

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“First chase away the mother and only then may you take the young (Deut: 22:7)" A theological question: do we follow the laws of the Torah because G-d is good and His commandments guide us to be more compassionate ourselves, or because G-d is G-d, and the Torah's primary intention is to inculcate us with the discipline to follow - even blindly - the Divine decrees?

The interpretation of one particular commandment in this week's Biblical portion of Ki Teitze will bring our question into sharp focus: "If you come across a bird's nest on any tree or on the ground, and it contains baby birds or eggs, if the mother is sitting on the chicks or eggs, you must not take the mother along with her young. You must first chase away the mother, and only then may you take the young." (Deut. 22:6-7).

Since the mother hovers about her nest protecting the young, she represents motherly concern for and commitment to her offspring. In commanding us to send the mother away, it would seem that our Torah is desirous of sparing her the pain of watching her young taken from her embrace: apparently we are obliged to show sympathy toward all of life, not just humans.

Professor Yishayahu Leibowitz, of blessed memory, one of Israel's pro-eminent philosophical minds of the modern era, believed that Judaism is not necessarily centered on ethics or compassion. Rather, the Torah wants Jews to follow G-d's commandments because they're G-d's commandments. Judaism is a discipline, and in following it, a certain society will be formed. No discipline, and the society falls apart - as simple as that. My rational interpretations of human love and compassion are not within the purview of Biblical concerns. The classic example often cited by Professor Leibowitz was the Binding of Isaac, which is hardly a test of Abraham's potential for compassion; it is rather a test of his ability to submit to G-d's inscrutable will, even to the extent of G-d's demanding a "teleological suspension of the ethical" (Kierkegaard).

Leibowitz would seem to be supported by the Talmudic discussion surrounding a mishna in Tractate Brakhot (Ch. 5. mishna 3), which lists three occasions when a person praying on behalf of the congregation must be silenced. One such case is if the worshipper

who entreats G-d to show compassion because His compassion extends even to a bird- as evidenced in our commandment to send away the mother bird before taking her young. Then why do we silence the Cantor?

In the ensuing Talmudic discussion, R. Yosi bar Zvida explains that the Cantor is presenting the commandments (in his prayers) as "...springing from compassion, whereas they are but decrees" (B.T. Brakhot 33b)! Clarifying R. Yosi's comment, Rashi writes (loc. cit.) that "... G-d didn't give (Israel) His commandments because of compassion, but merely to inform them that they are His servants ...".

Maimonides has a view which is diametrically opposed to that of Professor Leibowitz. In his Commentary on the Mishna (Brakhot ad loc.), as well as in the Guide to the Perplexed (Part 3, Chapter 48), Maimonides insists that we do send away the bird because of compassion. He makes the point that even in the animal world the mother suffers when she sees the suffering of her calf: "As far as pain is concerned, there is no real distinction between the pain of humans and the pain of animals. The love and compassion of the mother for her young is not reasoned intellectually, but has only to do with emotions and instincts, which are found among animals no less than amongst human beings." If so, then why do we silence the Cantor? "Because this particular commandment is a Divine decree...; were it to have been given because of compassion, the Bible would not have permitted slaughtering animals or fowl altogether" (Mishneh Torah, laws of Prayer, 9,7). Apparently, Maimonides believes that the ideal view of the Bible is not to take animal life at all for human needs; after all Adam and Eve were initially granted only fruit and vegetables for food. "It was only after the flood, when G-d saw that man's instinct was deeply imbedded with a desire to kill, that He allowed humanity to spill the blood of an animal and eat its flesh, a legitimate sublimation. Thus the concession. Meat for the masses. We are allowed to kill animals, but not human beings.

Thus sending away the mother bird and being permitted to take the nestlings is like being permitted to eat meat or to bring home the captive woman from the battle field. It's a concession, not the ideal. The Torah deals here with reality, the human instinct to take it all, mother and child, the Biblical compromise that we may take the child but not in the presence of the mother. Our Torah is a Torah of compassion, but it is a Torah of

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reality as well. And while the commandment to send away the mother is an attempt to sensitize us to the moral ambiguities of eating fowl, it can hardly be invoked as the idea of compassion on the basis of which we are deserving of lovingkindness.

From this perspective it becomes quite clear that the Torah certainly does attempt to train us in compassion, to have us emulate G-d because He is good and compassionate, therefore desirous of our becoming good and compassionate. Thus when Moses beseeches G-d in Parshat Ki Tisa to reveal to him the vision of G-d's glory, an aspect of G-d's essence able to be revealed to humans, what Moses sees is expressed in the famous Thirteen Attributes of G-d, which begin: "G-d, G-d, omnipotent, compassionate and kind, long-suffering and full of lovingkindness ... " (Exodus 34:6) so that immediately following G-d's omnipotence, we learn that the essence of G-d is compassion. And why is G-d's name mentioned twice in the opening of Thirteen Attributes? The Talmud teaches that just as G-d loves us before we sin, G-d continues to love us after we sin as well. The very four letter name of G-d, Y-HVH, means a G-d of love, and our Torah is described as one whose paths lead to pleasantness and peace. Thus, by definition, G-d is the compassionate One. And let us never forget that in the commandment surrounding the Binding of Isaac, Leibowitz forgets the punch-line in which G-d exhorts Abraham not to even touch his son, never to "sacrifice" his son, but that our G-d is a G-d of life and love.

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RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

In this week's Torah portion, Moses tells the Jewish people of many laws they need to observe. One of the laws that are of utmost importance is when it comes to making a vow to G-d. Regarding this, Moses said: "You shall observe and carry out what emerges from your lips..." (Deuteronomy 23:24)

If one were to make a vow or promise to G-d, it is something that must be fulfilled. While there are ways in Jewish law to have these vows annulled, nonetheless, the intent when one makes the vow is that he or she plans on honoring it. Sadly, most people today speak with little or no regard for carrying out the

words they say to someone else. It's incredible just how often someone will say something with which he has absolutely no intention whatsoever of following through. Also, since the Torah is a guidebook for living, how does keeping your word lead to having a happy and fulfilling life?

The answer is that when someone keeps his word, he will actually experience a great amount of pleasure. The reason for this is that a person can only feel good about himself when he makes good choices. Making poor choices will inevitably give a person a low self-image, whereby making positive and healthy choices will make him feel great about himself.

When you follow through with the most simplest of declarations, like "I'll be there at 8:00 PM," it shows that you value your word and what you say is important to you. But here's the thing-the only way you'll care about keeping your word is if you care about yourself. But the reverse is just as true-the more you keep your word, the better you'll feel about yourself. This is actually self-esteem math; it works every time.

When you honor what you say-no matter what it might be-you're actually making a bold statement of just how important your word is. And again, the reason keeping your word makes you feel terrific is that only someone who has a high self worth cares about following through with what he says. The more you do what it is that you say you'll do-even the most simplest of commitments-you'll increasingly feel better and better about yourself.

So always keep your word. If not for the person to whom you're speaking, then do it for yourself. Because over time, it will just make you feel amazing.

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RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

Parshat Ki Teitzei begins by describing a scenario in which the Jewish army is victorious in war and captures foreign prisoners. A Jewish soldier sees a beautiful woman among the captives and wishes to marry her. The Torah permits this marriage, but adds that if the soldier no longer desires the woman after they are wed, he must send her away (Deut. 21:14). Rashi, based on the Sifri, explains that this unhappy result is inevitable. The soldier will necessarily come to hate the foreign woman he married and will eventually divorce her.

Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mizrahi does not see the textual basis for this interpretation. The verse seems simply to state, "If you do not desire her, send her away." Where are the extra words from which to derive that the divorce is inevitable?

One approach in answering this question is based on the Shulchan Aruch (Even HaEzer 126:2), which states that, when writing the date on a divorce contract, the word used for "month" is yerach. This

seems peculiar, since when writing a marriage contract, the word used for "month" is chodesh. Why use different words on documents that have comparable legal functions?

The Levush and the Beit Shmuel explain that the Torah associates the word yerach with divorce (see Deut. 33:14). Because of this relationship, the word yerach is used in a divorce contract. The word chodesh, however, is associated with marriage, as we see in this week's parsha: "When a man takes a new (chadasha) wife" (Deut. 24:5). Although the word chadasha literally means "new," it shares a linguistic root with the word chodesh. Therefore, the word chodesh is used in a marriage contract.

When the Torah describes a soldier who desires a foreign captive woman, it states, "You may take her for a wife" (Deut. 21:11). The commentator Gan Raveh notes that the word "take" in this verse refers to marriage (as we also saw in the verse, "When a man takes a new wife"). If the Torah is referring to marriage, however, we see a puzzling phrase later in the story, when the woman is permitted to spend a full month weeping for her parents (Deut. 21:13). This month-long period of time is termed yerach yamim! Why would the Torah use a word associated with divorce (yerach) when describing a new marriage?

According to the Gan Raveh, this is the clue upon which the Sifri based its inference. The phrase yerach yamim (as opposed to chodesh yamim) hints that the marriage between the Jewish soldier and the foreign woman will inevitably end in divorce.

Why should this be? What is the root cause of the couple's unhappiness? We can suggest that the relationship described in this week's parsha is not based on the couple's appreciation of each other's spiritual qualities. Rather, the man and woman were drawn together solely due to external physical attributes, and therefore the marriage is doomed to fail.

The Mishnah (Avot 5:16) teaches, "Any love that is dependent on a specific cause will be gone when the cause is gone. But a love that is not dependent on a specific cause will never disappear." Virtually all the commentators on the Mishnah struggle to understand what sort of love is not dependent on a specific cause. Isn't every relationship dependent on something?

Rabbi Ovadia MiBartenura answers this question in the following way: Although every love does depend on something, there is a difference between whether the foundation of the relationship is physical or spiritual. A physically-based relationship is necessarily temporary. Once the attractive physical attributes are gone, the love will also disappear. Spiritual qualities, however, are eternal—so a love that depends on spiritual attributes will last forever. According to the Bartenura's interpretation, "a love that is not dependent on a specific cause" refers to a specific physical cause. We

can learn from here the key to building successful interpersonal relationships. A man and woman must appreciate each other's inner beauty, and found their relationship on common spiritual goals and values.

May all of us, regardless of whether we are not yet dating, currently dating, or already married, be able to find the true "other." May we build our relationships based on internal beauty, thereby strengthening the fabric of the Jewish people, and through that unity may we merit the coming of Moshiach and the building of our eternal Temple. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.org

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

“When a man has a wayward, rebellious son, who does not obey his father and mother, they shall have him flogged. If he still does not listen to them... [the parents] must declare to the elders of his city, 'Our son is wayward and rebellious. He does not listen to us, and is an (exceptional) glutton and drunkard.' "(Deut. 21:18)

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 71a) says that there never was a rebellious son executed by the court. The topic was recorded in the Torah in order to learn and receive reward. But even if there never was a rebellious son, we can learn a great deal about raising children from a careful study of the Torah's description of the rebellious son. By studying the factors that help create a son so tainted that it is a kindness to kill him while he is still young and has not yet committed all the heinous crimes he otherwise would, we can learn to do the opposite with our own children.

It must be clear at the outset that there are no sure-fire rules of education that apply to all children at all times. Reishis Chachmah quotes a Midrash that it is easier to raise a legion of olive trees in the Galilee, where the soil and climate are not conducive to growing olive trees, than to raise one child in the Land of Israel, even though Israel is conducive to proper education, since the atmosphere itself helps to imbue one with wisdom and holiness.

Children are not objects to be fashioned at will, but rather human beings who have their own free will and can reject, if they so choose, even the best education. The most a parent can hope to achieve, as Chiddushei HaRim points out regarding all learning, is to put the words of Torah on the heart of the child so that when the heart opens up, the Torah found on it will sink into the receptive heart.

The law of the rebellious son is applicable only when the child is age 13 and for the next three months, i.e., at the very inception of his manhood. This points to the importance of a proper foundation in the education of children—that early education forms the basis of the child's experience and hence is the root and foundation of his life.

Avos deRav Nosson expounds on the Mishnah (Avot 4:25), "One who studies Torah as a child, to what can he be likened? To ink, written on fresh paper." Just as ink is readily absorbed into new paper, so the Torah learned when young permeates the very fiber of the child's being.

Alshich explains the injunction (Proverbs 22:6), "Educate the youth according to his path," as a warning to put him on the proper path before he develops the wrong path on his own. The proper beginning is crucial, for it forms the root, and any blemish in the root will manifest itself a thousand-fold in the resultant growth. A strong root, however, insures a healthy plant.

The Torah describes the rebellious son as not heeding the voice (kol) of his father and mother. Maharal points out that a kol denotes a voice or noise, something not necessarily intelligible. The rebellious son listens to his parents when their words make sense to him, but when their directives are not understood by him, he ignores them.

A child must be taught to rely on his parents' instructions and trust in their desire and ability to guide him on the proper path, even though he may not understand or grasp the wisdom of their directions. Though a parent should try to explain to the child the reasons for his directions and instructions, the child must be taught that in the end whether he understands or not, he must accept his parents' authority.

The Talmud learns from the phrase, "he does not listen to our voices," that to be deemed a rebellious son, both parents must have similar voices. Both parents' guidance must reflect the same values, and they must be consistent in their instruction. If the parents do not speak with one voice, their child cannot be deemed rebellious, because the blame for his rebellious behavior is not his alone.

Further, the parents must point at their son and say, "this son of ours." If the parents are blind and thus incapable of pointing him out, the son cannot be deemed a rebellious son. The requirement that the parents be able to see hints to the necessity of parents viewing each child as an individual, with unique gifts and needs, who must be educated according to his individual personality. If parents are blind to the child's individuality and educate him according to a predetermined formula, the child can also not be fully blamed.

To be classified as a rebellious son, he must steal money from his parents to eat and drink like a glutton. This conduct shows, says Ibn Ezra, a distorted outlook. The glutton makes the pleasures of this world his only goal rather than seeing this world as the place to prepare for eternal spiritual life. The meat and wine he consumed could have been fully kosher. It is not enough to teach a child that he may eat only kosher food. He must also understand why, so that he does not become a Jew in form but not in substance.

The Talmud explains that the rebellious son is killed now, because if allowed to continue on the same path he will eventually become a robber and murderer. He is killed for his own benefit so that he doesn't lose his portion in the World to Come.

From this we learn the most important lesson of child-rearing. A parent must focus on the soul of his child and his eternal status, even more intensely that his physical well-being. What parent would think of exposing his child to even a slight chance of catching a serious communicable disease? How much more so should a parent protect his child from an environment that might exert negative spiritual influences. If we fret over our child's ability to earn a living, how much more so should we be concerned that he or she grow to be a successful Jew.

We should remember in Elul that there is no greater merit for the Day of Judgment than having raised a child properly. The Zohar teaches that when an individual appears before the Heavenly Court, after 120 years, G-d inquires if he educated his children properly. If the answer is affirmative, G-d refuses to accept any more testimony against him, for the merit of guiding his children properly overshadows everything else.

May we learn the deep lessons contained in the Torah's discussion of the rebellious son, so that we merit to raise children fully occupied in Torah and mitzvot. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Because of the matter that they did not offer you bread and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and that they hired Bilam to curse you" (Devarim 23:4). There is much discussion surrounding the reasons given for not allowing men from the nations of Amon and Moav to marry Jewish women even after they convert to Judaism. One of the major topics is reconciling their not offering us food with Moshe telling Sichon that Moav did in fact sell them food (see Rashi on Devarim 2:29).

There are several approaches suggested to answer this apparent contradiction. Ibn Ezra says that Moshe didn't mean that they sold us food, but that they let us walk through their land, albeit on the outskirts. However, as the Ramban points out, there are explicit verses (Bamidbar 20:21 and Shoftim 11:17-18) that say that Israel never entered Moav's boundary. Elsewhere (Bamidbar 21:13), Rashi implies that Moshe actually meant that we weren't allowed to enter Moav or Sayir (and not that they gave us food), but this is hard to fit into the context of the words. The Abaranel has a similar approach, suggesting that Moshe's message was that even if you say "no" (we can't pass through), it's not going to stop us, just as Eisav and Moav saying no didn't stop us from continuing on towards the

Promised Land. The Chizkuni differentiates (and do many others) between offering food for free and selling the food. True, Moav sold us food (as Moshe told Sichon), but they should have given it to us for nothing. Nevertheless, the difference between having to pay for something instead of getting it for free, especially when Israel had such riches from the spoils of Egypt, would not seem to account for such a harsh reprisal (see Ramban). If we take into account that Lot's children should have gone out of their way for us because of what Avraham did for them (see Beraishis Rabbah 41:3) and that the custom was to supply free food to those traveling (see Vayikra Rabbah 34:8), the difference becomes a bit more significant. Several of the Ba'alay Tosfos (e.g. Rashbam) point out that Moshe only mentioned the Moavim in Ar selling them food, and therefore say that it was only that city that did so, but no one else from any other Moavite city. This raises the question of why even the men from the city of Ar (or their descendents) have to suffer the same fate as the others if they did nothing wrong. The Ramban says that only one of the two reasons given in the verse only apply to each nation; Amon didn't offer food and Moav hired Bilam. However, there are many indications that the verse is applying not offering food to both Amon and Moav (including Yevamos 76b-77a and Sanhedrin 103b).

Rashi also implies that Moav didn't give food, as he explains the seemingly extra words "on the matter" as referring to "the advice they took against you to cause you to sin." This is understood to refer to the plan Bilam and Balak hatched to entice them with the Moavite women. Since this "hint" is placed by the first reason (not offering food) and not by the second (hiring Bilam), it is apparent that the context of the first verse applies to Moav as well. However, the choice of Rashi's wording (which is based on the Sifray) may lead us to another approach explaining how Moav is being taken to task for not offering food if they did sell us food.

The connection between the word "matter" ("devar") and the sin of Peor that Bilam instigated (which Rashi mentions) seems rather obvious, as Moshe referred to it (Bamidbar 31:16) as "the matter (devar) of Peor." Why did Rashi only allude to the sin (by referring to the "advice") rather than explaining what the sin was? This is how the Midrashim (e.g. Sifray, Balak 131) describe the plan devised to get Israel to sin: "At that time, the Amonim and Moavim got up and built for them markets from Bais Hayeshimos to Har Hashelag, and set up elderly prostitutes on the outside and young ones on the inside who would sell linen clothing. And when Israel would eat and drink and be in a good mood and go out for a walk they would attempt to buy something from an elderly woman, who would sell it at its value (i.e. full price) [whereupon] the younger one would call to him from inside and say

come buy it [from me] for less, which he did on the first and second days. And on the third day she said to him enter and choose for yourself, for you are a regular [lit. like family]. And he would enter towards her and the cooler next to her was full of Ammonite wine-for the wine of idolaters had not yet been prohibited for Israel. She said to him 'do you want to drink wine?' And he would drink, and the wine would burn within him, and he said to her 'listen to me' (i.e. he would proposition her) and she would bring out a likeness of Peor from under her clothing and say to him, 'my master, if you want me to listen to you then bow down to this.' And he would say to her '[do you really think] I am going to bow down to an idol?' And she would say, "does it matter to you? (i.e. it's not really idol worship), all I am asking is that you reveal yourself to it," which was really the way to worship Peor. And the wine would burn within him and he would [again] say to her 'listen to me,' and she would say to him 'if you want me to listen to you then separate from the Torah of Moshe. And he would separate [from Moshe's Torah]."

Aside from the description of how the plan operated, we also see that the Amonim were also involved in the scheme, so that not only is Moav included in the first part (not offering food), but Amon was involved in the second part (causing Israel to sin, and perhaps even being complicit in the hiring of Bilam; see Malbim, who maintains that Amon and Moav were originally one nation, ruled by the king of Moav). We also see that part of the plan was offering food (especially wine) to Israel to get them to sin (see also Bamidbar 25:2). It is therefore possible that the Torah is contrasting not initially offering food with offering them food for nefarious purposes. It was specifically the "advice," which included feeding them, which magnified their originally not feeding them. They could no longer argue that they didn't have enough to share, as they eventually did share. They could not claim that sharing was not appropriate (for cultural or other reasons), as they eventually did share. But it was more than just contrasting not initially sharing with doing so eventually. Midrashim (i.e. Bamidbar Rabbah 21:4 and Tanchuma Pinchas 3) discuss how Amon and Moav "kidmu ba'veiruah," preceded for the purpose of sin. They "preceded" (kidmu) for sin but "did not precede" (lo kidmu) when it came to food. What does "preceding" refer to? Making the initial contact. They didn't make the initial contact with Israel to see if they needed food "when they were on the way," i.e. when they first arrived to the area, but initiated the contact when they wanted to entice Israel to sin.

Yes, it's true that Moav sold food to Israel, when Israel approached them and asked them if they had any to sell. And it's likely that the only ones they ended up buying from were those that lived on the border, next to where Israel was camped, i.e. Ar. But even they (Ar) didn't offer to sell food to Israel ("lo

kidmu"), only agreeing to sell food after they were approached. As opposed to following Bilam's advice, when they initiated the contact with Israel, feeding them and giving them to drink even before Israel asked for it ("kidmu"), in order to get them to stray from the Torah. And for that (and hiring Bilam to curse Israel), Amon and Moav can never be fully accepted into our families.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha begins with war and ends with war. The first war described in the beginning of the parsha is against an unknown, unspecified and unidentified enemy. It is so to speak, a generic war, fought for causes that are not clear and under undetermined circumstances. The second war described at the end of the parsha is fought against a bitter age-old foe, Amalek, and is a war of self-preservation.

The first war is not a mandatory one. The Torah prefaces it with the word "im"-when, if-you go to war. The second war is one of the mitzvot of the Torah. It is obligatory on all. It is to save Israel from the hands of an enemy whose sole intention is to annihilate us. The wars therefore differ not only in purpose and cause but in intensity as well. In the war against Amalek we seek not temporary triumph but permanent achievement. We seek literally the obliteration of Amalek. It is the fulfillment of the rabbinic dictum of the Talmud that "if one comes to kill you then rise earlier and kill him." In our current world of relative morality and feel-good wishful thinking pacifism, this mitzvah about the destruction of Amalek makes us uncomfortable. Perhaps if we only reasoned with Amalek, appeased him somehow with concessions, he would calm down and be nice to us.

That policy may be valid in the first war described in the parsha. In fact, the Torah bids us always to try peace before embarking on war. But in the war against Amalek no such attitude or policy is even mentioned. It has always been either Amalek or us and if you don't mind, the Jewish people prefer surviving over favorable obituaries in the world's press.

There is another major difference between the wars that the Torah points out to us in the parsha. In the first war, there is the danger of fraternization with the women of the enemy. The Torah makes temporary concessions to this situation though it clearly warns against the long term results of such a relationship. But in the war against Amalek such a possibility or situation is not even mentioned. The war against Amalek is so clearly a battle for survival that such a relationship becomes remote if not even impossible. Amalek asks for no quarter for it extends to us no quarter.

It is the ultimate war of attrition, of determining who will finally be left standing at the conclusion of the struggle. Hence it almost precludes any type of social

intercourse between the antagonists. Amalek has taken on many different names and guises in our millennia long struggle against him. He is never vanquished permanently but arises again in a different form and location. We hear his bellicose predictions and boasts about our destruction-G-d forbid-almost daily. We should not be lulled into the belief that his warnings are insincere.

Amalek has always had the one goal of destroying us. He has always met with partial success though always falling in final defeat after time. Let us realize the struggle that we are engaged in against Amalek is a real and desperate one. And let us pray that the G-d of Israel together with the people of Israel will foil Amalek's dastardly plans once more. © 2007 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/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The love between G-d and His people is often compared to the marital relationship. So the prophet Hoshea describes G-d, declaring: "And I will betroth you to Me forever." (Hoshea 2:21) The Song of Songs is similarly viewed as an allegory for the relationship between G-d and Am Yisrael (the Jewish people).

Indeed, throughout the year this imagery prevails. For example, every Friday evening we recite the Lekha Dodi-Come my Beloved (referring to G-d), let us greet the Sabbath bride. And the holidays of the Jewish year evoke the picture of G-d's love for us. On Passover we recall walking through the sea with the help of G-d, much like bride and groom walking to the huppa (wedding canopy). On Shavuot (the festival commemorating receiving the torah), we reenact our hearing the Aseret Ha'Dibrot (Ten Declarations) which can be viewed as the ketubah, the marital contract between G-d and His people. On Sukkot (the feast of booths) we eat and some try to live in a sukkah, beneath the skhakh (Sukkah roof), which can be seen as a kind of bridal canopy.

But, of course, this comparison has its limits. This week's parsha records the right of husband and wife to divorce. And if following the divorce the wife marries another, she may never remarry her first husband. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) Taking the analogy to its fullest, does this mean that we, the Jewish people, can permanently separate from G-d? Doesn't it mean that if we separate from G-d, and, if you will, "wed" to another albeit false G-d, that we can never return to G-d Himself.

It is here during the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that a new picture of love between G-d

and His people emerges. It is the idea that we are G-d's children and G-d is a parent figure. Thus, we recite Avinu Malkeinu - referring to G-d as our Father. So, too, do we speak of G-d as Hashem Hashem Keil rahum (the Lord is a G-d of mercy). The word rahum comes from the word rehem which means womb, conveying the idea of a mother's infinite and endless love for her young.

The difference is obvious. A husband and wife relationship can be terminated. But no matter what happens in life a parent always remains a parent. Similarly, G-d's love for us is limitless. Even if we separate from Him, even if we "marry another," we can always return- and G-d will always embrace us.

One last thought. Even the parental relationship has its limits since no one lives forever. G-d is however, the Eternal Parent. Hence during these days we recite Psalm twenty-seven, in which we proclaim, "Even if my father and mother have left me, G-d will gather me in." (Psalms 27:10)

Our relationship to G-d parallels the deep love between husband and wife. It intersects with a parent's love for a child. In fact, it transcends all. It is as deep and deeper than a spousal encounter, and it is beyond the endlessness of a parent's love for a child-it is eternal. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

In this week's Torah portion, the Torah commands us to maintain the purity of our camp (Devarim 23:10-15), from two different points of view: First, the fact that one who has a nighttime flow must leave the camp until the next night, and second, the command that one must leave the camp in order to relieve himself and must keep a shovel with him in order to cover the waste. The reason for these two commands is spelled out clearly: "For your G-d walks within your camp, in order to protect you and to conquer your enemy before you, and therefore your camp shall be holy, and He shall not see any unclean thing among you and leave you" [23:15].

This is not the only time in the Torah which where a law is brought that some people must be removed from the camp. In the Torah portion of Nasso, a command is given to expel from the camp "every leper and one with an impure flow, and everybody who has been in contact with the dead" [Bamidbar 5:2]. And the Torah gives a reason which is similar to that given in this week's portion: "Let them not contaminate their camps, in which I dwell among them" [5:3]. Why, however, are the lists of impure people in the two passages different? Why does this week's portion

mention a nighttime flow, while in Nasso the impurities are lepers, impure flows, and contact with the dead?

Evidently, even though the two passages seem similar, they are quite different. In Nasso, the Torah is referring to a normal camp, where G-d "dwells" among the people. The Tabernacle itself is in the center of the camp, and any ritual impurity must be kept away from it, so that Bnei Yisrael will not "contaminate" the camp in which G-d appears. However, one who has a release at night is not considered as being typically impure (as opposed to a leper, one who is impure because of a bodily flow, or one who was in contact with the dead, all of which are impure in their own right), and he is therefore not expelled from the camp. The subject in this week's Torah portion, on the other hand, is a camp that is actively involved in warfare, where the Almighty "walks within" the camp, in a tangible way and not symbolically. (This can be compared to another place in the Torah which uses the same description, "The voice of G-d walked within the garden, with the daily wind" [Bereishit 3:8].) Thus, in a camp at war no reference is made to ritual impurity, which is only relevant with respect to the Tabernacle and the Temple. Within the camp, the requirement is that "your camp shall be holy." Holiness is impaired not only by impure items but also by abominable things. Therefore the negative concepts in this week's portion are "something bad" [23:10] and a "shameful entity" [23:15]. This is what can cause harm to the sanctity of the camp.

On the other hand, this week's portion is concerned with a situation where Bnei Yisrael already dwell in their own land, and it therefore is not involved with a "camp" like the one in which Bnei Yisrael lived in the desert. Outside of the book of Bamidbar, the halachic definition of a "camp" appears only in the passage in this week's Torah portion? in reference to war. (As can be expected for a key word, "camp" appears seven times in the passage.) There is no Tabernacle in a camp which is at war, and there is therefore no need to mention the "impure" people. Rather, those who cause harm to the sanctity of the camp are emphasized. Maintaining the holiness of the camp will in the end lead to the desired result? "to protect you and to conquer your enemy before you."

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Parshat Ki Teizei begins with the laws of yefat toar. In the context of war which may stir intense human emotions and passions, the Torah reluctantly and conditionally sanctions relationships that would otherwise be illicit. Rashi, citing the gemara (Kidushin 21b), explains this unusual allowance as a concession to human weakness ("dibrah Torah keneged yetzer ha-ra").

The Torah's perspective about the religious challenges of warfare is particularly significant when

one considers that the ideal soldier according to Jewish law is one who is steeped in righteousness and Divine faith. According to R. Yose ha-Glili (Sotah 44a) one who is concerned about his religious stature is exempt from war ("yarei ve-rach leiv"). R. Akiva has a more inclusive stand regarding the piety of those who are qualified to fight, but also requires an advanced level of spirituality (at least according to Rambam's interpretation-Hilchot Melachim 7:15). The Baal ha-Turim links the last words of the previous parshah ("ki taaseh ha-yashar be-einei Hashem"), referring to the admirable implementation of Hashem's will, with the first words of Parshas Ki Tisah that discuss waging war because righteousness is a prerequisite for military conscription. And yet, despite the admirable character of the Jewish soldier, the Torah addresses and makes allowances for human frailty in the context of war. Apparently, the difficulty of maintaining spiritual equilibrium in the heat of battle, a time of intense passion and emotional stress, is a formidable one that tests even the most committed. Undoubtedly, the spiritual vulnerability of the pious soldier also reinforces the view expressed in Chazal (Sukah 52a) that great men are particularly challenged to maintain their high standards ("kol ha-gadol me-chaveiro yizro gadol heimenu").

While the laws of yefat toar demonstrate the Torah's realism in acknowledging and occasionally even providing outlets for human frailty, close scrutiny of the process that precedes the allowance of yefat toar (removing her from her indigenous environment, growing of her nails, shaving of her head...) unequivocally establishes that one is obligated to rigorously pursue any reasonable course to refashion one's emotional response to avoid even sanctioned halachic compromise. By detailing this process, the Torah conveys that this rare and unusual concession should not be abused or misconstrued. The steps outlined for yefat toar also provide a model through which one can respond to human temptation and strive for ideal halachic observance. Neutralizing the initial superficial stimuli and utilizing the perspective of time and distance constitute instructive guidelines in the struggle to confront and overcome human appetites and temptations.

In addition to these steps to combat obstacles and difficulties once encountered, it is vital to anticipate personal vulnerability and spiritually fortify oneself in advance of halachically challenging events or environments. The Kli Yakar notes that the Torah refers to multiple opponents ("oyevecha") even though it speaks only of a single defeated enemy ("unetano Hashem..."). He explains that in order to succeed against the concrete enemy on the battlefield, one must first struggle internally to refine one's halachic values and vanquish the yetzer ha-ra that is accentuated by the passions of battle. This is accomplished by

identifying and fortifying against one's spiritual deficiencies. Awareness that one confronts a second, highly personal front in all epic battles enables appropriate preparation for the dual struggle that may preclude the very problem of yefat toar! The role of intense Torah study is particularly crucial in confronting spiritual dangers, as Chazal (Kidushin 30a; Berachot 5a) viewed the internalization of Torah values and reinforcement of halachic perspective by means of study as an especially effective antidote to the yetzer ha-ra.

Chazal warn that marrying a yefat toar risks serious detrimental repercussions. Midrash Tanhuma (cited in Rashi) perceives the "hated wife-ha-senuah" and even the incorrigible or rebellious son ("ben sorer u-moreh") in the next sections of the parshah as products of this halachically flawed, albeit legal union. Chatam Sofer (Torat Moshe, Ki Teizei) sharply rejects the implication that any halachically sanctioned marriage could produce such suffering. He concludes that the full halachic allowance is extremely limited, as it is contingent upon maximal effort to neutralize one's improper obsession and skewed emotional state. In his view, the "hated wife" and rebellious son reflect the abuse rather than the proper implementation of yefat toar, although the marriage still stands. [Compare with Rambam (Melachim 8:2) and Ramban's (s.v. vechashaktah bah)] Chatam Sofer's perspective accentuates the obligation to strive for ideal halachic standards to avoid compromise.

It is conceivable, however, that the projected damage resulting from the yefat toar union depicted by Chazal does not constitute punishment but reflects the natural consequences of diluted and compromised standards of discipline, restraint, and mutual respect, cornerstones of the halachic vision of sanctity in family life. The origins and foundation of misplaced passion and obsession may easily produce a poisoned marriage (ishah senuah). The legality of the yefat toar marriage may be insufficient to foster an emotional and halachic environment that effectively inculcates the values of authority, restraint, and kedushah that safeguard against the development of a ben sorer u-moreh.

Directly and by hint, the Torah communicates through the halachot of yefat toar that one must strive mightily to maintain halachic standards and perspective even in the most challenging environments and circumstances. While conceding man's spiritual frailty, Chazal emphasize that one bears the potentially dire consequences that result from acquiescing to spiritual mediocrity. Our ultimate goal is to attain authentic kedushah which demands not only that we eschew halachic compromise, but that we conduct ourselves in accordance with Torah values that transcend strict obligation. Kadesh azmechah be-mutar lach. © 2007 Rabbi M. Rosensweig & TorahWeb Foundation