Twisted Jewish ethics

Try on this logic. Think hard. It’s dense.

An Israeli Knesset member says that Israeli revenge would preclude Arab terrorism. If Israelis burn an Arab baby to death in Duma, and if it stems from racism, it is wrong. But if it stems from revenge, it is justified “on the basis of the hostility and war of annihilation the Arabs are conducting against us.”

“The Arabs.” All Arabs? Includ-
ing babies?

The Knesset Member, Bezalel Snotrich of the Jewish Home par-
ty, is quoted as saying:

“It is possible to assume that if the State of Israel had not erased, under the influence of twisted Chris-
tian morality, the word revenge from its lexicon . . . we would not have been faced with these harsh inci-
dents of private individuals taking the laws and revenge into their own hands.”

“Gap year.”

Or: “Seminaries.”

Or: “Work-study program in Israel after high school.”

They all took their inspiration from Rabbi Yehuda Copperman — he of the five lives, any one of which another per-son would consider more than sufficient justification of his life — who died last January. His multi-
faceted legacy will continue to unfold for generations to come.

Back in 1956 — 60 years ago — he began to teach students in his living room in Jerusalem. This grew into a few rented classrooms in the Bayit Vegan neighborhood of Jerusalem, which he called, seem-
gringly grandiosely, “The Jerusalem College for Women” (Michlala), in 1964.

At the time, virtually no American Jewish stu-
dents went to Israel after high school. Yes, there were a couple of small pro-
grams; some eventually folded, some continued; but none grew in size, vision and dimension like Rabbi Copperman’s col-
lege. Only 15 years later, it was enunciated on a major campus; it had raised by leaps and bounds the requirements for becoming a teacher; it had branched out into many fields, from the sci-
ces to the history of the Holocaust; it had achiev-
ed academic status.

It had educated thou-
sands of students and inspired hundreds of teachers to go out into the wide and barren land of Jewish education, to make a contribution.

It had set a tone: There is a qual-
ity education and an indispensable experience in the Holy Land for Amer-
ican Jewish post-high school stu-
dents. Come! You’ll be forever grateful you did.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Rabbi Yehuda Copper-
man was flattered beyond measure, as school upon school, seminary upon seminary, program upon program, followed in his footsteps.

Thus, his first life: institutional pioneer and able administrator — a person who knew instinctively just when to be unbounding, as school principals must sometimes be, and just when to be flexible, as school principals must sometimes be.

Which brings us to his second life: foremost of humor. He never wasted words, with a gentle and ever present sense of joie de vivre.

His third life: teacher. Even as his institu-
tion grew, Rabbi Copperman was like a separate life, as if he were a full-time lecturer in a university or a yeshiva. He hit upon the five volumes of commentary on the Torah by the acknowledged polymath, Rab-i Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926), one of those rabbinic com-
ments so full of quotes and references, stated and implied, that it rises to the level of a great-
ly admired — but closed — book. Rabbi Copperman opened it up. Night after night, verse upon verse, page after page, volume after vol-
ume, he dedicated years to reading and publishing what is now a clas-
sic. As we say, many a full-time schol-

ative. Engaging. Fully focused on the text, yet also able to throw in a point of humor or a poignant sto-
ry. He succeeded in demanding high standards because he made the Bible come alive.

His fourth life: scholar. It really was like a separate life, as if he were a full-time lecturer in a university or a yeshiva. He hit upon the five volumes of commentary on the Torah by the acknowledged polymath, Rab-i Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926), one of those rabbinic com-
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His fifth life: Family man, progenitor of schol-
ars, teachers and admin-
istrators like himself, one-half of a couple who loved to do much, much-
er, full of joie de vivre.

Rabbi Copperman has gone on to his eternal reward, leaving behind not only the thousands of students and colleagues like himself, who learned from him but the countless students of the future who will benefit from his institution’s phenomenal books and his example.

Born in Ireland, edu-
cated in England, Chica-
go and Israel, he became a legend of Jerusalem.

The five lives of Rabbi Yehuda Copperman

In other words: If we practice revenge first, you won’t practice revenge later. The logic, as we say, is dense. To boot, this logic is said to be Jewish, not “twisted Christian morality.”

We cannot speak for Christian morality. We doubt that MK Smotrich can either. We can say that the morality invoked here is defi-
nitely a twisted version of Jewish morality. We do know, lo and behold, that the Torah says, “Do not take revenge” — right in this week’s Torah portion! (Lev. 19:18). Hmmm. Sounds like a Jewish source to us: the Torah. Don’t take revenge. Not to mention, an act of revenge presumes a prior act; in Smotrich’s context, an act of Arab terrorism. So how is revenge, which follows a terrorist act, supposed to prevent it in the first place?

Even to get into the “logic” of Snotrich’s twisted comments is to enter a cesspool, for how is the burning of a baby justified on any grounds? He says that if a baby is burned to death because of “the hatred of the other only because they are different,” it is wrong. But if the same murderous act stems from “anger” and “a desire for revenge” on the basis of the “hostility and war of annihilation the Arabs are con-
ducting against us,” it is right. The same murderous act: with one intention — it is wrong; with another intention — it is right. Even so, writes Smotrich, the murder in Duma was “serious and forbid-
den.” Go figure.

G’d save us from ethicists like Smotrich — who are members of Knesset, no less.

Smotrich is a classic case of a pre-
determined answer looking for a ret-
rospective justification. His answer is anti-Arab violence. His justifica-
tion is Jewish revenge, which, how-
ever, is not Jewish at all. After all, check the Torah as it is read this very week. Then toss in gratuitous anti-Christian rhetoric and the view that Arabs are responsible for Jew-
ish violence against them, and we reach this conclusion of Smotrich: “If the Arabs had not fought against us, not a single Arab would have been killed here.”

As if the preponderent intolerance and violence of Israel’s ene-
mies justifies killing the peaceful among them under the banner of “anger and a desire for revenge, jus-
tified in their own right.”

Justified by what? Not by the Torah. Anger is also rounded con-
demned in the Jewish treatises on ethics. And stereotyping “the Arabs”? Murder of Arabs by Jews on the basis of anger and revenge . . . it is a sad day when such dangerous drivel derives from a Jewish lawmaker in the State of Israel.

What do Bezalel Snotrich’s Jew-
ish Home party leaders, such as Naftali Bennett, have to say about this?

Dry Bones

THE HUNGRY WOLF WORE "SHEEP'S CLOTHING" TO WALK AMONG THE INNOCENT SHEEP.

THE WAY TODAY'S ANTI-SEMITISM DISGUISES ITSELF AS ANTI-ZIONISM.