

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KI TESSE

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 54:1-10

**SEPTEMBER 2, 2017 11 ELUL 5777 DEDICATION**  
**DEDICATION: Le'Refuah Shelemah Elisheva Bat Esther**  
**And in memory of Mordechai Fogel**

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY MIKHAYLA – BeShaah Tova

## EDITORS NOTES

While I was in Washington DC yesterday, my son Moses received a message from one of his friends in from Houston. The young man sent this picture and wrote: "Pretty much my whole community is flooded. Fortunately some have elevated houses (around 5-6 feet up) so those that flooded are able to live with them in the meantime. There were even some elevated houses that flooded." We are told that "Many Jewish community members who sheltered others in previous floods are themselves in need this time around. Homes that had been dry for the previous storms have taken on feet of water in the past 24-48 hours".

It's been almost five years since we were struck by Superstorm Sandy where so many in the community were forced from their homes and we spent years rebuilding. Seeing the images of Houston brings tears to my eyes and real depression. At first sight, it looks worse than what we survived. We have been communicating with the Houston Community and we will be helping them as best we can.

The good news is that where we had many hundreds of families who took many feet of water, the Houston community counts dozens, but may become a hundred or more. There is at least one community school, at least one community mikveh and at least a few synagogues which will need to be restored. What is hard to fathom is that this is the third major flood to strike Houston in the last three years and by all accounts, it is by far the most devastating.

We applaud the Hatzalah volunteers who have come to personally assist in Houston from all over the states and from Israel.

We fully understand that the recovery is going to be a long process and we need to hold their hands and support them along the way.

We realize the recovery will come in stages.

1. Make sure people are safe
2. Make sure everyone has shelter and food
3. Make sure people can meet short term financial obligations.
4. After the water recedes assist in the cleanup and recovery.
5. Assist with FEMA and insurance and possible negotiations with the banks

Many people rush to send things, but experience tells us that this is a mistake and the community confirmed today. So please do not send clothing, toys or the like at this time - they simply have no place to store anything that is not portable.

What they do need and what they will need is significant funds in the coming weeks. So each of us really must donate.

We need to make sure that every dollar sent goes to help someone. We need to avoid donating to national organizations where too much of the money goes toward overhead and administration.

In the weekend after Sandy, we raised more than a million dollars. Every Synagogue needs to organize a collection and drive. We have set up a fund and will make sure each and every dollar is sent through to the community in Houston. We hope to have more details in the coming few days, but for now please visit <http://www.benaiasher.org/donate-online/> make your donation and note Houston as the reference.

Tizkeh LeMisvot

I gave a class early this week based on the opening lines of this week's portion and the subject of Eshet Yefat Toar – The Beautiful Captive. We discussed the morality of the subject and I began to write about it, but came across this article by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed. The Rabbi is the Head of Yeshivat Har Bracha and a prolific author on Jewish Law, whose works include the series on Jewish law "Pininei Halacha".

## Slander of the Torah and Israel

In recent months we have witnessed a libelous defamation of our holy Torah and the people of Israel who teach its' values to the world, propagated by the secular media, together with women MK's from the leftist Meretz party, concerning the issue of 'eshet yefat toar' (a non-Jewish woman captured in battle) and the appointment of Rabbi Krim as the next Chief Rabbi of the I.D.F.

Although the majority of blame lies with the slanderers who failed to comprehend the Torah's profundity, we also are responsible to explain the Torah's words and values completely and precisely, while emphasizing its Divine vision and logic, so that any decent person is able to understand just how true and compassionate the Torah is, and to what extent tikkun olam (repairing the world) is dependent on its study and fulfillment.

**The Status of Those Defeated in War in the Past**  
In ancient times, the victors of wars would do whatever they pleased with those they vanquished. Any type of abuse was considered acceptable, both legally, and morally. Those who fell in captivity were considered the property of the victors. Many of them were killed and publicly abused (for that reason, King Saul asked to be killed with his own the sword, rather than be captured by the Philistines). Some were slaughtered as sacrifices on the altars of their gods, while others were taken for murderous games and used as gladiators in wars against wild beasts or between one another, until death.

In most cases, a large percentage of the men were killed, and the rest were sold as slaves. The beautiful and young women were "fortunate": they weren't killed, but rather, first the soldiers would rape them as they pleased, and when finished with them, the women were thrown into cages of prostitutes, or sold as slaves and concubines. This was the norm; therefore, it was common practice among the nations that when defeat was imminent, the women would adorn themselves in order to appeal to the victorious soldiers, and thus, save their lives.

Many of them harbored the hope that perhaps one of the enemy soldiers would covet and protect her, wishing to use her as a concubine. And perhaps afterwards, she would even be able to improve her standing and be legitimately considered his second wife, or maybe even his first wife. And if not, then at the very least she might have been sold as a concubine to an old, sick and crippled man who would not abuse her as much, and if lucky enough to bear him a child - he might even support her, and

save her from dying of starvation. Parents would even help their own daughters to adorn themselves as it was the only chance to save them and possibly have their seed continue existing in the world because, in most cases, the useless were killed so as to reduce the number of people who needed to be fed, for often wars were fought over means of sustenance, and consequently, one of the objectives was to kill the vanquished, and inherit their fields.

Some women even came to the throne in this manner, such as the captive Martha Skavronskeya. Initially, a soldier had taken her captive and she became his mistress. Following this, his commander coveted her, and took her as his mistress. Afterwards, the commander in chief took her for himself, and when the notable Minister Menshikov set eyes on her, he then took her for himself. When Tsar Peter the Great – the symbol of Russian enlightenment, saw her – he craved her, and took her for himself. Not only that, but so his first wife wouldn't cause any problems, he put her in a convent until the end of her life, married the captive legally, and renamed her Catherine the First. When he died, she became the leader of the Russian empire for two years until her death (1727).

**The Custom in Europe after the Eradication of Slavery**

For the last hundreds of years, along with the eradication of slavery in Europe, the legal status of individuals in developed countries gradually improved. Captives from countries defeated in war were no longer sold as slaves, however, they could indeed be made to serve hard labor for the kingdom, or the conquering country. This helped the victorious countries steady their economies, like the Soviet Union did with hundreds of thousands of German prisoners after World War II.

As far as looting and rape was concerned, until the end of World War II it was customary that for three days following the occupation of a city, law and order was overlooked so that soldiers were able to plunder and rape women freely, on the condition their brutality was not over-exaggerated. When the first three days ended, the laws of war prohibiting looting, rape and murder began to be enforced. Only in 1949 the Fourth Geneva Convention established protection for civilian populations in times of war.

**The Law of 'Eshet Yefat Toar'**

After all this, we can now address the law of 'eshet yefat toar' from the Torah, and understand to what extent the Torah uplifted the Jewish nation and mankind as a whole, by determining restrictions for

the complicated and difficult situation of the cruelty of war.

Ideally, in times of war a soldier is required to guard himself against any thoughts of sexual immorality, and think only about saving Israel and victory in war (Rambam, Laws of Kings and Wars 7:16). This is included in the general mitzvah of guarding the sanctity of the camp, as it says: "When you go out as together against your enemies, you must avoid everything evil... because God your Lord makes His presence known in your camp, so as to deliver you and grant you victory over your enemy. Your camp must therefore be holy. Let Him not see anything lascivious among you, and turn away from you"(Deuteronomy 23:10-15).

After victory, while taking women captive, a soldier must ideally guard himself from illicit thoughts. If, nevertheless, he desired one of the women captives, the Torah permitted him to have relations with her once, provided he does so with the commitment to marry her afterwards if she so pleased. Some of our Sages (Rabbi Yochanan and Shmuel) were of the opinion that in any event, only after she converted was the soldier permitted to have relations with her, and apparently, this was the *l'chatchila* (ideal) directive; but in a *bediavad* (after the fact) situation, the halakha was determined that a soldier was permitted to have relations with the captive woman one time, under the aforementioned conditions (Rambam, *ibid.*, 8:1; Kesef Mishneh).

The details of the law are as follows: the heter (permission) to have relations with the woman is only in the heat of battle, while taking the woman from her dwelling to captivity; but once in captivity, it is forbidden for any soldier to touch any captive woman.

The heter is on the condition that the soldier commits to marry her afterwards, as it says: "If you see a beautiful woman among the prisoners and desire her, you may take her as a wife" (Deuteronomy 21:11). Therefore, a soldier is allowed to take only one woman, and no more. Similarly, it is forbidden for him to take a woman for his brother or someone else; rather, only a soldier who coveted a particular woman is allowed to take her for himself.

After having relations with her once, he is forbidden to have relations with her again until their marriage is arranged. In other words, if the woman captive agrees to enter under the wings of the Divine Presence and convert and marry him – she is immediately converted.

If she still did not consent to convert and marry him, he leaves her to weep in his house for thirty days over her mother and father, and over her former religion which she must forsake. And the Rambam added that she is even allowed to publicly worship the idolatry she was accustomed to worship, without talking to her about matters of Jewish faith during the entire month (Moreh Nevuchim III: 41).

After the month had ended, if the man decided he did not want to marry her, she must agree to accept the seven Noahide laws, is released, and it is forbidden for him to keep her as a servant or sell her to others, as it says: "If you do not desire her, however, you must send her away freed. Since you have had your way with her, you may not sell her for cash or keep her as a servant" (Deuteronomy 21:14). In other words, if in the end he did not want her, in retrospect, the first time he had relations with her he had violated her, and in order to compensate, he must set her free.

If after this month he still desired her and she agrees to convert and marry him, she is converted, and marries. If she did not want to convert and marry, she remains with him for twelve months, because perhaps in the end she will change her mind. If after twelve months she has not consented, she must agree to accept the seven Noahide laws and is released.

#### A Bediavad Heter

From verses of the Torah, we have learned that the heter is a forced and *bediavad* type of approval, as our Sages said: "The Torah only provided for human passions: it is better for Israel to eat flesh of animals about to die yet ritually slaughtered (a doubtful prohibition), than flesh of dying animals which have perished (a definite prohibition)" (Kiddushin 21b). And although it is permitted *bediavad*, the Torah attempted to distance us from it as best as possible, thus hinting that such marriages will not be blessed, will often cause family conflicts and disputes over inheritances, and result in situations where a son born out of such a marriage is liable to be wayward and rebellious.

Our Sages termed this as "*aveira goreret aveira*" (one sin leads to another sin) (Tanchuma, Ki Taytze 1), and similarly, Rashi comments: "Scripture in permitting this marriage is speaking only against the evil inclination which drives him to desire her. For if the Holy One, blessed is He, would not permit her to him, he would take her illicitly. The Torah teaches us, however, that if he marries her, he will ultimately come to despise her...and he will ultimately father through her a wayward and rebellious son. For this reason, these passages are juxtaposed." Likewise, we find a similar incident occurred with King David

and his son Amnon who raped Tamar, and Avshalom who rebelled against his father and sought to kill him (Sanhedrin 21a, Tanchuma, ibid.).

Today the Heter is Null and Void  
Indeed, in Arab countries and ones similar to them, it is still common practice for soldiers to rape women and kill people; even in Western armies many soldiers break the law and rape women from occupied or controlled populations. In any event, since the heter of eshet yefat toar is against the evil inclination so as to regulate the behavior of a soldier under cruel and evil conditions and thus save him from transgressing more serious prohibitions, today, thanks to the positive influence of the Torah's morality, the laws of war among Western nations have improved, both from the aspect of the defeated populations lives' not being handed over as property to the occupiers, and also, as military laws are enforced more effectively on soldiers – the heter of eshet yefat toar is null and void. The law has returned to its original objective, forbidding a man and a woman to maintain sexual relations outside the framework of marriage in accordance with halakha.

The Slander and its Correction

Therefore, those who slandered the Torah, implying it supports rape, are similar to people who vilify doctors, accusing them of causing people to get sick by lending legitimacy to their illness.

All this considered, a great principle from the law of eshet yefat toar has emerged: finding fault with something is easy; knowing how to correct it by means of planting positive foundations within a harsh, cruel, and complicated reality is called for, and this can be achieved specifically through the Jewish nation.

### Summary of the Perasha

Popular learning topics for the 40 days between Elul and Yom Kippur. Even 5 minutes a day can really help us get in the right mind frame for the holidays

- 1- Tomer Devorah – Learn about the 13 midot and how to treat people better - We all need this
- 2- Hovot Halevaot – Many people learn the chapter dealing with Heshbon Ha'nefesh (Self-accounting)
- 3- Rambam Hilchot Teshuva
- 4- Shaarey Teshuva

\*You can call Eichler's to order one of these books. 718-258-7643. They all come in English as well.

\*\*You can search for classes on these books at learnTorah.com or Torahanytime.com

Also, now is a good time to start thinking about what would like to take on for this coming year. It takes a

while to figure out what we want to work on so it is good to start thinking about it a little in advance.

Ki Teseh - 74 mitsvot that largely deal with relationships and sensitivity towards others

- 1- A soldier who desires a woman in war, the hated wife, the wayward son
- 2- Various mitsvot including returning a lost item and sending away the mother bird
- 3- Forbidden mixtures, cases of forbidden relations
- 4- Holiness of the Jewish camp, prostitution, interest, keeping vows
- 5- Laws of gitin (divorce)
- 6- Mitsvot largely dealing with what lenders can take as collateral
- 7- Various mitsvot including paying workers on time, sensitivity toward the convert and orphan, leket shicheha pe'ah, yibum and halitsah, honesty in business, remembering Amalek.

### FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

**“If you build a new house, you shall make a fence for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house if the faller shall fall from it.” (Debarim 22:8)**

We are in the season of teshubah (repentance). We should not make teshubah a matter of routine of going through the motions over and over again. The verse quoted above tells about the obligation to build a maakeh (a fence) for your roof. There are two questions that one can ask about this verse. Does the law only apply to a new house? Surely an old house also requires a protective enclosure! Second, the expression “the faller shall fall” appears illogical. The man standing atop the roof has not yet fallen. He is a faller only after he falls!

The Pnei Menahem zt”l (quoted by Rabbi Shmuel Yaakov Klein) explains that the “new house” represents situations that are new. “A new year is also a new house,” he writes. Thus, the Torah offers guidance to the Jew upon his new chance to draw closer to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah, which is for him a “new house”. The message is: take care not to fall when you attempt to come closer to Hashem. Organize your thoughts and focus on the goal.

You can further derive from this the notion of rising from a self-imposed burden of guilt. “You shall not place blood in your house,” means that when this new edifice of teshubah is being built, you must not place stains of guilt of sin anywhere within it. Wallowing in one's past misdeeds hinders a person's repentance. This is what is meant by “the faller shall fall”. However, he surely can rise above the history.

Surely each of us has committed some measure of sin in the past, but through our move to break loose from the past, we can rise above it. However, if a person places the stain of guilt in his "new house," then he shall fail in elevating himself because of it.

The more we tend to be encumbered by negative imagery about ourselves, the less we are able to change it. Let us be mindful to prepare the right mood as we rise to the lofty heights of the new year. Rabbi Reuven Semah

### **"When you will go out to war against your enemies" (Debarim 21:10)**

The Torah tells us that when you go out to war G-d will give the enemy in your hands and you will take captives. Is that always the case that when we go to war we will win over our enemies?

The Rabbis tell us this refers to the constant wars we have with our arch-enemy, the yeser hara, the evil inclination. The Torah is teaching us an amazing lesson. If we only go to war with him, already we have won the battle because we know to be aware of his tricks and we are therefore committed to win him. Our problem with the evil inclination is that we let him take over our lives and don't put up any resistance. That's because we feel we don't stand a chance with him. But the truth is that if we attempt to fight him, we are more than halfway there and then Hashem will give him to us in our hands. As the Selihot season begins, we should know that by coming to Selihot and minyan or classes, we are going out to war with the yeser hara. Then Hashem will help us by giving him into our hands even in other areas so that we can truly better our lives. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **I Can Do It**

The ball soared over the little boy's head, flying out of his family's yard, over the fence, and into the neighbor's garden.

"Where are you going?" yelled his father, as the little boy headed for the seven-foot-high fence that separated the two properties.

"I am going to get the ball," replied the brave child, starting to climb the fence.

"Stop!" commanded his dad. "That fence is too high for a little boy to climb!"

The boy ignored his father's warnings and stubbornly continued to climb the fence. He reached the top and pulled himself over as his dad gazed in disbelief.

"How did you do that?" asked the shocked parent. "How come you didn't listen to me?"

"I knew I could do it – and I did!" replied the proud child, tossing the retrieved ball back to his dad. "Play ball!"

Sometimes people fail to achieve, not due to lack of ability, but to lack of self-confidence. You cannot draw on talents or powers that you do not realize you have.

While it's true that nobody is perfect, you, like everyone else, often sell yourself short and fail to accomplish because of a poor self-image.

When you think you cannot, assume that you can. Reach down deep into your untapped potential and remember the four-foot-tall boy and the seven-foot-high fence. It only takes a small dose of self-confidence to provide the impetus to help you reach success in areas you were unable to excel in before. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR**

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
**Misvot and the Potato Chip Syndrome****

One of many Misvot discussed in Parashat Ki-Teseh is the famous Misva of "Shilu'ah Ha'ken," sending away a mother bird before taking eggs from the nest. This Misva is followed by the Misva of "Ma'akeh," the obligation to place a parapet around one's roof for safety: "If you build a new house, you shall construct a parapet for your roof" (22:8). The Midrash explains the juxtaposition between these two topics, teaching that the second is the reward for the first. Meaning, the reward for faithfully fulfilling the Misva of Shilu'ah Ha'ken is a new house, which necessitates the construction of a parapet. The Torah then proceeds to discuss several laws relating to farming, such as the prohibition against sowing two types of seeds together. This, too, the Midrash comments, is a reward. For fulfilling the Misva of "Ma'akeh," one is rewarded with a field which allows him to observe the Torah's agricultural laws. Then, the Torah introduces the Misva of Sisit, the obligation to affix strings to the corners of one's garment. Once again, the Midrash teaches that this is a reward. If one observes the Torah's farming laws, then he is given the ability to obtain new, fine garments and fulfill the Misva of Sisit.

The point the Midrash is making is that one Misva leads to another. The reward for Shilu'ah Ha'ken is not simply a house – because a house that is not used for a higher purpose is not a reward – but rather the ability to perform Misvot with the house. And then, one is rewarded with a field, which provides opportunities for even more Misvot. And then one purchases new garments, and is able to do additional Misvot. Each Misva we perform ends up facilitating another one. And that Misva then brings us to yet another. We might say that Misvot are like potato chips. As we all know too well, it is impossible to eat

just one potato chip. When we eat one, we then need another. And then another. Misvot work the same way. Once we perform a Misva, we will soon find ourselves involved in another one. A person's friend drags him to a Torah class, and he finds it gratifying, and also makes some new friends. Soon enough, he is attending more classes and community functions, helping out friends, volunteering for community functions, and so on.

Why is this so? How does one Misva lead to another?

Our Rabbis teach us that every time we do a Misva, we create an angel. That angel looks to "repay" us for bringing him into existence by advocating on our behalf that we should have the ability to perform additional Misvot. This is the secret to the concept of "Misva Goreret Misva," that one Misva leads to another. Each angel we create by performing Misvot works to ensure that we will be able to perform more Misvot.

People involved in outreach, in trying to bring Jews back to religious observance, know this concept very well. Attempting to persuade somebody to drastically change his or her lifestyle is not likely to succeed. But what can and does work is encouraging somebody to perform one Misva, such as to observe one Shabbat, to participate in one Hesed project, or to attend one Shiur. The power of that Misva will naturally lead to yet another, which will then lead to another, and so on. It is that initial step which triggers the process of developing a full-fledged Torah commitment.

We must realize, however, that the converse is also true. Just as one Misva facilitates another, one sin facilitates another. When we commit a sin, we create an angel that seeks to lead us toward yet another sin. There's no such thing as transgressing just once, as breaking the rules only temporarily and then immediately getting back on track. This is not how it works. If we violate the Torah once, we bring ourselves dramatically closer to another violation. And then to another. The "potato chip syndrome" is true regarding sins just as it is regarding Misvot.

We must never underestimate the power and significance of any action. A positive act will lead us along the path of more Misvot, while a negative act will lead us along the opposite path. Let us therefore always choose wisely, and put ourselves on the road of Misva performance, one Misva at a time, and we will then be rewarded with even more Misvot, and then some more, throughout our lives.

## VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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### Rabbi Wein LOST CAUSES

The tendency of us old folks is to glorify the past generation of the days of our youth and to be skeptical of the motives and behavior of current generations. This tendency is so universal and pronounced that King Solomon in Kohelet warns us against so thinking for it is not out of wisdom that we believe it to be so. Yet I cannot help but in my mind compare the great causes that dominated the Jewish world in my youth to the seeming absence of such inspiring causes in the generation of my grandchildren.

It is as though all of our battles have been won and there are really no new worlds left to discover and conquer. This may be the view of a grumpy old man but please hear me out. In my generation, after the destruction of a third of world Jewry, there were three main goals that dominated the minds and hearts of my friends and me studying then in the yeshiva in Chicago.

The first one was how to go about rebuilding the Jewish people physically. There was no thought of marrying late or placing career or profession ahead of marriage and family. Jewish souls required Jewish bodies to inhabit. Anti-Semitism was still rampant in America but Jews began to stand up to it and became more assertive in their Jewish identity. We began to wear a kippah in college classes and on the public street. And our generation fostered a great sense of solidarity amongst all Jews regardless of religious levels of observance and political affiliation. And "never again" meant what it said.

The second great cause in our lives was the State of Israel. We prayed for its success, hungered for its news and hoped to be able to somehow and at some time to be able to settle and live there. The then very secular nature of the state, with its constant political, noisy bickering and its ingrained unfriendliness towards strangers from the Western world, was in the main ignored by us in our hopes and wishes for the success of the first independent Jewish state in nineteen hundred years.

Israel was no longer a question of Zionism or not; it was the embodiment of the Jewish people and its future. Israel to us was like an arrangement in

marriage – certain things had to be ignored in the interests of the overall success of the relationship. We felt that Israel was too fragile a gift to be subjected to the scrutiny of a George Soros or a J Street. And the wars that Israel was compelled to fight and the never-ending Arab terror to which it was subjected only served to strengthen our support and resolve.

We were never blind to the faults and deficiencies of the State of Israel but it was viewed as a work in progress, with patience and optimism the watchwords of most of the Jewish world towards Israel. The very success of Israel has now allowed its critics – left, right and center, charedim, “modern” and Reform, etc. – to become open critics of the State of Israel and some even question its right of existence. How sad it is that they so misread the map of Jewish history and the import of current events.

The third cause that was paramount in my youth was the restoration of Torah study, observance and values to its rightful place as the fulcrum of Jewish life. There was an idealistic urge to build Jewish schools and staff then, wherever Jewish communities existed. The focus was on sharing Jewish knowledge and lifestyle with Jews who had lost their traditions and heritage. There was a realization that this would require a great deal of personal sacrifice – familial, financial and even spiritual – on the part of these Torah pioneers. But somehow this bold idea found roots and growth in Israel and throughout the Diaspora as well. The cause of Torah engendered an adventurous pioneering spirit amongst yeshiva students who were willingly ready to forego lucrative careers in the world of commerce and the professions in order to restore the crown of Torah to the Jewish people.

All of the causes described above have, to a certain extent, become victims of their amazing, near miraculous achievements and successes. So perhaps what is needed are new challenges and causes to fire up the imaginations and hopes of the arriving generation and to continue in the never-ending process of renewal and regeneration of the ever-young Jewish people. I am certain that these causes will be found.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Two Types of Hate**

It is by any standards a strange, almost incomprehensible law. Here it is in the form it appears in this week's parsha:

Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the

way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land He is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under the heaven. Do not forget. (Deut. 25:17-19)

The Israelites had two enemies in the days of Moses: the Egyptians and the Amalekites. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They turned them into a forced labour colony. They oppressed them. Pharaoh commanded them to drown every male Israelite child. It was attempted genocide. Yet about them, Moses commands:

Do not despise an Egyptian, because you were strangers in his land. (Deut. 23:8)

The Amalekites did no more than attack the Israelites once<sup>[1]</sup>, an attack that they successfully repelled (Ex. 17:13). Yet Moses commands, “Remember.” “Do not forget.” “Blot out the name.” In Exodus the Torah says that “God shall be at war with Amalek for all generations” (Ex. 17:16). Why the difference? Why did Moses tell the Israelites, in effect, to forgive the Egyptians but not the Amalekites?

The answer is to be found as a corollary of teaching in the Mishna, Avot (5:19):

Whenever love depends on a cause and the cause passes away, then the love passes away too. But if love does not depend on a cause then the love will never pass away. What is an example of the love which depended upon a cause? That of Amnon for Tamar. And what is an example of the love which did not depend on a cause? That of David and Jonathan.

When love is conditional, it lasts as long as the condition lasts but no longer. Amnon loved, or rather lusted, for Tamar because she was forbidden to him. She was his half-sister. Once he had had his way with her, “Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her.” (2 Sam. 13:15). But when love is unconditional and irrational, it never ceases. In the words of Dylan Thomas: “Though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have no dominion.”

The same applies to hate. When hate is rational, based on some fear or disapproval that – justified or not – has some logic to it, then it can be reasoned with and brought to an end. But unconditional, irrational hatred cannot be reasoned with. There is nothing one can do to address it and end it. It

persists.

That was the difference between the Amalekites and the Egyptians. The Egyptians' hatred and fear of the Israelites was not irrational. Pharaoh said to his people:

'The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us. We must deal wisely with them. Otherwise, they may increase so much, that if there is war, they will join our enemies and fight against us, driving [us] from the land.' (Ex. 1:9-10)

The Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were numerous. They constituted a potential threat to the native population. Historians tell us that this was not groundless. Egypt had already suffered from one invasion of outsiders, the Hyksos, an Asiatic people with Canaanite names and beliefs, who took over the Nile Delta during the Second Intermediate Period of the Egypt of the pharaohs. Eventually they were expelled from Egypt and all traces of their occupation were erased. But the memory persisted. It was not irrational for the Egyptians to fear that the Hebrews were another such population. They feared the Israelites because they were strong.

(Note that there is a difference between "rational" and "justified". The Egyptians' fear was in this case certainly unjustified. The Israelites did not want to take over Egypt. To the contrary, they would have preferred to leave. Not every rational emotion is justified. It is not irrational to feel fear of flying after the report of a major air disaster, despite the fact that statistically it is more dangerous to drive a car than to be a passenger in a plane. The point is simply that rational but unjustified emotion can, in principle, be cured through reasoning.)

Precisely the opposite was true of the Amalekites. They attacked the Israelites when they were "weary and weak". They focused their assault on those who were "lagging behind." Those who are weak and lagging behind pose no danger. This was irrational, groundless hate.

With rational hate it is possible to reason. Besides, there was no reason for the Egyptians to fear the Israelites any more. They had left. They were no longer a threat. But with irrational hate it is impossible to reason. It has no cause, no logic. Therefore it may never go away. Irrational hate is as durable and persistent as irrational love. The hatred symbolised by Amalek lasts "for all generations." All one can do is to remember and not forget, to be constantly vigilant, and to fight it whenever and wherever it appears.

There is such a thing as rational xenophobia: fear and hate of the foreigner, the stranger, the one not like us. In the hunter-gatherer stage of humanity, it was vital to distinguish between members of your tribe and those of another tribe. There was competition for food and territory. It was not an age of liberalism and tolerance. The other tribe was likely to kill you or oust you, given the chance.

The ancient Greeks were xenophobic, regarding all non-Greeks as barbarians. So still are many native populations. Even people as tolerant as the British and Americans were historically distrustful of immigrants, be they Jews, Irish, Italian or Puerto Rican – and for some this remains the case today. What happens, though, is that within two or three generations the newcomers acculturate and integrate. They are seen as contributing to the national economy and adding richness and variety to its culture. When an emotion like fear of immigrants is rational but unjustified, eventually it declines and disappears.

Antisemitism is different from xenophobia. It is the paradigm case of irrational hatred. In the Middle Ages Jews were accused of poisoning wells, spreading the plague, and in one of the most absurd claims ever – the Blood Libel – they were suspected of killing Christian children to use their blood to make matzot for Pesach. This was self-evidently impossible, but that did not stop people believing it.

The European Enlightenment, with its worship of science and reason, was expected to end all such hatred. Instead it gave rise to a new version of it, racial antisemitism. In the nineteenth century Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor; because they were capitalists and because they were communists; because they were exclusive and kept to themselves and because they infiltrated everywhere; because they were believers in an ancient, superstitious faith and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

Antisemitism was the supreme irrationality of the age of reason.

It gave rise to a new myth, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a literary forgery produced by members of the Czarist Russia secret police toward the end of the nineteenth century. It held that Jews had power over the whole of Europe – this at the time of the Russian pogroms of 1881 and the antisemitic May Laws of 1882, which sent some three million Jews, powerless and impoverished, into flight from Russia to the West.



The situation in which Jews found themselves at the end of what was supposed to be the century of Enlightenment and emancipation was stated eloquently by Theodor Herzl, in 1897:

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country . . . If we were left in peace . . . But I think we shall not be left in peace.

This was deeply shocking to Herzl. No less shocking has been the return of antisemitism to parts of the world today, particularly the Middle East and even Europe, within living memory of the Holocaust. Yet the Torah intimates why. Irrational hate does not die.

Not all hostility to Jews, or to Israel as a Jewish state, is irrational, and where it is not, it can be reasoned with. But some of it is irrational. Some of it, even today, is a repeat of the myths of the past, from the Blood Libel to the Protocols. All we can do is remember and not forget, confront it and defend ourselves against it.

Amalek does not die. But neither does the Jewish people. Attacked so many times over the centuries, it still lives, giving testimony to the victory of the God of love over the myths and madness of hate.

[1] Of course, there were subsequent attacks by Amalek (including, according to tradition, in Bamidbar 21:1) but the decree to obliterate Amalek was issued after their first attack.

### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "Remember that which Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the way when you went out from Egypt" (24:9)**

This is a command of the Torah.

I cannot tell you how often we are to fulfill this commandment. Some Siddurim say it should be said every day. The Chafetz Chaim based his sefer on this. We are not merely commanded, "Not to go around being tale-bearers amongst our people" (Vayikra 19:16), but to remember what happened to Miriam, and the sin of Miriam was the sin that she was not judging others favorably.

Miriam's sin was really quite small. First, she posed it as a question. "Is it not that we also speak with Hashem?" (Bamidbar 12:2). It was a legitimate question. After all Miriam was a prophetess herself, and received prophecy before Moshe. So why was she punished? Because the closer one is to Hashem, the more one is held accountable, and Miriam was very great. However, she misunderstood the perfection of Moshe and the immensity of the prophecy Moshe received from Hashem.

This event was made part of the Torah with the intention of teaching us the importance of judging others favorably and giving them the benefit of the doubt, and that the evil of lashon hara does not only bring Tzaraat, but a great many other forms of suffering. Much suffering descends upon a person because of speaking lashon hara.

"When a camp goes out to war against your enemies" (Debarim 23:10).

You have no enemies except for yourself, and except for the Yetzer Hara, which everyone ignores.

Your enemy is not that other man. Oh, he may want to kill you, but he can only take away your life.

The Yetzer Hara wants to take away your Neshama/Soul. He is the real enemy.

Quoted from "The Path of Life" by Rabbi Yehoshua Danese