

Why would anyone wish to have such a terrible diagnosis? The answer is that this young woman feared taking on the challenges of life, and brain damage would have provided her with a lifetime of excellent excuses: "Stop trying to help me stay sober. It's too late - I am brain damaged!" As horrible a diagnosis as brain damage may be, for this young woman it had a redeeming feature: it would absolve her of responsibility. Knowing that one has talents and abilities makes one responsible to use them.

We have been informed that we have G-d-like attributes and that we are the children of G-d. It may be more comfortable for us to make believe this is not so, but we should not deny the truth. (Growing Each Day)

The Finger Bowl

Rabenu Yehiel of Paris was one of the *Baalei Tosafot* (commentaries on the *Gemara*). The king of France recognized his great wisdom, and appointed him his advisor. The ministers of the king were envious of his appointment, and plotted to prove to the king that Rabenu Yehiel did not respect him, and as a matter of fact despised him.

"Your Majesty," the foreign minister began, "Your new adviser seems to have found ill-deserved favor in the king's eyes. While he makes a great show of having the king's welfare in mind, he actually despises you. Why, if you were to touch his wine cup, he would refuse to drink it, as if it were offensive to drink something you touched."

The next day, the king invited Rabenu Yehiel to the palace at mealtime. He poured a goblet of wine and offered it to him. Rabenu Yehiel froze. How would he prove that he was unable to drink the wine because of the prohibition of *yayin nesech*, which forbids Jews to partake of wine handled by a non-Jew? The king would surely be offended. A quick glance around the table confirmed his suspicions. The smug look on the faces of the other ministers told him that this was a pre-planned test to prove his disloyalty to the king. Rabenu Yehiel calmly refused the outstretched goblet.

The meal continued. A few minutes later, the main course was served. As was the custom at the time, the king dipped his fingers into a finger bowl to cleanse them. This was the moment Rabenu Yehiel had been waiting for. He removed the bowl from the king's side, and to the great surprise of all present, drank the water in the bowl. The king's eyebrows shot up in surprise. Why was the Jew drinking the dirty water in his finger bowl?

"Dear king," he explained, "A few minutes ago, you offered me a cup of wine. The Torah prohibits me from drinking wine touched by a non-Jew. However, there is no prohibition in the Torah against drinking finger water, and you are so great in my eyes that it is an honor for me to drink the water with which you cleansed your hands."

It was now clear to the king that Rabenu Yehiel harbored no disrespect toward him. On the contrary, his loyalty and honorable conduct greatly exceeded the norm. Rabenu Yehiel's act earned him the affection of the king, who continued to honor him as before. (Brilliant Gems)

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בס"ד

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שַׁבָּת אַחֲרֵי מוֹת-קְדוֹשִׁים אֶת-חֲקֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת-חֲקֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ

Haftarah: Yehezkel 20:2-20

MAY 1-2, 2020 8 IYAR 5780

See enclosed sheet for full Shabbat schedule

Mabrook to Avraham & Elisheva Mizrahi on the birth of a baby boy. Mabrook to the grandparents, Mark & Aileen Mizrahi.

A Message from our Rabbi

”וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-חֻקֵי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי”

“You shall observe My decrees and My laws.” (Vayikra 18:5)

The *misvot* of the Torah are divided into two parts: laws (*mishpatim*) and decrees (*hukim*). Laws are those with logical reasons, like robbery, murder, and immorality. Decrees are those like *sha'atnez*, *parah adumah* and the laws of *kashrut*, which do not have a rational reason but must be honored because that is the will of the Creator. The verse above lists decrees first, implying that the reward for decrees is greater than the reward for the laws. The reason is that there is naturally a greater resistance to do something one does not understand, and it shows more subjugation to Hashem's will. (Rav Pam)

How should a person view acquiring positive character traits and avoiding improper ones? Should one, for example, consider the avoidance of anger a logical law or a decree without reason? It may seem that when one avoids anger he is fulfilling a logical law, because by doing so, one usually benefits by enjoying good physical and emotional health. He will not suffer the inevitable outgrowths of unbridled anger, like high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, etc. Rav Yisrael Salanter says (*Dirashot* entitled *Even Yisrael*) that all this may be true, but when a person is confronted by a situation that severely tests his temper, he will be hard pressed to control his anger.

The best way to overcome character deficiencies is to consider them as decrees without reason (*hukim*), which are required by the Creator. Hashem, as it were, despises character deficiencies, such as anger, and that is the sole reason to avoid them. Consequently, the *Gemara* (*Pesahim* 113b) teaches that there are three types of people who evoke Hashem's special love; one of them is a person who controls his temper. This is especially true in a situation where an outburst of anger would be understandable. Nonetheless, when a person considers it a *hok*, a Heavenly decree that

defies logic, it is more likely that he will be able to control his anger and reap the benefits both in this world and the next.

With such an attitude, the admittedly difficult task of *tikkun hamidot* (character improvement) will be considerably easier.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Reuven Semah

Fences

The last *pasuk* of *Parashat Aharei Mot* states: “You shall safeguard My charge that these abominable traditions that were done before you not be done, and not to make yourselves impure through them. I am Hashem, your G-d.” The *Talmud* derives the idea of making a fence around the Torah from this exhortation to “safeguard” the commandments (*Mishmeret l'mishmarti*).

If people would only observe the strict Biblical commandments and not observe the Rabbinical safeguards that were added later, we would not recognize what we now call “observant” Judaism. *Shabbat* observance is a totally different experience because of the Rabbinical enactments that “safeguard” the basic prohibitions of labor. The scope of virtually every area of *halachic* restriction that we practice has been greatly expanded by virtue of the principle of “make a safeguard for My charge.”

Sometimes a person may wonder whether the Rabbis did not go “too far.” We look at some “*D'Rabanans*” and say, “this sounds a little too farfetched; we would never make a mistake over here.” However, we need to understand that the Rabbis were extremely wise, and knew exactly what they were doing. Their basic intent many times was not so much concern with stopping a specific violation, as with creating a certain atmosphere. They were interested in establishing a pervasive attitude. There are prohibitions against eating food prepared (under certain circumstances) by a non-Jew and of drinking wine that is so much as touched (under certain circumstances) by a non-Jew. The rationale behind all of these Rabbinic prohibitions is “lest we come to intermarry with them.”

A person can ask, if the food only contains Kosher ingredients and I take it into the confines of my own home, why should the fact that it happened to have been cooked by a non-Jew be any cause for concern that I might come to marry a non-Jewish woman?

The Rabbis were not worried that if someone ate something cooked by a non-Jew, they would immediately go out and marry that person. Rather, they were interested in creating an atmosphere that shouts to us “we need to remain separate.” Once we start breaking down the little things and start tampering with the atmosphere, we quickly reach the situation that we have today in the United States of America: over fifty percent intermarriage. We no longer have an atmosphere of separation.

The following is excerpted from a column by the rabbi of a Reform congregation in Miami, Florida:

“We think that intermarriage leads to assimilation, but it is the other way around. We marry people like ourselves. I know Rabbis are supposed to fight assimilation tooth and nail. But to be honest I am about as assimilated as you can get. Put me in a lineup of the average middle class *goy* and the only way you could tell us apart is to play a Jackie Mason tape and see who laughs. The truth is our kids don't intermarry. They marry people just like themselves. People who eat stone crabs marry people who eat stone crabs.”

The rabbi has it exactly right. People are simply marrying people exactly like themselves. The reason why a strictly religious person would not contemplate marrying a non-Jew (or vice-versa) is because they are so different. Those who follow the Rabbis' safeguards live in an environment totally different from that of the average

middle class American non-Jew. The groups are too different from each other, so they do not intermarry. It would be like marrying someone from a different planet. However, if someone eats like them and talks like them and dresses like them, then it is not intermarriage at all. It is marrying within one's own kind.

This all started because of an attitude that said, “so what if I eat food cooked by non-Jews? So what if I drink a cup of wine with them? It's kosher food! It's kosher wine!” Once one breaks down the “safeguard of My charge” then anything can happen.

Therefore, when we see Rabbinic decrees that sometimes strike us as being farfetched or even absurd, we need to step back and acknowledge that the Rabbis knew exactly what they were talking about. They wished to create an attitude and an atmosphere, as the Torah instructs: “Make a safeguard for My charge.”

Those who mock the concept of making safeguards should look at what is happening in the world. The alternative is readily present for us to painfully witness. People who eat stone crabs marry people who eat stone crabs. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

Wise Guy

Among the numerous Commandments in this week's Torah portion, 51 in all, is the *misvah* of *Tochacha* – to correct others when we see they've done something wrong (*Vayikra* 19:17). This is a challenging *misvah*, because it can only be fulfilled with one who is receptive to criticism. As human beings with a healthy sense of pride, we all find it difficult to accept rebuke, especially if it's uninvited. So how does one properly observe this commandment?

King Solomon writes in Proverbs 9:8, “Do not criticize the fool, lest he hate you. Critique the wise one, and he will love you.” The advice seems simple: offer criticism only to someone who welcomes it. A trademark of the wise is their openness to negative feedback.

However, Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz zt"l (known as the *Shla"h HaKadosh*, 1555-1630) offers a more profound reading of this proverb: Don't critique someone by calling him a fool. That will breed hatred and prove counterproductive. To help a person change, call him “wise.” When you've demonstrated your respect for him and how you hold him in high esteem, he will love you, and be willing to hear your constructive advice.

This applies to every person at every level. An approach that emphasizes the positive is always more likely to have positive results. May G-d give us the strength, and sensitivity, to perform this *misvah* correctly, and thereby introduce more people to His Torah and His Goodness. (Rabbi Mordechai Dixler)

Ethics of the Fathers

It is customary to study *Pirkei Abot* (Ethics of the Fathers) during the six weeks between Pesah and Shabuot, one chapter every Shabbat.

“חֲבֵהּ יְתֵרָה נִוְדַעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְמֵ”
“It is an extra measure of love that man was informed that he was created in G-d's image” (*Pirkei Abot* 3:18)

It is one thing to be gifted, and another thing to know that one is gifted. A woman who was admitted for treatment for alcoholism insisted on test after test to determine whether she had suffered brain damage because of her use of alcohol. When she could not be reassured, Dr. Twerski became suspicious that something was preventing her from accepting this reassurance. A long psychiatric interview revealed that this young woman wanted the test to prove that she indeed had sustained brain damage.