

Ki Satzay

Frameworks, Survival, Lies, and Love

We all know that one of the hardest things to do is to give up our framework, our way of thinking about the world. It is this framework which allows us to determine what is important and what is not important in life. To give up an established way of thinking, a way of thinking which we have held since we left our parents' home and to adopt a different way of thinking is an excruciating experience. Each of us by the time we have either finished college or have gone out to work have constructed a way of thinking about the world, a framework which allows us to make sense of our present so that we can work for our future. Our view of the world energizes us. It tells us not only what things are important and what things are not important, but it also tells us who we are and what we have to do in order to make our lives successful and happy.

Many young people 60 years ago thought that Communism gave them this framework of thinking about the world and would order their priorities for them and would tell them how they should act or should not act. These Communist youths thought they were the harbingers of the future and they looked down on the previous generation which had a different way of looking at the world, primarily a religious view of the world. This older generation knew that the assumptions and framework of this Communist youth was false and would lead only to despair and to butchery. Competing also with the Communist way of looking at the world 60 years ago were the Nazis. The Nazis' framework for looking at the world was based on racism, survival of the fittest, etc., and was even worse than the Communists. We all know about the terrible consequences of the Nazi way of looking at the world, especially to our people.

One of the problems which has always vexed philosophers is where do people get the will to sacrifice for their ideals? The answer is that if a person believes that his ideas are true, then this will give him the will to sacrifice for them. Also, if we believe that in order for us to physically survive, we must do certain things, then we will do them even at great cost. The United States believed after Pearl Harbor that it had to fight Japan and Germany, if we were to survive. We were willing to take a great

many casualties and to amass a horrendous debt because we believed that our survival was at stake as a people. We believed and still believe that it is important that the United States survive as an independent nation because we believed and still believe that America is unique and that it has a special message still to give the world. We believe that the American political system, which has ensured domestic tranquility now for 130 years and which has allowed disparate peoples, races, and religions to live together basically in harmony for 218 years, is a model which is necessary for the world if the world is ever to have peace. The United States, though, has no desire to impose its ideas and ideals on other peoples forcibly and, therefore, unless America feels that its survival, itself, is threatened, it will not muster the will to intervene in foreign conflicts. We have no will to suffer casualties by trying to mediate other people's disputes, even though historically this has been the role of a great power. America would rather have others--France, Germany, Russia--do this task. We really do not have the stomach for it.

In the world today many of the assumptions and frameworks which held true during the Cold War no longer hold true. This is especially true of the frameworks of Jewish people in American and in Israel. We have seen in the modern world how nations can be defeated without a shot ever having been fired. The Soviet Union crumbled because nobody in the Soviet Union wanted to fight for Communism anymore. South Africa's apartheid regime was overturned, not by force of arms, but because the South African people no longer believed in apartheid. The argument has been made by many Jews in America that it really does not make any difference whether Judaism survives or not. To them, Judaism has already performed its function by remaining a viable entity until the modern era when almost all of its ideas were incorporated into the culture and political organization of the United States. The United States believes in the rule of law; so does Judaism. The United States stresses deed over creed; so does Judaism. The United States believes in personal freedom; so does Judaism. To many Jews, it is not important anymore to remain Jews in America. The most important thing is to be a good American. After all, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman were all good Americans and none of them were Jewish.

We are all very proud of the fact that President Clinton has appointed two Supreme Court justices, both of whom are Jewish: Judge Ginsburg and Judge Breyer. All of Judge Ginsburg's grandchildren are Catholic and all of Judge Breyer's children are Episcopalians. Their appointments to the Supreme Court do not mean that Judaism is thriving in America; it just means that Jews are now so fully accepted in America that they can assimilate with ease.

In Israel, too, there have been big changes. For many, the whole idea of the Zionist enterprise, a Jewish State, is being called into question. To many of them it is not important any more that Israel reflect Jewish values. In fact, they would rather Israel not reflect Jewish values because they believe that this will only make for constant conflict between Israel and her Arab neighbors. To them it would be much better if Israel would just become another Levantine state. That way the whole problem of Arab-Jewish relations would be attenuated. Israel should not be unique or special. It should blend into the Middle East. This is part of the internal battle which is going on in Israel today. It is not just about what kind of peace Israel should have with the Arabs, but it is about what type of state Israel should be. There are some who would go so far as to want the Jews in Israel to break off all their contacts with their past. In fact, there are some who claim that Israel should no longer send its high school students to Poland to see Auschwitz because it makes the Jewish youth too nationalistic and gives them a Holocaust complex. This was seriously proposed by Shulamit Aloni, a former Education Minister. Right now the framework, the assumptions which have been made by American Jewry and Israel Jewry as to what we should be in the future is very much up in the air. The previous framework has broken for many people and, as of yet, there is not a new framework to replace it.

This conflict as to how we Jews should view the world is nothing new. This effort to change the way Jews have traditionally looked at the world is something which has been going on since the time of the Exodus. We learn in the *Torah* portion *Ki Thetze* how everyone can convert to Judaism except for the Ammonite and Moabite men. (Nowadays there are no Ammonite or Moabite nations so everyone can become a Jew.) The reasons given are: (1) because they were not a hospitable people and begrudged

giving bread and water to the Jewish people when they left Egypt (They would rather let people die than help them) and (2) because they hired Bilam, the son of Be'or, to curse the Jewish people. What Balak, the head of the Moabites, knew when he hired Bilam was that you could not destroy the Jewish people frontally by attacking them. He knew that there was only one way to destroy the Jewish people and that was to get them to change their view of the world so that they would lose heart and destroy themselves. Balak knew that the only way to destroy the Jewish people was to make them lose their will to be Jews. The pen is mightier than the sword because if you can convince a people that it is not worthwhile fighting for its ideals, then they will give up without a fight. Bilam failed to curse the Jewish people because G-d would not let him, but he did give Balak advice on how to destroy the Jewish people, and we find that his advice was very effective. He told him to entice the Jewish people into licentious idol worship. Get the Jewish people so enamored of your culture and your ways that they will not want to fight for their own ways, was his message.

We learn how Zimri Ben Saluh, who was the head of the Tribe of Shimon, consorted with Kozbi Bas Tzor performing licentious acts right in front of Moshe and the elders. The rabbis explain that Zimri's act was not an act of passion. Zimri did what he did because he had a calculated political agenda. He was one of the Jewish people's best leaders. *Zimri* means in Hebrew "the best." "Ben Saluh" can also mean "a person who weighs everything." He weighed his actions very carefully. He knew what he was doing. He was telling Moshe Rabbeinu that the Jewish people had to be like the Canaanites, the Moabites, and Midianites if they were to survive in this world. They could not maintain a unique and special society; otherwise, there would be constant warfare. They had to adopt the mores of the people around them. True, they could have a special Hebrew dialect and a few special songs, but, by and large, they had to be culturally and politically like the peoples around them; otherwise, they would never be able to integrate into this area. He had a message to sell and that's why he did what he did. In fact, the name of the girl who he was consorting with, "*Kozbi*," in Hebrew means "lies."

The rabbis say that was not her real name, but Zimri called her Kozbi,

the daughter of Tzur, because in order to sell his agenda, he wrapped up what he was doing in lies. "Tzur" in Hebrew means "to wrap or to tie." He felt that his cause was so just that he could wrap it in lies. It was especially astonishing that it was the head of the Tribe of Shimon which propounded this philosophy because it was Shimon, together with Levi, who years earlier had taken vengeance on the whole city of Shechem because the son of the chief of Shechem had raped their sister Dena. Jacob never forgave Shimon and Levi for this. Shimon was known as an extremist, and we should all remember that in order for the Jewish people to survive, extremism on the left or the right is wrong. Extremism will never save the Jewish people, whether it is by erecting walls to prevent all intercourse with other peoples or if it is by claiming that only if we integrate totally and change our customs completely can we survive in peace. Hitler, by the way, considered the assimilated Jew a much greater threat than the traditional Jew.

In America today we constantly tell each other lies. We say, for example, that the only way we can prevent our children from assimilating is by making sure that there is no prayer in the public schools, when really this is not the case at all. We do not want to have any prayer in the public schools because we are afraid that some teacher or administrator will take offense when our children do not pray other religion's prayers and this will cause them not to receive the grades necessary in order for them to get into the best colleges so they can earn higher salaries and integrate more fully into America. That this is the real reason is proven by the fact that many leaders of the Jewish community throughout the United States send their children to Christian private high schools which have compulsory chapel and many of whose uniforms have crosses displayed on them. Graduating from these schools will allow the children of these Jewish leaders to get into the best colleges. These Jewish leaders are not concerned about Christian prayers. They are concerned about getting their children into the best colleges. We also tell lies to ourselves when we say that a few hours of Jewish education is just as effective as many hours, that the synagogue and school can keep our children Jews even if we do not practice any Judaism in our homes.

In Israel today, even though Arafat proclaims that he is going to have

a Palestinian State whose capitol will be Jerusalem and that he is prepared to launch a Jihad to achieve this, many Jews do not believe him and pretend that even if he said these things, he does not mean them. They, too, are lying to themselves. There is only one thing that can assure that Israel will be Jewish and that the Jewish people in America will survive, and that is if the Jewish people really believe that it is important that we survive as Jews; otherwise, we will not be willing to make the necessary sacrifices to assure that we will survive. Judaism has only survived throughout the ages because we Jews have loved our religion and our traditions and have always believed that these traditions must be maintained not only for ourselves alone, but also for the world, that the whole world needs them if the world is ever to be redeemed.

In the *Torah* portion *Ki Thetze* we have more commandments enunciated than in any other *Torah* portion, and the undelying theme of almost all these *mitzvahs* is compassion, love for our fellow human being, G-d's closeness to man and our ability to have a relationship with G-d and with man. We Jewish people have always loved our religion, its ethics, and its ritual, and it is because of this great love that we have been able to endure the persecutions because we knew that it was all worthwhile. The great moral teachings and rituals of our faith enhance a person's life and raise a person to a higher spiritual level. Every human being is unique and special and can form a meaningful relationship with G-d and must be treated with care and consideration. The poor, the downtrodden, the helpless, and the hopeless must be taken care of and be given access to all the comforting spirituality of our faith. It is only if we will truly love our religion and want to see it perpetuated, not only because it is so good for the world, but also because it elevates our lives and gives our lives such great meaning and purpose, will Judaism survive. Let us all hope and pray that each of us will love our religion so much that none of us will want to see it die but will make the necessary sacrifices in order to make sure that it will continue.