



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**

No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

28 April - 4 May, 2019
23 - 29 Nissan, 5779

First Torah:

Leviticus 16:1 - 18:30

Haftorah:

Samuel I 20:18-42

■ **CALENDARS**

We have Jewish Calendars, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

■ **FAMILY PROGRAMS**

Do you have family on the outside who are struggling, please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

■ **GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH**

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

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MORAL IS NORMAL

If anyone was bent on convincing us that Torah was old-fashioned, this would be a good Parshah to prove it. Leviticus, Chapter 18, contains the Bible's Immorality Act. Our moral code, the forbidden relationships, who may marry whom and who may not—all come from this week's reading.

We read this same chapter every year on Yom Kippur afternoon. And every year in every Shul around the world someone asks the very same question. "Why on Yom Kippur, Rabbi? Was there no other section of the Torah to choose besides the one about illicit sex? Is this an appropriate choice to read in Shul on the holiest day of the year?"

Fair question. So the Rabbis explain that this is, in fact, the ultimate test of our holiness. The most challenging arena of human conduct, the one that really tests the mettle of our morality, is not how we behave in the synagogue but how we behave in our bedrooms. To conduct ourselves appropriately in public is far easier than to be morally consistent in our intimate lives.

Old-fashioned? You bet. In a world of ever-changing, relative morality, the Torah does indeed seem rather antiquated.

Man-made laws are forever being amended to suit changing times and circumstances. When a new super-highway is built, traffic officials may decide that it is safe to raise the speed limit.

Should there be a fuel shortage, these same officials may decide to lower the speed limit in order to conserve the energy supply. Human legislation is constantly adapting to fluctuating realities. But G-d's laws are constant, consistent and eternal. Divine legislation governs moral issues. Values, ethics, right and wrong, these are eternal, never-changing issues. Humankind has been confronting these problems since time immemorial. From cavemen to Attila the Hun to nuclear superpowers, the essential issues really have not changed very much. Questions of moral principle, good and evil, have been there from the very beginning. Life choices are made by each of us in every generation. These questions are timeless.

So we read that adultery was forbidden in Moses' day and it still is in ours. So is incest. But it wouldn't shock me at all if the same forces motivating for new sexual freedoms soon began campaigning for incestuous relationships to become legal. And why not? If it's all about consenting adults, why deny siblings? Given the slippery slope of our moral mountains, nothing is unthinkable any more.

Ultimately, morality cannot be decided by referendum. We desperately need a higher authority to guide us in the often confusing dilemmas of life. In Egypt and Canaan lots of degenerate behavior was acceptable, even popular. In this week's Parshah, G-d tells His people that He expects us to march to a different beat. We are called upon to be a holy

nation, distinctively different in this, the most challenging test of our morality. It doesn't matter what is legal or trendy in Egypt, Canaan, America or Scandinavia. We have our own moral guide, our own book of books which requires no editing or revised editions for the new age. Because right is right and wrong is wrong and so it will always be.

A wise rabbi once wrote that we mustn't confuse "normal" with "average." Since there are people out there who, tragically, may have lost a leg, this would mean that the "average" person has something like 1.97 legs. But that isn't quite "normal." A normal person has two legs. When Torah teaches us to be holy and distinctive, it is reminding us to be normal, not average. Average can be rather mediocre. Just be normal and retain your Jewish uniqueness. It may not be easy. It may not be politically correct. You probably will not win any popularity contests. But you will be faithful to the eternal truths of life. And in the long run, you will be right.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

WHY IS THE TORAH LAW SO RESTRICTIVE OF CONTACT BETWEEN 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

Ethics

In preparation for the festival of Shavuot, we study one of the six chapters of the Talmud’s Ethics of the Fathers (“Avot”) on the afternoon of each of the six Shabbat between Passover and Shavuot; this week, being the first Shabbat after Passover, we study Chapter One. (In many communities the study cycle is repeated until Rosh Hashanah.)

In Jewish History

Thursday, 27 Nissan, 5779 - May 2, 2019
Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943)

In the summer of 1942, about 300,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka. When reports of the mass murder in the killing center leaked back to the Warsaw ghetto, an organized resistance began forming, which managed to smuggle a modest cache of arms into the ghetto. On the 14th of Nissan of 1943, the remaining 35,000 Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto (from an original 450,000) staged an organized uprising, and drove back the Nazis with a rain of bullets when they came to begin the final removal of all Jews. The Jewish resistance lasted 27 days. A heroic stand was made in an underground bunker under 18 Mila Street, where hundreds of fighters, including the 24-year-old leader of the uprising, Mordechai Anilevitch, met their death. Although the Ghetto was burned to the ground by Iyar 3, a few stray survivors hid in the rubble and fired at the Nazis for two months longer.

In tribute to the uprising, the Israeli government designated the 27th of Nissan as its official “Holocaust and Bravery Day,” and in many Jewish communities the day is observed as an annual Holocaust remembrance day. But because of the halachic prohibition to conduct eulogies and other mournful events in the festive month of Nissan, the chief rabbinate of Israel, and many Jewish communities, observe instead the 10th of Tevet as a day to mourn and remember the six million, which include many whose yahrtzeit (date of passing) remains unknown.