

TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE!

by Rabbi Label Lam

There is a famous Midrashic tale of Avraham, our common father, as a youth. He was minding his father Terach's idol shop when a woman came in to bring a food offering. Avraham smashed all the idols and left the hammer in the hand of the largest one. When his father returned to the store he was amazed to find such damage. Avraham blamed the largest idol for the destruction since, he explained, they had been competing fiercely for the offering. The father insisted that it was an incredulous story since idols are not animate objects with truth, feelings or independent mobility.

What can we learn from this story? Though a child naturally trusts and believes his father, that belief is not blind. Before a child invests his or her entire life in a thing, the child must first test whether the parent believes it with a deep abiding conviction. If not, then the youth sets forth to inquire elsewhere.

The courtroom was heavy with dread for the accused. Mountains of evidence hung over his head, as his unfortunate defending attorney was about to make his closing remarks. It was the eleventh hour. He boldly claimed that he had hard evidence that would clearly demonstrate that his client was in fact, innocent.

He stated that in precisely one minute the murder victim himself would enter the large oak doors in the back of the courtroom. In a state of shock, everyone present stared for a full minute at the doors and after the last second lapsed, refocused their attention on the defending attorney. With the genius of a desperate man he pointed out that in order to convict, the jury had to be certain beyond a shadow of a doubt. Since everyone in the courtroom, including the members of jury, had stared, awaiting the entrance of the victim himself, then they must harbor a shadow of a doubt and therefore must find the accused man innocent. He brilliantly rested his case.

The jury deliberated for ten minutes and returned the decision finding the accused...guilty! The lawyer was aghast. He quickly put his papers together and buttonholed a juror in the parking lot, begging for an explanation.

The juror told him that his summary statement was so clever that for the first nine minutes of deliberation they were prepared to acquit his client, but in the last minute it all changed.

One of the jurors admitted allowing his eye to wander during that pregnant minute when all were awaiting the victim, presumed dead, to walk into the courtroom. In that moment he noticed that the one person in the courtroom who was not studying the large oak doors in the back of the room

was...his client, the accused man!

If the accused himself does not believe the claim, then all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot deceive the observant eye of even a child. Similarly, when we lack understanding about the promise of a holy-land our grip becomes weak. All the clever lawyers or articulate politicians cannot convince the world of that which we are not convinced ourselves. That is an invitation for eviction. Clarity on the basic issues of our Jewish existence then becomes a matter of the highest national security.

When Avraham and Yitzchak walked to the mountain where Yitzchak his son was to deliver his life, twice we read the phrase; "And they walked, both of the them, together." One time to emphasize Avraham's unswerving commitment, and the second time to inform us of Yitzchak's knowledgeable state of trusting cooperation.

There was no generation gap. There was no doubt or breakdown of trust in the forging of the first link of our people. Thirty-six hundred years later with the eyes of the world and the eyes of our children upon us, it's still impossible even with the best rhetoric, to fake sincerity. It's the innate genius of an emerging generation to know the difference!

Good Shabbos!

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