# *Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*

From Rav Binny

## (Portion of Mishpatim)

*Recently, the media reported that two days before his execution, Adolph Eichmann penned a letter to then President Yitzchak Ben-Zvi begging for clemency. Facing his imminent death by hanging (the only death sentence ever executed in the State of Israel), the once arrogant Eichmann, finally humbled, was begging for his life. His request was denied, and two days later he was hanged, his body cremated, and his ashes spread over the Mediterranean to prevent his tomb from ever becoming a shrine for hatred.*

*During his time in prison, he took ill briefly, and, experiencing shortness of breath and fever, was seen by the prison Doctor, himself a Holocaust survivor. He would later describe the mix of emotions he felt, as he attempted to divorce himself from his personal feelings and focus on the task at hand, which in his words, was "to view him as any other patient in need of medical assistance".*

But is this correct? Is it even human? How are we meant to treat and even to view our enemies? When an Arab terrorist is seriously wounded in the midst of attempting to murder innocent civilians, even children, do we have a responsibility to care for them? And how should we feel for them? How can you ***not*** hate and despise a person who walks into a crowded pizzeria and detonates his bomb murdering fifteen human beings for no reason other than the fact that they are Jewish?

Let's assume our enemy is someone who hates us and wants to kill and destroy us, often willing to die in order to accomplish this nefarious goal. Obviously Judaism obligates us to fight such an enemy and even kill him before he will kill us in the absence of an alternative. But what about when there is no longer a defensive need to fight? When he or she is captured or incapacitated?

This week's portion *Mishpatim*, contains a fascinating mitzvah:

*"If you see your enemy's donkey sagging under its burden, you may not carry on, you must release it (the donkey; from its burden) with him (your enemy)."* (Shemot (Exodus) 23:5)

Interestingly, the verse contains a phrase which seems superfluous: Obviously if we are expected to help our enemy unload his suffering donkey's burden, we cannot carry on and pass by, so why the need to include this phrase?

Perhaps this mitzvah is not given us in order to help the donkey, rather, our natural inclination when seeing our enemy stuck with his donkey overburdened, is to pass by, precisely because we are seeing our enemy and enjoying ***his*** suffering.

In fact, the Talmud tells us (tractate *Baba Metzia* 32a; alluded to here by **Rashi**): if the enemy sits down and says 'It's your mitzvah; you do it!' we are no longer obligated to help; this mitzvah only applies if I am helping my enemy, and we are doing it ***together!***

If it's all about helping the donkey, what difference does it make what my enemy is doing? As long as I can help the donkey shouldn't I be getting to work unloading the burden?

Obviously, this mitzvah is not about the donkey, and it is not even about our enemy; it is all about us: how are we meant to behave, and even feel? How do we maintain a healthy balanced state of mind and behavior in the face of our enemies?

Interestingly, Judaism believes we are capable of controlling and even transforming our emotions; in fact, the Torah tells us we are not allowed to hate:

"*You shall not hate your brother in your heart*" (*Vayikra* (Leviticus) 19:17)

And Maimonides rules accordingly in his *Hilchot Deot* (laws of character development).

But this mitzvah specifically refers to 'your brother'; we are not allowed to hate our brother; which seems to mean our fellow Jew, so obviously we are ***not*** prohibited from hating the Arab terrorist. And while Christianity teaches one should love one's enemy, there is no such mitzvah in Judaism (of course, nowhere in the Torah does it command us to hate our enemies either …).

Why wouldn't the Torah even suggest that we should love our enemies? And why aren't we prohibited from hating our enemies? And if that is true, why would we stop and help unload his donkey, but only if he is willing to help as well?

Interestingly, the Talmud, continuing its discussion on this topic (*Baba Metzia* 32b) points out that if we come across a friend whose donkey requires unloading, alongside an enemy whose donkey requires help being loaded, we should still help our enemy first! And this is because it "***suppresses the evil inclination***".

In other words, the real danger here is that I hate my enemy because of what that does to ***me*** as a person. And the opportunity to overcome hatred, and to let go of ill will, is more valuable than the natural inclination to help one's friend, itself certainly a mitzvah (good deed). Because reducing hatred and negative feelings is ultimately part of creating a better world which is what it's all about.

Hence we are only obligated to help unload our enemy's donkey ***with*** him because working on anything together allows us to let go of the dangerous poison of hatred that can be so destructive. Indeed, love is all about giving (as opposed to lust which is all about taking; that's why love grow and lust wanes…) and the Hebrew word for love '*ahava*' is the same as the word for bringing (le'havi'). And the more you give to something or someone, the more you love them or it. So giving help to your enemy will naturally reduce your enmity and negativity. In fact, the Torah's word for helping in this case is "*azov*" which also means to let go, precisely because we are meant to let go of the anger and hatred which poisons one's soul….

But then, why are we not commanded to love our enemy? Perhaps we need to take care; loving one's enemy can also result in hating one's friends….

It is not accidental that some of the well-meaning (?) people and organizations who work so hard to help Arabs whom they perceive as victims, expressing the admirable values of tolerance, accommodation, sensitivity and compromise, end up spewing such incredible hatred for Jews and Israelis. If you love your enemy enough he will soon become your friend, which will naturally lead to his enemies becoming your enemies as well.

Judaism suggests that the goal is a better world and the reason to eschew hatred for my enemy is not because I should necessary love him, but because the world becomes a better place when there is less hatred. And it certainly does not mean I should turn a blind eye towards the evil actions he or she may be perpetrating, which would obviously undermine the entire point.

Interestingly, there is a second point to consider here: the donkey will ultimately only be unloaded and the immediate problem resolved when one's enemy joins in putting his shoulder to the task. It's a two-way street; and if my enemy is not giving and helping and taking responsibility for his dilemma, then nothing constructive will result in the long run. We have allowed our enemies to become hapless victims which aside from being untrue is also completely counterproductive. Until our enemies take responsibility for their plight and begin to advance constructive solutions, preferring instead to play the hapless victim and blame everything on outside forces, no constructive long lasting solution will ever be found.

Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem,

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