

# GROWTH INVESTMENT

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

In a portion replete with commands and laws that detail hundreds of the most diverse aspects of Jewish life, our sages look carefully at the juxtapositions of those commands, garnering even more wisdom and moral guidance from the holy words of the Torah.

That is why they explicated the very interesting placement of two commands that seem as diverse as ends of the spectrum. One verse tells us about the laws of a treifah animal, "People of holiness shall you be to Me; you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field; to the dog shall you throw it" (Exodus 22:30). The next verse tells us about carrying a false or evil reports, "Do not accept a false report, do not extend your hand with the wicked to be a venal witness" (Exodus 23:1).

The two seem quite disjointed; yet the Talmud in Pesachim 118 quotes Rav Shaishes in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah who connects the two. "Whoever speaks or accepts gossip (lashon horah) is worthy to be thrown to the dogs, as it is written 'to the dog shall you throw it' and immediately afterwards it is written, 'do not accept a false report.'"

At first the connection, albeit homiletic, is difficult to understand. What does throwing non-kosher meat to a dog have to do with a gossip? The two seem totally unconnected. According to the Mechilta, the meat given to the dogs is a payback for their reticence on the night of the Egyptian exodus. That night, despite the cries and wails of the Egyptians as their first-born were smitten, the dogs were still. "Against all the Children of Israel, no dog shall whet its tongue, against neither man nor beast, so that you shall know that Hashem will have differentiated between Egypt and Israel" (Exodus 11:7). Therefore they are rewarded with the meat that a Jew must refrain from eating. How is their reward of reticence a lesson for Jews who slander?

I recently read of a man who was going on vacation to one of the islands south of the United States. He wanted a room for himself and his pet dog, and asked if the establishment, a hotel in Kingston, Jamaica, would allow an animal. A few weeks later he received his reply:

Dear Sir,

I've been in the hotel business for forty years and never had to eject a disorderly dog. Never has a dog set a mattress on fire while smoking in bed. Never has a dog stolen a towel or sneaked an unpaid guest into his room. Never has a dog acted disorderly, drunk or otherwise. Your dog is welcome. If he can vouch for you, you can come along as well.

Thank You

The Chafetz Chaim explains that the Talmud is making an amazingly profound comparison.

The reason dogs were rewarded was because their nature is to yelp and bark at tragedy. Despite their instinct, they went against their nature and held back. They followed the command of the Almighty and held their tongues. The Torah rewarded their reserve with the spoils of our control treif meat.

But when humans, who are supposed to control their desires and their tongues, lose control, there is no better method to learn how to mend the folly of their ways than through the very animals who mastered self-control in most trying times.

How fitting is it that the two verses, one that rewards the canine for constraint be juxtaposed next to one which upbraids their mortal masters who unfortunately lose perspective all too often. We are the masters of our animals, but more so must be the masters of our desires! Often, however, when our dogs get their just rewards it is not only time for us to appreciate their constraint. Instead of just teaching our dogs new tricks, we can learn a lesson as well.

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