



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**

No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

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30 April -

6 May, 2017

4 - 10 Iyar, 5777

Leviticus 16:20 -20:27

Omer: 19 - 25

Haftarah: Amos 9:7 - 15

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THE ANSWER IS LOVE

Torah contains many stories, all of which present special lessons and morals for each end every one of us to apply to our personal lives.

One of the more curious stories relates how God commanded Moses to speak to a particular rock and instruct it to supply water for the Jews in the desert. Moses instead hit the rock. As a result, for defying God's command and forgoing an opportunity to glorify His name before the nation, Moses was denied the ability to enter the land of Israel, something he so desperately desired to do, but would rather remain in the desert until the end of his life.

Similarly, we read in the prophets the story of Jonah. He is instructed by God to travel to the city of Ninve and warn the non-Jewish inhabitants of God's intention to destroy the city unless they repent from their evil ways.

Jonah is hesitant to fulfill God's bidding and instead escapes by ship far into the sea, until the ship is overcome by wild waters and Jonah realizes it is God's way of bringing him back to his mission.

A third story in a similar vein, is the story of King Saul who was commanded by God to eradicate the evil nation of Amalek, not leaving a single

member alive. In the end, Saul spares their king, Agag, and as a result is stripped of his kingship.

These stories seem to display a lack of obedience for God's wishes on the part of these otherwise great men. Is that even possible? Is there another explanation?

Of course there is. In this week's Torah Portion God commands, "And you shall love your fellow as yourself." The famous Rabbi Akiva comments on that verse saying, "This is a major principle in the Torah."

A principle, by definition, is "a fundamental, primary, or general law or truth from which others are derived." So what is the major principle of the Torah? Love for our fellow Jew.

Moses and Jonah were concerned with the outcome of their respective missions and how it would reflect upon the Jewish people. Moses knew the rock would obey God's command on the first instruction, Jonah knew the same about the nation of Ninve. That would reflect poorly on the Jewish nation who had to be commanded and reprimanded numerous times about many things yet sometimes fell short of God's wishes.

As the leaders, Moses and Jonah knew God was presenting them with the need to choose between shaming their people

or fulfilling His command. They knew what it was they were being presented with and as well as the inevitable consequences. And they were ready to accept them. Moses lost his entry to the land and Jonah, by leaving Israel, forfeited his role as a prophet, as prophesy can only be received within the borders of the Holy Land.

Similarly, King Saul saw with prophetic vision that Agag, king of Amalek was destined to have a Jewish descendant who would teach Torah publicly in the city of Bnei Brak. He couldn't bring himself to partake in the denial of that, even if it meant giving up his kingship. Again, it was a choice between the good of the Jewish Nation or the word of God.

God presented them with this impossible dilemma and they chose like true leaders. Using this "major principle of the Torah," they opted to exhibit their extraordinary love for a fellow Jew.

These great men were willing and ready to sacrifice that which they had lived for, and occasionally nearly died for, their entire lives! All this for the sake of not dishonoring or belittling the Jewish people, or denying them the spiritual sustenance of the Torah taught by a future scholar.

With this in mind, as we are presented with much lesser sacrifices in the interest of protecting the dignity, or

emotional or spiritual wellbeing of another throughout the course of our lives, how much more so should we be equally ready and willing to make those sacrifices?

Each and every Jew has a small spark of Moses in him/herself. A spark which connects us all as one, and gives us all the ability to emulate the great leaders of yesteryear, if even just ever so slightly. We can do it, we must do it. It's in our DNA.

By Rabbi Moishe Mayir Vogel

Why Is Torah Law So Restrictive of Contact Between the Genders?

Question:

I understand that Torah law forbids all physical contact between a man and a woman—or even for them to be alone in a room together—unless they are first-degree relatives or married to each other. This applies to any man and any woman, regardless of their ages or whether or not they are sexually attracted to each other. And then there are all those rules about “modest” dress. Isn't that carrying it a bit far? Are we really such animals?

Answer:

When a man and woman are together in a room, and the door closes, that is a sexual event. Not because of what is going to happen, but what has already happened. It may not be something to make novels of, but it is a sexual occurrence, because male and female is what sexuality used to be all about.

It is true that in our world today, in the “free world” certainly, people have, on the whole, stopped thinking in these terms. What happened was that we started putting up all these defenses, getting steeled, inured, against the constant exposure and stimulation of men and women sharing all sorts of activities—coeducational school, camps, gyms—is that we started blocking out groups of people. We can't be as naturally sexual as G-d created us to be. When a man says, “I have a woman friend, but we're just friends, nothing more, I'm not attracted to her in any sexual way, she's not my type,” you've got to ask yourself what is really going on here. Is this a disciplined person? Or is this a person who has died a little bit?

What does he mean, “She's not my type?” When did all this “typing” come into existence? It's all artificial. It's not true to human sexuality. And it really isn't even true in this particular context, because given a slight change of circumstance, you could very easily be attracted. After all, you are a male, she's a female. How many times does a relationship begin that is casual, neighborly, and then suddenly becomes intimate? The great awakening of this boy and girl who are running around, doing all sorts of things, sharing all sorts of activities, and lo and behold, they realize—what drama,

what drama—that they are attracted to each other. These are grownups, intelligent human beings, and it caught them by surprise. It's kind of silly.

So, closing a door should be recognized as a sexual event. And you need to ask yourself: Are you prepared for this? Is it permissible? Is it proper? If not, leave the door open. Should men and women shake hands? Should it be seen as an intimate gesture? Should any physical contact that is friendly be considered intimate? Hopefully, it should.

These laws are not guarantees against sin. They have never completely prevented it. There are people who dress very modestly. They cover everything. They sin. It's a little more cumbersome, but they manage. All these laws are not just there to lessen the possibility of someone doing something wrong. They also preserve sexuality—because human sexuality is what G-d wants. He gave us these laws to preserve it, to enhance it—and make sure it's focused to the right places and circumstances—not to stifle it.

We have become callous about our sexuality. Even in marriage, a kiss on the run cheapens it, makes it callous—then we run to the therapist for advice. And do you know what the therapist who charges \$200 an hour for his advice says? He tells the couple not to touch each other for two weeks. Judaism tells you that, free of charge. Yes, there are two weeks each month during which a husband and wife don't touch. This therapy has been around for 3000 years. And it still works. It's a wonderful idea.

When you don't close the door on yourself and that other person, you are recognizing your own sexuality. You are acknowledging the sexuality of the other person. Being modest, recognizing our borders, knowing where intimacy begins and not waiting until it is so intimate that we're too far gone, is a very healthy way of living. It doesn't change your lifestyle dramatically, but enhances it dramatically, and you come away more capable of relaxing, better able to be spontaneous, because you know that you can trust yourself. You've defined your borders. Now you can be free. It takes a load off your mind, and it makes you a much more lovable person.

By Rabbi Manis Friedman

In Jewish History

Sunday, 4 Iyar, 5777 - April 30, 2017

Maimonides Saved (1165)

The 4th of Iyar was observed by Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204) as a personal day of fasting and prayer. Maimonides recounts that when he and his family were fleeing Islamic persecution from Fez, Morocco to the Holy Land, their ship was caught in a fierce storm at sea. He cried out to G-d in prayer and vowed to fast each year on this date.