

Is Tolerance in the Tanakh?

By

Yochanan Zaquantov

One of the things that Karaites like myself teach is tolerance in other people's interpretations as long as they well formed from Miqra and the holding of that interpretation is a possible interpretation even if minority held. From the Karaite position it is based up reading the Miqra and reason that we come up with this. So the question of the title is, can one find a concept of tolerance in the Tanakh and when would it appropriate to show tolerance and when not.

The first Hebrew word we will look at is Riv or Riyv (Resh-Yod-Bet) which is a verb and is reference number 7378. You can find it in the BDB on page 936 and in the NEHC on page 1171.

Bereshit/Genesis 26:22

22 He moved from there and dug yet another well, **and they did not quarrel (valo ravu וְלֹא רָבוּ)** over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, "Now at last Yehovah has granted us ample space to increase in the land."

Ravu or They Quarrel is what this verse uses for an argument.

Bamidbar/Numbers 20:13

13 Those are the Waters of Meribah—meaning that the Israelites quarreled (ravu רָבוּ) with Yehovah—through which He affirmed His sanctity.

The Benei Yisrael argued with Moshe, Aharon and ultimately with Yehovah.

Shemu'el Aleph/I Samuel 25:39

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praised be Yehovah who **championed my cause (rav et riv רָב אֶת־רִיב)** against the insults of Nabal and held back His servant from wrongdoing; Yehovah has brought Nabal's wrongdoing down on his own head."

David sent messengers to propose marriage to Abigail, to take her as his wife.

Here we see the verb form contended for taking up his argument or his side and the masculine noun form which is the argue Nabal and David had.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 25:8

8 Be vented rashly **in a quarrel** (**lariv לָרִיב**); Think of what it will effect in the end,
When your fellow puts you to shame.

Don't be quick to quarrel otherwise you may be ashamed in the end. Quarreling without fully being prepared.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 3:13

13 Yehovah stands up **to plead a cause** (**lariv לָרִיב**), He rises to champion peoples.

Like David talked about Yehovah will take up the cause of his people. He will take their side if it is just.

Yirmeyahu/Jeremiah 50:34

34 Their Redeemer is mighty, His name is LORD of Hosts. **He will champion their cause** (**riv yariv רִיב יָרִיב**)—So as to give rest to the earth, And unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon.

Again he will take up their side in the argument.

Tehillim/Psalms 35:1

1 Of David. Yehovah, **strive** (**rivah רִיבָה**) with my adversaries, give battle to my foes,

David asks Yehovah to take up his cause. Those who are in opposition to him.

Tehillim/Psalms 43:1

1 Vindicate me, Elohim, **champion my cause** (**verivah rivi וְרִיבָה רִיבִי**) against faithless people; rescue me from the treacherous, dishonest man.

Again David asks it for those working against him and not in the right.

Tehillim/Psalms 119:154

154 **Champion my cause** (**rivah rivi רִיבָה רִיבִי**) and redeem me; preserve me according to Your promise.

Here again like the earlier one of David it asks that Yehovah take our side in the argument and protect us.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 25:9

9 Defend your right (riv'kha riv רִיבְךָ רִיב) against your fellow, But do not give away the secrets of another,

It is ok to defend yourself in a cause but not to reveal secrets of another.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 1:17

17 Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; Aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; Defend the cause (rivu רִיבוּ) the widow.

Argue you for the Widow. Take up her cause.

Shemot/Exodus 21:18 (18-19)

18 When men quarrel (yerivun יִרִיבִין) and one strikes the other with stone or fist, and he does not die but has to take to his bed—**19** if he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff, the assailant shall go unpunished, except that he must pay for his idleness and his cure.

Quarreling can come to blows.

Bamidbar/Numbers 20:3

3 The people quarreled (vayarev וִיָּרֶב) with Moses, saying, “If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of Yehovah!

The confronted Moshe and start arguing with him.

Shemu'el Aleph/I Samuel 24:15 (16)

16 May Yehovah be arbiter and may He judge between you and me! May He take note and uphold my cause (veyarev et rivi וִיָּרֶב אֶת־רִיבִי), and vindicate me against you.”

May he confront my opponent in this my argument.

Nehemyah/Nehemia 5:7

7 After pondering the matter carefully, I censured the nobles and the prefects, saying, “Are you pressing claims on loans made to your brothers?” Then I raised a large crowd against them.

Nehemyah/Nehemia 13:11, 17, 25

11 I censured (va’arivah וְאַרִיבָהּ) the prefects, saying, “How is it that the House of HaElohim has been neglected?” Then I recalled [the Levites] and installed them again in their posts;

Nehemyah argued with the people to change their ways.

17 I censured (va’arivah וְאַרִיבָהּ) the nobles of Judah, saying to them, “What evil thing is this that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day!

Again Nehemia argues with the people.

25 I censured (va’ariv וְאַרִיב) them, cursed them, flogged them, tore out their hair, and adjured them by Elohim, saying, “You shall not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, or take any of their daughters for your sons or yourselves.

Nehemyah did a lot more than argue his point.

Mish’lei/Proverbs 3:30

30 Do not quarrel (tariv תִּרִיב) with a man for no cause, When he has done you no harm.

Don’t argue with a person who has done nothing to you.

You can see from these that there was much arguing in the Tanakh and each side has a cause and wanted Yehovah to find their position in the right. We too have these types of arguments today. We too ask him to find us right and them wrong. Yehovah in the end will judge one right and one wrong. That is why it is important to 1) study for the position we take, 2) look at that position and make sure it is well founded in the Tanakh, 3) consider the other point of view to see the weakness of your position. In the end when we argue we must be ready to defend of view. Next we look at the Masculine noun from riv.

The next Hebrew word we will look at is Riv or Riyv (Resh-Yod-Bet) which is a masculine noun and is reference number 7379. You can find it in the BDB on page 936 and in the NEHC on page 1171.

Bereshit/Genesis 13:7

7 And there was **quarreling (riv רִיב)** between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle.—The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.

This is essentially an argument. As a noun it is the thing which was being argued about. The cattle was the subject of the argument.

Shemot/Exodus 17:7

7 The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites **quarreled (riv רִיב)** and because they tried Yehovah, saying, “Is Yehovah present among us or not?”

Here is what they were arguing by saying. They were presenting a doubt whether Yehovah was really with them.

Shemot/Exodus 23:2, 3, 6

2 You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong—you shall not give perverse testimony in a **dispute (riv רִב)** so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty. 3 nor shall you show deference to a poor man **in his dispute (barivo בְּרִיבוֹ)**.

6 You shall not subvert the rights of your needy **in their disputes (barivo בְּרִיבוֹ)**.

In all three verses we see that we are not to work for or against the disputes when judging. Only judge right.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 17:8 (8-12)

8 If a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault—**matters of dispute (rivot רִיבֹת)** in your courts—you shall promptly repair to the place that Yehovah Eloheykha will have chosen, 9 and appear before the levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at the time, and present your problem. When they have announced to you the verdict in the case, 10 you shall carry out the verdict that is announced to you from that place that Yehovah chose, observing scrupulously all their instructions to you. 11 You shall act in accordance with the instructions given you and the ruling handed down to you; you must not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left. 12 Should a man act presumptuously and disregard the priest charged with serving there Yehovah Eloheykha, or the magistrate, that man shall die. Thus you will sweep out evil from Israel:

Here is the verse used to say that even today in the matters of disputes one is required to go by the magistrates of this time announce. However, is this really what this was understood to mean. This one clumps all matters religious and civil together. Then it refers to both Priests and Magistrates. We know that in matters when they were to get an answer for an unknown matter they would approach the Priest with the Urim and Thummim. That would be the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). Thus, he looked for an answer from Yehovah himself. We will look more at this later.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 19:17 (16-19)

16 If a man appears against another to testify maliciously and gives false testimony against him, 17 the two parties to **the dispute (hariv הַרִיב)** shall appear before Yehovah, before the priests or magistrates in authority at the time, 18 and the magistrates shall make a thorough investigation. If the man who testified is a false witness, if he has testified falsely against his fellow, 19 you shall do to him as he schemed to do to his fellow. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst;

The person making an accusation had to be truthful to be found right and if found wrong then he was punished in the way he asked for punishment to be done.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 25:1

1 When there is **a dispute (riv רִיב)** between men and they go to law, and a decision is rendered declaring the one in the right and the other in the wrong—2 if the guilty one is to be flogged, the magistrate shall have him lie down and be given lashes in his presence, by count, as his guilt warrants. 3 He may be given up to forty lashes, but not more, lest being flogged further, to excess, your brother be degraded before your eyes.

There is a limitation to the punishment especially for the whipping of a man.

Divrei HaYamim Bet/2 Chronicles 19:8, 10 (5-11)

5 He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified towns of Judah, in each and every town. 6 He charged the judges: “Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of man, but on behalf of Yehovah, and He is with you when you pass judgment. 7 Now let the dread of Yehovah be upon you; act with care, for there is no injustice or favoritism or bribe-taking with Yehovah Eloheynu.” 8 Jehoshaphat also appointed in Jerusalem some Levites and priests and heads of the clans of Israelites for rendering judgment in matters of Yehovah, **and for disputes (velariv וְלָרִיב)**. Then they returned to Jerusalem. 9 He charged them, “This is how you shall act: in fear of Yehovah, with fidelity, and with whole heart. 10 **When a dispute (vekol riv וְכָל-רִיב)** comes before you from your brothers living in their towns, whether about homicide, or about ritual, or laws or rules, you must instruct them so that they do not

incur guilt before Yehovah and wrath be upon you and your brothers. Act so and you will not incur guilt. **11** See, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all cases concerning Yehovah, and Zebadiah son of Ishmael is the commander of the house of Judah in all cases concerning the king; the Levitical officials are at your disposal; act with resolve and Yehovah be with the good.”

You will notice how Yehoshafat interpreted the Devarim 17 verse. The King judged on all civil matters and the Priest all religious matters. Thus, the magistrates would have been for the civil matters unknown. Only the Priest was to be used for religious matters that were unknown since they were given the duty to teach the people on religious matters.

Yehez'qel/Ezekiel 44:24 (21-24)

21 No priest shall drink wine when he enters into the inner court. **22** They shall not marry widows or divorced women; they may marry only virgins of the stock of the House of Israel, or widows who are widows of priests.

23 They shall declare to My people what is sacred and what is profane, and inform them what is clean and what is unclean. **24** **In lawsuits (ve'al riv וְעַל-רִיב)**, too, it is they who shall act as judges; they shall decide them in accordance with My rules. They shall preserve My teachings and My laws regarding all My fixed occasions; and they shall maintain the sanctity of My sabbaths.

Even in the future the Priest judge in matters of Religious rules.

So you see that the Devarim 17 matter of in dispute arguments is a matter for the High Priest and Yehovah to tell us what to do. Therefore, since we have no High Priest, no Urim or Thummim, no direct contact with the Elohey of our fathers, we have a problem. We can not make a decision and judge between two individuals on religious matters because if it is truly unknown and nothing is written in Torah on it, we can not say for certain who is in the right and who is in the wrong. There is the first reason for why Karaites allow for tolerance in opinions on interpretation. Lets look further.

The next Hebrew word we will look at is yakhach (Yod-Kaf-Chet) which is a verb and is reference number 3198. You can find it in the BDB on page 406 and in the NEHC on page 525. This is generally used for to reason.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 1:18

18 “Come, let us reach an understanding (lekhu na venivakh'chah/ to us please and we will reason לְכוּ-נָא וְנִבְחַחַהּ),—says Yehovah. Be your sins like crimson,

They can turn snow-white; Be they red as dyed wool, They can become like fleece.”

19 If, then, you agree and give heed, You will eat the good things of the earth; **20** But if you refuse and disobey, You will be devoured [by] the sword.—For it was Yehovah who spoke.

Yehovah invites us to see his point of view. This is really as close as we get to tolerance in the sense of reasoning in the Tanakh.

Shemu'el Bet/2 Samuel 7:14

14 I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to Me. When he does wrong, **I will chastise him (vehokhach'tiyv וְהִכַּחֲתִיו)** with the rod of men and the affliction of mortals;

Here he reasons with force. As a father reasons with us when we are wrong sometimes.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 19:25

25 Beat the scoffer and the simple will become clever; **Reprove (vehokhiach וְהוֹכִיחַ)** an intelligent man and he gains knowledge.

Reason with words and not beatings.

Bereshit/Genesis 31:37

36 Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, "What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me?"

37 You rummaged through all my things; what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, **and let them decide (veyokhiach וַיּוֹכִיחוּ)** between us two.

Let them reason between us. Let them choose who is right.

Vayiqra/Leviticus 19:17

17 You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. **Reprove (hokheach tochiach הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ)** your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him.

We are to reason with each other or in this case utterly reason.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 3:12

12 For whom Yehovah loves, **He rebukes (yokhiach יוֹכִיחַ)**, As a father the son whom he favors.

He reasons with us as a father to a son.

Mish'lei/Proverbs 30:6

5 Every word of Elo'ah is pure, A shield to those who take refuge in Him. 6 Do not add to His words, **Lest He indict you (yokhiach יוֹכִיחַ)** and you be proved a liar.

If one shows a person they are wrong it is through proof like Torah. Thus, saying that the torah says something it does not say. You are rebuked; reasoned, shown you are a liar. Thus, what we can prove from Tanakh is sure and from Torah true. There is neither tolerance nor difference of interpretation. When there is no proof or it is uncertain we cannot declare it known. However, where Karaites say there is latitude to interpret does not mean unlimited latitude to interpret. So when someone says Karaites allow all interpretations it is not necessarily true. We search the scriptures to validate all interpretations on whether they are true or not from Tanakh.

You can also see from this study that one may argue or debate with your brother. In the end, on matters when it could not be solved for issues of Torah they went to the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) for his ruling. After that he must follow what is said because that ruling would come from communications with Elohim. Since there is no Kohen Gadol we must wait everyone keeping Torah in the best way they can.