

In This Issue:

- **"Rabbi Frand on the Weekly Torah Portion"** by Rabbi Yissocher Frand
- **"Covenant and Conversation"** by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
- **"The Guiding Light"** by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen
- **"Mayanot"** by Rabbi Noson Weisz



Every Life is Precious

A murder victim is found in a field out in the open country between two cities. There are no witnesses and no clues to the identity of his assailant. The Torah demands an exact measurement to determine the closest city. The elders of that city have to declare, "We were not derelict in our responsibilities to this traveler. Our hands did not spill this innocent blood." Then they go through a process of atonement called the *eglah arufah*, the decapitated calf.

These laws seem to be incongruously wedged in between two chapters that talk about going out to war. What is it doing there?

Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, my *Rosh Yeshivah*, explains that the Torah is teaching us a lesson. In times of war, life becomes incredibly cheap. People are dying left and right, men,

women, children, soldiers, civilians. Life somehow loses its value.

Therefore, right in the middle of the discussion of war, the Torah interrupts to present the laws of *eglah arufah*, laws that underscore the extreme preciousness of each individual life. An entire city must bring atonement for the loss of one unidentified person who may or may not have passed through unnoticed.

The *Shemen Hatov* suggests that this may be why Yaakov learned the laws of *eglah arufah* with Yosef on their last day together. Perhaps Yaakov's soul felt intuitively that Yosef would become the leader of a huge and powerful nation, that he would have the power of life and death over millions and millions of people. Therefore, it was important to teach him about *eglah arufah* to impress on him the importance of every single human life.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the *rav* of Brisk, once called a special meeting in the *shul*. "My dear friends, we have a serious problem. The Czar's police have arrested a young Jewish boy."

"What did he do?" asked a congregant.

"He burned the Czar in effigy."

The man slapped his forehead in frustration.

"Regardless of what he has done," Rav Chaim continued, "the boy is in danger. We must get him out immediately. It is a question of money. Just money."

"How much money?"

Rav Chaim mentioned the sum. It was an exorbitant amount, and people gasped audibly.

“We are faced with a great *mitzvah*,” said Rav Chaim. “This is true *pidyon shevuyim*, ransoming captives.”

“Who is the boy?” one man wanted to know. “Is he a *yeshivah* boy?”

“No,” said Rav Chaim.

“Is he a member of our *shul*? Is he someone we know?”

“No.”

“Is he religious?”

“I’m afraid not. At least not yet.”

One of the men threw up his hands in frustration. “How will we raise money for a boy like that? And such a large sum!”

“I don’t know,” Reb Chaim said, “but somehow it must be done. I am not coming to *shul* on Yom Kippur until the money is collected.”

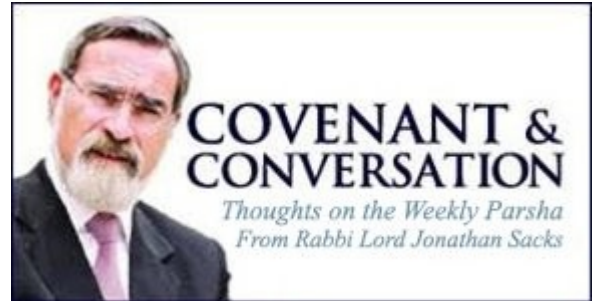
Time passed, and only a small amount of money was raised.

Yom Kippur came. It was time for *Kol Nidrei*, and Rav Chaim still had not come to *shul*. The elders of the community went to his house.

“I told you,” he said. “I am not coming until you raise the money. It doesn’t matter if the boy is religious or not. A Jewish soul is a Jewish soul!”

The community raised the money to ransom the boy.

Every life is precious.



A Sage is Greater than a Prophet

In Shoftim, Moses speaks about the great institutions of Judaism: courts, judges, officers, Kings, Priests, Levites and Prophets. In the case of the Prophet, Moses says in the name of God:

I will raise up a Prophet for them from among their own people, like yourself: I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him. (Deut. 18:18)

The phrase “a Prophet ... like yourself” cannot be meant literally. In the quality and clarity of his communications with God, Moses was unique. He was unique in the miracles he performed. Most importantly, only he was authorised to proclaim Torah: he was Israel’s sole legislator. The King and Sanhedrin both had powers to make temporary enactments for the sake of social order. Prophets were given the authority to command specific, time-bound acts. But no one could add to or subtract from the 613 commandments given by God through Moses.

This, therefore, is how Rambam explains our passage:

Why is it said in the Torah: "I will raise up a Prophet for them from among their own people, like yourself" (Deut. 18:18)? He will come not to establish a religion, but to command them to

keep the words of the Torah, warning the people not to transgress them, as the last among them said:

"Remember the Torah of Moses My servant" (Mal. 3:22).

In other words, the Prophets who followed Moses, from Elijah to Malachi, were not revolutionaries. They did not intend to create something new but to restore something old. Their task was to recall people to the mission Moses taught them: to stay faithful to God, and to create a just and compassionate society.

Eventually, during or after the Second Temple period, most of these institutions came to an end. There were no Kings because Israel had no sovereignty. There were no Priests because it had no Temple. But there were also no Prophets. How important was this? And what happened to prophecy? The Talmud gives two radically opposite opinions. The first:

Rabbi Yochanan said: From the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the Prophets and given to fools and children.¹

We can't be sure what Rabbi Yochanan meant. He may have meant that children and fools sometimes see what others don't (as Hans Christian Anderson illustrated in the famous story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*). He may, though, have meant the opposite, that prophecy deteriorated during the late Second Temple period. There were many false prophets, soothsayers, doomsayers, mystics, announcers of the apocalypse, and messianic movements, all confidently predicting the end of history and

the birth of a new order of things. There were religious sectarians. There were Essenes expecting the arrival of the Teacher of Righteousness. There were rebels against Rome who believed that their military hero would bring freedom, even the messianic age. It was a fevered, destructive time, and Rabbi Yochanan may have wanted to discredit, as far as possible, any dependence on supposedly divine certainty about the future. Prophecy is the chattering of children or the rambling of fools.

However the Talmud also cites a quite different opinion:

Rabbi Avdimi from Haifa says: From the day that the Temple was destroyed prophecy was taken from the Prophets and given to the Sages ... Ameimar said: And a Sage is greater than a Prophet, as it is stated: "A Prophet has a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Who is compared to whom? You must say that the lesser is compared to the greater.² (Since a Prophet must have a heart of wisdom, the Sage, who is wisdom personified, must be greater still).

This is seriously interesting. The early Judges in Israel were Kohanim.³ When Moses blessed the people at the end of his life he said of the tribe of Levi, "They shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your instructions to Israel" (Deut. 33:10). When Ezra taught Torah to the Israelites, he positioned Levites among the people to explain what was being said. All this suggests that when the Sages – teachers and masters of Jewish law – traced their intellectual-spiritual lineage, they should have done so by seeing themselves as

heirs of the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im*. But they did not do so. We see this from the famous Mishnah that opens Pirkei Avot:

Moses received the Torah at Sinai and handed it onto Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders *to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly.*

The Sages saw themselves as heirs to the Prophets. But in what sense? And how did they come to see themselves not just as heirs to, but as *greater than* the Prophets. What is more, the proof-text they cite means nothing of the kind. The verse in Psalm 90 says, “Teach us to number our days, that *we may gain* a heart of wisdom.” The Talmud is playing on the fact that two quite different words sound alike: נבא (*we may gain*) and נביא (*a Prophet*). In other words, only by suspending our critical faculties is the proof-text a proof.

Something very strange is happening here. The Sages, who valued humility, who knew that prophecy had come to an end in the days of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi five centuries before the destruction of the Second Temple, who believed that the most one could hear from heaven was a *bat kol*, a distant echo, are here saying that not only are they Prophets, but they are superior to Prophets.

All this to teach us that the Sages took the ideals of the Prophets and turned them into practical programmes. Here is one example. Remonstrating with the people, administering rebuke, was fundamental to the prophetic task. This is how Ezekiel understood the task:

God said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me ... Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says.’ And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious people – they will know that a Prophet has been among them. (Ez. 2:3-5)

Ezekiel must take a public stand. Once he has done that, he has fulfilled his duty. The people will have been warned, and if they fail to listen, it will be their fault.

The Sages had a completely different approach. First, they understood the task of remonstrating as belonging to everyone, not just Prophets. That is how they understood the verse, “You shall surely rebuke your neighbour so you will not share in his guilt” (Lev. 19:17). Second, they held that it should be done not once but up to a hundred times if necessary.⁴ In fact you should keep reprimanding a wrongdoer until they hit you or curse you or scold you.⁵ All of this, though, applies only if there is a reasonable chance of making the situation better. If not, then we apply the rule: “Just as it is a mitzvah to say something that will be heeded, so it is a mitzvah *not* to say something that will not be heeded.”⁶

Note the difference between the two approaches. The Prophet takes a heroic stand but does not take responsibility for whether the people listen or not. The Rabbis do not take a heroic stand. In fact, they democratise the responsibility for rebuke so that it applies to everyone. But they are ultrasensitive to whether it is effective or not. If there is a chance of

changing someone for the better, then you must try a hundred times, but if there is no chance at all, better be silent. This is not only a wise approach; it is a highly effective one.

Now consider peace. No finer visions of a world at peace have ever been given than by Israel's Prophets. This is just one:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them ...

They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Now consider rabbinic teachings: "For the sake of peace, the poor of the heathens should not be prevented from gathering gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and corners of the field ... Our masters taught: for the sake of peace, the poor of the heathens should be supported as we support the poor of Israel, the sick of the heathens should be visited as we visit the sick of Israel, and the dead of the heathens should be buried as we bury the dead of Israel."⁷

Once again, the difference is glaring. What for the Prophets was a dazzling vision of a distant future was, for the Sages, a practical programme of good community relations, a way of sustaining peaceful coexistence between the Jewish community and its Gentile neighbours. It was imaginative, gracious and workable.

There are many other examples. The Sages achieved something extraordinary. Throughout

the biblical era, the Israelites were constantly tempted by idolatry and foreign ways. The Prophets were often driven close to despair. During the rabbinic era, Jews became a people defined by religion, commandments, learning and prayer, sustained voluntarily and maintained tenaciously against all pressures to convert to the majority faith. That is because the Rabbis did not focus on distant visions. They devised practical programmes. These may have lacked drama, but they worked.

The Sages, perhaps to their surprise, realised this: where the Prophets failed, they succeeded. I believe that institutions like prophecy survive when they are translated from utopian ideals into practical policies. The greatness of the Sages, still not fully appreciated by the world, is that guided by the visions of the Prophets, they gave us the instructions for how to get from here to there.

Shabbat Shalom

NOTES

1. Baba Batra 12b.
2. Baba Batra 12a.
3. See Deut. 17:9.
4. Baba Metzia 31a.
5. Arachin 16b.
6. Yevamot 65b.
7. Mishnah Shevi'it, 4:3, 5:9, Gittin 5:9, Tosefta, Gittin 3:13-14, Avodah Zarah 1:3; Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 59a-61a.



The Pillar and the Altar

Devarim, 16:22: “You shall not set up any pillar, which HaShem, your God hates”.

The Torah forbids setting up a pillar (*matzeivah*) as a way to worship God. Instead, one should use an altar (*mizbayach*) for offerings. The problem arises that the Patriarchs themselves used to use *matzeivot* in their Divine service¹, so why now does the Torah forbid it? Rashi explains that at the time the Torah was written, it was common for idol worshippers to use a *matzeivah* in their idol worship, whereas at the time of the Patriarchs, this was not a common practice.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a different explanation². He begins by elucidating the differences between a *matzeivah* and a *mizbayach*. A *matzeivah* is one stone in its natural form which is a symbol of God’s control over nature. In contrast, a *mizbayach* comprises of a number of stones that a human assembles into an orderly structure. This symbolizes the idea that man’s purpose is not just to see God in nature, but to subjugate man to God through man’s actions. With this introduction, Rabbi Hirsch explains that in the time of the Patriarchs, before the Torah was given, the main purpose of

man was to recognize God in the world through nature, but there was no requirement to direct one’s actions to Divine service because the Torah had not yet been given³. God loved these *matzeivot* because they achieved what was required at that time. However, after the Torah was given, it was insufficient to simply recognize God in nature without also living one’s life in the way require by the Torah. Accordingly, the *mizbayach* became the optimal means with which to serve God, because It symbolized man’s active submission to God. Moreover, the *matzeivah* was now transformed from being beloved to God to being hated by Him, because only recognizing God in the world, without an accompanying commitment to live according to the Torah, is considered a sin in God’s eyes.

A person who recognizes God in nature, and even believe in Divine Providence, fulfils two of the three foundations of belief that the Sefer Halkrim outlines, but the third is that God gave us the Torah to fulfil it. If he does not follow that third foundation, even if he believes in the other two, then he is fundamentally flawed, because man’s purpose is to take his recognition of God and Divine Providence and live his life according to God’s instructions, as outlined in the Torah.

It is possible to discern a similar idea in explanation of a Mishnah in Pirkei Avot. The Mishna states: “One who is going on the way and is learning, and stops learning, and says, ‘how pleasant is this tree, how pleasant is this bush’, the verse considers it as if he is obligated for his life⁴.” A number of commentaries understand that when the person notes the pleasantness of the tree, he is seeing it as a creation of God and is marveling at God’s

creation. Accordingly, they ask what is so bad about observing the wonders of God's creations, even if one stops learning to do so⁵⁶? This is all the more difficult given that the Rambam writes that one of the ways of fulfilling the mitzvot of *Ahavat Hashem* (love of God) and *Yirat Hashem* (fear of God) is by seeing God in nature⁷. They also note that the Mishna can't simply be coming to teach the severity of *bittul Torah* (stopping learning), because this was already expressed in an earlier Mishna⁸. This is all the more difficult given that the Rambam writes that one of the ways of fulfilling *Ahavat Hashem* and *Yirat Hashem* is by seeing God in nature.

One explanation given is that learning Torah is a higher method of seeing God than observing nature, accordingly, one who stops seeing God through his learning in order to see God through nature, is erring, because Torah is the optimum way to come to love and fear God. However, it is perhaps possible to suggest a slightly different approach, based on the above principle of Rav Hirsch. Learning Torah is one of the optimum ways of fulfilling the '*mizbayach*' form of Divine service, of doing actions in this world as a way of expressing recognition of God. Stopping learning in order to see God through nature is akin to rejecting the *mizbayach* form of Divine service and returning to the '*matzeivah*' form of acknowledging God in nature, because the ultimate purpose of contemplation of God in nature is to bring a person to action. In this instance, he is doing the opposite – foregoing action for contemplation, hence the severity of this behavior.

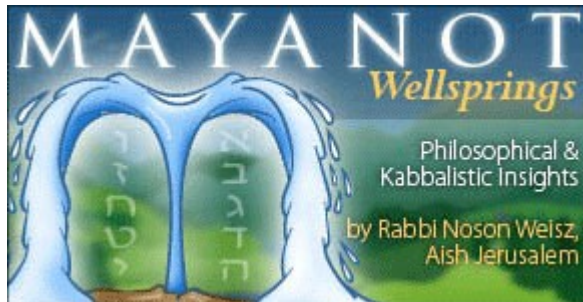
Rabbi Hirsch wrote his monumental commentary on the Torah at a time when non-Orthodox

movements were arising, that accepted the general idea of God's existence but rejected active Torah observance, hence his message was very pertinent. Even today, there are certainly many people who have no qualms about acknowledging the Divine imprint on the world, but are far more reluctant to live their lives according to the Torah's dictates. Even for the 'observant', Rabbi Hirsch's lesson seems to be pertinent. It is quite easy for a person to go through the mundane activities in his daily life without an awareness that every action can constitute a type of Mitzva when done with the right intent. Actions such as helping one's wife, paying a taxi driver, being honest in work, and even crossing the road carefully⁹, can all constitute Mitzvot with the correct intention (*kavannah*). However, without *kavannah*, the majority of a person's actions are not expressions of submission to God, even though the person will readily acknowledge God's presence. Rabbi Hirsch's lesson teaches us that we must never forget that the purpose of our lives is to bring God into the world through our actions.

NOTES

1. *Bereishis*, 28:18.
2. *Peirush Al Hatorah*, *Devarim*, 16:22.
3. It is true that the *Avos* observed the Torah before It was given, but this was not out of strict obligation.
4. *Avos*, 3:9. In some versions, this is found in *Mishna* 7 instead of *Mishna* 9.
5. Others hold that the person is observing the pleasantness of the tree without noting that *HaShem* created it. According to this understanding, it is easier to comprehend the seriousness of this behavior.
6. Another significant question on this *Mishna* is the language of 'it is as if he is obligated for his life' The reason for this specific language is not addressed in this essay.
7. *Rambam*, *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, 2:2.

8. Avos, 3:5.
9. It can be a fulfillment of the *Mitzva* to guard one's life.



Trees of Life

"When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it and to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from it you will eat and you shall not cut it down; is the tree of the field a man that it should enter the siege before you?" (Devarim 20:19)

PEOPLE AS FRUIT TREES

According to the Maharal, the subject of the rhetorical question at the end of the verse is man, not trees; it is people who are being compared to trees, rather than trees to people. Trees put out branches, twigs, and flowers and they ultimately provide fruit that nourishes the hungry. Similarly, man is expected to be productive and labor to produce fruit. The fruit that only man can grow and the nourishment that only he can supply is moral behavior, and the pursuit and attainment of knowledge to add to the world's store of knowledge and wisdom.

In other words, people were not placed here on earth to harvest its fruits and reap its benefits and simply enjoy. The earthly inputs that we enjoy are akin to the soil that supports the growth of fruit bearing trees. Just as the fruit-

bearing tree transforms the nourishment it derives from the soil into edible fruit, so must the human being make use of the inputs provided by the earth to make himself sprout and grow until he is productive and provides his fruit - wisdom and good deeds.

Pursuing the analogy, the prohibition against cutting down the fruit-bearing tree is based on its usefulness and productivity. Productive people, the allegorical fruit trees of the verse, are no less covered by this injunction, whereas the unproductive person who produces no 'fruit,' is left unguarded.

IN MIDST OF WAR

In fact, the placement of this injunction is highly significant. The passage in which it is found covers the Torah laws of warfare, and our specific verse is written in the context of besieging an enemy city. War is by definition a destructive activity. It takes centuries of effort to develop civilizations and cultures. A single war can nullify the constructive effort of a chain of generations and wipe out the unique human flavor of an entire civilization overnight. The injunction against wanton destruction is placed in this passage to teach us that even when we are embroiled in destructive activities we must never forget that the ultimate goal of all human endeavors must be constructive. We must ensure that everything we do bears fruit.

The Torah laws of warfare themselves are built around this message:

"You cannot wage war against any people on earth until you first approach them with an offer of peace; this is true concerning all wars;

optional wars as well as wars we are commanded to fight [the war against the Seven nations of Canaan, and the war against Amalek] if they agree to make peace and accept upon themselves the obligation of the Seven Noachide laws it is forbidden to kill a single soul; they can be taxed, and they have to accept the jurisdiction of the courts of Israel." (Maimonides, Laws of Kings Ch.6,1)

War is treated by the Torah as the clash between diverse civilizations. The minimum Torah requirement for defining a human community as a civilization that must be preserved is the commitment to observance of the Noachide laws. A society that agrees to abide by the Noachide laws is considered a fruitful human society. As such, Torah law guards its physical safety and integrity. Such a society cannot be an enemy by definition in the Torah's view.

On the other hand, when the opposing people refuse to abide by the Noachide laws and reject the peace offered in those terms, the Torah mandates the execution of the entire adult male population of the vanquished. In the case of the Seven nations and the Amalekites its measures are even harsher; it requires the execution of the entire vanquished population.

This appears very harsh and inhuman to us at first glance. Yet, these are the commands issued by the Merciful God to the people of Israel who are themselves expected to mirror God's attributes and behave towards all fellow creatures and especially human beings with the utmost mercy. Is there any way to rationally comprehend this sort of approach?

WESTERN WARS

The history of the Western world is replete with warfare. But the wars with which we are familiar are not wars between contending civilizations. Most of the wars of the Western world, were fought by nations who shared the same fundamental Judeo-Christian beliefs and whose cultures were virtually identical. Generally speaking, the major difference between the contestants was the languages they spoke. The stakes in such wars were always concrete: control of some asset or territory. Peace was always a real possibility between the parties as they shared similar outlooks and values.

This continues to be the case for the nations that comprise the Western world, and largely applies to all so-called 'developed' nations. These nations have become so close to each other in terms of cultures and life-styles that the idea of going to war to settle disputes has become largely unthinkable. The theories of economics and government that the parties share, the common ambition to pursue a higher standard of living through the mechanism of free markets renders the idea of engaging in actual hostilities with one another totally absurd. The entire developed world is a single civilization.

THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

But there are other sorts of wars. There are wars between diverse civilizations and cultures, which differ not only in language, but also over fundamental ideas of what the world is about and the purpose of man within it. Compromise between civilizations is rarely possible once they start warring with each other. The clash between civilizations, even when it is ignited by the

occurrence of a practical dispute, is never about the control of physical assets, but about the dominance of one way of life and one system of belief over a contending culture. In such conflicts, the losing side merely bides its time. Hatred and mutual misunderstanding simmer beneath the surface and confidence-building measures are extremely problematic.

The Torah adopts a city-by-city approach to the settlement of such conflicts. Rather than treating the entire enemy nation as a single entity, each local community is offered the chance of accepting the basic tenets of Torah civilization and due process by accepting the Noachide laws and jurisdiction of the Jewish courts. If they accept the dominance of the Torah culture and agree to avoid hostilities it is assumed that peaceful coexistence will be possible.

But when a community decides to go to war to defend its beliefs, and refuses to abide by the Noachide laws, in the opinion of the Torah, peaceful coexistence in the long run is impossible. The war will continue forever as long as the adult proponents of the opposing culture remain alive to spread their teaching. It may take a long time for hostilities to resume but they are inevitable. The subdued counterculture is a ticking time bomb that threatens Israel and will inevitably explode. Protective measures must be instituted even if the immediate danger is not apparent.

DISASTERS THAT RESULT WHEN CIVILIZATIONS CONTEND

To see the disastrous results of the interaction between different civilizations, we have only to look at Africa. The Western world rejected the

concept of colonialism and Western nations emancipated their colonies. The result of their withdrawal and this emancipation is an African continent riddled with civil war and starvation, Aids, corruption and mismanagement. Colonialism may not have been a desirable phenomenon, but there is little doubt that the emancipation that has replaced colonial rule is considerably worse for the average African. The colonial system totally upset the ancient modus vivendi that the warring tribes of Africa developed over the course of centuries. It redrew tribal borders and placed bitter enemies belonging to differing civilizations under the umbrella of a single administration.

This redrawn tribal map of colonialism required the supervision of a superior power to keep the peace. Once it was withdrawn the results were inevitable. Colonial rule is no doubt immoral but the way it was ended was unconscionable and caused centuries of harm. Having upset the balance of local power, the withdrawing colonial powers had a responsibility to see to it that the native peoples were left in a state of stable peace.

MORAL STANDARDS

As this example of the abandonment of colonialism illustrates, when a clash between civilizations is involved, taking the apparently proper moral action is often inexcusable. The colonial order was established through violence. Violence inevitably alters the established order irrevocably. Once it has been applied the balance between civilizations can never return to the status quo ante. Once a situation has been forcibly altered by the application of violence the

aim to reach ultimate peace must determine the morality of every behavior; actions do not have the same moral value as they would in peaceful times.

Life in a simmering war zone is impossible for all parties concerned. People cannot make a living and are unable to support their families. It is impossible to properly educate children, to travel freely, to shop, or to ever relax. Without peace there is no life. The attainment of true peace becomes the chief moral imperative in every war situation. Every action must be weighed in terms of its productivity for achieving peace in order to determine its moral rectitude. Violent acts that are anathema in times of peace can be justified morally in wartime if they can produce peace.

We, the Jewish people, are experiencing the tragedy of living in a permanent war zone on our very skins. We have staked our future on the return to our ancestral homeland. The civilized world, overcome by the horrors of the Holocaust, recognized the legitimate right of the Jewish people to a land of their own, and extended its approval to the Jewish return to the land of Israel. Once the decision to return had been reached, the successful conquest of the land of Israel became an imperative of Jewish survival no less than it was in the times of Joshua. We have sought peace with the Arabs ever since our return.

The tragedy we are living through is very real, but is only partially the result of objective circumstances. Moral ambivalence and confusion are just as responsible for our current problems as the objective realities are. Many among us are attempting to apply the rules of peaceful moral behavior to a war situation. This

policy benefits no one - not ourselves nor the Palestinians. As our survival demands the success of the conquest, we must do whatever is necessary to complete such conquest. Only this can bring the war to an end and restore the peace. Restoring the peace is the only moral imperative.

WE ARE NOT A COLONIAL POWER

Israel is not a colonial power. Jews are not imperialists seeking to exploit native peoples. We Jews have returned to this land as our own homeland. We cannot allow ourselves to be driven out of Israel; we have no place to go. Neither Jews nor Palestinians can survive and prosper in a perpetual war zone. There is no colonial power capable of imposing a peaceful solution and besides, the Western world has abandoned this method of imposing order as a matter of principle.

Peace is not a possibility with a people who send their kids to summer camps that preach hatred of Jews and glorify their slaughter at any price. The Israeli leaders who applied the European model of warfare and peace making to the clash between civilizations we are experiencing in the Middle East took an unconscionable risk. The Arabs and we do not share a common civilization. No Western population would tolerate the sort of dictatorship that exists in all the Arab countries for a minute. No Western population would tolerate such a great disparity between the rich and poor based entirely on one's location within the ruling oligarchy. No Western population could ever develop such a corps of suicide bombers.

A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

But this is all too up in the air. Let us study a concrete situation that is still a part of today's headlines and try to analyze it from a Torah perspective. Israel blew up the house of Salah Shehadeh, the head of Hamas in Gaza a couple of weeks ago. There were a number of civilian casualties. Moreover, the fact that there would be such casualties was reasonably foreseeable under the circumstances.

This action was attacked on two grounds. First, it was argued that we are no better than the Palestinian terrorists. Just as they blow up innocent people indiscriminately, we are guilty of the same crime ourselves. Second, it was argued that we are only feeding the never-ending spiral of violence. Hamas immediately swore to revenge the killing and sure enough, a week or so later they managed to blow up a bus full of soldiers at the Meron junction.

THE FIRST ARGUMENT

Israel repeatedly offered the Palestinian people peace. At Oslo and finally at Camp David, the Palestinian's were offered their own state on the most generous terms Israel was capable of presenting. No counter demand was made other than the demand to stop terrorism and maintain the peace. Knowing that we had been stretched to the limit of what we were able to offer, the Palestinians turned us down, and initiated the wave of terrorism that continues to the present. We are not at peace; we are at war.

Wars must be concluded for the sake of all concerned. Normal life is only possible in a state of peace. Wars that go on endlessly eventually

destroy both the contending parties. If they cannot be concluded through peace, and we tried that route, they must be won on the field of battle. You cannot win wars without attacking the enemy. Peace is the chief moral imperative in a state of war. Refraining from an action that promotes victory and therefore prolongs the war is immoral. Taking actions that bring victory and restore peace is a moral imperative.

In the Second World War, both sides engaged in massive bombing of civilian population centers. This practice was not based on gaining some military advantage. It was undertaken to demoralize the enemy and bring the war to a speedier conclusion. The only example of such an action that was demonstrably effective was the dropping of the Atom bomb on Hiroshima by President Truman. The Israeli army has never engaged in such actions. We have never bombed Palestinian civilian centers in an attempt to demoralize the enemy.

This is the Palestinian tactic - the practice of terror against civilians to demoralize the enemy, except that they have taken it a step further than the way it was practiced in the Second World War. Whereas in that war both sides used it in combination with military engagement of the enemy, the Palestinians employ discouragement of the civilian population as their sole tactic. True retaliation by Israel would justify the targeting of non-combatant Palestinians. This we have never done. Therefore, we have never, in fact, retaliated.

But the avoidance of attacking strategic targets because of collateral civilian damage is another matter. No one disputes the fact that the leader of Hamas in Gaza is an important cog in the

terrorist enterprise. Palestinian terrorist leaders make sure to surround themselves constantly with innocent civilians. They know that Israelis are different than they. They know that we do our utmost to avoid hurting non-combatants. The decision to totally abandon strategic targets on the bases of collateral damage would constitute the abandonment of attacking such targets altogether. You cannot win wars by deciding not to attack strategic targets. Winning this war is the greatest moral imperative.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT

We have attempted to tone down the violence several times by means of the application of unilateral cease-fires and by means of easing of restrictions on the Palestinian population. Each time the violence has only escalated. When we can see people dancing in the streets of Gaza on our screens, rejoicing over the successful murder of innocent Israelis, we can rest assured that it isn't our own actions that incite the violence on the other side. We must focus on the actions that will help us to win this war, even if it isn't absolutely clear and certain that they will be effective.

Remember that the moral imperative to pursue in a war must be the restoration of peace. If an action may possibly lead to such a restoration it is immoral to avoid it. In normal peaceful times the engagement in any form of violence can only be justified on the grounds of pure necessity. In wartime, the engagement in violence is a given, and will inevitably continue till the war is settled. The use of violence itself cannot serve as the bases of moral decisions in wartime. The quicker the war is won and peace is restored the

more lives will be spared. Utility must serve as the guide.

A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

From a broader perspective the Gaon of Vilna points to a very significant gematria [numerical equivalence] between the word 'etz' - tree, to which man is compared by the verse quoted in the beginning of this essay, and the word 'tzelem' - image, the word used to tell us that man was created in God's image. Both words have a numerical value of 160.

[70+90]=[90+30+40] Man is only considered to be in God's image when he is fruitful. He must strive to settle and enrich the world, increase its store of knowledge, and engage in moral behavior to deserve the appellation of being the image of God and the special treatment that goes along with it. The restoration of peace is the moral imperative of the person who desires to be fruitful. Only peace allows fruitful development.

People who do not aspire to be fruitful do not feel the same moral imperative to pursue peace. Civilizations that discourage progress and development are fundamentally negative. Such civilizations must be subdued.

See more great
parsha essays at:
www.aish.com/tp/