



Avoiding and accepting the negative

Did you ever hear the term, "a kaparah?"

Breaking the Glass

Under every chuppah, the traditional marriage canopy at Jewish weddings, there is an ancient custom that calls for the chosson, the groom, to break a glass under his foot, after which guests call out "Mazel tov!"

This custom was observed as far back as Talmudic times. The Talmud (Tractate Brachos 30b) mentions how Rav Ashi shattered a glass at his son's wedding. But what is the reason for shattering a glass? Why break it?

This custom has several reasons, but one of the most well-known is to remember the Destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. It is a sign of mourning over Jerusalem even at the height of personal celebration, as the verse states, "...I will raise Jerusalem above my greatest joy" (Psalms 137).

But there's another, deeper, reason for the entire matter.

Yaakov's Survival Tactics

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion of Vayishlach, we read how our forefather Yaakov dispatches angels ahead of him to his brother Esav to find out what the situation is: does Esav still hate him?

The angels return with rather unhappy news: “We came to your brother, and he is coming towards you with 400 men.”

“Yaakov was very frightened and it pained him,” our parshah tells us. Here was Yaakov, busy with 12 kids, four wives, and now a vengeful brother approaching with an army of 400 hired swords.

So, the Torah tells us, the first thing Yaakov did was “divide the people with him... into two camps.” The verse reads, “Yaakov said, ‘If Esav comes and attacks the first camp, then the remaining camp will be a refuge.’”

Yaakov’s initial reaction was strategically shrewd: he divided his people into two groups so that he’d always have at least one group saved and perhaps even able to fight should the other one be destroyed. Anyone who runs a battle does this.

But this raises a question: if Yaakov did that to save some of his people — as he himself said — then why not divide his people into additional groups? Why not at least three or four? Why only two?

The first thing every investment advisor will tell you is that it’s a poor idea to invest all your money in one place, as the expression goes, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” Rather, they’ll tell you, you should diversify—meaning, spread your investments around.

We even find this concept in the Talmud. Tractate Bava Metzia 107A quotes the Torah verse, “Blessed are you in the field,” and explains: “Your property should be divided three ways: one third in grain, one third in olives and a third in vines.” Why? Rashi explains “that there are years in which vines and olives don’t do well but grain does, and there are years in which one does well and the other doesn’t, leaving the owner with a.”

If this is true for commodities, it’s all the more true for a person’s

life—so Yaakov really should have divided everyone and everything belonging to him into as many divisions as possible, because then there'd be a chance that at least part of it all would be saved. But when we look at the verses in depth, we see that Yaakov divided everything into just two camps—and stranger yet, one camp consisted of his sheep, cattle and camels along with their herders and everything else property related, while the other camp consisted of his 12 kids and four wives and nothing else.

What kind of logic is at play here? True, if Esav fell upon the property camp, the other camp would escape, but what would happen if, G-d forbid, Esav attacked the family camp? He'd kill all of them, leaving no survivor of the House of Yaakov! What was the thinking in gathering the entire family into one group?

A Kaparah

I know a couple that not long ago were traveling on a Friday morning to be in New York in time for their daughter's Sheva Brachos. But when they arrived at the airport, they discovered that their names didn't appear on the passenger list—it was as if they simply didn't have tickets.

They tried investigating, asking and arguing, but nothing helped. And the clock was ticking.

Buying new tickets on the spot would cost \$700 apiece, but there was no choice and they had to buy two new tickets right there for a total of \$1,400. Understandably, their kids were pretty angry and upset about the whole story, having had to pay so much because of the airline's negligence.

But, to their surprise, their parents were calm—they merely said, "Nu! Let it be a kaparah [an atonement]." If something untoward were supposed to occur at the wedding, if there was supposed to be some

heartache, better that it be money and not something more serious, G-d forbid, they said.

The concept of kaparah is an ancient Jewish idea. The idea behind kaparah is that G-d created the universe with deliberation, in such a way that anything good, whether people or things, has some bad in it. That's why the Torah begins with the Hebrew letter "beis," the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet—to hint that the universe is imperfect and that the only perfect entity, the only "aleph," so to speak, is G-d Himself.

For the same reason, no party or celebration can be perfect—so when something happens like your flight reservations mysteriously vanishing, we say, better it be this than a health issue or even more serious issue, G-d forbid.

This concept is rooted in the saga of our Patriarch Yaakov. Here he was in this week's Torah portion returning to his home country of the Holy Land after many years, and, as he himself prayed, "I crossed the Jordan River with [nothing but] my stick, and now I'm split into two camps." What Yaakov was saying was that when he went to Charan (somewhere in the north of today's modern Syria) he had nothing, neither family nor wealth. Today, as he reentered Israel, however, he had "two camps"—one was his family and other was his material possessions.

That's why, when he felt trouble coming his way, he separated the family from the property. He said, "If something needs to go, let it be the money." That's why he said that if Esav comes to destroy one camp, let it be the property camp. At least he'll have his family saved.

We also find this idea in an ancient and interesting Jewish custom. On the day before Yom Kippur, Jews have the custom of "asking for honeycake." Everyone approaches his rabbi, grandfather or some

respected individuals and asks for a piece of cake. The aforementioned individual then serves a slice of honey cake amid wishes for a good and sweet new year.

The reason for this custom is that if Heaven decreed upon a person that he will need to depend on material support from others in the coming year, he symbolically gets “material support from others” by requesting the cake, thus not G-d forbid needing to really ask for help in the course of the year.

The Rebbe was accustomed to stand for hours on end every erev Yom Kippur giving out pieces of honey cake to every Jew who came, further demonstrating the fact that the universe is imperfect and that it's likely that one will need help from others—and that it's better to get help in this way, through one's one free choice and decision, rather than other ways.

That's also the inner reason for breaking the glass at weddings. As medieval leader Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz, known as the Shelah HaKadosh, wrote, “The breaking of the glass at weddings was established to give the Attribute of Justice a portion.” That means that since no simcha, or joyous celebration, can be perfect, we break a glass so that its destruction serves as the negative occurrence at the wedding—thus “fulfilling the obligation” for something negative to happen. Now, nothing truly bad needs to happen at the wedding.

This is really a lesson for life—if, G-d forbid, something bad must occur, we want it to occur to our property, not to our health or to anything else in our lives.

But the most important lesson here is that when something negative happens to you financially or property-wise, you shouldn't get depressed or angry, thinking, “How could this happen?” Rather, think just the opposite—you should accept G-d's verdict and tell yourself, “If something bad was supposed to happen, it's better that it be a

financial issue and not anything else.” That’s also why whenever something breaks in a Jewish home, everyone says, “Mazel tov!”

By the way, about the parents in the story? They eventually got their money back.