

Universal Morality without G-d?

In the book of Devarim (Deuteronomy) also called Mishneh Torah, we are taken on a trip down memory lane. Moses, the leader of the Jewish people, relates many of the events of the previous forty years, including mistakes and subsequent growth the people had undergone. He exhorts them to continue learning the Torah and fulfilling its dictates.

At this critical juncture of Jewish history, the one who received the Torah directly from G-d, Moses, translated Torah into seventy languages for each of the seventy nations of the world. And why was translation necessary when the Israelites learned their Torah from Moses in its original, the Holy Tongue? Life in the desert was purely miraculous; water from a rock, manna from heaven, clouds of glory for protection. Now, upon entering the land of Israel, there would be a total change. Their faith would be put to the test by foreign nations and strange beliefs. In such circumstances the people would need a Torah that speaks to them in every sense of the term. Thus we see the care of Moses not only for the flock of his generation but for the Jewish people of future generations. And translating the Torah connects with our obligation to teach all humans in their language, the Seven Noahide Laws. [**Maimanides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 9:1 : Six precepts were commanded to Adam: Noahide Laws : a) the prohibition against worship of false gods b) the prohibition against cursing G-d c) the prohibition against murder d) the prohibition against incest and adultery e) the prohibition against theft f) the command to establish laws and courts of justice**].

Why? Indeed the human being in particular is created in the image of G-d, with unique divine purpose. The onus is upon us to bring out the Divine image within each and every human being.

The Rebbe, Rabbi M.M. Schneerson expounds upon the phrase, "Beloved is a human being who is created in the image of G-d": Mishnah teaches us how a Jew ought to influence the entire world to follow the path of G-d. The best way to do this is to explain how precious they are, that they were created in His image, and by extension, it behooves them to fulfill His wishes. Also, we should use persuasive speech to draw the hearts of the nations to the will of their Maker. Inasmuch as humans are beloved by G-d to the point that they were created in His image, this should arouse them.

We would think that we are each capable of doing the right thing. However, left to our own devices, there is no guarantee that we will. Our minds are in constant danger of being bribed by our emotions, to justify decisions we have made, or actions we have taken, that go against our very own rules. In fact the key to making the right choices is to have rules that do not flow from our own minds but from something beyond ourselves, that cannot be bought off or corrupted.

Indeed, history has proven that relying solely on the intelligence, sophistication, and depth of humanity has led to great tragedy. The Holocaust was not so much the overthrow of reason as its triumph over morality. It allowed a scientific ultra rationality- what H. called “ice cold logic”- to provide murder with rational justification.

The Rebbe expressed this idea many times: From that selfsame nation that was the most advanced in science and in ethics, came the ultimate acts of inhumanity, to the point that no one was able to believe that human beings were capable of such behavior. The reason is, because their intellect was not based upon the foundation and base of all things, which is the knowledge that “there is a Master to this mansion” who is the Creator of the world and its Director.

On March 30, 1981, President Ronald Reagan and three others were shot and wounded by John Hinckley Jr. in Washington, D.C. as they were leaving a speaking engagement at the Washington Hilton Hotel. Shortly afterward, the Rebbe gave an impassioned talk about what happened and what needs to be done to combat crime today: The reason a person can come to perpetrate such an act is because they are not permeated with faith as they should be. By this we mean simple faith, that there is a Creator and Master to the world, who observes the actions of every individual.

This negates the assumption that one is allowed to do whatever they want, that you merely have to be “smart” enough to carry out your plan to hurt others. In fact, this hurts oneself possibly even more than it hurts others. The others experience only bodily pain whereas the perpetrator damages his body and his soul, in this world and the next.

Although as humans we err, and we give in to our temptations. Nevertheless, what a G-d-fearing education offers us is more room to strive for truth and pursue the right choices. It reminds us constantly of the Higher Authority to whom we all must answer. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 2:1): Keep your eye on three things, and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you: an Eye that sees, an Ear that hears, and all your Deeds are written in a book.**

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi: A person should see G-d not only as the Master over the universe in general, but also as a personal master over himself or herself. There is a personal relationship that G-d has with each and every one of us. One of the implications of this personal relationship

is recognizing that G-d observes every detail of our lives. This in turn evokes self-evaluation to be honest about where one could use improvement and growth.

In our society we have “progressed” to the point of putting a lot of trust in human intelligence to judge what is right and wrong. It is easy to forget that the United States was built upon a belief in G-d- given rights of every human being, or to forget the passionate words of President Kennedy in his inaugural address, that “the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of G-d.”

It is in the prayer we recite three times a day, Aleinu, that states, “all living beings will know and recognize you,” that makes for a good and righteous world. The Torah, G-d’s wisdom, is a blueprint for our humanity, a guide for people to live on this earth in civilization, peace, and harmony. It teaches us how to fill the world and to conduct our lives with acts of goodness and kindness, and live the way our Creator intended.

This Lesson is based upon JLI Torah Study Classes taught at Aleph Learning Institute.

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Dear Friend:

Warm Summer Greetings,

The Torah is studied throughout the year and read in the synagogue through the week and Shabbat. As the Jewish people, it is our wisdom, our life and our blueprint for living. The world has lost much in the way of morality and basic humanity. I trust that this lesson is a reminder to you my readers, to share with others the following: that morality must be foundational by the word of Almighty G-d and to share the 7 Noahide Laws with all nations.

May we merit the fulfillment of true G-d given humanity amongst all peoples.

Sincerely,

Rochel Kaplan, Director ALI

