



Parsha Perspectives

RABBI LEIBY BURNHAM

תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך

"You shall be wholehearted with the L-rd, your G-d." (Deuteronomy 18:13)

In the Torah portion this week, the Torah is delineating the relationship we are expected to foster with G-d. Rashi explains that this means that we should trust in whatever G-d has in store for us. Even one who has the means to predict the future should not do so. Instead, one should confidently and wholeheartedly rely on G-d.

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The story of Rabbi Akiva in the Talmud (*Brachos*, 60B) illustrates this point beautifully. Once while traveling, he came to a town where no one would give him lodging for the night. He said, "Whatever G-d does is for the best," and went out into the nearby fields to sleep. As night fell, a strong wind came and blew out his only candle, leaving him in the dark. Then a large cat crept up and ate his rooster (alarm clock, Circa 70 CE). A few minutes later a lion came and ate his donkey, leaving him with nothing. After each loss, he repeated, "Whatever G-d does is for the best."

In the morning, it became evident that a band of violent raiders had swept through town, pillaging the city, and taking the people as captives to be sold. Had Rabbi Akiva slept in town, had the raiders seen his candle or heard his animals, he would

have been taken along with them. Rabbi Akiva's total calmness in the face of challenging situations is the epitome of being wholehearted with G-d.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (the Chofetz Chaim), one of the greatest leaders of pre-war European Jewry, points out that there is an important flip side to this verse. The verse implies that it is only on G-d whom we must wholeheartedly rely. With human beings, however, we need to be cautious and judicious. While we have a commandment to give people the benefit of the doubt, it does not apply to areas that can affect us financially. In those situations, we need to carefully investigate the "facts" presented to us. The Torah recognizes this reality and doesn't pretend that we live in Utopia.

We see this concept with our forefather, Jacob. The Torah contrasts him with his crafty brother, Esau. "The lads grew up, and Esau became one who knows hunting, a man of the field, but Jacob was a wholehearted man, living in tents" (Genesis 25:27). The sages explain that while Esau was a "hunter," ensnaring people in his deceit, Jacob followed G-d unconditionally and studied in the tents of

the *yeshiva* of Shem and Eiver.

Yet it was this very same Jacob who did not trust the ultimate scammer, Lavan. He gave Rachel a secret code to try to prevent Lavan from switching brides. He devised a method to ensure that he would receive his fair share of Lavan's flock. Jacob may have epitomized the value of trusting in G-d, but he is the same person who teaches us how careful we need to be before putting our resources on the line.

In G-d we trust; all others require a healthy background check!

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WORD of the WEEK
by Rabbi Mordechai Becher
חלל

"If a חלל—*challal* is found in the land... (Deuteronomy 21:1). *Challal* refers to a human corpse and, based on the context, specifically to a murder victim, as Targum Onkelos and Yonasan translate it. Human life is holy, and therefore the murder of a person is an act of desecration which is implied by *challal* whose root is חולל—profane or devoid of holiness (Rabbi David Kimchi, *Sefer Hashorashim*). *Challal* also means space or vacuum and may be a reference to the idea that the dead body is empty, lacking its soul, and is therefore like a spiritual vacuum (Rabbi Moshe Shapiro).

Table Talk FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

The Torah admonishes judges against accepting bribes, warning that doing so will blind the eyes of the wise and twist the words of the righteous (Deuteronomy 16:19).

א) If a judge were to accept a bribe, he would be committing a grave sin. How, then, can the Torah still refer to him as “righteous”?

ב) In issuing its warning against taking bribes, the Torah specifically addresses the judges. Why would the Torah forbid the judge from *accepting* a bribe but not similarly prohibit the other parties from *giving* one?

HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

You shall be wholehearted with the L-rd your G-d” (Deuteronomy 18:13). From the context of this commandment it seems that the Torah is exhorting us not to engage in superstition, necromancy, astrology, and other types of divination. The *Code of Jewish Law* understands that the mitzvah of being “wholehearted” in our relationship with G-d means that we should not engage in any type of fortune-telling or looking into the future, even by means that are kosher and do not involve any type of idolatrous practices (O.C. 664:1). One of the world’s greatest kabbalists, Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel, goes even further and maintains that part and parcel of fulfilling this mitzvah is to refrain even from going to kabbalists and other rabbis to find out the future. Rather, one should take steps required by the Torah and the world of nature, pray to G-d for success and trust in G-d without knowing the future (*Faith and Folly: The Occult in Jewish Law*).

A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS

by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

The Torah prohibits destroying fruit-bearing trees even during a siege of an enemy city (Deuteronomy 20:20). Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch was asked if it is permitted to remove a non-fruit-bearing tree that is causing damage to a building. He responded that the Torah clearly permits this as the verse states, “Those trees that you know to be non-fruit-bearing, you may destroy.” However, there are later sources that maintain that if one destroys a tree of any type they will “not see blessings from this” and so Rabbi Shternbuch says that if possible one should ideally sell the tree to a non-Jew and have him transplant the tree to another location rather than destroy it. However, if that is not possible, there is no legal prohibition against its destruction if it is not fruit-bearing and is causing damage (Responso *Teshuvos Vehanhagos* 5:391).



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