

Vayechi

Ends, Means, G-d, and the Opposition



One of the great failings of good people is that they, many times, believe that the ends justify the means. We know that in certain circumstances the ends do justify the means. A wife wants to get her husband to the doctor, and he will not go, so she arranges for a doctor just to happen to drop over to the house for tea or dinner; a grandparent who can no longer take care of himself is brought to a home for the aged through the use of a ruse; a child who will not take his medicine has it slipped into his milkshake. In certain circumstances, then, it is not only permissible, but also desirable, that stratagems be used for a person's own good. A person's rights and freedoms have been violated, but it has been for his own good; therefore, it is permissible, especially with children. Children have to be forced many times to do things they would rather not do for their own good--for example, study or learn how to be polite and how to do chores around the house, etc. Appropriate punishments, like grounding and taking away their allowances, can be used to force them to do things they do not want to do.

However, when it comes to healthy adults, the matter becomes much more complicated. We know that, even in a democracy, people are forced to do things they do not want to do. However, at least they have the option of trying to change the rules, if they feel that the rules are too onerous. They have a hand in making the rules by participating in elections so, therefore, they, by and large, will comply with them. It gets a little fuzzy, though, when we have to determine who has the power to make what rules. In our modern democracies, which are really limited democracies, the majority can never make any rules which impinge upon our basic human rights. No state can impose religious beliefs on us or restrict our free speech or imprison us without immediately charging us with a crime, etc. The problem that good people have is that, because they are convinced that they are 100% right and because they feel that they are acting only for the benefit of the people they are serving, they will not brook any opposition. They will even use terrible means to silence the opposition and will, many times, coerce the very people they feel they are helping, because they feel they are only acting in the best interests of the people they are coercing.

Torquemada, the Spanish grand inquisitor, felt this way. He honestly believed that all Jews would go to hell and suffer forever, unless they accepted Christianity. He reasoned that it was better to give the Jews momentary pain but assure them eternal happiness than to desist from dealing with them and guarantee that they would suffer eternal pain. This is similar to a case where we see that a youngster is about to be run over by an automobile. We can save the youngster, but that would mean throwing him to the ground and maybe breaking his arm or skinning his knee. If we really love this youngster, we will cause his arm to be broken and skin his knee to save his life. Torquemada felt that he really loved the Jews. That's why he tortured them so they would be worthy of receiving eternal bliss.

In our own day, too, we find people who are so sure that they are right that they will brook no opposition. They will not allow demonstrations against their policies, and they will not speak to people who disagree with them. They will try, with every means possible, to crush the opposition. This, unfortunately, is a trait of many intellectuals. Every time ideologues have seized the reins of government throughout the centuries, they have always tried to impose their will upon the people, regardless of the consequences, because they have felt that they were doing it for the people's own good. We saw this in the communist regimes of this century, as well as in all the isms of past centuries. This is what the Jewish Hellenists did, too, in the time of the Maccabees when they encouraged Antiochus to ban the Jewish religion, because it was primitive and not progressive. This is not just a failing of secular intellectuals but, unfortunately, also of religious intellectuals. We see this in Iran today and in Moslem fundamentalism generally. Hamas feels that they are so right and their cause so just that they are willing to become suicide bombers to further it, even to the point of killing innocent women and children.

In Judaism we hesitate to use the name G-d. We do not even know anymore how to pronounce the name of G-d. Even in English, although this is not a strict Halachic requirement, we hesitate to write out in full the name of G-d. We instead write G-d. What's the reason for this? The reason for this is that Judaism is fully aware that one of the greatest of all religious sins is to feel that what you think and what you want done is what G-d thinks and what G-d wants done. Many times, religious people begin

to feel that what they think is what G-d thinks and, therefore, their enemies are definitely G-d's enemies and must be wiped out, not because they are "my enemies," but because they are "G-d's enemies." Sometimes religious intellectuals, like secular intellectuals, become so convinced of the truth of their path that they do all sorts of things that are contrary to their own religious teachings, because they feel they must defend G-d's honor. In Judaism, we say G-d can defend Himself.

It is interesting to note that for most ritual sins listed in the *Torah*, there are no human punishments. We leave those to G-d. Only if a ritual sin, also, somehow impinges on morality, or on our consciousness of morality, is there a human punishment. Judaism teaches that G-d can take care of Himself. We must maintain a distance between ourselves and G-d when it comes to trying to determine G-d's mind. G-d many times does very unusual things. He chooses all sorts of people, whom maybe we would not choose, to help Him in perfecting this world. After all, Moshe Rabbeinu never served a day in slavery. He married a gentile woman. He, according to the *Medrash*, even agreed to raise his eldest son as a pagan. Yet G-d chose him to lead the people and not Aaron, who had suffered with the people in Egypt and who had kept all the practices of Judaism. We do not know G-d's mind. It is not always true that our personal enemies are G-d's enemies. Unfortunately, there are many people who feel this way, even within the Jewish community. They feel that those who do not agree with them are not only their personal enemies, but are also willful, stupid fools who are the Jewish people's enemies and, ultimately, G-d's enemies, and they act accordingly. They treat them with great disrespect, calling them names, threatening them, and considering them outside the pale. This means that, in many instances, they feel that they are not entitled to civil liberties or to have their right to protest protected. This can only lead to disaster. This is exactly what caused the destruction of the second Temple, according to the rabbis: senseless hatred, one Jew against the other. It did not just stop with name-calling either. It ended up with assassinations and pitched battles. Each group felt that they knew what was good for the Jewish people, and they would brook no interference from those who would stop them from effecting their plans.

In the *Torah* portion *Vayigash*, we learn about Yosef's reconciliation

with his brothers. The brothers had made the terrible error of thinking that only they knew what was best for their family. They did not get rid of Yosef, solely because they were jealous of him. They got rid of Yosef because they thought he was destroying their family. Yosef was telling them that they had to stop being shepherds, that they had to change their lives, that a new day was dawning. That's why he had dreams of sheaves in the middle of the field. What did sheaves have to do with his family? His family were shepherds. He was also advocating that the sons of Leah treat the sons of the handmaidens, Bilha and Zilpa, as equals. He also had undue influence over his father, they felt. If his ideas would be listened to, they and their families would suffer. Besides, some of his ideas seemed to be against the traditions of their family. They thought that he was even going against the will of G-d, and they had to get rid of him. Because of their actions, the rabbis say the Jewish people were to suffer the Egyptian exile for 210 years. The brothers made the egregious error of thinking that because they knew what was best for the Jewish people, they could trample over the rights of another Jew.

Yosef is known as Yosef Hatzadek. There are many reasons he is known as Yosef Hatzadek. He withstood the blandishments of Pontifar's wife; he was proud of his Jewish identity, even in Egypt. However, the main reason why I believe he was known as Yosef Hatzadek, Yosef the righteous, was because he understood that he could never fathom G-d's ways completely and that he could never identify his enemies as G-d's enemies and his desires as G-d's desires. The brothers were terrified, after Yosef revealed himself to them, that he would take vengeance upon them but, instead, Yosef told them, "G-d sent me before you to save you for a great deliverance." In other words, Yosef did not consider his enemies to be G-d's enemies. He was not going to punish them; that was up to G-d. They would have to live with their own consciences. Everything did turn out for the best, because G-d can even turn the evil that we do, to good, but we should not count on it. G-d should judge his brothers. In fact, Yosef says this explicitly in the *Torah* portion *Vayechi*. After Jacob dies and is buried in the land of Canaan, Yosef's brothers come to him and they say, "Your father commanded before his death, saying, 'Please forgive the sin of your brothers, for they did unto you evil,' and Yosef wept when they spoke to

him and he said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Am I in G-d's place?'" Yosef was a *tzadek* because he did not consider those who disagreed with him and, even in this case, those who wronged him, enemies of G-d. He was not their judge. G-d would do what would be appropriate.

This lesson, I believe, is very important for the Jewish people today. We all hope and pray that the peace process that was initiated by Rabin shaking the hand of Arafat will only turn out to be good. We hope that, in spite of all the recent terrorist incidents, peace will come to the land of Israel. King Hussein has already signed a peace treaty with Israel, and we hope that it will be cemented with commercial, cultural, and personal ties, and that Israel and Jordan will have normal relations. The Vatican has also recognized Israel, which can have very good long-range implications for the Jews, especially in the *diaspora*. However, in the pursuit of this great goal of peace, those in charge must not run roughshod over the rights of every Jew to disagree with this point or that point of the peace process. There are two ways the Jewish people can be destroyed. We can be destroyed from the outside, and we can be destroyed from the inside. Unless the strict democratic procedures are always maintained so that the rights of the opposition are always safeguarded, there will be great danger to Israel's very existence from the inside. What the left wants to do to the right in order to further the peace process, shortcutting basic human rights, can after the next election, or the election after that, be done by the right against the left.

Yosef was a *tzadek* because he did not try to play G-d, even when he was convinced he was 100 percent right. Intellectuals, whether they are secular or religious, many times feel they are so right that they can impose their will upon the people, even against the people's will, because they feel it is for the people's own good. This will never work, and this has never worked. The end never justifies the means in these circumstances. This can only lead to hatred and bloodshed. As Yosef said, "Am I in place of G-d?" Everyone's rights must be protected and basic human rights must never be infringed upon, even in pursuit of such a worthwhile and wonderful goal as peace.