

Sweet Vengeance?

Parashat Mikketz - Shabbat Hanukkah, 5779

ז וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת-אֶחָיו, וַיִּכְרַם; וַיַּתְנַבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם
וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָנָם קָשׁוֹת, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֵאֵין בָּאתֶם,
וַיֹּאמְרוּ, מִמֶּצְרַיִם כָּנַעַן לְשָׂבֵר-אֶכֶל. 42:7 And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made
himself strange unto them, and spoke roughly with them; and he
said unto them: 'Whence come ye?' And they said: 'From the
land of Canaan to buy food.'

ח וַיִּכְרַם יוֹסֵף, אֶת-אֶחָיו; וְהֵם, לֹא הִכְרָחוּ. 8 And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not.

ט וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף--אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת, אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם;
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מְרִגְלִים אַתֶּם, לִרְאוֹת אֶת-עֲרוֹת
הָאָרֶץ בָּאתֶם. 9 And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of
them, and said unto them: 'Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of
the land ye are come.'

When Judas saw all the evils that Alcimus and his men were bringing upon the Israelites, more than even the Gentiles had done, he went about all the borders of Judea and took revenge on the men who had deserted, preventing them from going out into the country. (1 Maccabees 7:24)

ה וַיַּכּוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּכָל-אֹיְבֵיהֶם, מִכַּת-חֶרֶב וְחֶרֶג
וְאֶבֶד; וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם, כְּרָצוֹנָם. Esther 9:5 And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke
of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what
they would unto them that hated them.

טז וְשָׂאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהָלוּ
וַעֲמָד עַל-נַפְשָׁם, וְנוֹחַ מֵאֹיְבֵיהֶם, וְהָרוּג בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם,
חֲמֵשָׁה וּשְׁבַעִים אָלֶף; וּבְבִזָּה--לֹא שָׁלְחוּ, אֶת-יָדָם. 16 And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered
themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from
their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and
five thousand

יז בַּיּוֹם-שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר, לַחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר; וְנוֹחַ, בְּאַרְבָּעָה
עָשָׂר בּוֹ, וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ, יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וּשְׂמֵחָה. 17 on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth
day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and
gladness.

Major Kira: As far as I'm concerned, if he was at Gallitap, he is guilty. They're all guilty. His punishment will let Bajor feel some... satisfaction.

Lieutenant Jadzia Dax: It sounds like you're trying too hard to believe what you're saying. You already know, if you punish him without reason, it won't mean anything. And you already know, **vengeance... isn't enough.**

"Star Trek: Deep Space Nine" Duet (1993)

We will be cruel to the Germans, and through our cruelty they will know who we are.
Lt. Aldo Raine – "Inglourious Basterds" (2009)

ח לֹא-תִתְעֵב אֶדְמוֹמִי, כִּי אֶחָיִךְ הוּא; לֹא-
תִתְעֵב מִצְרִי, כִּי-גֵר הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרְצוֹ. Deut. 23:8 Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother; thou
shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land.

What do these quotes tell us about the mixed feelings Jews have about revenge?

came, and bowed down to him with their faces to the earth. ⁷And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange to them, and spoke roughly with them; and

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b. Export to other countries required his permission.⁴⁰ **with their faces to the earth.** I.e., prostration.⁴¹ **He knew them.** a. At first he recognized them collectively as his brothers, but not individually; on closer inspection he distinguished each individually. Hence the next verse repeats, Joseph knew his brethren, i.e., each one separately.⁴² b. Because he was expecting and hoping that the famine would bring them.⁴³ c. Immediately they bowed he recognized them. Yet he could not believe his eyes, so he carefully looked at them again

("Joseph saw") and then he was sure.⁴⁴ d. They looked vaguely familiar: he knew he had seen them before; once they said they were from Canaan he realized exactly who they were, and recognized their faces.⁴⁵ **but made himself strange.** a. Rather, he took counsel with himself how to deal with the situation.⁴⁶ b. He recognized them at once, and feared they would recognize him; he pulled his hat low to partly cover his face, and disguised his voice.⁴⁷ c. He did not speak softly, as was his wont.⁴⁸ d. He did not speak himself, lest they recognize his voice.⁴⁹ **roughly.** a. When they protested together at his discriminatory treatment, he answered them roughly, "Why do you all speak on behalf of this one or that one, strangers as you are to each other?" (for ten brothers would not come to buy corn).⁵⁰ b. To throw them into confusion and fear, and prevent them from recognizing him.⁵¹ c. The brother who had been shamefully and pitilessly sold into slavery now had his opportunity for revenge. The greatness of Joseph lies in the fact that for all time he showed men a better way. He tests his brethren, holding his own natural

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Raba, quoting R. Shesheth, He is blessed, even as was Joseph, for the verse continues, But blessing shall be upon the head of him who provides it (*mashbir*), which is an allusion to Joseph, since Scripture says, He it was that sold (*hamashbir*) to all the people of the land.

Sanh. 92a. T.S. 42, 39.

25. Joseph's brethren came.

They should have been described as Israel's sons; why are they again described as Joseph's brethren? Because they recalled his love,¹ and decided, We will enter this city; if we find him still a slave and can redeem him with money, well and good. If not, we shall consider what to do.²

Sechel Tob. T.S. 42, 40.

26. And bowed down to him.

Now was fulfilled [his dream,] Your sheaves came round about, and bowed down to my sheaf (37:7).

Midrash Hahefetz. T.S. 42, 41.

27. He knew them, but made himself strange to them.

He recognized them, and was about to receive them warmly, when an angel came and accused them, saying to Joseph, "They have come for no other purpose but to kill you." Joseph heeded his words and immediately made himself strange to them. Who was this angel? The same who had found him wandering in the field, as it says, A certain man found him (37:15).

Y'lamdenu in Yalkut Shimoni, Appendix. T.S. 42, 43.

28. He spoke roughly with them.

He was harsh to them and asked, "Whence come you?" When they answered, "From the land of Canaan," he said to Simeon and Levi, "You are despoilers of men, as you were in Shechem." Thus "he spoke roughly with them." He did this because they had spoken to him in this way when he was sold; now they were requited measure for measure.

Tan. Y. Mikketz 10; Or Haafelah; Yemenite Anth. MS Kasher. T.S. 42, 45-6 and note.

§ 25 ¹ The love they owed him as a brother.

² Cp. par. 12.

he said to them: "Whence come you?" And they said: "From the land of Canaan to buy food."⁸ And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. ⁹And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed

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feelings in check until convinced of their filial piety to their father, their love for Benjamin, and their sincere contrition for their crime towards him. Then he forgives them freely, fully, and lovingly.⁵² **Whence come you.** a. He showed that he did not recognize them, for he did not ask them why they had come.⁵³ b. Which government has sent you, and why have you come?⁵⁴ c. Their physiognomy showed that they were Semites, from Aram Naharaim, whence none had come to buy corn, because the famine had not spread so far.⁵⁵ **to buy food.** a. For no other reason.⁵⁶ b. Since he had only asked them *whence* but not *why* they had come, "to buy food" was superfluous. That provided Joseph with a pretext for his accusation, because additional information is the sign of guilt, and an attempt to clear oneself.⁵⁷ ⁸**Joseph knew his brethren.** a. His first recognition (verse 7) was not absolute, but now that they had told him that they were from Canaan, and moreover, knowing that they would have to come on account of the famine, he was quite certain.⁵⁸ b. He had first

(verse 7) recognized them collectively as his brothers; now he knew them one by one.⁵⁹ c. Because they called one another by name.⁶⁰ d. Their voice and manner of speech completed his certainty.⁶¹ e. "Joseph knew" applies to the whole sentence: He knew his brothers, and he knew that they did not know him, particularly after his harsh speech and their reply.⁶² f. This repetition (for it has already been stated in verse 7) is only for the sake of adding that they did not know him.⁶³ **they knew not him.** a. Not even by his voice, "for the interpreter was between them" (verse 23).⁶⁴ b. Because they could not imagine that this great lord should be the slave whom they had sold to the Ishmaelites.⁶⁵ c. Because he had completely changed—in name, speech and physical appearance.⁶⁶ d. On account of his rough speech.⁶⁷ ⁹**Joseph remembered the dreams.** a. He recognized their fulfillment in his brothers' obeisance.⁶⁸ b. He appreciated that the dreams had not yet been completely fulfilled, for the second had indicated that his parents too would pay him homage, and this had not yet taken place. Therefore he planned that all the eleven brothers and his father should come to Egypt, for he saw in his dreams the Divine Will. Otherwise he would have sinned greatly in inflicting so much anxiety on his father instead of revealing himself immediately and sparing his father pain and worry. For the same reason he did not send a message to his father as soon as he arrived in Egypt; even as a slave he could have done this, and Egypt was only six days' journey from Hebron. But he realized that his dreams could be fulfilled, and had to be fulfilled, only when he had attained to eminence.⁶⁹ c. Which he had long forgotten.⁷⁰ d. Not

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29. HE SPOKE ROUGHLY WITH THEM. Asking them questions which he did not ask any other buyers, e.g., "Whence come you?" Perceiving this, they said to themselves, "Why should we reveal our intentions to him, and maybe fall into a trap?" Therefore they answered briefly, "From the land of Canaan to buy food,"¹ so that he should have nothing to say.

B. Rabbathi 203.

30. Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not.

Our Rabbis said: He had left them bearded, therefore he now knew his brethren; but they

had last seen him beardless, therefore they knew him not.

R. Levi pointed out: When they fell into his hand, "Joseph recognized them" as his brethren; but when he had fallen into their hands, "they knew him not" [as a brother].

R. Simeon b. Lakish interpreted: When he fell into their hands, "they knew not" the Holy One, blessed is He;¹ but when they fell into his hands, "Joseph knew his brethren,"² and he exclaimed, "I fear God" (verse 18). Said the Holy One, blessed is He: "In this world some men recognize Me and others do not, because of the Evil Tempter. But in the [Messianic]

§ 29 ¹ They did not disclose that they were also interested in finding their brother.

§ 30 ¹ They knew nothing of Divine compassion.

² He recognized the claims of brotherhood.

of them, and said to them: "You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you are come." ¹⁰ And they said to him: "Nay, my lord, but to buy food are your servants come.

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in a spirit of pride and hatred, but as the revealed will of the good God whose ways are inscrutable.⁷¹ of them. Only insofar as it affected them, viz., that they were to be subject to him. But insofar as his dreams intimated that he was to be a great ruler, that did not occur to him.⁷² You are spies. a. Other people who came in groups separated when the actual purchase was to be made; they, however, kept together, which might well arouse suspicion.⁷³ b. There must have been something about them that made the accusation plausible. Possibly they came richly dressed as chiefs, and this gave him the pretext for the charge. "Chiefs do not come

in person but send their servants," he said. It may also be that they were among the first to come from Canaan. On that ground he accused them, since none had yet come from that land, which indicated that the famine was not yet so severe there. This explains why he asked them whence they came (verse 7) before accusing them.⁷⁴ c. Their features showed them to be of Babylonian descent, and there had always been war between Egypt and the Babylonians and Assyrians.⁷⁵ d. Hebrew *m'raglim* from *regel*, foot: i.e., men who go about on foot to see things fully and in great detail.⁷⁶ e. The most natural accusation to bring against strangers in Egypt, or anywhere.⁷⁷ the nakedness of the land. a. Where it is most vulnerable for attack.⁷⁸ b. Its secrets.⁷⁹ c. Its deficiencies in food, soldiers and military equipment.⁸⁰ d. The weak spots in the line of defense along the border. The Northeast of Egypt was its weak side, and strangers entering from this direction were jealously watched.⁸¹ ¹⁰Nay, my lord. a. It is not as you say.⁸² b. Even if we had no reason for coming, there would still be no grounds for suspecting us of espionage.⁸³ but to buy food. Moreover, we have a good reason for coming—one that is patent

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future I will uproot the Evil Tempter from the world"—as it is written, I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh (Ezek. 36:26); "and then all will know Me"—as it is written, For they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them (Jer. 31:34); it also says, The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9).

Gen. R. 91, 7; MhG. T.S. 42, 47-8 and note.

31. Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them.

He remembered that he was destined to rule over them, but not that they had sought to kill him; he remembered that they had not spoken peaceably to him, but not that they had sold him for a slave. So he too did not speak peaceably to them but accused them of being spies.

B. Rabbathi 203.

32. He said to them, "You are spies."

R. Hiyya observed: [It is written,] Rejoice

not when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles (Prov. 24:17). . . . Now, Joseph had studied Torah with his father and knew its teachings; why then did he bring all these tribulations upon his brothers when they fell into his hands? Heaven forbid that he was motivated by a desire for revenge; his purpose was to have them bring Benjamin, for whom he yearned. But he certainly would not let his brothers fall, for it is written, Then Joseph commanded to fill their vessels with corn, etc. (verse 25), which he did to ensure that they would not fall.

Zohar 1, 199a. T.S. 42, 50.

33. To see the nakedness of the land you are come.

For you entered the street of harlots¹ to gaze upon their nakedness. "That was not so," they replied; "we lost something and were looking for it."

Sechel Tob. T.S. 42, 51.

§ 33 ¹ See above, par. 15.

The Jewish Ethicist: Right to Revenge

by Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir, Business Ethics Center of Jerusalem

Is taking revenge ever justified?

Q. I've been taught that revenge is wrong. But isn't a little revenge sometimes permissible when we need it to protect our rights?

A. You should thank your teachers. The Torah strictly warns us against taking revenge: **"Don't take vengeance and don't bear a grudge against the members of your nation; love your neighbor as yourself"**. (Leviticus 19:18.) And in many columns we have pointed out that it is unethical to slander or denigrate someone if there is any kind of vindictive motive.

Jewish tradition provides a number of distinctions which can help us sort out the exact extent of this ethical obligation.

One kind of vengeance is categorically forbidden: bearing a grudge when someone fails to do us a favor. The Talmud asks: "What is an example of vindictiveness or bearing a grudge?" The example is given of a person who asks his neighbor to lend him a saw, and the neighbor says no. The next day the same neighbor asks to borrow an axe. If the first person is able to lend the axe but refuses in reaction to the neighbor's refusal, this is vindictive. And even if he agrees to lend the axe but points out that this is despite the neighbor's refusal, then he is bearing a grudge.

In other words, even though small kindnesses like these are a major obligation in Jewish culture, if someone fails to help us we have to just forgive and forget. This policy prevents minor disagreements from snowballing into catastrophic feuds.

What if someone actually insults us or causes us harm? The Talmud states: "Those who are insulted but do not insult back, hear themselves slandered but don't respond, act with love and rejoice in tribulations -- of these Scripture states that 'Those who love Him are like the sun rising with all its might'!" **The righteous person will refrain from taking any action, and not escalate the dispute; but it is permissible to remember the incident and maintain cool relations until the other party asks forgiveness.**

If a person does forget himself in the heat of a dispute and responds to an insult or an attack, he is not living up to the ideal ethical level, but it is not considered a sinful act. However, when the next day comes around and things have cooled down, it is again impermissible to react in anger. Here also the general idea is clear: responding in the heat of anger is not likely to escalate the dispute; but after the dispute has cooled down it is absolutely forbidden to renew it. The injured party may demand that the attacker apologize and replace any loss, but under no circumstances should the spat be turned into a feud.

What about those cases in Scripture where we find that **vengeance is proper**? For example, the children of Israel are ordered to attack the Midianites in revenge for their aggression (Numbers 31:2); and Samson is granted Divine assistance when seeks vengeance against the Philistines for the loss of his eyes (Judges 16:28). **The distinction is clear: in these cases the leaders of the people are not being petty or vindictive for their own private honor, but rather are defending the honor as well as the safety and well-being of the entire people.**

In the book of Deuteronomy (32:35), God tells us, **"Vengeance belongs to Me."** Only the Creator is completely free of any petty motivations, and He has the perfect knowledge and power to make sure that vengeance is carried out in an equitable way. But we humans should strive mightily to erase any vindictive feelings, and respond to slights in a way that allows us to defend our dignity, yet takes care not to burn any bridges of understanding and good will.

SOURCES: *Babylonian Talmud Yoma 23a; Sema commentary on Shulchan Arukh Choshen Mishpat 421:24.*

'Inglourious Basterds' and the Problem of Revenge By JORDANA HORN

'Please keep in mind that it's a fable,' producer Harvey Weinstein said, almost pleadingly, to the audience before the lights went down.

The film being screened last week was "Inglourious Basterds," the newest blood-soaked Quentin Tarantino movie about a fictitious group of Jewish-American soldiers sent to France to kill as many Nazis as possible during World War II. The standard A-list was in attendance: Mr. Tarantino, Mr. Weinstein and his brother, Bob, as well as several stars of the film, including Eli Roth. The venue, however, was somewhat unusual—the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, which bills itself as a "living memorial to the Holocaust." About a third of the audience were children of Holocaust survivors, a museum trustee estimated.

It's understandable that Mr. Weinstein, one of the heads of the Weinstein Company, which produced the film, was somewhat wary of the audience reaction to "Inglourious Basterds," out in theaters today. **The film's central premise is revenge fantasy**—one in which Jews, both American and European, wreak the vengeance upon Nazis. They are killed, scalped, burned and disfigured. And, to a certain extent, the participants revel in the violence of it all. Mr. Roth's character, not-so-affectionately nicknamed "The Bear Jew," beats Nazis to death with a baseball bat.

Not 15 minutes after watching a grisly scene in which a Nazi propaganda film's premiere audience is burned to death in a movie theater, the crowd applauded at the film's conclusion. But Mr. Weinstein's nervousness was justified. Several audience members walked out as soon as the lights went up.

"How did you feel when you watched the film?" Mr. Tarantino asked the audience after the movie, prompting even more applause.

How should they feel?

Rita Lerner, whose mother was liberated from Dachau and whose father survived the war in Siberia, said that she was "unfortunately happy" to see the climactic theater burning scene during the screening. "With Hitler there, and all those high Nazi officials—how great would it have been?" she asked. "Maybe I would have had grandparents growing up, or other family. Not one minute did I feel sorry for them: It was well-deserved. When they locked the doors, I was hoping they wouldn't be able to get out." Her sister, Vivian Reisman, took it a step further: "I felt like Tarantino was a fellow Jew, just the way he made me feel so proud of the Basterds and the revenge against the Nazis. . . . He's a member of the tribe, as far as I'm concerned."

Jonathan Blake, a rabbi at Westchester Reform Temple in Scarsdale, N.Y., said he found the film "wickedly entertaining." Discussing it afterward, he mentions Amalek, an enemy nation discussed in the book of Numbers and Samuel and distinguished for its singular cruelty against the Israelites. The Amalekites trace their family tree from Esau, and rabbinic tradition extends Amalek's descendants to some of the Jewish people's most-loathed oppressors, including the Roman emperors and Hitler. According to Deuteronomy 25 17: 19, Jews are commanded to blot out the memory of Amalek—that is, to struggle against their oppressors.

Rabbi Blake says that Jews can "take pride in 'sticking it to the bad guy.'" Though "pulverizing heads with a baseball bat is not what the Scripture had in mind," he suggests that the Nazi-bashing of "Inglourious Basterds" "is not out of sync with the spirit of the Amalek tradition." And the movie, he adds, "has nothing on the blood-soaking orgies of violence that are the Bible's depictions of warfare."

Others in the audience were not as thrilled by the movie. One young man noted that watching Nazis beg for their lives provided him with little satisfaction.

The film does not pretend to be history and certainly does not make any attempt to be in sync with Jewish teachings. But it raises questions about the propriety of acts of retribution under Jewish law. Rabbi Blake's application of the Amalek tradition here is far from a definitive.

"There's something in that gusto that's scary," Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard, professor of Jewish Law at Fordham University, said to me about the premise of the film. "You like it too much."

This is not the first time these questions have been raised. Pocket books called *Stalags* circulated widely in Israel during the Eichmann trial in the 1960s. They depicted American or British pilots being abused by sadistic Nazi female officers, and then taking revenge by raping and/or killing their torturers. Deemed pornographic by Israeli courts, these books were banned.

There is a not uncommon belief that the Torah sanctions revenge. But the precept of "an eye for an eye" is usually cited incorrectly, according to Rabbi Joel Roth, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. It is actually meant to refer to monetary compensation rather than bloodletting. And Leviticus 19:18 says, "Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people." Rabbi Roth notes that Jews are prohibited from taking "the law into your own hands as a matter of legal punishment." The scaffolding of legality—a fair trial and conviction—is paramount under Jewish law. Eichmann was the one person to ever receive a death sentence in an Israeli court, and not without much hand-wringing from Jews world-wide.

But the Eichmann trial was after the fact. "Inglourious Basterds" takes place during the war. Rabbi Roth notes: "There is a principle in Jewish law that if someone is coming to kill you, you should kill them first. That's not revenge—that's self-defense." And, as Mr. Tarantino himself told me: "If you're dealing with people like the Nazis . . . well, you either eat the wolf or the wolf eats you."

But none of that excuses the pleasure that the film's characters seem to take in bloodletting. Historian and former United States Holocaust Museum Director Michael Berenbaum concludes that the issue is: **"How do you combat evil without being reduced to that level?"**

Ben Azzai said, the verse "this is the book of generations of Adam" is the most important principle in Torah. But Rabbi Akiva had taught "Love your neighbor as yourself" is the most important principle in Torah! Rather, a person should not say, "Since my neighbor humiliated me, I shall humiliate him with me; since my neighbor cursed me, I shall curse him with me." Rabbi Tanchuma said, "If you do so, know whom you humiliate: in the image of God was Adam made."

Midrash Breisheet Rabbah (24:6)

I see the Biblical Book of Esther as an ancient Jewish fable of justice and revenge. To wit, what would happen if the tables were turned and we had power over our enemies? With all the merrymaking and child-centered focus of the Purim holiday, we tend to forget that the Jews of Shushan kill 75,000 of their foes toward the end of the narrative (Esther 9:16). Then they go out and have a big party to celebrate their success.

Put in stark terms, was this too good to be true? Or too bad to be true? No one I respect would disagree with the premise that it would have been glorious had a band of Jewish soldiers killed Hitler and his top henchmen. But what do we make of scalping the heads of enemy combatants? Or of killing innocent people who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time (a.k.a. "collateral damage")? Is violent revenge the victim's only legitimate response to terror and brutality?

Monday The Rabbi Saw "Basterds" - by Rabbi Mark Diamond

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- Is gloating ever healthy? If so, when?
- Does seeing someone you hate suffer make you feel better?
- How can a cycle of hatred be reversed? (See selections that follow from Telushkin's Code of Jewish Ethics)

This type of irrational hatred operates on the national level as well. Thus, in December 2003, a large earthquake hit Iran and killed some thirty thousand people. In the quake's immediate aftermath, there were people stranded inside and under buildings, and the Iranian government issued an appeal soliciting aid from the rest of the world, with one exception: the government announced that it would not accept help from Israel. Ironically, in part because of the long history of Arab- and Iranian-supported terror bombings directed against Israel, Israel has more experience than other nations in rescuing people from damaged buildings. And Israel, both because of its sensitivity to human life, and out of a desire to do something to break the pattern of hatred felt toward it in the Islamic world, was very willing to extend help to those trapped in the earthquake. But the Iranian government, terrified that Israel might save some lives and bring about a lessening of hatred for Israel and the Jews, preferred to see Iranians die rather than have them saved by Israelis.

5. "Hatred of one's fellow drives a man from the world" (*The Ethics of the Fathers* 2:11). The obsessive quality of hatred often makes it impossible for people to enjoy the good things they do have. Thus, King Ahasuerus elevated Haman to the second highest position in the Persian Empire, and granted him extraordinary power, wealth, and honor. Yet when Mordechai refused to bow down to him, Haman was overcome with rage. It was not enough that everyone else in Persia treated him with deference, Mordechai had to be punished for his disrespect. And not just Mordechai. In his hatred, Haman "disdained to lay hands on Mordechai alone. Having been told who Mordechai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordechai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus" (Esther 3:6). This obsession caused Haman to embark on a course of action that destroyed him. By the end of the Book of Esther, the Jews, whom Haman wished to murder, were alive and prospering. But Haman, who would have remained in power if he had reined in his hatred, was dead, along with his ten sons.

Hatred is self-destructive in less dramatic ways also. I know, for example, that on days when I am consumed by anger against someone, I rarely get worthwhile work done. Every time I begin something, the angry thoughts intrude and distract me.

6. Try to curb your animosity, even when you believe you can find a justification for hating another group or nation. Thus, the Israelites leaving Egypt—after having endured hundreds of years of slavery and, at one point, the drowning of their newborn male infants—could easily have justified hating Egyptians. And yet the Bible legislates, "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land" (Deuteronomy 23:8).

In other words, even in an instance as extreme as that of Egypt, the Jews must still remember that they had entered Egypt by invitation at a time of famine and desperation, had been provided with food, and given land on which to live (Genesis 47:1-6).

On the other hand, the directive against hating Egypt was not given when the Israelites were still being oppressed and killed by them, but only after the Egyptians had been struck with the Ten Plagues (and thereby punished for the evil they had committed), and the Israelites had been liberated.

To this day at the Passover Seder, a drop of wine is spilled at the mention of each of the plagues that befell Egypt. In Jewish tradition, wine symbolizes joy, and its spilling the diminution of joy.

In the twentieth century, modern Egypt became one of the State of Israel's most unrelenting foes, and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat orchestrated the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which almost three thousand Israeli soldiers were killed. Prior to that, Sadat, who had been pro-Nazi during World War II, often preached to his army and people the crudest sort of antisemitism.² And yet, in 1977, when Sadat announced his willingness to make a full peace with Israel, Israelis treated him with great warmth and admiration. I recall reading an article at the time written by an Israeli Bible scholar on the commandment not to hate the Egyptians; the article was dedicated to the memory of the author's son, who had been killed during the Yom Kippur War.

7. The same verse that prohibits hating Egyptians, continues, "You shall not abhor an Edomite [a historic enemy of Israel], for he is your brother" (Deuteronomy 23:8). In this prohibition of hatred, we are reminded that many of those whom we regard as our enemies are also our brothers, fellow creatures who, like us, are created in God's image.*

*The Edomites were descended from Esau, Jacob's brother; hence, they were in a sense, the Jews' cousins.

This verse can help to check Jewish hostility to contemporary Arabs, many, but not all, of whom support the destruction of Israel. If the only emotion Jews feel toward Arabs—who are descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, and our “cousins”—is animosity, any future reconciliation will become impossible.

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“IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY”:

BREAKING THE PATTERN OF HATRED

Do your enemy a favor

1. What often intensifies animosity between people is the sense that the person we dislike dislikes us even more than we dislike him. This perception often causes us to feel justified in our own hatred (“It’s not my fault. Look how much he hates me.”). Therefore the Torah commands that we try to break the pattern by doing our enemy a favor: “If you see your enemy’s donkey lying down under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him” (Exodus 23:5). The Midrash explains how this single act can transform our relationship:

“Rabbi Alexandri said: Two donkey drivers who hated each other were walking on a road when the donkey of one lay down under its burden. His companion saw it, and at first he passed on. But then he reflected: Is it not written in the Torah, ‘If you see your enemy’s donkey lying down under its burden . . . ?’ So he returned, lent a hand, and helped his enemy in loading and unloading. He began talking to his enemy: ‘Release a bit here, pull up over there, unload over here.’ Thus, peace came about between them, so that the driver of the overloaded donkey said, ‘Did I not suppose that he hated me? But look how compassionate he has been.’ By and by, the two entered an inn, ate and drank together, and became fast friends” (*Tanhuma, Mishpatim #1*).

This commandment also reminds us that even if we hate someone, we are forbidden to “take it out” on his suffering animal or, even worse, on the members of his family. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook was often attacked unfairly by the Neturei Karta, an ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist group. On one occasion the daughter of a Neturei Karta leader, a man who had made some of the most extreme attacks on Rabbi Kook, fell ill with a serious and rare disease. The man learned that a doctor in another country was by far the best person to treat her. However, the doctor was very busy, and without some special connection, he would be unlikely to take her on as a patient; in addition, the physician’s fee was far beyond anything the father could pay. But the man also learned that the doctor was a great admirer of Rabbi Kook, and if the rabbi asked him to treat the girl, he would do so. The Neturei Karta leader was in a quandary: How could he, who hated and had attacked Rabbi Kook, ask him to intervene with the doctor? In desperation, the man sought out Rabbi Aryeh Levine, a well-known friend of Rabbi Kook, and asked him to speak to the rabbi. Reb Aryeh did so, and Rabbi Kook responded, “Of course I am prepared to give the man a letter to the professor. What does this have to do with the difference of opinion between the girl’s father and me?” Indeed, when Rabbi Kook wrote the letter, he depicted the father in favorable terms. He explained to Reb Aryeh that because he had reason to dislike the man, “I will let no personal bias influence me as I write this.” Rabbi Kook even wrote a letter to a shipping line with whose directors he had warm relations, asking them to offer the man and his daughter a substantial discount.¹

2. “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat. And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink” (Proverbs 25:21). Often, when we view someone as an enemy, we hope that misfortune overtakes him (“He should drop dead,” or “I don’t care if he starves”). But, as the Bible teaches, even if we harbor such feelings, we must not allow ourselves to act upon them. The fact that we regard someone as our enemy does not mean that he deserves to starve, and if we feed him, he might no longer be our enemy.

3. To break the pattern of enmity, there are times when you should help your enemy before you help others, including friends. The Talmud legislates that “if the animal of one’s friend is lying under its burden and needs to be unloaded, and the animal of one’s enemy needs to be loaded, one is commanded to first assist the animal of one’s enemy’s in order to subdue one’s evil inclination” (*Bava Mezia 32b*).

The talmudic commentary *Tosafot* (*Pe'aschim* 113b) asks the following: Assuming that the person who hates his enemy has good reason for feeling so (the despised party really has acted badly), then why should the person feel obliged to "subdue his evil inclination"? What is wrong with hating and not helping, someone who deserves it? *Tosafot* answers that even when you are justified in feeling animosity toward someone else, the ill will tends to escalate, leading to an exaggerated and unjustified *sinah gemurah* (complete hatred): at that point it is the evil inclination that is fueling the hatred, and it must be subdued. As *Tosafot* recognizes, our hatred often becomes disproportionate to the provocation and needs to be reined in.

Additional ways to lessen and eliminate hatred

4. Try to find a way to think differently about your enemy. Before reading further, think of someone whom you thoroughly dislike. Can you think of any good she has ever done for you, or any evil she was in a position to commit against you yet didn't. Are you willing to acknowledge that at least some of your animosity (and possible demonization of her) may be excessive?

It also helps to try and understand why your enemy hates you. Even if you believe the reasons to be unjustified and inaccurate, by putting yourself into the other person's mindset, you will become more understanding of the hatred, and this understanding may provide you with the insight to end the enmity. For example, a friend confided to me the following: "Once I realized that Mark hated and insulted me because he thought his wife, an old friend, had once loved me, I was able to improve the situation by continually complimenting him in front of her on how well he looked." It would be nice if such strategies always worked, but they do sometimes.

5. Try to restrain your angry thoughts against those you dislike. This does not mean that you must force yourself to think kindly thoughts about them; just try to think fewer bad ones. As the Bible teaches: "If your enemy falls, don't exult; if he trips, let your heart not rejoice. Lest the Lord see it and be displeased" (Proverbs 24:17-18). *

On the other hand, is it always wrong to feel some pleasure when your enemy suffers? That depends on why you regard the person as your enemy;

*Therefore, if you dislike someone, resolve that when that person's name comes up in conversation, you will not speak about her, except in the rare instance that the people to whom you are speaking need the information you possess. Even then, remain quiet unless you are certain that you can speak about her in a precise and non-exaggerated manner; the fact that you dislike someone does not entitle you to lie about her.

is it because of ungenerous evil and un-
less substantial and more personal reason? Some years ago, a reader wrote to my ethics advice column: "Lately, several of the highest-profile people in my industry—known for their cruelty to employees (including me) as well as for their talent—have been failing miserably and publicly. Their staffs are deserting them in droves. I'm trying not to gloat—can you help me?"

I responded, "Your final words imply that you're feeling guilty. Yet if your letter is an accurate portrayal of what's happened, perhaps you shouldn't. What is wrong about feeling happy that people known for their 'cruelty to employees' are experiencing professional failure? The alternative—being happy at their successes—would also mean feeling happy at their opportunity to go on being cruel to others who are unfortunate enough to work for them.

"Does this mean that all gloating about the sufferings of those who have hurt us is okay? No. What exonerates you from guilt in this case is that you are experiencing happiness that these people's cruelty in the workplace is now being rewarded by the workplace being cruel to them. It would be wrong to gloat, however, if they were forced to resign their positions because, say, they needed to take care of a child stricken with a virulent disease. Or, for that matter, if they themselves were so stricken. In such a case you might be pleased that they no longer were in a position to hurt others, but it would be wrong to rejoice.

"When we dislike someone, we may be tempted to say, when suffering comes to them, 'Serves them right,' but I would hold my tongue. For undoubtedly there are people whom I've hurt, and who believe some terrible fate would serve me right.

"The question remains: How much gloating is okay? It seems to me that it's all right to express your pleasure to those friends and relatives who are aware of how much you suffered while working for the 'highest-profile people' who are now getting their comeuppance, and to other former fellow employees. But limit the number of people to whom you speak about the situation, and don't go out of your way to start relaying your experiences and your gloating to others who aren't already in the know. Gloating about the sufferings of others won't do much for your own reputation; people might conclude that you're a vindictive person.

"Also, now that these people have fallen, see if you can distance yourself from your anger and find room in your heart for some compassion. I stress both words, 'compassion' as well as 'some.'

"Finally, if you want some good to come out of your gloating, think through what it is that these people did that really hurt you and others—

lot of us who are geniuses at recalling every slight we've experienced are far less insightful at noting the emotional suffering and cruelties we inflict on others."

6. When you start obsessing about someone you don't like, pick up a book or try to divert yourself with some other activity. A woman I know plays soothing music, and sometimes a taped recording of a babbling brook or a rain forest, when she starts to find herself consumed by anger; she says that it is impossible for her to hate others while this music is playing.

7. If somebody has treated you badly, don't keep your anger inside; confront the person and tell her what she has done wrong. This course of behavior is implied in the unusual wording of the Torah commandment, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart" (Leviticus 19:17). The Torah does not prohibit all hatred, just hatred in the heart. The medieval *Séfer Ha-Chinuch*, an exposition of the Torah's 613 commandments, notes that one who makes known his hatred does not violate the biblical command against hatred (although such a person violates the law to "love your neighbor as yourself," and might well come to violate the Torah's prohibition against bearing a grudge [Leviticus 19:18]).

8. Don't generalize about groups you dislike; your statements will be unfair at best. During the time of the Talmud there was great animosity between the talmudic scholars and those whom they categorized as *amei ha-aretz* (the term literally refers to the common folk, but it also acquired the connotation of ignoramuses, and those hostile to study). In an unhappy passage, there were Rabbis who justified hating the *amei ha-aretz*, arguing that they were "vermin and their wives are insects," and that one who married his son or daughter to such a person was, in effect, marrying them off to a sub-human creature (see *Pesachim* 49b).

While there were undoubtedly *amei ha-aretz* who were very hostile to Jewish scholars and scholarship, rabbinic teachings like these helped exacerbate the conflict, while unfairly denigrating a whole class of people, among whom were people who were kind and generous. To counteract such a tendency, the Rabbis offered another, very different, teaching: "Let no one say, 'I love the scholars and hate ignorant people [the *amei ha-aretz*],' but let one's rule be, 'Love them all'" (*The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* 16:5).²

Hatred becomes particularly dangerous when the word is used to describe those who are hated. That is why the use of terms such as "vermin" is so troublesome. In the 1990s the Huitus of Rwanda, who organized the murder of 800,000 Tutsis in a period of three and a half months, regularly referred to the Tutsis as "cockroaches," a designation intended to provoke repulsion and a desire to kill. Yehuda Bauer, the great historian of the Holocaust, told me that he never employs the commonly used phrase "the extermination of the Jews" to describe the Holocaust. That term, he explained, was itself a Nazi term, intended to make it sound like the Jews being killed were insects or rats.

Do not take revenge or bear a grudge

9. In the very verse in which the Torah issues the command to "love your neighbor as yourself," it issues two other commandments as well: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen" (Leviticus 19:18).

10. What constitutes revenge? The Talmud offers the following example: A asks B to lend him a sickle, and B refuses. The following day, B asks A to lend him an ax, and A says, "I will not lend it to you, just as you refused to lend me your sickle." This is revenge [and is forbidden by the Torah] (*Yoma* 23a).

11. Maimonides writes that the desire for revenge is "a very bad trait," and that we must do our best to relinquish it. One way is to realize that many things that prompt our wrath are "vanity and emptiness and are not worth seeking revenge for" ("Laws of Character Development" 7:7).

The Psalmist asks rhetorically, and with pride, "Have I repaid those who have done me evil?" (7:5). The same thought is conveyed in Proverbs: "Do not say, 'I will do to him what he did to me; I will pay the man what he deserves'" (Proverbs 24:29).

12. What constitutes bearing a grudge? A asks B for an ax and B refuses. The following day, B says to A, "Lend me your garment," and A answers,

the Talmud concludes, is bearing a grudge (*Yoma* 23b).

While the Bible and Talmud's standard (not even reminding someone who mistreated you of his mean-spirited behavior) seems beyond the capacity of most human beings, the fact that the Torah requires us not to bear a grudge means that Jewish law deems it within our capacity.

In addition, Rabbi Abraham Twerski, who has spent much of his life treating alcoholics and other addicts, notes that grudges can pose an even greater danger to those holding them than to others. Among addicts, grudges are "probably the single greatest factor responsible for relapse. One recovering alcoholic said it simply: 'Carrying resentments is like letting someone whom you don't like live inside your head rent-free.' Why would anybody allow that?"³

Grudges stir up anger. An alcoholic consumed by rage tries to divert himself by drinking, the rest of us by engaging in other types of self-destructive behavior (such as eating junk food, getting angry at the people with whom we live, or maybe even not moving forward in our careers, or not achieving what we are capable of, because of our preoccupation with the person or people at whom we are angry).

"Another possible approach would be for A to say, 'Of course you can borrow my ax. I am curious, however, why you wouldn't lend me your sickle yesterday.' Such an approach forces B to confront his own behavior, and might well increase the likelihood of B realizing he was wrong" (Dr. Isaac Herschkopf).⁴

13. If you go about spreading *lashon hara* about the person who offended you, then, in addition to violating the ban on speaking *lashon hara*, you are also violating the prohibition against bearing a grudge.

A final thought

14. While many people regard a hero as someone who vanquishes his foes, the Rabbis teach the opposite: "Who is a hero among heroes? One who turns an enemy into a friend" (*The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* 23i; see a further discussion of this teaching on pages 206–207).

For the story of how a cantor in Nebraska practiced this principle toward a Nazi, and transformed him, see pages 182–183.

WHEN HATRED IS PERMISSIBLE

1. That hatred is not always wrong is a well-known teaching of the third chapter of Ecclesiastes—one of the most famous chapters in the Bible—which speaks of "a time for loving and a time for hating" (3:8). The same chapter notes that other activities generally associated with hatred are also not always wrong: "A time for killing and a time for healing . . . A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones . . . A time for war and a time for peace" (3:3,5, and 8).

The Mishnah comments that the words "a time for hating" refer to "the time when a war is being fought" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:8). The implication of both the biblical verse and the midrashic comment is that when the war is over, the hatred should end. As Winston Churchill said, "I oppose the pacifists during the war, and the jingoists after the war." This is consistent with what was noted earlier, after the exodus from Egypt—but not during the time Jews were enslaved there—Jews were instructed not to hate Egypt (Deuteronomy 23:8).

2. So, when is the appropriate time for hating, and against whom should hatred be directed? The Bible teaches that certain actions render people hateful to God (it does not say that human beings are required to hate such people); for example, murderers. The Lord hates "hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:17). The same verse lists other actions that "the Lord hates," including the following:

- hatching evil plots
- bearing false witness
- inciting brothers to quarrel
- cheating others ("You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the Lord your God is giving you. For everyone who does those things, everyone who deals dishonestly, is abhorrent to the Lord your God" [Deuteronomy 25:13–16].)

