

STAYING AWAY!

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Just as there was in the days of Avraham, we read in this week's parsha that there was another famine in the land of Canaan (Eretz Yisrael). This caused Yitzchak and Rivkah to relocate to Gerar, where Avimelech king of the Philistines lived. They dwelled there for a while, and became very great. Eventually, their growth became too much for the Philistines to endure. Avimelech approached Yitzchak and told him to leave Gerar, which he did. Eventually, Avimelech follows Yitzchak and Rivkah with a group of his friends and Phicol, general of his legion. They find Yitzchak in Beer Sheba. It was there that the following conversation took place (26:27-29):

Yitzchak said to him, "Why have you come to me? You hate me and drove me away from you!" And they said, "We have indeed seen that Hashem has been with you, so we said, 'Let there be an oath between us... and let us make a covenant with you: If you do evil with us... ! Just as we have not touched you, and just as we have done with you only good, and sent you away in peace.'"

The previous Bobover Rebbe zt"l in his sefer Kedushas Tzion asks: What is the meaning of the words, "... just as we have done with you **only good**?" It implies that there are things that are not "only good," but are both good and bad, as opposed to what Avimelech had done for Yitzchak, which was entirely good. And what in fact was this "only good" which Avimelech did for him?

Everything a person owns is connected to him. The kiddush cups, besamim (spice) holders, and similar artifacts of tzaddikim from previous generations command exorbitant prices among people who collect such items. There are those who claim to be in possession of a sleeve from a bekitsche which belonged to the holy Baal Shem Tov. Since these items once belonged to holy, pious individuals, whose lives we emulate, they have become connected to them, and are infused with their holiness.

The opposite is true of the evil. The Gemara exclaims (Yevamos 103), "All the 'good' of the wicked is 'bad' for the righteous." Everything a wicked person owns is in some way connected to him. So any "good" one might receive from someone wicked is really a two-edged sword. Although it may indeed satisfy some immediate need, it connects one to the sinfulness of its owner. Perhaps this is why some Holocaust survivors refuse to take anything from the Germans - they don't want to be connected in any way to the wickedness they witnessed.

Ultimately, the only "absolute good" a wicked person can do for a righteous person is to leave him alone - to avoid all contact. Indeed, the Torah states (Bereishis 13:14), "Hashem said to Avram after

Lot parted from him..." Rashi notes that the sequence of events is crucial here. Only after Lot parted did Hashem reveal Himself to Avram. As long as Lot was around Hashem refrained from talking to him. This "good" is exactly what Avimelech did for Yitzchak; he cut off all contact with him, banishing him from his land.

This, explains Kedushas Tzion, is the meaning of the above passage: "Just as we have not touched you," for our contact would have defiled you. "And just as we have done with you *only good*," normally the "good" of the wicked is a mixed blessing. But the good which Avimelech did was a good with no-strings-attached. What was that? "We sent you away in peace."

It is told that the Chafetz Chaim zt"l was once called to court as a witness. The judge presiding over the case was known to be an evil person. Sitting in the witness' box, the Chafetz Chaim looked downwards, averting his gaze from the judge. The judge was bothered by this. His averted gaze aroused the judges suspicions that perhaps he was lying, and was therefore unable to look the judge in the eyes. "Ask him why he won't look at me," said the judge to the translator.

The translator asked the Chafetz Chaim. He answered, "We are taught, 'One should not cast his gaze upon the face of the wicked,' therefore I refuse to look at the judge." The translator turned white.

"What did he say," the judge asked, "I want to know." The translator told him. (In fact, the judge, instead of becoming outraged as one might have expected, was astonished by the Chafetz Chaim's honesty and frankness.) Even gazing upon the wicked can have its effect on a one's fear-of-Heaven.

Nowadays, we don't live in a ghetto. Our days are often spent among people who do not qualify as "good neighbours" in the sense that the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos had intended. At the very least, if we remind ourselves about the lesson of our Avos (our forefathers), we will be aware that as much as possible, we should distance ourselves from those people who's value systems are not in tune with our own, and surround ourselves with virtuous, G-d-fearing friends who provide positive influences in our lives.

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