Defending the Guilty; Using Non-Jewish Bible Translations; Politics at the Shabbat Table; Family Feuds: Rabbi Marc Angel Replies to Questions from the Jewish Press

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Should a lawyer defend someone in court whom he thinks is guilty? What if the man is truly despicable (e.g., a child killer)?

Each attorney needs to make his or her own decision. This entails a moral balancing act.

On the one hand, an attorney is paid to represent the client; even a reprehensible individual has a right to legal representation. On the other hand, an attorney's conscience may veto representing a client felt or known to be guilty.

One of the great barristers of fiction, Horace Rumpole, described his role as being like a taxi available for hire…even to passengers he did not like. Thus, he often defended criminals. But Rumpole dreaded a client who admitted guilt; even Rumpole wouldn't be able to defend a client he absolutely knew to be guilty.

The goal of a trial is to achieve justice. If a clever attorney can gain acquittal for a criminal, this is not justice. If a client is convicted because of lack of a proper defense attorney, this also is not justice.

Before taking on a client, an attorney needs to remember the Torah's demand: *tsedek tsedek tirdof*, you shall surely pursue justice. Your ultimate responsibility is not just to the client, but also to the legal system and society as a whole. And you want to be able to sleep at night!

In looking up a *pasuk* online, the first result one gets is usually the King James translation or another Christian translation. Can one use this translation if the *pasuk* isn't Isaiah 53:5 or something similar?

I generally prefer to provide my own translations. When I do use existing translations, I prefer the Jerusalem Bible translation of Koren Publishers, or the Bible translation of the Jewish Publication Society of America.

I think it is fine to draw on the King James translation (or other Christian translations) as long as the verses are not translated using Christological interpretations.

Rabbi Hayyim Angel has written about an interesting observation of a 12th century sage, Rabbi Yosef ibn Aknin. In his commentary to Shir haShirim, he noted several rabbinic precedents for utilizing Christian and Muslim writings. He quoted a story related by Shemuel haNagid: R. Mazliah b. Albazek the rabbinic judge of Saklia told [Shemuel HaNagid] when he came from Baghdad…that one day in [R. Hai Gaon's] yeshivah they studied the verse, "let my head not refuse such choice oil" (Psalms 141:5), and those present debated its meaning. R. Hai of blessed memory told R. Mazliah to go to the Catholic Patriarch and ask him what he knew about this verse, and this upset [R. Mazliah]. When [R. Hai] saw that R. Mazliah was upset, he rebuked him: "Our saintly predecessors who are our guides solicited information on language and interpretation from many religious communities—and even of shepherds, as is well known!"

When offering translations of Biblical verses, we should draw on those sources that provide the best understanding of the text.

Is it appropriate to discuss politics at the Shabbos table?

The Shulhan Arukh (O. H. 307:1) codifies the Talmudic teaching that one's speech on Shabbat should not be like one's speech on week days. We ought to avoid conversations about mundane matters, but rather should speak about ideas and ideals of Torah value.

In principle, then, discussions/arguments about politics are not in the proper spirit of Shabbat. If those at the Shabbat table have strong opposing opinions, the conversation could become heated and unpleasant.

Yet, political discussions sometimes relate to moral issues that affect us and our society…and the well-being of the State of Israel. Those around the Shabbat table may be deeply concerned about these issues and feel the need to discuss them with others. As long as such conversations are "leshem Shamayim" and genuinely seek moral clarity, I believe they are within permitted limits for Shabbat conversation. But if they entail lashon hara or antagonistic comments, they should certainly be avoided—even on weekdays!

Shabbat offers us an opportunity to rise above our mundane lives at least one day a week. This does not mean that we become oblivious to our everyday concerns, only that we try to set those concerns aside to the extent possible. The goal of our Shabbat conversations should be to elevate our thoughts and our words…and to set a standard for our thoughts and words during the weekdays as well.

Should one take sides in a family fight? If yes, under what circumstances?

The Torah presents us with a remarkable challenge: to walk in God's ways (Devarim 28:9). Rabbi Hayyim Palachi, a sage of 19th century Izmir, pointed out that to "walk in His ways" entails positive action. It is not enough to feel righteous; you must "walk" and actively pursue

opportunities to help others.

One of Hashem's names is Shalom…peace. In seeking to walk in Hashem's ways, it isn't enough to have nice thoughts about peace. One must act to bring peace.

Family feuds might be on trivial matters that can be resolved with moderate goodwill and compromise. But some feuds are very intense. How can we "walk" in Hashem's ways if we ourselves are involved in the feuds and have strong views on who is right and who is wrong?

First: don't be party to a family dispute. Even if you feel that you are right, don't persist in arguing. Make your case, state your concerns and then hope the others will do the right thing. If they do, great. If they don't, let it pass. Even if you "lose" the fight, you have won by keeping your dignity and uprightness.

Second: if the feud doesn't affect you directly, try speaking with members of both sides of the dispute. Point out ways that they can reach a compromise without engendering ill-will and permanent damage to family solidarity.

Third: remember that your first obligation is to "walk" in Hashem's ways and be a good and upright person.