

“Ancient Driving”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Did the Talmud anticipate city traffic? You might think that since there were no cars, no streetlights, and very few SUV's (some Roman chariots *were* extravagant, after all), that the Talmud may have missed this subject.

But as Daniel Feldman's book *The Right and the Good* reminds us, the Talmud and later authorities warn us not only against violence, but also against a threatening gesture. As Rabbi Feldman writes, the Talmud is concerned by such displays: "The civic relationship between human beings is disrupted, lowered to an animalistic conflict."

Much of our civic interaction, sadly, takes place between people looking out of car windows. Still the tone matters. People who cut in front of another car on one block scream at those who do the same a block later. Mistakes are seen as acts of aggression and frustration leads to rage and rage leads to the dark side. Pedestrians are endangered, children unnerved, drivers debased.

The great chess player Aron Nimzovitch used to say, "The threat is stronger than its execution." Sometimes the gesture, in a home or in the street, is more powerful and lasting even than a blow. So if we may reformulate the wisdom of our rabbis in modern terms, it would go like this: Be kind, be forgiving, and drive carefully.