



Thought Tools

Feud for Thought

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One of my most important rabbinic roles during the years I was privileged to lead the Pacific Jewish Center in Los Angeles was peacemaker. In order to preserve communal harmony it fell to me to mediate between parties in dispute.

Often these arguments were between husbands and wives and I felt special spiritual satisfaction at bringing these to an end. Restoring tranquility to a home is a momentous mitzvah. (A God-given obligation)

Frequently these disagreements were of a business nature. Most members of our community strongly preferred to resolve business disagreements by means of rabbinic mediation rather than by recourse to law suits.

Ancient Jewish wisdom emphasizes that it is impossible for a society to enjoy an active economy without occasional disagreements. Since creative people need to interact with others, disagreement is inevitable. For society to benefit from extensive commercial interaction, it needs to have mechanisms of dispute resolution. For us, in our Southern California beachfront community, that mechanism was largely me.

As you can imagine, this brought me blessing because I had the honor of repairing relationships. Additionally, oiling the wheels of commerce compelled me to become fluent and practiced at those parts of ancient Jewish wisdom dealing with business law.

It is important to resolve minor disputes before the tiny squabble becomes a feud that

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endures for years or even for generations as with Kentucky's Hatfields and McCoys or Shakespeare's Montagues and Capulets in Romeo and Juliet.

The importance of preventing a minor problem from turning into a multi-generational feud is one of the many marvelous examples of a powerful Biblical principle that is entirely invisible without access to the Lord's language. In other words, if you knew no Hebrew and depend upon the English translation, you'd never spot the following insight.

In Genesis 13, we read how Abraham and his nephew Lot both possessed considerable flocks but sadly, their shepherds quarreled.

And there was a quarrel between the shepherds of Abraham's flocks and the shepherds of Lot's flocks.....
(Genesis 13:7)

And Abraham said to Lot, 'Please now, let there not be a quarrel between me and you and between my shepherds and yours...'
(Genesis 13:8)

Why in the following verse did Abraham suggest that Lot move to another city? Isn't this a needlessly dramatic solution to a small squabble among a few shepherds?

Wrong! There is much more to the story. The Hebrew word used for quarrel in verse 7 is different from the slightly longer Hebrew word used for quarrel in verse 8.

Take a look at them here:

רֵיב

Gen. 13:7

מְרֵיבָה

Gen. 13:8

The shorter word ReeV is the simplest word for quarrel. It means just that - a quarrel. However, the longer word, MeReeVaH has 2 extra letters. A letter 'Mem' in front (read right to left) and a letter 'Hay' at the back.

Those of you who took our Holy Hebrew!—Learn to Read Hebrew course already know the meaning imparted to a word by these two letters.

(If you didn't, don't despair—[Holy Hebrew!](#) is coming up again in a few weeks)

“Hay’ changes the gender of a noun to feminine. This means that the thing or idea described by the noun has the feminine capacity to give birth. The ‘Mem’, shaped like a uterus also conveys the idea of transforming a concept (conception) into a reality (baby).

A masculine argument ReeV cannot give birth. A female argument MeReeVaH has the capacity to give birth to future generations of argument and feud.

Ancient Jewish wisdom teaches us that this wasn't an unimportant quarrel. Each man's shepherds acted in ways that reflected their boss's core values. Abraham understood that he and Lot disagreed on basic business principles. This isn't merely a child's Bible story. It is mature guidance for busy adults. Abraham is teaching us to spot small arguments with the potential to become major feuds and to take whatever action is necessary to preserve relationships and protect harmony among people.

People hang out with, and do business with people they like and trust. Don't allow



Dear Rabbi,

Do you believe that God can forgive a person for having an abortion(s) if they are truly repentant? I have heard that no matter how great your sin, God's mercy and forgiveness is greater. I pray that is true.

A lot of people spanning centuries need this forgiveness. So many young women these days have fallen for the lie that it is just a form of birth control without realizing how they will view it later.

Linda S.

[See Rabbi Lapin's Answer](#)

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fighters to fester. And don't delay learning to read Hebrew and spotting valuable Bible insights yourself. We look forward to sharing our [four part Internet webinar](#) with you.

Susan's Musings

This week's musing - [The Jonah Lives On](#)

Certain phrases such as, "Where's the beef?" leap into the national language. Other phrases glide into the shared language of smaller groups. When my children were younger, we read many books aloud. This lasted way beyond the years when the children became fluent readers. I have fond memories of taking turns reading Thomas Hardy's [The Mayor of Casterbridge](#) with my then sixteen year old son.

One book we enjoyed as a family...

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