

Eitan Urkowitz

Bar Mitzvah Speech

Shabbat Shalom

Birshut harav

This morning I read from two Torahs, the first one Parshat Vayikra, which was the Torah reading for the week, and a part of the annual cycle to finish the entire Torah reading in one year.

The second one was a special Torah reading associated with Shabbat Zachor, which always occurs the Shabbat before Purim. This second Torah reading was chosen because it speaks about the surprise and vicious attack on the Jews by the nation of Amalek, just after the Jews had left Egypt in the time of Moshe. As a result,

living in Persia and Media during the period between the two Batei Mikdash, the two Temples. And the attempt by the wicked Haman, to destroy the Jewish people, until the Jews were saved by Queen Esther and her ^{relative} ~~uncle~~-Mordechai.

Each of these three readings has its own obligations which are tied to it, and I would like to discuss some of the similarities and differences between them.

For example, about a year and a half ago, when Tropical Storm Allison hit, I looked out the ^{several} window^s o'clock that morning and we saw a river between our house and the one across the street. We figured we would be staying in because it would be impossible to get to shul. But about an hour later, the water went down and we got ready to go to shul. However when we got to ~~the~~

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The answer is that ~~the~~ next week we would have had to read the Torah reading for the week which was missed and for the next week.

The reason for this is that there is an obligation for the public to have a continuous Torah reading, without interruption.

In Hebrew this is known as a ^{חובת} ~~חובת~~ ^{צרכ}. So that if a person is

sick one Shabbat and cannot make it to shul, he does not have to make up the Torah reading, because the Torah was still read in the shul for other people. The obligation for the individual to hear the Torah reading every Shabbat morning, or on Monday and Thursday mornings is called a ~~חובת~~ ^{חובת יחיד}.

closed and everyone would go to the synagogue for Torah reading.

This may be understood as follows: that the people did not go to the synagogue for davening, because there is no obligation for an individual to daven prior to the time of the burial. There is no

חובת יחיד. Rather they went to the synagogue for the Torah reading because the mourning which they were practicing does not override the public obligation to read the Torah. The **חובת צבור** remained

However, for the Torah reading of Parshat Zachor, we are not talking about an obligation which is there for the public, There is no **חובת צבור** but one which is there for every individual Jew, there is a **חובת יחיד**. The mitzvah is for each one of us to read parshat Zachor by ourselves, but the rabbis said that we can fulfill the mitzvah by hearing it read in the synagogue when there is a

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The third reading which I would like to deal with this morning is the megillah reading, which will be this Monday night and Tuesday morning.

The obligation for the Megillah reading is a combination of the weekly Torah reading and of Zachor. It is similar to the weekly Torah reading in that it is something which should be done publicly, as one of the mitzvot associated with the megillah is **פרסומי ניסא** publicly showing that a miracle had taken place. That

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I would also like to thank all of my teachers who care about me

They are always there with a smile for me, making me feel good, telling me jokes and so many other things. I really think that my Poppy is more nervous than I am about my Bar Mitzvah. I hope that after this speech, he will take a deep breath and relax.

Going from the most nervous to the one who has the most nachas at family simchot, I am so happy that my great grandmother, whom I call Grandma, is here with me and my family celebrating this weekend. Watching Grandma being happy is a pleasure to see. And this weekend for her is a special time, with two simchot, this morning, and tomorrow evening.

I would like to thank my cousins from Israel, Elishai, Tal and Or, for coming all this way for my bar mitzvah. From my cousins who came from the four corners of America, from the Northeast, southeast, northwest and west

I would like to wish my 92 year old young, grandmother in

And אחרון תביב Last but not least, would like to thank my dear, loving, and caring parents for everything, they are there not only for this day, but for everyday of my life. I thought it is hard being a kid, but it has to be even harder being a parent. I guess that my parents will have it even tougher when they have four, yes four, teenagers at one time.

I would also like to thank the whole Houston Jewish community for making growing up in Houston so much fun, and such a great place to be.

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Shabbat Shalom

MARCH 1981
 Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

by and large

One of the major problems of our day is the breakdown of any objective standard of what is right or wrong. Our society has bought ^{hook} ~~almost~~ ^{hook} hook, line and sinker, the idea of subjective morality, the idea that if something feels good, it must be good, that how you feel about something determines completely its morality. This type of thinking is destructive of society and is even worse than the Greek idea which stated that if something was beautiful, it must be good. At least, with the Greek conception there was some objective criteria. Beauty had to have some form.

In our day and age, it all depends upon your feelings and even our art, music, and literature reflect this. They are almost all formless because feeling, itself, is amorphous. This idea of subjective morality, also, strips away from parents any authority over their children and, also, takes away from them their function as role models. Children can now say, "You are right, your particular life style may be good for you but, as for me, I feel another life style is much better". The trouble with subjective morality and the elevation of feelings as the sole repository of right and wrong is that human feelings can be very destructive. To some people, it may feel good to hit another person. To other people, it may feel so good to kill and, in fact, in the ancient world and in even modern India there have been cults of professional killers. Right now, crime is rising in our country at a ^{terrific!} featful rate. This can be directly attributed, in my opinion, to the rise of the idea that if something feels good you should do it.

Philosophically, the underpinnings for this idea were laid out by Kant who talked about the autonomous man. Morality was to spring from man himself. Man, himself, was to determine what was right and wrong. No outside law could ever be imposed on man because this would limit his

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freedom. This concept ^{posited} ~~posited~~ the notion that every man, unaided, could arrive at the same standards of morality. This proved to be false and all we are left with, today, is the idea that each one of us has our own subjective, individual morality and that it is based upon how we feel about certain things.

Of course, there are problems with trying to live with objective standards that stem from outside ourselves. They sometimes seem to stifle us as individuals. They sometimes are not always the true expression of our inner state. They sometimes can lead to depression and neurosis if the concept of Teshuva ^{repentance} or ~~a second and third chance~~ ^{one} does not accompany it, but they will allow us to measure ourselves and to rise to higher, loftier levels. If a person falls short of the basic objective standards of honor and integrity as laid down in the Torah, he can still try again to reach them. It is wrong to say that all values depend only on feeling. There is a right and a wrong outside of each of us and we must always try to do what is right even though sometimes we may fail.

In Judaism, we try to combine subjective and objective morality by education. We try to educate people in values so much and so long that subjectively they would always feel that they must do only what is objectively right. That really is the purpose of Jewish education, to internalize Jewish ^{values} values, to make them second nature. We must work at it, though. That's what it means to be a "mentsch." Sometimes, though, in spite of our Jewish education, we may feel we want to do things that we know are objectively wrong. When this happens, we must heed the objective morality outside of ourselves and not our feelings.

This idea is expressed clearly in the very substance on which the Ten Commandments were given. The Ten Commandments were given on tablets of

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stone. Stone is a substance which, if it is to be shaped, must be shaped from the outside. Other substances are shaped from the inside. Iron and steel are heated and then they can be shaped. They, however, do not last. They rust. Stone, on the other hand, will last forever. That's why we make our monuments out of stone. Outside intervention is necessary. Internal conditions alone will never shape stone. This is true of human beings as well. We all need objective standards for us to achieve the proper values. Just depending upon how we feel about something will quickly lead to our destruction.

This, basically, is what we learn, too, from the conduct of Ahasuerus, the king of the Purim story. He was a man who based all his morality on how he felt about something. He got rid of Vashti. He married Esther. He was willing to let Haman kill all the Jews based only on his subjective feelings. He is a prototype of a fool in Jewish literature. He bends and sways based on his feelings. He is a drunkard whose feelings, themselves, depend on how much he has drunk. Purim, itself, is a carnival type holiday with costumes and revelry. We are supposed to drink so much that we cannot tell the difference between cursing Haman and blessing Mordecai. This, of course, should teach us all that our subjective feelings are very variable. They depend upon what we eat, what we drink, what has happened to us during the day, what someone said to us, what our finances are, etc. Great harm can be done by people who base all their reactions and policies on their feelings. They need to measure what they want to do against objective criteria outside themselves. Only then can they tell whether or not they are doing the right thing.

In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we learn about the necessity of sacrifice. We learn that a person could only bring a sacrifice when he ^{committed} did a sin

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unintentionally. ~~Almost never~~ ^{He} could ^{not} bring a sacrifice when he ^{committed} did a
sin intentionally. ^{with a few exceptions.} Many times we fail to realize the objective harm
that we do when we allow ourselves to be led only by our internal feelings.
Many times we claim that we did not intend to hurt another person. We
only were following our feelings. This type of attitude the Torah labels
a sin even though we did not mean to do any harm directly. We are told
that after we have made restitution in such a case a sacrifice is required.
It is required because, symbolically, we must recognize that many times
we must sacrifice our feelings in order to be good. Morality based on
"well, it feels good" can only lead to havoc. Let us all remember that
there is an objective right and wrong and let's try to live by it.

The Torah portion Vayikra begins with the statement, "Vayikra El Moshe" and He called to Moshe. This word Vayikra is not spelled the normal way. The Aleph at the end of the word is written very small. The Torah portion then continues by telling us that Moshe was told to speak to the sons of Israel and you should say to them "a man when he will offer a sacrifice to G-d". The Torah here uses a different word for man. It uses the word Adam. It does not use the normal words like Ish, or Enosh or Gever but it uses the word Adam. Adam, of course, not only means man but was also the name of the first man. We are taught here that everyone could bring a sacrifice to the Temple, Jew or non-Jew, that everyone must be willing to sacrifice for everyone if we are going to have a community. It could have just said when a Jew will bring but it does not. In our day and age there is a fallacy that is widespread that the only one that is worth sacrificing for is yourself. There is no feeling of community. Everyone is out for themselves. In Judaism we say that we owe a responsibility not only to ourselves but also to G-d and to our community. Today everyone would agree that we owe responsibility to ourselves and many that we owe responsibility to G-d but very few believe that we owe a responsibility to our community. The community is looked at as only a mechanism to further the individual. It is not looked at as an entity itself. The community, itself, is an entity with all the rights to it. It is not just a mechanism for the furtherance of our individual goals. We understand this well in business where we have created an organism known as a corporation. It is not identical to its shareholders or workers or managers. It has a separate identity and in effect never dies. We owe obligations to the community. We cannot do just what we want to do. To further ourselves we are not free to do anything we want to do. One of the reasons for the emergence of crime in our society is the breakdown of community. People feel they are justified to do anything if it is for their benefit. This week in Indiana we killed a man named Judy. We should have killed him. He pretended his car was disabled. A woman stopped to help him. He raped the woman, then killed her, and then drowned her three small children in a creek. When he was 13 years old he had attacked another woman, stabbed her 40 times, beat her on the head with a hatchet twice, and cut off her thumb. Miraculously she lived and he was out on parole in a few months. He had attacked over 20 other women. This man had forfeited his right to community. He did not recognize any restraints on

himself. We all have to recognize that we are one. We are all descended from Adam. We cannot do anything we want. This week's Shabbos is also known as Shabbos Zochor. We are told to remember Amalek. Amalek attacked the weak and the feeble. We are told not to hate Amalek but to remember him. There is evil in the world and we have to recognize it but this evil is in all of us. We can overcome it if we are educated, if we learn moral values but we must start when we are young. That's why the word Vayikra is written with a small Aleph. The letter Aleph stands for the Hebrew word Aleph which means to teach. We have to teach the children when they are young about moral values if we are to have a feeling of community. Unfortunately, in our day we just stress skills. Purim emphasizes this, too. There was very little difference between Haman and Mordecai. In fact, the words Bless Haman and Curse Mordecai have the same numerical value in Hebrew. Haman was an ambitious man, hard working, industrious, a good family man, who listened to his wife but he would do anything to get ahead. He was ambitious only for himself. He had no feeling for anything except his own ambition. He would have been a Phi Beta Kappa at a university today. He was willing to sacrifice a whole people to further his career. There are certain things we just cannot do to get ahead, or to get more money or to be more successful. We have to realize that all of us are a part of a community and have a responsibility to it. The story about a fellow who went to the health department to complain about his roommates. He complained that they had a terrible amount of pets. One had 5 dogs, one had 10 cats, another had 3 monkeys and the place just stank. The health official asked him, "Don't you have any windows?" He said, "Yes", and the health official asked him "Why don't you open your windows?" He said, "What, and let all my pigeons fly out?" Unfortunately, in our day and age people do not conceive of themselves as a part of the community. They only want to use a community to further their own interests. Special interests will eventually destroy a community not build it. We all must learn to sacrifice in order to have a community.

2A.
VAYIKRA 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Respect is very important in Judaism. We are supposed to both respect and love G-d. There is a perpetual tension between respect and love. A respect which is only based on fear is no good, and a love which is not based on respect will not last and will end up by creating terrible problems. In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we have the phrase "and He called to Moshe". It does not say who called to Moshe. We have afterwards "and G-d spoke to him". It does not say who the "him" is. It would have been much better if the sentence had just said "and G-d spoke to Moshe". Why this double language? What's more, we also use here the expression Odom, Adam, for man. Why don't we use the other expressions? Each of us has a yearning to be loved by G-d. Each of us wants to be loved. Each of us wants to give love. This is expressed by the phrase "and He called to Moshe". Within each of us there is a yearning, there is a call to love G-d and to love others. Immediately following we have the expression "and G-d spoke to him". Even though the expression for G-d which is used here is the expression which denotes G-d's attribute of loving kindness, yet it says "to him". It does not say to Moshe. There is always a certain distance which we must maintain between us and G-d and even between us and another human being. G-d is completely other than us. Each of us has a little piece of G-d in us. Each of us is an individual and deserving of respect. In our dealings with others and G-d it is not enough just to have love. We must also have respect. Love can many times lead to terrible things. For example, if you really love me you will give up your children and family, etc. Love of country, of course, can be perverted and lead to concentration camps and horrors. Love of ideology can, too, lead to great human degradation. Love has its limits. We must respect each other. We must never trample on each other's uniqueness. Even in the community we must not go for the jugular. Even when we are doing Mitzvahs we have to be careful that we respect the other person. That's why it says here "speak to the sons of Israel saying, 'a person who will sin by accident by doing all the Commandments of G-d which should not be done'". If it is a Commandment by G-d, why shouldn't it be done? The answer is you can do a Mitzvah but still do a lot of harm unless you do it in the right way. It is not enough just to do Mitzvahs. We must do Mitzvahs which will make sure that we will treat another person with respect.

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That's why Odom is used for man. The word Odom in Hebrew comes from the word Adamo, ground. Each of us are other than G-d. Our base is the earth. On the other hand, the word Adam can also come from the Hebrew word Dome which means similar and we can read it "I will be similar to G-d". We each need to love G-d and to respect Him. We each need to love each other and to respect each other. This especially applies in the family with spouses, children, grandparents, etc. Human beings must always balance the demands of love and respect.

SIN

- 1) feeling of inadequacy
- 2) ^{burnt} acknowledge sacrifice
Purse outside of ourselves
- 3) ^{peace} closeness with G-D, may
- 3) ^{meal of grace} implement new insights
INT = Life

VAYIKRA 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In order to have ideals you must sacrifice for them. That's why the sacrifices are placed in the same book in which the loftiest Jewish ideals are recounted. (For example, love your neighbor as yourself.) Unless a person is willing to sacrifice his time, energy, and means for his ideals then he really does not believe in them. We Jews have never had a formal creed. We judge a person by what he does, not by what he says he believes. In fact, a person can get up and say I am not sure I believe in this or that and we tell him just to sit down. However, if a person fails to pay his charity obligations, his dues in a Synagogue, we kick him out. People when they say they believe in certain things and then do not even move in the direction of their beliefs by giving of their time, effort, etc., these people are just putting on a front. They are just trying to fool themselves so they will not suffer from guilt. Each of us must sacrifice for ideals otherwise we do not have any ideals. The question, though, can be asked, how can we know when the ideals we are sacrificing for are worthwhile. I much prefer a person who has no ideals rather than a person who has false ideals. There is no more evil person than a person who is willing to sacrifice for evil ideals. Hitler was a vegetarian. He did not chase other men's wives. He was not a glutton. He never took a penny from the State. All his income was based on the sale of his book Mein Kampf, but he was one of the most evil men who ever lived. Just being dedicated and devoted does not make you good. How do we know that the ideals we are sacrificing for are good ideals and worthy of our sacrifice? In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we have three criteria laid out. The Torah portion says "Vayikra El Moshe", "and He called to Moshe". The Aleph at the end of the word is written in small letters. The Rabbis teach us that this represents the children, that we are to teach the children. Are our sacrifices good for the children? Are they good for the future? If our ideals we espouse are not good for children or the future then they are false ideals. Second, the Torah tells us that Adam or man, when he will sacrifice for you (you plural), will sacrifice your offerings. The word in Hebrew for Adam, for man has no plural. There are three other words for man in Hebrew, Ish, Gever, and Enosh. They all have plurals. The Torah is telling us here that our ideals must always safeguard the individual. We cannot tramp on the individual and on the other hand our ideals must be good for the total community, for

everyone in it, not just for part of the community. Thirdly, our sacrifices must result in a Rayach Nachoach, in a sweet smelling offering. Our sacrifices must also create in each of us a wholesome sweet personality. If it does not then our ideals are missing something. Our ideals must be good for children, they must safeguard the individual, and be good for the total community and every group in it, and they must also produce wholesome sweet individuals. What are the requirements for a wholesome sweet individual? The meal offering was an offering that everyone could bring regardless of whether or not they had any money. It was composed of oil, matzah, salt, and spices. In order to have a pleasing and wholesome personality you must have enthusiasm symbolized by the oil, the recognition that we need others, that we are dependent on others which is symbolized by the matzah. We must also want to establish permanent relationships not just use people. We must possess a certain tact so that when we do nice things we do them in a nice way. If we have these things then we will have a sweet wholesome personality. Many times I ask people to help. Some people never turn me down, but they always say, "Rabbi, why do you have to ask me?". They make their giving very unpleasant. Others tell me, "Next time, Rabbi, when I get around to it". They really do not have the sweet wholesome personality we need. The story about a man who knocks on the door. The woman answers it and he says, "I am the plumber. I have come to fix your pipes." The woman looks at him surprised and says, "I didn't call any plumber". He looks at her and says, "Aren't you Mrs. Goldberg?". She said, "No, she moved a year ago". The plumber then looked at her and said, "How do you like that? They say it is an emergency and then they move".

2A...
VAYIKRA 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the headlines of this morning's Chronicle there was an item which claimed that the Israelis were harassing the American soldiers and making them lose their manhood. They were calling them chicken, not even an u chicken. If this whole thing wouldn't be so serious, it would be ludicrous. When I served as a Chaplain on an Air Force base, I saw many fights between the branches of the services. They called each other a lot worse names than chicken. There have been no casualties. No one has been hurt. This is a trumped up situation. The problem with this situation, and it is a very serious problem, is that once again the image of the arrogant Jew is being dredged up. In the Middle Ages a Jew could not walk on the sidewalk. He had to walk in the gutter. A Jew could not ride a horse. He had to ride a mule. The Jew was an upstart who always had to be put down. DeGaulle, after the 1967 War, when he wanted to curry favor with the Arabs, talked about the arrogant Jew. This concept has led to great danger for our people. It has caused us to be excluded from society and physically harmed. Its rebirth at this time is dangerous. We Jews in the past have never really cared what the outside world thought of us because we knew we had a satisfying way of life. Today, though, many Jews do not even know about their own way of life and this new campaign of the arrogant Jew is not only going to befuddle them, but will lead to self-hatred. In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we learn about sacrifices. Actually the word for sacrifice in Hebrew means to get close, to come near. The sacrifices were a mechanism which allowed the Jewish people to get closer to G-d and to get closer to each other. We Jews in the past have followed our religion because it fit. As Rabbi Steinsaltz explained when he was here, "You can either fulfill a religion just because it is commanded or you can do it because it is beneficial". However, both these reasons leave much to be desired. The main reason that most people follow the religion is because it gives meaning and reasons to life and it feels right. You were fulfilling the reason for which you were created. For example, if a person broke his wrist, he can still get along but it is awkward. The cast is heavy and he cannot cope as well. When the cast is removed and your wrist perfect for the task for which it was created you feel better. You are perfecting the function for which you are created. The same goes for the Mitzvah with the Jewish people. When you do them it just seems to fit. It makes for balance and a good life. In the Torah portion,

Vayikra begins with the Vayikra. It is written with a little Aleph at the end. The word Vayikra means with the Aleph "and he called " and with the Aleph it means "chance occurrence". The Aleph is written very small, much smaller than the other letters. This teaches us that just this little point of whether or not you believe you have been called and you are fulfilling your purpose or whether everything is just a product of chance can mean for your life. It seems like just a little thing but it is not. One makes your life fit and gives hope for the future. The other many times leads to drugs and alcohol and despair. We are told that we can get near to G-d and our fellow human beings. If we will do then we will see that they will fit. We are supposed to answer the call not to wait for chance occurrences. If we do so we really do not have to worry about what the rest of the world does. We will still be able to lead good fulfilling lives even though there may be danger. The story about the man whose house was on the flood plane. A big flood came. The waters came 10 feet into his house. A row boat came to save him. He said, "Go away, go away, G-d will help me". The waters came up to 20 feet and he was in the attic. The row boats came again to save him and once again he said, "Go away, go away, G-d will save me". Finally the waters rose to 30 feet. A helicopter came to take him off the roof. He said, "Go away, go away, G-d will save me". Five minutes later a huge wave came and knocked him off the roof and he drowned. He then went before G-d. He looked up at G-d and said, "What's the matter with you, G-d? Why didn't You save me? Why did You let me drown?" G-d looked at him and said, "Shlemiel, who do you think sent the row boats and helicopter?" If we want a fulfilling and good life we are not just to sit back and wait. We have Mitzvahs to do.

2A. VAYIKRA

LIMITS MAKE FOR LIFE

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the most prevalent ideas today is that the worst thing a person can do to himself is to set limits for himself. Stifling one's potentiality is a crime and anybody who shuts himself out from any of life is doing a terrible thing. People should try to experience everything. We were meant to develop ourselves to the full. Anybody who limits himself stifles himself. Life is to be lived without limits, without fences. We should explore our sensuality, probe the depths of our feelings, let it all hang out. This will prevent us from becoming neurotic. We are to sacrifice everything, parents, children to pursue this great goal of self-fulfillment, a fulfillment which can only take place if we set for ourselves no limits.

This idea of life without limits has doomed many people in our generation to a great deal of trauma and unhappiness. It has caused broken families and destroyed lives. Limits are essential if we are to experience life fully. This is one of Judaism's basic teachings. It also is one of the main reasons why people today are afraid of Judaism. Trying to experience everything can lead to terrible results. This idea of limitless man is actually the basis of Naziism. Why should't I kill, rape, and pillage if I feel like it? I should be able to experience everything and if I have the power to get away with it, why not? This is also the basis of the drug culture. I should expand my consciousness and take mind altering drugs. I should be able to experience and feel all sorts of highs and ecstasies. We believe, however, that everything in life has limits. Even love has limits. There is a famous French story of a woman who loved a man. She had a child from a previous marriage. He told her that if she really loved him she would throw her child out of a six-story window. Her love for him was so overpowering that she did as he asked and, of course, the child died. Love of country can be perverted, and was by the Germans, and led to the concentration camps. Love of ideoloty can be perverted, and was by the Communists, and led and leads to the great human suffering and degradation of the Gulag 17's.

In the Torah portion, Vayikra, we have many of these ideas discussed. We read in it the strange sentence, "If any one of the people sin through err by doing one of the

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commandments of G-d which should not be done". We have here an obvious contradiction. If it is one of the commandments of G-d, why shouldn't it be done? The answer is that you can even do a Mitzvan and do the wrong thing. Mitzvahs have to be done the right way, too. It is just not enough to do a Mitzvah. A husband who refuses to help his wife anytime on anything because he has to daven or learn, or the person who helps his relative but makes him cringe and beg for money is "doing one of the commandments of G-d which should not be done". Even the way we do Mitzvahs is limited.

Judaism is so hard for modern man because it sets limits and modern man does not like limits. Limits, though, are good for us. They actually allow us to enjoy more of life than if we do not have limits. In the physical realm we understand this. A person who eats continually without limits will become overweight. Being overweight will limit all his other activities and will endanger his health. This will, of course, lead to his having to live a much more restricted life than if he had initially limited his food intake. We believe that this is true in all aspects of life. Failure to limit yourself in one area will eventually cause you to be severely limited in many many areas. You will not be able to fulfill your potential this way.

We are not to sacrifice everything in order to be able to experience everything. This is not an ideal which will, in the long run, lead to happiness and which is worthy to sacrifice for. In this Torah portion we learn what ideals are worth sacrificing for. In it we have laid out three criteria by which we must measure all ideals. The ideal of experiencing everything does not measure up to these criteria. The Torah portion begins with the words "Vayikra El Moshe" "and He called to Moshe". The Aleph at the end of the word Vayikra is written in small letters. The Rabbis tell us that this represents the children. We must always ask the question, "Is this philosophy of life, this ideal we believe in good for our children? Does it assure a future?" If the ideals we espouse are not good for our children or for the future then they are false ideals. Taking drugs does not assure a future. Working so hard that you never see your children is a false sacrifice. It is not good for our children.

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Secondly, the Torah continues by telling us that "Adam (or man) when he will sacrifice for you will sacrifice your offerings". The word "Adam" (or man) has no plural. There are three other words for man in Heberw; Eesh, Gever, and Anosh. They all have plurals. The Torah is telling us by specifically using the word "Adam" that our ideals must never trample on an individual. If our love is going to hurt our children it is a false love. If our ideals are going to harm others then they are false ideals. We cannot trample on the individual. In that same sentence it mentions "Adam (or man) when he will sacrifice for you" the "you" is plural. Our ideals must not only encompass ourselves but the whole community, too. Our ideals must be good for the total community, for everyone in it not just for part of the community. Thirdly, in the Torah portion we learn that our sacrifices for our ideals must result in Rayach Nachoach, a pleasing acceptance. Our ideals must also create in each of us a wholesome sweet personality. If it does not then our ideals are missing something. Our ideals must be good for children, they must safeguard the individual and be good for the community, and produce wholesome sweet individuals. A philosophy which sets no limits on man cannot achieve these goals. Only a philosophy which sets limits on man can achieve these goals. Integrity, family, morality can never be sacrificed.

This same lesson about the importance of limits is emphasized in the story of Pesach. We celebrate Pesach by assuming greater limits. We can no longer eat all the foods we could throughout the year. This emphasizes the point that freedom does not mean that there are no limits, that freedom does not mean that I can do anything I want or how I want. Freedom does not mean that we have no limits. Freedom means that we now have the ability to sacrifice for worthwhile ideals, that we now have the ability to help G-d by being His partner in creating a more just and better society. Freedom means that we have the opportunity to fulfill ourselves by observing Mitzvahs. It does not mean that we now have no limits. It is very hard to realize that you are actually feeling and experiencing more of life when you have limits than when you do not have limits. It is a hard message to get across because it seems so contradictory, but it is true.

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All throughout Jewish history we have had this same problem of how to put across this message. Jews, many times, do not realize that by sacrificing and working for ideals that are good for children, good for the individual and the community, and which make for a sweet wholesome personality they are really allowing themselves to feel the real meaning of life. All the other philosophies of self-fulfillment through breaking down limits only end in desperation and unhappiness. Look at all the rock stars and so-called successful people of our day who end up committing suicide or dying from an overdose. But it is hard, though, to convince people.

At every Seder we set aside a cup for Eliahu. Eliahu had a hard time convincing the people of his time of Judaism's message, that life's fullness can only be felt by setting limits. Only 3000 Jews had not bowed down to Baal. But he persisted and Judaism survived and his cup stands on every Seder table to remind us that the philosophy of experiencing everything was tried before in Jewish history and found wanting, and it will and has been found wanting in our day. Judaism's message of life's fullness through limits is ultimately the only way we can feel life's true meaning.

2A. VAYIKRA

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Vayikra we learn about sacrifices. We learn how we are to sacrifice. This Torah portion begins with the word "Vayikra" "and he called". The word Vayikra is spelled with a little Aleph. This little Aleph has no sound, but yet it is vital to understand the meaning of this word because without the Aleph this words means "and it just happened". With the Aleph it means "and he called". The small things which make no sound are sometimes the most important things. Whether the world is just a chance occurrence or whether it has meaning and purpose and each of us has a function is just concepts within our mind. We cannot see, touch, or feel this concept, but whether or not we believe in this concept determines our whole life. It is the little, unseen, unheralded things that make the big difference. A person who thinks that life is just chance occurrence is not worth anything and is much more susceptible to drugs, alcohol, etc., but a person who knows that G-d is counting on him and that what he does is important will live a good and a just life and will be happier inside. That little Aleph is just a little thing. It does not make a sound but how important it is!

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In the Torah portion Vayikra we learn about sacrifice and the willingness to sacrifice. Each of us knows how important ideals are, we all know how dangerous they can be, too. We know that a person with the wrong ideals who is willing to sacrifice for these ideals is a very dangerous person. Hitler really believed that he was saving the world by killing Jews. The early Communists really believed that by killing 6,000,000 peasants they were saving Russia. They were willing to sacrifice others for their ideals. We in America remember the terrible religious wars in Europe and how these wars came about because people were willing to sacrifice everything for their beliefs. That's why in America we hesitate to elect any ideologs or people who have overriding fanatical beliefs to public office. We much prefer people who are willing to compromise a little. In fact, the matter is, and I concur with this, it is better to have a crook in office than an ideolog. The crook may take his 5% like Mayor Thompson did in Chicago, but he will build many parks and he did build Lakeshore Drive. He took his 5%, but he left everybody alone. An ideolog, on the other hand, would be compelled to force all sorts of life styles on people. This is true, but on the other hand, we have to be very careful that when we judge people we judge them not solely on style but also on substance. They must stand for something even though they are willing to compromise here and there how to implement it, and that they are tolerant of others in their beliefs. Too often in this country we judge people and things by questions of style. I remember a women who came to me recently complaining about a man who she thought was terribly uncouth because his table manners were not the best. I looked at the lady and said, "But, don't you realize how much good that man does, how much charity he does?" She said, "Yes, I realize that, but why can't he be more like Mr. So and So?" The person she now mentioned was a very polished individual, but he was really a nogoodnik. I knew many of the things he did and how he really did not go out of his way for anybody. He was a very selfish man. He had this woman's and the women she represented seal of approval because he had such wonderful manners, but he was a very selfish individual.

On the other hand, the man who really did good was shunned and considered to be uncouth. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to do the same thing today in politics and in judging who is fit to run institutions, etc. Do they make a good appearance is the theme. Style is stressed and not substance. If Abraham Lincoln were alive today I am sure he would be elected to nothing because he was not only a tall gangly man, but also had pocks on his face from having smallpox as a kid. He also spoke in a high pitched voice with an Indiana twang. I am sure that his television appearances would have been a disaster. In the Torah portion Vayikra we learn about sacrifices. Most of the sacrifices were actually eaten by the people and only a few drops of blood put on the altar. There was one, a sacrifice, the "Ola" which was totally sacrificed to G-d to show a person's dedication and devotion to G-d. It was completely sacrificed except for its skin. The hide was not sacrificed. The outer manifestation was not important. What was important was what was inside. We have this same thing enunciated later on when we learn about how "if one person would sin by accident from the people by doing one of the Mitzvahs of G-d which should not be done." If it is a Mitzvah of G-d, why shouldn't it be done? The Rabbis say that perhaps the person did a Mitzvah, but did not do it in the right way, but it is still a Mitzvah. The Torah still gives him credit for the Mitzvah. Maybe it would have been better if he had done the Mitzvah with style and grace, but the important thing is that he did the Mitzvah. The Torah portion starts out by telling us "and he called to Moshe and G-d spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying." Here we have repeated three different expressions for communication. And he called to Moshe, and G-d spoke, saying. The Rabbis say "called" in Hebrew is the language of affection. When you use the expression "speak" it has a harsher tone. "Saying" has a middle tone. G-d first called to Moshe, affectionately, and then He worried about any little details later. Finally He told Moshe that "Lemor", "Speak", or style is secondary. The most important thing is to be a warm human being. It is true that it would be better if a person could have substance and style, but

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style alone is not important. It is way down on the list, number three. The first thing is to be a warm human being, the second is to do good things, and the third is style. Too often in politics and at home and in our institutions we judge people too much by style and not by substance. Substance is what really counts, not style. I remember a story they tell about a movie director who was a very suave, polished character, but who was a bum. He liked to hurt people, and he would finagle them on contracts, etc. His 120 years were up and he died. He had a huge gigantic funeral. The people could not understand why he had such a big funeral since he hurt so many people. Finally one person said, "I understand it. He used to say, 'If you give the people what they want they will show up.'" Substance is important, not style.

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In the Torah portion Vayikra we learn about the sacrificial system. People have a wrong idea of what the sacrificial system was all about. A person could not bring a sacrifice in most instances if he committed a sin on purpose. The sacrificial system was ~~not meant to obtain forgiveness for~~ ^{NOT MEANT TO OBTAIN FORGIVENESS FOR} ~~not to forgive from~~ deliberate sins. It was a system which was designated to make a person feel psychologically whole. If a person committed a sin unintentionally, by mistake, he would, many times, feel terrible. The sacrificial system allowed a person to feel whole, to feel good about himself. For example, if a ~~little boy or girl~~ ^{child} ran in front of your automobile and you hit him ~~or her~~, even if it was not your fault at all, you would feel terrible. The sacrificial system allowed a person to regain a sense of psychological wholeness. Many times, too, a person would violate a holiday. He would, all of a sudden, take a drink on Yom Kippur, forgetting that it was Yom Kippur, or he would hurt somebody accidentally not meaning to. That's why the Torah portion says if one soul sins by doing one of the Mitzvahs of G-d and he will be guilty. Sometimes by doing a Mitzvah we also sin. How is this possible? If we are doing a Mitzvah, how are we sinning, and if we are sinning, how are we doing a Mitzvah? This can happen because we are insensitive to other people. We could help people but make them cringe and feel bad when we offer them aid. In fact, it said about the prince or the leader not "if" he will sin from doing all the Mitzvah, but that the leader "will" sin when he is doing one of the Mitzvahs of G-d. "Asher Nosee Yechetah, that the prince will sin." Many times a leader, when he makes a decision, will hurt certain people. It is inevitable. A leader, by favoring certain policies, will hurt certain groups. The hope is that the prince or leader will be sensitive to the needs of others and will minimize the hurts that are inevitable. From these three words, "Asher Nosee Yechetah" we learn the sin of the leaders. The first letters of these words spell "ani" which means, "I, I, I." A leader, many times, concentrates on himself and, therefore, only sees himself and his problems. Therefore, many times, he hurts other badly, unintentionally, but badly. Today we have no sacrificial system, but, ~~many times~~ ^{Today Too}, people have trouble handling their guilt. They instead take Valium or other drugs or alcohol to handle the tensions and guilt they feel. They cannot

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maintain their psychological wholeness. ¶ In this Torah portion we ^{also} learn that we are not to eat "Chailev", fat or blood of an animal. This thick fat and blood ~~was~~ ^{were} offered on the altar, but perhaps the Torah is telling us here something more important.

It is telling us how to maintain our psychological wholeness. Blood is very important to life. It, however, is not an organ which seems to fulfill a major function. It is not like the brain which thinks, or the stomach which brings in energy, or the kidneys which expel waste. It just is a transport system. It brings food to the cells and removes the waste. It connects the body. Blood is a symbol of trust.

Trust does not actually do anything itself, but it makes everything else possible.

¶ In order to maintain psychological wholeness you must have a personality in which people can put their trust. People you cannot trust are people who are shunned, people who are dealt with in a very standoffish way. People who cannot be trusted are recipients of a special kind of behavior. The word "Chailev" for fat in Hebrew, stands for a warm, sensitive heart. People who are not sensitive to others will, many times, hurt others badly. Many times people are looking only to get rid of their guilt and not to do a real Mitzvah. A lot of times if you ask a person, "Can I help you?" you are in effect telling him you do not want to help him. If a person has just been involved in an accident and is laying there bleeding, and you go up to him and say, "Can I help you?" he will probably turn to you and say, "No, get out of here." It is obvious he needs help. You should call the police and an ambulance and prop his head up with your jacket. This way a person can always say, "I asked him if he wanted help and he said no." ¶ This happens, many times, in marriage relationships and synagogue relationships. People do not really want to help so they ask questions hoping the people will tell them no. When a person sees a need he should respond. It is like people who call me up and say, "Rabbi, how much should I give for this charity?" By the very fact of asking me how much they should give, they are signalling they do not want to give and can say, "The Rabbi did not know how much I should give so, therefore, I did not give." A person has to have a warm heart and be sensitive to the needs of others and be willing to pitch in and help. You cannot rid yourself of psychological guilt

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and you cannot be psychologically whole by playing tricks. You also will not be trusted. The Torah is telling us here that, sure it is possible to do one of the Mitzvahs that should not be done and feel guilty. Your guilt comes because you did not do the Mitzvah in a trusting and warm hearted way, or it can come because you forced yourself on others who really wanted the help, but really did not want to be treated in the arrogant way you treated them. Many people do not understand why, after they have helped, people are angry at them. They have been insensitive to others. In order to be psychologically whole we must have a personality which inspires trust and a warm personality. I am reminded of the story about an Indian who went to a psychiatrist. He said, "On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I think I'm a teepee, but on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays I think I'm a wigwam. What's the matter with me." The psychiatrist looked at him and said, "Well, the trouble with you is that you are too tense." Tension, many times, comes because we are not psychologically whole, and we are not psychologically whole because we are not sensitive enough.

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Today is Shabbos Zochar. Today is a Sabbath in which we remember. We remember that there is evil in the world, and we remember that we must combat it. We read a special Haphtorah today in which we learn how King Sol was commanded to wipe out Amalek. He, however, did not fulfill the command entirely. He let the person who was responsible for all the Amalekite atrocities live: ~~the~~ King Agag. Perhaps he did this because he wanted to show off how he conquered a mighty king and how he would be immune to his influence.

The Bible records two stories of why the kingship was taken away from Sol. In this Haphtorah we learn it was taken away from him because he did not hold responsible and punish the man who^u was actually behind all the evil which Amalek had perpetuated: Agag. We learn how Samuel tells him that G-d had rejected him now as being king. In the other story in the Bible, we learn how Sol was commanded to wait for Samuel before he offered some sacrifices. The people were pressing him to get on with the sacrifices so he gave in to the people and did not wait. There, too, it mentions that his kingdom was taken away from him because of this.

In our Haphtorah, even after Shmuel tells Sol that G-d has "rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours that is better than you", all Sol can think about is his image. He said, "I sinned. Now honor me before the elders of my people and reutnr with me, and I will worship the Lord, thy G-d". In other words, all Sol was interested in was his image. Here he was told that his kingdom was to be taken away from him, and all he could think about was what type of an image he could present before the people. That's why he was not fit to be king. He was always concerned by his image and his popularity. Perhaps he thought that if he could maintain his image he would never be deposed as king.

That's probably why, too he hated David because David proved to be more popular than he.

Unfortunately, today, too, what many Jews are concerned about is only an image. They even choose their synagogues based on what image the synagogues portray to the general community. I know many people have told me, "Rabbi, I really like your services better, but how can I invite my gentile neighbors to a Bar Mitzvah or wedding here? They would not understand anything." In other words, their gentile neighbors even determine what type of a synagogue they belong to. They want a synagogue not in order to get closer to G-d or to understand their traditions better; they only want a synagogue in order to impress their gentile neighbors. I remember when I first went into the rabbinate over 25 years ago, a man in the community approached me and said, "You know, Rabbi, I do not care what kind of sermons you make, I do not care what kind of classes you give, I do not care what kind of services you hold, but make sure that your name gets in the paper often working for the Community Chest, the Red Cross, the Cancer Fund, etc." In other words, he did not want to support a synagogue or a rabbi in order that he could learn how to get closer to G-d or Judaism. All he wanted a synagogue for was to make a good image for him in the community.

Judaism, though, cannot survive on image. King Sol could not continue as a king based on his image. Our children immediately sense that our religion is a fake if it is only something to impress our gentile neighbors with, but we, ourselves, are not impressed at all. That's why many childre after Bar Mitzvah never set foot in a synagogue because they feel it is fake. Their parents do nothing so when they

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grow up it means they do not have to do anything. Most Jews do not practice the principles of Judaism no matter to what kind of congregation they belong. Reform Jews are supposed to go to synagogue every Saturday. How many of them really go? Conservative Jews are supposed to keep kosher. How many of them keep kosher? In fact, in our synagogue, do more than half our members keep kosher?

Many of our Jews today use Judaism only as a public relations gimmick, a way of staging family life cycle events. Of course, almost all our people have a warm feeling toward their religion. They have a nostalgic feeling for Judaism. They remember how their parents and grandparents celebrated it. However, nostalgia cannot be transmitted. Today is Shabbos Zochar, the Shabbos on which we remember. People who have had Jewish experiences when they are young have something to remember. Even when they choose to forget these experiences, they remember that they have forgotten them, but people who have never had them have nothing to remember, not even that they have forgotten them.

We have done a terrific job in the last 40 years improving the Jewish image throughout the world. Jews are no longer considered, as in the 30's and 40's, outcasts and worse than dirt. Jewish doctors have no trouble practicing in hospitals now. Jews can get jobs in banks and corporations. We Jews are accepted almost anywhere. However, because our image has improved so much it is so much easier now for us to pass, to assimilate. People do not reject us anymore because we are Jews. Jews do not have to stay Jews anymore and, because of this, many of our young people are opting out. They are opting out because they have no memory. It is the memory which will preserve

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Judaism and not a public relations image to present to our gentile neighbors. Only through obtaining a memory can Judaism survive. Those Jews who do not have a memory will disappear.

We have done a terrific job during the past 40 years saving the Jewish body. We have rescued Jews from Europe and throughout the world. We have helped set up the State of Israel. We still need to rescue Russian Jewry, but we still make great strides. In the next 40 years our greatest challenge is to rescue the Jewish soul so that Jews should not choose to disappear. For this we need learning. We cannot rely on nostalgia or images.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a high school student who received a C+ as her final grade. She went to the teacher and said, "Can't you change this to a B-. If you'll change it to a B- I could make the honor roll." The teacher said, "I can't do it." The girl said, "Oh, have a heart." The teacher said, "I can't do it." She asked why, and he replied, "Because it would mean putting the heart before the course." The most important thing now we must stress is to give every Jew a memory and that means stressing learning.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we took out two Torahs, and we read about Amalek. It is interesting to note that there are three ways we relate to G-d. In the Torah portion Vayikra, we talk about sacrifices. We relate to G-d in two ways. We relate to G-d as our king, which means that we owe Him obedience, and, therefore, we have to bring certain sacrifices at certain times, and we also refer to G-d as our father using the name Hashem. This name denotes a loving, caring relationship with G-d.

In the whole book of Vayikra when it speaks about sacrifices, it uses the word Hashem because the whole purpose of sacrifices is to grow close to G-d. We want to have a father-son-mother-daughter relationship with Him.

There is a third way of relating to G-d, which is stressed in the Zohar when we remember Amalek. This relationship is stressed by the prophet Hoshea, who says that our relationship to G-d is that of husband and wife, of two lovers where, in a certain sense, we are G-d's partners, and sometimes G-d takes the initiative, but many times, though, we have to take the initiative. The Zohar mentions, in connection with Amalek, that G-d wants us to take the initiative, and He will then help us. We are supposed to fight evil. Amalek represents

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evil. If we will fight evil, G-d will help us overcome this evil. We cannot just sit back and say G-d will take care of it. We believe that G-d helps those who help themselves. That's why the Zohar refers to our relationship with G-d as that of lovers. If we will just open up our hearts a little bit to G-d as a point of a needle, He will open it up enough so you can drive a camel through. In other words, if we will take the initiative, G-d will always be there for us.

This point is emphasized in the Megillah. In the Megillah, we learn how the Jewish people are not saved until Esther is willing to risk her life to save her people. Once she is willing to do that, then G-d quickly intervenes by not allowing King Achaverosh to sleep so he must consult his book of chronicles where he learns that Mordechai saved his life. Esther was far from her people. No one knew she was Jewish, and, yet, when she decided to help her people, when she decided to fight evil, even at the risk of her own life, ^{she decided to do it} Because after all Achaverosh could have been in a bad mood, and he might not have stretched out his scepter to her. In that case, she would have been killed, but she risked ^{her life} to save her people.

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In our day, too, we have to risk to confront evil. We especially see that in Israel where the enemies of the Jewish people are still trying to destroy Israel, but we have been told that if we will just do our job, G-d will come through to help us thwart the evil designs of those who would destroy us.

I am reminded of a story they tell about a man named Shapiro who was walking along the California seashore when he spied a bottle. He rubbed the bottle and out came a genie. The genie said, "I will give you two wishes." The man said, "Well, I am afraid ~~to~~ fly, and I have always wanted to go to Hawaii. Please make me a highway from California to Hawaii." The genie said, "Do you know how hard that is? Make two more wishes, and I'll give them to you." The man said, "I wish that all the Jews would come back to Judaism, and that there will be real peace in the Middle East between the Arabs and Jews." The genie said, "Do you want a two-lane or four-lane highway?"

Let us all do our part. Let none of us be discouraged, and let us all risk to make sure that Judaism and the Jewish people will continue. If we do so, then G-d will help us, and Jewish continuity will be preserved so the Mashiach will

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VAYIKRA 2003
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Purim is this week, and we will read the Megillah. The Megillah ends in a very strange way. It ends with the phrase, "And Mordechai the Jew was the viceroy to the King Achashverosh, and he was great among the Jews and accepted by the majority of his brothers, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his progeny." What a strange way to end the Megillah! Here Mordechai, aided by Esther, had just saved the Jewish people, and here he was only accepted by the majority of the Jews? What's going on here?

It is like the story they tell about a rabbi who got sick and was hospitalized for four days. On the fifth day, the president of the congregation came and said, "Rabbi, the board, by a vote of six to five, wishes you a refuah schleimah."

Why should Mordechai have only been accepted by a majority of his brethren? We know in the Gemora that there was a lot of criticism of Mordechai. Why didn't he bow down to Haman? After all, Haman was the King's viceroy, and it was expected that everyone should bow down to him. Some rabbis explain that he had a little idol hidden away, and that's why

Mordechai did not bow down to him, but nobody saw this idol, and some rabbis say it was not even there. Why did Mordechai jeopardize the entire Jewish people by not bowing?

Secondly, why did he tell Esther not to tell the King that she was Jewish?

Are we Jews supposed to hide our identity? That's not what our religion calls for. It calls for us to be proud Jews. I remember once when I was rabbi in Lafayette, I got a call at 3:30 a.m. from a very famous professor. Based on his work, we now have the space program. I had only met him once casually. He said, "Rabbi, it's urgent that I see you, but please come through the basement door to my recreation room." I got dressed and went to his basement door. He let me in, and I could see he was also half drunk. He said, "Rabbi, I have a terrible problem." I asked, "What's the problem?" He replied, "My mother just died." I said, "I'm sorry. What can I do for you?" He said, "My wife and children do not know I am Jewish. If I go to the funeral, my wife and children will know that I am Jewish. What should I do?" I told him he had to go to the funeral. We talked for almost three hours. I do not know if he went to the funeral or not, but he certainly should not have hidden his identity.

What's more, we learn that all the holidays will disappear when the Mashiach comes except for Purim. Why should this be? The Medrash tells us that Mordechai knew about Haman and his ideas for a long time. Mordechai had already gone on aliyah to the land of Israel when Cyrus the Great allowed it. When he heard that Haman had ascended to power, he returned to Persia. He knew, according to this Medrash, that Haman hated the Jews, and that he wanted to prevent at all costs the rebuilding of the Temple, and he wanted to destroy all Jews. He would use any pretext. Mordechai knew when he came back that he had to confront Haman. Many rabbis thought Mordechai was 100% wrong. He was endangering the Jewish people. They felt we could deal with Haman and protect our people, but not through confrontation. There was a big policy difference between him and many rabbis, just like before World War II in the 1920's and 1930's there were many rabbis who said, "Stay put. Do not worry. Nazism and Communism are a passing phenomenon." They were ultimately right, but they failed to realize that unless Jews left, millions of Jews would be killed.

Mordechai knew that unless Haman was confronted, there would be millions of Jews killed. That's why he told Esther not to reveal her identity. He knew that he may need her in the inner circle of the King. This was similar to the

Holocaust where many Jews sent their children to convents and Christian homes to save them from the Nazis. We even had in our congregation one of these children, Elie Frances, whose father was the Chief Rabbi of Holland. He did not know he was Jewish until he was eight or nine years old. Mordechai felt that the danger was imminent and drastic measures had to be taken.

The same thing happened in our day where many rabbis were against the protest that American Jewry made on behalf of Russian Jewry. We know they were wrong. These protests helped. Rabbis have complete authority when it comes to Halachic matters, how to celebrate Shabbat, how to celebrate the holidays, kashruth, etc. However, rabbis are not infallible. Rabbi Soloveitchik did not believe in the concept of Das torah, that the rabbis' opinions on matters that were not Halachic were decisive. In fact, once I called him on an issue. He asked why I called him because it was a policy matter, not a Halachic matter. Mordechai differed from the rabbis on a policy matter, not a Halachic matter. He evaluated the situation and decided that it was extreme. Old methods would not work. Policy matters are not subject to rabbinic decree or veto. That's why shuls have board. Boards are supposed to decide the policy matters and the rabbi the Halachic matters.

Sometimes they overlap, but most of the time they do not. For example, someone once asked me, "Why do you need a board," and I agreed with him. It would perhaps be easier if I could make all the decisions, but that is not the way Judaism works. In medical matters, we do not tell doctors when to give shots or pills. In extreme cases, whether or not to turn off machines, then maybe rabbis come into play. When it comes to building buildings, whether you put the kitchen here or the library here or the choice of colors is a policy issue. Some rabbis get in a lot of trouble when they get involved in policy matters. When services should be conducted, where the mechitza should be, what is allowed in the kitchen are Halachic matters.

Mordechai disagreed on a policy matter, and he was right. Those who opposed him were proven wrong. In life, we cannot shirk off our responsibilities by saying that somebody else should decide on policy matters of our life. I know when people come to me with problems, I give them all the options, and I give them what I think is the best option. However, it is their life, and they have to choose the best option for them. I am never mad if they do not accept my advice. They are called upon to act responsibly, according to what they think is the best way to act, after they get advice from many people. When a person becomes bar mitzvah, he then has to make

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