

10-17-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *B'reshit* (Beginning)
Torah Portion: Genesis 1:1 – 6:8
Haftarah: Isaiah 42:5-43
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Matt 18:15-20

Biblical Dispute Resolution 18 – The Decision Tree 2 – The First Conversation

Central question:

We are this week once again beginning our reading of the Torah from Genesis in the continuing spiral of annual learning of G-d's ways. We are in parasha *B'reshit*. Its name comes from the first through the third words in English, and the first word in the original Hebrew.

Gen 1:1-5

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 And

God called the light day, and the darkness He called night.

And there was evening and there was morning, one day

1:1

בְּרֵאשִׁית	בָּרָא	אֱלֹהִים	אֶת	הַשָּׁמַיִם	וְאֶת	הָאָרֶץ:
In the beginning	created	God		the Heaven	and	the earth.
7225	1254	430	853	8064	853	776

2

וְהָאָרֶץ	הָיְתָה	לִחְוָה	וְנִבְהוּ	וְחָשֶׁךְ	עַל-	פְּנֵי
And the earth	was	without form,	and void;	and darkness	upon	the face of
776	1961	8414	922	2822	5999	5921

תְּהוֹם	וְרוּחַ	אֱלֹהִים	מְרַחֶפֶת	עַל-	פְּנֵי	הַמַּיִם:
the deep.	And the Spirit of	God	moved	upon	the face of	the waters.
8415	7307	430	7363	5921	6440	4325

3

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֱלֹהִים	יְהִי	אֹר	וַיְהִי-	אֹר:
And said,	God	Let there be	light:	and there was	light.
559	430	1961	216	1961	216

4

וַיִּרְא	אֱלֹהִים	אֶת-	הָאֹר	כִּי-	טוֹב	וַיַּבְדֵּל
And saw	God		the light,	that	it was	and divided
7200	430	853	216	3588	9999	914

בֵּין	הָאֹר	וּבֵין	הַחֹשֶׁךְ:
from	the light		the darkness.
996	216	996	2822

5

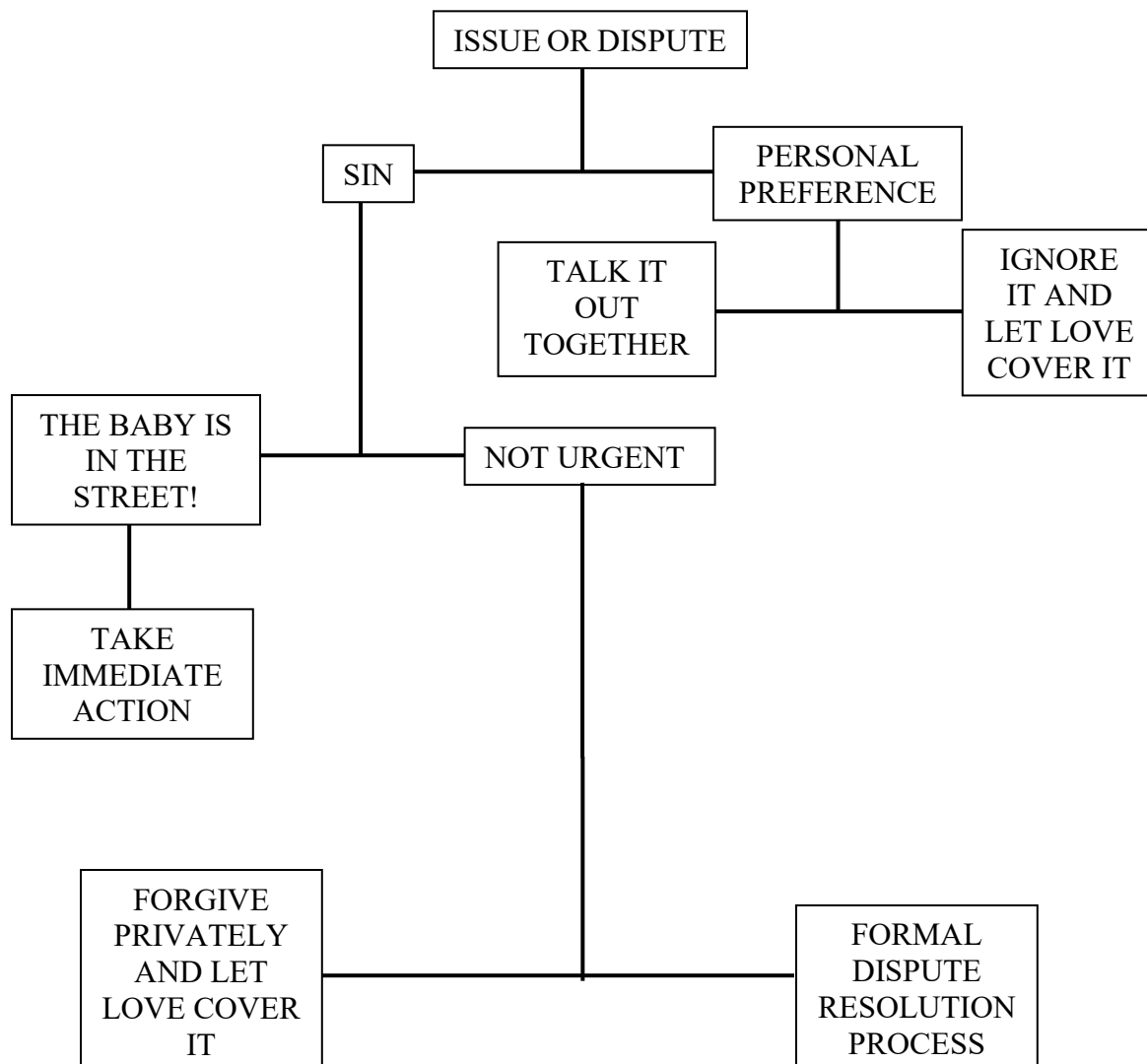
וַיִּקְרָא	אֱלֹהִים	לְאֹר	יוֹם	וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ	קָרָא	לַיְלָה
And called	God	the light	Day,	and the darkness	he called	Night.
7121	430	216	3117	2822	7121	3915

עֶרֶב	וַיְהִי-	בֹקֶר	יוֹם	אֶחָד:
the evening	were	the morning	day.	the first
6153	1961	1242	3117	259

We are beginning the new Torah cycle and much will be made new to us in this coming year, but I wish to continue our series in Biblical Dispute

Resolution, in hopes that our walk with G-d and one another will be better in the coming year than it was in the last.

In our last lesson, we went through the decision tree all the way down to the point where we determined that the matter was properly identified as a sin (as opposed to a personal preference), and that it is not so urgent as to require immediate action.



Today we will begin talking about the formal dispute resolution process.

We find some instructions in the gospels which offer a summary of the process.

Matt 18:15-20

15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. 18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

What Yeshua was doing is not unusual for Him to do. He used a short summary of a much larger process to invoke a much larger truth which was already in the minds of those who were hearing His words.

In this part of the series, we will unpack that entire process, and show how it is proper to carry it out today. We will take it step by step.

Be Certain the Conduct can be Described as a Sin

The first step in this process is to check your heart to be certain that you are exercising a strong presumption of innocence.

Once you have determined that the matter is one for a formal process, you need to first be certain that the matter is one of a sin. According to our people's counting, there are 248 positive commands in Torah, and 365 negative commandments. Maimonides declared there were 613 commandments.¹ Some scholars have determined that there are only 270 commands that we are to observe, regardless of circumstances. Of these, 48 are positive commandments, and 222 are negative ones.² Thus, we should have an easier time in searching Torah for the answer to our question. One can also search the latter writings³ for further guidance.

¹ A listing of them can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/613_commandments#cite_note-1

² https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/541686/jewish/How-Many-of-the-Torahs-Commandments-Still-Apply.htm

³ Which many today call the "New Testament."

These teachings are elaborations on the way of righteousness found in Torah. So, you might find a bit of redundancy there. Identifying the same action (or inaction) in more than one place in the Bible is always a good idea.

When you can write down in a sentence or two the general description of the conduct that you believe you have witnessed, and can put your finger on one or more verses of Scripture which either prohibit conduct which occurred, or mandate conduct which did not occur, then you are ready to go to the next step.

Get Your Own Heart Right

Next, you need to be certain your heart is right for the process to continue. Since this is not a “baby is in the street” issue, you have some time. You have taken some time to search out the Scriptures to find those which address the issue at hand, and hopefully you have also searched-out the Scriptures to see how your heart should be postured to continue.

My personal standard is as follows: If you have tears in your eyes because of the offense you have suffered by the sin, you are probably not ready to go to the other person yet. If you have tears in your eyes for that other

person's failings from G-d's standard, then you might be ready to go to that person.

Another option at this juncture is to decide to simply let it go and forget it.

1 Peter 4:8-9

8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another,
because love covers a multitude of sins.

That is also an honorable thing to do, even though we are to seek justice as well. Where to strike this balance is in many ways situationally dependent, and the Spirit will lead you in the right path, if you will sincerely pray and seek guidance.

But if you do decide to just "let it go" you must also work to clear it out of your heart. If you do not, an offense left to fester will eat your soul. Most importantly, you must not speak of it to anyone else, for in doing so you will be sinning.

Prov 17:7

9 He who covers a transgression seeks love,
But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

If you chose to go forward, then there are additional things to be done.

Start With the Presumption of Innocence, and be Certain You Have the Facts Right

To do this, you must be able to see clearly. Scripture commands us to be certain our lifestyle is clean enough so that we can better see what we are to do in this process, and it combines that instruction with a reminder to apply a gracious presumption of innocence to our judgment of the facts.

Matt 7:1-5

7 "Do not judge lest you be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the

log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

If we apply the presumption of innocence to another at the outset, then it seems that G-d will apply the presumption of innocence to us as well, as Satan approaches His throne to accuse us of wrongs.

Then the passage indicates that we should spend some time removing anything in our lives which might cloud our judgment or our ability to see things clearly as we go forward.

One thing we must do to clear our field of vision in this process is to examine our conclusions to be certain that all the facts support them. If as we write-out the few sentences which represent the accusation of sin, we must examine all the facts upon which that accusation is based. It is best to write-out all the facts that support that accusation before we write the accusation.

Do all the facts line up properly? Are we filling-in any areas where there are no facts with a connection that really isn't there? Taking an incomplete set of facts, and adding to them some imaginings of your own is a formula for your own failings – and can lead to the making of a false accusation.

If there are some blank spaces in the facts, then you might wish to do some additional investigation to fill those blanks.

One way to move forward, even with some blank spaces in the facts, is to go to the person you believe might have sinned, and present the facts as you believe them to be, and identify the particular sins that you believe might be implicated. You can then tell the person that you don't have all the facts, and so are not making an accusation, but you wish to have more facts to either refute or establish the idea of sin. Tell the person that you simply seek to have a quiet heart on the matter, and need his help.

If the person is in sin and knows that giving you the missing facts will lead to an accusation, you can expect resistance from that person, and he won't be forthright in giving you information. But if that person recognizes that your heart is right for making the further inquiry, then it is more likely that you will be able to hear directly from that person's mouth the additional facts that are likely (from his viewpoint) to exonerate him from sin. How this exchange goes will tell you much.

I recommend that you consider writing down all the facts that you have found to be true, and then writing down the verses that address these facts as sinful. This list will be very useful when you go to speak with the other

person. It will keep you on-track and will keep you from forgetting important details as the stress of the conversation increases.

I also recommend you spend some time in prayer before going to the next step. You will need divine guidance as well as courage going forward.

Go Speak to the Other Person in Private

It is best to make an appointment with the other person, and you may wish to inform him of the reason for the meeting. If the other person believes that the meeting is one of a more social nature, and it is really for a conversation about a potential sin, then the other person will see what you have done as an ambush, rather than an attempt to follow Scripture. Since this meeting is to be private, it is best to pick a neutral location which has no chance of eavesdropping by anyone else. Be prepared that the other person may refuse to speak with you. If so, you need to go to the next step.

I recommend you go alone, if you can, during this phase. I have seen instances where a more timid person feared going to such a meeting with a more powerful person. In such cases, I have volunteered to go with the person for moral support. I have been able to moderate the proceedings to keep the conversation going in a productive fashion, as well. I would

recommend not taking another witness or even another lay person with you at this time. This needs to be a conversation, and if two or more people show up to engage in the confrontation, then it will appear more like you are “ganging up” on the other person, and just that appearance at the outset will put a chill on the conversation. If you take an elder, and that elder sits off at a short distance, that should be sufficient. Again, the elder can intervene in the conversation should it start to become an argument, or in any other way become non-productive.

If you get to this point, and decide (for whatever reason) that you will not go to the other person to have a conversation about the issue, then you are left with only one option – drop it completely. That will be difficult to do, because human nature wishes to “keep a record of wrongs” but Scripture tells us that love must not do such a thing.⁴ Remember, if you allow a perceived wrong (whether it is supported by facts and Scripture or not) to remain in your heart, it will eat away at you like a spiritual cancer.

Remember to speak in a way that facilitates a good, productive conversation. It will be good to review the lessons on how to speak with one another one more time before going to have this conversation.

⁴ 1 Cor 13:5

When with the other person, your body language will speak volumes. If you have an aggressive posture, that will set a tone for argument. If you are relaxed, and cordial, that will set a tone for a loving conversation that can be very productive.

You can begin the substantive part of the conversation with the following statement: “Here are some facts that I believe are correct, and which concern me.” This is much less threatening than, “Here is what you did.” Or, “Here are the facts.” You might ask if you are right in your belief regarding this fact, and allow time for a response. If the other person has comments on each of those facts, you can write-down the responses so that you can keep track of what is admitted, and what is contested. If you don’t write this down, you will likely forget it later, if you are trying to evaluate the various responses. If the person admits the fact, then you should note that as well.

Once you have finished with your statement of the facts (and if you have needed to reframe any facts due to the other person’s input) and have gotten a more accurate set of facts, then you should re-evaluate those facts in light of the Scriptures you have selected which you thought addressed those facts. Be prepared to replace those Scriptures with others, if you need to do so. You may need to adjourn the meeting at this point to go do further research based on the admitted facts (or revised facts). But if you

do so, make it clear that this is an adjournment, and not the end of the conversation. There is yet unfinished business to be done.

Once you have the facts established (if that is possible), and the Scripture which applies to those facts solidified, then you can state to the other person your conclusion that certain verses seem to apply. You can say it like this: “Given these facts, it seems that this verse applies.” Then you can read the passage and see if you get agreement. The other person can agree, or not. He might cite another passage that he thinks applies in a way which justifies his actions. He might simply deny that this passage applies to these facts. Or he might agree that the passage applies, but his actions are not sin.

Another potential outcome of the conversation can be that the person denies important facts which implicate certain Scriptures. If you still believe that the facts as you have presented them is accurate, then you should stop right there, and go to the next step.

So, the options from the first conversation are these:

1. The person refuses to speak to you at all.
2. The person denies certain facts that are essential to the sin.
3. The person denies all facts that are essential to the sin.

4. The person corrects certain facts and you agree to the correction, but believe those revised facts still support an accusation of sin.
5. The person corrects certain facts and you agree to the correction, and you determine that these new facts are not consistent with sin.
6. The person agrees to all the essential facts but denies sin.
7. The person agrees to all the essential facts, and admits sin.
8. The person agrees to all the essential facts, admits sin, but refuses to repent and restore.

Obviously, the best outcome of the conversation is that there is agreement that there is not a sin after all. If the agreement is that there is a sin, that conclusion should lead to immediate acts of repentance and restoration. With these two outcomes of the initial conversation, the formal process can end here.⁵ With the other possible outcomes, the process should continue to the next step.

We will continue to examine the next steps in this process in our next lesson.

⁵ However, if the one accused of sin is an elder or Rabbi, a further determination should be made by the covering authority regarding the fitness of the leader to continue in office, and any conditions for that continuing service.