire, which is 'cheifetz.' In Tanach, we find it used several times. It is used when Chamor discussed his son Shechem's attachment to Dina, daughter of Yaakov. It is also used in relation to the things Shlomo HaMelech built and did.

Kabbalistically, Shechem's soul cleaved to Dina. It was more than base desire, but a deep desire to connect to the spiritual and holy. The soul of R' Chanina ben Tradyon was trapped in Shechem, and Dina freed that soul and allowed it to come to the good side. Similarly, the desires of Shlomo, the wisest of men, were surely possessed of deep meaning and intent.

The Torah is telling us that this soldier senses a deep reason to take this woman. It is destiny; it must be done for some purpose like that of Shechem and Dina. But the soldier was wrong. At the end, the Torah tells us, "if you will not want her…"

It's actually an announcement that he will not want her. He will not even have a base desire for her, and this is the way the Torah speaks, "against the Yetzer Hara." The Evil Inclination will push you to sin, because this act is morally correct, it is for a higher purpose, and you are doing the right thing. But this is smoke and mirrors. The Torah says, "Though you think you have a deep passion for the good, this is just trickery. You will end up seeing the truth and being disgusted. So it is with all the drives the Yetzer Hara puts in you. Don't let yourself be fooled."

One Shabbos, during a break in an Agudah Convention, a certain gadol went for a walk with another Rav to get some fresh air. As they approached the boardwalk, the sage asked the younger rabbi to hold his hand.

When the younger man asked for an explanation, the older Rosh Yeshiva said, "There are immodestly-dressed women here and I want to close my eyes as I walk."

Surprised that the sage, who had been a senior citizen for many years, would be concerned about this, the fellow asked, "What about me? Shouldn't I have to close my eyes as well?" "I don't know YOUR Yetzer Hara," replied the gadol, "I only know mine." *© 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

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 בן סורר 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 פרשת ויצא 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 אנכי 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*