



JewishTimes

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Jewish Life

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**SHLISSEL
CHALLA**

**LOAF OF
IDOLATRY**

SHELOMO ALFASSA

KOSHER

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



WEBSITE UPDATE

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Mesora has toiled tirelessly to create a better design and user experience. New homepage sections will be updated regularly, and now access all library portals easily on smartphones with horizontal scrolling and drop-down menus. Please enjoy!



OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

EMAIL

ASK THE RABBI

JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

| Please send letters and questions to: Comments@Mesora.org |

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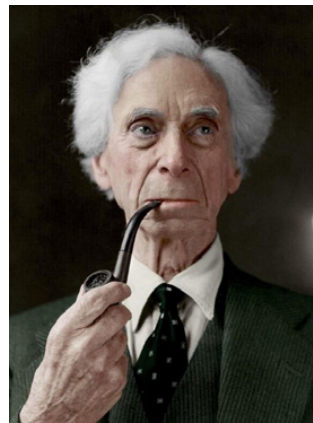
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"If an opinion contrary to your own makes you angry, that is a sign that you are subconsciously aware of having no good reason for thinking as you do."

BERTRAND RUSSEL

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

King David & Humility

READER: I am not able to understand the scene where King David dances before the ark, even though I am aware that he is being humble. Is it permissible to dance before the holy ark? Is there more to this incident, seeing the [rebuking] reaction of his wife Michal?

Also, in one of your Q&As I read about not shaving the 5 parts of the beard. I use an electric trimmer and have stopped shaving using a razor. My doubt is whether one can use a razor to shave his mustache, as this is not one of the forbidden parts? Also can razor be used to shave the hair on the body?

Thank you,
Mark

RABBI: David was enthused with God and his Torah. He told Michal he would be even more humbled than he already displayed while dancing before the ark. David was right, as Michal never bore a child due to her error.

Trimming the mustache is not a forbidden part. Certainly if the razor does into touch the skin there is no problem. A razor can be used to shave the hair on the body provided one does not remove hair as women do from their private areas, legs, armpits or eyebrows. This then may violate copying a woman, in my opinion. I believe Rashi refers to the prohibition of males shaving private areas. ■ (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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Consulting the Dead

READER: I cannot understand the custom of inviting deceased relatives (particularly grandparents) to a wedding. How does Torah permit this?

Be well and stay healthy,

Patrick Davidovici

RABBI: It is forbidden to (try to) consult the dead, so this practice is not permitted by Torah. ■

Phone on Shabbos?

READER: Can one check on a sick relative/friend using the phone on shabbos?

Rivkah Nachmias

RABBI: It is forbidden to use electronic devices on shabbos, unless the purpose is to maintain or save one's life or health. To call as a check-in with sickly people should not be necessary, as those who are very ill must not be left unattended. If they are cared for, no call is warranted or permitted. ■

Rabbinic Laws

READER: Dear Rabbi, As a convert I seem to get into hot water for the questions I ask. My best friend whom is a born Jew has warned me not to ask too many contentious questions as I will get a "black mark" against me from my fellow Jews and the Beth Din. Yes, I have been taken to the Beth Din by a Lubavitch Rabbi for a disagreement. My question: The 8 days of Pesach we keep outside of Israel is a problem for me. Hashem instructed in His Torah that there is only one day of Pesach, 15 Nisan. Then there is seven days of unleavened bread 15 to 21 Nissan. This instruction was given when the Jews were outside of Israel. The additional day was added by man. Is my Tanach in error? Can we add and subtract? I want to be obedient to Hashem as He will require an answer from me. What am I to do: honor His instruction or follow man's instruction? Life on earth has changed, time is set, the calendar has been developed. We know all there is to be known about time, dates, years. The time has come to rectify this issue and adhere to Hashem's instruction. Hashem is truth and only his truth must be followed. Kind Regards, Avraham Pesach

RABBI: I always say, "The only poor question is the one not asked." No one is correct to penalize you for inquiring how to follow God accurately.

God authorized the Rabbis (Deut. 17:11) to create fences around the Written Law to protect it. One of these fences is creating a 2-day holiday at the beginning and closing of the holiday outside Israel. Once this law was established, only a court that is greater can abolish it. Therefore we follow the Rabbinic 8-day Passover, created by Rabbis and authorized by God. ■

The following is a student's questions posed to Mesora. We felt it valuable to post our response so you may read them as well.

General Questions

1. What does it mean to be a good person?

RABBI: Being good does not mean following one's feelings or acting to please others. It means following God's code of morality as displayed by the patriarchs, matriarchs and prophets, and as outlined in Torah laws. Morality is not subjectively determined by our whims, but God alone—based on His role as the Creator of life and justice, in His great wisdom—determined what is good. The prophet says, "God has told you, O man, what is good..." (Micah 6:8). Rashi adds, "The Holy One, blessed be He, has told you what is good for you to do." This means that God alone defines goodness.

2. Why be good?

RABBI: Being good refers primarily to how we deal with others. And God wants man to be good—to live harmoniously with all others—in order to serve as the backdrop for all people to follow a Torah lifestyle. Morality is both the prerequisite for a proper society, and it is the barometer of one's perfection. Corrupt societies inhibit Torah from flourishing.

Being good also refers to how we treat ourselves. We should want to benefit ourselves by following what is best: what is good.

3. Is it possible to be a good person and not be a member of your religion?

RABBI: One cannot be "good" without following God's Torah (Bible), or Noahide laws if one is a Gentile. Otherwise, using one's own mind and feelings, one rarely arrives at what is the true good. Only very rare personalities like Abraham could arrive at God's system. Torah was unnecessary for mankind's first 2448 years since Adam, as wise men like Adam and Abraham could teach others. But as time progressed from Adam onward, man regressed into idolatry, superstition and moral decay, so Torah became necessary.

4. Is it possible to be a good person and no longer believe in Judaism, i.e., can an apostate be a good person?

RABBI: If one opposes Torah fundamentals, it is not possible to be good. One must

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Jewish Life

55 Q&As

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

follow God's objective "good" defined by the Torah. This demands knowledge of God, rejection of idolatry, and knowledge of God's morality which He requires man to follow. Judaism teaches that ignorance is evil (Rabbi Israel Chait). One who is ignorant of Torah fundamentals must live an evil life. But don't be fooled by "evil": this does not refer to murderers, rapists or thieves alone. Evil also refers to harming oneself or others by limiting one from perfecting their morals and ideas through Torah study and practice. To live with the wrong ideas is the worst evil, as one forfeits the happiest life here and one may also forfeit his afterlife.

5. Is there a difference between religious requirements and morality?

RABBI: Both originate in Torah. Religious requirements refer to all laws. Morality refers to a subset dealing with human relationships.

6. What is the source of ethics?

RABBI: God can be the only source of ethics. As He alone created human life, He alone determines how that life should operate, and how members of the species must act towards each other. Thus, man cannot answer if abortion is permitted. Man did not create life and principles guiding the decisions of aborting life or saving it. Only God determines these truths.

7. Can someone be a good person and be an atheist?

RABBI: This is an impossibility as "good" refers to partaking of God's will.

8. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?

RABBI: "Good" is defined as God's biblically stated morality. Without an authoritative system, there is no way to define what is good.

9. Why do bad things happen to good people?

RABBI: This is a complicated subject and requires much study and thought, but see our articles by searching "Why the Good Suffer" at Mesora.org/-search.html

But in principle, without citing individual cases, one who follows God must have a better life than one who does not follow Him. This is because God designed happiness to be attained by following His will. Just as God designed air, water and food to

perfectly satisfy man's bodily needs, wisdom was designed to satisfy man's psychological and mental needs at the highest level. But even a wise person makes errors, and this is when bad things happen. But without error, God will intervene and protect a righteous person from others seeking to harm him, from disease and other problems, as King David discusses in Psalms. Additionally, a person cannot assess another person as "good" or righteous. Ego is powerful; we see only what others wish us to see. Many people operate to gain approval, and not because they are truly righteous. This mitigates the strength of your question.

10. Is there a difference between a religious offense and a moral/secular offense?

RABBI: Both violate God's Torah, but punishments differ. They also have their source in different parts of man's psyche: religious offenders usually seek security improperly (idol worshiping to secure rain, health, etc.), while moral offenders seek to satisfy desires (viz., sexual impropriety, robbery, evil speech). Religious offenses—those opposing God in some measure—tread on the loss of the afterlife, as errors regarding God are more severe than errors regarding property, for example. While moral offenses are met with monetary or physical punishments. But severe moral sins can forfeit the afterlife as well.

11. Who enforces the moral rules of your religion?

RABBI: If one cannot enforce them upon himself, then it is enforced by the courts and the police.

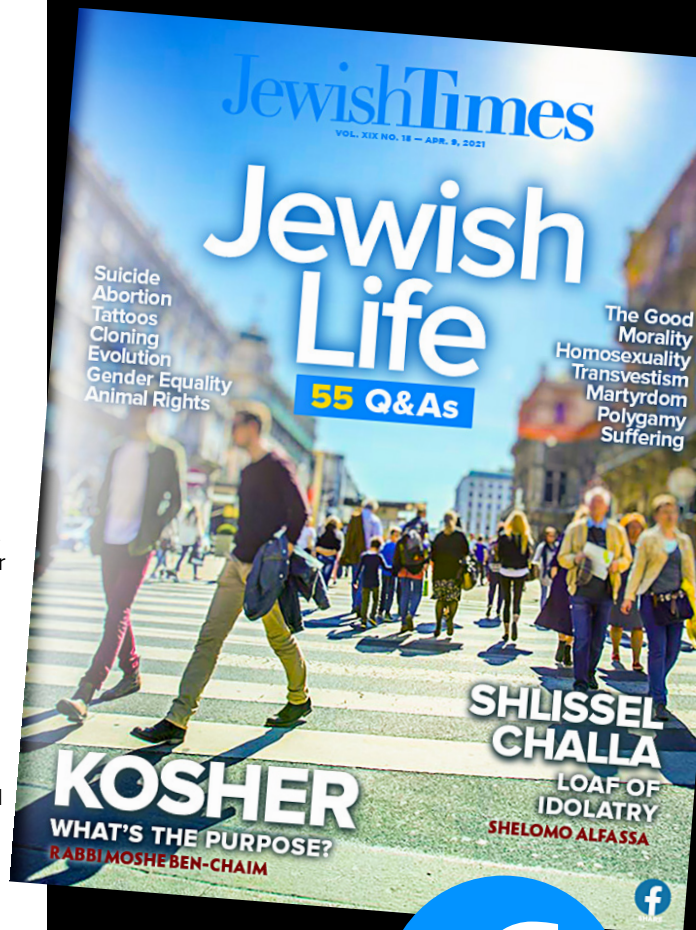
12. Should the moral rules of your religion apply to everyone?

RABBI: All mankind are equal, so all mankind would equally benefit from following Torah, the only religion offering proof of divine origin. However, unless one converts to Judaism, one is bound to follow only the moral code of the 7 Noahide laws.


13. What role should religion play in secular society?

RABBI: Judaism does not recognize "secular society"—there is only "society." Society was taken into consideration when God designed the Torah. Torah guides all aspects of mankind, be he alone or among others, at work or in temple.

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Physical Coercion

14. Is killing ever justified?

RABBI: Yes: for human benefit (executed humanely for food, clothing, etc.), self-defense and destruction of evil.

15. Is war ever justified?

RABBI: Yes, for defense and destruction of evil. God authorized many wars for the sake of preserving mankind.

16. Is violence against innocent people justifiable?

RABBI: No.

17. Can someone be a conscientious objector?

RABBI: No. War is guided by Torah, as are all areas of life. One must follow Torah's rules and he cannot avoid them, including battle.

18. Is force justifiable against children?

RABBI: For a child's safety and proper upbringing, force is necessary at times. But it need not be physical or painful. Verbal force such as rebuke without anger is appropriate and can be used according to the level of a child's understanding and with the child's best interest in mind. This is not so easy and a parent must be aware of his/her own motives of rebuke. If physical force is warranted, then it should be employed. King Solomon taught, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him early" (Proverbs 13:24). Refraining from punitive measures will spoil children. It is for this very reason that in one passage, Adonyahu—King David's son—was described to have rebelled and taken over the kingdom, he was also described as handsome, and that David never rebuked him. I believe the joining of all 3 topics teach that due to his beauty, David pitied his son and never rebuked him, and this resulted in a child who knew nothing of disappointment. Adonyahu therefore rebelled without fear of punishment.

19. Is force justifiable against a spouse?

RABBI: Physical force used against a spouse or another is not justifiable. Moses called a man "wicked" for even the mere lifting his hand against his fellow (Exod. 2:13). However, verbal force such as rebuke, if done with the spouse's best interest in mind, is justifiable. Again, a spouse must be aware of his/her own motives regarding rebuke.

20. Is suicide ever justifiable?

RABBI: No. Only the Giver of life may take it away.

21. To what extent is martyrdom acceptable?

RABBI: One is required to die rather than worship idols, commit murder or engage in inappropriate sexual behavior, regardless of the motives of the person forcing him to choose. The only time the intent of the coercer factors in is when the Jew is commanded to violate one of the other 610 commands for the sake of opposing God/Torah. In such a case, ten Jews must also be present for self-sacrifice to be required.

22. Is it right to kill an innocent person in order to save the life of another?

RABBI: A fetus may be killed to spare the mother. But once its head exits the mother, you cannot kill it. It is a full human. If coerced to kill a person or suffer death, one must suffer death and not kill to save oneself. Maimonides writes, "If idolaters will say to a group of men, 'Give us one of you and we will kill him, if not we will kill you all,' let all of them be killed rather than surrender to them one soul in Israel. If, however, they single out the one, saying, 'Give us that man, if not we will kill you all,' if he be guilty of a capital crime, as, for example, Sheba son of Bichri, they may surrender him to them, but it is not commendable to advise them to do so. If he be not guilty of a capital crime, they all must submit rather than surrender them one soul in Israel" (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:5).

23. Is capital punishment acceptable; if so, for what offenses?

RABBI: Many offenses require capital punishment as a means of deterring others and ridding society of evil influences. God annihilated evil people on a number of occasions, including the Flood, Egypt's army, and others. God also commands us to kill certain sinners.

Science and Medicine

24. Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion allowable?

RABBI: Abortion may be performed for the mother's safety, but only prior to the infant's head existing, at which point, one can no longer abort. As now the infant is an independent life on par with the mother and all other people.

25. Are autopsies allowable; if so, under what circumstances?

RABBI: They are not. We demonstrate thereby that even our bodies are God's, and not ours to mutilate. But an autopsy can be permitted if it can save others.

26. Are there rules about body modification e.g. tattoos, cosmetic surgery or amputations?

RABBI: Health needs allow all operations. Tattoos are prohibited as they seek to increase the worth of our temporary bodies. Cosmetic surgery may be allowed if it eases a distraught state of mind.

27. Are transfusions allowed?

RABBI: Yes.

28. Should extraordinary means be used to prolong life?

RABBI: Yes, in general.

29. Should family and/or patients have the right to end suffering?

RABBI: One may pray to God to end one's misery as the Rabbis had done on one such occasion. Euthanasia is prohibited, but Rav Feinstein makes it clear that resuscitation may be forbidden for certain patients, and halacha demands that no aggressive, invasive contact be made with such patients.

30. Does anyone have the right to hasten death?

RABBI: Only the courts may execute punitive measures outlined by God's Torah. Individuals in defense of one's life may kill another if that is what is needed. We try all measures to prolong lives of the ill.

31. In the case of conjoined twins when both will die if nothing is done to separate them but only one will live (and the other die) if the operation takes place, is the killing of one acceptable in order to save the life of the other?

RABBI: Baby A and Baby B were joined from the shoulder to the pelvic area, sharing one liver and one six-chambered heart. The wall between the four essentially normal chambers belonging to Baby B and the stunted two-chamber heart belonging to Baby A was too thin to be divided; the twins, therefore, could not each be given a heart. Even if it were possible, a two-chambered heart could not have supported Baby A for long.

In addition, Baby A had a circulatory defect that would eventually kill her. The doctors could only help Baby B, by giving

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her the entire six-chambered heart. This procedure would end the life of Baby A.

On October 6, 1977, Rav Moshe Feinstein asked his son-in-law Rabbi Moshe D. Tendler to call the surgeon in charge of the case, Dr. C. Everett Koop, and instruct him to proceed with the surgery — in other words, to end the life of Baby A in a procedure that might save the life of Baby B. Read more here: <http://bit.ly/Cojoined>

32. Is genetic engineering permissible?

RABBI: This must be researched fully. But Rabbi Moshe Tendler, professor of medical ethics, talmudic law and biology at Yeshiva University in New York, sees other potential good use for human cloning. In theory, the Orthodox scholar might permit cloned children when a husband cannot produce sperm. But he believes that the danger of abusing the science is too great to allow its use. See more: <http://bit.ly/torahcloning>

33. Is the theory of evolution compatible with your religion?

RABBI: Man was created with a soul: eternal life. There is nothing eternal in animal. Therefore, evolution—a biological phenomenon—of the human soul from animal (a soulless creature) is not possible according to Judaism (Hirsch), as a soul cannot “evolve” from flesh. The oldest known evidence for anatomically modern humans (as of 2017) are fossils found at Jebel Irhoud, Morocco, dated about 300,000 years old. Science recently discovered a sudden leap in human development about the same time of Adam’s arrival 5700 years ago. Judaism is never in conflict with science, as God created both Torah and nature. Both areas reflect His singular wisdom and plan. Man’s “physical” nature could have evolved from animal and then God could have implanted a soul in the new evolution of man 5700 years ago. This does not conflict with Torah.

34. Are environmental concerns part of your religious ethic?

RABBI: Yes. We are not allowed to kill for sport, or destroy produce trees with no cause (Deut. 20:19).

35. Do animals have any moral standing?

RABBI: Killing for pleasure (hunting) and painning animals are not allowed. But animals do not have rights, so we can slaughter them for food or their skins.

36. Does your religion predict an end of time? If so, when will that be and what will the world be like for humans?

RABBI: We do not predict an end to time.

Behavior

37. Is sex outside marriage permissible? **RABBI:** No.

38. Is sex only for procreation?

RABBI: No. After menopause sex is still obligated (to satisfy oneself and one’s partner) as is so when the woman is pregnant. Thus, sex for a healthy physical lifestyle is recommended.

39. Is masturbation allowed?

RABBI: Not for men. Spilling seed is prohibited.

40. Is genital sex the only morally permissible type?

RABBI: No, anal sex may be performed, but not as a regular practice.

41. Are there moral codes regarding dress and hairstyles?

RABBI: Yes, we do not copy idolaters’ styles. Many of our laws exist to distance us from idolatrous peoples and practices, with the goal of preserving monotheism. We also follow modesty in all areas.

42. Is transvestism immoral?

RABBI: es. If we understand the basic idea that, “Male and female He created them,” transvestism is inappropriate. It distorts the boundaries of the genders and also leads to sexual promiscuity. Torah prohibits this.

43. Is homosexuality immoral?

RABBI: Homosexuality distorts the purpose of sex, it caters to lust alone, and avoids procreation. In addition, the spilling of seed is prohibited, which is defined as seminal emission not during sex with a woman.

44. Should all people have equal rights under the law even if they engage in immoral behavior?

RABBI: Yes. One violation is limited to its own sphere, and such violation does not affect how others must treat their fellow. But some violations require death, so equal rights would not exist in such a case.

45. Should gay marriages be recognized by the state?

RABBI: No. The Jewish state should not recognize same sex marriage as it is prohibited, and contrary to the ideal that the union of man and woman is how marriage is defined. The Jewish state should defend all that is Jewish. Israel was given primarily for Torah observance.

46. Is it immoral to have more than one spouse at time?

RABBI: Patriarch’s who took on additional wives did so at their wives’ request; it was not their choice. In the pre-Torah marriage framework there was no violation. Today’s law is monogamy. But a woman never had more than one husband. This prohibition ensures no confusion of patrilineal tribal lineage.

47. Is divorce acceptable?

RABBI: Yes, and needed many times.

48. Are the roles played by men and women a moral issue?

RABBI: Yes, and also philosophical, by God’s design of our 2 distinct natures.

49. Are men and women separate but equal? **RABBI:** Yes.

50. Is the use of drugs and/or alcohol allowable?

RABBI: Drugs and alcohol may not be prohibited in many cases but they do incapacitate one’s thinking. Alcohol is not only permitted in acceptable quantities, but is even required for gladness on the holidays. But drunkenness is prohibited since the use of mind in Torah is paramount.

51. Should prayers be allowed in public schools?

RABBI: Recognition of reality should be in all schools, and this must start with knowledge of the Creator. Otherwise, all knowledge loses its purpose which must culminate with the appreciation of the Creator. I would suggest prayers be part of all education, but this is not a religious issue.

52. Should the state subsidize religious schools or programs?

RABBI: Not a Judaic issue.

53. Is the food a person eats a religious and/or moral concern?

RABBI: Laws of Kosher exist to temper one’s drive; the same applies to sexual laws. Such tempering restrains our emotions, allowing our minds to be free for Torah study. Kosher also bars man from identifying with disgusting creatures through eating them. Maintaining a level of disgust in the area of food, man also benefits from not indulging in other disgusting acts. Restraint in one area has far-reaching effects.

54. Is gambling allowed?

RABBI: Yes. No philosophical or moral violations exist. However, we learn that a regular gambler cannot act as a witness. Perhaps this lifestyle demonstrates an inflated ego and greater entitlement over others. One gambles as one believes he will win. This subjectivity is contrary to the requirements of testimony: to be an objective witness.

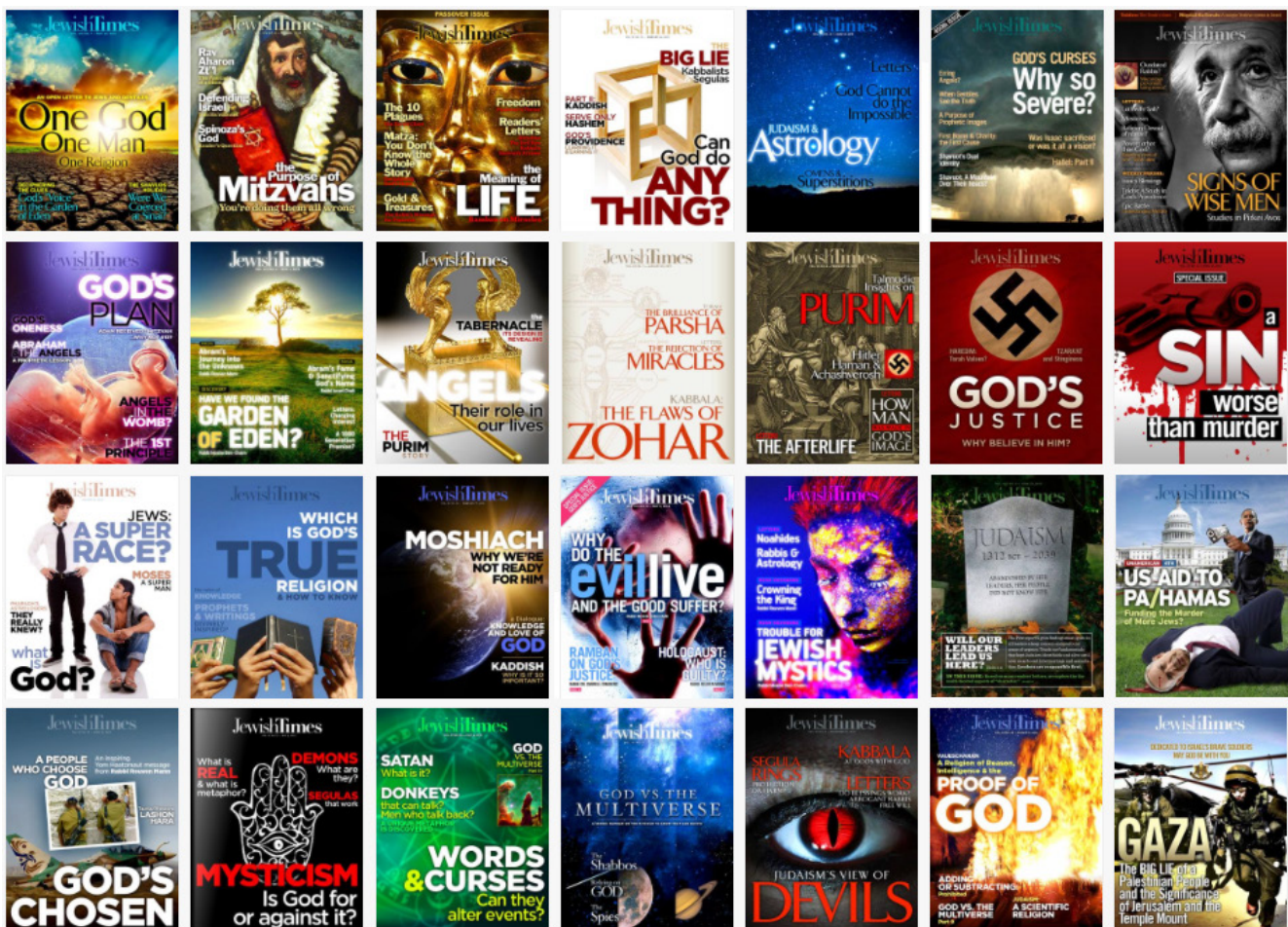
55. Is smoking allowed?

RABBI: Yes. A single cigarette does no measurable bodily damage, and therefore each act of smoking a single cigarette cannot be prohibited. ■

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Song of Songs

RABBI REUVEN MANN



According to Jewish custom the Megillah of Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs) composed by King Solomon is publicly read on the Shabbat of Chol Hamoed Pesach. On the surface this is a most baffling religious composition as it seems like a love poem depicting a very romantic relationship between a lover and his beloved.

However, according to the Talmudic sages the book is purely allegorical and may not be taken literally. Moreover it's true intent is to depict, in a hidden manner, the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish People and between Israel and the Nations.

In general terms it emerges that the historical odyssey of the Jewish People is no simple matter. The "lover" who actually represents Hashem and the beloved, His chosen People, are desperately searching for each other. Yet as much as they ostensibly yearn for a mutual rendezvous for some unknown reason they keep missing each other.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in a major work, "And From There You Shall Seek", describes the strange and mystifying nature of this "romantic" encounter. "The most beautiful of women wanders within the city walls in the pale, moon-enchanted nights. Early in the dewy sun drenched mornings she goes out into the orchards. She is looking for the beloved of her soul, who is standing among the shadows, watching from the byways, peering from the cracks. Lovesick, she searches for her partner. She searches for him but cannot find him. Has her lover left her and forgotten her for eternity? Has He forgotten the affection of their wedding day and departed from her forever? (Let us remember that these words are highly anthropomorphic and one may not take them literally, in their plain meaning.)

The Shulammitte woman, who is the beloved, desperately continues her search for her "lover" along the mountains and hills, winding roads and twisting paths. Finally filled with exhaustion she returns home disappointed and worn out from her strivings and exhaustedly gets into bed. And then something amazing occurs. In the words of the Rav; "Suddenly her lover appears from the obscurity of the dark night, knocking on his dear one's door and whispering faithfully 'Let me in my sister, my darling, my faultless dove! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with drops of the night.' Now I have arrived, I have kept my word, I have fulfilled the vision. Your desire has been fulfilled, your longing has not been in vain. I have yearned for you; I, the companion of your youth, am now here. You shall follow me and never be separated from me."

Our first reaction to this is enormous relief and joy. After all our desperate striving we are about to be reunited with Hashem never to be parted again. But what happens next is shocking and inexplicable; "Nevertheless, the beloved refuses to rise from her bed and open the door to her lover. The cold of the moonless, starless night, deep weariness, laziness, and fear combine to paralyze her will and bind her legs. Why should she refuse to undo the latch and open the door to her lover? Hasn't she been searching for him day and night?"

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Hasn't she been pursuing him, asking passerby if they have seen him, abjuring the daughters of Jerusalem and suffering insults, blows and spiritual torment on his behalf?

"What has happened? Has her sense of yearning evaporated under the oppressive torpor of loneliness just at the moment when her lover has arrived? Has the hidden force that stirred her spirit during the days filled with wandering and the nights filled with anticipation and anxiety subsided just at the moment that her lover has fulfilled his pledge and his footsteps are heard at the entrance to her tent? Does desire no longer permeate her being, is the urgency no longer alive within her? At the very moment of fulfillment and realization, the hour of redemption and deliverance, has it all vanished and been silenced? Yet, inexplicably the beloved says; "I have taken off my robe—am I to don it again? I have bathed my feet—am I to soil them again?" ("And You Shall Search From There" p.1-4)

However, after only a moment, she returns to her senses and leaps out of bed to let her lover in. Her love and yearning are rekindled and she wants nothing more than to welcome her lover. But, when she opens the door it is too late; the lover has departed and the seemingly endless searching must resume again.

At first glance it might be difficult to understand why she pays such a heavy price for her momentary self indulgence and hesitation. She was tired, longing for sleep and reluctant to get out of bed. Perhaps that was wrong but she quickly rebounded and burst forth to welcome her lover. Why did he have to depart because of that unintentional lapse?

I believe that King Shlomo is teaching us that certain things cannot be acquired according to our timetable. We may be worthy for Hashem to make certain benefits available to us but when that occurs we may not hesitate but must seize them immediately. When one is pursuing the goal of a genuine relationship with Hashem there is no room for self indulgence.

For what this Megillah is depicting is the attainment of genuine Ahavat Hashem (Love of G-d) which is the highest ideal of Judaism. As the Rambam says not every Torah sage can attain it. Among its requirement is that one places all of one's energies into the love and pursuit of Hashem.

The Rambam describes this experience in Laws of Repentance 10:3, "What is the nature of the appropriate love? It is that he should love Hashem with a great, plentiful and extremely strong love until his soul is bound with the love of Hashem and he is constantly immersed in it as though he were lovesick so that he cannot free his mind from the love of that woman and he thinks about it constantly, when he stands and when he sits and when he eats and drinks. Even more excessive than this is the love of Hashem in the heart those who love him, they are always immersed in it as we have been commanded; ".....(And you shall love Hashem your G-d) with all your heart and all your soul." And that is what King Shlomo said by way of allegory, "For I am love sick" (Song of Songs 2:5). And the entire book of Song of Songs is a parable pertains to this matter."

It is very important for us to ponder this idea. For while we may not be on the level of love which the Rambam depicts it is not a matter of "all or nothing". We must seek to cultivate an Ahavat Hashem commensurate with our individual level of spiritual potential. This is a transformative experience which elevates all of our service of Hashem to an entirely different level. And permeates us with great joy. May we merit to attain it.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

Dear Friends,

In this time of social isolation, we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online. But that can only take you so far.

Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.





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CONDÉ NAST



Kosher: What's the Purpose?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

More than most laws, kosher has become iconic of Jewish observance; and not without cause. Many times in His Torah[1], God commands us to abstain from eating and touching certain creatures. Like all other commands, the benefit in following any law lies in understanding how it perfects us. And as always, God provides clues. The following are God's words as He concludes the section on permitted and prohibited species:

"Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified" (Lev. 11:43-45).

God's objective for us in our abstention from these creatures is to become like Him: "sanctified." The avoidance of disgusting behavior is a path towards sanctity. But how does this sanctification work? What is "sanctity?" How does eating prohibited animals harm us? More precisely, how does eating physical objects harm our metaphysical souls? Rashi says[2] abstaining from loathsome creatures alone sufficed for God to take us out of Egypt. What is Rashi's point? Why are we also told many times (Lev. chap 11) to additionally "abhor" (shakitz) those creatures prohibited from our diet? But why isn't abstention from eating sufficient? Oddly, Moses omits this abhorrence when he repeats the section of kosher and non-kosher animals in Deuteronomy 14:3-21. Why this omission?

We can eat literally all vegetation without restriction. But when it comes to animals, certain species are not to be eaten. Why this distinction? And what is significant about "creeping" things that renders it a dominant consideration among prohibited creatures? Finally, what is it about the act of eating per se that is harmful? Other peoples do not follow kosher laws, yet, they have existed as long as we have. Eating non-kosher apparently does not wipe out civilizations.

Deciphering God's Clues

In Leviticus chapter 11, God offers us signs that indicate permitted and prohibited animals: fully-split hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, knees (locusts), multiple legs, belly-crawlers, paws, and things that creep upon the ground. Even the Rabbis say[3] that although in the Torah birds are not signaled by a sign but by species, there is yet a sign relating to their legs. Notably, most signs indicating a species' kosher and non-kosher status are based on its means of locomotion...an idea worth pondering.

Locomotion & Kosher

What is significant about locomotion? Unlike inanimate vegetation, animate life—beings with locomotion—engenders human identification. We don't identify with inanimate objects, like plants, rocks, mountains, or oceans. But animals move. This element of animate life awakens in man our identification with that creature. We are drawn to animals and visit zoos. We obtain pets and mourn at their deaths. We develop systems of animal rights, in which, man draws distinctions: killing insects or even reptiles and birds is not met with the same crime as killing dogs or cats. This is because man places greater value on those species with which he identifies greater.

Identification exists with moving creatures, unlike inanimate objects. Signs of prohibited species inhere in their means of locomotion, the feature wherein man identifies.

Kosher is a Barrier

God wishes man to not identify with the prohibited species. By eating snakes, rats, spiders, etc. man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and numbs his sense of what is to be loathsome. However, God wishes man to preserve this disgust. This is why He created man with this emotion. By preserving our emotion of disgust, our behavior in all areas benefits by these "retaining walls." In contrast, people who eat whatever they wish and engage in unbridled lusts, and worse, eat disgusting species, forfeit their purpose as an intelligent being. They are no longer "sanctified." Sanctified refers to man operating on the highest level humanly possible. This level is when he is most engaged in intellectual pursuits, studying the universe and Torah, as God designed humans to do. Caving to desires without limit, and breaking the barriers of naturally-reviled things, man loses a critical boundary. (As vegetation offers man no dangers of identification, no restrictions apply. All fruits and vegetation are permitted as they were since Adam the First.)

We now understand that God wishes man to retain certain barriers. The emotion of disgust is dulled by eating/identifying with certain creatures. Rabbi Israel Chait stated that things that creep on the ground remind us of death. Perhaps it is that close proximity to the underground that we find abhorrent in these species. This can also explain why God created man

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

upright, unlike most other creatures...distancing us further from the Earth. "...also the world [God] planted in their hearts so man should not discover the matter that God has done from beginning to end (Koheles 3:11)." This verse refers to God's design of man's immortality fantasy (Ibid. Ibn Ezra). God does not wish us to be preoccupied with death. Anything that reminds us of the grave is disturbing. These species disgust us due to their association with death. This disgust is reinforced through the additional prohibition of contact with their carcasses, possibly bearing out this idea of distancing us from death.

Eating is one of our two primary drives; sex is the other. The rabbis and leading psychologists are in agreement on this. God limits the Jew's involvement in satisfying these core instincts so we may become accustomed to controlling our instincts. The goal is to enable our intellects to rule our instincts, and ultimately engage in pursuing wisdom, the greatest pleasure. A person who has no limits on his appetitive and sexual activity will find great difficulty in advancing, or even engaging his intellect. His pursuit to know God will never be realized. For he will incite cravings that only grow as he feeds them: "Rabbi Yochanan said, 'There is a small limb in man: starve it and it becomes satiated, feed it and it becomes hungry' (Tal. Succah 52b)." Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the more we satisfy the sexual drive, the greater the urge, and thus, less energy is available for fulfilling God's Torah. This applies to all drives.

Abstaining from lusts and from eating certain creature suffices to control our emotions on one level. By not eating "disgusting" creatures, we break identification with that species, and we additionally maintain the emotion of disgust, which can then be applied to other forbidden areas. God desires we maintain a minimal level of abhorrence in the area of the appetitive drive. Retaining this disgust for certain species, we don't only control one emotion, but all of our emotions benefit. We will find avoiding detestable behaviors easier since we strengthened our overall emotion of disgust.

By our very nature, we cannot be overindulgent in one area, without our entire emotional makeup sensing this relaxation. This explains why the Jews worshipping the Gold Calf also arose to engage other instincts (Exod. 32:6). The satisfaction of one emotion—idolatry—causes other emotions to seek satisfaction. In contrast, barring instinctual expression—not eating disgusting creatures—controls other emotions.

Increased Mercy

Leviticus 11 categorizes mammals, then fish, then birds. It is interesting that pawed animals are not initially identified in the first group of mammals[4]. Also interesting is that mammals alone are the one group in which we do not find the word "disgusting" (shekhetz). Instead, they are called "tammay" or impure. Perhaps this is because God wishes to teach another consideration within kosher laws. One aspect is what we answered: to sustain a barricade of disgust. Another benefit—in abstaining from pawed creatures—is that it engenders mercy. Pawed animals offer man more identification than other creatures. They are more like man: paws closely resemble human hands, our tools of creativity. We even ascribe intelligence to species that express greater tactile dexterity, like monkeys. The more an animal resembles man, the greater the identification. It's a natural human response. The prohibition to abstain from pawed animals may serve the opposite benefit: to retain a level of mercy towards God's creatures. Therefore, God also prohibits animals that more closely resemble man. It is then not surprising that our pets are pawed. Our relationship to animals is then twofold: 1) abstention from disgusting creatures to maintain the necessary emotion of abhorrence, 2) to engender mercy toward beings that are not disgusting. Good and bad emotions are

thereby kept in check. Therefore, as pawed mammals are not eaten due to a reason different from impurity, they are not included in the first mention of impure mammals.

God created man to naturally sense a feeling of abhorrence. We could have been designed to find all creatures equally appealing, but God deemed this harmful. He instilled in human nature many emotions, including disgust for many creatures. This disgust may be towards their outer appearance like rats and many insects. We also are designed to revile things that crawl on the ground like snakes and spiders, which recall the grave. God created us with disgust, and additionally commanded the Jew to reinforce this disgust through abstaining from eating or touching many creatures. Disgust is the natural wall between man and his instincts. By abstaining from instinctual gratification according to Torah parameters, God intends that man raise himself to the life where his intellect is not compromised, but rather, free to engage in studying the Creator. This is how man is sanctified, and resembles his Creator. This is Rashi's point, that the path to living an intelligent life is paved by controlling our instincts. Abstaining from certain species accomplishes this goal, and alone, warranted God's Egyptian Exodus. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



Summary

At first, we wonder at the various species; why are they all needed? What is kosher all about? Is it a health law? But we then appreciate that God permitted us to enjoy flesh in all corners of the Earth, since man is mobile. We travel. God provided food in all regions: land and sea, valleys and mountains. By analyzing the signs that indicate kosher and non-kosher species, we realize they address our inner rarely examined emotional makeup. But God teaches us through kosher laws that we must have one eye on our psychological health and strive toward the perfection of our instincts. We also must recognize the species as God's will and show them mercy, as in sending the mother before taking the young, thereby sparing her pain, and perhaps also via abstaining from eating pawed species. This reinforces the mercy we are to show people. With our emotions in check, abstaining from eating certain species and even going so far to abhor them too, we control our instincts and become in some small way like our perfectly intelligent Creator who is bereft of any human quality and emotion. We too can partake of wisdom, the pursuit that God designed that offers us the greatest satisfaction.

As Jews, our mission differs from all other peoples. As teachers of God's Torah, we must condition our instincts through restraint, allowing our intellects to be untarnished from urges that cloud our thought. In this pristine manner, we can study clearly and accurately teach God's single system for mankind, in a manner that impresses all who observe us. God's will that we impress the world with Torah will then be fulfilled, as the nations remark, "What a wise and understanding people is this great nation (Deut. 4:6)."

Addendum

"Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified" (Lev. 11:43-45).

Parshas Shmini concludes by clearly identifying the prohibition as "Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps" and "do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth." Clearly, the prohibition against these species is not to a physical concern, but that our "souls"—our intelligences—should not become compromised through association with death, embodied in creatures that creep on the Earth's surface close to the place of our graves. Perhaps even the signs in kosher mammals—split hooves—and the signs in kosher fish—fins and scales—cause those creatures to move in a way dissimilar than the non-kosher creeping creatures. We are left with the question of how chewing cud plays a role in this theory.

Addendum II

Why did Moses omit any reference to "shekletz" in Deuteronomy 14:3-21? Perhaps Torah contains 2 sections of kosher laws to address 2 distinct objectives. One objective^[1] is to retain a level of disgust, as stated. But when Moses omits that term, he thereby teaches that even without retaining disgust, a restricted diet serves another purpose: distinguishing the Jewish nation, which Moses states just before discussing kosher: "For you are a holy nation to the Lord your God, and you God selected to be a treasured nation from all peoples on the face of the Earth" (Deut. 14:2). Thus, Moses teaches the Jews that even without preserving the emotion of disgust, some level of diet contributes to the Jews' role as a treasured nation. We are treasured, as we exhibit control over our most base instinct of appetite. Only one who masters his instincts can elevate his intellect and partake of the Chosen People's role as Torah students and educators of mankind. ■

[1] Exod. 22:30, Lev. chap 11, Deut. 14:3-21.

[2] Lev. 11:45

[3] Tal. Chullin 59a. See the mishna.

[4] Lev. 11:1-8



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IDOLATRY

Shlissel Challa

Loaf of Idolatry

SHELOMO ALFASSA



Every year Jewish women, young and old, partake in an Ashkenazi^[1] custom to place a key (such as a door key to a home), inside the dough of a loaf of bread that they bake.^[2] This custom is known as shlissel challah—shlissel from the German language schlüssel (key) and challah or hallah from the Hebrew for bread.^[3] While a metal key is often baked within the bread, some form the bread itself into the shape of a key or even arrange sesame seeds on top in the form of a key.^[4] Often times, these women gather in celebratory groups with the common belief that baking the shlissel challah will bring blessing into their homes, and specifically, the blessing of increased fiscal livelihood. There is also a seemingly new ‘custom’ of baking shlissel challah in the “merit” of a sick person, as a way of helping them recover from physical disease or trauma.^[5] A poll on the popular Orthodox Jewish website imamother.com asked participants: “How do you make your schlissel [sic] challah?”^[6] The 88 respondents reported: In the shape of a key 13% ^[12]; With a key baked in it 61% ^[54]; Neither, I don't do this 17% ^[15]; Other 7% ^[7].

Non-Jewish Origins

The baking of a key inside a bread is a non-Jewish custom which has its foundation in Christian, and possibly even earlier, pagan culture. At least one old Irish source tells how at times when a town was under attack, the men said, “let our women-folk be instructed in the art of baking cakes containing keys.”^[7] Keys were traditionally manufactured in the form of a cross, the traditional symbol of Christianity,^[8] a physical item all Christian commoners would possess in their home.^[9] On Easter, the Christian holiday which celebrates the idea of Jesus ‘rising’ from the dead, they would bake the symbol of Jesus—the key shaped like a cross—into or onto a rising loaf.^[10] This was not only a religious gesture, but the bread was a special holiday treat. Sometimes these breads were wholly formed in the shape of a cross; other times the shape of a cross was made out of dough and applied on top. In the context of historically baking a key into bread—the key itself, intrinsically, was a symbol of Christianity and by extension symbolized Jesus ‘rising’ in the dough.^[11]

Connection to Passover

The modern Jewish custom of baking the symbolic shlissel challah, annually takes place on the shabbat immediately following the holiday of Pessah, when tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of religiously observant Jewish women^[12] practice this observance.

In Christianity, baked goods associated with keys are commonly called ‘Easter breads,’^[13] and in Europe they are also known as ‘Paschals,’^[14] as the holiday of Easter in the East is known as ‘Pascha’ or ‘Pascua.’ This is most likely the reason Christians often call Easter breads baked with keys Paschals.^[15] Before the Romans destroyed the Beit HaMikdash (the holy Temple) in Jerusalem, the focus of the Passover holiday for the Jewish people was the Korban Pessah (lit. Pessah sacrifice, also known as the Paschal Lamb^[16]). Within Christianity, Jesus is known as the ‘Paschal Lamb.’

Geographic Origins

Professor Marvin Herzog, a world renowned Yiddish linguist at Columbia University tells that dough twisted in the form of a key (among other shapes such as a ladder) were found to top challah loafs in Poland, “...the distribution of some of these things was a regional matter.”^[17] As an example of the regionality, Prof. Herzog

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

created a map demonstrating where dough was shaped as a ladder and placed on challah, and how it was specific only to certain communities and was not universal. Insomuch as a ladder motif was regional, it can be conjectured that the use of a key or key motif could have evolved the same way. Both a ladder and a key are symbolic as tools that could metaphysically help one attain heaven, as they both help 'gain access.'

Lack of Sources

While the custom is said to be mentioned in the writings of Avraham Yehoshua Heshel (the "Apter Rav" 1748-1825) and in the Ta'amei ha-Minhagim (1891), there is no one clear source for shlüssel challah. And while people will say there is a passuq attributed to it, there is not. And, even if there were, a passuq that can be linked to the practice is not the same as a source. Micha Berger, founder of the AishDas Society, [orthodox] calls this type of logic 'reverse engineering,' it's like drawing a circle around an arrow in a tree, and subsequently declaring the arrow is a bullseye.[18] The idea of baking shlüssel challah is not from the Torah; it's not in the Tannaitic, Amoraitic, Savoraitic, Gaonic or Rishonic literature. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner of Israel's Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim said that while baking challah with a key in it is not forbidden, "there is no meaning in doing so." [19]

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim [20] of Mesora.Org [orthodox] teaches that:

Torah teaches that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. It does not say that challah baking or any other activity will earn us God's favor. When the matriarchs were barren, they did not resort to segulas, but introspected and prayed. When the Jews needed rain, they prayed. Torah rejects the idea of a segula...baking challas with brachos cannot help...segulas are useless, and violate the Torah prohibition of Nichush [good luck charms]. It does not matter if the charm is a rabbit's foot, a horseshoe, a challah, mezuzah, key or a red bendel. The practice assumes that imaginary forces exist other than God, which is idolatrous. Furthermore, God rewards man based on his merit, not magic. Segulahs deny God's Torah fundamentals, as if any fool can earn reward with an amulet, instead of Torah study, good deeds and mitzvos. [21]

Rabbi Reuven Mann, Principal of Yeshiva B'nei Torah in Far Rockaway, New York [orthodox] says,

One should ask themselves, "What connection is there between putting a key in the dough of a challah (schlüssel challah) and the improvement of my material situation (parnasa)?" [22] The dangers of deviation are very great. For by inventing new practices not prescribed by Torah one, in fact, implicitly denies the Torah. He is in effect saying that the Torah is not perfect, for it does not work in my case, and there are other man made practices out there which will work for me. In effect this is a negation of Torah and constitutes a form of idolatry, heaven forbid...[this] indicates that a person has lost faith in the authentic prescriptions of Torah. By performing these "unauthorized actions" one is implicitly affirming that there are other "forces" out there besides God which will respond to the needs of the performer of these ritualistic practices. This constitutes a form of "Avodah Zorah."

Who Is Doing It?

As this is written in 2011, the concept and observance of shlüssel challah continues to grow and be exploited, especially in the USA and among newly religious Jews who are being taught it is acceptable to use a loaf of bread and a machine made die-cut piece of brass as an intermediary between them and the Almighty. The baking is conducted today across the Jewish spectrum. It is widely popular (but certainly not universally practiced) in both the Hassidic and non-Hassidic haredi communities.[23] It is also conducted by the Modern-Orthodox, among the 'Yeshivish' communities and by other American Orthodox Jews such as those with Lithuanian and German family ancestry.[24] The idea of shlüssel challah is known to be taught in schools, but probably is upon the whim of the individual teacher. An informal telephone survey of 40 participants demonstrated that it has been taught in haredi educational institutions such as the Bais Yaakov and Bnos Yisroel schools in New York City, Los Angeles, Miami and other locations. It is also taught by teachers in the Centrist / Zionist Orthodox Jewish schools.[25]

After Pessah, shlüssel challah can be found being sold in stores, a challah with a key right inside the bag! As the custom of shlüssel challah continues to be passed along from mother to daughter and in social groups, it also has been popularized on Facebook, Twitter and promoted on other popular internet social media outlets. On the internet can even be found an anonymously distributed prayer, said to be specifically developed for those who make the key challah.[26] (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

An internet search will find dozens of articles and comments on shlissel challah:

- Shlissel Challah is a segula, good omen, for parnassa, or livelihood. It's a very interesting custom with many sources and traditions.[27]
- It's really bizarre, and EVERYONE is doing it. It was all the talk among the women at the playground. Mind you, the talk was about technique for making it, not whether the practice has any merit or makes any sense.[28]
- My friend told me about this and we baked the key in the challah and this week we got a tax refund that we were not expecting![29]
- I also shape a piece of dough in the shape of a key and place it lengthwise on the challah, from end to end, so that everyone can eat a piece of the key.[30]
- I had a aunt who one year put a car key and got a new car and another year put a house key and bought a house that year.[31]
- The economic downturn has affected virtually every community and Lakewood...For the Shabbos after Pesach, Lakewood Mayor R' Menashe Miller arranged for a key to Lakewood's Town Hall [to be used in schlissel challah][32]
- This week is the week to bake shlissel challah, challah imprinted with or shaped like a key. It is a segulah for parnassah, and fun, too![33]

Halakhic Acceptance

Several clever ideas have been devised which attempt to connect the non-Jewish idea of 'key bread' to the Torah, however these all fail to bring a Jewish wrapper to a wholly non-Jewish tradition. A popular one attempts to inexplicably connect the idea of a spiritual "gate" to a physical "key," during the period when Jews count the 49 days during the Omer up to the 50th day which is the holiday of Shavuot.[34] The idea of the 50th day represents the sha'ar hanun (50th gate), which according to kabbalah is known as the sha'ar binah (gate of understanding—and, since we are said to go [spiritually] from gate to gate,[35] this is why the focus is on a key, as a key will 'unlock' a gate.

Further, modern commentators have exploited the name of HaRambam (Maimonides), to indicate that he demonstrates an association between the idea of a key with challah.[36] Such alleged connections are baseless and are only meager attempts to legitimize the idea of shlissel challah. Nonetheless, it's well known that HaRambam himself would have been utterly against the practice of baking a key into a bread which allegedly could influence the Almighty. It is one of HaRambam's clear principles that any belief in an intermediary between man and God (including a physical object), is considered heretical to the Torah. He teaches that God is the only One we may serve and praise; that we may not act in this way toward anything beneath God, whether it be an angel, a star, or one of the elements; there are no intermediaries between us and God; that all our prayers should be directed towards God; and that nothing else should even be considered. This would certainly include baking a key inside a loaf of bread and/or shaping a bread in the form of a key, then expecting it to either change your fortune or influence your future.

Commentary

It is up to each of us to halt legitimizing any extrahalakhic or even extraminhagic activities. The need for a quick 'spiritual fix' such as baking a bread with a key in it and hoping God rewards the baker(s), seems to have replaced the desire for pure prayer with kavanah (intrinsic intent). Increasingly, tefillot (prayer) is being trumped by what is 'cool,' 'the in thing,' or being 'with it.' The truth of the matter is, often in the observant Jewish world, people care more about 'fitting in' with their peers, then with God.

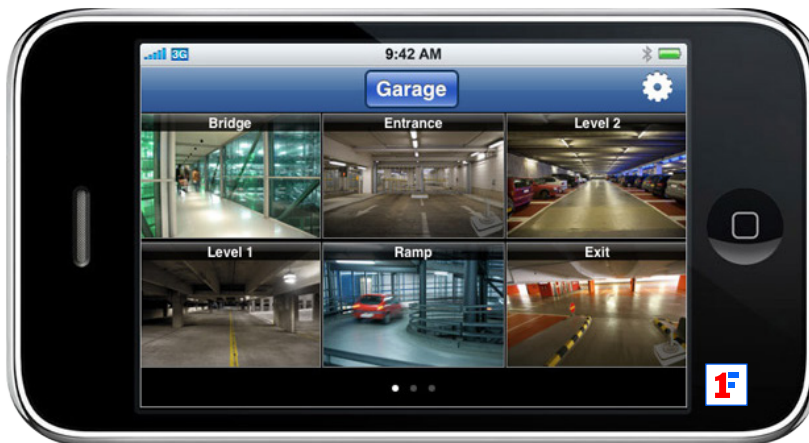
On the far end of the scale, it can be said that shlissel challah observance is a nothing less than 'the way of the Amorites.' It is precisely this type of behavior and observance which Jews are supposed to separate themselves from, so it doesn't go on to influence our thoughts and deeds. Am Yisrael was not created to lose itself in such folklore, and Judaism without disciplined study is nothing but folklore. Judaism allows and encourages the use of our minds. It's never too late to realign our path with Torah sources, not blind faith practices which are "trendy," "in," or "cool."

Educated Jews should help to promote Torah sources to our friends and neighbors, not false practices which are of non-Jewish origin and have nothing to do with Judaism. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

FOOTNOTES

- [1] Jews with family roots in countries of Europe and Asia such as Poland, Belarus, Hungary, Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia, etc. Note: In the once popular *The Hallah Book*, the author mentions that key bread originated in eighteenth century Ukraine, but did not provide a source or citation. See: Reider, Freda. *The Hallah Book*. New York: Ktav, 1986. 21
- [2] Note: as of late, this custom is becoming increasingly common among Sephardic Jews as well due to co-mingling of communities and day-to-day social intercourse.
- [3] aka shlissl khale
- [4] A photograph of a shlissel challah exists in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972 edition, volume 6 page 1419. The loaf, with a long metal key impressed and left to bake on top, is captioned: "Hallah from Volhynia [Western Ukraine near Poland and Belarus] for the first Sabbath after Passover. The key placed on top of the loaf symbolizes the 'gate of release' which traditionally remains open for a month after the festival."
- [5] [Shlissel Challah for Refuah Shlaima] (Are you or anyone you know baking challah this week? Someone is trying to put together a group of 'bakers' for a zechus for a complete refuah shelayma for Rochel Leah Bas Miriam Tobal.] If you can participate, please email: sandyn@... Either way, please have her in mind in your tefillos. Tizku L'mitzvos!) groups.yahoo.com/group/FrumSingleMoms/message/663
- [6] imamother.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=111317 Poll was in April 2010
- [7] O'Brien, Flann. *The Best of Myles*. Normal, IL; Dalkey Archive Press, 1968. 393
- [8] Small breads with the sign of the cross have been found as far back as 79 CE in the ancient Roman city of Herculaneum (see *The New York Times* March 31, 1912). This was when Christianity emerged in Roman Judea as a Jewish religious sect which gradually spread out of Jerusalem.
- [9] This was no different than the poor Jews of the 'old world,' who often would not have holy books but would certainly have a mezuzah on their door which they considered a holy script in their own home.
- [10] Another account mentions a key in a loaf: "In other parts of Esthonia [sic], again, the Christmas Boar [cake], as it is called, is baked of the first rye cut at harvest; it has a conical shape and a cross is impressed on it with a pig's bone or a key, or three dints are made in it with a buckle or a piece of charcoal. It stands with a light beside it on the table all through the festival season." See: Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1920. VII. Part 5. 302 (Thanks go to Rabbi Yossie Azose who led me to this mention. Rabbi Azose said: "It's a sad commentary on the state of Jewry today that such a custom [shlissel challah] has become so widespread and accepted; moreover that there are not more contemporary Torah leaders who are not decrying this practice." Via email December 20, 2011.)
- [11] Similar, there are modern non-Jewish customs, such as in Mexico, where a 'baby Jesus' figurine is baked into cupcakes; often, the child who finds it wins a prize. This is also practiced in the U.S. state of Louisiana beginning at Mardi Gras and practiced for 30 days after. There, a 'baby Jesus' toys baked into a whole cake, and whoever finds the baby in their piece has to buy the next day's cake. In Spain, there is a tradition of placing a small Jesus doll inside a cake and whoever finds it must take it to the nearest church on February 2, Candlemas Day (Día de la Candelaria), which celebrates the presentation of Jesus in Jerusalem.
- [12] This includes women of all backgrounds, including Hassidic and non-Hassidic, Modern Orthodox, etc.
- [13] Chandler, Richard. *Travels in Asia Minor*. London 1776. 158 (It's been supposed the British custom of 'cross-buns,' small rolls with a cross on them eaten on the Christian holiday of Good Friday [the Day of the Cross], probably arose from this.)
- [14] Justin Martyr, also known as just Saint Justin (103–165 CE), was an early Christian apologist. He depicted the paschal lamb as being offered in the form of a cross and he claimed that the manner in which the paschal lamb was slaughtered prefigured the crucifixion of Jesus. Some opinions indicate rabbinic evidence shows that in Jerusalem the Jewish paschal lamb was offered in a manner which resembled a crucifixion. (See: Tabory, Joseph. "From The Crucifixion of the Paschal Lamb." *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 86, No. 3/4 (Jan.-Apr., 1996), pp. 395-406.
- [15] Paschal derives from the Latin paschalis or pashalis, which means "relating to Easter," from Latin pascha ('Passover,' i.e. the Easter Passover'), Greek Πάσχα, Aramaic paschā, in turn from the Hebrew pessah, which means "to be born on, or to be associated with, Passover day." Since the Hebrew holiday Passover coincides closely with the later Christian holiday of Easter, the Latin word came to be used for both occasions.
- [16] Driscoll, James F. "Paschal Lamb." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 8. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910.
- [17] Herzog, Marvin. *The Yiddish Language in Northern Poland: Its Geography and History*. Bloomington, Indiana University, 1965. 30-32.
- [18] See. aishdas.org/avodah/vol25/v25n384.shtml & aishdas.org/avodah/vol28/v28n067.shtml#03
- [19] ravaviner.com/2011/04/shut-sms-110.html
- [20] Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has been a Jewish educator for 25 years. He is the founder of www.Mesora.org and publisher of the *Jewish-Times*.
- [21] "Segulas: Open Letter about the Shliss Challah from Moshe Ben-Chaim" (Mesora.Org) reposted on aishdas.org/avodah/vol28/v28n067.shtml#12
- [22] Mann, Reuven. "Segulas II: Be-emunah Shlaimah: With Perfect Faith." mesora.org/segulasII.htm
- [23] While some families have a minhag (tradition) of schlissel challah, others have none.
- [24] It also occasionally takes place by those in the Reform and Conservative synagogue movements and at 'JCC' Jewish Community Centers.
- [25] Survey conducted by this author November 12, 2011-December 1, 2011 (This includes the Shulamith School for Girls in Brooklyn, NY, the first Orthodox Jewish elementary school for girls in North America).
- [26] thefivetowns.com/images/schlisseltefillah.pdf
- [27] thekosherchannel.com/kosher-recipes-blog.html
- [28] backoftheshul.com/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=3581
- [29] asimplejew.blogspot.com/2007/04/guest-posting-by-talmid-shlissel.html
- [30] imamother.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=149108
- [31] imamother.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=2033
- [32] jewishupdates.com/2011/05/09/key-to-lake-wood%E2%80%99s-town-hall-used-for-shlissel-challah/
- [33] metroimma.com/group/shabbatchallah
- [34] You shall count for yourselves - from the day following the holiday, the day when you bring the omer as a wave-offering - for seven complete weeks. Until the after the seventh week you shall count - fifty days.... (Lev. 23:15-16)
- [35] From Rabbi Jacob ben Sheshet of Spain, is where we find the the concept and idea that the fifty gates (examined by the original kabbalists in the milieu of where the Zohar was written), represent a way to understand the Torah, "Fifty gates consist of five sets of ten gates, each set explicating one of the five parts of the Pentateuch." See: Idel, Moshe. *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah And Interpretation*. Binghamton: Vail-Ballou Press, 2002. 212 / Also, this very subjective concept has its origin in the Talmud (Gemara RH 21b), and even there, there is more than one interpretation. Further, the connection to the Omer is clearly out of context, as what the Gemara says is that "Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all were given to Moshe except one." This, of course, is completely unrelated to the topic of the Omer.
- [36] Purportedly we learn from the "Tzvi LaTzadik" that he lists at the beginning of his *Hilkhot Hamets uMatsa*, that there are 8 mitsvot (3 positive and 5 negative) involved with connecting the idea of a key with challah. The alleged indication is that the key that is put in the challah alludes to the letters מפתח (key) spell פתח מצות (ה"פ) is bread, representing the "hamets" and פתח is for matsa- these allude to Hilkhot Hamets uMatsa, and the ח is the 8 mitsvot involved). ■

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