

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MAN'S DIGNITY must ever be protected and cherished, even when he is accused, convicted or prosecuted. When accused, he is to be assumed innocent until proven guilty: suspect him, yet respect him. When convicted, the limits of his culpability are to be clearly defined: condemn his wrongdoings; ignore not his personality and virtues. When prosecuted, his punishment must never exceed the norms prescribed by law: deserving his punishment, he is still entitled to his dignity; do not despise him. By submitting to the authority of the law, willingly or not, the guilty forfeits none of his rights and is protected from undue harassment and ridicule. Punishment must be carried out with utmost care and regard for the punished person, with no vengefulness or humiliation – without “overkill,” “Lest your brother be disgraced before your eyes” (Deut. 25:3). By the same reasoning, displaying the executed convict on his gallows, for any reason – expressing contempt and fury or impressing fear and terror – is prohibited (21:33): “Do not let his corpse hang overnight – but be sure to bury it the same day – for the degradation of God is thereby being displayed.” An insult to man is an insult to God, since – explain the Rabbis – every human being is a real representation of God, in whose image He made man.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

NO WAR IS HOLY! — regardless of its reasons or aims, its background or outcome; even when promoted by religion and crowned with victory, war is the antithesis of holiness.

Even the glorious wars of King David were deemed in Jewish view unholy; his wars disqualified him from building the holy Temple (I Chronicles 22:8):

You have shed much blood.

You have waged extensive wars.

You may not build a house in My honor!

War and holiness do not entwine. Any symbol of war desecrates the holiness of the Temple. War is always regrettable and detestable. Precisely because war is potential for unholiness, Torah insists that the soldiers, while fighting, must retain their human dignity and sanctity and uphold their morality and purity (Deuteronomy 23:15): “Let your camp be pure!”

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

NO WAR IS HOLY! Regardless of its reasons and aims, any war, even when crowned with victory, is the very opposite of holiness. Even the most glorious wars of the great hero of Israel, King David, were deemed in Jewish outlook as unholy. King David's wars disqualified him from building the holy Temple. In the words of God (I Chronicles 22:8): "You have shed much blood. You have waged extensive wars. You may *not* build a house in My honor." War and holiness are antithetical; they do not commingle. Any symbol of war desecrates the holiness of the Temple. War is always regrettable, lamentable, detestable; war is never holy. Precisely because war is intrinsically unholy, Torah insists that the soldiers fighting it must retain their human dignity and sanctity, uphold their morality and purity. (Deuteronomy 23:15).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

SANCTITY OF PERSONAL ENVIRONMENT is a uniquely Jewish ideal expressed in Torah's laws of "Camp Purity" (Deut. 23:10-15). A person's territory must ever be kept clean and decent, even in trying conditions of war. The sanitary provision for the soldier in battlefield specifically dictates (14): "A spade shall be carried by you on your weapon-belt; when you go to sit outside the camp (for natural need), first dig a hole with it and afterward cover up your excrement." This elementary rule of filth disposal, to avoid physical pollution, includes, in a deeper sense, also general protection from spiritual and moral pollution as well. Utilizing an amusing play of words—in Hebrew the phrase "a spade on your belt" sounds like "A finger in your ear"—the rabbis in a didactic Midrash broadened the scope of this biblical sanitary law: Avoid exposure to dirty words. Rather than listen to indecent language, close your ears (with your fingers...). One must guard oneself—within the privacy and sanctity of one's personal environment—from the harmful impact of this form of "noise pollution"—caused rather by filthy content than disturbing volume. The personal environment of every individual is sacred; it must reflect his innate dignity as born in God's image.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

RESPECT FOR LABOR AND THE LABORER is reflected in Torah's demand to pay wages on time (Deut. 24:15): "before sundown of the same day." The moral reason given for this demand is commonly translated to mean that the wage-earning worker deeply yearns for his pay: "He sets his heart upon it," or, "He looks forward to it." The original Hebrew phrase, however, conveys more than that; poetically it says that for his pay the worker "stakes his nefesh", his very life and being. Explain the Sages in the Talmud: The worker's very life depends on his earnings; he risks his life in engaging in dangerous jobs, or, in the jobs, sacrifices comfort and pleasure in order to earn his livelihood for himself and his family. The law of paying wages on time symbolizes Judaism's respect for honest labor as a means of human survival, and for the simple laborer as a dignified person born in God's image.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

AN EMPLOYEE'S WAGES must be payed on time without delay, insists Torah (Deut. 24:14-15): "Do not exploit a hired worker in need and want, whether he is one of your brothers or a stranger residing in your land within your gates. On the very same day pay him his wages; let not the sun set on him while he is in need and anxious for it (his wages), else he may call against you to the Lord and you be at fault." The Hebrew idiom in this verse for "anxious for it" literally reads: "towards it (his wages) he carries his 'nefesh' (life)." The plain meaning is that he "sets his heart on it," looks forward to be paid. Our talmudic sages, however, explain the phrase more dramatically (BM 122a): The Laborer actually risks his life, imperils his "nefesh" for his hire: "Why did he ascend the ladder, suspend himself from the tree, endangering his life, if not for his hire?" Thus Unkelos renders: "he stakes his life" for his wages. The laborer's wages are consecrated to him by his work and dedication, representing his heroic struggle to eke out a livelihood with his sweat and blood – investing for it his very "nefesh" (life). Yonatan ben Uziel offers another rendition: "he hopes to sustain his life" on his wages. The worker's life depends on his hire. Any abuse of his full entitlement to it, either curtailing or delaying his pay, is deemed by Torah as an infringement upon his very life.

September 15, 1978

AN EMPLOYEE'S WAGES must be payed on time without delay, insists Torah (Deut. 24:14-15): "Do not exploit a hired worker in need and want, whether he is one of your brothers or a stranger residing in your land within your gates. On the very same day pay him his wages; let not the sun set on him while he is in need and anxious for it (his wages), else he may call against you to the Lord and you be at fault." The Hebrew idiom in this verse for "anxious for it" literally reads: "towards it (his wages) he carries his 'nefesh' (life)." The plain meaning may well be that he "sets his heart on it," looks foreward to be payed. Our talmudic sages, however, explain the phrase more dramatically (BM 112a): The laborer actually risks his life, imperils his "nefesh" for his hire: "Why did he ascend the ladder, suspend himself from the tree, endangering his life, if not for his hire?" Thus Unkelos renders: "he stakes his life" for his wages. The laborer's wages are consecrated to him by his work and dedication, representing his heroic struggle to eke out a livelihood with his sweat and blood -- investing for it his very "nefesh" (life). Yonatan ben Uziel offers another rendition: "he hopes to sustain his life" on ~~his~~ his wages. The worker's ~~very~~ life depends on his hire. Any abuse of his full entitlement to it, either curtailing or delaying his pay, is deemed by Torah as an infringement upon his very life.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE SANCTITY OF THE PRIVATE DOMAIN of each individual is strongly guarded in Torah's law. Deuteronomy (24:10-11): "When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, you shall not enter his house to receive a pledge from him. Outside you must stay, until the person from whom you make the claim shall bring the pledge to you, to the outside." Uninvited, no one, not even a messenger of the Court, may enter and invade the privacy of a person's home. Even when you are entitled to get a pledge, you are not allowed to seize it. You must remain and wait—until it is given to you by the debtor—*outside* his house. There is a ringing poetic quality to the verse, which both starts and concludes with the word "outside" (*hutz*). A person's privacy, his "inside"—is inviolable; his home—a sanctuary.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

SAFETY (Deut. 22:8): "When you build a new house, you shall make a 'ma'ake' (parapet, fence) for your roof." Your house must be a safe place, so that no one will be killed or injured. This mitzva is a general call for a safety-oriented society, based on concern for human life and security. Rabbi Yonatan Eybeshitz (Germany, 1690-1764) says (Ya'arot Devash II 55b): "No passenger on board the most seaworthy vessel may rejoice in his sense of security as long as there be one compartment not properly safeguarded." Torah requires human alertness to establish a state and sense of security and safety for everyone.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

REMEMBERING AMALEK OR OBLITERATING HIS MEMORY? Torah insists (Deut. 25:17-18):

Remember, what (the people of) Amalek did to you on your way out of Egypt: How they met you on the way and, attacking you from the rear, they cut off all those who lagged behind, while you were tired and exhausted. For they had no fear of God. Therefore, when God gives you peace—do not forget!

Torah mentions the idea of remembrance twice. First in the imperative: Remember! (Zakhor!) Then, in striking contrast, in the negative sense: Obliterate the memory (zekher) of Amalek. The “memory” of Amalek in the latter phrase refers to his impact, his potential viability. How do we make sure that Amalekism will be obliterated in the future? By always remembering what Amalek did in the past. The “Never-Again” is contingent on “Do Not Forget!”

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

KIDNAPPING IN JEWISH LAW is a capital crime. The Eighth Commandment in the Decalogue (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17), "lo tignov," is explained in rabbinic tradition: "You shall not kidnap" (rather than "steal"). The Ten Words are not concerned with the sanctity of property but the inviolability of person. Kidnapping is a broad term; certainly, it includes rape, which is specifically equated with murder (Deut. 22:26): "For as if a person attacks his fellow and murders him, so is this case (rape)." Kidnapping often involves trade and enslavement (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:17) – selling the victim for prostitution, forcing him into indignities, holding him for ransom. Torah's laws are therefore harsh against the kidnapper, demanding capital punishment. A person's sovereignty over himself is the supreme quality of his life as a human being. Violating his freedom and dignity is an offense against the very essence of his life.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

KINDNESS TO ANIMALS based on compassion for their sufferings (“za’ar ba’alei haim”) is advocated in Torah’s legislation. Man is taught to be sensitive and responsive to the feelings and needs of all living creatures: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing” (Deut. 25:4). The ox must not be restricted from eating freely from the field’s produce while laboring. “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together” (22:10). Both the ox and the donkey must not be subjected to suffer from their incompatibility in size and strength. Rest on the Shabbat is ordained for man’s animals as well as for himself and his household. Man is not permitted to eat before feeding his animals. Hunting for sport and pleasure is contrary to the Jewish spirit. Torah gives man dominion over his natural environment, fauna and flora alike, only for constructive and not destructive aims – to provide for his sustenance and well-being and to guard himself from danger. Even then, man must do his best to avoid or minimize cruelty to animals.

Friday, August 31, 1990

THE WEEK

— * — TEHUDA

CARE FOR STRAY ANIMALS (Deuteronomy 22:1-2): "Do not watch your brother's ox or sheep straying and ignore them! Restore them to your brother. And if he is far from you or is unknown to you, provide shelter within your home (for the animal), until your brother claims it ..." While the Deuteronomic version speaks of "your brother" (*ahikah*), the Exodus version of this law (23:4) demands the same concern and helpfulness (even) for an animal of "your enemy" (*oyyivekha*). The two versions are ancillary: While you care for an animal of "your enemy," you may thus repress your animosity and see him as "your brother" (*Midrash*). Real friendship is achieved by concrete deeds of loving kindness, not by abstract ideas of love. True love is expressed in proper action, not in lofty meditation. Appreciating the dynamics of human nature and social interaction, Torah does not preach blanket, unrealistic "love of enemy," but insists that we act kindly and charitably toward everyone, even an enemy. We thus turn "enemy" into "brother." The mightiest hero is one who makes of a foe a friend.

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

CARE FOR STRAY ANIMALS is part of Torah's legislation: "Do not watch your brother's ox or sheep going astray and ignore it! Restore it to your brother. And if he does not live near you, or you do not know who he may be, give shelter to the animal within your home until your brother claims it; then return it to him" (Deuteronomy 22:1-2). In a previous version of this law (Exodus 23:4), Torah specifies that you must show the same concern and helpfulness even for an animal belonging to your enemy. Thus, the formulation of the law in Exodus refers to your enemy (*oyevékha*) and the law in Deuteronomy refers to your brother (*a'hikha*). Our Sages comment: When you care for an animal of your enemy and restore it to him, you thereby extinguish your hatred; thus, you will be returning it to your brother. We achieve friendship and love between people not by abstract conceptualization and contemplation, but through positive acts of loving-kindness. Torah, being realistic, does not preach love for the enemy. However, appreciating the dynamics of human action and social interaction, Torah insists that we act kindly and charitably even toward our enemy. Thus, by our kindness, we turn our enemy into a friend. The mightiest hero is he who turns his foes into allies.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

CARE FOR STRAY ANIMALS is legislated in Torah (Deuteronomy 22:1-2):

Do not watch your brother's ox or sheep going astray and ignore it! Restore it to your brother. And if he does not live near you, or you do not know who he may be, give shelter to the animal within your home, until your brother claims it; then return it to him.

In a previous version of this law (Exodus 23:4), it is specified that you must show the same concern even for the enemy's animal. Our sages comment: When you care for the animal of your *enemy*, restore it to him and extinguish your hatred; you will be returning it to your *brother*. The mightiest hero is he who makes friends of his enemies.

BY RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

SHIKH'HA, "FORGETFULNESS" (DEUT. 24:19): "When you reap your harvest in your field and you forget a sheaf (of grain) in the field, do not return to take it; it shall be there for the newcomer, the orphan and the widow. Thus the Lord your God will bless you in all your endeavors." Intriguingly, in this case, "forgetfulness" is meritorious. A sage of old once remarked that this mitzva supersedes all others: "All mitzvot are to be performed mindfully, this one mindlessly. Willingly, could this mitzva ever be accomplished?"

But even to forget may be done somewhat intentionally. The phrase, "and you forget ..." may also be taken as prescriptive: Be inclined to overlook some sheaves in the field, leaving them for the needy. Do not be eager to grab them all. Let not your sense of possessiveness over your field and its produce overpower and possess you. Subtly, yet deftly, the verse shifts from "in *your* field" (*be-sadekha*) to "in *the* field" (*ba-sadeh*). The field is not completely yours, and your "forgotten" sheaves of grain in "the field" rightly belong to "the newcomer, the orphan and the widow."

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / AUGUST 31, 2001 W

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“FORGETFULNESS” (*SHIKH’HA*), (Deuteronomy 24:19): “When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf (of grain) in the field, do not return to take it; leave it there for the newcomer, the orphan and the widow. Thus, the Lord your God will bless you in all your endeavors.” In this case, “forgetfulness” is meritorious. A sage of old once remarked that this *mitzvah* (Torah precept) supersedes all others: “All other mitzvot are to be performed mindfully, this one mindlessly. Willingly, could this precept ever be accomplished?”

However, forgetting may be done somewhat intentionally. The phrase “and you forget ...” may also be taken in context as prescriptive: Be inclined to overlook some sheaves in the field, leaving them for the needy. Do not be eager to grab them all. Let not your sense of possessiveness over your field and its produce overpower and possess you. Subtly yet deftly, the verse shifts from “in *your* field” (*be-sadekha*) to “in the field” (*ba-sadeh*). As if to say: The field is not completely yours, and your “forgotten” sheaves of grain in “the field” rightly belong to “the newcomer, the orphan and the widow.”

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

WHEN FORGETFULNESS IS MERITORIOUS (DEUT. 24:19): "When you reap your harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf of grain there, you must not turn back to get it; let it be left for the stranger, the orphan and the widow – so that the Lord your God will bless you in all your undertakings." In the days of the Second Temple, a Hassid once forgot a sheaf in his field; he was overjoyed. When asked why he was so joyous in this mitzva, more than in all other mitzvot, he replied:

"All other mitzvot were given to us to be performed mindfully, this one mindlessly. Willingly, this mitzva could have never occurred to us! Although a person has no deliberate intention of performing a mitzva, yet he is rewarded for it. How much more is the merit of one who does a mitzva deliberately!" (Tosefta Peah 3:8).

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

KI-TETZE

August 23, 1991

SHIKH'HA, "FORGETFULNESS" (Deut. 24:19): "When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf [*of grain*] in the field, do not return to take it; it shall be there for the newcomer, the orphan and the widow. Thus the Lord your God will bless you in all your endeavors." Intriguingly, in this case "forgetfulness" is meritorious. A sage of old once remarked that this *mitzvah* supersedes all others: "All *mitzvot* are to be performed mindfully, this one mindlessly. Willingly, could this *mitzva* ever be accomplished?!"

But even to forget may be done somewhat intentionally. The phrase "and you forget..." may also be taken as prescriptive: Be inclined to overlook some sheaves in the field, leaving them for the needy. Do not be eager to grab them all. Let not your sense of possessiveness over your field and its produce overpower and possess you. Subtly yet deftly, the verse shifts from "in your field" [*be-sadekha*] to "in the field" [*ba-sadeh*]. The field is not completely yours, and your "forgotten" sheaves of grain in "the field" rightly belong to "the newcomer, the orphan and the widow."

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: *The law of "yefat to 'ar" (Deut. 21:10-14), an attractive woman captured in war, is a turning-point in the evolution of international law. In antiquity, captives of war were generally considered property of their captors, who, at their discretion, would retain, sell or dispose of their human spoil. Challenging the ancient practice, Torah explicitly defends the captive woman from being assaulted or shamed in any way. Her captor is required to respect and treat her as a person, with delicacy and understanding. Bereft of her dear ones, she is to be allowed to mourn for them. Being "enemy" does not render people less human. Therefore, "Bring her to your home; let her shave her head, grow her nails, take off her captivity dress, settle in your home, and bewail her father and mother a full month. Afterwards, you may live with her in marriage. If you want her no more, let her be free. By no means, may you trade or sell her. Do not maltreat her; you have already hurt her enough." (12-14) Torah provides that every human encounter, between enemies or friends, in war or peace, become a source of moral concern and responsibility to care for each other's needs and to respect each other's dignity.*

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

...HUMAN ENCOUNTER: The law of "yefat toar" (Deut. 21:10-14), dealing with an attractive woman captured in war, marks a turning-point in the evolution of international law. In antiquity, captives of war were generally considered property of their captors, who, at their discretion, would retain, sell or dispose of their human spoil. Challenging the ancient practice, Torah explicitly defends the captive woman from being assaulted or shamed in any way. Her captor is required to respect and treat her as a person, with delicacy and understanding. Bereft of her dear ones, she is to be allowed to mourn for them. "Enemy" or not, she and her people are still human beings. Torah insists that any encounter between people, enemies or friends, in war or peace, should become a source of moral concern and responsibility. True human encounter means to care for each other's needs and to respect each other's dignity.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE WOMAN (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). In antiquity, captives of war were treated as mere property. Their captors could abuse, retain, trade or dispose of their human spoil at will. In striking contrast, Torah teaches to treat prisoners of war with dignity and compassion—as human beings. What if you see in captivity a beautiful woman and desire her? In the ancient world she would remain totally helpless and unprotected. But Torah shields her from any assault or shame. She is treated as a person, not an object. Her captor is instructed to be sensitive to her tragedy and allow her to express her feelings of pain.

Let her stay as guest in your home and mourn her father and mother for a full month. Only then may you live with her in marriage. In case you no more want her, you must free her. You may neither sell nor enslave her. Do not degrade her; you have already hurt her enough!

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

89 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / SEPTEMBER 12, 1997

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE WOMAN (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). In antiquity, captives of war were treated as mere property. Their captors could abuse, retain, trade or dispose of their human spoil at will. In striking contrast, Torah teaches to treat prisoners of war with dignity and compassion – as human beings. What if you see a beautiful woman in captivity and desire her? In the ancient world, she would remain totally helpless and unprotected. Torah, however, shields her from any assault or shame. She is to be treated as a person, not an object. Devastated by the defeat

of her people, the collapse of her culture, the death of her parents, she is in shock and bereavement. Her captor is instructed to be sensitive to her tragedy and allow her to express her feelings of pain for her personal and national losses. Though she and her people are the “enemy,” they are nonetheless human beings!

Let her stay as a guest in your home and mourn her father and mother for a full month. Only then may you live with her in marriage. In case you want her no more, you must free her. Do not degrade her; you have already hurt her enough!

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE WOMEN (Deut. 21:10-14): Captives of war were treated in antiquity as mere property. Their captors could abuse, retain, trade or dispose of them at will. In contrast, Torah teaches to treat prisoners of war with dignity and compassion -- in short, as human beings: What if you see in captivity a beautiful woman and desire her? By ancient law she would remain totally helpless. But Torah protects her from any assault or shame. She must be treated as a person, not an object.

Devastated by the defeat of her people, the collapse of her culture, the death of her parents, the captive woman is in shock and bereavement. Her captor must show sensitivity to her tragedy, and allow her to express her feelings of pain for her personal and national losses. Though she and her people are the "enemy" -- they are nonetheless human beings!