

ואבימלך הלך אליו מגרר ואחזת מרעהו ופיכל שר צבאו: ויאמר אלהם יצחק:

מדוע באתם אלי ואתם שנאתם אתי ותשלחוני מאתכם:

ויאמרו:

ראו ראינו כי היה יקוק עמך, ונאמר:

תהי נא אלה בינותינו בינינו ובינך ונכרתה ברית עמך:

אם תעשה עמנו רעה כאשר לא נגענוך וכאשר עשינו עמך רק טוב ונשלחך בשלום

אתה עתה ברוך יקוק:

ויעש להם משתה ויאכלו וישתו: וישכימו בבקר וישבעו איש לאחיו וישלחם יצחק וילכו מאתו בשלום:

Avimelekh went to him from Grar, and *achuzat/Achuzat m'reieihu*, and Pikhol his general.

Yitzchak said to them:

“Why have you come to me? You have hated me, and you sent me away from you!”

They said:

We have emphatically seen that Hashem was with you, and we said:

“Let there please be an *alah* between us, between ourselves and you, and we will cut a covenant with you.

Should you do evil with us – just as we have not harmed you, and just as we have done only good with you, and we sent you away in peace – and you are now the blessed of Hashem.

He made them a feast, and they ate and drank. They arose in the morning; they swore each to his brother; Yitzchak sent them away, and they went from him in peace.

I want to begin by conveying my deep appreciation and gratitude for the many, many of you who learned mishnayot and thereby enabled me to make the siyum mishnayot l'ilui nishmat my mother, Malkah bat Elazar HaLevi, Wednesday afternoon. May we share much Torah and only joy in the future.

In lieu of a full dvar Torah, which I hope I will resume next week, here is a slightly more developed version of my extremely brief dvar Torah at the siyum.

The last statement in Shas Mishnayot is Rabbi Shimon bar Chalafta's statement that

לא מצא הקדוש ב"ה כלי מהזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום שנאמר (תהלים כ"ט) ה' עוז לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום:
The Holy Blessed One found no vessel to hold blessing for Israel other than peace, as Scripture writes (Psalms 29) Hashem will give strength to his nation; Hashem will bless His nation with/in peace.

As many commentators note, there is a tension in the proof-text, which can be resolved by saying that strength generates peace, whether by discouraging other's aggression (deterrence) or one's own (removing insecurity). This parallels an implicit tension in closing the Mishnah with a statement about the blessing of peace, when the structure of the Mishnah regularly emphasizes the extent and depth of machloket or disagreement, which the Rabbis call *milchamtah shel Torah*, the war of Torah; indeed, the last halakhic mishnah records, appropriately, enough, a dispute between the arch-combatants Beit Hillel

and Beit Shammai (about when the honey in honeycombs becomes a liquid for the purposes of tum'ah.) But a core belief of rabbinic culture is that honest argument about Torah leads to love.

The term “shalom”, peace, also shows up in this week’s parshah. Bereshit 26:31 records that Yitzchak sent a Plishti delegation away after mutual oaths, “and they went from him in peace”. The question is how this happened – after all, when the Plishtim arrive, Yitzchak greets them – apparently before they have a chance to say anything – with “Why have you come to me! You have hated me, and you sent me away from you!” So what enables the movement from there to covenant and peace?

Here, I think some insights from my mother’s last career as a mediator, and specifically from the chapter she wrote in the collection she edited entitled Definitive Creative Impasse-Breaking Techniques in Mediation, may be helpful. To take an obvious example, section 1:33 is headed “Bring Along Snacks”, with the comment that food is especially useful when parties in a negotiation are tiring. And indeed, the *mishteh* that Yitzchak makes seems to take place at night, and the next morning the negotiations are concluded smoothly.

Perhaps more profoundly,(section 1.5) mediators understand that the venting of strong emotions is often a positive sign – it (section 1:10)“puts all the issues on the table” and therefore enables holistic negotiations that genuinely address both parties’ feelings as well as their interests. Otherwise, negotiations often hit impasses that seem like unjustified nitpicking or stubbornness.

It is also important (section 1:9) to address whether the negotiation is about a one-time deal, or rather about a specific episode in a longstanding relationship which one or both parties have an interest in continuing. Here, the traditional commentators note inter alia that Yitzchak went to Avimelekh because Avraham and Avimelekh (or his predecessor) had established a covenant, and that presumably it was in Yitzchak’s interest to maintain the family option of going to Gerar during famines. (Indeed, there should be no surprise that no one touched Rivkah even when Yitzchak said she was his sister; the Plishtim knew all about Abrahamites and sisters).

We should also briefly the power of Avimelekh’s bald acknowledgement that he has come because “Hashem is with you”. One might say, with Ralbag, that he was impressed by Yitzchak’s spiritual power. By contrast, the conventional midrashic answer is that the Plishtim were initially jealous when Yitzchak outprospered them, but after his departure, they realized that his presence had caused them to prosper as well – perhaps, in modern terms, they realized that economic egalitarianism can have problematic effects on the tax base. Here Ibn Caspi’ s unsentimental summaries – “the masses only come to a man when they have need of him”, and “Here we have learned an important matter about the nature of the world, namely that the successful man is the one who is honored and valued and loved by many, whereas the reverse is true in times of trouble, and therefore Avimelekh’s response to Yitzchak was compelling” – are useful if they lead to realism rather than cynicism – Yitzchak does conclude the treaty in then end. This seems to me an example of the importance of distinguishing between positions and interests (1:26) without devaluing moral as opposed to financial or physical interests.

These are all negotiating pointers – but do Avimelekh and Yitzchak realize all these on their own, without mediation? Perhaps. But on the other hand, there is a longstanding question as to why

Avimelekh brings along “Achuzat Mreieihu”. Some see Achuzat as a name, and suggest he was a counselor; others that Avimelekh, like most kings, travelled with a posse, and *achuzat* mean “group”. But Meshekh Chokhmah suggests that Avimelekh brought along a group of people who had been **Yitzchak’s** friends in Grar, and perhaps opposed his being sent away. This, of course, would have blunted the force of “You have hated me”, and perhaps it was that group which served the mediating function.

May we develop the capacity and merit to find true, realistic, and therefore lasting paths to peace with all our fellows.

Shabbat shalom