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On Leadership: Against Hate

Ki Tetzei contains more laws than any other parsha in the Torah, and it is possible to be overwhelmed by this *embarrass de richesse* of detail. One verse, however, stands out by its sheer counter-intuitiveness:

Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother.

Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land. (Deut. 23:8)

These are very unexpected commands. Understanding them will teach us an important lesson about leadership.

First, a general point. Jews have been subjected to racism more and longer than any other nation on earth. Therefore we should be doubly careful never to be guilty of it ourselves. We believe that God created each of us, regardless of colour, class, culture or creed, in His image. If we look down on other

people because of their race, then we are demeaning God's image and failing to respect *kavod ha-briyot*, human dignity.

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

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

Jews cannot complain that others have racist attitudes toward them if they hold racist attitudes toward others. "First correct yourself then [seek to] correct others," says the Talmud⁽¹⁾ *Tanakh* contains negative evaluations of some other nations, but always and only because of their moral failures, never because of ethnicity or skin colour.

Now to Moses' two commands against hate,⁽²⁾ both of which are surprising. "Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." This is extraordinary. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites, planned a programme against them of slow genocide, and then refused to let them go despite the plagues that were devastating the land. Are these reasons not to hate?

True: but the Egyptians had initially provided a refuge for the Israelites at a time of famine. They had honoured Joseph and made him second-in-command. The evils they committed

against them under "a new king who did not know of Joseph" (Ex. 1:8) were at the instigation of Pharaoh himself, not the people as a whole. Besides which it was the daughter of that Pharaoh who had rescued Moses and adopted him.

The Torah makes a clear distinction between the Egyptians and the Amalekites. The latter were destined to be perennial enemies of Israel, but not the former. In a later age Isaiah would make a remarkable prophecy, that a day would come when the Egyptians would suffer their own oppression. They would cry out to God, who would rescue them just as he had rescued the Israelites:

When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, he will send them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them. So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. (Isaiah 19:20-21)

The wisdom of Moses' command not to despise Egyptians still shines through today. If the people continued to hate their erstwhile oppressors, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of Egypt but would have failed to take Egypt out of the Israelites. They would still be slaves, not physically but psychologically. They would be slaves to the past, held captive by the chains of resentment, unable to build the future. *To be free, you have to let go of hate.* That is a difficult truth but a necessary one.

No less surprising is Moses' insistence: "Do not despise an Edomite, because he is your brother." Edom was, of course, the other name of Esau. There was a time when Esau hated Jacob and vowed to kill him. Besides which, before the twins were born, Rebecca received an oracle telling her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than

the other, and the elder will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). Whatever these words mean, they seem to imply that there will be eternal conflict between the two brothers and their descendants.

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

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

It was none other than Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai who said that when Esau met Jacob for the last time, he kissed and embraced him "with a full heart." (4) Hate, especially between brothers, is not eternal and inexorable. Always be ready, Moses seems to have implied, for reconciliation between enemies.

Contemporary Games Theory suggests the same. Martin Nowak's programme "Generous Tit-for-Tat" is a winning strategy in the scenario known as the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. Tit-for-tat says: start by being nice to your opponent, then do to him what he does to you (in Hebrew, *middah kneged middah*).

Generous Tit-for-Tat says, don't always do to him what he does to you or you may find yourself locked into a mutually destructive cycle of retaliation. Every so often ignore (i.e. forgive) your opponent's last harmful move. That, roughly speaking, is what the sages meant when they said that God originally created the world under the attribute of strict justice but saw that it could not survive. Therefore He built into it the principle of compassion.(5)

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

This was the technique mastered by Hitler as a prelude to the worst-ever crime of man against man. The language of hate is capable of creating enmity between people of different faiths and ethnicities who have lived peaceably together for centuries. It has consistently been the most destructive force in history, and even knowledge of the Holocaust has not put an end to it, even in Europe. It is the unmistakable mark of toxic leadership.

In his classic work, *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns distinguishes between transactional and transformational leaders. The former address people's interests. The latter attempt to raise their sights. "Transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralistic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality; in the enmeshing of goals and values both leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgement." (6)

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

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

1. Baba Metsia 107b.
2. Whenever I refer, here and elsewhere, to "Moses' commands," I mean, of course, to imply that these were given by Divine instruction and revelation. This, in a deep sense, is why God chose Moses, a man who said repeatedly of himself that he was not a man of words. The words he spoke were those of God. That, and that alone, is what gives them timeless authority for the people of the covenant.
3. Sifri, Bamidbar, Behaalotecha, 69.
4. Sifri ad loc.
5. See Rashi to Genesis 1:1, s.v. *bara*.
6. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, Harper Perennial, 2010, 455.



War and Peace

From a moral perspective, one of the most difficult laws in the Torah is the law of the captive wife. Matrimony by force with any woman, and even more so with a member of an enemy nation who is plucked from the battlefield, shocks our sensibilities on so many levels. And lest we consider this an instance of modern sensibilities taking offense with the mores of ancient society, we should note that the Talmud deemed this law "a concession to the evil inclination."¹ For thousands of years, Jewish ethicists and religious leaders have been troubled by the fact that the Torah allows this seemingly-antinomian "concession." The consensus among rabbinic comments on this law is that its purpose is to forestall the type of behavior that is an all-too-common aspect of warfare, even today: "Taking" women in battle proffers upon them all the rights and privileges of a wife. Women captives may not be abused; there can be no "heat of the battle" excuses for soldiers' bad behavior.

Even if this is so, we might ask an additional question: How can a vanquished enemy become a spouse? How can a member of a foreign nation suddenly appear to be "marriage material?" War has an ideological component; how does romance spring up between a person who is willing to risk their life to protect the ideals for which the nation has gone to war, and a member of the enemy camp?

A law that is taught in the preceding parashah, Shoftim, may have far reaching ramifications

for our present inquiry: Before engaging in battle, the Israelite army must first attempt to achieve peace: "When you approach a city to wage war against it, you must propose a peaceful settlement."² If possible, war is to be avoided; yesterday's enemy may be tomorrow's partner.

Perhaps these overtures of peace impact the mindset of the men who go into battle: Rather than suffering from the tunnel vision that often besets people in wartime, they no longer see the enemy in absolute terms. When a non-violent resolution is the first option, absolute annihilation is not the only end-game in town. The Torah seems to be encouraging us - even in times of conflict - not to think in absolutes, in black and white categories.

On the other hand, the Torah does not place pacifism as a virtue above all else. In order to achieve a non-military resolution, an understanding must be achieved: The enemy must accept the right of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, must accept Jewish sovereignty over their land, in addition to accepting the basic morality encapsulated in the Seven Noachide laws. If these conditions are not met, we must fight - secure in the knowledge that we have done everything possible to avoid bloodshed without compromising the moral integrity of our homeland.

With this in mind, we gain new insight into another law that appears at the end of this week's parashah - a law that has been the cause of much debate and soul searching: The commandment to destroy Amalek.³

There is some debate as to whether this law is absolute, whether the commandment to annihilate Amalek⁴ regards each and every member of the nation, or, alternatively, if the commandment pertains only to the king and other leaders of the Amalekite nation.⁵ In either case, though, the commandment to expunge Amalek should be reconsidered in

light of the requirement to extend a hand in peace before going to war.

According to some rabbinic authorities, the commandment to invite our enemies to make peace pertains only to "permissible wars," those waged for purposes of territorial or economic expansion; no such requirement exists regarding "obligatory" or existential wars.⁶ Other authorities, though, regard the obligation to invite the enemy to engage in peaceful, non-violent conflict resolution as an obligation in respect to all wars.⁷ Rambam⁸ goes even further, and qualifies the battle against Amalek as one that is waged only when a peaceful solution cannot be achieved. In the Jewish tradition, Amalek represents the epitome of evil - and even in this case, Rambam's understanding is that the Torah legislates eradication of the evil but not the eradication of evil-doers. A fascinating dialectic emerges: We are commanded to eradicate evil from the world by stamping out evil ideologies and practices, but at the same time we must do our utmost to save the people who are currently engaged in these behaviors and beliefs. We are to hate evil, but we must not see it as absolute, or as an all-consuming and defining trait of individuals or peoples - even our enemies.

This underlying approach helps us understand the complexities with which the Jewish warrior must contend as he prepares for battle: The emotional and spiritual dialectic created by Torah law informs our approach to other nations and religions, be they friend or foe. And if today's enemy can undergo the requisite ideological metamorphosis that allows him or her to become tomorrow's ally, the leap to becoming "marriage material" may be far shorter than it first seemed. A battle that began with the possibility of peace, may give rise to emotions based on the potential for camaraderie, friendship, and even possibly love.

For a more in-depth analysis see:

<http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2016/09/essays-and-audio-on-parashat-ki-tetze.html>

1. Talmud Bavli Kedushin 21b.
2. Devarim 20:10.
3. Devarim 25:19.
4. See, for example, the comments of Rav Chaim Paltiel, a member of the Tosafot school, on this verse.
5. See Ibn Ezra's, Sh'mot 17:14; *Ha'amek Davar*, Devarim 25:19.
6. Rashi, Devarim 20:10.
7. Ramban, Devarim 20:10.
8. Laws of Kings, Chapter 6:1,4.



Mother Birds

Only two of the mitzvot in the Torah come with a promise of long life, *kibud av va'eim*, honoring parents, and *sheluach hakan*, sending off the mother bird before taking the fledglings. At first glance, these seem totally dissimilar and unrelated, but intuitively it seems there must be some sort of a common denominator. What can it be?

Rav Yaakov Weinberg, my *Rosh Yeshivah*, suggests that the common denominator may be that both *mitzvot* acknowledge *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. The Torah tells us to honor our parents because of all the *mesiras nefesh* they have for their children. They sacrifice their time, their energy, their wealth, their hearts and souls for their children, and we must show our appreciation.

A new father once said, “When I was younger, I thought my parents did many things for me, but now that I am a father myself, I realize they did only one thing for me. They gave me their lives.” That is *mesiras nefesh*.

We find the same concept of *mesiras nefesh* in the *mitzvah* of *sheluach hakan*. Anyone who has ever tried to catch a bird knows it is virtually impossible to do so. So why does the Torah have to tell us not to take the mother bird? How would we be able to take her if we wanted to? Wouldn't she fly away?

The answer is that the bird would not fly away when her nest is full of fledglings. She is a mother, and she is prepared to sacrifice freedom and even her life in order to remain with her children. For a person to capture that bird is prohibited, because it takes advantage of the *mesiras nefesh* of the maternal instinct and disrespects it. By sending away the mother first, he shows his appreciation for *mesiras nefesh*. In this sense, it is like honoring parents.

The Midrash comments that the two *mitzvot* of honoring parents and sending away the mother bird are the “easiest of the easy” and the “most difficult of the difficult,” yet they share the same reward – long life. Apparently, we cannot really know the reward of the *mitzvot*.

Why is sending away of the mother bird referred to as “the easiest of the easy” and honoring parents as “the most difficult of the difficult”?

The *Shemen Hatov* suggests that these *mitzvot* span the spectrum of human nature. According to the Ramban, the Torah wants us to perform the merciful act of sending away the mother bird before taking the fledglings, because this will condition us to become more merciful toward people. Mercy is a common human emotion. People instinctively feel a surge of mercy when they see an animal in

distress. We should feel the same instinctive mercy when we see a person in distress, but with other people, all sorts of complicated feelings and prejudices come into play. Therefore, when we develop and reinforce our natural faculty of mercy through a compassionate act toward a mother bird, we will feel a stronger impulse to be merciful when we see a person suffering. This then is the “easiest of the easy” *mitzvot*, because it taps into a natural tendency in human nature.

Honoring parents, on the other hand, goes against human nature. It requires us to acknowledge all they've done for us and show gratitude. It requires us to admit that we needed them, that we could not have done it ourselves. This is a difficult thing for the human ego. The ego would have us view ourselves as independent, self-sufficient and invincible. We can bring ourselves to thank strangers who do small things for us now and then, because this does not really affect our egotistical self-image. But when it comes to our parents, if we admit they did anything, we also have to admit they did everything for us. Our egos do not allow us to say, “I owe you everything.” This then is the “most difficult of the difficult” *mitzvot*.



Lunar Modules

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

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 Mizrachi 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.

Marriage and Divorce

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.