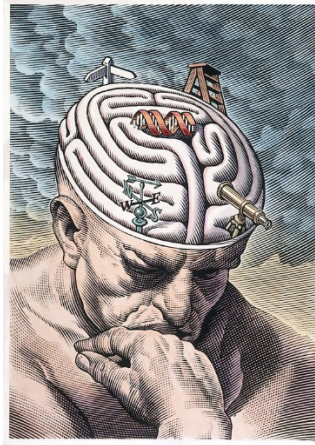


Rabbi M. Dubitsky

YU- Sacks- Herenstein Center

August 2022

Morality



Throughout the beginning perakim of Melachim Aleph we find many different cases that have stipulations:

Melachim Aleph 1:49-52

וַיִּתְרָדוּ וַיִּקְמוּ כָּל־הַקְּרָאִים אֲשֶׁר לְאַדְוִיָּהוּ וַיֵּלְכוּ אִישׁ לְדַרְכּוֹ:

Thereupon, all of Adonijah's guests rose in alarm and each went his own way.

וְאַדְוִיָּהוּ יָרָא מִפְּנֵי שְׁלֹמֹה וַיִּקַּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּחְזַק בְּקַרְנֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went at once [to the Tent] and grasped the horns of the altar.

וַיִּגַּד לְשֹׁלֹמֹה לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ יָרָא אֶת־הַמִּלְחָה וַיִּקַּח אֶת־קַרְנֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֵאמֹר יִשָּׁבַע־לִי כִּי־וְיִשְׁלַח אֶת־יָדוֹ לְשֹׁלֹמֹה אִם־יָמִית אֶת־עַבְדּוֹ בְּחֶרֶב:

It was reported to Solomon: "Adonijah is in fear of King Solomon and has grasped the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon first swear to me that he will not put his servant to the sword.'"

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלֹמֹה אִם־יִהְיֶה לְבֹנֵי־סִיל לֹא־יִפֹּל מִשְׁעַרְתּוֹ אֶרְצָה וְאִם־רָעָה תִּמְצָאֵבוּ וְנָמַת:

Solomon said, "If he behaves worthily, not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground; but if he is caught in any offense, he shall die."

What did Shlomo stipulate should be the condition to harm or not harm Adoniyahu?

2:5-6

וגם אתה ידעת את אשר-עשה לי יואב בן-צרויה אשר עשה לשני-שרי צבאות ישראל לאבנר בן-נר ולעמשא בן-לחמי
“בנהרגם גישם דמי-מלחמה בשלם ויתו דמי מלחמה בתגרתו אשר במתניו ובנעלו אשר ברגליו:

Further, you know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of Israel's forces, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether: he killed them, shedding^b*Meaning of Heb. uncertain.* blood of war in peacetime, staining the girdle of his loins and the sandals on his feet with blood of war.^c*I.e., Joab had thus brought bloodguilt on David's house; see 2 Sam. 3.27 and 20.10.*

ועשית כחכמתך ולא תורד שיבתו בשלם שאל:

So act in accordance with your wisdom, and see that his white hair does not go down to Sheol in peace.

Are these cases of an objective morality--- regarding right and wrong or is they subjective feelings?

What moral dilemma does the story of Dovid HaMelech instructing Shlomo (before Dovid's death) present?

Finally, regarding Shimi ben Gera:

וגם אתה ידעת את אשר-עשה לי יואב בן-צרויה אשר עשה לשני-שרי צבאות ישראל לאבנר בן-נר ולעמשא בן-לחמי
“בנהרגם גישם דמי-מלחמה בשלם ויתו דמי מלחמה בתגרתו אשר במתניו ובנעלו אשר ברגליו:

Further, you know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of Israel's forces, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether: he killed them, shedding^b*Meaning of Heb. uncertain.* blood of war in peacetime, staining the girdle of his loins and the sandals on his feet with blood of war.^c*I.e., Joab had thus brought bloodguilt on David's house; see 2 Sam. 3.27 and 20.10.*

וְעִשִׂיתָ כְּחִכְמָתְךָ וְלֹא־תוֹרֵד שִׁיבְתוֹ בְּשָׁלֶם שְׂאֵל:

So act in accordance with your wisdom, and see that his white hair does not go down to Sheol in peace.

Rashi—outrightly—seems to indicate that there should be a misdeed found on purpose to have a basis for punishment:

כִּי אִישׁ חָכָם אַתָּה. תֵּן לְבָךְ לְמַצָּא לוֹ עֵוֹן מְוֹת בְּשִׁבִיל דְּבַר אַחֵר, וְזֶהוּ: וַיִּדְעַתָּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ

For you are a wise man. Turn your attention to find for him a capital iniquity on account of another matter. This is [what it means by], “You will know how to deal with him.”

The *Malbim* states:

ועתה רצה לומר אני נשבעתי ומחלתי לו ועתה אם יחטא לך אל תנקהו, כי איש חכם אתה וידעת את אשר תעשה לו
לנסותו אם פי מלך ישמור כראוי ואם רעה תמצא בו והורדת את שיבתו בדם שאול, ואל תמחול לו

The *Ralbag* similar to Rashi states:

עתה אל תנקהו. ר"ל אף על פי שהוא עמך ואין לך עליו דרך ותואנה להרגו ולא על מה שחרף וקלל אותו כי כבר נשבעתי לו שלא אמיתו והנה תעשה בדרך שלא יהיה נקי מהעונש כי איש חכם אתה ותמצא בזה דרכים יתכן בהם שתוכל להגיע עליו עונש המות באופן שתוריד את שיבתו אל הקבר בשפיכות דמים לא כמות כל האדם

All these stories give us pause to think about whether defining morality is objective or subjective.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do you define morality?

2. What is it based on?

3. Have any of your decisions ever changed throughout your life? If so, what led to these changes?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l wrote extensively on these questions and below are some of his citations:

2. *Faith in the Future*, p.14

“In teaching our children moral relativism we have placed them in the world without a moral compass, even hinting that there is no such thing. In the name of tolerance we have taught that

every alternative lifestyle is legitimate and that moral judgement is taboo, even ‘judgemental’. What is right becomes what does not harm others, and in time degenerates to what I feel like doing and can get away with.”

What is Rabbi Sacks pointing out in this section?

Does it change our perspective on the story from Dovid and Shlomo above?

In class assignment: Write a brief paragraph from one personlatity in our perek to another describing what they think about the interactions between Dovid HaMelscha dn Shlomo. What suggestions might they make relating to the facts we are presented with in the perek in Tanach?

3. *Covenant and Conversation: Numbers* p. 299

“In the end – not only in the religious life but in life as a whole – moral qualities count for more than intellectual or even spiritual ones.”

Do you agree? If so, why?

4. *Morality*, p.159

“Morality makes a difference to the way we think about problems and their solution. It shifts us from self-interest to concern for the common good, and from a narrow focus on immediate gain to more distant horizons. We need to be able to think in this collective, long-term way if we are to avoid the short-sightedness that led people to think that you could abandon morality without paying a momentous price.”

How do you conceive of this price in reality? What can be done to restore morality?

Thinking Question: How do you think Dovid Hamelech would respond to your letter and discussion above were you to speak with him in person? Substantiate your answer based upon what we learned throughout the first number of perakim in Melachim Aleph.

