

DARSHANUT

Darshanut, *derived from the Hebrew root darash [explicate, expound], presents the expository, homiletic interpretation of the Bible. Its origins are as old as the most ancient aggadic and midrashic teachings and as new as the sermon or D'var Torah delivered on the most recent Shabbat. The intent is a challenge to relate the Bible to the problems, issues and goals of daily living.*

We encourage our readers to contribute to Darshanut. The submission should be based on the Bible, no more than 750 words in length, and as relevant and current as you would like to make it. For more information on submissions, see the inside back cover.

FRIENDS, STRANGERS, ENEMIES

THEODORE STEINBERG

Deuteronomy 10:19 states: *You shall love the stranger; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.* The Torah asks its readers to love, befriend, and not to oppress the stranger no less than 36 times. There is no doubt that strangers and aliens had a difficult time in the ancient world, and conditions have not changed all too much. The Torah clearly wants to ameliorate this painful and persistent human problem.

Two reasons are given for this commandment. First, you were strangers yourselves in Egypt, and you know the feelings of a stranger. So, have empathy and sympathy for others who find themselves in that predicament. Second, do not ever forget that when you were strangers in Egypt, you were mistreated. Do not do to others what was done to you and to your ancestors.

The Ramban, a medieval Bible scholar, notes that the teaching about befriending the stranger begins two verses earlier, in Deuteronomy 10: 17-18. The Lord who is supreme, great, mighty and awesome, the God of gods and the Lord of lords, takes care of widows and orphans and *ve'ohev ger* [loves the stranger]. Therefore, you go and do likewise – *imitatio dei*. One lesson to draw

Theodore Steinberg, an Associate Editor of JBQ, lives in Jerusalem and delivers his Divrei Torah at the weekday morning minyan of Kehilat Moreshet Yisrael.

from this is that ethical action has a religious grounding. God sets the standard for human behavior. Befriending the stranger is an expression of fealty and loyalty to God. Stimulated by such sentiments in the Scriptures, the Talmud is peppered with teachings such as:

A person should always try to be on best terms with his friends and relatives and with all people, including the heathen in the street, so that he may be beloved in heaven above and well-liked below It was said of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that no one, not a stranger, not even a heathen, ever greeted him first, before he greeted them (Berachot 17a).

I especially like this teaching, about helping strangers who might be enemies: What does one do in a complicated situation of conflicting needs? (1) You are called on to help unload the ass of a friend, and (2) at the same time you are asked to help load the ass of an enemy. Who comes first? The answer given is that the stranger or enemy takes precedence. For this reason: You want to "crush" the *yetzer hara* [evil nature] that tempts you to turn away from the stranger in order to help your friend.

The Tosefta makes a slight change in the reasoning that makes this teaching more sensible. What you want to "crush" is not your own *yetzer hara*, the natural inclination to avoid strangers and enemies, but rather to "crush the heart" of your enemy; that is, you help him because you want to change his heart and transform an enemy into a friend.

This kind of outgoing attitude towards strangers is found throughout Jewish tradition. It points to a tougher question: What about enemies? What does Jewish teaching have to say about dealing with people who really hate you? Proverbs 24:17-18, and 25:21, are quite specific: *Rejoice not when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.*

Rabbinic tradition asks: "*Ezehu gibbor* [Who is a hero]? He who turns an enemy into a friend" (Avot deRabi Natan 23). Is this attitude a little too sweet and optimistic?

The Jews are an optimistic sort, and often like to think that most people are basically good hearted. We love the idea that people can change for the better, and that most human beings, if one relates to them with fairness,

generosity and decency, will want to become like angels. The trouble is that in real life it usually is not so. People are not quite so changeable. There are many more than a few who thrive on having someone or something to hate.

From another perspective, there may be something useful in having an enemy. A few wide-awake, nasty, persistent enemies may be worth more than a whole passel of friends. Friends point out the good things you do, but you know all about that. Enemies go after out your mistakes. They probe your weaknesses. It's always good to have a few first-class enemies around, and to learn from them. Especially, to learn from the mistakes they discover in us, and to work at getting rid of the weaknesses of which they make us aware. When you achieve success, thank that enemy who has helped you make yourself stronger.

As Jewish people, we stand by the principle of befriending strangers, and transforming enemies into friends. Would that we did not have or need enemies, but since we do have them, may we always have the will to withstand them, wisely and with strength. Perhaps even, as the Torah urges us, to have the will and wisdom to persist at turning at least a few into true friends.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT !

The **AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE JEWISH BIBLE ASSOCIATION** is devoted to promoting and advancing knowledge and appreciation of the Tanakh in the United States, Israel, and throughout the world. The **AFJBA** provides financial and other support for a variety of educational, scientific and literary activities, including:

- * Publication of the **JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY** and sending it free to all 130 Hillel Houses on American college campuses and to all 34 active duty American Jewish chaplains
- * Offering a regionally accredited American college degree in Judaic Studies
- * Participation in the planning of the International Bible Contest for Jewish Youth and the Bible Art Contest for Children
- * Public lectures on Biblical themes

By supporting the **AFJBA**, a US nonprofit tax-exempt organization, you will be demonstrating your commitment to the unparalleled significance of the Tanakh in the modern world, its message and insights. Your greatest benefit will be

THEODORE STEINBERG

knowing that you are participating in a world-wide effort to spread understanding and appreciation of the Tanakh to people everywhere.

**AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE JEWISH BIBLE ASSOCIATION
P.O.B. 29002, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL**

JEWISH BIBLE QUARTERLY