

DO NOT PASS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Edom answered them, "Do not pass through us or we will go to war with you!" The Children of Israel answered him, "We will only take the highway. If either we or our cattle drink your water, then we will pay for it. Nothing will cause you harm; only our feet will we cross." He answered, "You may not pass!" (Bamidbar 20:18-20)

Some things just don't make sense, and in the way that they don't make sense, they teach you a lot about life. This episode with Edom is one of those cases. All the Jewish people wanted to do was cross over the land of Edom on their way to Eretz Yisroel. They had no territorial acquisition plans, and the Bnei Edom knew that.

In fact, they were even prepared to spend some money along the way, in appreciation for access to their land, to help the local economy prosper, even though they did not require a single thing from the people of Edom. They would have been the perfect guests. Not surprising, the "brother" of Ya'akov said no, perhaps still harboring an ancient grudge going back to the time that Ya'akov took the blessings originally intended for Eisav, their ancestor. However, given that they were now talking to a nation that had conquered Egypt, and then had the sea split for them, not to mention that the Shechinah itself traveled amongst the Jewish camp for all to see, refusing the advancing Jewish nation was kind of like throwing caution to the wind.

But they did it anyhow, and they even threatened to go to war against the Jewish nation should they decide to ignore Edom's reply and cross their land anyways. Of the many traits for which Edom (other than Amalek) is known, national suicide is not one of them. What were they thinking? Did they really think that they stood a chance of survival if war actually ensued?

People do crazy things. I mean, murder 6,000,000 Jews right before the eyes of the world, and in the most cruel ways possible? Did not Hitler, ysv"z, think for a second that at some point, his murderous activities would catch up with him, one way or another? Even if he didn't believe in God, and the concept of Bris Avos, of the special covenant between God and His people, what about the rest of mankind? Did he so not believe in their sense of conscience that he felt free to do whatever he wanted to the Jewish people?

The Arab world is different, as was the Christian world before them. They get around those problems by deluding themselves into believing that, when they are converting or killing Jews, it is God's will. In their minds, they are not warring against God when they kill His people, they are, in fact, fighting

God's war for Him. As far as they are concerned, God is, in fact, the one Who is after the Jewish people, making them His emissaries to catch them for Him. Talk about self-delusion!

However, the people of Edom in this week's parshah were about as religious as Hitler's national party. They had no delusions about rejecting access to their land on behalf of God, as opposed to against Him and His people. Therefore, the question returns: what in the world had they been thinking when they rejected the request of the advancing Jewish nation, which had to be out of spite, since it could only have benefited them to say yes? The truth is, they are not the first nation to which such a question can be addressed, and they have certainly not been the last. According to the Leshem, the people of Bavel, in building their tower, had been even more brazen than Bnei Edom in this week's parshah. For, in building their tower, they had planned to usurp power over Creation directly from God Himself (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 532). And, they knew what they were doing, sort of. It's actually a long story, and somewhat deeper than the one portrayed by the Torah. The physical tower had been, in reality, a Kabbalistic attempt to take control over the sefirah, in the spiritual realm, that powers and runs this world. And, lest we think that they were simply off their Kabbalistic rocker, let us not forget Who it was Who actually came down to observe, and befuddle the attempt: the Creator of the Universe Himself!

This would imply that the builders of the tower were not only completely evil, as the Leshem explains, but they were geniuses as well; evil geniuses. They were completely evil because they were prepared to abuse Creation to suit their own purposes and desires. They were geniuses because it was their profound understanding of how Creation actually works that showed them a potential path to accomplish their goal, a Kabbalistic loophole within Creation that God Himself came down to plug.

People don't like putting the two words together. We'd like to believe that geniuses cannot be evil, that by virtue of their very genius that they can only see truth, and overcome all their evil tendencies, if they have any at all. We'd like to believe that just by becoming very smart, we can learn to see reality as it is, and not be fooled by the more confusing aspects of Creation. We'd like to believe this so much that when it comes to evil geniuses, we tend to ignore their genius part, and simply accentuate their evil part, so that we can condemn them and make a separation between them and us. However, by doing precisely that, we accomplish just the opposite. We don't separate ourselves from them, but rather, we make it possible to be more like them, albeit on a far more subtle level. By disregarding the possibility of evil and genius fitting together, we ourselves throw caution to the wind, and make possible the type of intellectual, emotional, and political errors that have dogged mankind for millennia.

It has to do with character development.

There are two sides to human beings, intellect and emotion. Though meant to work together, they often work against each other. And, though the intellect can be advanced by simply accumulating

knowledge, the emotions develop based upon life's experiences, our interpretation of them, and our processing of what we learn through them. As a result, the two processes do not necessarily, or even usually, develop in tandem.

In other words, though technical education can consistently increase and expand one's intellect, our life's experiences can either do the same for our emotions, or stunt them, God forbid. Hence, whereas a healthy upbringing can result in an intellectually and emotionally developed individual, sterling citizens of any society, an unhealthy upbringing can result in just the opposite, producing a person that is either intellectually or emotionally underdeveloped, or both.

Thus, we find, there are basically four categories of adults. There are those who are intellectually and emotionally mature: they make great spouses, great parents, great bosses, and great leaders. There are those who are intellectually and emotionally underdeveloped, and tragically, they usually have little to offer society, and society usually has little to offer them. They can be totally harmless, or totally harmful.

Then, there are those who intellectually underdeveloped, but emotionally developed. They may not be smart people, but they are usually nice people, have integrity and are quite reliable. Being emotionally mature, they can sense that there is more to know in life, and will often pursue it, becoming more like the first group as a result.

Then, there is the last group, the most manipulative and dangerous of all human beings: intellectually developed, but emotionally immature. They are smart, and know a lot, except that, having the emotions of a child, they tend to use their knowledge in terms of getting what it is they want at any particular moment, with little or no regard for the consequences. All their knowledge is "filtered" through their emotions, which automatically distort it, and blind them to the true, inner meaning of what they know. Such people become the evil geniuses of history. They become the builders of towers that take advantage of Godly knowledge, to challenge God Himself. They are the Hitlers of history, who know how to take advantage of peoples' weaknesses and their own strengths, to manipulate the world according to their will. And, to their own self-destructive detriment, they end up becoming the victim of their own manipulation, which other people will put up with for only so long.

It's like watching a crime take place in a subway station. If there are few other people around, and the place is quiet, the noise that accompanies the vision penetrates us, makes us feel very uneasy, and more than likely, it pushes us to spring into action. It is hard to just look the other way when it is just you and the event occupying the same place, even if it is occurring at the far end of the platform.

However, if the station is crowded and noisy, even though you can see what is happening just as clear as you could in the previous example, all of the noise that is now taking place at the same time somehow mitigates, in our minds, the seriousness of the situation. Not being able to hear clearly

what our eyes are seeing somehow lessens the impact of what we know to be occurring, leaving us feeling less of a need to get involved.

For evil geniuses, their emotions make so much noise that they can't hear what their minds are saying. Indeed, their emotions tend to drown out their thoughts, or would-be thoughts, if the person merely took the time to consider the implications of their knowledge. Which of course they don't, and won't, allowing them to develop into the evil geniuses that they eventually become. Eventually, their perception of reality becomes so distorted that they end up doing things that become the source of their own undoing. Hence, though the pressure being put on Israel to acquiesce to the demands of the Palestinian people and the Arab world do not make sense, intellectually- speaking, they do make sense, to the Western world, emotionally- speaking. As the Arab world predicted, the Western world has neither the patience or the stomach for Islamic radicalism, and therefore they are giving into Arab demands, at the cost of the security of the Jewish people, just to put an end to the Middle-East conflict any way possible.

There are people from that world who are calling out against this approach. They know and understand the risks of standing up on behalf of the State of Israel against the Arab world and its Western allies, but they do it anyhow, as a matter of principle, and of right and wrong. Being intellectually and emotionally mature, they see no other approach to a life that is based on integrity.

President Obama, and his men I suspect, do not fit into this category. If you go back and review his campaign, and how he has acted since taking office, you can see a kid at heart, which for the rest of the kids-at- heart, is a very refreshing change in the White House. Late night talk shows? Give me a break.

It is the reason why, amongst recent Presidents (other than Slick Willy Clinton), he acts the least presidential. For, the President of the United States of America is a world leader, and world leaders must be both intellectually and emotionally developed. President Obama may be very smart, but emotionally, he is showing signs of not quite being there.

That is not good. World leaders who lack emotional maturity can become very manipulative, and consumed by their own power and ability to affect the course of history. They make sacrifices, but usually the wrong ones, catering instead to what feels good to themselves, and the people who elect them into power. That is clearly the case today in the United States of America.

As the Talmud states:

It has been taught, Rebi Nechemiah said, "In the generation in which Ben Dovid will arrive impudence will increase, esteem be perverted (i.e., none shall esteem another, or even the most esteemed shall be perverted and deceitful) ... and the kingdom will be converted to heresy with none to rebuke them." This supports Rav Yitzchak, who said, "Ben David will not come until the whole world is converted to the belief of the heretics." (Sanhedrin 97a)

Unfortunately, it seems, it is a shoe that fits all too well, and one which we wear too easily. Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org