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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Many years ago, Elaine and I were being driven to the Catskills, a long-time favourite summer getaway for Jews in New York, and our driver told us the following story: One Friday afternoon, he was making his way to join his family in the Catskills for Shabbat when he saw a man wearing a yarmulke, bending over his car at the side of the road. One of the tires was flat, and he was about to change the wheel.

Our driver told us that he pulled over to the roadside, went over to the man, helped him change the wheel, and wished him "Good Shabbos." The man thanked him, took his yarmulke off and put it in his pocket. Our driver must have given him a quizzical look, because the man turned and explained: "Oh, I'm not Jewish. It's just that I know that if I'm wearing one of these" -- he gestured to the yarmulke -- "someone Jewish will stop and come to help me."

I mention this story because of its obvious relevance to the command in today's parsha: "Do not see your kinsman's donkey or his ox fallen on the road and ignore it. Help him lift it up" (Deut. 22:4). On the face of it, this is one tiny detail in a parsha full of commands. But its real significance lies in telling us what a covenant society should look like. It is a place where people are good neighbours, and are willing to help even a stranger in distress. Its citizens care about the welfare of others. When they see someone in need of help, they don't walk on by.

The sages debated the precise logic of the command. Some held that it is motivated by concern for the welfare of the animal involved, the ox or the donkey, and that accordingly tsa'ar ba'alei hayyim, prevention of suffering to animals, is a biblical command. (See Baba Metzia 31a) Others, notably the Rambam, held that it had to do with the welfare of the animal's owner, who might be so distressed that he came to stay with the animal at a risk to his own safety -- the keyword here being "on the road." The roadside in ancient times was a place of danger. (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Rotze'ach, 13:2, 14)

Equally the sages discussed the precise relationship between this command and the similar but different one in Exodus (23:5): "If you see your enemy's donkey fallen under its load, do not pass by. Help him load it." They said that, all other things being equal, if there is a choice between helping an enemy and helping a friend, helping an enemy takes precedence since it may "overcome the inclination", that is, it may help end the animosity and turn an enemy into a friend. (Baba Metzia 32b; see also Tosafot, Pesachim 113b) This, the ethic of "help your enemy" is a principle that works, unlike the ethic of "love your enemy" which has never worked and has led to some truly tragic histories of hate.

In general, as the Rambam states, one should do for someone you find in distress what you would do for yourself in a similar situation. Better still, one should put aside all considerations of honour and go "beyond the limit of the law." Even a prince, he says, should help the lowliest commoner, even if the circumstances do not accord with the dignity of his office or his personal standing. (Hilkhot Rotzeach 13:4)

All of this is part of what sociologists nowadays call social capital: the wealth that has nothing to do with money and everything to do with the level of trust within a society -- the knowledge that you are surrounded by people who have your welfare at heart, who will return your lost property (see the lines immediately prior to the fallen donkey: Deut. 22:1-3), who will raise the alarm if someone is breaking into your house or car, who will keep an eye on the safety of your children, and who generally contribute to a "good neighbourhood," itself an essential component of a good society.

The man who has done more than anyone else to chart the fate of social capital in modern times is Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam. In a famous article, 'Bowling Alone' and subsequent book of the same title,[5] he drew attention to the sharp loss of social capital in modern times. It was symbolised by the fact that more people than ever were going ten-pin bowling, but fewer than ever were joining bowling teams: hence 'bowling alone,' which seemed to epitomise the individualism of contemporary society and its corollary: loneliness.

Ten years later, in an equally fascinating study, American Grace, he argued that in fact social capital was alive and well in the United States, but in specific locations, namely religious communities: places of worship that still bring people together in shared belonging and mutual responsibility.

His extensive research, carried out throughout the United States between 2004 and 2006, showed that frequent church -- or synagogue-goers are more likely

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to give money to charity, regardless of whether the charity is religious or secular. They are also more likely to do voluntary work for a charity, give money to a homeless person, give excess change back to a shop assistant, donate blood, help a neighbour with housework, spend time with someone who is feeling depressed, allow another driver to cut in front of them, offer a seat to a stranger, or help someone find a job. Religious Americans are measurably more likely than their secular counterparts to give of their time and money to others, not only within but also beyond their own communities.

Regular attendance at a house of worship turns out to be the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender or race. Religion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good. Putnam goes so far as to speculate that an atheist who went regularly to church (perhaps because of a spouse) would be more likely to volunteer in a soup kitchen than a believer who prays alone. There is something about the tenor of relationships within a religious community that makes it an ongoing tutorial in citizenship and good neighbourliness.

At the same time one has to make sure that 'religiosity' does not get in the way. One of the cruelest of all social science experiments was the "Good Samaritan" test organised, in the early 1970s, by two Princeton social psychologists, John Darley and Daniel Batson. (1973) 'From Jerusalem to Jericho:...' Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 27(1), 100-108) The well known parable tells the story of how a priest and a Levite failed to stop and help a traveler by the roadside who had been attacked and robbed, while a Samaritan did so. Wanting to get to the reality behind the story, the psychologists recruited students from Princeton Theological Seminary and told them they were to prepare a talk about being a minister. Half were given no more instructions than that. The other half were told to construct the talk around the Good Samaritan parable.

They were then told to go and deliver the talk in a nearby building where an audience was waiting. Some were told that they were late, others that if they left now they would be on time, and a third group that there was no need to hurry. Unbeknown to the students, the researchers had positioned, directly on the students' route, an actor playing the part of a victim slumped in a doorway, moaning and coughing -- replicating the situation in the Good Samaritan parable.

You can probably guess the rest: preparing a talk on the Good Samaritan had no influence whatever on whether the student actually stopped to help the victim. What made the difference was whether the student had been told he was late, or that there was no hurry. On several occasions, a student about to deliver a talk on the Good Samaritan, "literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way."

The point is not that some fail to practice what they preach. (Tosefta Yevamot 8:7; Bavli, Yevamot 63b) The researchers themselves simply concluded that the parable should not be taken to suggest that Samaritans are better human beings than priests or Levites, but rather, it all depends on time and conflicting duties. The rushed seminary students may well have wanted to stop and help, but were reluctant to keep a whole crowd waiting. They may have felt that their duty to the many overrode their duty to the one.

The Princeton experiment does, though, help us understand the precise phrasing of the command in our parsha: "Do not see... and ignore." Essentially it is telling us to slow down when you see someone in need. Whatever the time pressure, don't walk on by.

Think of a moment when you needed help and a friend or stranger came to your assistance. Can you remember such occasions? Of course. They linger in the mind forever, and whenever you think of them, you feel a warm glow, as if to say, the world is not such a bad place after all. That is the life-changing idea: Never be in too much of a rush to stop and come to the aid of someone in need of help. Rarely if ever will you better invest your time. It may take a moment but its effect may last a lifetime. Or as William Wordsworth put it: "The best portion of a good man's life: his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love." (From 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'.) *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When you go forth to battle against your enemies, and God your Lord delivers them into your hands, and you…see among the captives a woman of beauty, and you desire her, you may take her to be your wife. When you bring her home, she must shave her head, and let her fingernails grow, mourning for her father and mother. Only then may you be intimate with her and possess her, making

her your wife." (Deuteronomy 21:10–13)

Indeed, if we've ever thought of Judaism as a straight-laced religion that doesn't concern itself with sexual blandishments, or alternately was lenient about inter-marriage in Biblical times, here is something to jolt our imagination. And Rashi meaningfully comments: "The Torah speaks only in consideration of a person's evil inclination. For if God would not have permitted her to him as a wife, he would nevertheless marry her although she would be [biblically] forbidden to him."

But what is the Torah really saying in "consideration of the evil inclination?" Are our Scriptures allowing us to momentarily give in to our desire, in order to prevent a major transgression of intermarriage or is the Torah actually teaching us how to overcome our evil desires entirely?

The answer to this question lies in a difference of interpretation on this issue by two giants of biblical exegesis. Maimonides, on the one hand, rules that a soldier has the right to have sexual relations with "the beautiful gentile captive woman" one time before the month-long period of waiting and mourning begins – but only once. Then after he has satisfied his initial lust, he takes her home, and must go through the steps the Torah commands, in order to dissuade him and her from an eventual marriage. Only if he still feels the same way about her when he sees her in his home environment, and only if she is willing to leave her previous lifestyle and convert to Judaism, are they permitted to be married (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 8:1–6). And perhaps Maimonides feels that in order to give the "experiment" a chance to be successful, it is necessary to remove the "sweetness" of the "forbidden fruit" by permitting the one act of intimacy before the process of alienation or conversion can properly begin.

Nahmanides, in contrast and in accordance with the Jerusalem Talmud, rules that the woman is not permitted to the soldier even once before first taking her home; he must take the month-long preparatory steps, and if he and she then still wish to be together she may convert and become his wife.

I believe that Maimonides is taking the more pragmatic approach: give in a little bit so that you not lose the entire battle. Try to allow him to get her out of his system with one sexual act. Hopefully it will work, especially after a month of reality in accustomed surrounding.

In general, Hasidut was critical of self-styled ascetics who tortured themselves in order to bring their bodies into line. One of the important followers of the founding father of Hasidut, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name, eighteenth century) was a leading rabbinical scholar, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye, who had previously been given to fasts and mortifications. Rabbi Yaakov Yosef was initially an aggressive opponent of the Baal Shem Tov and the following story is told how he became one of his most faithful disciples. One day the Baal Shem Tov whispered to him, "When horses get wild, a stupid rider tightens the reins, but that only gets the horse more upset and difficult to manage. A clever rider loosens the reins, and in that way brings the horses into his control." Rabbi Yaakov Yosef understood, stopped his fasts, and became a Hasid.

Nahmanides, who may agree that the yetzer hara is very powerful, might argue that the result is the opposite: give the enemy a finger and he will ultimately take your hand. Therefore he understands the verses in the Torah as giving advice on how to conquer the evil instinct completely. Hold out the promise of sexual conquest, but only after following a complex procedure which he believes will generally lead either to the complete splitting up or to her willing and even joyous acceptance of Judaism; they would then be able to get married in accordance with "the laws of Moses and of Israel."

This difference of opinion is further confirmed by a talmudic adage which advises that if a person is smitten with the yetzer hara he should go to a place where no one knows him, dress in black, wrap himself up, and do what "his heart desires" (Moed Katan 17a).

Maimonides, taking these words at their obvious meaning, would say this advice is comparable to the law allowing the soldier one act of intimacy with a forbidden woman. If one's evil inclination is so overpowering that he cannot control it, let him locate himself in a strange city, incognito, and do what he has to do: in this manner he can "get it out of his system" and soon return to his former life without the shame of the entire world being privy to his indiscretion. There is no need to ruin your life because of one incident of weakness.

R. Hananel (ad loc.) gives the passage another interpretation, more in keeping with Nahmanides. By the time the individual changes his clothes, takes the journey to a city where he's unknown, and finds a new place to live, he'll be so exhausted and ashamed at what he sees in the mirror that if he does "what his heart desires" it could very well be returning home. Halakha, or Jewish law, takes the would-be sinner by the hand, and step-by-step teaches him to desire what Torah would say is right to desire.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah in this week's reading speaks about wars against our enemies. Unfortunately, over the long period of Jewish history and today as well there is no shortage of enemies arrayed against Israel and the Jewish people. The Torah does not enumerate who these enemies are, it just states generally that there certainly will be enemies and constant struggles and challenges, a strange but unremitting enmity towards

the Jewish people, the Jewish state and Judaism itself.

And, to complicate this matter even further, rabbinic literature has identified the major enemy to be overcome as the personal weakness of all the Jewish people generally and of individuals Jews in their own right. Part of the problem of all great military strategists has been to identify the true enemy, and to deal with the core of the problem and not only with the periphery. That is why espionage, spies, informants and military intelligence are so much a part of warfare from time immemorial.

It is therefore important to note this observation of the Rabbis that our main enemies may not be external foes and forces but rather internal weaknesses as lack of confidence in our true mission and ourselves. Throughout human history the symbol of the Trojan horse has dominated the imagination and planning of all armies and governments. Of course, overwhelming external force, that no amount of internal courage and selflessness could overcome, has conquered nations. But it is no less true that mighty empires have also collapsed because of internal weaknesses and unsustainable constraints.

Life is a constant struggle with ourselves, with our base instincts, with our selfishness and greed, our desires and lusts. It is a war that we fight with ourselves daily and it is a cruel war because it knows no compromise nor cease-fire. The example of the non-Jewish woman taken in war by the lust of the moment, described for us this week's Torah reading, is meant to be the paradigm for all our struggles to remain upright and human despite financial, physical and political temptations.

They Torah instructed us to survive these wars by always choosing life over death, right over wrong, holy values over temporary temptations. The problem is that many people do not realize that they are engaged in such a struggle and arrive at the battlefront unprepared and ill armed. Knowing next to nothing about their identity and character, Jews, ignorant of the lessons of Jewish history and the values that have been taught to us by previous generations, are unable to identify the enemy. They form a circular firing squad that is self-destructive to themselves and others.

Freedom becomes licentiousness and achievement is forced to give way to entitlement and never-ending dependency upon others. Any careful study of the words of the prophets of Israel during first Temple times will notice that they reviewed all the external enemies that they then faced, and in the end eventually conquered Israel as being manifestations of the internal enemy that was destroying Jewish spirituality and sense of godly mission and purpose. This is a lesson that our generation should certainly also take to heart.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

"All is fair in love and war." Not so in Judaism. In fact, the test of moral standards is not how one acts when things are peaceful, clear and smooth. Such instances do not by and large require moral strength. Rather the test of moral integrity truly presents itself when facing difficult situations.

One example of such an instance is during war. It's precisely then when soldiers can take advantage of the weak and the captured using the excuse that "all is not fair." It is precisely then that the Torah demands that we conduct ourselves with the greatest moral fortitude.

Note the law of a woman captured during war. (Deuteronomy 21:10-14) The Torah tells us that such a woman is to shave her hair, let her nails grow and weep for her father and mother a full month. Only after that process, the Torah says, "she shall be a wife to you."

A classic difference emerges between Nachmanides and Maimonides. Nachmanides believes that after the thirty-day period, the captured woman can be forced to convert and marry her captor. Still, for Nachmanides, during the thirty days, the soldier must observe firsthand how the captured woman is in deep mourning. Clearly Nachmanides sees this law as the Torah doing all that it can in order to evoke feelings of sympathy towards the captured woman in the hope that ultimately her plight would be heard and she would be freed.

Maimonides takes it much further. The thirty days of mourning were introduced as a time period in which the soldier tries to convince the captured woman to convert and marry. After the thirty days, however, the woman has the right to leave her captor. Under no circumstances can she be forced to convert or marry.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld argues that Maimonides' position is not only morally correct but it fits into the context of our portion. Note that the portion concludes with the mandate to destroy the nation of Amalek. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19) Amalek's sin was attacking the weakest. Here, one sees the great contrast. Amalek set out to abuse the most vulnerable. Maimonides tells us that Jewish law prohibits taking advantage of the weak. Indeed, the test of morality is how one treats the most vulnerable.

War is horrific. Given its horror, our portion reminds us of our responsibility even in those circumstances to conduct ourselves morally. This is a mandate that the IDF is superbly fulfilling today. As one we should all declare - Kol Hakavod le-Tzahal.

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Within the awe-inspiring tefillah of Unesaneh Tokef, recited on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we refer to the angels who cannot survive strict Divine justice. The implication is obvious: how much more so can't we, as human beings, with our frailties, expect to be inscribed in the Book of Life on these awesome days of Judgement. Nevertheless, we continue to daven and when Yom Kippur concludes, we are confident that Hashem has indeed judged us favorably. How can we expect to be victorious in judgment if even the angels cannot accomplish this?

Chazal teach us that Hashem judges the world in two ways: through the lens of strict judgment on the one hand or through the lens of mercy and compassion on the other hand. When He looks at us through the prism of strict justice, we have no hope of succeeding. However, when Hashem views us through the lens of mercy and compassion, we can daven and hope to receive a positive verdict. The challenge that faces us is how we can have Hashem judge us in this manner and not apply the rules of strict justice? Chazal instruct us that Hashem treats us as we treat others. If we act to our fellow man in a way that always invokes the rules of justice, then Hashem will act accordingly towards us. However, if we treat others with compassion, then Hashem will likewise judge us in a merciful and compassionate way.

This week's parsha incorporates into halacha specific ways to treat others that go above and beyond what otherwise strict justice would have dictated. The Torah instructs us what to do when we find a lost object, we are not allowed to keep it or even ignore it and leave it. Rather, we are obligated to return it to its original owner. According to the strict rules of justice, we should have applied the concept of "finders-keepers." Yet, the Torah insists that we approach a lost object through the eyes of compassion. Although technically the owner has lost the claim to his property, compassion to others requires of us to go beyond the absolute letter of the law.

There is a similar mitzvah later in the parsha concerning lending money. Theoretically there should be nothing wrong with taking interest on a loan. The lender is losing the opportunity to invest his own funds and it is understandable if he were to receive interest for this loss.

Nevertheless, the Torah strictly forbids any form of interest. This is because we are not to treat our fellow man with strict justice, rather, out of love and compassion, we must forego our otherwise legitimate right to collect interest. The Torah elaborates on the relationship between the lender and the borrower that further highlights the need for compassion. If the borrower cannot repay the loan and it is necessary to take a collateral, the laws that govern such action greatly limit one's otherwise legitimate rights. One is prohibited from taking a collateral that would impinge upon the borrower's livelihood. If an article of clothing is taken, it must be returned at a time that the borrower has to wear it. Even though the lender is legally entitled to receive his payment, all efforts are made to insist that the lender view the borrower through the prism of compassion and mercy. As the ultimate act of compassion concerning loans, the Torah teaches us in Parshas Re'ei that at the end of the shemittah year the entire loan is cancelled. Clearly this is not rooted in justice but rather in the loving kindness expected to be shown to one another.

The entire institution of matnos aniyim -- gifts to the poor -- is predicated on the traits of kindness and compassion. At the end of the parsha the Torah instructs us concerning the special gifts that are given from our fields and vineyards. We must leave a corner of what we harvest and significant parts of our crops for the poor to take. These mitzvos and the mitzvah of tzedakah are expressions of our love for others above and beyond what actual justice would have required. Theoretically what we harvest should be ours completely to keep. Yet by sharing with others, we become compassionate and in turn, we merit the compassion of Hashem.

As we approach the Days of Judgement we realize, like the angels on high, that we cannot be victorious in a world dictated by Divine justice alone. We call out to Hashem to view us though the eyes of kindness, love, and compassion. Our most effective way of meriting this Divine love is by treating others in this way. By performing these monetary mitzvos designed to implant within us these character traits, may we all merit Divine kindness and all be blessed and inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Beautiful Woman

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Is there a situation when something that is permitted for a Jew is prohibited for a Non-Jew? This is the case of the “Eishet Yefat Toar” sited in this week’s portion. When a soldier during war sees a beautiful woman he may take her for a wife. The reason offered is that the Torah addresses the evil inclination of a man during war and charges him in such a situation to show restraint as opposed to the throws of war when restraint is more difficult.

This law of “Eishet Yefat Toar” is only applicable during war and does not incur a penalty for stealing (he is stealing this woman) and applies even if the woman is married. The reasoning behind this is, since it is during war, the victor is entitled to all the

spoils of war, which include physical possessions as well as humans.

In contrast, according to Torah law, when a non-Jew enters into war he is not permitted to take possession of this "Eishet Yefat Toar" since for him it would be stealing which is one of the seven prohibitions of a Non-Jew ("Ben Noach").

The law of "Yefat Toar" is only applicable in a war against Non-Jews. However in a civil war of Jewish people, as we find in the book of Melachim, the law of "Yefat Toar" does not apply. As well, if the war is between Jew and Non-Jew and a Jewish woman from the non-Jewish side is taken captive, the law of "Eishet yefat Toar" also does not apply.

This law as sited in this week's portion would only be applicable in a time when we have a Sanhedrin, however in our times these laws are only theoretical, and are not germane to our present time, and are only for discussion value.

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Whose Justice is Just?

As we look at Parashat Ki Teitzei we see a pattern of disconnected laws. One case in which this does not occur is a section dealing with two different sets of laws but each set dealing with the poor person. The Torah teaches, "When you hold against your fellow a debt of any amount, you shall not enter his house to take his security (collateral). You shall stand outside and the man from whom you claim the debt shall bring the security to you outside. And if the man is a poor man you shall not lie down with his security. You shall surely return the security to him when the sun sets and he will lie down in his garment and bless you and for you it will be an act of righteousness before Hashem your Elokim. You shall not cheat a poor or destitute hired person from among your brothers or from among your converts who are in your land in your cities. You shall pay his hire on its day, the sun shall not set upon him for he is poor and he risks his life for it, let him not call out to Hashem against you and there be a sin on you." Here we clearly see the two different areas of laws, one dealing with a loan made to the poor and the other dealing with wages of the poor.

This section begins with the concept of collateral when a loan is overdue. The Jewish concept of collateral is very different than a secular view. Collateral is unlikely to be equal in value to the amount of the loan, nor is it intended to be. Collateral for a Jewish loan is demanded only after the loan has not been repaid on time. The courts established a set time during which any loan was to be repaid. If the borrower was unable to repay the loan within that time then the lender may go to a Jewish court and demand collateral from the borrower. This collateral was often an object which was important to the borrower but was not judged by the court to be of any particular value. The purpose of this collateral was simply to be a promise that the loan would be paid even though it was delayed. Here the lender is trying to avoid the possibility that the borrower will not pay and the Sabbatical year will cancel the loan.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains why we stand outside of the poor man's house and do not enter. "The Halacha teaches that such fetching a pledge imposed to ensure the payment of a debt which has fallen due, may never be made by the creditor himself, but that he must engage the intervention of the court for it." The Torah is concerned with any embarrassment that this demand for an object of collateral may cause the borrower. The Torah placed an even further barrier between the lender and the poor man. The borrower is already distraught that he has not been able to repay the loan on time. He will be too embarrassed to face the lender when he cannot fulfill his promise to pay. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the collector must not the lender but is appointed by the court. Sorotzkin points out that the Torah refers to the borrower by the term ish, man. This term gives dignity to the borrower but also acts as a reminder to him to bring the collateral outside and face his responsibility. The Rambam asks why a messenger from the court is preferred. A messenger from the court has the right to grab the object immediately when the borrower brings it out of his house. The lender must afford this man greater dignity and may not take from the borrower until he offers it.

The Torah then emphasizes dignity while demanding collateral. "And if the man is a poor man you shall not lie down with his security. You shall surely return the security to him when the sun sets and he will lie down in his garment and bless you and for you it will be an act of righteousness before Hashem your Elokim." A poor man may own very little and the shirt off his back may be the only object that he has as collateral. The shirt that the poor man wears in the day is the same shirt in which he sleeps at night. If he has two separate shirts, the day shirt must be returned to him each day and the night shirt at night. The Kli Yakar explains the double wording in the Hebrew "hasheiv tashiv, you shall surely return." One must return the garment each day or night (double) so that the poor person will not be wanting. He then asks why this collateral is really collateral if it must be returned every night. It is as if one is merely a babysitter for the garment during the day. He explains that Hashem views the lender's actions in returning the garment as if he were giving a new tzedakah, charity, to the poor man each day.

The Rabbis then deal with the statement about a hired worker that "he risks his life on it." The ibn Ezra explains that he was only willing to hire himself out for

the money he could make. The Or HaChaim explains that a desperate person only has a choice of stealing or hiring himself to do work for someone else. The Ramban explains that one who hires a regular day-worker must pay him any time overnight, but for the poor worker this is unacceptable. The poor person was expecting to buy food for his family. He stakes his life and the lives of his family on receiving that pay promptly. To make him wait overnight could mean that his family might starve to death. One must pay him promptly. Today a worker may sign a contract to be paid monthly or weekly. Here, again it is a sin not to pay one's workers at the time agreed upon. It is even incorrect to ask a worker if he is willing to postpone receiving his pay for a short time as he may be afraid that he will not have a job if he does not agree to wait for his money.

The Torah demonstrates here a tremendous amount of sympathy for the plight of the poor. They are dependent on the community for daily work (and they must work). But this dependence comes with a price. The poor person is often placed in the position of borrowing money and desperately seeking work each day just to survive. We must sympathize with his suffering and provide him with his needs. And throughout we must treat him with dignity for his plight may be no fault of his own. Hashem has told us that there will always be poor people and there will always be our need to help them. The poor man is a dignified person who is experiencing difficulty. We must be grateful to Hashem for providing us with an abundance of riches, but we will not have served our part in the world if we overlook the needs of the poor that we must help alleviate. May we be generous in our assistance to the poor and may we also be careful to treat them with the dignity that is rightfully belonging to all mankind.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God." (Devarim 25:17-18)

I mentioned years ago that I was traveling when the movie about the Titanic came out. At one airport, in the Duty Free section, they had books piled high on a table that was obviously part of the movie promotion. Fascinated, I picked one up and went to the pictures at the middle of the book.

The sinking of the Titanic was something almost everyone knew about, even 85 years later. They even had a camp song that recalled the tragedy, and how "they thought it was a ship that water would never go through." They found out differently after hitting an iceberg.

What a "coincidence." I don't know how many ships have been sunken by icebergs, but none of them ever boasted that they couldn't be. The Talmud has an expression that says, "Do not open your mouth to the Satan" (Kesuvos 8b), because doing so can get his interest and inspire him to cause mischief, real SERIOUS mischief. That's what must have happened to the Titanic.

At least that is what I had assumed, more-or-less, until I saw a picture in the book, I think the first one. I had never seen the photo before or even heard about it. Seeing it though really took me aback, and I always wonder why people have to go so far and risk so much just to be cocky.

What was the picture? It was a bunch of passengers holding a long banner on the deck of the Titanic before sailing that read: A SHIP THAT EVEN GOD CAN'T SINK.

Really? You had to be SO proud? You had to take it SO far? Remember Titus who took on God, and who was taken down after only two years in power... by a gnat (Gittin 56b)? Remember Apollo 13, that not only did not make it to the moon as planned, but almost did not make it back home either:

Apollo 13 was the seventh manned mission in the Apollo space program and the third intended to land on the Moon. The craft was launched on April 11, 1970, at 14:13 EST (19:13 UTC) from the Kennedy Space Center, Florida, but the lunar landing was aborted after an oxygen tank exploded two days later, crippling the Service Module (SM) upon which the Command Module (CM) had depended. Despite great hardship caused by limited power, loss of cabin heat, shortage of potable water, and the critical need to make makeshift repairs to the carbon dioxide removal system, the crew returned safely to Earth on April 17, 1970, six days after launch. (Wikipedia, Apollo 13)

It wasn't the first disaster to happen in the space program. Apollo 1 didn't even leave the earth and all three astronauts died in a terrible fire. But there were some unusual occurrences that added EXTRA drama to this story. The principle of, "This is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes" (Tehillim 118:23), makes one wonder about these unusual circumstances, and the Divine Providence behind the incident.

This is the background to that dramatic story:

According to the standard crew rotation in place during the Apollo program, the prime crew for Apollo 13 would have been the backup crew for Apollo 10 with Mercury and Gemini veteran L. Gordon Cooper in command. That crew was composed of L. Gordon Cooper, Jr (Commander), Donn F. Eisele (Command Module Pilot), and Edgar D. Mitchell (Lunar Module Pilot). Deke Slayton, NASA's Director of Flight Crew Operations, never intended to rotate Cooper and Eisele to another mission, as both were out of favor with NASA management for various reasons... For the first

time ever, Slayton's recommendation was rejected by management, who felt that Shepard needed more time to train properly for a lunar flight, as he had only recently benefited from experimental surgery to correct an inner ear disorder which had kept him grounded since his first Mercury flight in 1961. Thus, Lovell's crew, backup for the historic Apollo 11 mission and therefore slated for Apollo 14, was swapped with Shepard's crew and the original crew selection for the mission became: James A. Lovell, Jr., T. Kenneth Mattingly II, and Fred W. Haise, Jr.... Three days before launch, at the insistence of the Flight Surgeon, Swigert was moved to the prime crew [to replace Mattingly]. (Wikipedia, Apollo 13)

Though 13 is considered a bad luck number in the secular world, it is the opposite from a Torah perspective. So, we won't attribute the Apollo mission's failure to its number. Is there anything that MIGHT have had something to do with all the extraordinary circumstances involved in making the Apollo 13 mission so spectacular?

Honestly, who even knows, besides God Himself? But, it is interesting to point out, given the other stories above, that Lovell is quoted as saying, regarding Neil Armstrong's dramatic first walk on the moon, "From now on we'll live in a world where man has walked on the Moon. It's not a miracle, we just decided to go."

Hmm. Miracle implies God, and taking God out of something as MIRACULOUS as space travel, given all the THOUSANDS of things that had to be built, and go right, as the Apollo 13 crew were reminded, to make a mission succeed. Perhaps had Commander Lovell kept that in mind and spoken differently about the moon walk, he might have walked on the moon himself as he had so wanted.

It never pays to challenge God. It's one thing to not follow His will, but it is a whole different level of "bad" to actually CONFRONT Him. It's not that He gets offended and has to respond in kind. It's more that the Chillul Hashem created by the brazenness then needs fixing up.

The sinking of the Titanic humbled the world. Titus' death showed God's ability to get at any person He wants, any way He wants, whenever He wants. The Apollo 13 mission caused hundreds of thousands of people around the world to pray for their safe return, to ask God to MIRACULOUSLY spare the astronauts from sure death.

Challenging God, on any level, even inadvertently, is suicidal, at least to some degree. It unnecessarily adds additional risk to life. And, though it may not make a person an Amaleki, it is still a very Amaleki thing to do. Even a disbeliever would be wise to exercise a little fear of God in life. He may not be able to praise God, but he certainly shouldn't disparage Him either.

The rule is, if you're not going to sanctify God through what you do, then you will sanctify God by what happens THROUGH you. It wasn't enough for one scientist to show how Creation began with a big bang. He insisted that it also proved that God didn't have to be involved in Creation. I'm not saying he suffered terribly for it. I'm just saying that I for one was super-impressed by what he was MIRACULOUSLY able to accomplish in spite of his extreme handicap.

My closing statement is the one from the Talmud, at the end of Maseches Krisos. Someone who "challenged" God received their due in kind, to which one rabbi commented: Blessed be God who paid Yissachar of Kefar Barkai his due [in this world] (Krisos 28b)! Apparently God does, so why provoke Him?

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Ki Tetzei contains the commandment of Shiluach Hakan (22:6,7), sending away the mother bird before taking her children/eggs. According to the Rambam (Maimonides) the idea is that making the mother watch as you take her children is cruel, even for animals, and one should be sensitive. The Ramban (Nachmonides) sees it differently, arguing that while the Torah gave humans the right to consume animals, taking two generations at once is an over-consumption of that species, and wrong. However, as Rabbi David Fohrman asks, why is this Mitzvah phrased in reference to birds? The reasons above would seem to apply to any animal. Further, the words in the Passuk (verse) don't seem to fit with either explanation: "Don't take the mother with her children there" (22:6) sounds like we shouldn't take the mother, but according to the Rambam we'd be taking the children, and according to the Ramban we'd be taking both. How do we resolve these issues?

Rabbi Fohrman explains that the answers lies in the reward for this commandment: Long life. Aside from this commandment, there is only one other commandment with the same reward -- honoring one's parents. The connection is the honoring of motherhood. He goes on to explain that it's very difficult to capture a bird, unless it's a mother bird protecting its young. The Torah tells us not to take advantage of a mother's love and sacrifice for her offspring for your own benefit. This lesson is true for all of us -- our parents will always love us, but we should not desecrate that love by taking advantage of it. Parental love is meant to help us grow, not to be used as a trap against them. If we honor our parents, appreciating everything that we have because of them, may our reward be a long and healthy life.