



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

The Housewife and The Cat

When Jacob with his wives and twelve children left the house of Lavan to return to the house of Isaac his father, he heard news that his wicked brother Esau was on the way to greet them. Esau had sworn to kill Jacob many years before, which led Jacob to flee to the house of Lavan in the first place. Thus when messengers reported to Jacob that Esau was approaching with four hundred men, “*Jacob was very frightened and distressed.*” (Genesis 32:7)

Rashi comments that Jacob was *frightened* lest he or members of his family be killed, and he was *distressed*, that he might be forced to kill others.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein asks: Why was Jacob distressed that he might be put in a position of having to kill Esau or one of his four hundred wicked companions? Wasn't the opportunity to rid the world of evil a reason to rejoice, and not to be distressed? Rabbi Feinstein answers from the Talmud with the words of Beruria to her husband Rabbi Meir: “Better to pray that evildoers repent than to pray that the wicked die.”

Jacob was distressed that he

might have to kill to remove evil from the world. There is an inherent danger in using undesirable methods to achieve desirable goals, that one can become tainted by the means.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik pointed out that there are two kinds of zealots in the world, comparable to a housewife and a cat. Both the housewife and the cat want to rid the house of mice. The only difference is that the housewife hopes that there will never be another mouse to eliminate, whereas the cat hopes there will be many more.

Before we go about zealously addressing the evils of the world, we must make sure that we are acting as housewives and not cats.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Beit Lechem (Bethlehem)

“*Rachel died and was buried on the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob placed a monument on her grave which is the monument of Rachel's grave until this day.*” (Genesis 35:19)

Although **B**eit Lechem achieved fame in later years as the birthplace and

early home of King David, it is principally associated with the Tomb of Rachel.

Our Sages tell us that Jacob buried her there on Divine orders so that when Nevuzradan, the

Babylonian conqueror of the Land of Israel, would lead her children into exile past her burial site, Mother Rachel would pray to Heaven for their return.

Bethlehem is today populated exclusively by Arabs, but the Tomb of Rachel continues to attract Jews from all over the world who revere it as a prayer site second only to the Cave of the Machpela in Hebron.

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The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

We often act without thinking how our behavior will be viewed. We don't imagine that others will interpret our actions as negative especially when we know we've done nothing wrong. Remember: Honest doings sometimes look like...

Cheesy Dealings

Mrs. Ross stopped by the local grocery store and bought three tubs of cheese

for the traditional Shavuot cheesecake. That afternoon, she and her daughter Yehudis were in the process of mixing the batter. When they had used half the cheese Mrs. Ross said, "taste it." Yehudis dipped a finger into the batter and tasted it. "Ick!" she said, wrinkling her nose.

"What's wrong?" asked Mrs. Ross. She took a spoon and tasted it herself. It was awful! The cheese was spoiled! It must have been spoiled when she bought it.

"Yehudis," she said, "please go to the store. Tell the storekeeper that I bought this cheese today and it was spoiled. Take these containers with

you and exchange them for three fresh ones." She gave Yehudis the three containers: One full, one half-full and one empty.

The next week, Mrs. Ross went shopping. As she was checking out, the storekeeper commented: "Mrs. Ross, I hope you don't mind my asking, but is it necessary to eat one and a half containers of spoiled cheese before you return the rest?"

True, the storekeeper erred by not judging favorably. But Mrs. Ross was also to blame: She should have realized that returning empty containers might create the false impression that she had eaten the contents. We help others judge favorably when we explain our questionable behavior.

Response Line

Heiko Evermann wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I have a question concerning a greeting found in the Star Trek series, which, as someone told me, has a Jewish origin, and I would like to know more about it. Mr. Spock greets people with "live long and prosper" while holding his hand towards them with a gap between his thumb and first finger, and a gap between his middle and third finger, forming something like the letter "W". I was told that Leonard Nemo, the actor, has Jewish parents. I would like to know more about this and thought that you might be able to help me. Thank you.*

Dear Heiko Evermann,

Yes, Leonard Nemo is Jewish, and his "Vulcanic" hand-gestures

originate from the Torah.

The Torah commands the *kohanim*, the descendants of Aaron, to bless the Jewish people. They stand in front of the congregation, raise their hands to shoulder level and pronounce "priestly blessings" found in the Numbers (6:22): "May G-d bless"

This commandment is performed by *kohanim* in synagogues until today. The prevalent custom is that the hands are held together palms-down, and the fingers are split such that there are 5 spaces: One space between the thumbs, a space between the thumb and first finger of each

hand, and a space between the second and third finger of each hand. The five spaces are an allusion to the verse in Song of Songs 2:8 which states that G-d "peeks through the cracks in the wall." In other words, G-d protects and watches the Jewish people even when He is hidden.

As mentioned, a *kohen* is someone descended from Aaron (Moses's brother) and therefore from the tribe of *Levi*. Even if a *kohen* can't split his fingers in the proper manner, he can still give the priestly blessing. The ability to split your fingers in the proper manner is no indication that you are from the priestly tribe.

By the way, "Captain Kirk" (William Shatner) is also Jewish. The phrase "Set your phasers to stun," however, is found nowhere in the Talmud.