

A few months ago my dear friend Dov Weinstein mailed me a copy of מבקשי פניך, a collection of commissioned conversations – really interviews - between R. Chaim Sabato and R. Aharon Lichtenstein. The book was my constant companion for many weeks, and I look forward to rereading it soon, as it contains many moments of great insight both from and about Rav Lichtenstein, a combination that laaniyut daati adds significantly to the power of the insights fromi. Not everything in the book is exciting and/or new, I imagine especially to those who have been comprehensively reading the remarkable flow of R. Lichtenstein's work coming out of Yeshivat Har Etzion, but at least to me, there is enough of both to make its publication a significant event, and I hope it will be made available soon in English.

One of the chapters that most interested me covers Rav Lichtenstein's understanding of his father-in-law, the Rav. The key insight there for me was his portrayal of the Rav as often a public figure and orator rather than an analytic philosopher, with the specific consequence that the Rav did not make a strong effort to be rigorously consistent in his speeches. Rather, the Rav would emphasize values that he felt were necessary to combat a prevalent misunderstanding or corruption, and having seized upon a theme in a particular lecture, he would then magnify and develop it until it seemed to dwarf all other issues. But the next week a different theme might draw his attention, with the same consequence.

This is a phenomenon familiar in Chazal, where many mitzvot – kashrut, Shabbat, tzitzit, avoidance of avodah zarah, Talmud Torah, tzedakah, etc., not to mention derekh eretz, the casual conversation of scholars, et al – are individually equal to “the whole entire Torah”, presumably including all the others. And as in Chazal, there can be legitimate controversy as to which such statements are situational hyperbole and which represent fundamental ideological convictions. In Chazal, of course, we have the complication that statements by different rabbis may represent conflicting fundamental convictions, and with the Rav, there is the reality, as Rav Lichtenstein also notes, that he was willing to change his mind, sometimes in response to changed circumstances, and sometimes simply as the result of a reevaluation of the evidence.

In the aftermath of מבקשי פניך, I've begun reading נפש הרב, the opening chapters of which emphasize the Rav's capacity for drama in public speaking. R. Schachter quotes a student coming up to the Rav and praising his ability as an actor, to which the Rav replies that “drama is an integral element of communication.” This seems to me another way of describing the same phenomenon.

My attitude toward the phenomenon of acting is colored by my own woodenness on stage, but also by a de Maupassant short story, and by Aviva Zorenberg's fascinating treatment of the impact on Yaakov of dressing up as Esav. In the short story (as I remember it), a hulking idiot is dressed up by his friend a burglar as a policeman and placed outside the house he is burgling, with the intent of removing any suspicion of nearby illegal activity. The idiot plays his part well, stopping cars so little old ladies and schoolchildren can cross the street safely, breaking up loitering gangs, and so forth. He “gets into the part”, to the point that when his friend emerges, he arrests him! In Zorenberg's reading of Bereshit, Yaakov is haunted by the possibility that he might really be no different than Esav – thus the battle with the “angel of Esav” who can only be a projection of himself, as he is alone when the wrestling begins. It seems to me similarly plausible that the late Heath Ledger's suicide was partially caused by his portrayal of the Joker in the movie The Dark Knight.

The fulcrum of this week's parshah, and the climax toward which the last several parshiyot have been building, is the moment when Yosef “breaks character”, when he can no longer sustain his

pretense of being an objective Egyptian prelate and reveals himself as a brother. Many have written about the textual indications that Yehudah, at least, had already penetrated the masquerade, but let us read here on the assumption that it is ultimately, and entirely, Yosef's decision to reveal himself (here I always refer to Professor Twersky's derashah about Yosef as "Tzofnat Paneiach" always being tzanua about his psychological self). The question I want to ask is: Did Yosef change at that moment, or was he simply dropping a mask? Could he have worn the mask if it didn't represent a truth about himself? Could he wear the mask convincingly without it becoming a true representation of a part of himself?

Rav Lichtenstein interestingly contrasts the Rav with Rav A.Y. Kuk by saying that Rav Kuk had a comprehensive worldview which was constant and consistent, so that everything he said had its clear place in his overall system, whereas the Rav had not always worked out the farthest and deepest implications of his statements. On the other hand, Deborah Klapper, in conversation with me, noted that Rav Lichtenstein's portrayal of the Rav resembled the understanding of Rav Kuk I took from Professor Binyamin Ish Shalom, as someone who felt a religious necessity to express, as powerfully as he could, his religious perceptions of the moment, without regard to what he had written or felt the moment before. I have consequently seen Rav Kuk in Whitmanesque terms: "You say I contradict myself? Very well – I contradict myself...I am a cosmos . . . ". This comparison and contrast are I think themselves reconcilable, but the reconciliation may be less interesting than the tension.

Why does Yosef reveal himself? Bereshit 45:1 opens with the cryptic "And Yosef was no longer able *lehit'apek lekhol hanitzavim alav*". As a result, he demands that all people (other than the brothers, apparently) be removed from him – and yet when he cries, everyone hears. Now when Yosef cried previously (43:30), we are told explicitly it was because his affections/mercies were roused toward his brothers – but we are apparently given no clear reason here. For this reason, Ramban (and others follow him) makes the astonishing, and laaniyut daati wholly unconvincing, suggestion that many Egyptian courtiers were so moved by Yehudah's speech that they begged Yosef to have mercy on Binyamin, and Yosef was unable to withstand them all, and so had them removed.

Rashi cites the midrashic position that Yosef had everyone removed for his brothers' sake, so that they would not be humiliated when their sale of him was discussed, as it inevitably would be once he revealed himself. (The midrash notes that he thus makes himself physically vulnerable to them in order to protect them.) But this attractive suggestion nonetheless seems to me *ikkar chaser min hasefer*, unconnected to anything openly mentioned in the text.

The underlying assumption of Rashi is that Yosef knows what he will do in advance, that his removal of onlookers is a strategic decision rather than a tactical attempt to gain time, to avoid making a decision.

But perhaps it is not a coincidence that Yosef, like Yaakov, is in a room with his brothers when he is left alone, and this is his internal wrestling match. He has treated the brothers, thus far, the way he imagines they would treat him – but is that really who he is? He has dreams of them bowing to him, but no fantasies of cruelty or abuse. And maybe he hasn't just treated the brothers the way he imagines they would treat him, but rather also the way he treats everyone else – so it cannot be denied that this is at least partly who he is, that it is not just an act.

It seems unlikely to me that Yosef at this moment decides to change who he is – he does not resign his government positions, nor does he change policies. What he decides instead is that this is not the aspect of himself that should govern his relationship with his brothers. In the enthusiasm of the

moment, he goes on to tell them that they should not be sad, or angry (at themselves or each other), for selling him down to Egypt – after all, this was clearly part of the Divine Plan for the family’s survival. Thus they must hurry, and bring Yaakov and the entire family down to him in Egypt.

This too, however, cannot be his full attitude. With apologies to the Mei Shiloach and Rav Tzadok HaKohen MeiLublin, it seems unwise, and wrong, to tell people not to be sad about their interpersonal sins, on the ground that everything is intended by G-d. In the moment, it was the right thing to say – but I don’t think that Yosef was committing himself to philosophic rejection of substantive free will, or to the position that free human choices cannot have morally significant real-world consequences.

This is what Rav Lichtenstein says the Rav was doing when he spoke to Mizrahi conventions exalting the ideology and achievements of Religious Zionism – saying what needed to be said in that role at that time, but not committing himself to a worldview. He notes correctly that this is a hard message for those who wish to follow a leader – that you can’t simply follow what the leader says at any moment, but rather you need to balance it with what he or she said previously and elsewhere, and make judgments about what applies where.

This is true not only of those who wish to follow leaders, but also of those who wish to follow Halakhah.

Now I believe it is conventional to close the final tax year dvar Torah with an appeal for one’s organization, and in the context of that appeal, to seek to present a picture in which one’s organization is the most important cause in the universe, even if one knows that tomorrow or the next day one may feel the need to urgently appeal for some other cause. One recent donation to CMTL came with the wonderfully lighthearted note “for the future of world Jewry –a bargain!” I think that is the attitude fundraisers seek to instill, and without any tongue in-cheek element. And perhaps Rav Lichtenstein’s portrayal of the Rav will liberate me to be more like that (and perhaps, in this regard, less like Rav Lichtenstein himself. And yet, Rav Lichtenstein has been a primary builder of an institution which, if I could create an equivalent, would quite exceed my current dreams).

For now, however, it seems to me important to note that tzedakah money be given wisely and in context, not just in charismatic enthusiasm. There is perhaps institutional self-interest involved here as well – there are others much better than I at generating that enthusiasm, and so CMTL may do better in sober society, at least until we find a way to hire or enlist one of those others, which maybe a catch-22 issue.

I want, therefore, to conclude not with an explicit appeal for CMTL, but rather, perhaps inappropriately, with a negative appeal. We, the Torah community, need to make sure that our tzedakah goes to organizations that do good work, and that sanctify G-d’s Name. It is not impossible for organizations to both do good work and yet desecrate the Name through shady fundraising practices, and in such cases, I think we need to find other ways to get that work done. I also think that such organizations lose any presumption of integrity, and therefore one should be suspicious of their claims to be using the money they raise efficiently to do good work, unless they are transparent financially and have their claims verified.

Several years ago I tried and failed to get news organizations to investigate EJJ (Eternal Jewish Family, a conversion organization still doing business as Netzach Yisroel), and was unwilling to publicize

my own suspicions in the absence of hard evidence. The ensuing scandal, I think, was worse as a result. I want, therefore, to put statements about two other organizations on the record now.

1. Kars4Kids – You have all heard the jingle, and perhaps some of you are aware that the kids involved are almost exclusively Jewish, and the work done for them is largely kiruv. In response to various legal issues, this is now discoverable by anyone who reads their website very, very closely, but it seems clear to me that it is not evident to those listening on the radio. At some point, this will become more public than it already has, and then, I fear, the negative will far outweigh whatever positives have been accomplished.
2. Kupat Hair (pronounced HaEer) – Their ads famously promise miracles to those who contribute, and their endorsements from various gedolei Yisroel have been credibly questioned. We should not encourage the theology, and the techniques should raise red flags. We should, rather, demand a detailed and verifiable accounting of the millions of dollars already raised – not just how much has been transferred to Kupat Hair from the American Friends of Kupat Hair, which is available from GuideStar several years out, but how Kupat Hair has spent those funds.

Shabbat shalom, and thank you as always for your attention and support.

Aryeh Klapper