

**Human Communitations Capstone**  
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**University Life:**

**Living and Flourishing in Accordance With Jewish Law**

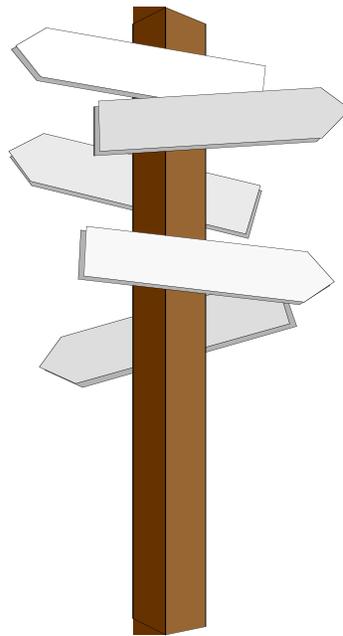
*A Student's Guide and Preparation for Observant Jews*



◆ *California State University, Monterey Bay* ◆

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## Introduction

Today, all Jews have the option to pursue a college education. However, because most elite schools were initially directed towards training for the Christian ministry, nearly all American colonial universities were off limits to Jews. So badly did Jews ache for the opportunity to get themselves into academia, that some actually converted to Christianity to gain acceptance.<sup>1</sup> This began to change toward the end of the colonial period, when Benjamin Franklin introduced non-theological subjects to the university. In 1770, Brown University officially opened its doors to Jews, finally granting equal access to a higher education for American Jews.<sup>2</sup>

By the early 1920's Jewish representation at the leading American universities had grown remarkably. For example, Jews made up 22% of the incoming class at Harvard in 1922, while in 1909 they had been only 6%.<sup>3</sup> This came at a time when there were only 3.5 millions Jews<sup>4</sup> in a United States of 106.5 million people.<sup>5</sup> This made the United States only about 3% Jewish, rendering Jews greatly over-represented in universities all over the country. However, in due course the momentum reversed.

During the “Roaring 1920’s,” a trend towards quotas limiting Jewish students became prevalent. Following the lead of Harvard, over seven hundred liberal arts colleges initiated strict quotas, denying Jewish enrollment.<sup>6</sup> At Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons for instance, Jewish enrollment dropped from 50% in

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<sup>1</sup> Solomon Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), 557.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom (New York, NY: William and Morrow Company, 1994), 484.

<sup>4</sup> The New York Public Library American History Desk Reference (New York, NY: Macmillan Books, 1997), 107.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>6</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 485.

1923, to below 20% five years later, and down to just 6.4% in 1940.<sup>7</sup> Another dramatic example of the effect of these quotas was the decline of Jewish students at Cornell Medical school from 40% in 1920 to a meager 5% in 1940.<sup>8</sup> Many people do not know that in very recent times American Jews were denied the opportunity to compete and participate on the open marketplace of ideas at the college level, and thus limited in their professional opportunities. The inability to study in a university suppressed the Jewish community until some Jewish sponsored institutions began to sprout as an alternative. Brandeis University, established in 1948, is one notable example.<sup>9</sup>

It was not until the 1960's that the quotas finally began to fade and Jewish students and faculty began to re-appear on American campuses. Access was re-granted and many Jews (though not all) jumped back into academia. Today, Jews are once again over-represented at most American universities. While Jews now make up slightly less than 2.5% of the United States population, Jewish enrollment in Ivy league schools is as high as 40% some years.<sup>10</sup> Most assume, however, that this information is all irrelevant to strictly observant Jews, who tend to avoid the university. That notwithstanding, the religious Jewish community actually does have a rich tradition of scholars and sages who were well educated in "worldly" non-Torah topics.

There is currently a religious shunning of academia that is found in traditional Jewish communities, which I propose is actually a rather recent phenomenon in Jewish life. In fact, it seems that at the same time as American Jews were fractionated away from colleges against their will, the religious community began to willfully withdraw

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Brandeis University: A People's History, Online, Brandeis University, Internet, 1998. Available: <http://www.brandeis.edu/b50/timeline/4849.html>

itself from this sphere. The religious Jewish community in America grew steadily into the 1960's. Historian and Orthodox rabbi, Berel Wein, has observed that in the early 1960's higher standards in observance of Jewish law became the norm, with behavior that was acceptable in the 1920's and 1930's becoming taboo by the 1960's in the same religious circles.<sup>11</sup> At this time the traditional Jews in America became more traditional while the secular became more assimilated. When Jews were allowed back into the university, the religious Jews generally declined the invitation.

The move to the right has continued to intensify since the Israeli six-day war victory, which has marked an incredible resurgence of Orthodox life and religious commitment. In the meanwhile, "Orthodoxy moved towards a more demanding pose."<sup>12</sup> The mainstream of the Orthodox world has become much more right wing, and the left wing within Orthodoxy has been given pressure to disassociate from the secular realm.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these recent shifts, it has been conjectured that Eastern European Jewry of the past three hundred years has been antagonistic towards secular education (much more than Jews of other regions) because of the isolated nature of Jewish life as well as in response to the Enlightenment.

The Jewish "Enlightenment" began in eighteenth century Germany and consisted of Jewish intellectuals who were trying to "enlighten" their 'patriarchal' and 'out of date' co-religionists. Those who were pushing for "enlightenment" wanted Judaism to enter the modern world in an attempt to bring about a Jewish renaissance through a mixture of Judaism with Western European secular society, values, and learning. However, the

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<sup>10</sup> Alan M. Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), 346.

<sup>11</sup> Berel Wein, *Triumph of Survival*, (Brooklyn, NY: Shaar Press, 1990), 463.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

religious communities considered this to be the first step on the road to assimilation. Indeed, hordes of Jews followed the Enlightenment out of the ghettos and not only into secularization and universities, but many actually ended up converting to Christianity. Moreover, religious Jews worried that the enlightenment saw itself as a replacement for religion, by attempting to bring about a better world and improved scholarship through human logic and scientific understanding.

As a result of these tide changes, the religious community began a process of “self-segregation” to save itself from these external dangers to its survival. Therefore, claims Yeshiva University president Dr. Norman Lamm, the reasons for university avoidance have been historic rather than halachic (based in Jewish law).<sup>14</sup>

Most "Ultra-Orthodox" rabbis claim that declining secular morals, anti-religious atmosphere and ideologies, as well as danger of assimilation have been the reasons for the religious retreat from the university. The argument is that these issues render it unwise and too spiritually dangerous for a strictly observant religious Jew to be in a university atmosphere or classroom. Some contemporary Orthodox scholars have posited that this dramatic change toward opposition to the university occurred within the religious community as recently as just after World War I.<sup>15</sup> At this time, Eastern European Jewry became so saturated in blood by its gentile neighbors, that Jews developed a general intolerance of anything associated with the surrounding society, values, and culture. "The indifference to general culture and opposition to all forms of non-Torah learning that characterized the post World War I period turned into an

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<sup>14</sup> Norman Lamm, Torah Umadda (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aaronson Inc., 1990), 149.

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Z. Fasman, “Trends in the American Yeshiva Today,” in Reuven P. Bulka (ed.), Dimensions in Orthodox Judaism (New York, NY: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1983), 318.

intensive hatred after World War II."<sup>16</sup> The First World War gave Jews reservations about non-Jewish society, and World War II hastened the process of self-withdrawal.

Naturally, rabbis who had witnessed an "advanced" and "modern" culture allow such atrocities as the holocaust became infused with a violent new spirit of rejection toward every manifestation of modern civilization. Further self-isolation of the religious community followed and secular studies declined. All patriotic customs became suspect and college became forbidden. If one needed to work, only subjects such as math and accounting, which do not relate to non-Jewish values, could be considered. This attitude is still somewhat alive today, as some proclaim, "scratch a gentile deep enough, and you'll uncover an anti-Semite." Thus, we see that the Enlightenment began the religious communities' withdrawal process, the wars magnified the process, and the resurgence of Orthodoxy has renewed and intensified this repudiation

There is no denying that Jewish tradition has always had a profound element of "Torah only" ideology in addition to suspicion of gentile neighbors that dates back to the Bible. We must nonetheless be aware that the primary reasons for avoidance of the university are not necessarily Torah obligations. In fact, many leading rabbis who oppose university education went to universities themselves! It's a big risk, but we're there. The question of our day is no longer *how* to survive, but *why*? The goal can no longer be to merely *survive* but finally to *revive*, to fully come alive!

Jews have been contributing to general society for generations and it is finally the religious communities' chance and obligation to do our part. The solution to the risks of college life has been to avoid it like the plague. If some want to compare college life and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 319.

education to the plague, then we've developed immunizations, vaccines, and vitamins. However, college life need not be so deadly. During the course of university education one encounters some of the most passionate, well-rounded, dedicated, and intelligent people around. It seems that college life is only viewed from the outside as a plague, but those of us here obviously don't feel that it is so lethal. It might not be the ideal spiritual environment, but we think we are ready, we are here, and we need help!

From my experience, most campus rabbis are concerned primarily with outreach to less observant Jews, with cultivating pluralism and open mindedness in the Jewish community, or with fundraising and other civic concerns. None of these options are necessarily bad things, but they don't help those of us who are trying to maintain our religious observance while learning in a university. These rabbis often work with students only on a part-time basis, and are not prepared to deal with issues that devout Jews regularly encounter on campus.

I have been through this situation, and dealt with many profound personal issues as a result; I hope to offer an "insider's view." I have been a student at a university in Jerusalem where I lived in a "kosher" dorm, and was one of many Jews in general and religious Jews in particular. I also lived in a Jewish dorm at a university in New York City, which consisted of religious and non-religious Jews, in a neighborhood that is very Jewish, (but nothing quite like Jerusalem). The bulk of my college life was spent at the marvelous new university in Monterey Bay, California. Here, not only was I one of the only Jewish students on our small campus (and in the entire county for that matter), but I was the only strictly observant Jew. My diverse experience has empowered and enabled me to relate to the dilemmas that my peers around the world go through. Now, if there is

no rabbi, or community around your campus that you can directly relate to, hopefully my experience can provide some illumination, comfort, and direction.

Additionally, this project can be useful to my fellow students and professors. From the perspective of religious Jews, it is good to know that more people will be exposed to the trials and tribulations of the strictly observant Jew in a secular environment. Moreover, any helpful personal insights that one can draw on ideas of general philosophy or spirituality will render this project a rewarding undertaking.

The Jewish ideal may be (or has become) to seclude oneself in a "holy" or protected environment. However, this "ideal" is not always actualized, hence the goal of this work: to help strictly observant religious Jews who are facing the difficulties of religious survival in a secular environment. There are indeed many books and individuals that specialize in helping Jews in such non-ideal predicaments. However, with regard to the college experience in particular, the hostility in the religious community toward the university, and the rabbis who shun our decision to go to college, leaves many religiously observant Jews alone, struggling to stay afloat. Following extensive research, I have not found a single guide for religious college students. We are here; why are we being ignored? I have found guides for choosing a school, guides for finding an Orthodox community once at school, and things like this, but nothing that I can thoroughly relate to. I would like to be an understanding companion to my lonely and troubled kindred. This is my contribution to the modern Jewish library.

This work is primarily intended for religiously observant Jewish college students, generally those identifying themselves as Orthodox Jews, but by no means only this community. Many who identify as "Conservative" or choose no label will likewise find

many relevant points within the chambers of this project. Religious individuals of other faiths, and those simply interested in religion may be very interested in this as well. Still, my foremost audience is those who face such imperative issues as dietary laws, shabbat adherence, and constrictions on their social interaction on a daily basis. Therefore, when I write "you" in this work, I am referring to strictly observant Jews in secular institutions.

This is not at all meant to alienate any individuals who may be deeply religious and committed to Judaism, yet not "strictly observant." It is my hope, and goal to be accessible to all people in general, and all Jews in particular. Nevertheless, it is my utmost desire to address an often-abandoned community that must deal with specific, difficult, and largely ignored needs. In the process of focusing on the all too often forgotten, I am trying my best not to forget anyone else.

To achieve my goals I will begin with two concepts that I think should be on the forefront of every religious Jew's mind while they are in the university setting: Sanctification of God's name, and Torah study. I will also address the most common and difficult issues that respondents to my survey of 103 religious Jewish college students raised. I will write at the level of a religious Jew and any terms that may be an obstacle to others reading this work will be defined at the outset of each chapter. I am absolutely not a rabbi, nor am I in any way competent to decide on issues in Jewish Law. I do intend to train for the rabbinate after college, but keep in mind that I am not there yet. While reading this, please therefore take into account that at this point I am more like a "wanna be" rabbi.

*Let the fun begin!*

## Chapter 1 Definitions:

**Hashem**- The word "Hashem" means "the name," refers to God and is very often used by Jews when speaking about God. It is used in traditional literature because we avoid mentioning God's name unless as part of the prayer service or Torah reading. "Hashem" is the closest one would come to mentioning God in Hebrew without actually mentioning God's name.

**Mitzvah**-Commandment or precept that a Jew must fulfill based on a Biblical or Rabbinical injunction. Comes from the root of 'connection.' Fulfilling a divine command connects one to their commander, Hashem.

**Aveira**- Usually translated as 'sin' or 'transgression.' It comes from the root Avar, which means 'passed' or 'past tense.' When someone commits a "sin" they are simply "passing up" the chance for connection with Hashem.

**Talmud**-Summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylon until the beginning of the middle ages. "If the bible is the cornerstone of Judaism, then the Talmud is the central pillar." <sup>17</sup> The Talmud is a repository of Jewish wisdom and law, but does not contain actual rulings relied upon in our era. The oral law (Talmud), is actually as significant and authoritative as the written law (Torah). The Talmud has two components, the **Mishna**, a book of law, and the second is known as the Gemarah.

The **Gemarah** is a summary of discussion and elucidation on the Mishna. The "Oral Torah" remained oral until Jewish leaders feared it would be forgotten. Around the year 200 CE Rabbi Judah The Prince decided to commit the oral law into writing, after over a million Jews had been killed in the great revolt, and Bar Kochba rebellion. The rabbis of Palestine edited their discussions of the Mishna in the year 400 CE this became the Jerusalem Talmud. More than a century later, the leading Babylonian Rabbis (modern day Iraq) did another editing of the discussions on the Mishna. This became the much more authoritative and extensive Babylonian Talmud, which is what is referred to by saying, "The Talmud."

**Shulchan Aruch**- The code of Jewish law, compiled by Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488-1575) in what is now Israel, it is the standard legal code of Judaism. It also contains the rulings of Moses Isserles, "The Rama" (1525-1572) of Poland, to include the customs of Eastern European Jewry.<sup>18</sup>

**Kiddush Hashem**- Literally, "Sanctification of the Name" (of God), will be defined inside.

**Hillul Hashem**- "Desecrating the name" the reverse of a Kiddush Hashem.

**R' Yisrael Salanter**- (1810-1883) founder and spiritual leader of the "mussar" movement in Lithuania-a movement which stressed moral behavior, based on the study of traditional ethical literature.<sup>19</sup>

**Maimonides/Rambam**- Moses Ben Maimon (1135-1204). First to write a systematic code of Jewish law-the "Mishna Torah." Also wrote authoritative and monumental philosophical works, commentaries, medical books, and other compilations. Was born in Spain, fled to Morocco

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<sup>17</sup>Adin Steinsaltz, Essential Talmud, Trans. Chaya Galai (In Hebrew) (United States of America: Basic Books, 1976), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Literacy (New York, NY: William and Morrow Company, Inc., 1991), 203.

<sup>19</sup> Zelig Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor (Brooklyn, NY: Zelig Pliskin, 1977), 449.

during Muslim persecution, later went to Israel, and finally settled in Egypt where he served as the physician to the Sultan of Egypt. Possibly the most influential Jewish thinker of all time.<sup>20</sup>

**Ramban /Nachmanides-** Moshe Ben Nachman, (1194-1270), of Spain, one of the leading Torah scholars of the Middle Ages, authored numerous fundamental works on Judaism.<sup>21</sup>

**Glatt-** Literally means smooth, has come to mean ‘super-duper’ as in strictly (glatt) kosher.

**Maharsha-** Moreinu Harav Shlomo Eidel's (1555-1632) of Poland, leader of many communities, authored a monumental commentary on much of the Talmud.

**Rabbeinu Bachya-** (1263-1340) Spanish rabbi who authored a large and complex commentary on the Torah that explored both the simple as well as the deeper meanings.<sup>22</sup>

**Gamach-** (short for “Gimilut Chassadim”--Acts of Loving Kindness), refers to an organization, or fund established to help needy individuals.

**Halacha-**Jewish Law, from the root H-L-CH "go" or "walk," halacha, is the Jewish way.

**Midrash-** The name of a collection of rabbinic interpretations of scripture that bring out lessons through homiletics and stories.

**Chafetz Chaim-** Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, (1839-1933) Leader of Eastern European Jewry, known by the name of his first book, written in 1873, dealing with the laws of derogatory gossip. Famous for his extreme humility, piety, scholarship, and promotion of ethical behavior. He wrote many authoritative works, primarily dealing with Jewish Law.<sup>23</sup>

**Shaarei Teshuva-** “Gates of Repentance” Classic self-improvement book written in the Middle Ages.

## Just Another Day

Well well well, so you want to go college? The big “U”, institution of higher learning, post-secondary education... college! Four (or more) years of studying, books, lectures, stress, and paperwork all for a diploma. Then again there is also fun, friends, new horizons, intellectual stimulation, etc. Come to think of it, university life has a lot to offer. In order to insure that it doesn't offer you up like a good item at a bad flea market, you are going to have to be on your toes. Thousands of religious Jews have successfully

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<sup>20</sup> Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, 175.

<sup>21</sup> *Stone Edition Chumash* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1998), 1301.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

gone through the pearly gates of secular American universities, but it takes incredible knowledge, tact, preparation, and effort to get by in general, not to mention in accordance with *halacha*. Based primarily in Jewish wisdom, my goal is to use my experience as well as that of my peers and mentors in order to help make your college days as successful and meaningful as possible, in harmony with Jewish law, (with regard to college nights--good luck, you're on your own! Just kidding).

Although this work is presented as a *halachic* guide, I would like to begin with something beyond, but not out of the scope of *halacha*. It has often been said that the fifth volume of the *Shulchan Aruch* is common sense (there are only four volumes). Your everyday behavior and interactions with others may be the most common and important issue that arises. The area regarding *hillul* and *kiddush Hashem*, two of the most significant concepts in Judaism, are extremely relevant to a strictly observant Jew in college.

The *Talmud* explains that the commandment to love *Hashem*<sup>24</sup> actually means causing others to love or think greater of *Hashem* because of our good actions.<sup>25</sup> We have to be out and about, doing what *Hashem* created us to do, which I suspect is not to just sit around and meditate about how much we love the Almighty (although set times for such reflection can be beneficial). In fact, The *Midrash* states that the entire purpose of the giving of the Torah was to sanctify *Hashem's* name.<sup>26</sup> If your next question is how to do this, allow me put those words into your mouth: "How do I sanctify *Hashem's* name?"

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<sup>23</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 444.

<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy. 6:5

<sup>25</sup> Nachum Amsel, The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson Inc., 1996), 235.

When the Torah commands us to sanctify *Hashem's* name it basically means acting in a manner that evokes love and admiration for *Hashem*.<sup>27</sup> Through our adherence to *Hashem's* Torah, with kind, loving, just, and refined actions based on it, we create positive PR for *Hashem*, Torah, and Jews. As *Hashem* exists, *Hashem* is “personally” unknown and ungraspable. It's easy for anyone to look around and deny the existence of anything beyond the physical realm. *Hashem* only becomes manifest in human life when human beings acknowledge *Hashem* by acting in such a way that *Hashem's* being is relevant to and influential in one's daily life. We are not trying to "win" converts to Judaism or convince anyone that Judaism is the true religion. We are merely upholding a belief that a society with reverence for its creator will be a better place to live for all, as it allows everyone to maximize their potential and work towards the betterment of humanity with the ultimate realization of a deep unity. Furthermore, we are not trying to intellectually persuade anyone into anything; we just need to act in a way that sheds a complimentary light and can generate a worthy role model.

Obviously, this is extremely important to every Jew, but those of us in college and secular or non-Jewish environments have an increased obligation to keep this issue at the forefront of our minds. College life might be the arena where people learn most about other cultures through both academic and social interaction. Indeed, when his son left for college, Emanuel Rackman had just one message to convey to him, “I want you to perform the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*-sanctifying God's name in everything you do. The essence of that *mitzvah* is not martyrdom, although it sometimes calls for that. However, our sages define it differently. ‘So act’ they enjoin us, ‘that all who behold you

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

will say: 'Blessed is that man's God.' It is thus that I pray you will act. And you and we shall rejoice."<sup>28</sup> This is the first thing any of us must think about when entering college.

When an able-bodied, heterosexual, white male commits a horrendous act in America, few pay attention to his race, gender, or sexual orientation, whereas if someone from a minority group commits the same act, their ethnicity becomes a critical factor. When someone is in a place where they stick out in any way, like a tourist in a foreign country or a person who dresses differently than the dominant groups they are surrounded by, they are associated with and representative of their native group.

No person is an island, even if they want to be one. People are generally not perceived as individuals, no matter how they view themselves. Perceiving oneself as only 'so and so' with no relation to one's community or origins can be a little bit of a selfish and irresponsible cop out. Everyone represents some group and must be careful about how they come across publicly, because it will reflect on their group. Furthermore, I have noticed that people often recognize and accentuate the negative aspects of another's behavior before the positive ones.

While, "Individualism...is central to the American value system,"<sup>29</sup> Judaism places great emphasis on the community. Although Judaism recognizes each person's individuality and important uniqueness, we must remember that, "All Jews are responsible one for another."<sup>30</sup> . We are all part of a larger community, the Mishna says,

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<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Biblical Literacy (New York, NY: William and Morrow Company, Inc., 1997), 469.

<sup>28</sup> Alfred J. Kolatch, Great Jewish Quotations (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1996), 373.

<sup>29</sup> Harry H.L. Kitano, Race Relations (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1997), 52.

<sup>30</sup> Schottenstein edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shevuos (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1999), 39a.

“Do not separate yourself from the community.”<sup>31</sup> The Jewish world is a community made of individuals, but ultimately we are one.

People see you as a Jew and what you do as Judaism. The third of the Ten Commandments reads, "You shall not *carry* God's name in vain, for the Lord God will not forgive one who *carries* his name in vain (Exodus 20:).” Rabbi Telushkin explains that everything a religious Jew does 'carries God's name.' Telushkin understands that what the third commandment is actually forbidding, “is to use 'God' to justify selfish and/or evil causes.”<sup>32</sup> It is a tremendous responsibility to be "The Jew." By making the decision to "leave" a Jewish community and go to college, you accepted this responsibility upon yourself. While this does not have to be your only identity, it can be good for us if we can rise to the occasion.

While we must always remember what we represent, carrying God's name need not be a heavy burden. This can be seen not only as a challenge, but also as an opportunity and inspiration to grow and stay in line Jewishly. I do not believe in giving in to racism, ignorance, or stereotyping; I advocate that we use such negativity to force ourselves be our very best. Religious Jews have a double obligation to be a *kiddush Hashem*, because everyone can see that we are Jewish and many people meet very few religious strictly observant Jews in their lives.

This limit on your individuality and freedom may not seem fair, but you have to remember that in general you are sort of an ambassador of the Jewish people to the world. Unfortunately, an enormous number of people have a tendency to make huge generalizations and massive judgements about others. Your uncivil behavior may cause

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<sup>31</sup> The Pirkei Avos Treasury, (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 2:5/75.

<sup>32</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 316.

others to draw poor conclusions about Jews in general, which may one day be acted upon in some manner. While on the contrary, pleasant behavior brings honor to Judaism and the Jewish people and can have colossal ramifications, as the following true story may illustrate.

Shortly after Rabbi Yaakov Kamenestsky assumed the position as the Rav of Tzitevian, Lithuania, a Jew approached him to explain that he had accidentally received much more change from the postmaster than he should have. On Reb Yaakov's council, the man returned the money. Some time later, Reb Yaakov was in the very same post office where the same postmaster gave him more stamps than he had paid for. The rabbi immediately returned the excess stamps and the sly grin on the postmaster's face convinced Reb Yaakov that this had actually been a tricky test of his honesty. Not only was Reb Yaakov happy that he had made a *kiddush Hashem*, but years later he found out from survivors of Tzitevian that the postmaster had actually been one of the few locals who was willing to hide Jews from the Nazis!<sup>33</sup>

The importance of a ethical behavior can not be understated. Rabbi Telushkin has commented that, "Given that one of Judaism's most important concepts is that each human being is created 'In Gods image,' bad manners is not a minor matter; it reveals that you don't really accept this fundamental Jewish belief."<sup>34</sup> *Hashem* demands ethical behavior, acting poorly shows that belief in *Hashem* either does not refine a person, or that *Hashem's* primary demand is not proper behavior; either conclusion alienates people from *Hashem*. Only if the person who claims that God is necessary for true goodness

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<sup>33</sup> The Pirkei Avos Treasury, 95.

<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, The Book of Jewish Values (New York, NY: Bell Tower, 2000), 117.

behaves in an exceptionally kind, honest and generous manner will their claim have any merit.

The Torah commands each of us to, "be holy"<sup>35</sup> To which *Nachmanides* notes that although it is technically possible to be a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah, the commandment to be holy is our injunction to be ethical and moral.<sup>36</sup> Thus, even if a person is doing something that is technically permitted by the Torah, with every step a person takes he or she must ask themselves if it is fulfilling the commandment to be holy.

Judaism is not mere meaningless rituals. It has been noted that, "Judaism is concerned with organizing people to better the world. It is an all-encompassing value- and action-shaping way of life whose goal is the creation of a moral and holy nation which in turn morally improves the world, and whose means are the laws (*mitzvot*) of Judaism."<sup>37</sup> According to the *Talmud*, the very first question a person will be asked by the heavenly court after they die will actually be in regard to ethics, "did you conduct your business transactions faithfully?"<sup>38</sup> As Reb Yosef Breuer was fond of saying, it is more important to be *glatt* kosher in one's dealings with people than to be *glatt* kosher in what one eats.<sup>39</sup>

On the flip side of striving to behave in a way that creates a *kiddush Hashem*, we also have a gargantuan necessity to be on guard from causing a *hillul Hashem*. The Torah tells the Jewish people: "You shall not desecrate My Holy Name (*hillul Hashem*), rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel (*kiddush Hashem*). I am

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<sup>35</sup> Leviticus 19:2

<sup>36</sup> Telushkin, *Biblical Literacy*, 457.

<sup>37</sup> Dennis Prager & Joseph Telushkin, *The Nine questions People Ask About Judaism* (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster Inc., 1986), 41.

<sup>38</sup> *Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbos Vol. 1* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1996), 31a.

Hashem who sanctifies you."<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to observe that the commandment not to desecrate God's name comes first. In fact, the *Talmud* says that *hillul Hashem* is the most serious of all transgressions, and the one for which it is most difficult to atone.<sup>41</sup> Our rabbis tell us that a *hillul Hashem* is so severe that while *Hashem* can eventually forgive all aveirot, *hillul Hashem* is punished immediately.<sup>42</sup> In the authoritative words of the Chafetz Chaim, "The sin of *hillul Hashem* is so severe, that neither repentance nor Yom Kippur has the power to atone for it."<sup>43</sup>

This is such a crucial *mitzvah* that one must go to any cost to avoid desecrating the name. Thus, if a person can not hold back from sinning, the *Talmud* actually urges them to go to a strange town and do the *aveira* incognito in order to avoid soiling *Hashem's* name.<sup>44</sup> This way a stranger appears to have done the indecent act and not specifically a Jew, who would thus bring shame to Judaism and *Hashem*.

According to the *Talmud*, an act is rendered a "hillul Hashem" more as a result of public perception than by actual behavior. This is the basis for the statement of the sages that it can actually be considered a *hillul Hashem* if your friends are embarrassed on account of your bad reputation.<sup>45</sup> *Maimonides* stated that there are actually three things that a Jew can do, that may not actually be sinful, but would still be considered a *hillul*

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<sup>39</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 62.

<sup>40</sup> Leviticus 22:32, Stone Edition.

<sup>41</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yoma Vol. II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1998), 86a.

<sup>42</sup> Levitz, "Crisis in Orthodoxy," Dimensions in Orthodox Judaism, 382.

<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen, The Concise Book of Mitzvoth (Nanuet, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 1990), 243.

<sup>44</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Moed Katan (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1999), 17a.

<sup>45</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Yoma, 86a.

*Hashem*. This includes not paying workers or merchants promptly, not greeting people with a pleasant facial expression, and being quarrelsome or easily angered.<sup>46</sup>

The *Chofetz Chaim* categorizes the transgression of *hillul Hashem* into three sections.<sup>47</sup> The first comes up if a Jew submits to forceful pressure of converting to another religion, or to commit one of the three cardinal sins of idolatry, incestuous or adulterous relations, or murder. Secondly, when a person commits an *aveira* for no other reason than to rebel against *Hashem* and Torah, they have also violated the prohibition against *hillul Hashem*. The third case arises when a distinguished Jew does some action that appears to be a sinful deed. Even if the action was actually permissible, this constitutes a *hillul Hashem*. The *aveira* of *hillul Hashem* is actually so severe that the *Talmud* asserts that if the amount of one's good deeds and bad deeds are qualitatively balanced equally, and among his or her sins is a *hillul Hashem*, that single *aveira* tips the scales to the side of their misdeeds.<sup>48</sup>

You might be wondering if there is any way out of this. One way that has been explored by the *Talmud* is that if one is going to do an *aveira*, at the very least they should do it secretly so as not to desecrate *Hashem's* name in public, which would cause the witnesses to disrespect and lower their esteem for *Hashem*.<sup>49</sup> Another opinion even claims that if one can not overcome their urge to do wrong, they should actually clothe and cover themselves in black, in order not to desecrate the name of heaven openly. The primary commentaries explain that this "humble" attire may subdue one's passions and save them from transgression, or at least divert attention away from the person. The

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<sup>46</sup> Pliskin, Love your Neighbor, 317.

<sup>47</sup> Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen, The Concise Book of Mitzvoth, 241.

<sup>48</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Kidushin Vol.1 (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1999), 40a.

*Maharsha* explains that while it is still an *aveira*, at least not doing it in the open avoids the additional *aveira* of *hillul Hashem*.<sup>50</sup>

Other rabbis of the *Talmud* disagree.<sup>51</sup> Their argument is that sinning in private is worse because while one who sins in public does not care about what people or *Hashem* think, the one who sins in secret does not care if *Hashem* sees their deeds, yet tries to hide them from people, thus fearing humans more than the Almighty. Moreover, the progression of wrongdoing is such that it often begins in private, which at least shows that the person knows it is wrong. Soon however, the behavior becomes habit, shame is lost, and a person ignores their misdeeds, committing them even in public.

The resolution of these two opinions is that the former sentiment, which regards secret *aveirot* as worse than public ones, is only applicable when one is able to subdue their evil inclination, but decides not to. However, when one is totally unable to subdue their inclination and avoid improper actions, they should at least sin secretly to avoid the damage of public desecration.

Although we have the above *Talmudic* statement, "It is better that a person commit a sin secretly, and not desecrate the name of heaven by sinning publicly,"<sup>52</sup> it is obviously still preferable not to do it at all. The *Mishna* thus tells us that "whoever desecrates the name of heaven in secret, they will exact punishment from him in public; unintentional and intentional, both are alike regarding desecration of the name."<sup>53</sup> The option to do an *aveira* in secret is only in a last ditch effort when a person can't control

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Chagigah (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1999), 16a

<sup>52</sup> Scholtenstein Talmud Kiddushin, 40a.

<sup>53</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 229.

themselves. The aveira is still not a good thing, it is simply not as bad as it would have been if it included the transgression of *hillul Hashem*.

A person should never be careless concerning *Hashem's* honor. If you really want some avenue out of the severity of causing a *hillul Hashem*, notice above that the biblical commandment not to cause a *hillul Hashem* is immediately followed by the injunction to cause a *kiddush Hashem*. The fact that being a *kiddush Hashem* is mentioned right after may indicate that this is in fact the way to atone for a *hillul Hashem*. *Rabbeinu Bachya* has commented that if one has caused a *hillul Hashem*, one must attempt to sanctify the name in a manner corresponding to his or her *aveira*. One who slandered another person, for example, should study Torah (using the gift of speech to utter sacred words), and one who committed bunches of bad deeds should commit bunches of good deeds.<sup>54</sup> The *Shaarei Teshuva* explains that a *hillul Hashem* can be cured through a *kiddush Hashem* because it is hoped that the good done by a *kiddush Hashem* will cancel out the bad done by the *hillul Hashem*.<sup>55</sup>

A woman named Yitta once accompanied Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach into a New York restaurant where he paid two dollars for a fifty-cent soda. When Reb Shlomo told the clerk to keep the change, Yitta figured that he did not know how to tip, so she said, "When you order to go, you don't give a tip, and certainly you don't give a \$1.50 tip on a fifty-cent soda."

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<sup>54</sup> *Stone Chumash*, 681.

<sup>55</sup> *Rabbeinu Yona Ben Avraham, The Gates of Repentance* Trans. Shagra Silverstein (In Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1967), 357. Translated by Shagra Silverstein

Reb Shlomo smiled and said to her, "Holly sister, Yitta, I know. But I am trying to make up for *unzer tierla yiddalach* (our sweet Jews) who don't give tips, and consequently make a hillul Hashem."<sup>56</sup>

As we will see, plenty of issues arise for the religious college student, and there is no time void of opportunity or responsibility. Being in such an environment is an incredible chance to be a *kiddush Hashem*, and to show that a religious Jew can be religious, educated, and thrive in a secular environment.

Contemporary ideology often found in universities is the foremost proponent of the anti-judging movement. Many professors teach, and students uphold, that we have no right to judge others or be judgmental in any way. In spite of this, you will immediately be labeled as a "religious hypocrite" the second you slip up. Sadly, it is likely that there is always someone who will be judging you and associating you with religion and Judaism so you really have to be careful not to cause a *hillul Hashem*, and to do your best to make a *kiddush Hashem*.

Now go out there, do your finest, and make Jason (that's me) proud! Wait, first finish reading this treatise, then go and make me more proud than I was when my mom got her Ph.D. (go mom!)

### **Specific Advise for the University Student**

It is generally the more religious students who are active in Jewish student organizations, and thus have a say in the type of programs that their clubs organize. With the desire to create a *kiddush Hashem* on campus, along with my Jewish Student Union, I have tried a few innovative, yet traditional ideas at my university. One thing that I have

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<sup>56</sup> Telushkin, Book of Jewish Values, 147.

attempted to recreate is a traditional “giving fund” or *Gamach* and the community that it induces. This was done by establishing a list of names and contacts for various services that people can provide. For example, we provide a list of textbooks that students have available, car and bike repair tools, and carpool availability, to name just a few. This list is circulated as a flier, over Email, and in article form in the campus newspaper. The only catch is that everything is free. The goal of this project was to create a greater sense of community on campus, help people through their college life, do acts of kindness, and carry on this time-honored tradition.

There is a Chassidic saying that whether one really loves Hashem can be determined by the love they bear towards their fellows.<sup>57</sup> Based on this and numerous biblical commandments,<sup>58</sup> there is an ancient Jewish custom of establishing free loan societies. Today there are hundreds of such “Gamach’s” in Jerusalem<sup>59</sup> and scores in Brooklyn, as well as many more in smaller observant Jewish communities. Some of the very large ones actually function as non-profit banks, while others clothe children or provide food and household items for families in need. “Jewish communities throughout the world have free loan societies, some of which extend loans to hundreds of people; most report exceptionally high rates of repayment.”<sup>60</sup>

There is one Jewish charitable fund known as the “Ziv Tzedakah Fund.” This fund helps people start their own charitable giving funds by providing financial assistance, giving them advertising space, or simply help in coming up with ideas.<sup>61</sup> The fund then publicizes the different creative kindnesses that people do. Some of them have

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<sup>57</sup> Telushkin, *Jewish Wisdom*, 176.

<sup>58</sup> Exodus 22:20, 22:24, Deuteronomy 15:7, 15:11, Leviticus 19:18.

<sup>59</sup> Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, 182.

<sup>60</sup> Telushkin, *Book of Jewish Values*, 112.

included providing infant needs such as car seats and other needed items to families that can not afford them. Others have collected wigs for cancer patients or distributed day old bread from bakeries or other unwanted but useful foods from restaurants, to needy recipients. A synagogue also pooled resources to help battered women and a grade school class worked to aid child laborers in Asia. A group of professional Jewish songwriters formed under the title, “Songs of Love.” This group has already composed 564 personal songs for children with life threatening diseases.

Jewish law decrees that one must give at least 10% of their net income as a donation to the needy.<sup>62</sup> In addition to the commandment to give monetarily, so too does Jewish law declare it incumbent upon every Jew to give any item that another person wishes to borrow.<sup>63</sup> Jewish Law further states that those without sufficient funds should come together to form a free loan society with their collective recourses.<sup>64</sup> So significant is this law that the *Chofetz Chaim* rules, “no one with any intelligence will rest until they see a free loan society existing in their city to lend money to the needy.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, the *Rambam* wrote in the twelfth century that he never saw or heard of a city in which there lived ten Jews that did not have a charity fund.<sup>66</sup>

Jewish tradition actually regards the needy as the ones doing a favor for the wealthy, by providing them with someone to give to. The affluent thus benefit from their giving, as much as the poor benefit from receiving. In fact, according to the *Talmud*,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 155,56.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>63</sup> Chofetz Chaim, *Ahavath Chesed* Trans. Leonard Oschry (In Hebrew) (New York /Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1967), 39.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 148

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, 389.

when asking for help in ancient Palestine, the poor would say to the intended giver, 'acquire merit for yourself.'<sup>67</sup>

These kindness associations obviously have ancient Jewish roots, but they actually seem to have very deep American roots as well. The first Jews to arrive in North America were twenty-three refugees from Brazil who came to New Amsterdam in 1654.<sup>68</sup> The governor, Peter Stuyvesant (1610-1672),<sup>69</sup> demanded that the Jewish refugees be admitted only, "On condition that they take care of their own poor."<sup>70</sup> Thus, the very first American Jews initiated the tradition of caring for their own needy.

It is important to note that while an emphasis is placed on helping one's neighbor first and foremost, Jewish tradition venerates helping every individual in need, associate or stranger, Jew or non-Jew. The *Talmud* states that, "we must provide help for the non-Jewish poor as well as for the Jewish poor; we must visit the non-Jews when they are sick, as we visit our fellow Jews when they are sick; and we must attend to their burial of their dead as well as the burial of our own dead; for these are the ways of peace."<sup>71</sup>

All of the above notwithstanding, the American Jewish community, the most affluent Jewish community in Jewish history, is "in search of itself."<sup>72</sup> Scores are being lured into Eastern religion or alternative practices, and many Jews have lost touch with the source of their altruistic values. For many Jews, social action and charity has become

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<sup>67</sup> Louis Jacobs, *Oxford Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1999), 24.

<sup>68</sup> Abba Eban, *My People* (New York, NY: Random Dwelling, 1968),299.

<sup>69</sup> *Electric Library*, Encyclopedia Online, 2000, Available: <http://www.encyclopedia.com>

<sup>70</sup> Eban, *My People*, 471.

<sup>71</sup> *Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Gittin Vol.3* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1993), 61a.

<sup>72</sup> Social Action . Com, *Torah Teachings*, 1999, Available: <http://www.socialaction.com/reaching.html> .

an exalted god within itself. As civil rights activist A.J. Heschel once said, "Jews are a messenger who forgot their message."<sup>73</sup>

There is something being said by current Jewish thinkers that might not have sounded true in previous generations, today however, "Most American Jews do not derive their values from Judaism. They derive their values from the dominant secular liberal culture, and those values are no longer congruent with Judaism, even a non-fundamentalist Judaism."<sup>74</sup> As Jews look elsewhere for proper conduct, the "proper" conduct becomes less and less Jewish and the odds of this activity in philanthropy and social justice are threatened. Many scholars praise Jews for their disproportionate generosity, civic-mindedness, and social actions, but it is clear that what is being done is only a fraction of that which Jews could do. The secularization of the cause has brought a lack of urgency and importance to it.

I strongly encourage Jewish student leaders to start such programs on their campuses. None of the academic work on this issue can measure up to the excitement, satisfaction, pride, and joy of actually putting this knowledge into action. Beyond the fact that it put me directly into a deep and ancient historical context, it has actually achieved its desired purpose of creating community, and promoting kind deeds on my campus. Now that I have carried it through, I see how simple, inspiring, and meaningful it is.

Another similar program I was involved in at my school was a yellow bike program. All it takes is acquiring and servicing a few old bikes from a police station or dump, painting them yellow, and putting them around campus for pedestrian use. Not

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<sup>73</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity ( New York, NY: NoonDay Press, 1996) 53.

only is it good for the environment, but anyone running late for class will appreciate the public bicycles lying around.

If you don't have the means to start any of these projects, simply being a diligent student and getting good grades can be a *kiddush Hashem*, (although making a difference in society *and* getting good grades is even more exemplary). Every aspect of our behavior can be a *kiddush Hashem*. Another simple way to be *kiddush Hashem* that frequently occurs on campus is our avoidance of non-kosher foods.

It can be a powerful statement to disregard money, honor and some societal norms simply because a person is trying to live in accordance with *Hashem's* will. One shows their respect and veneration of *Hashem* when they live every single aspect of their lives based on *Hashem's* principles. When food is served and one does not partake based on their beliefs, it makes a profound statement. Of course, this can only be labeled a *kiddush Hashem* if a person is extremely tactful and respectful about their abstention and makes their motivations brilliantly clear. Thus, even if you are not capable of starting or participating in community activities, you nevertheless have the constant opportunity to be a *kiddush Hashem* and in that way do your best to make a positive difference in the world.

Indeed, there are many reasons for a religious Jew to avoid college life, but to my mind this is one of the best reasons to go for it. Being around so many different people is a tremendous opportunity and it will force you to be and do your absolute best. Jews in Jewish neighborhoods sometimes act indecently in their everyday interactions, lacking the respect and dignity that a religious Jew should maintain. I am convinced that this is a

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<sup>74</sup> Dennis Prager, Think A Second Time (New York, NY: Reagan Books, 1995), 92.

result of the fact that they have little external motivation to act in an exceptional way. Being on a college campus, however, Jews must elevate themselves and strive to be their very best at every moment.

In conclusion with the words of Dennis Prager: "In order for a caterpillar to become a beautiful butterfly taking its beauty out into the world, it must first spend time in a cocoon. In order for a Jew to become a beautiful Jew taking his or her beauty into the world, he or she too must spend time in a cocoon. Unfortunately, most non-Orthodox Jews don't believe in the cocoon, and most Orthodox Jews don't believe in flying into the world."<sup>75</sup> This is your chance to soar!

## **Chapter 2 Definitions:**

**Torah-** By "Torah," here I refer to general Jewish learning. The translation of the word Torah is simply, "That which teaches."<sup>76</sup> While it generally refers specifically to the five books of Moses, the foundational and essential text of Judaism, it also has this broader connotation with regard to religious studies.

**Masmid-** Term commonly used among ashkenazi Jewry referring to a very devoted student of Torah, often one who studies over ten hours a day.

**Vilna Goan-** Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Shlomo Zalman of Vilna, (1720-1797). Goan means 'Genius' He was a phenomenal genius, who mastered every facet of Torah knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

**Agada-** Talmudic literature that embraces all non-legal topics, from history, ethics, philosophy, and proverbs to astronomy and more.<sup>78</sup>

**Mussar-** Traditional ethical literature; moral teachings, dealing primarily with character building. The word Mussar means reproof or instruction.<sup>79</sup>

**Dubno Magid-** A magid is a preacher, this one was R' Yaakov Krantz, (1741-1804). Famous for his parables, he was one of the most famous of the eastern European preachers.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 617.

<sup>76</sup> Amsel, The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues, 140.

<sup>77</sup> ibid. 450.

<sup>78</sup> Jacobs, Oxford Jewish Religion, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>80</sup> Stone Chumash, 1298.

***Tiferes Yisrael***- A comprehensive commentary on the mishna by Rabbi Yisrael Lipschutz (1782-1860), he was the rabbi of many Jewish communities in Germany.<sup>81</sup>

***Rashi***- Rabbi Shlomo Ben Yitzchok (1040-1104) leading commentator on the Hebrew Bible and Talmud.<sup>82</sup> His commentary is considered the commentary par excellence, and is heeded as absolutely essential to understanding the text to this very day. He lived in Northern France where he headed a school that attracted many young pupils.

***R' Moshe Feinstein***- (1895-1986) Head of a well known New York City yeshiva, leading halachic decisor of his time, and leader of world Jewry.<sup>83</sup>

***Rabbi Schnuer Zalman/Tanya***- (1745-1812) Lived in White Russia and was the founder of the large Chabad-Lubavitch Chassidic Movement. He is the author of the Tanya, which was completed in 1796. The "Tanya" is "An incisive compilation of Jewish mystical concepts, the Tanya presents a systematic approach, both to an individual's moral and spiritual development, and to a conceptual awareness of Divine immanence."<sup>84</sup>

***Derech Hashem***- "The Way of God." A classic book that is a systematic approach to the basic principles of Jewish belief and philosophy, written by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in Italy during the 1730's.<sup>85</sup>

***Messilat Yesharim***- "Path of the Upright." Classic book on character development, also written by Moshe Chaim Luzzatto.

***R' Shapira***- (1880-1944) The rabbi of Piaseczno, and later the rebbe of the Warsaw ghetto. He was the son of Reb Elimelech of Grozisk, a Chassidic Master and leader of Polish Chassidism. R' Shapira was a great Chassidic leader in his own right until he was murdered by the Nazis at the age of 55.<sup>86</sup>

***The Neztiv***- Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, (1817-1894) Russian Jewish leader who wrote a commentary on the Torah known as "Haamak Hadavar."

## Torah

Now that the need for proper behavior has been discussed, some of that behavior will have to be elucidated. The rest of this guide will go into specific actions for different situations that arise for the religious college student, both ritual and ethical. Firstly, we

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 1303.

<sup>82</sup> Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, 449.

<sup>83</sup> *Stone Chumash*, 1298.

<sup>84</sup> *Chabad-Lubavitch in Cyberspace* Available: [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)

<sup>85</sup> Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *Pathways to the Way of God*, Trans. Aryeh Kaplan (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1988), 25.

will talk about acquiring that knowledge on your own. The *Talmud* raises the question as to which is more important, the study of Torah or performance of its commandments. There is a disagreement among the rabbis but the conclusion is that, "The study of Torah is more important, because the study of Torah brings one to the performance of mitzvot."<sup>87</sup> Study takes precedence over action only because without it, correct Jewish behavior will not be maintained for long.

Being "good" without instructions can be like cooking without a recipe. Keep in mind that according to Judaism, good is what *Hashem* says is good, not a person's reason alone. We must keep in touch with, and stay true to the source of our values- The Torah. While a person may remain politically and socially active without daily Torah study, one may lose touch with the specific manner in which the Torah instructs us to better our world. Thus, while upright action is fundamentally irreplaceable, it needs constant study to keep it accurate. Therefore, before entering the specifics of college life (the practice of Torah) there must be some locution on the preparation for and upkeep of one's Jewishness while at college (the study of Torah).

### **Learning**

Traditional Jewish thought accords an incredibly central role to Torah study. The central mode of religious observance used to be sacrifices, which has been substituted by prayer in the absence of the Jerusalem Temple. However, the Talmud holds that, "The study of Torah is greater than offering the daily sacrifices."<sup>88</sup> It is interesting to note that according to Jewish law, when a community begins, it must build a school to teach Torah

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<sup>86</sup> Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, Students obligation, Trans. Micha Obenheimer (in Hebrew) (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson, Inc., 1995), xiii.

<sup>87</sup> Scholtenstein Talmud Kiddushin, 40b.

before it builds a synagogue.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, Jewish law mandates that one is permitted to destroy a synagogue in order to build a house of Torah learning, because, “a study hall is more sacred than a synagogue.”<sup>90</sup>

We see that Torah study supersedes even prayer in importance. Maybe the Rabbinic statement that most clearly shows the centrality of Torah study in Jewish life is the one that is read daily in the morning prayers. The Talmud states that there are nine noble actions that a person can enjoy the benefit of in this world, while the reward remains for them in the world to come. The statement then ends with the illustrious phrase, “*V’Talmud Torah k’neged kulam*- And Torah study is equivalent to them all.”<sup>91</sup>

Judaism holds tremendous regard for the pursuit of wisdom in general. Some say that the Yeshiva, the oldest institution of higher learning in Judaism, may in fact be the oldest form of higher education in the world. Universities became formal schools in the late middle ages, but the earliest known Yeshivot flourished in Palestine and Babylon a century before the common era.<sup>92</sup> So much does our tradition venerate learning that we have a holiday where we dance with books! In fact, we are often referred to as the people of the book. The Talmud has gone so far as to state that, "No one is poor except the one who lacks wisdom."<sup>93</sup> The Talmud in fact lists five questions that a person will be asked after their death, one of which is, "Did you delve into wisdom?"<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Eruvin Vol.II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1991), 63b.

<sup>89</sup> Stone Chumash, 1087.

<sup>90</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Megillah (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1991), 27a.

<sup>91</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbos Vol.IV (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 127a.

<sup>92</sup> Lamm, Torah Umadda, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Talmud Nedarim, 41a

<sup>94</sup> Scholtenstein Talmud Shabbos Vol.I, 31a.

A Jew must respect their mind, which is housed and symbolized by the head, to such an extent that Jewish law actually dictates us to wash and dry our heads before any other part of the body, after all, “the head is ruler of all of one’s limbs”.<sup>95</sup> Contemporary scholars have made the observation that, “In a world that glorified power, Jewish tradition glorified study.”<sup>96</sup> The Talmud elsewhere rules that, “A scholar takes precedence over a king of Israel, for if a scholar dies no one can replace him, while if a king dies, all Israel is eligible for kingship.” It may be out of Jewish ideals in favor of knowledge that so many modern Jews enroll in university, but as we will see, Torah learning is fundamental.

Similar to the concepts of kiddush and hillul Hashem, the subject of Torah learning is an equally pervasive issue. We have an obligation to learn Torah in every spare second. This is a particularly major issue for religious college students for many reasons. Often for the first time, students become submerged in intensive secular studies and a person can only learn so much. Further, as we will see, Torah study has certain attributes that will aid a religious Jew in a non-religious environment. Additionally, going away to college gives a person control over their free time; this issue directly addresses what to do with that time. One of the beautiful things about being in an environment such as that of the university, is that you can put your Torah knowledge into action. Whether in the classroom, dining hall, dorms or any place else, your learning will (should) guide you.

Just because it is harder to make time for Torah study in college due to the activities, responsibilities, and general studies, our sages teach that one should not neglect

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<sup>95</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbos Vol.II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1996), 61a.

their studies due to a learning handicap. We are encouraged that we will get an extra reward in the next world for any struggles undergone in order to learn in this world.<sup>97</sup> Maimonides has stated that a person can only permanently acquire Torah if they struggle and work hard for it.<sup>98</sup> The reward for Torah study is proportionate to the trouble taken. In order to uphold one's religiosity, Torah study is essential and irreplaceable. In fact, Rashi tells us that if someone abandons Torah learning they will inevitably not perform any of the commandments.<sup>99</sup>

Traditional literature considers Torah to be the life-blood of the Jewish people. "Our Rabbis taught: The wicked [Roman] government once issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study Torah. But Pappus Ben Judah found Rabbi Akiva teaching Torah to public assemblies. Pappus said to him, 'Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?' Akiva replied: 'I will answer you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside a river, and he saw fishes anxiously swimming from place to place. He said to them, 'From what are you fleeing?'

The fishes answered, 'From the nets cast for us by men.'

The fox said, 'Why do you not come up and find safety on land, so that you and I can live together [in peace]...?'

But the fish replied, 'Are you the one they call the most clever of animals? You are not clever, but foolish. If we are afraid in the one element in which we can live, how much more would we have to be afraid in the element in which we would certainly die?'

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<sup>96</sup> Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, 558.

<sup>97</sup> Rabbi Yitzchol Margiso, *The Torah Anthology* Trans. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (in Ladino) (New York/Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1990), 259.

<sup>98</sup> Moshe Ben Maimon, *Mishna Torah: Hilchot Talmud Torah* Trans. Rabbi Eliyahu Touger (in Hebrew) (Brooklyn, NY: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1989), 3:12/204.

<sup>99</sup> *Stone Chumash*, 711.

‘So it is with us [Said Akiva]. If we are in such danger when we sit and study Torah, of which it is written, 'For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure' (Deuteronomy 30:20), how much worse our situation will be if we were to neglect Torah!'

Soon afterwards Rabbi Akiva was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappus Ben Judah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him, 'Pappus, for what sin were you brought here?'

He replied, 'Happy are you Rabbi Akiva, that you have been arrested because of Torah! Woe to Pappus who was arrested for worthless reasons.'<sup>100</sup>

Not only does our ideology regard Torah as our life source, which Rabbi Akiva was willing to die for (as he later did), but Torah study is also said to have practical benefits. Clearly an observant Jew entering a secular and mostly non-Jewish environment needs to know much Jewish law and strive to maintain inspiration, but there are even other reasons to be deeply involved in regular Torah study. The *Tanya* explains that learning Torah is a means of attaching ones soul to Hashem, through the comprehension of Hashem's intellect.<sup>101</sup> Miamonides says that Torah study has the quality of sharpening a person's mind, so much so that after learning Torah a person's intellect will be strengthened and improved to the extent that it will become easier to understand concepts that were previously thought to be difficult.<sup>102</sup>

The Talmud illustrates that Torah study is such an essential aspect of Judaism that when Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai managed to get out of the besieged city of Jerusalem to

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<sup>100</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachos Vol.II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 61b.

<sup>101</sup> R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi Lessons in Tanya Trans. R. Sholom B. Wineberg & R. Levy Wineberg (In Hebrew) (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1997), 96.

visit the new Roman emperor, Vespasian, he had but one request. Rabbi Yochanan knew that Jerusalem was soon to be conquered and laid ruin, which would put the very survival of Judaism into question. Rabbi Yochanan's one request was that the yeshiva and scholars of the town of Yavneh be permitted to continue to exist, which was granted. Of all things to perpetuate Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Yochanan chose Torah study.<sup>103</sup> Elsewhere the Talmud records that when nations tried to destroy the Jewish people they would ban Torah learning, (in addition to shabbat observance and circumcision).<sup>104</sup> Indeed, in our generation it has been related that, "Jewish literacy remains the best defense against assimilation in America."<sup>105</sup>

Norman Lamm put it particularly well, especially with regards to college students, "Torah, as the source of all forms of Jewish learning, is necessary to the survival of Jews as a distinct group, and more critical to the flourishing of Judaism in an open society than in a closed one."<sup>106</sup> Being a Jew in a Jewish ghetto requires no knowledge or self-sacrifice. Ignorance of Judaism in an open society ensures that Jews will melt into the majority and disappear. Thus, the informed choice to be a Jew can only happen in an open society.

Most Jews think that by dressing Jewishly or participating in Jewish rituals and events they are avoiding assimilation. However, assimilation has been defined as, "A change of mental perspective in which the immigrant eventually perceives the world from an American point of view, rather than from that of his or her previous national

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<sup>102</sup> Amsel, Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues, 142.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>104</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli Tractate Taanis (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1991), 18a.

<sup>105</sup> Kolatch, Great Jewish Quotations, 412.

<sup>106</sup> Lamm, Torah Umadda, 200.

background."<sup>107</sup> Keeping a Jewish mind and outlook is critically important to Jewish survival, and supportive of everything else. Outer practice can be very superficial. If one truly desires to remain strictly observant in college, it will be necessary to strive to “think Jewish” and keep a Jewish perspective on all one does.

Jewish law prescribes that every person must learn Torah, poor or rich, healthy or ailing, young or old. The obligation to study Torah lasts for a person’s entire life because when people are not involved in study they forget.<sup>108</sup> So fundamental is this mitzvah that the Talmud tell us that *Hashem* has in certain instances glossed over idolatry, even though it is deserving of excision and capital punishment, but did not excuse the neglect of Torah study.<sup>109</sup>

Although it is not always possible, the following Talmudic encounter exposes the ideal of constantly learning Torah: "Ben-Dama, son of R' Yishmael's sister asked R' Yishmael: 'Is a man such as myself, who has studied the entire Torah, permitted to study Greek wisdom?' R' Yishmael read before him the passage, 'The Torah must never depart from your mouth, you must contemplate it day and night (Joshua 1:8)' and said: "Go forth and find a time that is neither day nor night and learn then Greek wisdom.""<sup>110</sup>

The Mishna tells us, "make your Torah [study] a fixed practice."<sup>111</sup> A Jew must set certain hours as fixed obligation each day (for as long as possible).<sup>112</sup> The second of those five questions a person is asked when they arrive in the next world is, "Have you

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<sup>107</sup> Kitano, Race Relations, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Mishna Torah, Laws of Torah Study, 1:8 /170.

<sup>109</sup> Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagiga 1:7,

<sup>110</sup> Talmud Tractate Menachoth (Londond: The Soncino Press, 1989), 99B.

<sup>111</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 1:15/45.

<sup>112</sup> Torah Anthology, 55.

set aside times for Torah?"<sup>113</sup> The Talmud records that the early generations regarded their study of Torah as fixed, and their worldly labors as provisional, and they succeeded in both. The later generations regarded their labors as fixed and their study of Torah as provisional, and they failed at both.<sup>114</sup> If one absolutely can not learn in that hour, they should make it up at another time of the day in order to, "never go to sleep at night owing such a debt."<sup>115</sup>

Learning twice a day is a tremendously praiseworthy effort. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter argued for a new usage of the term *masmid*, "A masmid is not one who studies continuously, but one who studies every day. This is proven by the use of the word *tamid* (from which *masmid* is derived, in Hebrew *tamid* means 'continually') to describe the daily sacrifice, even though it was offered only twice during the day." In fact, the midrash proclaims that if someone learns two paragraphs of the law in the morning and two in the evening, while engaging in work all day, it is considered as though they had fulfilled the Torah in its entirety.<sup>116</sup>

The Chafetz Chaim came up with a parable for a person who can not be fully immersed in Torah study: A man was once warned by his physician not to enter a sauna because the substantial heat and steam were hazardous to his health. Nevertheless, one day this man could not help but to enter the sauna, and he did become weakened by the heat. Using his last bit of strength before he felt that he would faint, the man tried to enter a nearby cold pool to revive himself. Unfortunately, the pool was locked, but a bystander was able to sprinkle some frosty water from a bucket onto him. "I need a cold

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<sup>113</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Shabbos Vol.I, 31a.

<sup>114</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Berachos Vol.II, 35b.

<sup>115</sup> Torah Anthology, 55.

<sup>116</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 9.

pool," the sick man objected. "These few drops will not help!" His rescuer replied, "You are right-but until we can open the pool, be refreshed from this little bit of cool water. It is still better than fainting."

The Chafetz Chaim explained that optimally one would refresh themselves with complete submersion in the waters of Torah; but even if this is not possible, it's senseless to refuse the partial rescue of some exposure to the waters of Torah. In fact, the Torah is compared to water.<sup>117</sup> One dimension of this analogy is the fact that just as water comes in drops and yet has the power to raise to the levels of streams and rivers, so too if one studies even a little Torah each day, it can accumulate and raise the person to great spiritual heights.

Chassidic philosophy has also offered an extraordinary insight into our duty to sandwich the beginning and end of our day with Torah study. Commenting on the Talmudic statement, "Even one chapter in the morning and one at night." *Rabbi Shneur Zalman* explains that this suffices for one who can manage no more to be regarded as engaging in Torah study day and night. Rabbi Schneur Zalman explains that one should resolve that as more time becomes available, they will devote it to Torah study. Then, as the Talmud tells us "God reckons a good intention as an actual deed."<sup>118</sup> Even while one's time for Torah study is limited to a small part of the day and night, they are regarded as having studied for the entire day, since they would have devoted all their time to Torah study had it been available. One's good intention made them an abode for Godliness at all times, as if they had studied Torah all day.<sup>119</sup> This is much like the idea

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<sup>117</sup> Isaiah 55:1

<sup>118</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Kiddushin, 40a.

<sup>119</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 445.

that by giving part of one's salary to charity, they thus become a receptacle for Godliness while engaged in business.<sup>120</sup>

Having said all of this about the value of learning (and there is more to come), it is important to remember the earlier Talmudic statement reminding us that the goal of learning is action, as summed up in the Mishniac statement that, "Practice is the main thing."<sup>121</sup> The Dubno Magid once visited the Vilna Goan, and the Goan asked the Magid to "give him mussar" (ethical rebuke). "Vilna Goan!" The Magid began, "You think you are pious, but you spend your entire day locked away in your room immersed in your studies. Go out into the street, engage in business, and then see if you are still so righteous!"<sup>122</sup> It's easy to know something, it's challenging to put it into proper actions.

The descendants of Eli the Priest were destined to die prematurely. The Talmud relates of Rava and Abaye, both from that family, that Rava, who was involved exclusively in Torah study, lived only until the age of forty. Abaye on the other hand, who not only studied but also performed many acts of kindness, lived until the age of sixty,<sup>123</sup> clearly testifying to the greater importance of study combined with good deeds, over study alone.

One of the intrinsic goals of Torah study is character refinement, as it has been said, "One whose character is not refined by Torah study is not studying Torah in the correct manner with proper intention and devotion."<sup>124</sup> In fact, the code of Jewish law states that a person may not learn Torah from a person who is a great scholar but does not

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 446.

<sup>121</sup> Torah Anthology, 1:17/ 59.

<sup>122</sup> Chaim Kramer, Crossing the Narrow Bridge, (Jerusalem/NY: Breslov Research Institute, 1989), 249.

<sup>123</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Rosh Hashanah, (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1990) 18a.

<sup>124</sup> Rabbi A.L Scheinbaum, Peninim on the Torah (Cleveland Hts. Ohio: Peninim Publications, 2000), 212.

behave in an upright fashion.<sup>125</sup> It has been stated that when one leaves this world they have nothing other than the Torah they learned and the good deeds they have done.<sup>126</sup> One does not have to go to university, or even leave yeshiva in order to do such good deeds, but study in and of itself is not always the goal, but rather a means to a greater end. Torah is not a mere intellectual exercise, but for correct observance, one must learn in order to do.<sup>127</sup>

Lastly, what is to be of an individual who has absolutely no time or ability to sit and study Torah? The code of Jewish law answers this dilemma with a model straight out of the Torah. Deuteronomy 33:18 says, "Rejoice Zevulun in your going out and Yissachar in your tents." Our rabbis interpret that the two entered into a partnership. Zevulun "went out" to engage in business, while Yissachar stayed "in" to study. In spite of the fact that Yissachar was the elder brother,<sup>128</sup> the Torah mentions Zevulun first because the learning of Yissachar was made possible only through the financial support of Zevulun.<sup>129</sup> Thus, if a person lacks the knowledge to study Torah, or he or she just has so many burdens that it is impossible to study, he or she should support others who do engage in Torah study, and they will be considered as though they themselves had studied.<sup>130</sup>

In spite of this leniency in our obligation to study, every person should do his or her utmost to study Torah, even just a little, every day and every night. The more a

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<sup>125</sup> Amsel, Jewish encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues, 141.

<sup>126</sup> Torah Anthology, 222.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>128</sup> Stone Chumash, 117.

<sup>129</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Trans. Rabbi Avrohom Davis (in Hebrew) (Brooklyn, NY: Metsudah Publications, 1996), 191.

<sup>130</sup> ibid.

person studies the more blessing they receive from heaven.<sup>131</sup> Also, if the reason one does not want to study Torah is purely for intellectual difficulties, they should remember that "anyone who engages in Torah study but is unable to understand it for lack of knowledge, will merit to understand it in the world to come."<sup>132</sup> We are also taught that as long as one tries to learn Torah, he or she will find some "flavor" or meaning in it.<sup>133</sup> I think it also says somewhere that if you read this essay over and over again (sending me a check every time you do) you will receive some sort of great merit!<sup>134</sup>

While learning Torah is a prerequisite to fulfilling the Torah, it is not just to learn about Judaism, it is a part of Judaism. A Torah student once complained to Rabbi Yisrael Salanter that no matter how much he studied, he could never seem to remember anything, which he felt rendered his efforts pointless. Rabbi Salanter responded, "Where did you ever hear of a mitzvah that demanded that you become a great scholar? The mitzvah is only that you study Torah."<sup>135</sup> Learning is in itself of positive Jewish action. This may be another reason that the Talmud venerates study over practice; although the mishna holds practice to be the main thing, study leads to mitzvot and it is in itself a mitzvah. Adin Steinsaltz puts it well, "Torah is both a gateway leading into the palace of Judaism and a great hall within that palace."<sup>136</sup>



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<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, 193.

<sup>133</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Eruvin Vol. II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1991), 54a-54b.

<sup>134</sup> make checks payable to Jason Weiner and round to the nearest thousand

<sup>135</sup> Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Understanding Judaism, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aaronson Inc, 1991), 210.

<sup>136</sup> Adin Steinsaltz, Teshuvah (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1987), 87-88.

## Specific Advice for the University Student

The Mishna warns us, "Do not say, 'when I am free I will study,' for perhaps you will not become free."<sup>137</sup> The commentaries explain that one who says this will never find leisure, thus remaining without studying Torah. In addition to setting aside times specifically devoted to Torah study, one always should keep a book at hand and study all they can whenever they have the opportunity.<sup>138</sup> What exactly should a college student learn? The code of Jewish law advises that in one's set learning periods they should study the laws that frequently occur and which every Jew must know.<sup>139</sup> Reb Ovadia Yosef and Rav Moshe Feisntein have both ruled that if a person can not learn full time (which they considered to be the ideal), then they should at least learn halacha to keep their life running according to Torah.<sup>140</sup> It is further suggested for one to study *Agadah*, *Midrashim*, *mussar*, because these studies, "help a person break their evil impulses."<sup>141</sup>

One grows as a person in many ways while in college, but actual religiosity may be (and often is) damaged at some level, because the mishna tells us that in regards to Torah learning, "One who does not increase, decreases."<sup>142</sup> Lack of review breeds forgetfulness in Torah learning, and people often get bored with the status quo. In order to keep us from "shrinking", it is very important to learn *mussar*. Someone in a college atmosphere may often find themselves in the clutches of their desires and impulses and may benefit from a little severity or rebuke to keep them on the right path. The study of *mussar* helps to keep a person from falling religiously, and it instructs a person how to be

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<sup>137</sup> The Pirkei Avos Treasury, 2:5/77.

<sup>138</sup> Torah Anthology, 83.

<sup>139</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulachan Aruch, 191.

<sup>140</sup> Rabbi David Bassous, Jewish Law Meets Modern Challenges Vol.1, (Highland Park, NJ: The Jesse M. Sutton Foundation, 1999), 123.

<sup>141</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulachan Aruch, 191.

<sup>142</sup> Torah Anthology, 40.

kind and ethical, which one needs to review constantly in order to be a kiddush Hashem. Indeed, I was fortunate enough to interview a highly respected Chassidic Rav from Brooklyn, Rabbi Avraham Hecht, who gave me great advice for staying religious while at college, including studying books of *mussar*.<sup>143</sup>

*Mussar* will not suffice as one's total daily learning, however. To obtain inspiration, and remain in awe of Hashem, one may also choose to study Chassidic philosophy (Chassidus). While *mussar* may keep someone from falling behind, the study of *chassidus* is intended to help a person grow forward. *Mussar* will tell you to, and help you to be very precise and passionate in your observance of halacha. However, in order to know specifically how to behave, obviously constant review of halacha is needed. *Mussar* will tell you to keep a Jewish outlook, to think Jewish, but in order to do that one must constantly learn and review Jewish philosophy books, as well as Talmud and *Tanach* (Hebrew Bible) with commentaries. *Mussar* is an important and essential base, a good thing to review on the bus for example, but in a person's daily learning periods it is not enough.

Someone once asked Rabbi Yisrael Salanter whether the fifteen minutes that he had spared for Torah study should be used learning Talmud or *mussar*. Rabbi Yisrael said, "Mussar, of course." The man challenged, "Do you mean to say that you consider the study of *mussar* to supersede Talmud?" Not at all," said Rabbi Yisrael. "But if you will learn *mussar* for fifteen minutes, you will discover that you can find three hours for the study of Talmud."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Interview by author, Verbal Interview, Lomita, California, December 20, 1999.

<sup>144</sup> Rabbi Abraham J. Twersky M.D., *Lights Along the Way* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1995), 25.

I also interviewed Rabbi Simcha Weinberg and he had very relevant and specific advice.<sup>145</sup> He felt that if someone wishes to stay religious in college, their primary concern should be Torah study. When he was in Johns Hopkins University he set a minimum of 3.5 hours a day that he would study Torah, and would not give in to going below that time, no matter what. This way, if anything has to give, it is secular studies rather than Torah learning. One will have to be particularly adept in this respect, because as we stated earlier, achieving good grades can be a *kiddush Hashem*. Reb Simcha advocated limiting *mussar* study and focusing on subjects with more substance, such as *Tanach*, *Rambam*, and *Derech Hashem*. Another idea is to take issues that you are learning about in your classes, and do research in traditional Jewish texts to figure out, in depth, the Jewish position on these issues. This will help you learn Torah and earn good grades at the same time.

I additionally had the opportunity to meet with a well-known Rosh Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Rabbi Noach Weinberg.<sup>146</sup> He said that in part of the time one allots for Torah learning it would be wise to learn *Pirkei Avot* in depth. Reading just one mishna a day and asking oneself what it means, how it can be done, why it needs to be done, and finally trying to implement the advice of our sages into one's daily life.

Although it is not always recommended, if you take Judaica studies classes it is best to avoid claiming that those classes suffice for your daily study periods. Daily Torah learning should be something that you do on your own, not as a homework assignment. While in a secular institution, I think that it is beneficial to take advantage and get a good, well-rounded education. Torah learning in this period of your life is not aimed at

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<sup>145</sup> Interview by author, Verbal Interview, Jerusalem, Israel, January 2, 2000.

<sup>146</sup> Interview by author, Verbal Interview, Jerusalem, Israel, January 6, 2000.

becoming a scholar but simply to stay religious. Learn what inspires you and keeps you in line; learn what you like. Be able to teach it to someone if you had to. You will have to answer many basic questions about Judaism, so even reading some introductory books on Jewish thought is helpful.

It is very important to have a good teacher to learn from, as the mishna enjoins us, "appoint a teacher for yourself."<sup>147</sup> It is important to have a rabbi to keep a person "plugged in" and in good company in general, as well as to be there to consult with when the need arises. Learning with a rabbi can be very beneficial because the exchange of ideas created by studying with others often leads to better clarity, and helps free a person of the doubt that can often result from learning alone. It is also believed that people tend to remember that which is learned from a teacher better than through independent study.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, an experienced authority can help an individual figure out specifically what he or she should be learning, and answer questions when they arise. Books are good, but there is often a need for someone well versed in Jewish law, who can respond to and explain specific questions for individualized situations.

While having a good teacher is essential, one of the best forms of learning is teaching. If you can arrange with someone less knowledgeable than you to learn with it could be very helpful, as it has been for me. Teach the student what they want to know without trying to impose an agenda on them. Show the relevance in what you're learning and help them grow. The best history teachers are those who teach us how to learn from the past, the best science teachers show us how to improve our life and the world with the

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<sup>147</sup> [The Pirkei Avos Treasury](#), 1:6/25.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

principles learned. A teacher of Judaism should lead through example, and show how relevant and life changing the Torah is.

Torah should be treated as wisdom for life, not just academic information. It is usually most effective to be friends with your study partner, and respect them. Just because they may not be as “religious” as you, they are still wise, even if it is not in Torah knowledge. Try to remember, “teach, don't preach”<sup>149</sup> as I am doing my best to do. A teacher's role is to give students the tools to grow. Try to be patient, honest, and open, without being judgmental or condescending. It is also important to listen and avoid debate. Always remember that you are allowed not to know something. The Talmud urges us, “Teach your tongue to say, ‘I don't know,’ lest you be caught in a falsehood.”<sup>150</sup> Not only is it better to profess one's ignorance than to ruin their credibility, but misrepresenting Torah is very detrimental. If one can not respond to a question, an honest, “good question, I don't know the answer” or, “Ill have to find out for you,” is the best approach.

When you take your time for Torah study, the biggest challenge yet may be distinguishing Torah study from secular studies. The purpose of secular studies may be to advance academically and intellectually, whereas Torah study is intended intrinsically as a manner of connecting one's self with the infinite, growing spiritually as well as gaining inspiration and strength. The Talmud equates a person who acquires Torah but not fear of heaven to a treasurer who has the key to the inner chamber, but not to the

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<sup>149</sup> Yitzchak Coopersmith, The Eye of a Needle, (Jerusalem/ New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1993),135.

<sup>150</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachos Vol.1 (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 4a.

outer chamber.<sup>151</sup> Fear and awe of Hashem are fundamentally important in Torah study. Without it, a person will not be able to go to the proper depth of Torah study.

The goal when studying for class is generally to drive a point into one's brain, while with Torah studies one must strive to bring the concepts from one's head to their heart. Normal Lamm has commented beautifully on the verse in Psalms 93:14, "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." Lamm remarks that, "Only if one is firmly planted within, in the inner precincts of Torah will he or she spiritually flourish in the outer courtyards of madda [secular studies] as well."<sup>152</sup>

In my major, I often have to write essays that require much preparation, research, and often nearly twenty pages of cogent, analytical, deep writing. I always get them in on time, but for some reason, I usually don't get started with these projects until 2 a.m. the night before they are due. Many people refer to this as procrastination, but let's be honest, it's laziness. The Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira has said that laziness, "is so severe an affliction that one can not take even the first step towards serving God until one has shaken its influence."<sup>153</sup> Reb Shapira advised that one who has problems with laziness should set goals for learning a specific amount in a specified period of time and be careful to keep themselves within that goal. Reb Shapira further advised people who have trouble with laziness to learn only the simpler meanings of text and primarily attempt to accomplish the goal of studying a specific text for a set amount of time.<sup>154</sup> When learning alone, it is advisable to start slow, taking less time, and gradually increasing.

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<sup>151</sup> <sup>151</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Shabbos Vol. I, 31a-31b

<sup>152</sup> Lamm, Torah Umadda, 202.

<sup>153</sup> Shapira, Students Obligation, 50.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 47.

Reb Shapira also advised people to write out their learning schedule on a piece of paper, including daily activities and check back on it periodically to make sure that one is achieving his or her goals. Additionally, Rabbi Shapira advised that one check their schedule from the previous day, and attempt to complete, in learning, that which they did not complete the previous day, if they were slacking off.<sup>155</sup> In some cases one is advised to set their schedule based on how many pages they want to cover, and keep it at a certain minimum, but if one can learn esoteric levels on their own, they should set time slots for learning, rather than specific page quotas. If one can increase this level by level, and it inspires them to learn more, according to Reb Shapira, they should.

Finally, remember the Talmudic dictate that even if one repeats what they have learned one hundred times, it can not be compared to one who repeats it a hundred and one times.<sup>156</sup> Constant review is essential for grasping Torah and maintaining refined behavior.

*Tiferes Yisrael* also offered some practical ideas to help one accord primacy to their Torah studies. He taught that one should not study while lying down, while in a warm place, or in any other condition that induces drowsiness and disturbs concentration. Nor should one eat or be involved in any other activity while they learn Torah. Further, one should study out loud if possible and in a well-lit, comfortable and quiet room. Finally, a person should learn in consistently set times, rather than in occasional spurts, and try to achieve a clear understanding of that which they are studying.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>156</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Chagigah (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1999), 9b.

<sup>157</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 44.

To review, learn with a study partner if possible, ideally learn in a synagogue or a similar place where you find it easy to study. Fight the two main problems that make it hard to learn, bad habits and lack of time. Have a fixed time for learning, (inform people that from x - x you are always busy). Lastly, have goals, write them down, and keep a chart of your learning; bad habits are changeable.

### **There are Only So Many Hours in a Day**

Wait a second; go to college, observe shabbat and holidays, get a job, extracurricular activities, and learn Torah!?! Messilat Yescharim has cautioned us not to get so busy that we don't have any time to evaluate our ways, thus losing sight of what is really important.<sup>158</sup> However, for many people, myself included, a little bit of stress and excessive occupation keeps people animated and forced to do their best work. Often, when people are very busy they become more energized and fit things into their schedules that they may never have gotten around to if they had nothing to do. According to "*The Netziv*," when people are busy they feel more fulfilled and their health is actually better.<sup>159</sup>

Moreover, *The Netziv* was under the opinion that when people are idle they seek amusement and stimulation. *The Netziv* was concerned that this boredom would cause a person to search for excitement, forfeiting the discipline of home, routine and community, thus increasing the danger of sin and ill effecting one's physical well-being. Many Rabbis have advocated people keeping busy schedules with worthwhile endeavors, simply so they would not have a chance to do something wrong. Reb Menachem Mendel

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<sup>158</sup> Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, *The Path of the Just* Trans. Shagra Silverstein (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem/New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1990), 31.

<sup>159</sup> *Stone Chumash*, 709.

of Kotzk said, "I wish that people would avoid sin not because it is forbidden, but because they do not have the free time to waste on sin."<sup>160</sup>

It is important not to let learning Torah become a heavy burden, or to become overly stressed out. It may be advisable to make sure to take time out and avoid burn out. It is often helpful to prioritize, make a to-do list, and use a daily planner. However, the fact that fitting Torah learning into a hectic schedule will make a person more busy is not an excuse to avoid learning, it may actually be a positive benefit Torah study.

There are not many excuses for neglecting Torah study all together. A New York museum of pre-holocaust Jewish life has a volume of the Mishnah that is stamped, "The Society of Woodchoppers for the Study of Mishnah in Berditchev."<sup>161</sup> If woodchoppers of who required no literacy and held little status in this small town made it a priority to study on a regular basis, so can you! When you finish going *out* there, spreading joy and kindness and making me proud, try to find a second to go back *in* there, open a book and keep me proud!

(please)

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<sup>160</sup> Simcha Raz, Hasidic Wisdom (New Jersey/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997), 175.

<sup>161</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 556.

## Appropriate Eats

According to my survey of 103 religious Jewish College students, by far the number one problem, difficulty, and dilemma of their college years has been eating. In fact, kashrut is a very significant part of Jewish living in general. Almost every time the laws for kashrut are delineated in the Torah, the only hint of a reason for observing them is to be holy. As we discussed earlier, Jews are to be a holy people, which traditionally means being special and distinctive. This means that a Jew is to be holy, even during this “animal act” of eating. Judaism insists that, “in *all* your ways know Him.”<sup>162</sup> A religious Jewish life is not based in the synagogue alone. “Religion” for a Jew must play out in every single aspect of life because Judaism is not just faith or ritual, but a daily way of life.

When explaining this project to religious non-Jews, I am often asked, “But why a guide for religious *Jews*? What’s the difference between you and me?” As far as enduring challenges of college life, we all have similar obstacles. An observant Jew, however has an additional dimension of difficulty. As my survey has shown, what we eat, (or do not eat) is at the heart of that added difficulty.

I am not so worried about your physical survival at school. You will eventually get through hard classes, social situations and administrative red tape. I am most concerned with your spiritual wellness. If you don’t feel fulfilled, motivated, and exhilarated by your Jewishness, your spiritual world will crumble. Inevitably this will lead to a complete disaster in your daily life as well. Why give you this shpiel in the chapter about keeping kosher? Rabbi Chaim Donin states that kashrut is, “Not so much a

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<sup>162</sup> Proverbs 3:6

diet to maintain one's physical well-being as a diet to maintain one's spiritual well-being."<sup>163</sup>

With regards to all issues in general, and particularly kashrut, one must plan ahead by making appropriate arrangements, notifying people, or bringing food. Two wise men of Chelm once went out for a walk, when suddenly it began to rain.

“Quick,” said one man, “open your umbrella.”

“It won't help,” said his friend, “My umbrella is full of holes.”

“Then why did you bring it in the first place?”

“I didn't think it would rain!”

Proper observance of the laws of kashrut requires detailed knowledge of its laws and much preparation. Don't be caught unprepared like the “wise men” of Chelm. In this section I will cover only those laws which occur frequently to those of us in less-than-ideal situations. For a full exposition on the laws of kashrut, you will have to look elsewhere, and even with regards to that which I will cover, it is still best to consult a competent rabbi before action is taken.

### **Specifics**

Additives found in processed foods, canned goods, baked goods, candies, soft drinks, etc. can make observance of the complex laws of kashrut very difficult. Among these additives there are often extracts, preservatives, and food colorings that may not always be listed among the ingredients, and may contain non-kosher animal products. Moreover, many factories make food using a steam system that heats kosher food with the steam in which non-kosher foods were processed, rendering the food completely

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<sup>163</sup> Donin, To be a Jew, 98.

unkosher.<sup>164</sup> This is why the best policy is to eat only those processed foods that are marked with kosher certification. Common examples of foods that have problems even though people assume that they are kosher would be:

- Bread: may contain fats and leavening agents derived from animal sources, or made with flour that contains insects.<sup>165</sup>
- Chocolates/Candies: often contain non-kosher fats, extracts, mammalian gelatin, non-kosher milk, etc. Even raisins are sometimes smeared with non-kosher fat<sup>166</sup>

When arriving to a campus, it is necessary to find out which kashrut certifications are reliable in the area. If you have roommates who keep kosher, or you are on a kosher meal plan, your situation is not very different from anyone else's circumstances of kashrut observance. Most issues arise, however, when a person has roommates who do not keep kosher and/or there are no kosher facilities nearby. At first, one may eat cold kosher foods from clean non-kosher utensils, but only until they can get their own.<sup>167</sup> One may store kosher food with non-kosher food, as long as it is kept in a well wrapped, closed container.<sup>168</sup> I have found that when storing food in some place like a refrigerator, with non-kosher food, it is also best to keep your food elevated higher than the rest so that nothing can drip or spill into it.

One should have a place mat in order to avoid eating off non-kosher surfaces. If the dishwasher or sink has not been kashered (made kosher), then one should not wash

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<sup>164</sup> Rabbi Ze'ev Greenwald, Shaarei Halacha, (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 2000),328.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Mordechai Becher & Moshe Newman, After the Return (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1994), 84.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. , 85.

kosher dishes in them.<sup>169</sup> A kosher utensil can only be washed in a non-kosher sink if the utensil is held and not allowed to touch the sink itself.<sup>170</sup> Another option would be to use only disposable utensils, but Mother Earth would not be so happy about that one, so a sink that is not used for non-kosher items, like a laundry sink, could be another choice.

Once a person obtains utensils, what about cooking? If one chooses to keep a kosher kitchen or cook in the same kitchen as their roommates, their utensils will inevitably become non-kosher; I speak from experience. Thus, the laws regarding re-kashering them need to be known. Cooking or roasting non-kosher food in a kosher vessel renders that vessel non-kosher.<sup>171</sup> Likewise, leaving non-kosher liquid in a kosher utensil for 24 hours or more causes the vessel to become non-kosher.<sup>172</sup>

The method of kashering a pot or utensil parallels the way in which the pot became unkosher. Consequently, if a utensil was used for cold foods, it may be kashered simply by washing it in cold water.<sup>173</sup> Likewise, vessels that never encounter heat, such as bread containers, jars, or refrigerators, need no kashering, just a good washing.<sup>174</sup> Any pot or utensil made of metal, plastic, or wood, and made of one piece (no seams or joints) that became non-kosher by contact with hot liquids, may be kashered in the following way, known as "hagalah":

- 1) Thoroughly clean the vessel, removing any tags, labels, or rust.
- 2) Wait at least 24 hours after its last use, which is the difference in time between something tasting okay and starting to go bad.

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<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Rabbi Eliezer Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World (New York, NY: Eliezer Wolff, 1989), 30.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, 168.

3) Immerse the entire object in a big (kosher) pot of bubbly boiling water, it does not matter if it is a dairy or a meat pot.<sup>175</sup> The whole utensil must be underwater while the water is boiling. The optimum time is to leave the utensil in for 30 seconds at the very most, and then remove it. (If it is left in any longer, there's a problem of re-absorption). If the pot is too big to be immersed in a larger vessel, then the pot itself can be filled to the very brim and brought to a boil so that the water overflows.<sup>176</sup> It is often necessary to place something, like a stone, into the water once it is boiling to make sure that it overflows. There is also the option of putting the utensil in the pot bit by bit, but care must be taken that no part is dipped in the boiling water twice.<sup>177</sup>

4) Last, remove the object and rinse it in cold water.

If it is close to Passover, one may find out when their local synagogue is having their pre-Passover "kashering day" because this is the same way dishes become kosher for Passover. On these days they prepare a huge public vat of boiling water and bring out the blowtorches. We are not permitted to do hagala on any utensil that may be ruined in the process.<sup>178</sup>

If the object has joints, seams, rivets, patches, or anything that may contain food particles, it must be burned by a blowtorch before it is kashered.<sup>179</sup> This is also necessary with a frying pan used on fire (without liquid), because a pan absorbs non-kosher substances more directly and intensely. If you need to kasher a pan, then you have to burn the unkosherness out, which is called "libun," literally getting the metal red-hot.

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<sup>174</sup> Steinsaltz, Teshuvah, 132.

<sup>175</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 168.

<sup>176</sup> Donin, To be a Jew, 120.

<sup>177</sup> Rabbi Doniel Yehuda Neustadt, The Weekly Halacha Discussion (Jerusalem/New York, Feldheim Publishers, 1998), 285.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

There are two possible options. One is to use a blowtorch, and the other is to put the pan in with the cleaning cycle of a self-cleaning oven (be careful that the plastic handle doesn't disintegrate). Porcelain, pottery, china, general earthenware, and enamelware can not be koshered.<sup>180</sup>

Metal sinks and faucets as well as marble, and Formica surfaces that were used for non-kosher foods may be kashered in the following manner:<sup>181</sup>

1. If there are cracks, burn them out or pour a strong detergent on them.
2. Clean the surface thoroughly.
3. Don't use it for 24 hours.
4. Pour boiling water over the entire surface.

An oven may also be kashered. Some say that a blowtorch must be used on each area of the oven in addition to cleaning it very well. Others say that a blowtorch is not necessary, and all that must be done is to clean the oven very well (preferably with a chemical cleaner like "Easy Off") and set the oven on the highest temperature for up to an hour. This suffices for the racks as well.<sup>182</sup> If the oven has a self-clean cycle, it may be kashered by cleaning it once by hand, waiting 24 hours and then running the cycle once.<sup>183</sup> Kashering is technically not needed for gas range ovens, but it should still be done.<sup>184</sup> In non-ideal situations, a non-kosher oven may be used if the item being cooked

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<sup>179</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 169.

<sup>180</sup> Donin, To be a Jew, 119.

<sup>181</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 168.

<sup>182</sup> Rabbi Donneal Epstein, On the Road and in the Air (Brooklyn, NY: Rabbi Donneal Epstein, 1999),15.

<sup>183</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 170.

<sup>184</sup> Epstein, On the Road and in the Air, 15.

is kept in a covered kosher utensil,<sup>185</sup> or double wrapped in aluminum foil to avoid problems of condensation with non-kosher particles.<sup>186</sup>

A metal dishwasher may be kashered by cleaning it well and waiting 24 hours, then running it on its hottest cycle.<sup>187</sup> What about microwaves? I'm glad you asked. It must sit idle for 24 hours, then be cleaned well. Afterwards, a bowl of water is placed inside and it is turned on until the water is steaming. Finally, some boiling water may need to be poured over the glass bottom of the microwave.<sup>188</sup>

How about A stove? First, clean the grates well with an oven cleaner, and then turn them over so that they will be upside down, leaving the fire on high for at least fifteen minutes.<sup>189</sup> If it is an electric stove, then all that one has to do is turn it on its highest setting until the rings become red-hot.<sup>190</sup> In a case of great need, one may cook on a non-kosher stovetop, but one should first place a metal sheet on the grate.<sup>191</sup> If you don't have a metal sheet, oh well, go ahead and cook on the non-kosher stove top because it is assumed that the fire burns away non-kosher particles, (preferably let the fire burn before putting the pot on the stove).<sup>192</sup> The same holds true for a barbecue.

### **Around Town**

One major issue is eating out. I spent time living at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and at Columbia University in New York City. Both of these places had abundant options for kosher dining. In the social sciences we call people who live in such conditions “privileged.” The closest kosher restaurant to my home campus in

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World, 24.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Epstein, On the Road and in the Air, 15.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World, 22.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

Central California, however, was over 100 miles away! If you go out (into a non-kosher establishment), you may eat kosher food off non-kosher utensils as long as it was not cooked in them.<sup>193</sup> Some examples are cold fruits (even if they are cut),<sup>194</sup> fresh veggies, canned fruits, and canned kosher fish. Just make sure that everything is clean, free of bugs and no grape juice was used on anything.<sup>195</sup>

One may not eat fish prepared in a non-kosher place, because of various halachic problems that arise.<sup>196</sup> One may buy kosher fish in a fish store that sells non-kosher fish, as long as they are sure that they can see the scales on the fish and they ask the proprietor to wash the knife first (if one doesn't have their own to provide them with).<sup>197</sup> One must also make sure that the fish was not salted, and that the scale it is weighed on is clean.<sup>198</sup>

Many authorities permit drinking hot coffee, tea, or chocolate in non-kosher places because it is prepared and served in vessels that are used exclusively for that purpose.<sup>199</sup> In the United States, all beer and non-flavored coffee is kosher.<sup>200</sup> If you do drink coffee from a non-kosher café, you should use a paper or glass cup, and avoid metal spoons.<sup>201</sup>

What about eating in a vegetarian restaurant that is not under rabbinical supervision? This is not allowed because it is not always strictly vegetarian.<sup>202</sup> For example, some margarine contains animal fat and would thus make all the pots non-

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<sup>192</sup> Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World, 22.

<sup>193</sup> Donin, To be a Jew, 117.

<sup>194</sup> Rabbi David Weinberger, Around the World the Halachic Way (Laurence, NY: Rabbi David Weinberger, 2000), 55.

<sup>195</sup> Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World, 19.

<sup>196</sup> Weinberger, Around the World the Halachic Way, 55.

<sup>197</sup> Epstein, On the Road and in the Air, 15.

<sup>198</sup> Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World, 19-20.

<sup>199</sup> Donin, To be a Jew, 118.

<sup>200</sup> Epstein, On the Road and in the Air, 18.

<sup>201</sup> Wolff, Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World, 16.

kosher. Additionally, cheeses often have rennet in them, which is derived from the inner stomach lining of non-kosher animals.<sup>203</sup> Thirdly, there is the prohibition of “Bishul Akum,” which we will get into shortly. Then there is the problem of “sharp”; cutting something like an onion, radish, or pickle with a knife that was once used to cut non-kosher food makes the entire “sharp” item unkosher. Moreover, grape juice is forbidden unless it has strict rabbinical supervision, and it is often poured over items such as fruit salad.<sup>204</sup>

Alright, now I am about to do something that will make some of you regret reading this, and I may even get death threats for this one, but I am going to dispel a very common misconception. Are you ready? For at least five significant reasons, it is completely prohibited to eat a veggie-salad in a restaurant that does not have a kosher certification.<sup>205</sup> You might have put this paper down and begun to burn it already, but if you are still reading let’s talk about the reasons that you can not eat a simple salad in a non-kosher establishment.

First of all, non-kosher knives used for the salad may very likely have been used for non-kosher items that the restaurant sells. Thus, some of the unkosherness could get into the salad. Secondly, some vegetables are “sharp” and if one part of the vegetable is cut with a non-kosher knife, the whole thing becomes unkosher. Thirdly, people preparing salads at non-kosher restaurants don’t check the salads for bugs. Thus, even if you can’t see them, it is very likely that your salad will have bugs in it and according to Jewish law, eating an insect is five times worse than eating pork! Still not convinced?

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

The dressing used on non-kosher salads often has animal fat or other non-kosher ingredients in it.

The last issue with regards to eating a salad in a restaurant that is not kosher is also applicable to the simple act of entering the restaurant in the first place. This is known as “maris ayin,” which means ‘appearance.’ The Torah tells us to be, “clean before God and before Israel.”<sup>206</sup> Hashem knows if what you’re doing is correct or not, but we should also have reservations about how our actions look to other Jews. This therefore obligates us to do not only that which is correct, but also that which appears correct. We should avoid situations that may give the impression that one is transgressing a prohibition. There are basically three reasons to avoid causing a suspicion:<sup>207</sup>

- 1) It is forbidden to suspect an innocent person of sin, therefore if you cause someone else to suspect you, you are causing him or her to sin.

- 2) A person with no regard for how others perceive them will become arrogant and shameless, and the Talmud holds that, “Anyone who is bashful does not readily sin.”<sup>208</sup> Thus, if one doesn't care how others perceive them, they are more likely to sin.

- 3) People tend to be influenced by their surroundings, so your appearance of laxity will lead others to decrease their religious observance by thinking that something is no big deal (“everybody is doing it”).

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<sup>206</sup> Numbers 32:22

<sup>207</sup> Rabbi S. Wagschal, Guide to Derech Eretz (Jerusalem, Israel: Targum Press, Inc., 1993), 82.

<sup>208</sup> Schottenstein edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Nedarim Vol. I (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2000), 20a.

Many authorities do allow Jews to sit in non-kosher restaurants, but it is not ideal and shouldn't be done on a regular basis.<sup>209</sup> Accordingly, while sitting in a non-kosher restaurant, one may leave their yarmulke on, but should try to sit in an inconspicuous spot (I usually sit under the tables or in the restroom☺). One should also explain to Jewish acquaintances that may see you that you are not eating the non-kosher food, because if people conclude that the food there is kosher and consequently eat there, it will be your fault. Why is this making me picture being at “The Max” at Bayside High School (from the show “Saved by the Bell”)?

Thus, while there is no specific prohibition against entering a non-kosher restaurant, ‘Maris Ayin’ is the problem with it. Therefore, in addition to the above four reasons, eating a salad in such a restaurant would violate the prohibition of maris ayin. A café on the other hand, which is patronized mostly for beverages, poses less of a problem for maris ayin.<sup>210</sup>

Okay, so you can go sit in a restaurant with friends, but that's no fun; watching people eat yummy smelling food gets old fast. How about having them cook for you? Most “friends” are willing to accommodate their friends’ dietary needs but the issue of Bishul Akum then arises. The Talmud forbids the eating of certain types of food if a person who is not Jewish cooked them, this is Bishul Akum. This prohibition was intended to prevent intermarriage by creating a sizeable social barrier between Jews and gentiles and to prohibit Jews from becoming overly accustomed to eat or drink with non-Jews, which may lead to the accidental sharing of non-kosher food with a Jew.<sup>211</sup> Even

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<sup>209</sup> Becher & Newman, *After the Return*, 88.

<sup>210</sup> Wolff, *Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World*, 16.

<sup>211</sup> Rabbi Moshe Berstein, “Bishul Akum,” *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, No. VII (Spring, 1984): 68.

food cooked in a kosher home may not be eaten if a non-Jew cooked it.<sup>212</sup> This law is very logical because people who don't know the complicated laws of kashrut may make hazardous mistakes even though they mean well.

Our sages only prohibited food that is fit to be served at a royal table (thus excluding snack foods like popcorn and candy that are not usually part of a meal). Further, it only applies to things that must be cooked because they are not easily edible raw, in which case most fruits and veggies are excluded from this prohibition. Thus, anything that could be eaten if it was not cooked, may be eaten even if a person who is not Jewish did the entire cooking. Additionally, foods in which the major component is water, such as coffee and tea, may also be cooked by a non-Jew and remain permitted.

There are a few ways to decrease the strictness of these laws, for example, the prohibition against Bishul Akum applies only when the person who is not Jewish performed the entire cooking process.<sup>213</sup> If a Jew simply lights the flame, or even just adds fuel to an existing flame, simply places food on a flame, or stirs the food, it is still kosher (even if a gentile completed the cooking process).<sup>214</sup> If this is a major issue for someone, a rabbi should be consulted because these laws get very complicated (for example, the status of the utensils used in Bishul Akum).

One final note, as you may know, new metal or glass utensils need to be immersed in a kosher mikveh before being used. This causes many people to worry about eating off other people's dishes. If you are just borrowing or renting them from a non-Jew, it need not be immersed.<sup>215</sup> In addition, food cooked in a utensil that has not

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 172.

been immersed is permitted.<sup>216</sup> If the utensil belongs to a Jew, who is thus obligated to immerse the item, most rulings state that we may not eat off it.<sup>217</sup> In sticky situations we may rely, however, on a lenient opinion that since only the owner is obligated to immerse them, others can use them, even if not immersed.<sup>218</sup>

### **Curtains Up!**

This is a good place to introduce a principle that is applicable to much of college life. The *Messilat Yesharim* explains that a person must observe all of the commandments without fear or shame, no matter in whose presence one finds themselves.<sup>219</sup> Having said that, the *Messilat Yesharim* goes on to clarify that this requires distinction and discrimination, for this was said in relation to the mitzvah in itself, for whose sake one must be very strict. However, there are some additions of saintliness that, if performed in public, may evoke laughter and ridicule, rendering the “scoffers” sinners because of you.<sup>220</sup> Due to the fact that one can forego some customary actions that are not absolutely required, a person striving for righteousness would certainly do better to leave them than to do them.

Furthermore, because of the importance of humility, many holy Jews throughout history have left off some of their accustomed ways of saintliness when in public so as not to appear proud. In short, what is essential in respect to mitzvot must be performed in the face of all mockery, and what is not essential and provokes laughter and ridicule need not be performed. This is one of the reasons that it is important to know halacha well, and to be able to distinguish between actual laws, customs, and additions to the law.

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>217</sup> Wolff, *Keeping Kosher in a Non-Kosher World*, 33.

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> Luzzatto, *Path of the Just*, 271.

The Messilat Yescharim is explaining that mitzvot are divided into two categories:

A) *Ikar hadin*, which is real halacha that we are bound by.

B) *Chassidus*, which is extra, exemplary and pious things that add to and beautify mitzvot, but are not required.

When it comes to *ikar hadin*, we must do them no matter what, because it is the law and “God’s Will.” With *chassidus*, on the other hand, one must weigh each action against its price and effect, a sort of a “cost-benefit analysis.” Since *chissidus* is not binding, but often a personal elevated approach to serving Hashem, it does not always have to be performed.

If it is someone else that is paying for our “holiness” in any way, it must not be done. For instance, we have to recite a blessing before eating, which is the *ikar hadin*. However, *chassidus* may dictate saying the blessing slowly with a holy melody, but in front of confused onlookers this should be avoided. Doing such a thing may make others who quickly recited a blessing under their breath look bad, or it may simply rub people the wrong way. Then again, you don’t have to cover your mouth while saying it. Do the mitzvah completely, and without apologizing, but not arrogantly. A person striving for holiness must have consideration for others as their first priority and must never be “righteous” at the expense of anyone else.

Once you figure out just where you stand on various issues, draw a line and hold your standards. Yeshiva or at home are proper places to explore a little and find one’s comfort level. While in college however, I recommend holding and maintaining specific standards. If a person is wishy-washy it may be perceived as though they are playing

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 273.

games and lacking true values. It is best to decide one way or the other on various aspects of life before hand and make a commitment to them.

I am not trying to tell you to be closed minded or aloof. College is a great opportunity to see many new interesting, exiting, and profound ways of living and thinking. However, a person who wants to remain committed to their own background would do well to start off with definite standards and a solid foundation. Most people have heard the saying that, “those who stand for nothing will fall for anything.” The college experience may be referred to as a search for truth, but it should never be a place of blind brain washing and indoctrination. The point is to be well grounded, and focused, not closed off.

I recommend starting with high standards that are not, however, out of reach. It is not advisable to push oneself too hard, but it is very important to start with a strong commitment because most people I know gradually lowered their standards throughout college (except in Israel where many of my peers raised their standards considerably). Constantly changing standards while you’re at school makes halacha look like a fad and may ultimately be detrimental to your psychological survival. Of course, being human, you have permission to make mistakes. The point is to know halacha well, be prepared, and stay strong.

In conclusion, keeping kosher is inescapably crucial, but don’t get scared. While in the college environment, you are already experiencing self-sacrifice and difficulty. If you know the laws well, you can make eating very easy. College is a time that one must take many measures to increase their observance just to sustain sincere religiosity, but don’t make it too hard to be Jewish. Learn the laws well, and ask many questions so that

you will know what you can get away with. A person who does not thoroughly know these laws, will most likely break many of them. However, a person who knows these laws really well will find that they can comfortably maneuver through almost any situation. In addition to other common areas, it would be wise to learn and review the laws of kashrut in one's daily learning period.

Knowledge of these laws is a big responsibility. The *Messilat Yesharim* states that one who is lenient in relation to these laws is destroying their own soul.<sup>221</sup> The *Messilat Yesharim* further states that forbidden foods are in some respects worse than all other prohibitions because the food enters a person's body and becomes one with their flesh.<sup>222</sup> In fact, an event in Maimonides' life actually implies that consumption of unkosher food alters and distorts a person thinking in a distinctive manner. It is related that Maimonides once had a dialogue with some philosophers, and at one point retorted, "From your arguments I can detect that you had just eaten from meat of an unclean animal."<sup>223</sup> The Talmud does in fact support this idea.<sup>224</sup> The *Messilat Yesharim* compares unkosher foods to poison, or food mixed with poison.<sup>225</sup> If a person had any suspicion that the food they were about to consume had poison in it, they would probably have second thoughts to say the least. Likewise, with food that is damaging to the heart and soul, watch what you eat!

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 131

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>223</sup> Twerski, *Lights Along the Way*, 142.

<sup>224</sup> Schottenstein edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yoma Vol. I (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1998), 39a.

<sup>225</sup> Luzzatto, *Path of the Just*, 133.

## Chapter 4 definitions:

*Sanhedrin*- The Jewish high court in ancient Judea, comprised of 71 members who met in the holy temple. They interpret biblical laws, and enacted new ones when needed, the job of protecting the Shabbat (as well as other mitzvot) was entrusted to these, the wisest and most dedicated leaders of the Jewish people.

*Melava Malka*- “Escorting the Bride.” Festive meal eaten after shabbat.

*Zohar*- “Illumination.” Or “Brightness” Holy book on kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) believed to have been written in the second century.

### No sleep 'til...

Shabbat was actually the second biggest issue for the respondents to my survey, and it's no light matter. The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that, "Shabbat is equivalent to all the mitzvot."<sup>226</sup> The *Zohar* says that whoever keeps shabbat in accordance with its laws is regarded as though they fulfilled the entire Torah.<sup>227</sup> Whoa, another major concept in Judaism, do you want to deny that? You can, but the Talmud teaches that whoever desecrates Shabbat is like one who completely denies the whole Torah.<sup>228</sup> One could literally go on forever with statements of the sages exulting shabbat. On the other hand, one could continue for an eternity with the detailed and complicated regulations of the day, so let's dive right into the particulars, shall we?

I am assuming that you already know the general laws and principles of shabbat, so I will simply deal with problematic issues that can often arise within the college student context.

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<sup>226</sup> Ganzfried, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, 463.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

## **Illumination**

Speaking of light issues, the first issue actually takes place before shabbat, eighteen minutes before to be precise. You guessed it, candle lighting. One who lives in dorms is obligated to light shabbat candles in his or her room, because for the present time this is his or her fixed residence.<sup>229</sup> If you are going to eat elsewhere, you should say the blessing and make sure that the candles will still be burning when you returns so that you can receive some sort of benefit or enjoyment from them.<sup>230</sup> If this option is not feasible, one may simply get benefit from the lights right after lighting them by saying some of the shabbat prayers in the illumination of the candles, for example.<sup>231</sup>

The problem is that in most situations it is impermissible to light candles in dorms. Therefore, if you asked about your situation and were told that you should not light even two small "tea light" candles, I don't suggest fighting it or making any kind of stink because there is another option. Simply turn on an electric light in honor of shabbat, and say the blessing.<sup>232</sup> If it was already on you should turn it off and then on again specifically in honor of shabbat.<sup>233</sup> Once you turn it on you have to leave it on, unless it can be put on a timer. If you do not know what time candle lighting is, it should be done a half an hour before sunset to be safe.<sup>234</sup>

One may also kindle lights for everyone else in the dining room, because all of the dorm residents are like one big happy family.<sup>235</sup> It's best to light candles all around the dining room so that everyone can enjoy them. Generally, one who is sleeping at home

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<sup>229</sup> Rav Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath (Nanuet, NY: Feldheim Publishers, 1984), 769.

<sup>230</sup> Weinberger, Around the World the Halachic Way, 45.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 156.

<sup>235</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 770.

but eating the Friday night meal elsewhere, should light shabbat candles at home.<sup>236</sup> According to some opinions, if one is invited out for a meal Friday night, the host discharges their obligation, even if one sleeps back at the dorm.<sup>237</sup> In every situation, all rooms used in any way on Friday night should have some light in them.

### **“Assistance”**

Another shabbat issue that actually arises before the sun sets and shabbat begins is the question of a person who is not Jewish working for, or helping Jews to do something that a Jew may not do on shabbat. This can be a major issue for college students, especially those who grew up only around Jews. There are certain ways to get help from a person who is not Jewish, for things that are impossible for a Jew to do on shabbat.

A big issue is the fact that many assume that because a person is not Jewish and therefore not obligated to perform the commandments of shabbat, he or she may therefore be asked to do anything. However, it is forbidden to allow a person who is not Jewish, even before shabbat, to do work for a Jew on shabbat.<sup>238</sup> One may however hire a non-Jew for a fixed task or for a long period although the work is done on shabbat, provided it is not obvious that they are doing work for a Jew on shabbat because it may lead people to regard shabbat lightly.<sup>239</sup> One may only give a non-Jew work to do on shabbat if the item to be worked on is taken from the Jew’s home before shabbat begins.<sup>240</sup>

Concerning shabbat, the Torah says, "No work at all shall be done."<sup>241</sup> From this our rabbis have extrapolated that Jews should not ask a person who is not Jewish to do

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<sup>236</sup> Greenwald, Shaarei Halacha, 134.

<sup>237</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 771.

<sup>238</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 477.

<sup>239</sup> Mishna Torah: Hilchot Shabbat 6:1, 12-13/ 96,106,108

<sup>240</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 477.

<sup>241</sup> Exodus 12:16 JPS Edition.

work for them, because they would simply become a messenger or an agent for the prohibited action, rendering it as though the Jew did it themselves.<sup>242</sup> The principle is that whatever is forbidden to be done on shabbat by a Jew, is also forbidden to be done through them by a non-Jew.<sup>243</sup>

By becoming accustomed to having a non-Jew perform forbidden activity, one may be led to devalue the abstention from the given act, eventually performing it themselves, and violating shabbat.<sup>244</sup> It is permitted to ask a non-Jew to do work on shabbat for a sick person even if there is no danger to life; if there is such danger one may violate shabbat oneself.<sup>245</sup> When I stayed home for shabbat, I usually had more than ten guests at my apartment for the meals, most of whom were not Jewish, so this became a major issue.

The fundamental principle that one needs to know for this issue is that a person who is not Jewish can help a Jew on shabbat as long as the non-Jew was not: A) commanded to do the work, and B) the Jew does not directly benefit from the work.<sup>246</sup> Stipulation "A" can be avoided if the non-Jew understands what they must do without being explicitly ordered. Indirect hints such as, "I won't be able to sleep because the light in my room is on" or, "too bad so much electricity is being wasted" are acceptable. However, one may not add, "will you please help me out?"<sup>247</sup> Even if a non-Jew asks, "Should I turn on the light for you?" A Jew can't answer "Yes" or even nod in the affirmative.

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<sup>242</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 477.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 545.

<sup>244</sup> Rav Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath Volume Four (Jerusalem, / New York: Feldheim Publishers, 2000), 45.

<sup>245</sup> Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shabbat, 2:10 1,3/ 38.

<sup>246</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 125.

When hinting to a person who is not Jewish, a Jew cannot use expressions or motions which directly indicate to them what they should do. One should merely describe it to them so that they draw the correct conclusion and understand that the act must be done on their own assent.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, a Jew may not mention the forbidden act, like "golly, it would be swell if someone turned off that light."<sup>249</sup> One may ask a non-Jew to do any permitted act, like washing dishes, even if it is known that they will do something prohibited in the process, like turn on hot water.<sup>250</sup>

With regard to stipulation "B," not getting direct benefit means that if a person who is not Jewish turned off a Jew's light, for example, it makes it easier to sleep, but it would have been possible to sleep anyway, so no direct benefit was gained. On the other hand, if a non-Jew turns on a light for the benefit of a Jew, and it had been pitch dark, one may not read or gain any benefit from this light,<sup>251</sup> though there are leniencies for public mitzvot or in synagogue situations. If the room was already dimly lit or there is some natural daylight, it's okay to benefit from it because one could have read anyway, the light simply made it easier. If a person who is not Jewish performs an act for themselves that would be forbidden for a Jew to do, it is still okay to derive benefit from it. One must make sure however, that the person who is not Jewish will not do more than they otherwise would have done, specifically for the Jew.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>248</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 452.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 453.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 462.

<sup>251</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 127.

<sup>252</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath p.474

If a person forgets to remove the light bulb from the refrigerator and they must get into it for shabbat needs, one is allowed to ask a person who is not Jewish to open it.<sup>253</sup> One may not, however, ask them to remove the bulb, although one may non-directly hint that they do it and if they do, que sera, sera. If there are no non-Jews around, some say to ask a minor, while other opinions hold that an adult Jew may do it,<sup>254</sup> but it gets complicated and I'm not a rabbi, so go ask one if you need to know so bad. ☺

People often want to help out, but if a Jew transgresses any prohibited action on shabbat, one may not derive benefit from those actions while it is still shabbat, even if it was done unintentionally.<sup>255</sup> The only chance you have of deriving benefit from a prohibited action of a Jew on shabbat is if it was a rabbinical prohibition (rather than a Torah prohibition), it was unintentional, and the object was not altered (by cooking it for example).<sup>256</sup> Basically, even if a Jew does not observe shabbat, you may not ask them in any way to transgress it.

### **Sanctamification**

Another issue that comes up is making *kiddush*, which is recited in the place where the meal is eaten. This is how we fulfill the biblical commandment of exodus 20:8 to "Remember shabbat."<sup>257</sup> It should be done with wine, but alcoholic beverages are often not allowed on campus, especially for school sponsored club events, so there are plenty of other options.

Kosher grape juice is the next best thing, and if that is not available there is a concept called *chamor medina*. Chamor medina means a beverage that would be served

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<sup>253</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 87.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>255</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 156.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

to a guest to show respect for them. Obviously, this varies from place to place, but schnapps and beers are universally accepted as being *chamor medina*.<sup>258</sup> Of course, this is still alcoholic, so often we have to make do with what we've got.

If nothing is available, there is the possibility of reciting kiddush over bread. The procedure for this is different from reciting kiddush over beverages. Here it goes: first wash your hands and say the appropriate blessing, then, while holding the loaves recite the normal kiddush, substituting the word *homotzie* for *hagofen*. Finally, slice the bread and enjoy!<sup>259</sup> Before the daytime meal, and at *havdala*, if there is no wine or grape juice available, then one should use *chamor medina* rather than bread.<sup>260</sup>

While away at school, most of us are on a major budget and few have packed family heirlooms. Just remember that the cup used for kiddush should not be a disposable utensil, unless nothing else is available. Any unbroken, clean cup may be used for kiddush, but it is best to use a beautiful cup.<sup>261</sup>

### **Are we there yet?**

Now that we have covered the things that occur in the introductory stages of shabbat, and some other technicalities, it is important to consider the mood of the day. Shabbat is not meant to be restrictive, but rather a release from weekday concerns. The Torah tells us that in the six days before shabbat you shall, "accomplish ALL your work."<sup>262</sup> Can a person really finish all of their work in six days? It is not physically possible. Spiritually, however, when shabbat arrives one is to imagine that all of their

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<sup>257</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath Volume Four, 7.

<sup>258</sup> Epstein, On the Road and in the Air, 19.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 158.

<sup>262</sup> Exodus 20:9, Stone Edition.

work has been completed in that time, as though they have nothing left to do.<sup>263</sup> The test is: do thoughts of our schoolwork invade shabbat, or does the spirit of shabbat permeate our weekly work, so that weekday thoughts are automatically eliminated as soon as shabbat enters?

It is often necessary for a person to bring their day to some stage of closure in order to fall asleep at night, (it is 4:20 a.m. as I write this). Similarly, proper shabbat mood is achieved or enhanced when a person can bring some conclusion to their week. Shabbat can be very enjoyable if a person plans his or her daily schedule in a way that everything will reach a certain stage of completion before shabbat begins. This is a very crucial point because this way you will not be preoccupied on shabbat. Rather than simply abstaining from work, this is how we reach a state of total rest.

One reason the Torah gives us for the observance of shabbat is to remember that we were slaves in Egypt.<sup>264</sup> People are like slaves to so many external things. Shabbat is our day of freedom, to get in touch with ourselves and become unshackled from schoolwork for one day! Enjoy the inner freedom, and take the opportunity to improve yourself week by highbrow week.

Shabbat should be dedicated to "holy actions." Ideally shabbat is to be used for things that one does not have time for during the week, particularly Torah study and unhurried prayer. Our sages have said that shabbat was given to the Jewish people just for the sake of Torah study.<sup>265</sup> Due to the fact that so many people are burdened during the week with their daily tasks, most don't have the time to deeply engage themselves in Torah study. Thus, Jewish law states that those of us not engaged in full-time Torah

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<sup>263</sup> Stone Chumash, 410.

<sup>264</sup> Deuteronomy 5:15

study actually have more of an obligation to study Torah on the holy shabbat day than anyone else does.<sup>266</sup> It is also a mitzvah to teach Torah on shabbat, in fact this is what Moses did on shabbat when the Jews were in the desert.<sup>267</sup> If possible, it is good to organize Torah lectures and classes for various people on shabbat.

The prophet Isaiah enjoins us to respect shabbat,<sup>268</sup> which our rabbis have expounded to mean that our shabbat clothes should not be like weekday clothes.<sup>269</sup> In fact, this means not wearing any article of clothing that is worn during the week, from the time you wash for shabbat until after the *melava malka* meal.<sup>270</sup> What "shabbat clothes" constitutes will vary for every individual, although it is assumed that they are "nicer" than one's weekday clothing. The Jerusalem Talmud says that if one is too poor to dress up on shabbat, he or she should at least make some slight change in their clothing as a reminder that it is shabbat.<sup>271</sup> Even if one is alone on shabbat, the obligation to dress well remains because the clothes are worn in honor of shabbat, not people.<sup>272</sup>

In addition to wearing nice clothes, cleaning oneself, one's clothes, and the house (or room) before shabbat begins fulfills the command to honor shabbat.<sup>273</sup> One's abode should be elegantly prepared as if he or she was going to receive a distinguished and beloved guest.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 517.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath Volume Four, 53.

<sup>268</sup> Isaiah 58:13

<sup>269</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 720.

<sup>270</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 721.

<sup>271</sup> Amsel, Jewish Encyclopedia of ethical and Moral Issues, 270.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath Volume Four, 46.

<sup>274</sup> Donin, To be a Jew, 71.

The Talmud<sup>275</sup> says that more than just dressing differently, one should even try to walk differently on shabbat. The rabbis explain this to mean that one should take shorter strides, which I understand to mean that one should walk slower. Conversation on shabbat should also not be the same as on other days.<sup>276</sup> Additionally, not only is idle chatter looked down upon on shabbat, but no distressing topics should be discussed.<sup>277</sup> There is also a prohibition against making plans for after shabbat. Therefore, much class related speech is out of the question. The ideal is to have the holiness of shabbat so close at heart that one only talks about Torah topics and things that one needs.<sup>278</sup>

### **Who'd a thunk it?**

Technically speaking, despite the fact that we may not speak about forbidden matters on shabbat, it is permitted to think about them.<sup>279</sup> Even still, one should strive to think in a more elevated manner on this distinguished day. The Talmud tells of a holy person who went for a stroll in his field on shabbat and, seeing a break in the fence, thought to himself that he would fill in the gap after shabbat. When shabbat was over he said, "Since I thought about it on shabbat, I shall forever refrain from repairing it." In reward, Hashem caused a fruit tree to grow in the gap. From that tree the righteous person and his family derived their livelihood for the rest of their life.<sup>280</sup> The idea is not that we must force weekday thoughts out of our minds on shabbat, but that we should tap into and experience the depth of shabbat to such an extent that the joy of the day outweighs anything else that could possibly enter a person's mind.

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<sup>275</sup> Schottenstein edition Talmud Bavli Tractate Shabbos Vol. III (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1996), 113a-113b.

<sup>276</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 447.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 448. / Shabbos 113b.

Although a person's thoughts are his or her own business, one may not read matters connected with one's day to day business on shabbat.<sup>281</sup> However, I have been told that one may study for Judaic studies classes on shabbat. Strictly speaking, one may also read newspapers for current events, but it is not permitted to read business news or advertisements.<sup>282</sup> One may read professional literature and journals or textbooks that are not of business nature and do not deal with one's own occupation.<sup>283</sup>

One may learn something on shabbat that they are not required to know until the following day.<sup>284</sup> This does not infringe the prohibition against preparing on shabbat for another day because the acquisition of knowledge is an everyday need. The general rule is to avoid reading anything whose subject matter is not consonant with the spirit and sanctity that should prevail on shabbat. Generally, I try to provide information that makes it as easy as possible to be religious in a non-religious environment. In this case, however, I don't think that one should be lenient, because proper shabbat observance and sanctity is imperative to spiritual survival.

### **Out-N-About**

There are often events on or around campus that have an enticing lure for shabbat observing Jews. If one wishes to go to an event, like a free play, that is "kosher" and they do not have to pay money or carry anything to get in, they may go. However, they should keep the spirit of shabbat in mind as well as "maris ayin." One difficult example is listening to music, because we know that we may not play instruments on shabbat. The

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<sup>280</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli Tractate Shabbos Vol.IV (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 150b.

<sup>281</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath, 441.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

sages of the *Sanhedrin* made certain enactment's to protect the uniqueness of the shabbat experience. One enactment is to avoid playing a musical instrument on shabbat, which was approved and accepted by the entire Jewish nation. This enactment began due to a concern that playing an instrument on shabbat could lead somebody to fix an instrument in a way that infringes on one of the areas of prohibited shabbat activity. If these laws are not respected, then the shabbat experience is ultimately diminished.

So what about listening to music? If an orchestra or band is playing for free and they are not Jewish, Jewish law offers no specific reason not to listen to the music. Still, there might be other reasons not to go. It would not be in the spirit of shabbat to be there, and if many Jews started to attend, causing the band to play just for the Jews in attendance, they would probably start playing the blues because it would be bad news for the Jews in the pews. Just to overheard music, or relax in a park where there happens to be music is not a shabbat violation.

Speaking of music, however, while in a non-religious environment, singing songs on shabbat is very helpful for maintaining inspiration and the shabbat mood. Most Jewish singing is actually intended to refine a person and spiritually elevate him or her, turning the singer into a more spiritually sensitive person. This is perfect for shabbat, especially when one's schoolwork causes a person to lose touch with their spiritual side. It is very helpful to spiritual survival if one can bring the sanctity of the shabbat day into the rest of their week. Singing shabbat songs stirs the soul in a way that makes this easier.

My sister used to live in a nine-story dorm building at the University of Arizona; that's a lot of flights of stairs, especially on a hot Arizona afternoon. Although most

authorities frown upon going in an elevator on shabbat, many people do so anyway because they contend that the weight of a person does not have a significant effect on the electricity usage of the elevator. Therefore, if you decide to take advantage of an elevator on shabbat, at least do it right.

One may only go in an electric elevator operated by an attendant who is not Jewish, assuming that the attendant does not set it in motion specifically for the Jew.<sup>285</sup> In this case a Jew can only enter and exit on the same floors as people who are not Jewish. Obviously, a Jewish person may not activate any of the buttons. It is best not to use the elevator at all, except when heading to public prayers or Torah study, and even then it is best to use it only when ascending, rather than descending.<sup>286</sup> This is because while going down, there may be some effect on total electricity usage based on a person's weight. Furthermore, it is much easier to simply walk down stairs, then to climb up them. These prohibitions are strict, but it is preferred not to use an elevator excessively because it may cause other Jews to follow your example, without regard for the specific stringencies.

On shabbat one may not use electric "card keys," so one should try to follow the principles of asking a person who is not Jewish to open the door for him or her if there is no other option. One should leave the card at the front desk and not carry it outside.<sup>287</sup> It is good to know that all types of combo-locks may be used on shabbat.<sup>288</sup> Another dorm issue is automatic vending machines. One may not make a purchase from an automatic vending machine, even if it is operated by tokens that are purchased before shabbat. This

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 480.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Weinberger, *Around the World the Halachic Way*, 46.

<sup>288</sup> Neuwirth, *Shemirath Shabbath*, 344.

holds true even if it is not an electronically operated machine, and even if one needs the object for shabbat.<sup>289</sup> There is also a prohibition against benefiting from food bought on shabbat,<sup>290</sup> so all vending machine purchases are out of the question, sorry Mike & Ike.

Some campuses come with ready-made Shabbat experiences, such as Hillel or Chabad sponsored shabbat dinners and events. It is often a good idea to take part in these once you find your niche. On campuses that pose a greater challenge to shabbat observance, you will have to do the work of building a community. Either way, I strongly recommend being with people on shabbat.

Hosting meals and events is fun, but when it comes to a person's spiritual survival, sometimes one needs to be a little bit selfish. If the stress or loss of free time that may result from doing nice things for others is overwhelming a person, they shouldn't feel guilty by toning down a bit.

Usually when I hosted shabbat dinners, I had to do a lot of cooking and cleaning in addition to explaining the rituals and avoiding more complicated practices. The evenings were very fun and exciting for me, but also exhausting. To balance it out, I would only eat with a few friends during the day, so that I could relax, sing all the songs, and take time to read and sleep. Either way, nothing can replace the strengthening effects of being in the home of a religious family on shabbat. In fact, Rav Avraham Hecht's second piece of advice to me was to go away to a religious family every week for shabbat, (his last piece of advice was to constantly beseech *Hashem* for strength and help). If you do choose to stay in the same environment on shabbat that you are in during

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<sup>289</sup> Neuwirth, Shemirath Shabbath ,435.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 485.

the week, it will take a great deal of preparation and work to turn it into a shabbat environment.

In addition to the relatively simple aspects such as cooking and cleaning, one must literally create an enhanced religious atmosphere that is different from the way it is during the week. Unless you are some sort of an extremely spiritually sensitive Chassidic rebbe or something like that, Saturday afternoon is incredibly similar to Sunday afternoon or any other day. Although "work" is forbidden on shabbat, a Jew must do the "work" of tapping into the sanctity of the day, because without your effort and toil, shabbat will be just like any other day. If that becomes the case, a religious Jew will not remain religious for long.

### **In the Spotlight**

The Talmud compares public violation of shabbat to idol worship.<sup>291</sup> This is because shabbat observance demonstrates belief in Hashem. This is not solely because we are observing these peculiar laws, but because a fundamental principle of shabbat is that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Ergo, in our mission to be "Godlike" we also rest on the seventh day. This is the day that we acknowledge the fact that we are part of creation, rather than the creator ourselves. It follows that public desecration is a major hillul Hashem as well as denial of Hashem. No matter what one's personal observance, our sages have regarded public violation of shabbat very seriously. One must venture to do his or her best in public, avoiding any chance for the suspicion of disregard for shabbat, which could add to the general disregard for shabbat.

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<sup>291</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Eruvin Vol.II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1991),69b.

As noted, every Jew bears some responsibility towards other Jews. Public shabbat violations can have major ramifications, as my following true story may illustrate:

One shabbat after dinner I was sitting around with my roommates and one of them came up with a stupendous idea, "Yo J, let's go out!" Roommate A busted out with excitement.

"Sorry bro, but it's shabbos, nu!" I calmly replied.

"So what man," roommate B chimed in, "we don't have to drive, we could just ride our bikes downtown!"

"Duuude, I can't ride a bike on shabbat, you know that!" I smoothly reminded them.

"Au contraire mon frere" Roommate A wittily spoke up, "Last Saturday afternoon I went to a protest in Santa Cruz, and I saw some guy riding a bike and waving a banner. Guess what, he was wearing a yarmulke!"

"Gnnrrrrr" sounded my teeth as they gnashed together.

"Alright, it's cool, we could just walk to a party in the neighborhood, I know of a few good ones" responded roommate B.

"Shoot man, I would love to but I shouldn't on the sacred sabbath day!" I wisely informed them.

"Ooohh no you don't," remarks roommate B, like the cool cat he knows he is, "don't ask why, but last Friday night I went to a dumb, stupid, idiotic frat party at San Diego State..." remembers my not so hip to the fraternity scene rommie, "And I saw a guy with a yarmulke, and he was dancing with a girl!"

"Um" I uttered, as veins began to bulge from my neck.

"WHAT!" roommate A interrupts, "So you CAN dance with girls, and go partying, AND dance with girls, and ride your bike on shabbat eh!?!"

\*CRASH\*, sounded my glass cup as I squeezed it to bits in my hand.

One person's shabbat desecration anywhere harms Jews everywhere. In addition to showing a public disregard, it makes observance even harder for other Jews.

### **Kegger!**

Speaking of parties, many religious Jews struggle with the party question. College parties may not be a "proper" environment for a religious Jew, and in addition to the problem of maris ayin they may also lead to improper actions, be a waste of time that could be used for Torah study. In spite of that, many religious Jews go to parties, and have a darn tootin' good time at that. Although many choose to attend, the party going dilemma intensifies on shabbat when the additional consideration of shabbat mood and also has to be taken into account. The dilemma of going or not going to parties on shabbat really is a hard issue for many people. On the one hand, if all of your friends go out and have a good time, leaving you home alone, you may become lonely, depressed, and bored. Not only are these emotions no fun, but it may cause shabbat to feel like a burden that one would rather just blow off. On the other hand, if you do go to a party, you may end up feeling very guilty or "naughty" for going out on shabbat.

One solution is not to fight the amusement, but to offer a good Jewish alternative. This holds true in various areas; fighting against harmless things that people like can not do much good. However, a lot of good can come out of an innovative and exciting idea spurred by a little friendly competition.

I don't think I would be able to convince everyone not to go to parties on shabbat, especially not my homeboy in San Diego. Although I think it is best to avoid parties and similar scenes on shabbat, I have a little bit of advice for those who just have to cruise to the shindig. Firstly, we have seen that the way a person dresses on shabbat is very important. If one goes to a party on shabbat, it may be wise to stay in their shabbat clothes so they are constantly reminded that it is indeed the holy seventh day. Then again, this could lead to major problems, like if less observant Jews assume that you are breaking shabbat.

I would further advocate that if one is to go to a non-shabbat party on shabbat, they at least make a major distinction between their party behavior on shabbat and their conduct at parties on other days or nights. This could mean many things for various individuals. For a person who normally drinks and dances and totally gets into the festivities, maybe on shabbat they should at least refrain from drinking, and limit (if not fully cancel) the dancing. For a person who tends not to drink, or dance or socialize much (whoohoo!), maybe they should just stay at the party for a shorter time than usual. Whatever the case, if a person absolutely must do things that are not "shabbosdic," they should at least tone it down a bit in honor of shabbat.

To be honest however, making such concessions on one's shabbat observance is really the opposite of the frame of mind that one should have on this day. The Hebrew letters used to spell SHaBBaT are the same as those used to spell the word TaSHuV, "return." The basis for this idea may lie in the concept that shabbat is the day the world reverts to its original state of creation, but I would like to take the idea to another level. Tashuv also means to repent, or "return" to proper observance.

Traditionally the day leading up to shabbat (Friday) is supposed to be partially devoted to reflection of one's actions in the past week, with resolve to improve one's ways so that they can enter shabbat with the feeling of a clean slate.<sup>292</sup> Once shabbat starts, no matter how bogged down, and far from their ideal observance a Jew gets during the week, shabbat should also be used to do "Teshuvah." To return to one's Godly source, to their motivation, and complete practice of Jewish Law. If we find ourselves in circumstances during the week where we know that we probably should not be, at least on shabbat we should "do the right thing."

This idea may sound hypocritical; after all, a Jew is expected to act equally Jewish at all times and in all places, not simply in synagogue or just one day a week. However, one of the greatest aspects of shabbat is the challenge of bringing its warmth, sanctity, and inspiration into our weekday lives. In order for someone to advance, or at least maintain their observance, shabbat must be distinguished and venerated with care. If shabbat is properly observed, it can have the positive benefit of strengthening a person throughout their week.

### **Be There or Be Square**

Thankfully, there are almost never any classes or tests scheduled on Friday nights or Saturdays. However, almost all of the Jewish holidays come during the school year and the principles and laws of these days are very similar to those of shabbat. It is important to avoid going to classes on shabbat and holidays, even if one does not plan on writing anything, or violating the laws of the day in any way. One reason is that you never know what will happen, it is always possible that there will be a pop-quiz or some reason that a person just needs to take some important notes or take a handout home, thus

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<sup>292</sup> Greenwald, Shaarei Halacha, 130.

violating shabbat. This is not as unlikely as it may sound because when people put themselves in non-shabbat environments, it is easy to forget that it is shabbat and slip up now and then. Furthermore, it is not in the spirit of shabbat or holidays to be thinking about and engaged in school/weekday matters.

Missing classes and falling behind in course work is part of the self-sacrifice inherent in being strictly observant while at college, but of course, it is best to minimize the conflict as much as possible. I have found that it is helpful to get a syllabus as soon as possible and do work ahead of time. When a person misses class for shabbat or holidays, he or she may get notes from a classmate who is not Jewish as long as they would have taken the notes anyway and were not asked to take them for a Jew. Due to the prohibition of benefiting from a Jew's shabbat desecration, however, one may not use notes taken by a Jew on shabbat or a holiday.

It is also important to speak to the professor about your situation as early on in the semester (or quarter) as you can. If there are problems, explain your predicament to the administration and remember that in some ways you are the customer, and your college owes you a top quality educational experience. As long as you do your part, your college should be there to serve you. Most schools are very accommodating on this issue.

When shabbat finally rolls around, it is time to stop doing and just return to being. You can finally stop going, and for one day just be there. I have said it already, but proper shabbat observance is essential. In the words of *Ahad Ha'am* more than a century ago, "more than the Jews have kept the sabbath, the sabbath has kept the Jews."<sup>293</sup> Closer to our times, Herman Wouk has observed that, "The Sabbath is the usual breaking

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<sup>293</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 382.

off point from tradition, and also the point at which many Jews rejoin Judaism."<sup>294</sup> If there is one aspect of Judaism that I would recommend being "fanatical" about, that would be keeping shabbat. Of course being a fanatic does not mean that you should in any way be disrespectful or aggressive towards other people, just venture to fully give shabbat her due veneration so she will give you your needed inspiration. We have shabbat and holidays to thank for keeping us in touch with our Jewish roots for thousands of years. Don't pass up the opportunity to refresh your body and soul with some good old fashion shabbatafication. Hang in there, shabbat is coming!

### **Chapter 5 definitions:**

*Yatzer Hara*, Usually translated as "Evil Inclination;" literally means "bad impulse" or "desire."

The opposite is the "Yatzer Ha-Tov," Good Inclination. Everyone has both.

Judaism teaches that in order to become a better person, the struggle is not so much with external factors such as society, but with ourselves and our internal instincts. Judaism holds that people are inherently neither good nor bad, but have remarkable potential either way. In order to maximize one's potential towards good, we must struggle with our individual desires that pull us the other way, such as addictions, selfishness, laziness, ect., our yatzer hara.

Yatzer hara is not always "Evil." Sometimes a person may desire to give charity because their "Yatzer Hara" convinced them that it will make them famous. It may not be the correct reason to give, but at least the person gave.

There is a Parable of a king who wished to test the loyalty of his subjects, and engaged someone to circulate among the people and incite them to defy the majesty's orders. The Yatzer hara is a tool of God to test our allegiance, to see whether we will justify yielding to it, or do the right thing.

*Nazerite*- A person who takes a special type of oath forbidding him or her from a number of activities - not to drink wine, cut their hair, or come in contact with ritually unclean objects, such as a corpse.

*Lubavitcher Rebbe*- (1902-1994) Inspirational and scholarly leader of the Lubavitcher Chassidic movement, one of World Jewry's foremost leaders in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>294</sup> Herman Wouk, *This is my God* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 61.

## "Are you Shomer???"

Before I let you in on what this chapter is about, let's quickly analyze the question. What could "are you *shomer*" mean? Almost every religious or even slightly, sort of, occasionally, observant Jewish student has probably heard this one. *Shomer* literally means to guard or observe a commandment. An example from the last chapter would be someone who is "*shomer shabbat*," observes the laws of shabbat. College life, however, is a whole new ball game. Clark Kerr, former University of California president summed it up pretty well when he said, "I find that the three major administrative problems on a campus are sex for the students, athletics for the alumni, and parking for the faculty."<sup>295</sup> In addition to general contemporary society, college is a particularly sex-saturated environment. Hence the meaning of "Are you *shomer*?" for Jewish college students: "Do you observe the laws of prohibited relations between men and women!?" This would traditionally be referred to as "shomer negia," but for college students one simply has to say, "Are you shomer?" and everyone knows what is meant. Indeed, this always seems to be one of the first questions religious college students ask each other. This issue was the third biggest difficulty for respondents to my survey.

This section will require some analysis of Jewish law on the topic, followed by a "real life" response. I know what Jewish law says we should be doing, and I also know what is really going on. Hopefully, if you are struggling with this issue, I can present some ideas and points that will be helpful.

I will begin with an overview and explanation of the Jewish sexual ideal as I understand it. By way of warning and introduction, I must say that in this area I am very

limited due to limited knowledge and experience. Moreover, Jewish law tends to be written by men for men. Jewish law also makes certain assumptions about living arrangements of Jews and their sexual orientation. However, this is an area that is often ignored by books and rabbis, despite the fact that college students often have a lot of questions and dilemmas in the sphere. I will therefore do my best not only to cover the basics, but also to present some solutions to the not so ideal situations in which we sometimes find ourselves. Anything I write for you is purely out of my desire to be of assistance, so bear with me.

### **Need some time alone?**

There is no question that it is permissible to interact socially with someone of the opposite sex on a casual basis. One can speak and be friendly with him or her, while avoiding any physical and emotional intimacy. Certainly, on a college campus it is virtually impossible, nor is it required, to avoid interaction with the opposite sex. While there should be some distance, Rav Dovid Feinstein has said that the Torah does not obligate a person to become a "recluse."<sup>295</sup> On the other hand, if one wants to maintain their religiosity, they have to be careful. Aryeh Kaplan has noticed, "Very often, it is sexual temptation that leads a person away from religion and godliness in other areas. It is often the strongest barrier standing in the way of an individual's spiritual perfection."<sup>297</sup>

Jewish law goes into great detail with the laws of separation between men and women. Although college students tend to be more concerned with what to do once those barriers have fallen, it is important to cover the primary rules of separation between the

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<sup>295</sup> Leonard Roy Frank Random House Webster's Quotationary, (New York, NY: Random House Websters: 1999), 896.

<sup>296</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 104.

<sup>297</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, Tzitzith ( New York, NY: National Conference of Synagogue Youth, 1984), 46.

sexes. The regulation that most of us don't fully understand, but worry about constantly is known as *yichud*. This is the law that prohibits a man and a woman from being secluded alone together, whether young or old, Jew or non-Jew.<sup>298</sup>

The word *yihud* translates to something like 'togetherness' or 'solitude.' The halachic definition of *yihud* is "Seclusion with little or no chance of intrusion from the outside."<sup>299</sup> *Yihud* is how Judaism secures the principle of modesty and holiness in relationships between the sexes, as well as preventing temptations that could lead to other major violations of Jewish law. The laws of *yihud* apply anytime a man and a woman are alone together, it is prohibited even for a very short period if the possibility exists that it may last for a longer time.<sup>300</sup>

Two possible reasons for the prohibition of *yihud* have traditionally been explored. One opinion is that the Torah forbids *yihud* as a restraining or protective law designed to prevent something more from happening. This is based on the fear that privacy between a man and a woman will go from one step to another and eventually lead to sexual promiscuity.<sup>301</sup> Due to the fact that Judaism prohibits sexual intercourse outside of marriage, it follows that any opportunity for two individuals who are not married to have intercourse is blocked off.

The other possible reason that the Torah forbids *yihud* is that it is considered objectionable and a violation of modesty in and of itself.<sup>302</sup> Rabbi Manis Friedman has beheld that, "a man and a woman alone together is a sexual event-even if nothing else

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<sup>298</sup> Ganzfried, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, 1021.

<sup>299</sup> Neustadt, *Weekly Halacha Discussion*, 73.

<sup>300</sup> Neustadt, *Weekly Halacha Discussion*, 325.

<sup>301</sup> Rabbi Azarya Berzon, "Contemporary Issues in the Laws of *Yichud*," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* No. XIII (Spring 1987): 82.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

happens."<sup>303</sup> Either way, the principle that underlies this prohibition is that of sanctity and modesty, which the Torah view insists play a primary role in human behavior.

Although these laws make an assumption of heterosexuality, people who are gay would need to understand these prohibitions as well as the intentions behind them, in order to apply them to their specific situation. Certain places and times when homosexuality was very wide spread, Jewish men observed the yihud laws with other men, as well as with women. Thus, nowadays, when there is a situation of two adults who are gay, the laws of yihud should be applied the same as they are between a male and a female.

Though I will now deal with the few ways around this law, the spirit and goal of the rules should be kept in mind. The following situations are the exceptions to the rule, in all of the ensuing cases that yihud does not apply the individuals may be alone together, but should always maintain modest relations:

1. Relatives who have no sexual disposition toward one another, e.g. one's parents, grandparents, children, or siblings, may be alone together.<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, if one of these individuals is present when a man and a woman are together, they become like a chaperone and there is no violation of yihud.<sup>305</sup>

2. When one of the individuals is a child, e.g. a boy below the age of nine, or a girl below the age of three.<sup>306</sup> A man and woman may also be alone together during the daytime hours if a child aged seven or older is present (or at least two children at

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<sup>303</sup> Manis Friedman, Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore? (Minneapolis, MN: Bais Chana Press, 1996),102.

<sup>304</sup> Berzon, "Laws of Yichud," 81.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

nighttime).<sup>307</sup> The Mishna has prohibited one man being alone with two women.<sup>308</sup> A man may, however, be alone with three women, unless they are in a deserted area or at nighttime, a man can then be alone with no less than four women.<sup>309</sup> A woman may be alone with no less than two men during the day or three at night,<sup>310</sup> but only if these men are considered trustworthy.<sup>311</sup> These stipulations are not as strict when dealing with important business affairs.<sup>312</sup>

3. Situations in which the psychological state of the woman or the man precludes a sexual disposition, e.g. after the death of a loved one.<sup>313</sup>

4. A man and a woman can also be secluded in situations that lack privacy. Thus a man and a woman may be alone if a door is completely or partially open, although at night the place must also be well lit.<sup>314</sup> In addition to the door being opened, two can be alone together if it is closed but unlocked, or even in extenuating circumstances, the door may be locked if there is a reasonable possibility that people will knock and expect to be answered.<sup>315</sup> Likewise, the door can be locked if members of the household have a key and may enter at any time, or if there is an unimpeded view of the street from a facing window directly into the room where the yihud is taking place.<sup>316</sup> However, many authorities have ruled that for two to be alone when the door is locked the person possessing the key must be a respectable person and there must be some likelihood that

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<sup>307</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 324.

<sup>308</sup> Berzon, "Laws of Yichud," 85.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>310</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 323.

<sup>311</sup> Berzon, "Laws of Yichud," 88.

<sup>312</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 323.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 74.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 320

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

they will enter.<sup>317</sup> Our rabbis do advise that this "open door" leniency should be avoided if the other person is someone that you are close with and have a long standing relationship, thus increasing the chances of something inappropriate happening. Furthermore, at night the window leniency should be avoided. It should be noted that being together in an elevator is not forbidden.<sup>318</sup>

### **General Consanguinity**

The prohibition of being alone together renders most non-professional male/female relationships off limits, at least the way that such relationships are defined in our society. Numerous religious Jews do attempt to form sort of semi-boyfriend/girlfriend relationships while observing the laws of yihud. This is very noble on their part, but based on many biblical and rabbinical prohibitions, Reb Moshe Feinstein has ruled that any social relationship of the "boyfriend/girlfriend" type are forbidden, even if all laws regarding physical intimacy between unmarried men and women are observed.<sup>319</sup> Jewish law only permits dating for the distinct purpose of finding a suitable marriage partner.<sup>320</sup>

Any sort of physical relationships certainly are forbidden. Not only is hugging and kissing prohibited, but Jewish law even prohibits touching a person of the opposite sex.<sup>321</sup> Maimonides lists avoidance of any kind of pleasurable physical contact outside of marriage as one of the Torah's 613 commandments, based on Leviticus 18:6.<sup>322</sup> The commentators point out that these commandments apply equally to men and women.<sup>323</sup> If

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<sup>317</sup> Berzon, "Laws of Yichud," 86.

<sup>318</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 325.

<sup>319</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 103.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 411.

<sup>322</sup> Becher & Newman, After the Return, 103.

<sup>323</sup> Stone Chumash, 651.

you want to get technical, Jewish law actually cautions us to diligently avoid the other sex, avoiding any sort of gestures, or frivolity.<sup>324</sup> Men are even cautioned not to gaze at a women's beauty, smell her perfume or even walk behind her.<sup>325</sup>

In one of the Chafetz Chaim's codifications of Jewish law, he explains that these prohibitions are for the sake avoiding anything that may lead to improper fantasy.<sup>326</sup> For that reason, he lists even enjoying physical proximity with someone from the opposite sex as being equally as prohibited as embracing or kissing.<sup>327</sup> In *Sforno's* commentary on the Torah he takes a slightly different approach. Sforno comments that the reason to abstain from excessive physical pleasures is to be able devote oneself entirely to Torah study and perfection of one's character traits.<sup>328</sup> Either way, it is all not approved of and this causes a Jew to be struggling with radically different, or exactly the opposite, ordeals than our classmates.

These prohibitions lead to many sticky situations. Not only do most people not know about these standards, but they can be very hard and uncomfortable to maintain. Shaking hands, hugging, or kisses on the cheek have become very common, even amongst total strangers. You will have to decide for yourself if you are going to shake hands with individuals of the opposite sex, and like I advised earlier, it is best to have standards and not be wishy washy with them.

In the spirit of my desire to be of assistance, I'll tell you what I do, but keep in mind that it's not totally based on Jewish law, it's just what I do. I try my best to let women whom I am going to meet know in advance that I can't shake hands with them or

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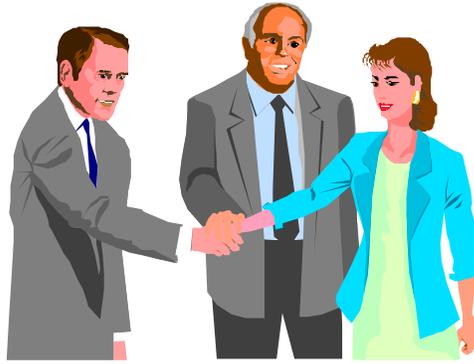
<sup>324</sup> Ganzfried, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 1023.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Rabbi Yisraek Meir Hakohen, Concise book of Mitzvoth, 195.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

have any sort of physical contact. If a woman extends her hand to shake mine, I shake it. I do not, however, initiate contact. One should at least keep in mind that according to Jewish law it really is best even to avoid innocent handshakes.



A person who does not shake hands or give light hugs to members of the opposite sex will have to come up with a polite way of declining. Like I said, I do my best to let people know the situation ahead of time. Inform people that it is an important part of your religion and culture and it is not their fault. This is an important thing and you need not apologize. People tend to be most respectful when a person is faithful and true to their beliefs. I usually smile and assure people that I have a deep respect for the way they interact with others, and while I would like to give them a pat on the back it would be in conflict with my values and I hope they can honor my values of interaction. Ultimately, honesty (and maybe some humor) is the best policy; it pays to be up front with people from the outset.

The general attitude towards interactions with the opposite sex must be centered on modesty. Judaism places profound importance on modest behavior. Many people have a misconception that modesty is played out only in people's dress, but this is not entirely

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<sup>328</sup> Zelig Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, (Brooklyn, NY: Benei Yakov Publications, 1988), 313.

factual. Judaism defines modesty as that which comes from within and deals with behavior much more than clothing. Talking to members of another gender is thus permissible, but it must be done with tremendous caution and decency. Rather than acting like a hermit, it is best to simply maintain borders, dignity, and respect in these interactions. Of course, decency means something different to everybody, and we should never look down on others who do not find innocent physical affection objectionable. We happen not to touch members of the opposite sex, but a person need not regret such exchanges, nor should they brush them off. It is good to be a little worried about them, keeping in mind the correct limits and conduct that must be placed on male/female interaction.

### **TAG, You're it!**

All of this business about not touching people of the opposite sex as well as the Jewish approach to “relationships” in general begs for some explanation. The Talmud says that there are no guarantees when it comes to sexual desire, everyone is susceptible.<sup>329</sup> We consequently have the laws of yihud to keep people in line and the prohibition from touching, out of fear that once some physical pleasure begins, a person may not be able to control themselves.

Intimacy has been compared to fire, because if one thinks that they can quench it through indulgence, they are actually pouring gasoline on the fire, rather than water.<sup>330</sup> When intimacy is experienced with discipline, it becomes a fire that warms both partners, illuminating a home and family. Additionally, the Vilna Gaon viewed indulging one's

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<sup>329</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Kesubos Vol.I (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1999), 13a.

<sup>330</sup> Simon Jacobson, Towards a Meaningful Life(New York, NY: William and Morrow Company, 1995), 68.

lusts like drinking salt water, the more one drinks, the thirstier they get.<sup>331</sup> Just to drive the point home, the Talmud declares that “there is a small organ in man; when he starves it he is sated, and when he satiates it, he is hungry.”<sup>332</sup> This is in accord with a famous midrash that states that, “People never leave this world with half of their cravings satisfied. If they have a hundred, they want two hundred, and if they have two hundred, they want four hundred.”<sup>333</sup>

There is nothing wrong with sex and it is not taboo. Judaism regards sex as a gift and a very good and beautiful thing, in its time. Just like we can not eat anything we want, we can not engage in intercourse with anyone we want. Just as some days we can not eat, (fast days) there are times we can not engage in intimate relations. Eating is not a bad thing, but in its desire to channel all of our actions into holiness, certain things have been put in a specific place or deemed impermissible to our religious community. Sex is not bad, before marriage is just a bad time.

The mishna instructs us to, “make a [protective] fence for the torah.” Our sages wanted to keep us far from Torah violations, so just like a gardener erects a fence to protect a garden that he or she cares for, our sages imposed restrictions to keep us away from any chance of mishap. Our sages created these protective fences for us in various areas, but the line was drawn tightly for desires, such as sex, that they felt needed added caution.

The Messilat Yesharim quotes a midrash that states, “Just as when a *Nazirite* takes a vow not to drink wine, he is forbidden to eat grapes or raisins, or drink grape

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<sup>331</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 284.

<sup>332</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Succah Vol.II (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1998), 52b.

<sup>333</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 215.

juice, or partake of anything, for that matter, which comes from the grapevine, so is it forbidden to touch any woman but your own wife, and anyone who does touch a woman other than his wife brings death to himself."<sup>334</sup> Commenting on that statement, Rabbi Avraham Twerski M.D. has noted that anyone who values their life and health would stay miles away from a radioactive disaster area, and no one would consider such a person to be a fanatic or a fundamentalist. However, one is not tempted toward radioactivity, so they can appreciate the danger. On the other hand, when physical temptations are intense, rationalization overrides fear of danger, and people dupe themselves into disaster.<sup>335</sup>

It takes great strength to overcome much of what becomes available to college students but as *Ibn Ezra* has pointed out, the term Nazir (a Nazerite) is etymologically related the word zair, meaning crown. This is to teach us that while most people are held captive to pleasures of the world, a true king is one who frees themselves from, and is not bound by these desires.<sup>336</sup>

The “mystical” sources in Judaism explain that a human being is enclothed in three “garments,” thought, speech, and action. The natural tendency is to go from thought, to speech, to action. Dating is encouraged when the action, or end result is marriage. Since it is hard to control desires once they are tempted, a person who dates without the possibility of the end result is running the risk of “sexual frustration,” caused by getting oneself into a situation that is tough to maneuver out of. Judaism dictates that people do not tease themselves nor start that which they should not finish.

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<sup>334</sup> Luzzatto, *Path of the Just*, 125.

<sup>335</sup> Twerski, *Lights Along the Way*, 141.

<sup>336</sup> Pliskin, *Growth Through Torah*, 414.

Many also argue that rather than being a simple protective fence, the prohibition against physical contact has value in and of itself. Gila Manolson refers to touch as, “the superglue of human relations.”<sup>337</sup> This is because any physical contact leaves two people feeling closer and more connected, stuck together, if you will. The problem with this can be that when people feel bonded they believe that they really are close, when it can actually be more of a superficial feeling than a deep connection. Gila Manolson argues that objectivity towards the partner and the relationship is then lost, as she has written, “As soon as physical closeness on any level occurs, that all-too-familiar rose-colored cloud descends, enveloping everything in warm and glowing feelings of intimacy. Once this bonding takes place, you can kiss much of your perspective on your partner and the relationship goodbye.”<sup>338</sup>

Manolson reasons that this superglue effect is why many people, especially women, have trouble getting out of bad and abusive relationships. Physical aspects of a relationship leave people too emotionally attached to stand back and view reality in its completeness. Conversely, when people refrain from physical contact, space is left for something real to develop and for each partner to appreciate that realness.

I was always taught that we do not *have* souls, we *are* souls, we are spiritual beings. Excessive focus on the physical denies our spiritual reality. Hand shakes and hugs are obviously not “excessive focus” but the fear is that if a relationship becomes based on physical contact, it runs the risk of distracting people from attaching on a deep, spiritual level, by causing the primary focus of a relationship to be its physical component. However, based on the idea that we are essentially spiritual beings, bonds

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<sup>337</sup> Gila Manolson, *The Magic Touch* (Jerusalem, Israel: Gila Manolson, 1992), 25.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

forged through inner dimensions are the only way that a true and meaningful attachment can form.

Here, I am comparing opposite extremes; superficial relationships of over indulgence with those void of any touching at all. Many relationships that have a strong physical component do develop into complete, beautiful and loving relationships. Some will argue that physical expression of affection nurtures and adds much to relationships. This is not only possible, but common. However, in Judaism's thorough concern for relationships of sanctity founded on inner dimensions alone, it has put up grand borders and drawn very narrow lines.

Judaism seeks holiness and specialness in relationships; we are asked (told) to pass up on many average pleasures in favor a few intensely meaningful, lasting pleasures. Not only does Judaism ban touching, but it effectively does away with any sort of using, or taking advantage of others. People are forced talk to each to other and get to know people for who they really are, based on much more than physical attraction alone.

Ultimately, the only reason that we keep these laws is because Hashem commanded us to. A Jew is to engage in self-control rather than indulgence and the slightest chance of the cheapening of sex, and to develop relationships of respect and dignity. Going to this opposite extreme seems like less fun, but many find that it is ultimately happier. In the final analysis, happiness is more important than fun because while fun ends the second the fun action is over, happiness is real and lasting because it is not an action, but the result of action(s) or abstention therefrom. The truth is that the pleasure of doing the right thing lasts much longer than the excitement of a physical encounter. I am entirely in favor of fun. The concept of no touching is not fun, but it can

ultimately be beneficial to a future relationship in many ways, as sensitivity to the mystery and excitement of sexuality is maintained.

Rabbi Twersky has explained that overly engaging in physicality suppresses spirituality.<sup>339</sup> Judaism teaches that we should not abstain from the physical world, and in fact we should use physicality as a vehicle towards spirituality. Many people in fact view the physical side of a relationship as the springboard and road to a deep, spiritual connection. A person has a deep inner desire to connect with Hashem and one's spiritual side. However, caution is mandated because this desire becomes frustrated by overly indulging in physicality. To allow spirituality to issue forth, one must overcome many physical temptations.

### **Pre-marital Sex**

Judaism does not only ban acts that will lead to pre-marital sex, Judaism also restricts anything that is detrimental to a person and their divine service. The midrash teaches that wherever one finds safeguards of chastity, there one finds holiness.<sup>340</sup> Regarding sexual intimacy, the *Lubavitcher Rebbe* cautioned that, "If you are close when you should be distant, you will be distant when you should be close."<sup>341</sup> According to Judaism, the time when "you should be close" is marriage.

Many reasons are given for abstaining from sex before marriage. I know that there are many religious Jews who break these "hands off" rules and I will address that soon. Still, I think that it is important to refrain from sex before marriage even if you have broken other rules. Of course, this abstinence will take some will power and

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<sup>339</sup> Twerski, *Lights Along the Way*, 34.

<sup>340</sup> *Stone Chumash*, 651.

<sup>341</sup> Jacobson, *Towards a Meaningful Life*, 67.

friction against the dominant culture, but I suspect that it's not as uncommon as people think.

There is a perception in our culture regarding sex that "everybody's doing it" and it's no big deal. We live in a culture that trivializes sex, and crams sexual imagery down our throats to sell products. In contrast, Jewish law tells us that sex is a very big deal, and we need to think of it that way, as an act of great significance and not just as a way to get immediate personal gratification.

I have gone over how physical contact creates a bond between people that is more emotional and psychological than spiritual. Judaism holds it to be very unhealthy for people to share this bond before marriage because the idea of marriage can be summed up as commitment and responsibility. Sex without marriage means that a bond of intimacy is being created between two people without the commitment of marriage.

Allowing sexual relations without the bond of marriage may eventually hurt people more than help them because an intimate and highly emotional bond is taking place with very little guarantee for any kind of continuity. One might contend that while they will not have sex before marriage, they will engage in "lesser-wrongs." They feel that while the prohibition of sex before marriage is very important or makes sense, they can still try to get away with other intimate acts that do not actually constitute "premarital sex."

There are varying degrees of transgression in Jewish law, but the minor ones should still be highly valued like the "major" transgressions. Every transgression is still a transgression. Despite the fact that one may view the prohibition against touching

merely as something to prevent further acts, it is still something very impermissible in and of itself, in our religious tradition.

The danger of slipping into a purely physical relationship is distressing because when people take sex away from the context of a meaningful committed relationship, they miss out on the emotional significance that it should have. Thus, when a person is only in pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of commitment, the more they prevail, the less pleasurable sex becomes. The whole system (game) consequently self-destructs for such an individual.

Today, pro-abstinence advocates offer many reasons to wait for marriage. Included in their argument is a warning of sexually transmitted diseases, stress, relationship difficulties, pregnancy, reputation, feeling ostracized from religious community, regret, and difficulty focusing on studies. These are valid concerns to which Judaism has offered much additional course of thought. Rabbi Nachum Braverman claims that from his experience, people are more willing to lend themselves to a stranger than their cars because, "the car could get damaged."<sup>342</sup> People don't realize how much they hurt themselves and their souls. Braverman argues that when people get hurt often enough, trust and intimacy become impossible.

Gila Manolson put it eloquently, "The sad truth is that because of the subtler nature of emotional damage, countless people throw caution to the wind, take emotional dives into empty pools, and walk around with the equivalent of open wounds and fractured limbs."<sup>343</sup> Each time a person is physically involved with another prior to their spouse, sensitivity is dulled and future relationships are damaged. This subtracts from

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<sup>342</sup> Nachum Braverman, The Bible for Clueless but Curious (Baltimore, MD: Leviathan Press, 1999),169.

<sup>343</sup> Manolson, Magic Touch, 45.

the distinction of that ultimate relationship. A Jew is asked to pause and think about what is truly best in life, how to achieve it, and to treat their souls with at least the same care as their bodies.

Many strictly observant Jews feel that by avoiding all of this fun before marriage they are in effect, missing out on exciting things that most people their age enjoy. Today, innocence is not seen as a virtue, but in Judaism “experience” is only intended to cultivate a person into a more spiritually sensitive and ultimately enriched individual. Many sexually active teens regret early sexual involvement, and many people who wait for marriage are tremendously thankful and glad that they did. Due to the fact that they waited, they held onto feelings of singularity and total specialness with their spouse and they eliminated the possibility of inadequate comparisons between one’s spouse and past relationships. You may think that you are missing out now, but eventually you will probably be relieved.

Judaism presumes that a person’s marriage partner is prearranged and meant to be. The Talmud says that, "Forty days before a child is created, a voice proclaims from heaven: This child will be the match for that person."<sup>344</sup> In fact, Rabbi Chiya says in the midrash that a true, heaven decreed couple is united before the two partners entered as a breath in their mothers' womb.<sup>345</sup> It then follows that the few years between birth and your wedding is the only time that one is "without" their spouse. Thus, pre-marital sex may be like cheating on your spouse to be, a form of adultery and violation of the seventh of the ten commandments. Oy, this is a heavy topic. Just so you know, it has taken me a

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<sup>344</sup> Talmud Sota, 2a.

<sup>345</sup> No Longer Alone (Brooklyn, NY: Mesifita Heichal Hakodesh),14.

week just to write the last few pages because I keep on getting suffocating headaches from it. That did not happen during any of the other chapters! Okay back to the show:

In addition to the problem of comparing past experiences with one's spouse, the Chassidic master and mystic Rebbe Nachmen of Breslov explained that when a person abuses his or her sexual being (in act or thought), that person will consequently find it difficult to meet his or her marriage partner.<sup>346</sup> Rebbe Nachmen said that premarital intimacy, "creates opposite feelings between the pair and enlarges the distance between them."<sup>347</sup> He also taught that if a person contaminates their sexual nature profoundly, by engaging in Jewishly inappropriate pre-marital relations, it becomes exceedingly hard to reconcile the two individuals.

Some will argue that "experimenting" before marriage will actually benefit their future partner in that they will gain valuable experience and improve their ability to make them happy. The problem with this reasoning is the fact that all people have different preferences. Thus even when (if) you get married, you will have to learn how to be compatible with your future partner, and therefore unlearn what you had experienced with previous partners. You may miss out on the chance to grow together with your spouse and you may cause tremendous growing pains from the start. Moreover, if people get into the habit of casual sex, it becomes increasingly difficult to stay with one partner when it is time to. A person will have to weigh the benefits of promiscuous dating against the risk of relationships becoming a selfish game, with ensuing commitment difficulties, and a decline in the chances for a happy marriage.

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

Many insist that it is irrational for a couple to get married if they haven't been intimate yet, because they may not end up physically compatible. The problem is that in general contemporary society people try everything before they get married, and most marriages still end in divorce. Furthermore, I think that it is much more important to make sure that one is emotionally compatible with a person before marriage, than if they are physically in accord. If two people are not inwardly compatible then they will have major problems. However, if these problems are intimate situations, they can be worked out and improved. This is because, as I wrote earlier, a person is not a body, they have a body. If a relationship is based on that body, the people don't truly know each other.

This concept is demonstrated by the Mishna which directs us that, "Whenever love depends on something, if the thing ceases to exist, love ceases to exist. But when it does not depend on something, then it never ceases to exist."<sup>348</sup> Love based, or primarily focused in external factors, are only as strong as that specific, finite thing. We see an example of this idea in the fact that the Torah describes Isaac's love for Esau in the past tense, and Rebecca's love for Jacob in the present tense (Gen. 25:28). "Isaac Loved Esau, for game was in his mouth." This love was merely temporary because it was based on the material factor that Esau hunted and prepared fancy meals for his father Isaac. "Rebecca loves Jacob" because she loved him for his intrinsic good character and spiritual pursuits, a love that lasted permanently.<sup>349</sup> When one person loves another because of a specific benefit, it is not well-founded love. This love is only as strong and lasting as that external benefit.

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<sup>348</sup> Torah Anthology, 264.

<sup>349</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 352.

All too often relationships develop and revolve around physical attraction and gratification. In such cases of superficial "love", individuals do not truly love their partner, but rather the things that they do for them, or the way they make them feel. This is similar to the way people feel towards their favorite food, one minute they profess their love for it and want it very badly, but as soon as they are satiated or sick of its flavor, the love is completely gone. This is the difference between love and infatuation. Love comes from a genuine appreciation for another person, whereas infatuation is based more in how they make you feel. Not what you can do for them, but what they can do for you.

Basically, any love based on an external, physical factor is limited to the significance of that motivating factor, and can endure only as long as that factor is valid.<sup>350</sup> For love to endure it must be rooted in more internal factors. Many college students have no desire for long-lasting, committed relationships at this point, but in ideal Jewish relationships we are to grow with and give to another person, the opposite of a physical fling.

Some people simply feel a need for attention and love, but the initial solution is not to find a mate. The solution is to get in touch with oneself, achieving some level of inner peace and self-esteem. "To achieve selfless love you must first learn to love yourself, to create harmony between your own body and soul."<sup>351</sup> Only then can the search for a mate take place. Experimentation may not seem so bad, but it does not give people the chance to find and develop peace with themselves. In order to function in a give/take relationship, a person has to have something to give (yes, something besides money). As Rabbi Braverman puts it, "Real giving comes from a whole and healthy

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<sup>350</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 423.

<sup>351</sup> Jacobson, Towards a meaningful Life, 63.

sense of self. The giving that is an attempt to buy other people's love isn't love at all. It's manipulation."<sup>352</sup>

Moreover, love is based on recognizing the inner beauty and virtues of another person. If we focus our attention on how great we are in comparison to others, we will never be able to acknowledge another person's greatness. Once we can get comfortable with ourselves, we can appreciate noble qualities in others.

Judaism explains that the essence of love is giving priority to the spiritual instead of the physical.<sup>353</sup> Judaism holds that love is primarily based on, and nourished through giving.<sup>354</sup> Of course, with two partners giving to each other, there has to be somebody receiving as well. The point is that love is developed and strengthened through giving to another person. Love means more than just worrying about one's own pleasure, but being truly attentive to others needs.<sup>355</sup> Therefore, when people enter relationships that revolve around physical gratification (taking), they are really cultivating the opposite of love.

Rabbi Steinsaltz teaches that a person can never fully love another as long as his or her primary concern is for him or herself. However, when the soul is seen as the essence of a person's being there is no limit to the possibility of love. Two bodies can never become one, at best they can just make good use of each other. "Two souls however, which strive together toward the primal root of things, come closer and closer; and if they continue on an even higher plane, they can grow into genuine unity."<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Braverman, Bible For clueless but curious, 163.

<sup>353</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 424.

<sup>354</sup> Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Strive For the Truth Trans. Aryeh Carmel (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem/NY: Feldheim Publishing, 1999) 131.

<sup>355</sup> Braverman, Bible for Clueless, 162

<sup>356</sup> Steinsaltz, Long Shorter Way, 211.

Most places do not permit marriage between people who are gay. There are religiously observant Jews who are gay and must certainly know what it feels like to be torn between Torah ideals and some of their actions. My only advice for a person who is gay, and struggling to adhere to as much of Jewish law as possible, would be to similarly apply all of these laws and ideals of a committed and spiritual relationship to their life. It should go without saying, but people who are gay should take part in, and contribute to the Jewish community, and live vibrant Jewish lifestyle as much as anyone else. There is nobody who fully lives up to the Jewish ideal, and a person who is gay should not be singled out because of this one aspect of their lives.

### **Temptations**

If you actually do want to talk about the Jewish ideal, then college life becomes problematic due to the typical age of students. Recognizing the power of hormones at our age, the rabbis advocated early marriage. In the Talmud, Rav Huna says that if a man reaches the age of twenty still unmarried (and younger for women),<sup>357</sup> he lives each of his days in sin. The Gemara then asks in astonishment if he can really think that the man will live each day in sin, constantly committing acts of immorality. The rabbis then explain that what Rav Hunna meant was that such a person will live each of their days in thoughts of sin, due to the lack of a permissible outlet for their desires.<sup>358</sup>

This leads me to another problematic area of college life. People are flirtatious and often (especially on the California Coast) don't wear very much clothing. Many Jews have this idea that we can think whatever we want as long as we don't act on it. There is something to be said for that. Good old Dennis Prager often humorously

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<sup>357</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 131.

<sup>358</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Kiddushin Vol.I, 29B.

comments that according to Christianity, one who lusts after a woman has committed adultery with his heart, while in Judaism there is only one organ a person can commit adultery with, and it ain't the heart. Indeed, The Talmud recounts that Hashem, "Does not regard a bad thought as a deed."<sup>359</sup>

Before you decide to go committing adultery with your heart however, you should know that the Talmud elsewhere states that in some ways, "thoughts of sin are worse than sin itself,<sup>360</sup> and Proverbs 15:26 cries, "evil thoughts are an abomination to God." The main problem with indulging in lustful thoughts is that it could lead a person to violate many serious commandments.

According to the Talmud there are three aveirot which every person commits daily: lustful thoughts, expecting one's prayers to Hashem to be answered immediately, and slander.<sup>361</sup> A person can rest assured that everyone falls pray to it and need not feel overly guilty. Even still, keep in mind the saying of Reb Nachman of Breslov, "You are wherever your thoughts are. Make sure your thoughts are where you want to be."<sup>362</sup>

Everyone has "sinful" thoughts; the way out of this is not to indulge in fantasy all day but to overcome the thoughts and avoid acting on them. The Tanya actually teaches that a person should be happy if "sinful thoughts" come upon them during the day.<sup>363</sup> The Tanya explains that diverting one's mind from improper thoughts is the only way to

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 39b

<sup>360</sup> Schottenstien Talmud Yoma, 29a.

<sup>361</sup> Scholtenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Bava Basra Vol.III (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1994), 164b-165a.

<sup>362</sup> Moshe Mykoff, The Empty Chair (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994), 20.

<sup>363</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 353.

fulfill the biblical injunction, “You shall not follow after your heart and after your eyes, by which you go astray.”<sup>364</sup>

Furthermore, the Talmud relates that when a person overcomes their desires and an opportunity to do wrong, even by passively doing nothing, it is as though they had actively performed a mitzvah!<sup>365</sup> In fact, Rashi comments on that statement that there is no greater mitzvah than this. The merit of a person who doesn’t sin out of lack of opportunity is not as great as one who struggles with the opportunity and overcomes it.<sup>366</sup> Judaism is not totally at peace with our thoughts, but when a person has such thoughts, they need not feel guilty, like when I used to get caught climbing on the refrigerator to find candy. “No mom, I was looking for the vitamins!” Oh wait, that’s a different topic.

### **Resisting**

The mishna asks, "Who is strong?" Our rabbis answer, "He who subdues his personal inclination."<sup>367</sup> One of the great challenges of being a Jew is developing the maturity to overcome great temporary pleasures for the enduring ones down the road. Rav Dovid Feinstein has commented on the famous statement of Deuteronomy 30:19, "Choose life!" that we are being told here to avoid things that detract from one’s life, particularly "ephemeral pleasures" which will ultimately shorten our “lives.”<sup>368</sup> Sort of like they say in diet lingo, “a moment on the lips means a lifetime on the hips.”<sup>369</sup> In order to overcome temptation, people need to take themselves out of the heat of the moment, and give themselves some time to reflect on what they are doing.

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<sup>364</sup> Numbers 15:31

<sup>365</sup> Schottenstien Talmud Kiddushin, 39b.

<sup>366</sup> Steinsaltz, Long Shorter Way, 80.

<sup>367</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 4:1/211.

<sup>368</sup> Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Kol Dodi on the Torah (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1992), 289.

<sup>369</sup> Manolson, The Magic Touch, 42.

Avoiding excessive physical pleasure, which would only satisfy our bodies, is how we acknowledge that we are indeed spiritual beings. A student often has to sacrifice parties and fun because of the need to study, sometimes one has to pass up on pleasures that they want, for that which they know is ultimately best for them, this is called maturity. If there is something destructive that a person is attracted to, we are taught to keep a distance from it. Basically, we have to find our weaknesses and keep a distance from them.

Moreover, Rabbi Twersky explains that all living things prefer pleasure and avoid distress.<sup>370</sup> However, as noted above, people sometimes forgo much pleasure in order to achieve a goal. The student that passes up fun for studying knows that in order to achieve their goals they have to pass up on some pleasure. If a person's only goal is to pursue pleasure, then this relinquishment makes no sense. For a Jew, who is commanded to have the lifelong goal of character refinement constantly deepening, and improving levels of spirituality, must tolerate the discomfort of making changes that will be necessary to achieve such goals. The degree of abstinence one displays is indicative of their conviction of the purpose of existence, and their dedication to achieving that purpose.

"A person's evil inclination renews itself against him every day."<sup>371</sup> If it doesn't succeed in enticing a person in a certain aveira, it will renew itself and attempt to entice one to commit a different aveira. Even as we grow and overcome our individual difficulties, another one arises (i.e. first shabbat, then kashrut, etc.). Further, just because one overcomes something one day, they may have to "battle" it again the next. "If the repulsive one engages you, draw him into the study hall: if he is like a stone, he will

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<sup>370</sup> Twerski, Lights Along the Way, 23.

<sup>371</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Kiddushin, 30b.

dissolve and if he is like iron, he will shatter." The repulsive one is a person's inclination towards improper activities, which may be termed "repulsive" because some believe that we must be disgusted by our *yatzer hara* if we are to overcome it.

After the famous Adam and Eve story in the Torah, Hashem tells the snake that humans will pound its head, and it will bite their heel.<sup>372</sup> The sages use this symbolism to describe the proper tactics that one should take against the *yatzer hara*, which is represented by the snake. The snake seduces a Jew to trample on the commandment by heel, but they can prevail by rationally using their head, through the study of Torah.<sup>373</sup>

Torah study will dissolve minor difficulties and break even the major desires. The *Messilat Yesharim* declares that Torah is the only way that a person can overcome their *yatzer hara*.<sup>374</sup> According to the Talmud, Hashem created the *yatzer hara* and the Torah specifically as its antidote.<sup>375</sup> A person needs to set times for Torah study with the intention that it lead to character refinement with analyzing one's behavior with strategies for improvement. Like the fact that many illnesses require specific medicines, our urges can only be controlled by Torah study. Torah was created to battle these urges, and it works.

The Torah has been compared to both water and fire throughout Jewish literature. The *Mezricher Maggid* reconciled these two contrasting metaphors by explaining that Torah study serves to subdue the two different manifestations of the *yatzer hara*. Sometimes our *yatzer hara* heats a person's passions to do wrong, in which cases Torah serves as cooling water. At other times, the *yatzer hara* cools a person into complacency

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<sup>372</sup> Genesis 17:15

<sup>373</sup> Stone Chumash, 17.

<sup>374</sup> Luzzatto, Path of the Just, 63.

<sup>375</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Kiddushin, 30b.

and laziness. In these cases the *yatzer hara* is overcome through the fire of Torah study.<sup>376</sup>

The Chassidic rebbe of Rhizin once had a follower who practiced mortification of the flesh in attempt to subdue his physical desires. The Rebbe enquired into exactly what he hoped to accomplish with this.

"I wish to break my bad character traits," responded the chassid.

"You will break your neck before you break a single trait." The Rebbe said. "Study Torah diligently and observe the Mitzvot properly and your bad traits will disappear."<sup>377</sup>

Tanya teaches that we can only overcome our struggles with alacrity, not letting them get us down because, "It is impossible to conquer the evil nature with laziness and sluggishness."<sup>378</sup> If possible, a person should refocus their energy on thoughts of Torah, thereby automatically driving away the other thoughts instead of doing battle with them. It is also taught in Tanya that to defeat one's *yatzer hara*, a person must maintain the supremacy of the mind over the heart. One then overcomes desires in one's heart through fear and awe of Hashem who sees all of one's actions.<sup>379</sup>

Jewish literature offers many strategies to avoid such self-destructive behavior. Based on Psalms 4:5, the Talmud deduces four strategies for refraining from sin.<sup>380</sup> The first suggestion is to wage a constant mental battle against one's *yatzer hara*. When the going gets tough, the Talmud advises Torah study, but not merely reciting words. The

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<sup>376</sup> Scheinbaum, Peninim on the Torah, 15.

<sup>377</sup> Twerski, Lights Along the Way, 100.

<sup>378</sup> Zalman, Lesson in Tanya, 343.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>380</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachos Vol.I (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 5a.

advice here is to study so intensely that Torah occupies a person's entire heart and leaves them no room for other thoughts. If that does not work, the Talmud has more tricks up its sleeve. The next piece of advice is to say the shema prayer.

If a person still can not overcome their physical desire, they are advised to ponder their mortality and the day of their death, which may cause them to improve their behavior (I think I just figured out why we were told to wear black to avoid *hillul Hashem* if we must sin, black is the color of a mourner!). The logic behind this last resort is that if one reminds themselves that one day they will have to give an accounting for all of their actions, they will correct their behavior. However, the commentaries caution against this approach because it has the very detrimental side effect of causing sadness and depression.

It is also important to ask Hashem for help. The Talmud teaches that if one comes to purify themselves, they are actually given assistance from above.<sup>381</sup> The rabbis assure us that if we sanctify ourselves a little, we are sanctified a great deal. If we sanctify ourselves below, we are sanctified above.<sup>382</sup> Indeed, it is taught that, "In the way a person chooses to walk, he will be led."<sup>383</sup>

Elsewhere the Talmud discusses the influence one's celestial birth signs have over a person's wealth and intelligence in life. The Talmud assures us, however, that we can either overcome these predestination's, or we can channel our desires and self-direct the *yatzer hara* into good.<sup>384</sup> For example, if one has a desire to shed blood, they can be a

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<sup>381</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yoma Vol.I (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1998), 38b.

<sup>382</sup> Schottenstien Talmud Yoma, 39a.

<sup>383</sup> Makkos, 10b.

<sup>384</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbos Vol.V (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1997), 156a.

surgeon, a mohel, or a butcher. This is important to this subject because the Zohar maintains that a person's *yatzer hara* exists mainly in the area of sex.<sup>385</sup>

Once a person has already given in to their *yatzer hara*, if they wish to go back to strict observance Maimonides advises a person to temporarily bend to the opposite extreme. The goal is not to be an extremist, but to work hard to get back to the ideal of a "Golden Mean," taking the middle road in all of one's interactions.<sup>386</sup>

Another strategy is to meditate on a particular aspect of one's life and how to improve it. This is done by focusing on self-improvement and developing a sort of a mantra-like repetition of the area in which one wishes to improve.<sup>387</sup> For instance, a person who thinks that they gossip too much could meditate on speaking better and begin to softly repeat the verse in the Torah that prohibits slanderous gossip. This is done until a person fully absorbs and internalizes the idea. Reb Nachmen of Breslov felt that a person should literally speak to their body. Using the gossip example, a person would talk to their tongue for a fixed amount of time every day, telling it not to gossip about others.<sup>388</sup> After working on oneself, a person can gradually improve and do the best that they can without pushing themselves too hard or too fast.

Rabbi Twersky explains that the *yatzer hara* is really an illusion.<sup>389</sup> The *yatzer hara* can not do anything on its own. It is therefore not right to rationalize that the *yatzer hara* made you do something because it is unable to do anything unless one gives him or herself the means to do so. If one conceives the *yatzer hara* as being nothing other than an illusion, one can free oneself of its influence. Furthermore, keeping in mind the

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<sup>385</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, *Tzitzith*, 46.

<sup>386</sup> Telushkin, *Book of Jewish Values*, 215.

<sup>387</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*, (New York, NY: Schocken Books Inc., 1985), 162.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

parable that the yatzer hara is merely a hired servant of the "king" to test the loyalty of the commoners, a person can say to their yatzer hara, "When you provoke me against the great king, you are following his orders! How could you expect less of me? Why don't you do your job, and let me do mine!"

**\*Caution\***

This area of college life requires great caution; a person must know what he or she is getting themselves into, and how to maneuver once he or she is there. It has been asserted that "There is nothing that will draw a person away from God more than sexual promiscuity."<sup>390</sup> The mishna warns us to consider the loss sustained in performance of a mitzvah as opposed to the ultimate gain, and the gain in committing a sin as opposed to the ultimate loss.<sup>391</sup> Know what's best for you and be smart.

One must to think ahead, prepare even before one gets out of bed,  
know who they will marry before they're wed,  
ask a doctor before they take a med, and plan with care, not simply be led.

(Sorry, I just saw a Shakespeare play).

Or in the non-rhyming, but profound Talmudic proclamation, "Who is a wise person? One who can foresee the consequences of one's behavior."<sup>392</sup> One of my favorite lessons in the Talmud is where it relates that a man who passes the place where women are doing their washing (they lift up their dresses and sleeves to make it easier) without looking has done nothing wrong if there is no other route. If, however, there is another

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<sup>389</sup> Twerski, Lights Along the Way, 217.

<sup>390</sup> Kaplan, Tzitzith, 51.

<sup>391</sup> Pirkei Avos, 2:1.

<sup>392</sup> Talmud Tamid, 32a.

way, it is obligatory to take it. Rashi points out that if a person did not take the other route, even if he doesn't look, he has erred!<sup>393</sup>

What this gemara is saying, at least the way I learned it, is that we should not look for a test, even if we know we can pass it. In fact, the Talmud explains in another place that the whole error of King David with Batsheva was not that he failed the test, but simply that he had the audacity to ask Hashem to test him.<sup>394</sup> It is indeed more meritorious to avoid sticky situations, than to enter them and emerge victorious. Thus, a person must know where they are being led, and how to detour if needed. The Tamud clearly states in the name of Rav, that in ethical areas, "You should never intentionally test yourself."<sup>395</sup> I noted above that one earns tremendous merit by overcoming their ability and craving to do wrong, but this is only a case when they could not avoid getting into the adverse situation to begin with. The ideal is to steer clear of provocation all together.

### **Shomer what?**

Okie dokie, so I've told you the ideal, and why it is beneficial. I have also reviewed some ways to get through difficult and improper situations. What could be left? Well, I know about the human ability to rationalize, and I know something about the power of physical pleasure and desires. Many folks find themselves in inappropriate situations (by no fault of their own of course) yet still wish to have some genuine Jewish guidance.

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<sup>393</sup> Schottenstein Edition Talmud Bavli, Tractate Bava Basra Vol. I (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1992), 57b.

<sup>394</sup> Akiva Tatz, Living Inspired (Southfield, Mich: Targum Press Inc., 1993), 49.

<sup>395</sup> Talmud Sanhedrin, 107.

For example, Rabbi Manis Friedman tells of a group of teenagers who asked him how to keep kosher on a canoe trip.<sup>396</sup> The rabbi was told that there would be, "four boys and four girls" to which his response was that he could not help them because, "it's already not kosher." Rabbi Friedman felt that four boys and four girls going off into the wilderness on a canoe trip is not acceptable no matter what they eat. He may be correct, but this response doesn't help the teenagers if they go anyway. If Rabbi Friedman ended the conversation at that, he passed up a great opportunity to at least minimize the amount of "unkosherness" taking place, and to strive for some greater conformity to halacha.

Based on a Talmudic discussion of certain popular practices that were at odds with Jewish law, Rav Moshe Feinstein elucidated a guiding principle that when a situation goes against Jewish law, but can't be entirely corrected, one is bound to at least improve it.<sup>397</sup> The general rule is to always try to maximize mitzvahs and reduce transgressions as much as possible.

This concept is illustrated in an instance where the Chafetz Chaim was faced with a question from young Jewish men who had been drafted into the Russian army during the early 20th century. The men asked, "If we are on the battlefield, and they serve us pork, what should we do?" The Chafetz Chaim replied: "If there is no other food available, then you may eat the pork, because preservation of life overrides the kashrut prohibitions. But, when you eat the pork, you may not lick the bones." In other words, eat it if you must to stay alive, but if you're going to transgress, minimize it. Although the teenagers who asked Rabbi Friedman for advice were not in a life-threatening situation, this is how I would deal with improper boy/girl dilemmas that arise.

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<sup>396</sup> Friedman, Doesn't Anyone Blush Anymore?, 101.

<sup>397</sup> Manolson, Magic Touch, 6.

Indeed, I asked Rabbi Friedman about this incident and he told me that if a person knows that something is wrong, they should endeavor to make it better without giving the wrong impression. The principle is that one must first state the fact that it is wrong, but if it will be done regardless, one should then simply work to improve the situation as much as possible.<sup>398</sup>

Warning: we are now entering the messy territory of religious hypocrisy, you're the one who got yourself into this mess, so don't blame me.☺ For starters, I think that even when a person is in constant violation of a major transgression, he or she should try to stay generally as religious as possible. Rabbi Chayim of Tzanz once said to someone involved in improper ways, "Don't think that because you give in to your evil inclination in some areas you therefore must be evil in all areas. Rather, in whatever ways you can, do good and overcome evil."<sup>399</sup> "Good" in this context is that which is religiously permissible in Judaism. "Evil" is a very harsh and extreme term, used in this context for the havoc a person's *yatzer hara* can have over one's life.

One problem that I have seen with this situation is that is once a person lets some things become *nisht gefeirlach*-no big deal, and ignored, other difficult halachot will inevitably follow, leading a person to decrease their observance in all areas. One strategy may be to take on extra stringencies. For example, a person in a relationship may not get much sleep, so be very careful to wake up on time in the morning for minyon (prayer service); a person in a relationship spends more money, so they should be careful to give extra tzedaka. Furthermore, the person should take on to learn more Torah during the day, it may be painful if they come across statements that make them feel guilty for what

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<sup>398</sup> Interview By Author, Verbal Interview, Santa Cruz, California, November 9, 2000.

<sup>399</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 417.

they are doing, but like we said before, if you abandon Torah study, it's all down hill from there. Although I know that we are all trying our hardest, lack of perfection in one area does not free you from the duty to work on yourself day by day.

You may have heard of something people call "*Teffilin* dates." This is where a religious boy and girl go out and the guy brings his tefillin because he expects to be "sleeping" over and he knows that he will need them in the morning. It sounds very funny. A person is being nice and religious by bringing religious articles along, but in the process he is slapping Jewish law in the face by ignoring the relationship restrictions. When I first heard that this happens, I was a little bit shocked. Initially I thought that tefillin dates were not only hypocritical but also completely silly and contradictory.

I still have great reservations about such practices, but I have come to see a bright side of it; at least he brought his tefillin! This is part of my point about maintaining religious observance, even when a person has let his or her guard down in some areas. Just because a person speeds on the freeway, it would make no sense for them to feel exempt from paying their taxes. The excuse, "I broke that law, I might as well break them all" would not go far in court. It is true that all mitzvahs are connected and work together to form a cohesive system, but we can not let the whole thing break down.

Although I already advised that at least premarital sex should be avoided if one does get into a relationship. I would like to bring that up one more time and include a greater warning. The odds are that once any sort of physical relationship begins, it will be very hard to subdue it. Even when people go into it thinking "no sex," the odds are against them. Thus, if you do get into a relationship, in order to avoid intercourse, it would be most advisable to hold all physical interactions to an absolute minimum.

Relationships snowball very quickly in college living situations, great caution is required to prevent them from rolling out of control. The midrash says, "The holy one blessed be he said, do not say, 'since I may not live with a woman, I will hold her and be free of sin, I will embrace her and be free of sin, or I will kiss her and be free of sin."<sup>400</sup>

In the rationalization process, some will conjecture that if they date a non-religious Jew, it may have the benefit of helping them become more religious. However, this idea is clearly not fully rational. By you decreasing your observance, they will increase theirs? If anything, dating a non-religious individual is much more likely to stunt your religiosity than boost theirs.

This is a very tight rope to be walking on. If a man will not shake hands with women, but he kisses his girlfriend every night, it seems a little odd to ask him to maintain physical avoidance of all other women, doesn't it? Well, like I said, way to go for getting yourself into this mess! The easiest way is to simply follow Jewish law, but we don't always prefer easy do we? A person in such a situation undergoes a major inner struggle and it can only be hoped that this conflict will generate growth and clarity and that the person will not give up.

A major problem is that if you drop standards and allow yourself to be lenient on this, what comes next? Moreover, even if a person stays strictly observant in every area outside of sexual relations, one may end up willing to give up important elements of Judaism like shabbat observance and kashrut while pursuing those who will provide them with sexual outlets.

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<sup>400</sup> Luzzatto, Path of the Just, 123.

There are countless cases of religious individuals who have completely left the ranks of religious observance to pursue their sexual desires. Even though they started out simply breaking one rule, one thing leads to another and all of their Judaism is lost. Eventually, the statement that, "Sexual desire is the one thing that is most often responsible for leading a person away from religious observance,"<sup>401</sup> sadly becomes true.

There is a tragic story that is a little bit different, but I knew of a very Orthodox guy in Brooklyn who decided to go to a party one night. At the party he saw a beautiful woman who offered him heroin. Normally, he wouldn't even have thought twice, but his attraction to her led him to try the drug and eventually he became addicted. The really tragic part is that he never saw that woman again, but a few months later the boy died of a heroin overdose. I'm not trying to depress you, but I am hoping that we can learn from our past mistakes. I am saying that if you explore physical relationships, it's not the end of the world and you can still be observant, but I am cautioning that it's not likely. Stories like this are actually not so new.

Recall, if you will, the Torah recount that after the Jews approached the borders of ancient Moab, "Israel remained in Shittim, and the people began to behave promiscuously with the daughters of Moab. They invited the people to sacrifice to their Gods, and the people came and ate and bowed down to their Gods."<sup>402</sup> The stories in this section of the Torah testify to the power of sexual desires to lead anyone astray, even tribal leaders from a generation that witnessed the revelation at Sinia.

A very important point that I would like to make is that if one gets into such a situation, he or she should own up to their actions. One should really try not to justify

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<sup>401</sup> Kaplan, *Tzitzith*, 50.

<sup>402</sup> Numbers 20-25

improper behavior. How many completely horrible things have “religious” people justified in history? Let’s say you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend and the two of you do things that are not Jewishly “kosher.” It is important for you to have the integrity to say to yourself, “this is wrong, I shouldn’t be doing it, but I am anyway.” I admire a person who can recognize their limitations and actually admit that what they are doing is not right, although they just feel like doing it regardless, as they continue to strive for excellence.

Often, rationalization occurs when a person has a desire for something forbidden, but leads themselves to believe that it is actually permissible. In fact, people tend to set up a pattern of justification that will make it exactly the right thing to do! Accepting fault and avoiding rationalization may be your only chance to come out of the situation with any hint of your religiosity intact. This may also be the only way that one can ever hope to return to doing the right thing in every aspect, after all, if you have justified wrong to be right, the whole system sinks down the drain.

Rabbi Shapira taught that people generally do not turn away from Hashem and Torah in one fell swoop. The Talmud says, "This is the craft of the evil inclination: Today it tells him to do this, the next day to do that, until it tells him to perform idolatry and he does it."<sup>403</sup> We may start out by simply doing a good thing for the wrong reason, and before we know it we don’t even mind doing the wrong thing for the wrong reason. Unfortunately, we only see the process of corruption when it begins to be manifested in action. People descend level by level, in gradual steps. This starts with a gradual inner crisis, only effecting opinions, then one’s overall thinking begins to favor the outside

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<sup>403</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Shabbos, 105b.

world and disdain Torah and his upbringing. "This internal disease emanates from the feelings of egotistical independence." Then one wants to rebel against that which they were taught.<sup>404</sup> One can never let their guard down and forget that spirituality requires constant exertion.

Additionally, just because you fell behind in certain areas, Judaism asks a person not to drop everything; this religion is not all or nothing. The Talmud says that when a Jew performs a mitzvah even as slight as a chicken scratch, Hashem adds it to an accruing credit.<sup>405</sup> The Talmud also says that who ever performs just one mitzvah is rewarded with good.<sup>406</sup> If somebody found a gold mine worth millions of dollars, they wouldn't abandon it just because it is not all of the gold in the world. Whatever steps we can take have value. I could go on and on with stories, Biblical, and Talmudic proofs, but the idea that Jewish observance is not all or nothing does not need to be belabored.

Despite the above statements, many contemporary Jews still have the notion that if they are not observing every law, they might as well do nothing. Ronald A. Brauner makes the case for this idea being an example of infiltration of non-Jewish values upon our consciousness.<sup>407</sup> Specifically, the idea that Torah observance is all or nothing comes from Christianity rather than any Jewish source. The "New Testament" states in James 2:10, "Whoever keeps the whole Torah and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." Even though many Jews fall into this trap, it is not Jewish idea.

One can only be advised to do his or her best. If you are doing something wrong, Judaism pleads with you not to give up on the whole system. A Jew is expected to be the

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<sup>404</sup> Shapira, Students Obligation, 12.

<sup>405</sup> Talmud Avoda Zara, 4a.

<sup>406</sup> Schottenstien Talmud Kiddushin, 39b.

very best that they can be, but not necessarily perfect. Our Bible informs us that everybody sins<sup>408</sup> and the Talmud confirms that there have only been four individuals in all of history who were without sin.<sup>409</sup>

This is a very important issue, Judaism holds male/female relations in incredible regard. "Judaism does not view sex as unclean, as a necessary humiliation for the purpose of increase. Sexual life is seen rather as a physical expression of the union between man and woman, as an act of positive significance in itself, and at the highest level, as a sacrament."<sup>410</sup> Rashi comments on Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy," that the main path to holiness is mastery of one's sexuality.<sup>411</sup>

Arya Kaplan has noted that this commandment to be holy is also in the commandment to wear *Tzitzit*, where the verse ends with a reference to the exodus from Egypt. Therefore, Kaplan comments, true freedom is liberation from the domination of ones sexual appetites.<sup>412</sup>

A small compromise leads to a bigger one. This is true in all issues, like if a person starts going to parties on shabbat, even tough it may be technically allowed, who knows what comes next. If a person starts eating food that they know they shouldn't be, even though they found some rationalization for eating it, next they may eat downright non-kosher foods. If a person gives up on their Torah study periods for a few days because they were "too busy" they can probably kiss their daily learning times goodbye. In every area, small concessions lead to major infractions. In no area is this truer then

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<sup>407</sup> Ronald A. Brauner, Being Jewish in a Gentile World(Pittsburgh, Penn: Mirkov Publications, Inc., 2000), 26.

<sup>408</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:20

<sup>409</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Shabbos, 55b.

<sup>410</sup> Steinsaltz, Teshuva, 157.

<sup>411</sup> Stone Chumash, 657.

with physical relations, where the more one does, the better it feels. Sex is a very important issue and should not be trivialized.

Be strong, it's difficult but it has been done before, and I know you can do it!

May you go from strength to strength!

### **Chapter 6 Defenition:**

**Kollel:** Institution for advanced Torah study made up primarily of older, married students.

## **Ahavat Yisrael**

A discussion on the subject of *Ahavat Yisrael*-Love for a fellow Jew, will help make some final points for this essay. Not only is this idea needed as a basis for some other important issues, but knowledge of this often ignored concept is very important to every Jew. Often for the first time, upon entering college one encounters all sorts of people. Interpersonal relationships involve numerous factors and possibilities, and love, as it will be explained below, is the primary means to great ends.

A great deal of time has already been spent on the issue of Torah study, and indeed there are schools of thought that tie Torah study directly into *ahavat yisrael*. There is an idea in Judaism that because the Torah is the life-blood of the Jewish people, the more spiritual "blood" that a student pumps into the rest of the nation, the better the Jewish people's spiritual health will be. There are thus many who believe that the greatest public service they can do is to study Torah. The statement that Rav Yitzchak

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<sup>412</sup> Kaplan, *Tzitzith*, 52.

Hunter once made to a group of students can sum this up, "The greatest expression of love for the Jewish nation is deep, passionate, and committed study of Torah."<sup>413</sup>

For example, I have some friends who study in the distinguished Lakewood, New Jersey yeshiva who believe this deeply. In fact, their solution to the assimilation pervading modern Jewish life is to set up a *kollel* in various communities and study all day. This should provide the observant college student some motivation for making one's daily learning periods. After all, if by learning you are not just helping yourself but the entire Jewish people there is more incentive to learn.

However, a college student tends not have the time to devote their lives to Torah study, and most Jews who go to college have made the decision not to dedicate the rest of their days solely to Torah study. As much as someone may claim that studying Torah is the way to love another, the obligation to love others is constantly binding. For example, even if one does study all day long, they still have the duty to love others when they go home at night, or take a break from learning. A college student is out in "the world" and must focus on other manners of virtuous behavior. Interacting in society does increase the chance of causing a hillul Hashem, but we must not shrink to the challenge because the good that can be done ultimately outweighs the potential bad.

While secluding oneself in the halls of Torah study is intensely enjoyable, it can become a means of escape for a person who does not feel fit to enter the "real world." Some Jews are absolutely qualified and possibly best suited to study Torah all day, but many fall into this hideaway trap and use the excuse of "pumping lifeblood into the rest of the Jewish people" to justify avoidance of the perplexities of life.

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<sup>413</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 390.

When Moses asks for the Jews to be freed, the Pharaoh basically tells him to mind his own business because he is not subjected to slave labor.<sup>414</sup> Pharaoh is in essence saying that, “since you don’t have to be a slave, don’t bother worrying about those who do.” The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that a Jew should not be misled into thinking that it suffices to study Torah regularly and only occasionally take time to treat others well. Rather, it is vital for Jews to know that "Mind your own business" was first uttered by Pharaoh, and is not the proper Jewish attitude.<sup>415</sup>

The truth is that Torah study is just one small part of the major commandment to love others. The source for this “Golden Rule” is in the middle of the Torah, Leviticus 19:18, “Love your fellow as yourself-I am Hashem.” The Jewish library contains a tremendous amount of explanations of this verse and directions for fulfilling it. In the Palestinian Talmud Rabbi Akiva quotes this verse and proclaims that, “This is the major principle of the Torah.”<sup>416</sup> As a matter of fact, according to a Medieval Rabbinic work, this commandment is Hashem’s deepest hope: "This is what the Holy one said to Israel: My children, what do I seek from you? I seek no more than that you love one another and honor one another."<sup>417</sup>

Indeed, the Talmud tells that a person who was not Jewish came to Hillel the elder and asked to be converted on the condition that Hillel would teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel accepted his condition and told him, "That which is

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<sup>414</sup> Exodus 5:1

<sup>415</sup> Rabbi Sholom B. Wineberg, The Chassidic Dimension Vol.1 (Brooklyn NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1990), 66.

<sup>416</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 174.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

hateful to you, do not do to your fellow; this is the entire Torah; the rest is an elaboration. Go and learn."<sup>418</sup>

We see that *Ahavat yisrael* is the basis for the entire Torah, and all of the commandments are in fact rooted in it. Rabbi Twerski M.D. writes that all details of Torah observance are derivatives of *ahavat yisrael*, "If the performance of any mitzvah does not contribute to increasing the love of one's neighbor, it falls short of being true Torah observance."<sup>419</sup> So important is the concept of *ahavat yisrael* that in some prayer books, before prayer one is directed to say, "I hereby take upon myself the *mitzvah*, 'Love your fellow as yourself.'"<sup>420</sup> Love of others is considered the "entry-gate" through which one must pass in order to stand before Hashem in prayer.<sup>421</sup> It is by the merit of a person's love for others that their prayer is accepted.

The traditional commentators offer many levels of understanding for the verse that is the basis for all this love talk. Some explain that people naturally love great figures, but this commandment urges us to love even those who it is hard to love.<sup>422</sup> Ramban teaches that only the most saintly can literally love others just as much as they love themselves. Rather, in this commandment Hashem asks us to treat others with the utmost consideration and respect because we should want others to have the same degree of success and prosperity that we would want for ourselves.<sup>423</sup> According to Ramban, the goal of *ahavat yisrael* is thus not only to wish others well, but to actually hope and endeavor for as much good for them as we want for ourselves.

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<sup>418</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Shabbos Vol. I, 31a.

<sup>419</sup> Twerski, Lights Along the Way, 151.

<sup>420</sup> Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Siddur Tehillat Hashem, Trans. Nisan Mendel (in Hebrew) (Brooklyn, NY: Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, Inc., 1988), 12.

<sup>421</sup> Rabbi Menachem Mendel Scheerson, Hayom Yom (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1994), 67.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that just as a person desires to be respected, he or she should desire respect for others just as much.<sup>424</sup> For example, if you see someone doing something that will cause others to look down on him or her, or cause themselves embarrassment, it should be prevented if possible. According to Maimonides we are enjoined to care about others belongings and dignity the same way they we care for our own belongings and dignity.<sup>425</sup> We are directed to keep every other person's feelings in mind and do anything for another that we would want them to do for us, this is loving a neighbor.

### **One Step Deeper**

The traditional Chassidic approach to this commandment is to emphasize the word "As yourself." Just we love ourselves despite the faults that we know we have, we should likewise love our neighbors despite the faults that we see in them. We don't have to love others as much as we love ourselves, but in the way that we love ourselves. If a person sees another do something wrong, they should keep in mind that if they did the same "wrong" act, he or she would have a reason for it, and would continue to love him or herself in spite of it. It is consequently neither honest nor equitable if a person does not love others the way we love ourselves.<sup>426</sup>

Judaism teaches that the soul is a part of Hashem's self, and that Hashem is absolute unity. Hence, all souls are essentially one. Only our bodies are distinct from each other, whereas all of our souls are united.<sup>427</sup> Thus, if you love yourself in any way,

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<sup>422</sup> Stone Chumash, 661.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Chafetz Chayim, Ahavath Chesed, 221.

<sup>425</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 300.

<sup>426</sup> Steinsaltz, The Long Shorter Way, 215.

<sup>427</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 423.

it is natural to love others because we are all basically one.<sup>428</sup> The body separates us, but the soul is that which binds us. When a person focuses on the soul, he or she sees the similarities. We are only separate and distinct beings by virtue of our physical bodies. Only to the extent that we emphasize that physical side are we separate and distinct from each other. However, to the degree that we downgrade the significance of the body relative to the soul, granting the soul primacy, we are one, and can feel for each other just as we feel for ourselves.

Based on the above, in order to acquire *ahavat yisrael* a person must recognize the fact that the reality of an individual is not what we see, but what they are deep down.<sup>429</sup> If we address ourselves to a person's inner core rather than the “outer shell,” people can truly relate on a deep level and find true love for each other. We are spiritually related, and the fact that that we see Hashem as our parent, we should correspondingly see each other as brothers and sisters, regardless of blood ties.

The Maggid of Mezrich notes that people can force themselves into a physical act, but not an emotion. For example, one can make their hands give charity, even though they don't really want to. However, it does not seem possible for a person to force themselves to love on command. The Maggid explains that the reason the verse “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is one”<sup>430</sup> is followed by the commandment to love Hashem is because if one truly comprehends and meditates deeply on spiritual matters, love can be created where it did not exist before. Intellect can control emotion. The commandment to love is thus a directive to meditate on and develop this love.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Zalman Posner, Think Jewish (United States of America: Keshet Press, 1978), 173.

<sup>430</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4

<sup>431</sup> Posner, Think Jewish, 167.

## Can you get a Little More Specific?

King David tells us that the world is built upon kindness to others.<sup>432</sup> So significant are kind acts to the existence of the world that the Baal Shem Tov taught that at times, Hashem sends a soul into this world to live for seventy or eighty years, with the single mission of doing one person a favor.<sup>433</sup> The Torah states that we are required to attach ourselves to Hashem, which is done by emulating Hashem's traits, "Just as God is merciful, so must you be merciful..."<sup>434</sup> Anytime one does an act of kindness, one is also doing the seemingly impossible act of uniting him or herself with Hashem.

There was a saying among the elder Chassidim, "Have affection for a fellow Jew, and G-d will have affection for you; do a kindness for a fellow-Jew and G-d will do a kindness for you; befriend a fellow Jew; and G-d will befriend you."<sup>435</sup>

Countless opportunities to fulfill this commandment arise at college. Examples include helping people with homework, visiting them when they are sick, comforting someone after failing a test (or some other sad time), being hospitable to guests, lending money, or teaching Torah.<sup>436</sup>

Very simple acts like telling people good news, giving someone change, greeting people in a friendly manner, or even something like supplying a Jew with kosher food, fulfill the commandment to "Love your Neighbor."<sup>437</sup> Additional examples include picking up clothes from off the floor, giving helpful advice, cheering people up when they need it, keeping loved ones informed about your well-being so they won't worry,

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<sup>432</sup> Psalms 89:3

<sup>433</sup> Schneerson, Hayom Yom, 51.

<sup>434</sup> Sofrim, 3:17.

<sup>435</sup> Schneerson, Hayom Yom, 108.

<sup>436</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 301.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 305.

returning library books on time, and being quiet when others are sleeping, studying, or not feeling well.<sup>438</sup> These are all acts that bear great religious significance and which people do very often. Thus, not only strictly observant Jews should be referred to as "religious," we all do great things that hold tremendous religious worth. *Ahavat yisrael* is one of the most fundamental concepts in Judaism, and you never know who performs more of it on a regular basis.

It becomes certain that a major factor in loving others is being aware of their needs. Rabbi Telushkin beautifully understands this commandment as more than just loving others, but making sure to give them the chance to love us. According to Telushkin we are obliged to do whatever we can to make it possible for others to act lovingly towards us, meaning that we have a responsibility to make our needs clearly known, thus helping others help you.<sup>439</sup>

### **Says Who?**

It is important to remember that the commandment to love our neighbor ends by stating that it is Hashem who commanded it. Hashem created you and your neighbor, and in that way we are all of equal value. Moreover, because Hashem created us all, Hashem is the one who can tell us how to behave towards each other.

The commandments that come directly after the one to love our neighbor tell us not to crossbreed livestock with other species, plant fields with different species of seeds, or wear a garment that contains linen and wool fabrics. These are known as some of the quintessential irrational laws of the Torah, referred to as *Chukim*. There are many explanations given for the proximity of such obscure laws with the lofty commandment

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>439</sup> Telushkin, Book of Jewish Values, 344.

to love others. One explanation is the idea that just like those commandments make no rational sense and are thus done solely because it is the will of Hashem, one is likewise to act lovingly towards others only because Hashem commanded it.

Despite the fact that we are able to relate to this mitzvah with our intellect, it is best to love others only because Hashem said so. One day a person may feel like being nice, the other day nasty. It is possible to rationalize meanness, but we need to develop good feelings towards others at all times.<sup>440</sup> If a person comes up with some kind of underlying logic as the purpose for a commandment, they will be able to use that logic to get out of doing it when they don't feel like it.

Understanding the reasons for what we do is vital for enthusiastic observance of Judaism. However, actually performing the commandment is so important that just doing it comes before understanding it. Let's say a person thinks that the reason to love their neighbor is so that they will not get into a fight. That person could simply decide that because they are bigger and stronger they don't have to worry about behaving with love towards others. The only way to avoid rationalizing out of the commandment is to avoid rationalizing into it. We should do it because Hashem wants us to, and that's it. Not only does this keep us doing the commandment, it insures harmony with the mishnaic ideal spoken of in the previous chapter of developing a love that is not dependent on anything.

Hashem's commanding us to love our neighbor is what makes it right, otherwise it would only be that which we prefer. This topic has been subject to much debate between relativists and universalists. Those embracing the relativist standpoint embrace individual, or culturally relative ethics. However, traditional Judaism posits a universal,

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<sup>440</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 278.

timeless ethic and morality and does not accept this moral relativism. We uphold a belief that there is an objective reality, and the truth is out there.

According to Judaism, if there is no God, then there really is no absolute right or wrong, there are simply subjective opinions. Without a doubt an atheist can have a concept of right and wrong and there are most definitely good people who do not believe in God, but without God all morality becomes subjective because it is merely one person's thought against another's. I think Hitler was bad, another person may think Hitler was good, but what would make him bad is that God said so. Feodor Dostoevsky writes that, "If there is no God, all is permitted."<sup>441</sup> Without God issuing a transcendent moral standard there can be no objective. While he argued against God based morality, Bertrand Russell conceded that, "I cannot see how to refute the argument for the subjectivity of ethical values, but I find myself incapable of believing that all that is wrong with wanton cruelty is that I don't like it."<sup>442</sup>

One of the Talmudic commentaries tells a story of a philosopher who asked Rabbi Reuven, "Who is the most hateful person in the world?" Rabbi Reuven responded that the most hateful person in the world is one who denies his or her creator because, "Honor your mother and father; you shall not murder...; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor...; behold, a person does not repudiate any of these laws until he [or she] repudiates the root of them [God]."<sup>443</sup>

Keeping in mind that the rudimentary incentive for loving others is to fulfill Hashem's command, there is incentive to help motivate us. In the Jerusalem Talmud, after Rabbi Akiva's statement that love your neighbor as yourself is the great principle of

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<sup>441</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 290.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

the Torah, another great sage, Ben Azai, states that the verse which teaches that humans are created in Hashem's image is an even greater principle. This is explained by the fact that love of one's fellow that is not motivated and nourished by the realization that all of humanity was created in Hashem's image is doomed to failure.<sup>443</sup> If not for this realization, why should someone love another person? According to Judaism, the primary importance of humanity is the fact that everyone is created in Hashem's image and must be respected accordingly.

Moreover, the Jewish people are compared to a human body. Each of us is one part of the body, and just as a foot needs the head to tell it to move, and the head needs the foot to take it where it wants to go, every Jew is equally important to our nation. All organs are interconnected in a way, and an infection in one effects all of the others. A person generally does not love one of their kidneys more than their liver. Likewise, every part of our nation deserves full love as we fulfill our universal mission as Jews. I have heard this analogy related to a car as well. The engine might be the most important part, but take out something very little and seemingly insignificant like the gas pedal, and you won't be able to go very far. Some people may be more powerful, compact, or beautiful, but we are all equally valuable and essential.

The whole Torah and unity of the Jewish people rides on the commandment to love our neighbor. This is because we must focus on fulfilling Hashem's will for spiritual reasons, namely because God needs us to do it, not for any material benefits that we may receive. "The basis and root purpose of the entire Torah is to elevate and exalt

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 19.

the soul high above the body, to [G-d], the source and root of all worlds.”<sup>445</sup> The soul is the basis for interpersonal relations as well as human-God relations. Once we can climb over the corporeal, material hurdles to loving each other, we will be able to fulfill the entire Torah in a similarly elevated manner.

Furthermore, if the purpose of the Torah is to reveal Hashem’s presence in the world, this can only be done if we are united through *ahavat yisrael*. The Zohar teaches that Hashem's presence only dwells in a place where there is unity.<sup>446</sup> To fulfill this mitzvah we must do anything possible to help a fellow Jew, and refrain from anything that would harm him or her.

We also have a commandment to love Hashem, and the concept of love of a fellow Jew points directly to love of Hashem. Inasmuch as Hashem is abstract and intangible, it may be difficult to develop such love. The Baal Shem Tov taught that the way to love Hashem is by loving a fellow Jew, who has "a part of G-d above."<sup>447</sup> As one learns to see themselves as a soul, one can increase his or her ability to relate to their source (Hashem).

### **Do or Feel?**

As we have seen, Judaism focuses on actions more than beliefs, “deed over creed” as they say. More than just an emotion, love is all about action. However, it is possible to fulfill the elementary levels of commandment with our thoughts as well. Thus, the commandment to love one’s fellows can be fulfilled at any moment, for instance by judging others favorably, or being happy for the fortune of others.<sup>448</sup> The difficulty lies in

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<sup>445</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 424.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>447</sup> Schneerson, Hayom Yom, 78.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

the fact that people are often too jealous of others to recognize their merits, so jealousy becomes a major impediment to loving others. It's hard to love others if we focus on their flaws, but if we can focus on their virtues, loving others is not so hard.

We saw the famous quote of Hillel, who summarized the entire Torah as "What you dislike, do not do to others." Many commentators search for an explanation of why he didn't just quote the verse on loving one's neighbor as Rabbi Akiva did. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz explained that this teaches us the important principle that simply feeling love for another is not sufficient. We must have a love that motivates us to do positive things for others, while refraining from anything that would cause pain.<sup>449</sup>

Obviously just thinking nice things or praying on behalf of others is far from the most we can do for others, but it is a start. For example, one way to pray for the fortune of others may be fulfilled when an ambulance is seen speeding down the road, to hope that it is successful, and gets to its destination on time. Clearly however, if one doesn't get out of the way of the ambulance, his or her prayer doesn't do much good. Just hoping for the best is often not enough, but when possible positive actions are most significant. We have seen that Rabbi Akiva said to love others, while Hillel earlier taught us not to act badly towards others. The minimum level of observance is simply abstaining from doing something wrong; a higher level is pro-active good work. The commandment to love Jews is also a starting point to bring about a complete inner unity for all of humanity.

### **Ethnocentric?**

It is true that Torah observance can somewhat cloister or isolate a Jew from non-Jewish neighbors. However, this social isolation is specifically intended for Jews to

remain true to our mission of helping the entire world. The primary focus on loving a fellow Jew is not a bad thing as long as it does not come at the expense of a person who is not Jewish.

There is a lesson from the Torah that underscores this idea. The Torah lists the stork as one of the non-kosher birds.<sup>450</sup> The word for stork in Hebrew is "*Chasida*." According to the Talmud, this name was given to the *Chasida* because it acts with kindness (*Chesed*) towards its friends.<sup>451</sup> However, this idea becomes problematic because Maimonides has stated that the birds enumerated as unkosher in this section are rendered such because of their trait of cruelty. How could a bird named after its characteristic of kindness be rendered non-kosher due to its trait of cruelty?

Reb Yitzchak Meir, founder of Ger Chassidism, provides an enlightening answer. The problem with the stork is that it does favors exclusively for its friends. Due to the fact that it never does anything nice for strangers it falls into this category of cruel non-kosher animals. The lesson is that total kindness must be done for all, Jew or non-Jew, friend or enemy, and not restrictively for those whom one is close with.<sup>452</sup>

*Ahavat yisrael* is the starting point in learning how to show love for every individual. Prager holds that people who don't take care of their own, don't take care of anyone else.<sup>453</sup> Prager gives many examples for this claim, such as the fact that the Soviet Union was primarily mistrusted by other nations because they treated their own citizens horrifically. If a person is to be trusted to care for others, they must first take care of their own.

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<sup>449</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 281.

<sup>450</sup> Leviticus 11:19

<sup>451</sup> Talmud Chulin, 63a.

<sup>452</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 229.

Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I?"<sup>454</sup> The requirement to love a fellow Jew is only provincial if one never takes care of anyone else. The hope is that the person who becomes accustomed to helping others will more likely be willing and able to help another in their time of need. We are thus commanded to love our neighbors because it is easier to engage in lofty sentiments about all of humankind than it is to show loving behavior toward the person next door, imperfect as they may be.<sup>455</sup> While a person can profess love for impoverished people around the world, it's much harder to actually love people who we interact with daily. If we can take care of our own, we will then be able to care for others as much as possible. Jewish law only stresses loving neighbors initially, but the responsibility gradually spreads out and indeed one must eventually love all of humanity.

Finally, it may be important to remember that indiscriminate love is not always right. We do indeed have to love all people equally, but we also may not ignore injustice. Prager feels that acting equally lovingly towards all can sometimes be immoral, "Anyone who acts with equal love towards torturers and their victims is rewarding evil."<sup>456</sup> The problem with this, argues Prager, is that those who love Hitler, for example, are less likely to fight him. Kindness or justice may in fact be higher values than love, with love simply being the means to these ends.

The point is to keep love and good deeds at the forefront of our minds and at least encounter everyone with good intentions. Former Israeli Chief Rabbi, Abraham Isaac Kook used to say, "According to the Talmud the second temple was destroyed because of

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<sup>453</sup> Prager, Think a Second Time, 184.

<sup>454</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 1:14/43.

<sup>455</sup> Telushkin, Biblical Literacy, 466.

<sup>456</sup> Prager, Think a Second Time, 221.

causeless hatred within the Jewish community. Perhaps it will be rebuilt through causeless love."<sup>457</sup> The principle that underscored his actions, and should for ours as well, was that it is better to, "Err seriously through unjustified love than through unjustified hate."<sup>458</sup>

### **Rebuke**

Love is far more than just a lack of fighting, it involves working together, collaborating, and advising. The midrash says that, "Love unaccompanied by criticism is not love...Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace."<sup>459</sup> Just before the commandment to love our neighbor, the Torah tells us, "You shall reprove your fellow and do not bear sin Because of him."<sup>460</sup> In addition to behaving lovingly towards others, there is a requirement to let them know when something that they are doing is incorrect. This is a very vital issue and while there are volumes written on this topic, a brief overview of the fine points is important.

The purpose for our requirement to admonish people is to keep peace.<sup>461</sup> If we approach people who wronged us, we can resolve the situation and not bear a grudge. Remaining silent when you are wronged just breeds hatred, and interestingly this commandment is right next to the commandment not to hate another.

The commandment to reprove one's fellow ends with the directive not to bear sin because of them. One of the explanations for this detail is that although it is required to correct wrong doers, doing it the wrong way (i.e. embarrassing or angering them), will

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<sup>457</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 269.

<sup>458</sup> Simcha Raz, A Tzadik in our Time (Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1976), 462.

<sup>459</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 77.

<sup>460</sup> Leviticus 19:17, Stone Edition.

<sup>461</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 327.

cause you to sin rather than to improve them.<sup>462</sup> This is a great challenge, as the Talmud relates, "Rabbi Tarfon said, I wonder if there is anyone in this generation capable of accepting reproof..." Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azarya said: "I wonder whether there is anyone in this generation who knows how to reprove [without humiliating the one being criticized]."<sup>463</sup>

It is forbidden to correct someone if it will just make matters worse. If the other person will get defensive, and this will create tension and resentment it is no mitzvah to correct them. The bigger mitzvah in such a case would actually be to keep quiet, or find a more pleasant way of expression. Generally, we should rebuke others only if it will effect some improvement in their improper behavior. If there seems to be no chance that the rebuke will be effective, or perhaps might even be counter-effective, then most rabbis recommend silence.<sup>464</sup>

In addition to avoid hurting the person being rebuked, "Do not bear sin because of him" also means that we shouldn't be responsible for his or her sins. The Talmud says, whoever can stop the members of their household from committing a sin, but does not, is held responsible for the sins of their household. If they can stop the people of their city from sinning, but do not, they're held responsible for the sins of the people of their city. If they can stop the wrongdoing of the whole world, but do not, they are held responsible for the sins of the entire world.<sup>465</sup> Later the Talmud teaches that, "Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not admonish one another."<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Stone Chumash, 661.

<sup>463</sup> Talmud Arachin, 16b.

<sup>464</sup> Rabbi Alfred S. Cohen, "Protest Demonstrations," Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, (Spring 1993): 29.

<sup>465</sup> Schottenstien Talmud Shabbos, 54b.

<sup>466</sup> Schottenstien Talmud Shabbos, 119b.

The Chafetz Chaim explained that a person might meticulously observe of the dietary laws, yet be asked on their judgement day, “Why did you eat pork?” When the person explains how strict of a kashrut observer they were, they will be told, “But you knew that other Jews were eating pork. Why didn’t you do anything about it?”<sup>467</sup>

One should not remain silent if his or her silence can be mistaken for agreement. Sforno comments on Numbers 30:15 that when a person has the ability to protest something, yet remains silent, their silence is akin to verbal consent.<sup>468</sup> There is an obligation to speak up upon seeing immoral behavior, like if we see someone drunk, we shouldn't let him or her drive.<sup>469</sup>

### **Why?**

On top of the fact that if one is able to correct someone but does not, he or she becomes accountable for his or her wrongdoings.<sup>470</sup> When one corrects another, if the person does improve their ways, all of their subsequent mitzvot are accounted to both the advisor and the doer.<sup>471</sup> Moreover, by reproving others a person can be saved from committing the same transgression because they won’t want to feel like a hypocrite.<sup>472</sup> In addition to bearing love towards others, rebuke helps ourselves by focusing on certain mitzvot, not incurring the guilt of our neighbor's transgressions, and creating a peaceful society.

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<sup>467</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 287.

<sup>468</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 366.

<sup>469</sup> Telushkin, , 463.

<sup>470</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 286.

## How

There are many approaches to looking out for others and a person's personality is the foremost determinant in how each individual carries this out; but rebuke must be done in a gentle, harmonious manner, and in private.<sup>473</sup> One must make sure not to let anger get in the way, because the goal of rebuke is to correct a person, not to get even with them.<sup>474</sup> When rebuke is not done painlessly or lovingly it can often cause more harm than good.<sup>475</sup> According to our sages, only words that come from the heart will enter the heart.<sup>476</sup> Rebuke should only be done when it can be done with care. Technically, if someone is not capable of admonishing others in a pleasant tone of voice, they are exempt from the obligation to deliver reproof.<sup>477</sup> In most cases, if one is unable to rebuke another, he or she should simply refer it to someone who can.<sup>478</sup> Furthermore, the Talmud directs us to correct our own faults before we correct others.<sup>479</sup>

The Talmud says that it is better for a person to realize the truth for themselves, than to have it beaten into them with 100 lashes.<sup>480</sup> The Hebrew word for this concept is *toch'acha*, which comes from the word *hoch'acha*, meaning, "proof." This is because the only way to convince anyone of anything is by way of a clear and obvious proof, not harsh rebuke or debate.

Giving *tochacha* does not mean criticizing, throwing rocks, or shouting. Real *toch'acha* is demonstrating through action and example. We shouldn't blame others if

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>473</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 328.

<sup>474</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 85.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>476</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 274.

<sup>477</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 285.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>479</sup> Talmud Baba Metzia, 107b.

they don't appreciate Torah observance. If we were truly projecting the beauty of Torah, then it's truth should be clear without any arguments or conflicts. Indeed, the Talmud says that Moses was able to instruct the people only because he exemplified what he preached.

The mishna says, "Be among the disciples of Aaron: Love peace, pursue peace, love people and bring them close to Torah."<sup>481</sup> The commentaries explain that Aaron did not bring people to Torah with harsh admonishment or threats of divine punishment, but through gentle, pleasant words, showing respect and esteem for all people.<sup>482</sup> Even if Aaron encountered a person considered wicked, he would greet him or her and inquire into to his or her well being as though he or she was his best friend. Thus, when such a person wanted to do something wrong, they would remember Aaron's respect and realize that they would not be able to face him if they continued to do wrong.<sup>483</sup> This is the way Aaron, a true role model, kept his fellows observing the Torah.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak writes that the best way to correct people is to convince them of their spiritual worth and how important their deeds are in Hashem's eyes.<sup>484</sup> Proverbs 9:8 says, "Do not chastise a fool, lest he hate you; chastise a wise man and he will love you." One of the commentaries on this verse teaches a great principle that when you approach one of your peers to rebuke him or her, do not shame, degrade, or insult them, because it will only cause him or her to hate or reject you. Obviously a person should try to be effective as well as loving. They should appeal to the person's sense of pride and try to elevate their self-esteem by informing him or her that such behavior does

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<sup>480</sup> Shcottenstien Talmud Berachos, 7a.

<sup>481</sup> Pirkei Avos, 1:12.

<sup>482</sup> Torah Anthology, 46.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

not become them, or it is beneath their dignity, and that they are too good and intelligent for it.<sup>485</sup>

Along similar lines, the Chafetz Chaim taught a very important lesson based on the obligation to rebuke. When helping a person improve, we should stress the benefits of doing better, not the disadvantages of lack of observance.<sup>486</sup> It is always better to stress the positive rather than the negative. When working at summer camps, I was taught to motivate children with positive reinforcement and rewards, rather than threatening them with punishments.

### **When**

Although patience is a virtue when correcting anyone,<sup>487</sup> if the sin is in public they must be corrected immediately to avoid a hillul Hashem.<sup>488</sup> If Jews are transgressing because they don't know that what they are doing is wrong, then it may be proper to tell them so in order to guide them on the proper path.<sup>489</sup> Even if a Jew is deliberately transgressing Torah law, we have the mitzvah of reproof.<sup>490</sup> However, one should not criticize the actions of people when they act out of a belief that their behavior is acceptable since that is the tradition they were brought up with. Furthermore, other observant Jews who have different customs need not be corrected, even if one thinks they are wrong. A group of people who are accustomed to violate a particular law most likely

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<sup>484</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, Reaching Out (New York, NY: NCSY/Orthodox Union, 1997), 28.

<sup>485</sup> Shapira, Students Obligation, 22.

<sup>486</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 277.

<sup>487</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 432.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, .283.

<sup>489</sup> Cohen, "Protest Demonstrations," 28.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*

will not heed our advice. We are therefore not required to rebuke them as long as it is not an explicit Torah law.<sup>491</sup>

Some observant Jews justify protesting against disobedience to Torah, not to change a person, but to protect our heritage from total disregard and oblivion in the public mind. In such cases, protests serve to keep the Torah from being trampled on and forgotten without at least some objection to remind the public what the Torah view is, and that halacha has not been repealed due to neglect. Here the objective is the honor of the Torah, not necessarily to bring about repentance.

However, on a college campus protesting an event is rarely, if ever, a good idea, mainly because it will almost certainly cause more harm than good. Of course, we have mentioned that silence is akin to consent, and that we have an obligation to oppose evil. However, with regard to other Jewish groups who simply practice Judaism differently than us, or believe different things, while we may need to make it clear that we don't fully agree with them, protesting against them won't change anything. As for anti-Semitism, we will get to that soon.

As a joke, my roommates think it is funny to dress up as the Christian Coalition and go around town on Halloween with a bullhorn and picket signs protesting this, "pagan, heathen, sinful day." So far, they have not convinced anyone not to go trick or treating, but they have come home with bruises and broken placards. There are probably some folks in Monterey who dress up for Halloween just to spite these guys!

With regard to rebuking an entire group, the Shulchan Aruch maintains that if one seems willing to accept rebuke, they should be reminded until they change. If there is a

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<sup>491</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 290.

group that is not accepting of rebuke, it is better to keep silent if they will not listen.<sup>492</sup>

The Shulchan Aruch haRav, however, rules that one should not rebuke a whole group, but rather individuals in private.<sup>493</sup> Either way, one must be careful not to shame any person whether it is public or private.

There are many instances when we do not need to correct others. Many commentators say that if we can forgive a person without rebuking them, then we don't have to bother with the rebuke.<sup>494</sup> Additionally, if people unintentionally commit a transgression that is not explicitly stated in the Torah, and we are certain that they will not heed our rebuke then we need not rebuke them.<sup>495</sup> It is better for a person to do an aveira unintentionally, without knowing that it is wrong, than to deliberately do an aveira while knowing that they are doing wrong.<sup>496</sup> If one is sure that they will not accept it, it is better to remain silent, so they will mistakenly transgress, rather than intentionally.<sup>497</sup>

The goal is not to stand up for religion, but to suggest out of care for people that they may be doing the wrong thing, and perhaps they might want to improve. We are thus not required to correct people who are not interested. Indeed, there is really no requirement of rebuke unless the person is observant to begin with.<sup>498</sup> If rebuking someone will endanger you, or lead the person to hate you, you are exempt from the obligation.<sup>499</sup> The entire concept of rebuke pertains only to, "A Jew who believes [in the Torah] but his yetzer hara gets the best of him" and only if such a person might repent

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<sup>492</sup> Cohen, "Protest Demonstrations," 28.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 328.

<sup>495</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 288.

<sup>496</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Bava Basra, 60b.

<sup>497</sup> Cohen, "Protest Demonstrations," 28.

<sup>498</sup> Pliskin, Love Your Neighbor, 289.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 291.

when rebuked for his or her behavior.<sup>500</sup> Thus, we only really have to rebuke someone if they are strictly observant, may likely accept constructive criticism at some point, and they must be a person that one is familiar and friendly with.<sup>501</sup>

### **Pluralism**

If there is a sizeable Jewish community on one's campus, they will most likely face issues of pluralism, and often for the first time. If a person is one of the few strictly observant Jews on campus they will often be asked to come to various events and represent the "traditional" point of view. On the other hand, if there are many very observant Jews on campus, they often coagulate into small withdrawn religious cliques. Not only does this make the strictly observant Jews look elitist, but avoidance is the antithesis of *ahavat yisrael*. How does one integrate and deal with Jewish events that may not meet their standards of being authentically Jewish, or even violate halacha? To be honest, I don't know, it's very hard, but I have a few ideas that may help a person figure out how they are going to approach such situations.

First of all, is Judaism pluralistic? Some say that there is only one authentic way to be Jewish, and no other way but strict observance can be accepted, or have any claim at the "Truth." However, we can clearly see that Judaism is very pluralistic. There are Eastern-European traditions, Middle Eastern, Spanish, Chassidic, Yeshivish, and the list goes on. There are also dozens of very different commentaries on every verse of the Torah. All of these different ways differ in some customs or manners but basically have the same binding laws and fundamental beliefs. Thus, there is clearly more than one

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<sup>500</sup> Cohen, "Protest Demonstrations," 29.

<sup>501</sup> Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, *Jewish Outreach* (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1990), 13.

legitimate way to approach Torah. Judaism is very pluralistic, but within certain limits and perimeters. The trick is knowing how far one can go.

Even when we disagree about the way people practice Judaism, the most important principle to keep in mind is *ahavat yisrael*. The Talmud records that the school of Shammai had a dispute with the school of Hillel for three years. Both schools asserted that the Halacha was in accordance with their own view. A heavenly voice then announced that the utterances of both are, “The words of the living God, but the halacha is in agreement with the rulings of the school of Hillel.” Since they are both words of the living God, what entitled Hillel to have the halacha fixed in agreement with their rulings? “Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of the school of Shammai.”<sup>502</sup>

When Jewish campus groups present functions that do not acquiesce with halacha, each of the events has to be dealt with individually; there is no uniform answer for all examples in this broad category. One example is participating in campus events run by a Reform rabbi, which is a great opportunity to demonstrate unity and *ahavat yisrael*, assuming that the event itself is not totally unacceptable. However, a person must make sure that they are there to demonstrate love and unity, and not just to debate. A policy that one may choose to adopt would be to participate in those events that are more cultural in nature, rather than religious. A person should go out of their way to do whatever they can for another Jew, without clashing with traditional law. A person must pleasantly explain that he or she doesn't agree with them on an issue or two, but still loves and respects them very much for who they are. Up front, respectful yet

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<sup>502</sup> Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud Eruvin (London Eng: Soncino Press, 1990), 13b.

unadulterated honesty is the best policy. Life is much easier when we let people know what we are not comfortable with, and what can and can not be done.

It is important to keep in mind that division between Jews is a family dispute. Like any family going through strife, solutions based on love and loyalty need to be found. We may disagree on many things, but we are “all in the family” regardless. Further, there are many things that we do agree on which can form a starting point for healing. When interacting with other Jews, we must stay completely true to our principles, while also being open and holding the principle of *ahavat yisrael* as absolutely primary.

### **Unity**

The unity of the Jewish people is of fundamental importance and must be maintained as dynamically and lovingly as possible. The commentaries on the verse to love our neighbor explain that we should always keep in mind the other person’s feelings, and show love for them based on how they need or want it. Even if you would not mind if someone did something to you, it must not be done to someone who would be bothered by it.<sup>503</sup>

Disagreement is to be expected. There is an old adage that anytime you have three Jews, you will have four opinions. That is okay, in fact it is good! Dorothy Parker puts it well, "If two people agree, one of them is unnecessary."<sup>504</sup> We shouldn’t look down on others, but learn from them.

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<sup>503</sup> Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, 302.

<sup>504</sup> Braverman, *Bible for Clueless but Curious*, 168.

We may be able to judge actions, but not people. The Talmud notes that we never know which person's blood is redder.<sup>505</sup> "Even the soul of an uncultured and completely illiterate person shines the light of the sanctity of sabbath," say the kaballists.<sup>506</sup> The Talmud reminds us that even, "the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds."<sup>507</sup> We have to remember how deeply important each person is, and treat them accordingly.

The Hebrew word for life-*chaim*, is spelled with two of the letters *yud* to teach us that life requires equality and unity. Two yuds also spells Hashem's name, because the divine presence rests only where there is unity.<sup>508</sup> The other two letters Ch\_\_M spells, *Cham*-warm, because we have to treat each other warmly. If you like uncovering hidden words like this, look at the word for peace, *shalom*. "*Shalom*" comes from the word *shalaim*, meaning completeness, or wholeness. If we want peace with others, we first need inner completeness.

The Jerusalem Talmud says that, "one who is involved with the needs of the community is the same as one who is involved in Torah."<sup>509</sup> We have also been taught that when a person partakes in the suffering of their community, he or she will merit seeing its consolation.<sup>510</sup> Maintaining very different opinions and unity amongst the Jewish people is a tempestuous challenge, but this struggle can lead to a beautiful symphony of people and ideas.

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<sup>505</sup> Schottenstien Edition Talmud Bavli Pesachim Vol.I, (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1997), 25b.

<sup>506</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya , 699.

<sup>507</sup> Soncino Talmud Eruvin, 19a.

<sup>508</sup> Zalman, Lessons in Tanya, 425.

<sup>509</sup> Brauner, Being Jewish in a Gentile World, 167.

<sup>510</sup> Torah Anthology, 79-80.

*Kiruv*

Although Judaism does not advocate proselytizing non-Jews to become Jewish,<sup>511</sup> bringing less observant Jews closer to Jewish tradition is considered to be very positive. According to the Vilna Gaon, the most profound expression of our love for others is, "Bringing them close to the Torah."<sup>512</sup> This is done through acting lovingly, being a good example, and sharing, but not by being forceful or overbearing at all.

Like the Lubavitcher Rebbe, noted earlier, Reb Moshe Feinstein uses Moses as an example in caring for others. Reb Feinstein's ideal is that Jews should always be engaged in Torah study, like Moses. Reb Feinstein explains that this is why Moses was reluctant to take on leadership of the Jewish people, it would take away from his time for Torah study. However, because there was no one else to accept the responsibility, Moses took charge. Likewise, explain Reb Feinstein, we are in a crisis, we people must do all they can, even if it means sacrificing some of their Torah study time.<sup>513</sup>

In addition to our responsibility for our neighbors, reaching out can be good for a person's own spiritual survival as well. The Lubavitcher Rebbe taught that if people wish to simply strengthen themselves inwardly, so as not to be influenced by their surroundings, they're strengthening will be incomplete because if they ever relax their self-control they will yield their status. Likewise, if a person completely separates themselves from their surroundings, they have succeeded in avoiding temptation, but are still prone to failure if they are forced to face challenges head-on. According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, if a person wants the best results, they should seek to positively

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<sup>511</sup> Schottenstien Edition Talmud Bavli Yevamos Vol.II, (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1999), 47a.

<sup>512</sup> Kaplan, Reaching Out, 5.

<sup>513</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, Reaching Out, 63.

influence their environment, rather than being influenced by it. This way they not only avoid dangers, but deal with, and remove them.<sup>514</sup>

Most Jews today are not strictly observant and low birthrates, intermarriage, and assimilation have caused many Jewish leaders to tremble about the future of Judaism. On top of that, more than the obligation to love our neighbor, there are many charges throughout Jewish texts to reach out to our fellow Jews who are less observant.

Due to the crisis like situation people are instructed to do anything they can do to help. If someone knows one simple thing, they should teach it, and let people know that that's all they know and they should seek guidance for further information.

We do indeed have the obligation to share our knowledge, but we must be careful about our attitude. The name that this movement has obtained is *kiruv rechokim*, “bringing close the far away [from Torah].” Yet who are we to say who is close, and who is far? Is anyone truly far? Is anyone really that close? Furthermore, before you proclaim that you know what is best for others, you should be sure that you know what is right for yourself!

The main point is that a college student should not be on a “kiruv” mission, there are plenty of organizations and individuals who specialize in that. A strictly observant Jewish college student should just be there for other Jews (or anyone else) if they need it, refer them to others, be a living example and kiddush Hashem, and display complete *ahavat yisrael*. “Kiruv” is a good thing, but when a person is in a difficult environment, like college, “inreach” is more important than “outreach.” Teaching is good because teachers often learn a lot from their students and just through teaching the material.

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<sup>514</sup> Rabbi Jonathon Sacks, Ph.D. Torah Studies (London, Eng: Lubavitch Foundation, 1986), 24.

However, I don't think that a college student should set specific time for kiruv, they should just be the best Jew that they can be.

If a person does spend time doing "kiruv," they should keep in mind that Reb Moshe Feinstein limits it to 10% of one's time.<sup>515</sup> The mishna says that a person attains full strength at age thirty,<sup>516</sup> leading one of the commentaries to teach that until the age of thirty, one should study only in order to increase their own knowledge, and only once they have studied and strengthened themselves so much, should they begin teaching and guiding others.<sup>517</sup> This is obviously a major generalization, but the message is that it really takes a lot of maturity, knowledge, and foundation to help people who are less observant without negative results.

If a person is not good at what they are doing, going around and trying to convince people to be religious not only won't work, but can also be very destructive. *Kiruv* is very important but does not supersede halacha.<sup>518</sup> It is not okay to compromise halachic standards for the sake of kiruv.

### **Interfaith**

In addition to various cultures and types of Jews, colleges are often full of various religions, and there are often interfaith groups. Observant Jews sometimes find that they have more in common with religious people of different religions than they do with "non-observant" Jews. Even still, after many bad experiences I am generally skeptical about the value of joining interfaith groups and meetings. We obviously have to present a positive image in the eyes of the non-Jewish world, but I don't think that means we have

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<sup>515</sup> Kaplan, Reaching Out, 65.

<sup>516</sup> Pirkei Avos, 5:25.

<sup>517</sup> Pirkei Avos Treasury, 376.

<sup>518</sup> Neustadt, Weekly Halacha Discussion, 407.

to formally discuss religion with them. We're not out to convert them, and we certainly don't want to be converted by them, so the risk associated with such meetings generally outweighs the potential gain. It is certainly true that Jews have no monopoly on theological truth. However, these positive ideas may be much better received through books than through open discussions which could really lead anywhere.

The issue is primarily concerning unnecessary risk. Some explain that a person should focus on "inner faith" more than "interfaith." Interfaith meetings can often damage a person's religiosity. If one is not totally firm and committed in their inner faith, then there is no good reason to participate in interfaith.

Basically, if the council is for keeping peace between the diverse religious factions on campus, it is permissible. However, if it is just for religious and philosophical discussions, it is generally not recommended.

### **Multiculturalism**

This brings us to a concept that is very familiar and important to today's college students, "Multiculturalism." Going away to college grants us the opening to investigate different ideas and lifestyles, away from the fixed authority of family and friends. It has been said that, "We come to a University to find our place in the Universe. Nothing less."<sup>519</sup> College life is our opportunity to discover who we really are.

Multiculturalism sounds like a very good thing, but many rabbis tend to look down on it because they think that it really means multi-morality. Multiculturalism is seen as a threat to the uniqueness and influence of Judaism if it means that all cultures are of equal validity, value, and significance, with no culture being regarded as superior in

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<sup>519</sup> Matthew Fox, University of Creation Spirituality (1999). Online, Available: <http://www.creationspirituality.com/dmin.shtml>

any aspect. However, multiculturalism actually means that every culture has the right to exist distinct of each other. The rabbis should actually be more worried about a "melting pot" society in which Jews are forced to meld and mesh with every other culture. Multiculturalism is specifically that which allows us to remain as a distinct people within a diverse nation, and it is what we have to thank for allowing Judaism to flourish as it never has before.

Furthermore, after four years in an institution that prides itself in multiculturalism, I believe that multiculturalism simply means that every culture deserves equal respect and inquiry, but not control over my life. I have been taught that multiculturalism is simply awareness for and appreciation of diversity and different cultures, but not that I have to like them all equally.

Multicultural education is defined as, "Education involving two or more ethnic groups and designed to help participants clarify their own ethnic identity and appreciate that of others, reduce prejudice and stereotyping, and promote cultural pluralism and equal participation."<sup>520</sup> This can be very good for strictly observant Jews on many levels. First of all, we must recognize that there is too much prejudice within the traditional Jewish world. This is by absolutely no means to say that every strictly observant Jew is a bigot, but the amount of narrow-mindedness and prejudice that currently exists is too much. This fact must be acknowledged if any change is going to be made. The cause of this problem is most likely due to the isolation of the traditional Jewish community. It is only through interaction and education that this can be changed.

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<sup>520</sup> Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors, (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1995), 198.

In a university we are able to learn about different ways of life, and develop a mutual respect with them. I don't know where else I would have gotten the opportunity to learn about the Civil Rights Movement from an inspiring former leader of the Black Panthers, or about "El Movimiento" from a passionate Chicana feminists who was on the front lines. Multiculturalism truly creates an appreciation and respect for diversity that adds to the richness of life.

Multiculturalism also helps a person comprehend his or her own cultural identity in relation to others. Thus, another benefit of involvement in a diverse academic (as well as social) atmosphere is that it helps a person see where they fit into the world and society and locate where they can make a contribution. Exploration helps one to live intentionally, as opposed to being a Jew simply out of rote habit. The key to understanding one's self, and why one does what they do, is by listening to other people. The way to become your own, self created person with firm convictions is to critically examine and carefully consider your life in an open environment, not only through seclusion and constant study.

Facing the truths of what is out there is a huge part of growing up. Maria Cristina Gonzales, Ph.D., put it very well when she told me that, "multiculturalism challenges us as humans at the most sacred parts of our realities."<sup>521</sup> Going to college can lead to tensions between the opposite poles of one's inner life, and one's practical existence. This leads to a sort of schizoid split in one's personality. However, on an intellectual and even spiritual level, tensions can be a great source of growth and refinement because questions lead to answers, and problems lead to solutions.<sup>522</sup> In the words of a faculty

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<sup>521</sup> Interview by Author, Email, November 15, 2000.

<sup>522</sup> Lamm, Torah Umadda, 195.

member of my university, Dr. Ray Gonzales, "Multiculturalism and diversity beget creativity."<sup>523</sup> This is very important to the vitality of modern Judaism. I think it is no coincidence that possibly the greatest Jewish philosopher ever, Maimonides, lived among Muslims, not Jews.

Alan Dershowitz says that, "Our goal should be a self-sustaining Judaism that can thrive in the kind of open society in which most Jews want to spend their lives."<sup>524</sup> The truth is that if we were to just send strictly observant Jews out into the world unprepared, most would assimilate. The further one goes into a culturally integrated life, the higher the risk of assimilation and intermarriage. That is why it takes a lot of work, but unless we want to simply be unthinking fundamentalists, "The real challenge, and one from which we must not shrink, is to perpetuate a kind of Jewish life that will be *chosen* by our children and grandchildren from among the wide array of options they will be offered in the rich and diverse American lives they deserve to enjoy."<sup>525</sup> After all, "Jews are not supposed to be monks, we are supposed to be messengers. We are supposed to be a light unto the world."<sup>526</sup>

There are so many benefits to multicultural education. In the words of Norman Lamm, "The religious life does not abide in stagnation. It flourishes only when challenged, and if unchallenged it withers."<sup>527</sup> More than just challenges, interaction with other cultures can be good for a person's Judaism because the demand to explain it over and over again helps a person think about what they do, and search for deeper reasons. It can also be very rewarding to learn how to explain oneself. For instance, learning

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<sup>523</sup> Ray Gonzales, Ph. D, "One Man's View of Multiculturalism," Otter Realm, November 22, 1999, p.3.

<sup>524</sup> Dershowitz, The Vanishing American Jew, 15.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*

Spanish helps me explain concepts in the Hebrew language. Additionally, different people understand things in different ways, so while explaining concepts a Jew will really have to understand Judaism before they can give it over to various people. Furthermore, it is good that we are there to help educate people who are not Jewish to have increased respect and tolerance for Jewish practices.

The mishna instructs us, "Do not disregard anything. For...there is no thing that does not have [its] place."<sup>528</sup> Judaism is convinced that everything in the world does have some sort of value and purpose. There is something to be learned from everyone. In fact, the mishna characterizes a wise person as one who learns from every person.<sup>529</sup> The commentaries note that, "One who truly values wisdom will seek it wherever it can be found."<sup>530</sup> A person who desires knowledge will not refuse to learn from anyone, no matter what. "Willingness to learn from every person demonstrates a pursuit of wisdom that is spiritual in nature and not a means of self-aggrandizement."

The commentaries further explain that wisdom is not as much the quantity of one's knowledge as it is the thirst for wisdom. One who has a passion for wisdom is considered "wise," even though they are still acquiring knowledge, because the desire guarantees some further attainment of knowledge. Thus, "True wisdom is the appreciation of wisdom."<sup>531</sup> There are lessons bearing religious significance to be learned everywhere, and at all times.

It is very important for a person to strive for harmony with people who are different. The Torah states in Genesis 9:13, "I have set My Rainbow in the clouds, and it

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<sup>527</sup> Lamm, *Torah Umadda*, 213.

<sup>528</sup> *Torah Anthology*, 4:3/181.

<sup>529</sup> *Pirkei Avos*, 4:1.

<sup>530</sup> *Pirkei Avos treasury*, 209.

shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth." Based on one of the traditional understandings of this verse, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin says:

"The rainbow symbolizes peace and unity. A rainbow is made up of various colors and shades of colors and although they are very different from each other, they come together to make one entire whole. Similarly, people are very different from each other. They come from different national backgrounds, and they have different personalities. But if they will look at themselves as one unit there can be peace and harmony despite the differences between them. This is basic for the existence of the world and for the welfare of individuals. For this reason the rainbow is the symbol of the covenant between the Almighty and the Earth."<sup>532</sup>

Just because one person does not agree with another does not mean that he or she is not obligated to be pleasant and work together with them. Whenever a person sees a rainbow, or a picture of one, they should remember to work towards harmony with other people, even if they are very different.

While doing my research about the "Gamach" kindness programs and giving funds in Jewish tradition, I found similar mutual aid societies in every other culture that I looked into. This knowledge does not need to take away from my pride in being a Jew. On the contrary, this information gives me hope that people really do desire peace and goodness, and are in fact capable of great good. I am now confident that if I continue to do my part, in my (Jewish) way, I will not be alone in the struggle to 'goodify' the world.

In Genesis 15:5, Hashem tells Abraham to count the stars, which will be the number of His descendants. The Baal Shem Tov explains that people are in fact like stars

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>532</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 34-35.

because when we see others from far away, they seem to be just tiny specs. However, up close stars are actually gigantic and intricate worlds. Likewise, people may seem very small and insignificant, but every person is actually as enormous and great as the cosmos, and deserves to be respected accordingly.<sup>533</sup>

We have seen the opinion of Dennis Prager that, "Before you can be a universalist, you have to be a particularist."<sup>534</sup> Once a person has rooted themselves in their own group, they will be equipped to help and understand the entire world. Scholars point out that the people who have the most important things to say to the world are those primarily rooted in one particular group, like the Dali Lama or Mother Teresa.<sup>535</sup> One of the lessons of the *chassida* bird mentioned earlier in this chapter is that we need to be nice to all people, and while insular to a degree, not separatists.<sup>536</sup>

The Talmud says that a person should always, "Be yielding like a reed, and not unbending like a cedar-tree."<sup>537</sup> When I was taught this concept, it was explained to me that while most tolerance is really lack of knowledge, true tolerance is a skill that one develops after working on themselves. A reed has deep roots, it is firm and stays rooted although it swishes and moves with the breeze. A cedar-tree on the other hand stands erect at all times as if to say, "everyone must agree with me." People should evaluate their need to be "right" and to convince everyone else of their correctness. Rather than excluding other realities and experiences, allow them to be acknowledged as important and vital. The point is to be flexible yet rooted.

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<sup>533</sup> Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, 41.

<sup>534</sup> Prager, Think a Second Time, 186.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Bulka, Dimensions of Orthodox Judaism, 27.

<sup>537</sup> Schottenstein Talmud Taanis, 20a.

A person who has been immersed in one way of life and thought has a tremendous amount to offer the world, as well as insight to gain from others. We have already discussed that the "Ultra-Orthodox establishment" feels that it is improper and unsafe to send their children to college. However, the whole point of my project is that we can do it, and we should do it. If we are not prepared, as they say, it is their fault for not preparing us.

We've got to develop well-rounded Jews who are firmly entrenched in Torah while being able to explore the world, enjoy its bounty and add to its abundance. We have the technology to build the best space ships, and with our fortified and brave shuttles we can soar up and engage in all of the stars up close. It's very difficult to hold onto religious ideals and believe in a truth while embracing the values and ideals of others without being disrespectful. A Jew who desires to live a Jewish life according to strict adherence to Torah, and delve into the university atmosphere will be scouring between two often contradictory worlds. Still, it is precisely this conflict and tension that can produce a valuable cultivated resolution and clarification.



### **Anti-Semitism**

Baruch Hashem, (Thank God) Anti-Semitism is not a major issue for today's American Jewish college student. However, it is not completely absent. Of those who participated in my survey, 35% have encountered anti-Semitism on campus. Still, it is strictly observant Jews who tend to be very involved with Jewish life on campus, and

should thus think about how they would respond to any such incident. From my experience, I have no doubt that most non-Jews do not harbor anti-Semitic tendencies, even though many older Jews sometimes think they do. On the other hand, I do not completely reject the concern and need to be on the lookout, though not paranoid. Both over and underestimating hate can be dangerous, and I would simply like to provide some ideas for dealing with what really exists.

There are those who actually believe that a little anti-Semitism is good for Jews because it reminds them of their Jewishness, brings them together, and wakes people out of their “spiritual slumber.”<sup>538</sup> A statement has echoed throughout the Jewish community that, ‘The Jews survived 2000 years of persecution in Europe. It’s unclear whether they’ll survive 100 years of tolerance in America.’<sup>539</sup> That notwithstanding, I think that modern Jews need positive and inspiring Jewish reasons to be Jewish, because the world doesn’t force us into submission anymore.

The general rule is that if a person can respond to anti-Semitism, such as hate speech, in a convincing manner, then one is obligated to stop anti-Semitism because it is liable to build up and lead to violence. If it is just to fight back or get revenge, it is best to keep quiet and refrain from adding fuel to the fire.

What about hate speech: is it a hate action? A Holocaust survivor once said that, “The Holocaust did not begin with the building of the crematoria, and Hitler did not come to power with tanks and guns; it all began with uttering evil words, with defamation, with language and propaganda.”<sup>540</sup> In other words, the horrible massacre of millions of people and the violence that ravaged an entire generation can all be attributed to the malicious

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<sup>538</sup> Amsel, Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues, 14.

<sup>539</sup> Braverman, Bible for Clueless but Curious, 204.

hate speech that inspired a nation. To put the concept more succinctly, as Leon Da Modena said in the fifteenth century, “Words are guides to acts; the mouth makes the first move.”<sup>541</sup>

Critical Race theorist Charles Lawrence is convinced that hate speech does in fact lead to violence. Lawrence argues that due to the loss of dignity and the changes and limitations invoked in one’s behavior caused by hateful speech or messages, hate speech *is* hate conduct, “Racism is both 100% speech and it is 100% conduct.”<sup>542</sup> In fact, the Supreme Court, as quoted by Lawrence, holds that some words can, “by their very utterance inflict injury.”<sup>543</sup> From this we see that hate speech is a hateful action in and of itself, providing foundation for an obligation to respond to hate speech.

What ever happened to, “sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never harm me”? Most people are relieved to find out that an incident of racism was simply a graffiti message rather than a full scale lynching, for example. It can not be denied that the initial and up front effects of racist language are a lot less severe than a gunshot or beating (God forbid). Further, it could be argued that many hateful words are uttered without any intention of ever resulting in action. Consequently, some will argue that hate speech may be awful, but comparing it to hateful deeds is not fair.

Nevertheless because hate speech leads directly to the subordination of the group targeted, the speaker of such words bears a direct responsibility for violent actions encouraged by their words. Clearly, everyone also has free will and one’s choice to carry out a deed based on evil words they have heard is not without guilt. A person who acts

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<sup>540</sup> Heschel, Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, viii.

<sup>541</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 68.

<sup>542</sup> Crenshaw, Delgado, Lawrence, Matsuda. Words That Wound, (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 62.

out on hate speech is just as responsible for their deeds as the speaker is for initiating the misdeed.

It would seem clear that based on my position, everyone has an absolute responsibility to counter hate speech, because of the fact that it leads to harmful actions. However, what if a person knows that their opposition will not lead to any results? There is also the case of the more minor hate speech where rebuking the offender will not flower any result other than to publicly embarrass the speaker. Furthermore, there is the question of censorship. In America, freedom of speech is restricted in the case of “fighting words,” but this can be a very unclear definition, especially considering that often the response to hate speech is incumbent the moment it is uttered.

That notwithstanding, there are many powerful reasons to respond to hate speech with complete and mighty opposition. There is the significant fact that silence shows approval, and in the words of the critical race theorists, if we fail in our duty to counter all hate speech, “the victims of hate speech rightly assume that we are aligned with their oppressors.”<sup>543</sup> Thus, our response to hate speech *and even our lack of response* places us on one side or the other. Furthermore, there are those who believe that in many cases, if one does not speak out against an evil taking place, they hold part of the responsibility for the evil actions that they could have prevented. Thus, although there may be some questions like, “what if it won’t help?” or, “I’m not sure if I am the one to speak out” the obligation is equally incumbent upon everyone.

Another quote from the World War Two era will help to clarify. Reverend Martin Neimoller commented that, “First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out-

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>544</sup> Words that Wound, 86.

because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out-because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out-because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me-and there was no one left to speak for me.”<sup>545</sup> This powerful testimonial should serve as a reminder to everyone that as insignificant as they may feel, we all have a duty to speak out against injustice. If we do not protest, we may soon incur the ramifications of our complacency.

Specific answers on how we should respond to anti-Semitism, such as visible opposition, alternative events, or teach-ins, vary with each person and incident, but I would like to provide one general idea.

First of all, I don't think that anti-Semitism should be protested. If someone makes a major claim that all Jews have big noses, for instance, it wouldn't do much good to walk around campus with pictures of little nosed Jews to prove them wrong. Why should we even bother arguing with such people? The solution is not to educate others about what Jews really are (or are not), but to educate ourselves. Anti-Semitism actually should only motivate us to be better Jews.

The only way to truly defy anti-Semites is to learn more about our own heritage, delve deeper into our way of life, and invigorate the vitality that they wish to restrain. Instead of coming together to combat others, we should increase our gatherings to deal with real Jewish issues, like shabbat observance, kashrut, or reversing assimilation, to name just a few.

One example: Most students report that their university is extremely accepting of their need to miss class due to shabbat and holiday observance. However, some students

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<sup>545</sup> Telushkin, Jewish Wisdom, 536.

told me in my survey that their deans would not accept shabbat or holiday observance as a valid reason to miss class, although other students were allowed to miss class for various minor reasons. This may not be a major overt act of anti-Semitism, but it is a good example. Something definitely should be done to work towards the university allowing these students to miss class on such days.

However, I think that the primary response of the Jewish community should simply be to learn about the profundity and beauty of these days. We should come together on shabbat and holidays to share in their joy and blessing, and learn about, and discuss them in creative ways, spreading the wisdom of their greatness to other Jews. In my opinion, this will ultimately be much more effective than labeling the dean a racist, or spreading vicious rumors about him or her while trying to get him or her fired. Fighting darkness with darkness only breeds darkness. Seriously, I think that the best way to “fight” darkness is to add some light to the world, and like they say, a little light can dispel much darkness.

*The end, I'm done, I'm going home (finally) whoopee! Good luck, have a nice  
life! Bye*

## Conclusion

Okay, I guess I gotta write one of these real quick. I wanted to avoid writing a conclusion because I don't want to make any conclusions for you. The purpose of this project is really just to give you some things to think about. This document may have set high standards, but it is told that a Jew once went to his rebbe, who asked him what his goal in life was. The Jew said, "To be a good Jew." The Rebbe shook his head and said, "If you aspire to be a great tzaddik [saint], perhaps you will ultimately become a good Jew. If all you aspire to be is a good Jew, you may fall short of that."<sup>546</sup> One should aspire to go even beyond their goals.

Don't fret, anything the Torah demands is in our grasp. In the words of Rebbe Nachmen of Breslov, "Always remember: you are never given an obstacle you can not overcome."<sup>547</sup> Proverbs 24:16 says that although a holy person falls seven times, they always rise up. Despite the fact that one may frequently fail in their spiritual pursuits, he or she should not give up. Achieving greatness means not giving up, "Falling is not the sin, the sin is failing to try."<sup>548</sup> Don't fret, "When you plow, and you sow-things will grow."<sup>549</sup>

There is a fundamental Jewish belief that any money we will ever make has already been pre-determined. Yet so many Jews go to college and work very hard just to get a better job. Spirituality on the other hand is based on our effort, yet we sacrifice it for getting a better job! It is good to spend time focusing on maintenance and improvement of one's Judaism while at college. You are the key to your spiritual

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<sup>546</sup> Twerski, Lights Along the Way, 185.

<sup>547</sup> The Lonely Chair, 48.

<sup>548</sup> Rabbi Reuven Biala, Time for Torah, (Chicago, IL: Torah Action Publication, 1977), 8.

<sup>549</sup> Schneerson, Hayom Yom, 107.

survival, like Ari Goldman said when he entered the secular world, "I realized that the challenge to my Orthodoxy was not my job...but myself."<sup>550</sup>

During the time that the Greeks were in the land of Israel, the Jews were guilty of certain transgressions which resulted in defilement of the holy temple, death, and slavery in exile. Interestingly, the transgressions were: Fraternizing with the Greeks, studying their culture, profaning shabbat and holy days, eating non kosher food and neglecting Jewish family purity laws.<sup>551</sup> In other words, they did not make a kiddush Hashem, learn Torah, keep shabbat or kashrut, and they slighted the laws of forbidden relations. Sound familiar? (It is each one of the chapters of this essay).

People often lack wisdom and life experience when they are young and energetic. Once we begin to develop wisdom and understanding, we lose much of our spunk to make a difference with it. The solution is obviously to learn from the wise, while we are young. However, life really is the best teacher. The trick is, in my opinion, to seek guidance from the wise, and live life. This seems obvious but people would rather read a book and be comfortable, than to deal with the challenges, questions, and struggles of life. In order to gain depth, maturity, and wisdom a person must endure some pain. True growth does not come easily.

Your decision to go to college was in effect, a decision to grow. Yes, this means there will be struggles, but ultimately it is for the best. The mishna tells us, "According to the difficulty is the reward."<sup>552</sup> Based on that, I'll end with a story I heard in Israel:

After a delightful life, a cheery old man was walking in the clouds to his hearing on his "judgement day." While he was walking down the ethereal road, he felt what he

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<sup>550</sup> Ari L. Goldman, The Search for God at Harvard (New York, NY: Times Books, 1991), 202.

<sup>551</sup> Schneerson, Hayom Yom, 7.

thought was some sort of heavenly earthquake. The man looked back and saw a long row of huge cargo trucks heading his way. He flagged the first truck down and asked the driver was going. After all, the gas prices up there are sky high!

"As a matter of fact, I'm on my way to your heavenly tribunal." Responded the truck driver.

"Great!" exclaimed the cheery old man, "Do you think I could get a ride?"

The truck driver looked around and realized he didn't have a spare inch of room to give the man a ride, nor did any of the hundreds of trucks behind him. This information confused the old man, "What are you taking there anyway?" He inquired of the driver.

"I am taking all of your bad deeds, sorry buddy... Good luck, you'll need it!" The truck driver explained as he sped off.

After all of the huge trucks passed, the old man noticed a tiny car hopping down the road. The old man asked the tiny car to stop and questioned the driver as to where he was going.

"I'm on my way to your trial. Need a ride?"

The man hopped in and noticed that there was nothing but a small envelope in the back seat. When he was informed that this was the "caravan" taking all of his good deeds to the trial the old man almost fainted.

Once they arrived to the heavenly court, the huge scale had already been filled up with the old man's misdeeds; the small envelope tossed onto the side of the good deeds did not even make the slightest difference. This did not look good! Just then, the old

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<sup>552</sup> Pirkei Avos, 5:24.

man felt a great rumble and perceived another line of trucks heading towards the court. The trucks proceeded to pull up and unload their stock onto the side of the man's good deeds. When they finished, the scales where evenly balanced! The old man rushed over to one of the drivers to find out what that second load had been carrying. The trucker informed the man that they were carrying all of his difficulties in life. With a great sigh the man fell to his knees and cried out, "Oh God! Why didn't you give me more difficulties!!!"

It is based on this that I want to end. Your resolution to face the challenges and difficulties of the world head on is worthy of much admiration. I bless you that you *should* have many difficulties, and that through them you will rise to the challenge and turn yourself into the greatest, wisest, deepest, and most mature person that you can be, and together we shall rejoice!

***"Hazak V'Ameitz Libechah!" Be Strong and let your heart be Valiant!***

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