

Torah = Reality

When do we rely on God?
 When do we follow our own strategies?
 What is true "security"? Two articles in this issue.

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Parashas KiTetze

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And it will be that on the day that he wills his property to his sons, he may not give preference to the son of his beloved wife over the firstborn son of his unloved wife." (Devarim 21:16)

This pasuk discusses the rights of a firstborn son. This son inherits a double portion of his father's property. In other words, when the father's estate is divided, the

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The Female Captive

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

The Torah teaches us many interesting halachos with respect to wartime situations. One of the most intriguing areas is that of the Yifas Toar. These Halachos are applicable when God grants the Israelites a victory over their enemies and they capture female captives. The Torah tells us that when an Israelite soldier sees a beautiful woman captive who he desires, he is permitted to marry her. However there are many requirements prescribed in Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 10 through 15 that must be undertaken prior to marriage. He must shave her head, pare her nails, and wait a period of nine months time. After adhering to all these requirements he can consummate the marriage. Rashi tells us that these prerequisites are required in order that she should no longer be appealing to him. In fact Rashi tells us that eventually he will hate her.

This entire incident in the Torah raises many puzzling questions. The most bothersome problem is how does the Torah permit a marriage to a gentile. Rashi on verse 11 attempts to eradicate these difficulties. Rashi tells

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King David severs the head of Goliath

Desecration of God was intolerable to David

Reliance on God

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Student: When I learned the story when I was little, it made sense that David had faith in Hashem that Hashem would help him win the battle against Goliath. But reading it now, I can't help but ask what right did David have to assume he would win a battle against Goliath? Just because Goliath was "uncircumcised and angered the camp of the living

God"? It seems that David had a basis to think that Hashem would help him out, because he cites the case of the lion and the bear. Rashi mentions that once Hashem saved him from the animals, he realized that this salvation was not for no purpose; rather, it was a hint for the future that he would save Israel.

That's good, but on what basis did

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Reliance on God

RABBI REUVEN MANN

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David enter the situation with the animals in the first place? It seems, from the way David described it, that the animals took one sheep from the flock. David went after them and hit them, and rescued it from the lion's mouth, and the lion attacked him. The mefarshim bring down that there were 5 or 6 animals there. Why would David try to rescue one sheep from such a dangerous situation? Granted, once he killed all of the animals, he had a basis for assuming that such an event would not take place without Hashem's help, and use it as a basis for fighting Goliath, but why did he start up with the animals in the first place?

Rabbi Mann: As usual the question you ask is a good one. I will answer in a brief and general way.

David did not act on a blind and fanatical emotion when he volunteered to go up against Goliath. Saul and Jonathan were men of great valor who were prepared to risk and even sacrifice their lives for the sanctification of G-d's name. This is clear from the great battles they fought, from Saul's willingness to enter in to his final battle even though he knew he would be killed, and from the eulogy of David for Saul and Yonatan in which he coined the famous phrase "How have the mighty fallen?" Would he have referred to them as mighty if in fact they only fought when they felt safe but withdrew in fear from a mighty warrior who intimidated them?

Thus we ask: Why did the great warriors of Israel who were prepared to die for G-d shrink from a confrontation with Goliath thereby allowing a situation of chillul Hashem (Heavenly desecration) to occur? In my opinion it was not because of fear of death. Rather it was fear of defeat, not an emotional but a rational one. You see that even when one has the yearning to serve G-d and prevent a desecration of His name, he must control his emotions and act in the most intelligent way and not assume that simply because

he has the proper intention that G-d will come to his aid. This is another expression of the principle of "we do not rely on miracles. Thus we must say that Saul and the other great warriors of Israel abstained from the challenge of Goliath only because they were convinced they had no chance of defeating him and had no right to rely on miracles and that Goliath's victory would produce an even worse calamity for Israel and a greater chillul Hashem. Hence they were in an absolute dilemma. This is confirmed by the fact that when David came along and offered to fight, Saul was at first resistant for he did not see how David could possibly succeed - thus you must assume that a reasonable possibility for success was a prime condition for entering a battle even where the motivation is purely for kiddush Hashem.

The case of David was different. He did not enter the situation on blind faith. The Rambam says in the Moreh that when David went against the bear and the lion he was operating under ruach hakodesh. This does not mean prophecy but a sense of certainty and clarity and courage which comes to a person when he has developed his abilities to the highest possible degree and makes a judgment based on the most objective considerations, and not on some inner recklessness which stems from a distorted ego. (Note; see Ramban on why Joseph risked his life by explaining the dream to the Sar Haophim. Yosef was batuach bechochmaso [trustful in his wisdom] thus a person has the right to engage in what seems to us as recklessly dangerous situation when he is acting on the basis of his knowledge - provided that he is on the proper level to make such assessments). Thus, David was possessed by a sense rooted in the most perfected type of rational understanding of his courage and fighting capacities, that he could rescue the lamb from the lion and

the bear. When he encountered the situation of Goliath and was distressed at the desecration of G-d, he reviewed his experiences and came to the conclusion that he had the requisite courage and fighting ability to destroy their uncircumcised Philistine. Nobody can guarantee victory but you must have a viable plan that has a reasonable possibility of success and then you can pray for Divine assistance. We see the extent to which David used his intellect and independence of thought. Saul wanted to outfit him in his suit of armor. He tried it but wasn't comfortable. He rejected the advice of the great king and studied the situation carefully.

Why does the tanach recount this? To teach us that David was not relying on a blind emotion of faith that since he is for G-d, he must succeed. Rather, David knew that if he uses his intelligence to the greatest degree and works out a plan that has a good chance for success he has a right to go into battle and to hope and pray for divine assistance. Thus tanach says of him "And David was rational (maskil) in all his ways and G-d was with him".

Student: You addressed a question that I didn't even realize was bothering me: Why wasn't anybody

fighting Goliath, thus allowing a situation of chillul Hashem to occur?

You explained that David was operating under ruach hakodesh (Divine inspiration) in the situation with the lion and the bear. That he had "clarity and certainty and courage" that he was making a decision "based on the most objective considerations and not on some inner recklessness." It seems from what you are saying that when he encountered the situation with the lion and bear, he was possessed by a certainty that he had the ability to prevail and rescue the lamb. Therefore, he entered the situation, and was successful. Was Divine Providence responsible for his success (in addition to his using a rational plan, of course)?

I guess what I am asking is, did Divine Providence give him the certainty that he would prevail? If yes, and the Divine Providence helped him succeed, did the Divine Providence let him know that Hashem would give him help in this situation? (Then Divine Providence is the sense that a rational plan WILL succeed with Hashem's help) Or was the Divine Providence just a certainty that he had the ability to succeed against the lion & bear? (In

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Reliance on God

RABBI REUVEN MANN

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which case he didn't need Divine Providence to prevail over them. So how did he know, based on this case, that he could succeed against Goliath?)

I got the feeling when I was reading your answer that Divine Providence does NOT give a certainty regarding Providential assistance, rather, a certainty of his rational abilities. I don't understand exactly where the Divine Providence fits in, then. It seems like without a certainty of Divine assistance (which was necessary for his success against the lion & bear), it would still be foolish to fight with them. Is this false? Are you saying that as long as a person has a rational plan, and is doing something "I'shaim shamayim," (for true Torah purposes) that he is justified in entering a dangerous situation and praying for Divine assistance?

Rabbi Mann: I don't think that a person, no matter how perfected, acts with the assurance that the Divine Providence will work for him. There is always the possibility that he will fail. However he has the right to undertake complicated and risky tasks provided that he is acting on the highest level the intellectual faculty. Yosef had a right to risk interpreting the dream of the chief baker because his knowledge and understanding dictated that it was the correct thing to do.

Man is obligated to perfect his divine faculty to the greatest extent possible and to make accurate assessments of his capabilities. A

great talmid chocham (wise person) who has the knowledge to paskin (rule) the most difficult question but refrains from doing so because of fear or insecurity, is liable to punishment. He must have a clear awareness of his ability and the courage to act on it. Similarly a great surgeon who has the ability to perform a complicated operation but shrinks from it because of insecurity, is lacking in perfection.

David had an obligation to respond to the chillul Hashem (Heavenly desecration). It entailed a great danger and a great risk. But he approached with pure and objective wisdom and he had a sense of absolute conviction which stemmed from his perfected intellect - not any egoistic impulse - that he could prevail. Thus he had an obligation to act. He did not know for certain that G-d would help him and that he would certainly succeed. However, insofar as he was acting in accordance with the appropriate Divine guidelines for human behavior, he had every right to hope and pray for divine assistance. This is true trust in G-d. Avraham too took great risks in launching the rescue mission against the four mighty kings. But he acted in accordance with inspired wisdom and for the most appropriate motivations. He therefore had a right to take the risk and act in accordance with his faith. However without a specific prophecy, no one knows with certainty what the outcome will be. Life demands that we take risks. ■

The Female Captive

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

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us that the Torah is only speaking with respect to man's evil inclination. If God would not permit him to marry this captive, he would ultimately disregard the halacha and marry her anyway. Rashi continues and states that if he does marry her, it will invariably eventuate in his hating her and ultimately they will have a child who will be a stubborn and rebellious son. Rashi is obviously bothered by the notion that the Torah grants a reprieve to the warrior and allows him to enter a relationship which is strictly forbidden under normal circumstances. However there are many nagging questions which remain. Why does the Torah grant a reprieve and allow the person to indulge his evil inclination. A Torah Jew must raise his level of conduct to function on a higher spiritual level of kedushah whereby he uses his Tzelem Elokim to live a life of chochmah. Simply because a person may fail is not sufficient justification to allow a person to surrender to his desires. What does Rashi mean when he states the Torah is only talking against man's evil inclination. Many of the laws of the Torah address the yetzer hara. A person cannot always indulge his appetitive desires. Before a person eats meat he must perform shechita. The Torah recognizes man's instinctual desires, his evil inclinations, but teaches us to control them. Why is Yifas Toar so unique that the Torah allows us to surrender? Furthermore how does Rashi know that he will ultimately hate her. Perhaps he will have a happy

marriage? Rashi continues his prognostications and states that they will eventually have a son who is a Ben Sorer U'Moreh. Maybe their son will be a prince in Israel. This Rashi seems incongruous to Rashi's typical method of interpretation as Rashi seems to be more concerned with future events. However upon closer scrutiny we can appreciate the beauty of Rashi's psychological insights into human behavior.

There is a Gemara in Tractate Nedarim 9B which can give us insight into Yifas Toar. The Gemara quotes a statement by Rabbi Shimon the Tzaddik wherein he exclaims that he never ate from the trespass offering of a Nazir who was defiled except for one time. There was a Nazir who came from the South Country and I saw that he had beautiful eyes, a handsome appearance, and had thick locks of hair. I asked this Nazir why did you destroy your beautiful hair. He replied that he was a shepherd for his father. One day when he drew water from the well he gazed upon his reflection whereby he recognized that his evil desires were driving him out of this world. The Nazirite exclaimed to himself, rashah why are you so haughty in a world that is not yours. Your ultimate destiny is to become worms and dust. The Nazirite swore at that moment that he would shave his beautiful locks of hair for the sake of heaven. Rabbi Shimon thereby states that he arose and kissed this Nazirite's head and exalted, may there be many Nazirites like you in Israel.

Rabbi Shimon is teaching us an interesting insight into human behavior. His reluctance to eat from the sacrifice of a defiled Nazirite was because he recognized the impetus behind a Nazirite's vow. Most people are guided by their emotions. Therefore a Nazirite usually feels compelled to enter Nazirite because he feels guilty. He is sensitive to the temptations of the physical world and feels that he cannot control himself under his own free will. He therefore undertakes a vow to become a Nazir to repress his urges. Rabbi Shimon is teaching us that this is not the proper way for an individual to become a Nazir. The Mesilas Yesharim teaches us that a person cannot jump into righteousness. Righteousness is not an overnight transformation resulting

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RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

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from an emotional frenzy. Rather it requires hard work and the inner discipline to change oneself based upon one's intellectual conviction. The Yerushalmi teaches us this concept by telling us that a person who does not enjoy certain fruits of this world is punished. A person cannot deny his instinctual nature and aspire to attain perfection by simply repressing his urges. Change is a gradual process which demands greater knowledge. A person must appreciate that he has physical desires and must satisfy them in accordance with halachah but only as a means to help him to live life based on his true essence. Therefore Rabbi Shimon as a general principle refrained from eating the sacrifice of a Nazirite. Change cannot occur through the denial of one's emotional makeup. It requires recognition of one's nature and a harnessing of his energies to better himself.

However Rabbi Shimon did eat from the sacrifice of this one particular Nazir. He recognized that this individual was unique. He undertook the Nazirite vow because he possessed the intellectual conviction to realize that the world was not his. He recognized the lure of the physical was transitory and that God, the creator of the world, is truly the source of reality.

It is interesting to note the question that this Nazirite asked of himself. He questioned his haughtiness. This question seems to be misplaced. It would appear that his question should have been phrased in terms of his instinctual desires. Why did the Nazirite question his arrogance.

The question was an astute one and

is a reflection of the Nazir's appreciation of the forces that were overwhelming him and causing him to lead a life pursuing the instinctual pleasures. Most people do not commit sins simply because of their physical desires, albeit extremely powerful. A person is blessed with the intellectual capacity to recognize the good and live his life accordingly. However there is another major component of chet. This stems from man's ego. Every individual has an image of himself or an image of what he professes to be. This image or ego/ideal is a powerful ally of the yetzer horah and many times entices the person to adopt a particular lifestyle. A person is constantly aware, although perhaps unconsciously, of his transitory existence and he takes refuge and security in this ego/ideal. Therefore this Nazir questions his arrogance. He was extremely good looking and found security in his image as a playboy. The compelling force in his life was this false image as a handsome and suave gentleman. It is only after he contemplated regarding this image was he capable of appreciating that it was a false perception stemming from his ego. He therefore questioned his arrogance, recognizing that the world is not his. The world is a reflection of chochmas haborey, and man is ultimately destined to be nothing more than dust and worms. Rabbi Shimon concluded that this Nazir had undertaken his commitment in the ideal framework.

We can now appreciate Rashi's insights into the Yefas Toar. The Torah is speaking with respect to man's evil inclination. However the Torah is not just addressing itself to man's innate physical lust. That part of the Yetzer Harah man must attempt to control, as in all cases, guided by the precepts of the halachic system. The Torah is dealing with the lure of man's ego. The soldier at the height of his conquests on the battlefield is enraptured with his own image as a great warrior. Thus his desire for the beautiful captive is not merely an expression of his physical lust but rather the result of the ego/ideal as the all-powerful conquering warrior. Normally man can partake of the physical in the proper halachic framework. He recognizes it merely

as a means enabling him to continue his struggle in achieving perfection as a Torah Jew. Our forefather Isaac enjoyed the pottage that his son Esau brought him. However, this enjoyment did not detract from his perfection, but on the contrary, it comforted him and allowed him to continue his essential existence as a Talmid Chocham. In contrast the warrior cannot justify ravishing the Yefas Toar as a means for his perfection. This is an absurdity. Obviously, he was drawn to her as a captive, as an expression of his image as the omnipotent conqueror. Therefore the Torah was speaking only with respect to the Yetzer Horah. The Torah recognized the compelling force of this image and realized that if it were to forbid the Yefas Toar, he would still sin. Thus the Torah allows him to take the Yefas Toar as his wife. However, the Torah was cognizant that the image that a warrior possesses is amplified on the battlefield amidst the ravages of battle. After the war is over and the sweet smell of victory has dissipated, this ego/ideal will not be such a coercive force. Thus the Torah commands that you should shave her head and pare her nails. These requirements are necessary prior to your taking her as your wife. They are required in order to make her disgusting to him. The Torah appreciated that by the time you are allowed to marry her you will no longer be overwhelmed by the image of the ego/ideal. Hence, Rashi teaches us that ultimately you will hate her. The warrior, after he returns home to his wife, will feel guilty returning with the Yefas Toar. She will resent him and mourn her family that he killed on the battlefield. He will likewise resent her sudden intrusion into his family life. His guilt will not be expressed consciously as a wrongful action on his part, but rather will serve as a basis for his projection of hatred and resentment upon her as a wrongful intruder. Therefore Rashi is not attempting to prophecise by predicting his eventual enmity toward the Yefas Toar. Rather, Rashi is teaching us a valuable insight into human psychology and tachbulosav shel yetzer horah.

Rashi further comments that the child of such a union will be a Ben Sorer U'Moreh. The Torah teaches us



to respect one's father and mother. The respect of one's father is mentioned first because it is more difficult for the son to respect the father. The father represents the authority figure; he teaches his son Torah. However the son will naturally respect the mother as she is the one who comforts him. In contrast, the father's relationship with the son is often characterized by rebellion of the son. This rebelliousness is usually quashed by the mother, whom he naturally respects, since she stands together with her husband in a united front. She will likewise demand that he respect the father. In the situation of a Yefas Toar the son will rebel against the father as the authority figure and as his teacher of Torah. The mother will not bolster the father's authority, since their relationship as husband and wife is one of resentment and hatred. Besides, she will not respect the father as a teacher of Torah because she does not appreciate the Torah life. Their hatred will serve to foster the rebelliousness of the son as he attempts to play off one parent against the other. Their unstable family life will facilitate the son's rebelliousness and it will eventually become his standard mode of behavior. Therefore Rashi teaches us that the offspring of this marriage will be a Ben Sorer Umoreh.

We can now appreciate the Torah's remarkable insight into human behavior as elucidated by Rashi's insightful remarks. The Torah's logic is compelling by demonstrating that if one succumbs to the temptations of a Yefas Toar it will ultimately cause him much travail. □

Parashas KiTetze

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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firstborn son receives a portion that is double the value of the portions received by the other sons. A simple illustration will clarify this law. A man dies. Four sons survive him. His estate is divided into five portions. The firstborn son receives two of the portions – two fifths of the estate. Each of the other sons receives one fifth of the estate.

Our pasuk deals with a special case. In this case the husband has two wives. One wife is beloved to the husband. The second wife does not have the same relationship with her husband. The firstborn son is the child of the less preferred wife. This son should receive the double portion. The other sons should receive a single portion. However, the husband wishes to interfere with the rule of inheritance. He wishes to award the double portion to the son of the more beloved wife. He will provide the other sons with a single portion. As a result, the firstborn son will receive a single portion. The Torah prohibits this manipulation. The firstborn son must receive his double portion. His right to this double portion cannot be transferred to the son of the more beloved wife.

Sforno asks a question. According to our pasuk the father must respect the rights of the firstborn son. Yet, we see that the Avot – our forefathers – seemed to have disregarded this rule. The most obvious example of this disregard involves Yaakov. Reuven was Yaakov's firstborn son. His mother was Leah. Reuven did not receive a double portion in the land of Israel. Yaakov gave this double portion to Yosef. Yosef was the son of Rachel. Rachel was Yaakov's more beloved wife. It seems that Yaakov transferred the double portion of the true first born to another son. He violated the injunction in our pasuk! Furthermore, the Torah condones this decision!

There are various answers to this question. Sforno's answer deserved special attention. He maintains that Yaakov's behavior and the Torah's endorsement of his decision provide a fundamental insight in to our pasuk. According to Sforno, the passage does not prohibit the father from interfering with the normal pattern of inheritance. The father may show preference to a younger son at the expense of the firstborn son. However, our pasuk does restrict this interference. It cannot be motivated by the father's preference of one wife over the other. In other words, the father cannot discriminate against his firstborn because of his relationship with the child's mother.

Based on this interpretation of the injunction, Sforno answers his question. Yaakov did not

discriminate against Reuven because of the son's mother. Yaakov made his decision based upon his insight into his sons. He concluded that Yosef was more deserving of the special treatment normally accorded the firstborn. This dictated that Yosef inherit a double portion in the land of Israel. This same analysis dictated the Reuven should be deprived of this right.

Sforno explains that his interpretation of our pasuk is supported by another passage. In Sefer Divrai HaYamim it is stated the Yosef received the portion of the firstborn because Reuven desecrated his father's bed.[1] This passage clearly states that the transfer of the firstborn's privileges from Reuven to Yosef was occasioned by Reuven's behavior. This supports Sforno's reasoning. The right can be transferred. However, this interference in the pattern of inheritance cannot be occasioned by a preference of one wife over another.[2]



“You must first send away the mother and then you may take the young. This is order that you have it good and will live long.” (Devarim 22:7)

This pasuk discusses the law of removing chicks or eggs from a nest. When the mother bird is present, the eggs or chicks cannot be removed. First, the mother must be chased away. Then, the chicks or eggs can be removed. Furthermore, it is prohibited to simultaneously capture the mother and also collect the eggs or chicks.

The Torah indicates the reward for observing this mitzvah. Through observing this commandment we will be rewarded with long life. There is another commandment in the Torah that is associated with this same reward. The Torah assures us that respecting one's parents is rewarded with long life.[3] This raises an interesting question. These two commandments share a common reward. Is this merely a coincidence? Is some relationship between these commandments?

Rav Meshulam David Soloveitchik explains that there is a fundamental relationship between these

mitzvot. Birds and many other creatures have a natural fear of human beings. Typically, when a person approaches a bird and attempts to seize it, the bird flies away. Our pasuk discusses a case in which the bird does not flee. The mother bird, in our passage, allows herself to be captured. This is because she is protecting her young. Her instinctual reaction, when confronted with danger, is to remain with her young.

A human parent has the same instinctual compassion for his or her children. In other words, we observe, in the mother bird, the same instinct that exists in human parents. We, as children of our parents, are the beneficiaries of this emotion of loving-kindness. We are obligated to respect and demonstrate our appreciation for this self-sacrificing love. We show our appreciation through observing the commandment to respect our parents.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that the compassion that we demonstrate to the mother bird is an extension of our obligation to respect our own parents. We encounter, in the mother bird, the same loving-kindness that we received from our parents. We must show our appreciation of this love even when encountered among birds. Therefore, we cannot disregard this love and use it to our advantage. We cannot capture the mother bird. If we fail to appreciate the mother bird's compassion, we may not acknowledge our own parent's compassion.

It is reasonable that these two mitzvot should share a common reward. Sending away the mother bird is rewarded with long life. This is because this commandment is an extension of the mitzvah to respect our parents. Our respect for our parents is rewarded with long life. Therefore, this related mitzvah is associated with the same reward.[4]

“You shall charge the non-Jew interest. And your brother you shall not charge interest, so that Hashem your G-d will bless you in all of your endeavors in the land to which you come to possess.” (Devarim 23:21)

Our pasuk prohibits charging a Jew interest. The pasuk also stipulates that this prohibition does not apply to a non-Jew. Maimonides maintains that it is obligatory to charge interest on loans to non-Jews.[5]

Why are we required to charge interest on loans to non-Jews? Sefer HaChinuch explains that the Torah is not suggesting that it is appropriate to take economic advantage of the non-Jew. In fact, the Torah does not stipulate any minimum interest rate. Even a nominal interest charge satisfies the requirement to charge the non-Jew interest.

The intent of the mitzvah is to emphasize our obligation to our co-religionists. We are required to acknowledge the special bond of a shared outlook and set of convictions. This bond should

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result in a unique relationship. The relationship is evidenced through the obligation to lend to our fellow Jews interest-free. Such loans demonstrate an extra level of compassion and responsibility for the welfare of our co-religionists. The Torah commands us to restrict interest-free loans. This restriction demonstrates that the interest-free loan is a result of our relationship with our fellow Jews.[6]

Sforno asks a question on the end of our passage. The Torah tells us that through following the laws regarding interest we will be blessed by the Almighty in all of our endeavors. We can understand that Hashem will reward us for lending to our fellow Jews interest free. However, the passage implies that we will also be rewarded for charging interest to the non-Jew. Why does the Torah promise a reward for charging interest?

According to Sefer HaChinuch, we can easily answer this question. The obligation to charge the non-Jew interest is an extension of the restriction against charging interest to a Jew. Together, these two laws emphasize our relationship with our fellow Jews. It is the acknowledgement of this relationship that the Almighty promises to reward.

Sforno suggest that the passage has another meaning. He contends that a literal rendering of the pasuk provides an alternative message. Translated literally, the passage is not discussing the charging of interest. It is dealing with paying interest. The passage teaches two laws. We may pay the non-Jew interest. We may not pay interest to our fellow Jews. Sforno explains that the passage is dealing with two specific cases. In the first case, a Jew accepts a loan from a non-Jew. The loan requires payment of interest. The Jew is required to pay the interest to the non-Jew. In the second case, a Jew accepts a loan from a fellow Jew. He may not pay interest. The agreement between lender and borrower is irrelevant. Sforno is not suggesting that the pasuk has no other meaning. Our Sages interpret the pasuk to prohibit charging a fellow Jew interest and legislating interest in lending to the non-Jew. Sforno does not dispute this interpretation. Instead, he is suggesting that, in addition to the meaning provided by the Sages, the passage has a literal meaning and message.

Based on this interpretation Sforno explains the promise of blessings. The pasuk has dual meaning. One message is provided by the literal interpretation of a pasuk. The Sages offer an alternative meaning. Sforno explains that the blessing is related to the literal meaning of the

pasuk. In other words the blessing is a result of respecting our obligation to non-Jews and honoring our debts. It also results from our kindness to our co-religionists. Through upholding the loan agreement with the non-Jew, Hashem is sanctified. We demonstrate honesty and business ethics. This sanctification of the Almighty is rewarded with a blessing.[7] □

[1] Sefer Divrai HaYamim I 5:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 21:16.

[3] Sefer Shemot 20:12.

[4] Rav Shimon Yosef Miller, Shai LaTorah (Jerusalem 5755), volume 3, p 296.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Malve Ve'Loveh 5:1.

[6] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 573.

[7] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 23:21.

The Torah's Demand for Brutal Honesty: The Ibn Ezra & Magic

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Some Jews have the idea that the Torah prohibited magic because it is true. They believe 100% that magic and fortune telling works. The Ibn Ezra (Leviticus, 19:31) says the following, "Those with empty brains say 'were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues...."

The Ibn Ezra states clearly and without softening the blow, that it is not the way of God to prohibit us from that which is true. Just the opposite is the case; our lives are meant to be in search of truth, and living by it. The Torah prohibits magic, witchcraft, fortune telling and the like, for one reason: they are absolutely false. Saadia Gaon states this in Emunos v'Daos, that the Egyptian's who mimicked Moshe's feats, did so through slight of hand, not 'magic'. They used dyes to turn the Nile red, and chemicals to repel frogs from the water. Magic does not exist.

God designed us with a mind which can discern between truth and falsehood. If one would suggest

- as these fools had in Ibn Ezra's time - that God wants us to see the truth, but not follow it, this means to say that God contradicts Himself. Does He or doesn't He desire we follow the truth? Ibn Ezra says that God's plan - as expressed through Torah commands - is to abandon that which is false. The reason? Fallacy steers us away from the Source of all truth - God - while truth leads us to Him. Therefore, we must attach ourselves to all that is true as commanded by the Torah, and we must deny all fallacy.

We also note that the Ibn Ezra, and the Sages did not play 'politics' when they saw an idea as ludicrous. Terms like "empty brained" were used to make their teachings as penetrating and as passionate as possible. And this must be done if we are to make clear how false or true an idea is. The goal in teaching is that a new idea is successfully impressed upon the student. Reality must be presented in a stark, succinct and clear fashion. "Stark", so the contrast between truth and falsehood is seen; "succinct", so the concept is grasped easily and readily; and "clear", so no confusion enters the students' minds as they ponder the ideas.

Many times when people argue over Torah ideas, some may back off of their opinion if the other party becomes upset. This is wrong, as all must be sacrificed for Torah. We must not protect a friendship in place of allegiance to the truth. The person does not enter the equation when we debate over God's ideas. Rather, we are taught by Ibn Ezra that we must disagree, and do so strongly. A Rabbi once mentioned that we have a tradition that there is to be no restraint when learning - personal considerations of respect take a backseat when Torah is studied. Talking about objective truths must be approached with no restraint.

When is restraint proper? When rebuking someone. The verse says, "...surely rebuke your fellow man, and don't carry upon him sin." (Lev. 19:17) Rabbi Reuven Mann explained, rebuking another is a command, but the latter part of the verse, "and don't carry upon him sin" means, do so in a manner through which the recipient will accept your rebuke, and not become inflamed by your manner of delivery. No one likes to hear another rebuking them. But the Torah sees fit that man must assist another with rebuke, when he acts improperly. Since the goal is that man change his ways to the good, a rebuke must be delivered with the most care, that the recipient appreciate your concern, and not rebel.

In contrast, when not pointing out subjective flaws in others, but teaching the Torah's objective truths, a person is not "under fire", so there is no need to restrain oneself from expressing conviction or dissatisfaction in an idea. Here, one must show his unrestrained passion. Energies must not be curbed, as this compromises the learning process. □



True Security Forces

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

Medrash Eicha, Pesichta 2 relates the following story: Rebbi sent Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami to go out and set up cities in Israel. They would go into the cities and say “bring out the heads of security for the city”. The city would bring out the police chief and the head of security of the city. Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami responded “These are protectors of the city? They destroy the city!” The members of the city said back “then who are the protectors of the city?” Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami answered “The ones who teach the verses of Written Torah and the laws of the Oral Torah and who guard Torah day and night, as it says ‘You should be involved with it day and night’ (Joshua 1:8) and it says ‘If G-d will not build the house, in vain do its builders labor on it; If G-d will not guard the city, in vain is the watchman vigilant’ (Psalms 127:1).

This medrash demands explanation, as a number of questions arise when we examine it closely. Firstly, why do Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami say that the real guardians of the city are those who teach and learn torah? Does Judaism promote the idea that we just rely on miracles of G-d to save us while we sit and learn as our enemies attack? Certainly this wasn't the attitude of Yaakov Avinu; when he met Eisav; the Ramban there explains that Yaakov did three things: prayer, a gift to Eisav and preparation for war. So if we are to model ourselves after our Forefathers, this medrash seems to be very problematic!

Secondly, if Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami meant to say that G-d protects the city, as the verse from Psalms would seem to imply, then why not say that? In what sense are the teachers of torah the protectors of the city?

Another question is their critique of the police and security force- Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami call them the destroyers of the city. In what way are they destroyers of the city? We can understand that they may not be the real protectors, especially relative to the protection of G-d, but how are they destroying the city?

Finally, it's apparent from the medrash (especially if you look at its context in the Medrash Eicha) that the real critique of Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami was that the city lacked appropriate teachers learning torah. Why then did they not just say that? It seems as if they are expressing it as a riddle, and for what purpose?

When one looks at the basic functions of political and social systems, there is one objective that seems to be the most basic of all: the guarantee of physical security for its members. Cities are established

with systems in place to protect its citizens from any harm. In fact, each citizen will allow the others to do as they please, although they might think that it is wrong or immoral, as long as it doesn't affect anyone else's security. Without this security, of course, all other functions are purposeless, for if harm is done, these benefits and gains would be lost. It is for this reason that a priority in establishing a system is the police, firemen, and ambulances; they are viewed as the key to securing a society's physical well being.

The Torah teaches a different perspective on security in our physical existence. Let us start with an example from science: when the scientist makes his observations of physical phenomena, his focus is not the observation per se, but the theory and mechanisms behind it. He knows that what he observes is really just an expression of underlying theoretical concepts that cause that result. The primary ‘force’ or cause behind all observed phenomena are the ideas and theories that are a part of nature. The scientist knows that to have the correct understanding of the world, he must get to the right theory. Once he has this, not only will he have a better understanding of nature, but he may go so far as to manipulate and utilize these theories in many other ways and expressions. A clear example of this would be the atom bomb - once scientists understood the concept of an atom and its structure, they could then manipulate it to achieve their own goals.

Torah also has a similar view of nature - the Torah tells us that underlying all events in the world is one underlying ‘force’ or ‘theory’, that of Hashgachas Hashem. G-d's Will and Providence is the Prime Mover of the universe; as the Rambam states clearly in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah Chapter 1, Law 2, if one could imagine that G-d would not exist, then nothing else would exist. The observed physical world is just an expression of underlying Divine Providence, the primary force of the world.

With this idea, the Torah teaches us that to achieve security in this world, we must look to the prime force of natural events - Divine Providence. If we follow the Will of G-d and fulfill his commandments, we come under the Hashgacha so that we are no longer just working in the world of nature and chance, but rather we are under the influence of the more primary force of Divine Providence. When we are not acting in accordance with G-d's Will we lack this protection and are left to natural law and chance, with all its

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True Security Forces

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vulnerabilities. It is only under the Hashgacha that we may exist beyond the law of nature.

Of course, there is only one way to have the capability of following G-d's Will - to have knowledge of G-d's Will; without knowing what it is, there is no way for us to carry it out. Who can give us this knowledge? Only Talmidei Chachamim - those with vast and precise knowledge of Torah, guarding its detailed system. We are responsible for searching out these teachers and setting up a system where they can teach us. As teachers, they will provide us with the ability to act in line with G-d and attain access to the Hashgacha. With this Hashgacha, we will attain real security in this world. Our teachers then, are our real 'security force' - they are our link to security from Divine Providence.

Now we can understand what Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami meant when they pointed to teachers of Torah as the security force of the city. If the city was interested in security, their first priority should have been to look to the Primary Force behind all events in this world - that of the Hashgachas Hashem, G-d's Divine Providence. To gain Divine Providence they need to base their social structure on G-d's will, and that would mean setting up Torah scholars to teach knowledge of this.

When we look at the verses quoted by the medrash, we see that this is the basic idea of both of them. In Joshua, the point is that when Bnai Yisroel went into Israel, their success depended on G-d, so as a leader, Joshua's primary responsibility was to be involved in studying and spreading knowledge of G-d. So too with the verse from Psalms, where it says that the only way for a city to survive is if it's G-d's will that it should; otherwise, the efforts of the guardians of the city will be for naught.

The criticism that Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami launched at the heads of the police of the city as 'destroyers of the city' can now be explained as well. If true security can only be found through Divine Providence, any other method is merely a false security that does not provide what it claims to. If a society is built on police and army forces, they haven't achieved real security because even they are subject to the laws of nature; man alone can't overcome basic natural law. However, it's not just that it is a false security and is wrong; in Torah, we have to look at where such a perspective places people in regards to G-d. If a city thinks that security is found through manpower, this belief is not just wrong, but harmful, in that it takes people away from the truth,

promoting a false view of the world. Torah demands that one must view G-d as the Force behind all that we observe in the universe; once man thinks that he can succeed through his abilities alone, he has the wrong idea of G-d, the worst possible error, and has distanced himself from G-d and His Providence.

That's why Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami called them destroyers of the city. It's not that these people were consciously trying to hurt or destroy the city; they had good intentions. But Torah demands more than that - a person must act in accordance with the truth. By acting as the protectors of security, they were giving people a false idea of G-d and the world. They were promoting the belief that man can achieve security in this world on his own, without G-d. In doing so, they were destroying the city in a spiritual sense, by giving them a wrong idea of G-d, and in a physical sense, by not giving them the only security from natural law, that being Divine Providence.

With this we can understand the role of a police force and an army in Torah. As we said before, the Torah does not promote reliance on miracles; the example of Yaakov Avinu clearly proves this point. However, all that we do must be viewed from a certain, precise perspective. Man has the responsibility of using his G-d-given wisdom to figure out the best strategy for success in the world in which G-d placed him. However, this doesn't eliminate Divine Providence from the picture; on the contrary, because we know that the Hashgacha exists, we must take that into account as well. Thus we see throughout the Torah and Neviim (Prophets) that Bnai Yisroel took on stronger nations using their own military planning as well as knowing that the Hashgacha was behind them to allow and ensure for the success of their plan. Man has the responsibility to act in this world, but his actions must reflect his knowledge of the Hashgacha. Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami were criticizing them, not for the existence of a police force, but for the wrong perspective on the police force. The actions of man for security must exist within the greater framework of our knowledge of G-d and His Ways.

Now we can also see why Rebi Asi and Rebi Ami expressed their criticism in this way. They were not just saying that there was not enough learning or that they need a better education system. There was a far deeper idea that they were interested in giving over - the idea of true security, and security forces in this world. ■