

Right after the Ten Commandments we learn about freedom. No Jew is supposed to be a slave. G-d said we are to be His servants no one else's. If a Jew ever says he wants to be a servant his ear is pierced. He is told you who heard the Ten Commandments, you who have heard, you are only to serve G-d. By wanting to become a slave you have shown that you do not really want to worship G-d. Only a free man can worship G-d because only he has the opportunity to choose. In Jewish law even a Sefer Torah can be sold to buy a person's freedom. Freedom is a very precious commodity. There are two types of freedom, freedom from and freedom of. Freedom of speaks of freedom as an absolute. Freedom of worship, freedom of the press. This type of freedom does not tell anybody what to do. It just says we must have freedom. There is another type of freedom called freedom from. Freedom from hunger, freedom from oppression, freedom from fear, freedom from tyranny. This type of freedom tells us what we must do. Unfortunately, there are many people who in their zeal for freedom from forget that we must have freedom of also. This is what happened in Iran. In their zeal for freedom from oppression, freedom from domination they did not hesitate to take away someone else's freedom. In the Jewish concept of things we do not want to defeat our enemies. What we want them to do is to bless us. This is what happened when Jacob had the encounter with Esau's guardian ange. Dawn broke and the angel said let me go. Jacob said he would only if he would bless him. We do not want to destroy anybody else's freedom. We do not want to say death to any group. We just want to live with them in peace, to bless them and have them bless us. This is a difficult thing. In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah. The question could be asked why did he have to go up and spend forty days on the mountain? G-d created the whole world

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in six days. This is to teach us that it is a lot easier to create physical things than to create human relationships. We can build beautiful buildings. We can build great industries but unless we learn the lessons of freedom of and freedom from we will only destroy them and ourselves.

The story about a man who loved golf. He went to heaven but they had no golf course. He heard from Gabriel that there was a golf course in hell. He then asked Gabriel if he could go to hell. He went down to hell and found the most beautiful golf course. The best he had ever seen. He then turned to one of the residents there and said, "Where is the golf club? I want to get busy". The resident looked at him and said, "There is not any. That's why this is hell". We seem to be doing the same things. We seem to be creating beautiful technologically superior environments but we are forgetting about interior relationships.

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One of the most perplexing problems in religion is the problem of fate. If we believe that everything is from G-d, how can we ever want to change our fate? We should accept whatever G-d gives us and never try to improve our condition. Recently someone came to me and said, "Rabbi, I know that I can get an artificial limb and learn to walk again but since G-d has decreed that I be without one leg, I have decided not to get an artificial limb". I looked at him incredulously and I said, paraphrasing the words of Rabbi Akiva, "Aren't you sometimes hungry?". The person answered, "Yes". I said, "If G-d made you hungry, why do you eat? Aren't you, also, changing your fate by eating?"

Eventually, I was able to convince him to go and get fitted for an artificial limb, but his question raised a whole slew of other questions with which we have to deal. To many thinkers of the modern world, religion is portrayed as a force against man's betterment. Religion, they claim, causes people to become passive and to accept any fate which they have been given. That's why Karl Marx called religion the opiate of the people. He was following Ludwig Feuerbach who claimed that the more power we give to G-d, the less we have left for man, that the more we extol G-d's love and kindness, the more we accentuate man's sinfulness. He operated on some sort of scarcity principle which states that the more power G-d has, the less we have, the more love G-d has, the less we have. This type of analysis might be true of other religions but it certainly is not true of Judaism.

We do not believe that we must accept things in life which we can change. We do not believe, as others do, that it is our purpose in life to bear crosses. It is true that we all suffer in life, but it is a sin to suffer if we do not have to suffer. Each of us is meant to be free and to live life to the fullest extent possible while discharging our responsibilities to man and G-d. In fact, the Talmud teaches us that we are actually going to be held accountable in the after life for not enjoying anything in this life which we could have enjoyed but which we failed to have enjoyed because we did not want to make the effort. In Judaism, we do not extol suffering. We extol simcha, joy.

Obviously, there are many things in life we just must accept like death, human limitations of time and space, inevitable frustrations, storms, earthquakes, etc., but there are many

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things which we can change and which we should change. We, in Judaism, believe in fate only after we have done everything possible to make sure that ~~the terrible things that~~ ^{what happened} ~~have occurred~~ ^{is} are not our fate. If we absolutely cannot do anything about it, only then must we accept it and even then we should still pray to G-d and never give up hope that someday it will be changed.

We would not even fully agree with the prayer which states "G-d give me the courage to change the things I can and to accept the things I cannot change and the knowledge to know the difference between these two cases". We are always to hope and to pray that even those things which we cannot change eventually will be changed. That is the meaning of the concept of the coming of the Messiah. When he comes things will be different. There will be no evil, neither physical evil like storms, death, pain nor moral evil, the evil we do to each other. There will be no death or pain. That is what we say in the Kaddish. "May He establish His kingdom speedily and soon and say ye amen." That is why mourners say the Kaddish because they are affirming in the midst of their grief that they are not giving up hope, that eventually they believe that pain, suffering, and even death will be overcome.

In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, which comes right after the Ten Commandments, we have many of these ideas spelled out. We are told Rapoh Yerapeh which means "heal thoroughly heal". G-d not only gives permission to physicians to heal, he commands them to heal. We are supposed to go to doctors. It is against Jewish law to even live in a city which does not have a doctor. We cannot say, "G-d made me sick, let Him cure me". We are G-d's junior partner in creation. G-d wants us to act. He wants us to do things in this world. Just as He wants us to feed ourselves, He wants us to take care of ourselves, to heal ourselves, to organize our society ourselves, and to live in peace with each other. G-d can intervene and He does intervene in history in very subtle ways, but He wants us to take the initiative. We all know, as modern science has taught us, that almost all the laws of science are probabilities and G-d can act without even seeming to act. He, though, wants us to act first. He does not want us to be resigned to our fate. In fact,

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Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotz used to say that all resignation and despair stem from ignorance. Resigning ourselves to our fate is actually one of the worst sins. The Rabbis teach us that G-d's presence cannot be felt where there is despair. Life can be very good and we should try to make it good. G-d's presence can only be felt where there is joy.

In this Torah portion we learn how a Jewish bondsman who refused to go free at the end of six years service had his ear pierced. No Jew should ever accept slavery. No Jew should ever be satisfied with that type of fate. We learn, too, how we are to organize society. We do not have to have a society in which murder is now the leading cause of teenage deaths. We are killing close to a thousand people a year in the Houston area. We do not have to accept this. Poverty is not inevitable. We are taught how we are to make provisions for the poor. We are not to say that it is G-d's will that I am rich and G-d's will that he is poor. If G-d did not want him to be poor and starve and suffer, He would not have made him that way. That is a false concept.

It is true that there are certain limits upon us, but it is equally true that if we band together we can overcome most of them. In this Torah portion, we also learn about the Covenant that G-d made with our people in which the people said, "We will do and we will understand". We all must act, ~~must do~~. We should never become resigned. Resignation does not bring understanding but action does. If we all band together to help each other, then we will be able to understand our problems and overcome many of them. After this Covenant, Moshe and Aron, Nadav and Avihu and seventy of the elders of Israel see a vision of G-d. G-d's presence comes to them because the people are united. They see, so to speak, under G-d's feet "a paved work of sapphires which was like the very heavens for clearness". There must have been millions of sapphires which were all placed together in a beautiful paved work. Each sapphire, of course, represents each of our potentialities. Each of us, by working together with others, can solve many of the problems which confront us. G-d has assured us that if we begin to act and if we act together, we will be able to enjoy the good life.

The 19th century philosophers were wrong, at least when they speak about Judaism, when they say that religion debilitates a people and causes them to forsake the knowledge and unity of purpose which will allow them to overcome many of their problems. G-d, in Judaism, tells us all "you work individually and together to solve as many problems as you possibly can and ^{then} ~~then~~ I will send the Messiah who will complete the job and solve the rest". ^H Let none of us ever despair and let us all do everything possible which allows us to lead a full and a good life. Let none of us ever say that it is G-d's will that we are to accept or ^{our} fate without ever trying to do anything about it.

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In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, we learn how when the Jewish people were presented with the Torah they said "all which G-d spoke we will do and we will understand". In the preceding Torah portion, Yisro, we learn how it says "and they answered all the people together and they said all which G-d spoke we will do". In this Torah portion, Yisro, it does not say "we will understand". It says "and they answered all the people together" while in the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, it does not mention the people together, it says "we will do and we will understand". According to the Rabbis there is a Midrash which says that before a person is born an angel teaches him the whole Torah and then right before he is born the angel taps him on the mouth and he forgets all the Torah he learned. It is now in the subconscious but he is not consciously aware of it. This, of course, explains how we can recognize what is truth. The Rabbis also tell us in the Zohar that man has two different kinds of understanding. He has a Ratzon Elyon and a Ratzon Tachton, a higher level of understanding and a lower level of understanding. When we come to make decisions, the real important decisions in life, we do it with our Ratzon Elyon which is mainly intuitive. When we come to choose a wife or career or faith or ideology we do not do it like a bookkeeper putting all the pluses on one side and the minuses on another. Then we would never get married. If there are 4 billion people in the world we would have to interview 2 billion of the opposite sex before we could make a choice. This, of course, we do not do. Our choices on the really great matters of this world we make intuitively. The secondary choices about whether I should take this route or that route to a city are determined by Ratzon Tachton. That's why the Jewish people said "we will do and we will understand". But how are we to know whether our intuitive insights are correct? Perhaps they are wrong. That's why the Rabbis say "we will do and we will see". If the results of your intuitive insights lead to evil then what you have done is wrong. We Jews do not speak too much about love. We speak about loving kindness because love can many times be destructive. The story of the French woman who, in order to prove her love for her second husband, threw her child from her first husband out a five-story window. That love is wrong. If love does not

result in loving kindness then that love is wrong. Also, do our intuitive grasps bring us closer? "And all the people answered together." They increased togetherness. If they do not they are wrong. One of the major problems today is that many people have lost faith in their Ratzon Elyon. They are using only their Ratzon Tachton. They are acting like bookkeepers. They say they do not know enough to make a commitment. People are not sticking to careers or getting married or having children because they say they are afraid and do not know enough. Especially the men are having a failure of nerve but they are ending up in the deadend. The Ratzon Tachton, the reasoning will, the purely deductive cannot bring people together and cannot even really give values in life. It only can manipulate values. We have a good message to give the world. Unfortunately, we are not being heard because the Ratzon Elyon is not being used. Families are important. Without family we cannot really grow and we need not despair because we suffer from frustration. Frustration is an inevitable part of life and nothing is perfect, but by concentrating only on frustration we become paralyzed and never recognize our true natures. The macho image does not result in happiness. It results in 1000 murders a year in Houston. We have to tell people what we have to offer. The story about the fellow who went broke. His friend asked him, "Why did you go bankrupt?" He said, "Too much advertising". The friend said, "But you never spent any money on advertising", and he said, "I know, but my competitor did". Sometimes because of our failure to advertise our ideas we have allowed false ideas to crop up. We have allowed the Ratzon Tachton to be supreme and not the Ratzon Elyon.

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In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, we have enunciated one of Judaism's basic messages, a message which is hard to put across in the modern world, a message which says that you must set limits in order to grow. In our day and age we believe in a society without limits. The worst crime a person could commit is to limit himself, to deny your potential. We are supposed to eat everything and see everything and do everything. To be limited in any way is wrong. In our day and age anybody who sets limits for himself is considered to do the worst possible thing. That's why marriage is in a lot of trouble because people do not want to limit themselves. They do not want to limit themselves to one partner. Judaism, of course, believes in stating messages not by talking about them but by practicing them. We believed in John Dewy's philosophy way before John Dewy. We believe your ideas are formed by what you do. Ideas follow practice. That's why kashruth and Shabbos teach us that there are limits. We cannot eat everything and do everything and have a full life. We can understand this very well by the modern concern for keeping our weight down. We know that if we eat everything without limits we know we will be fat. By becoming fat we are going to actually restrict our activities and not be able to live the kind of life we want. Our failure to set limits actually causes us to lead a more limited life. This is true in all aspects of life. In this Torah portion we learn how we are not to charge interest to the poor. By limiting ourselves we actually improve the economy. Many of the most successful Jewish businesses in America were formed by people who got a loan from the Hebrew Free Loan Society who took out a loan to get a horse to peddle their wares. Limiting ourselves actually allows us to grow. When the Torah was given on Mount Sinai there were two pre-conditions: one, that the people would have to be as one and, two, that they were limited. They could not go all the way up the mountain. Only Moshe was allowed to go all the way up the mountain. The Torah stresses that our limits are to allow us to grow closer to each other. When Moshe went up into the mountain it says that he went through Hosech, Av, and Arofel, three kinds of darkness. Moshe, by limiting himself, looked like he was going into darkness, one darker than the other, but when he emerged his face shown. We, too, when we limit ourselves actually grow. If we want to be a doctor we have to study hard. We have to limit ourselves to our studies.

We cannot do everything we want. We cannot decide that we are going to go to this place and do that thing, but we must concentrate on our studies. This does not mean that occasionally we cannot read a magazine or other literature, but our primary emphasis must be on our studies ten, twelve, sometimes more hours a day in class and application. The same thing applies to marriage. By limiting ourselves to one partner we actually grow. In life there are not too many different experiences. Our trick is to learn how to deepen the experiences we have and to make sure that our excesses do not limit us. We are to concentrate on deepening our experiences with each other in marriage. It does not mean that we cannot talk with other people or be with other people, but your whole focus of attention shifts. When a person gets married a person's loyalties change. A spouse's first loyalty is to the other spouse. All the other loyalties fit around. It is hard work and as Rodney Dangerfield once said when he told his wife that he was not getting older, he was getting better like wine. She agreed with him and locked him in the cellar. This, of course, is not what we mean but it is true that limiting yourself allows you to grow. So many people today are afraid of marriage because it will limit them. We know, though, that as Moshe, if you make the effort and although it may sometimes be hard and difficult you will end up, though, shiny and bright with your life illuminated.

