

WHO ARE WE TRYING TO FOOL?

by Rabbi Label Lam

What will we gain if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? (Breishis 37:26)

This rhetorical question is asked by Yehuda as an appeal to lift Yosef from the pit. What was his point? Amongst the many approaches the Kotzker Rebbe offers a penetrating insight which may weigh in and impact many daily things we do. He explains Yehuda's words as standing alone, "If we must conceal his death and hide our actions then this means our actions are not honest. If a deed needs to be kept secret, then it is not based on truth!"

A young Rabbi living in Israel told me of a personal encounter he had with the revered Steipler Gaon ztl. It was well known that in his later years he was capable of giving frighteningly deep readings of people and their peculiarities. Still they would come from around the world to visit for a few moments at a time. While continuing to study, he would offer, with the mere reading of a piece of a paper, blessings, advice, and rebukes; some subtle and some less so.

This young man and his wife stayed for Shabbos in Bnei Brak with the special intent of visiting the Steipler on Sunday. They were granted use of an apartment by a couple that was going away for Shabbos. Before leaving they were shown around the house pointing out where the things they would need for Shabbos could be found. "Make your selves at home!" was the generous and general offer with one minor exception. They requested that since all their meals would be eaten out the dining room area should be considered "off limits". They agreed and thanked for all in advance.

In the middle of Shabbos afternoon after a hearty nap this young man awoke and strode into the living room and started to study but some spirit of folly lead him from the chair to the dining room. He parted the pocket doors and entered the room. There he saw family photos and pictures of some current sages including the Steipler. After a few minutes and afraid his wife would awake, he quickly and quietly backed out without a visible trace. He closed the doors and resumed his learning.

The next day he waited on line for hours with hundreds of others. When he presented the Rebbe his piece of paper, the Steipler shuddered and then thundered in his direction, "Ganav! (Thief) Ganav!" Instantly he flashed back to the moments he stood in that forbidden zone and how he had snuck out like a thief. He knew immediately and exactly what the Rebbe had meant. He was not told that day what he wanted to hear but certainly what he needed to hear.

The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch opens with the following words: "It's a general principle in Torah and the distinguishing quality of the righteous that they walk before G-d. Because the way a person sits,

moves and acts when he is alone in his house is not like his sitting, his movement, and his activity when he is before a great king. And so is his choice of words and style of speech when he is with his family and relatives not like when he sits before the king, because then he will certainly pay closer attention to his movements and his speech that they should be appropriate. How much more so when a person is conscious that The Great King, The Holy One Blessed be He, Who fills the whole world with His glory stands over him and watches his deeds."

Any act requires a cost benefit analysis, and responsible people are presumed to have made that calculation. However, to avoid self-deception about the goodness of a given choice, it must pass a screen of critical criteria. Amongst the evaluations to determine if our next move is truly noble or not is to honestly ask ourselves, "Why should we need to sneak about?" And: "Who are we trying to fool?" Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.