

Chapter 18

Why does this chapter start out with ? Usually this is only after a section which speaks about a matter that only G-d could know, if you were acting honestly for example, whether or not you gave bad advice or not. Nobody can know except you and G-d. Why, though, is this phrase mentioned here first? Also, why does it say that like the works of the Egyptian you shall not do, and like the Chukeem of the Canaanites you shall not do? It follows this by saying, My Judgements (Mishpotay) you shall do and My Chukeem you shall guard. The Hebrew word for guard here also can mean to esteem. When we referred to Egypt we didn't refer to Chukeem only when we referred to Canaan. Moshpoteem differ from Chukeem in that they are really accessible to reason and they are universal. Every society has laws against killing and stealing. They are easy to understand, but they are very hard to implement. Even cannibals say that you shouldn't kill, only certain people you can eat. Putting the so-called rational laws into practice is a very difficult thing. Therefore, the sentence says you shall do. When it comes to Chukeem they are not so readily understandable and they differ from group to group. These basically are the way we relate to G-d, to money and purpose in life. We are told to hold the Chukeem into high esteem because if we don't people will relate to the ultimate meaning of life through drugs, violent rites, terrible doctrines, etc. Don't treat kashrut, shabbos, etc. lightly because if you do other things will enter which do not elevate man but degrade him. We need both the social laws and the personal rituals in order to perfect the world. Unfortunately, in the West since the Middle Ages these two areas have been separated. It used to be thought that all that was needed was personal purity, monasteries were in vogue, etc. Forget about society concentrate on personal purity. Unfortunately, this idea leads to misery. Look at South America which skipped the reformation. There are no social programs. People literally starve and live in unspeakable conditions. Only military dictatorships can control the people. Also, unfortunately, today people in the West who are interested in social morality are not at all interested in personal purity. We, in Judaism, are commanded to be interested in both. We are not to be like the Egyptians who were personally pure but ran a terrible society. And we are not to be

like the Canaanites who ran a fair society but had not personal purity. Both courses lead to disaster. G-d is the author of both personal purity and social morality. And we are to follow both. Unfortunately, even in the United States we have this same dicotomy, those who are personally pure and not interested in social morality and those who are interested in social morality are not interested in personal purity. This means that we can't make intelligent choices. Each group has serious defects. I am reminded of the story about the man who turned to his wife right after his boy did something clever and he said, "Our boy inherited all his brains from me". "He must have", she said, "because I have all of mine". We must have both social morality and personal purity.

Arduer
No 3

Take your feelings getting away from you!

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Most of the serious problems that we have in life today have to do with our feelings and have to do with our not having our heads on straight. Thank goodness, in America at least, the problems of food, housing, and jobs, problems external to ourselves, have more or less been solved. Of course, in these areas things can still be improved, especially for the disadvantaged groups, but, basically, these problems have been taken care of. On the other hand, the problems that go on inside our heads are getting more and more severe as America liberates itself more and more from traditional attitudes.

As more and more emphasis is being put on feelings, people are having a harder and harder time dealing with their feelings. Today we are not urged to weigh and judge our feelings but ^{to} just act on them.

"Trust your feelings" has become a national slogan. Even supermarkets and department stores arrange their stock in such a way so that the average shopper will be enticed to do a lot of impulse buying. We have almost become a manic depressive society.

A manic depressive, of course, is a person who is mentally ill, a person who has great highs in which his or her feelings burst their bounds, and who feels that he or she can do everything and spend everything and be everything, only to be plunged a short while afterwards into the depths of despair and into feeling that he or she is not worth anything and cannot do anything. It is normal to have swings in feelings. ~~They~~ only difference between a normal person and a manic depressive is that a manic depressive's swings are much greater, and a manic depressive does not realize that his or ~~her~~ feelings are betraying him or ~~her~~. When feelings give him wrong signals he

doesn't desist but continues to rely on these feelings even though they fly in the face of reality.

One of the major problems of people today is that they expect to be on high^a all the time. The human body is subject to all sorts of rhythms and there are rhythms in feelings as well. Many marriages break up today for no real objective reason. They break up just because one of the partners or both of them do not feel like being married any more. Sometimes, too, certain episodes or needs or hurts or slights are blown up all out of proportion. These episodes, needs, or slights were real but, based upon the total relationship, they are really insignificant, but, because the parties do not know how to weigh or judge their feelings, divorce is inevitable.

The same thing applies in many other areas of life. People have a tendency to overreact. The highs and the lows of life catch them unawares. This is, of course, what we mean when we talk about experience. A person needs more than knowledge. He also needs experience. When a person comes upon a certain problem, he may have the knowledge to solve the problem, but the problem may overwhelm him because he cannot muster the necessary courage or concentration to solve it. An experienced person, one who has been through similar problems before, recognizes that he can solve this ^{problem} ~~one~~, too, because he has been through a problem like this before. He has the inner confidence not to panic. He has the courage, based upon previous experiences, to persevere and get the job done. A novice, though, even though he has the knowledge, will many times panic. This problem is new for him and, in the end,

the novice does not know if he can really solve it.

This is what happened to the Jewish people, too, when they left Egypt. After the Exodus when the Jewish people stood on the banks of the Red Sea after they had witnessed the destruction of the Egyptian army by the waters of the Red Sea, they were all filled with belief. Everything seemed wonderful and good. They had been the subject of a great deliverance. They all believed in G-d and Moshe, His servant. However, just three days later, when they could not find water to drink, the people murmured against Moshe. They were no longer people of great faith, and later on we learn that they even doubted whether G-d was among them or not. Great faith had given way to great doubt. Obviously, their feelings were swinging back and forth and affecting their perspective of G-d's presence. ~~Great faith had given way to great doubt.~~ The people did not know how to handle their feelings. They were slaves who had just come out of Egypt. They had no experience in dealing with life. The Torah had not been given to them yet. They did not know how to weigh or judge their feelings. They had no tradition to help them deal with their feelings. Great faith and great doubt vacillated.

Not everything in life is peaches and cream, not everything comes up roses. Life is filled with problems and defeats. We have to see G-d when we are low as well as when we are high, and sometimes the Jewish people have even found it harder to see G-d when they were riding high than when they were low. The same is true in any relationship between parents and children, between spouses, between friends, etc. Love and hate always interplay. We all know we cannot

always be either dependent or independent, that sometimes we have to be ~~either~~ dependent and sometimes independent. We all know that we need to be loved and to give love, and many times our desire to be, at the same time, dependent and independent and love and be ~~loved~~^{loving} conflict. This causes all our relationships to be love/hate relationships. We both love and hate our parents and love and hate our spouses and love and hate our friends. Mostly we love them, but sometimes when we feel overburdened, or when we feel we are not getting enough attention, or when we feel our spouses, children, parents, etc. are hurting our independence, hate feelings can come to the fore. They are passing and ephemeral, but if they are made too much of they can destroy a relationship.

It is hard to deal with our feelings. One of the strengths of Judaism has always been that we have a tradition, that we have stable institutions that allow us to handle our swings in feelings, the many ups and downs we all have. That's one of the beauties of Shabbos. It allows us to stop in the middle of our routine and to think about what is really important. It allows us to be with our family, to sing songs around the table, to eat a good meal, to exchange conversation. It gives us a pause so we can reflect on our feelings and judge them correctly. The Pesach Seder also has the same message. We are to feel the exhilaration of freedom, but not at the expense of our feelings of responsibility and compassion toward others.

In the Torah portion Achare Mos we have many of these ideas emphasized. We learn that the Jewish people were "not to do like the deeds of the land of Egypt...or like the deeds of the land of Canaan...you

shall observe My laws and My statutes which if a man will do he will live by them." The question is asked, why does the Torah have to specify both the deeds of the land of Egypt and the deeds of the land of Canaan? Why doesn't it just say, "You shall not do like the deeds of the other nations?" What was so special about Egypt, ~~and what was so special about~~ ^{and the land of} Canaan that they had to be singled out? The answer, to my mind, is because both these countries could not handle their feelings. Egypt was the land of depression. All its emphasis was on death. The pharaohs spent all their time building their mausoleums with slave labor: the pyramids. Egypt was overwhelmed by its feelings of mortality. It was a depressive and oppressive society. The people of the land of Canaan, on the other hand, were a manic society. Their society was obsessed with fantasies, with licentious, sexual orgies. They wanted always to be on ~~life's~~ ^{a perpetual} highs. They could not handle the fantasies of life.

The Torah is in effect telling us: Do not ~~go~~ ^{chase} either of these ~~paths~~ ^{paths}. ~~Do not~~ ^{Do not} swing from feelings of great depression to feelings of great exhilaration. Live life on an even keel. Do not let your feelings in either direction get away from you. We should be happy, and the Talmud commands us to be happy, but there is a limit to what we can do in order to be happy. Abusing our bodies with drugs or alcohol or sadistic sexual rites doesn't ~~lead~~ ^{lead} to happiness, ~~it~~ ^{it} only leads to sickness and disease. Life's joys and highs can best be felt within the paths that the Torah has laid out. Observe the laws of the Torah and you will live. A person who gives way to his fantasies does not live. He eventually ends up overwhelmed by great depression, fears, and dependencies.

The trouble with many people today is they are trying to simulate a manic depressive life style through means of drugs or other perversions. A manic depressive is a sick person. People who want to live this way want to be mentally ill. Our religion is very important. It allows us to weigh and judge our feelings. Without it our feelings can warp and destroy us. That's what we mean when we quote from the book of Proverbs everytime we put the Torah away. "The Torah is a tree of life to those who take hold of it, and happy are those who support it. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace."

Swings in feelings are natural. Giving way to these swings of feelings is not. The Jewish way of life is meant, in part, to allow us to cope with the swings in our feelings and allow us to maintain our emotional balance no matter what life throws our way. May each of us always have deep feelings, but may they never get out of hand and destroy us. Depression or frenzy are not happiness. They are sicknesses. Happiness comes from correctly weighing and judging our feelings.

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In the Torah portions Achare Mos and Kedosheem we have the ritual and moral law interspersed one with another. We do not have first the ritual law in one area and then the moral law in another area. We have them all interspersed. We learn about Yom Kippur in Achare Mos and then immediately we learn about sexual morality. In Kedosheem we learn about honoring our parents and then about Shabbos. Even the very famous line, "You should love your neighbor as yourself," is immediately following teaching us about Shmittah, how we are not to mix wool with flax together. Throughout the whole Torah portions we have mixed up the ritual laws about sacrifices with not oppressing our neighbor, not cursing the deaf for putting a stumbling block before the blind. Why should this be? Why is it that we have the moral law and the ritual law all intertwined? Why aren't they dealt with separately? What's more, in the Torah portion Achare Mos we learn, "Speak to the sons of Israel and you shall say to them, 'I am the Lord your G-d like the deeds of the land of Egypt which you lived in and which you should not do, and like the deeds of the land of Canaan which I am bringing you there you should not do, and in their statutes you shall not go, and My laws you shall do, and My statutes you should observe to live in them.'"

We have several questions here. One is, why does it say, "I am the Lord your G-d"? Usually the only time in the Torah when it says "I am the Lord your G-d" is when we are taught laws that only G-d, Himself, can know whether we are obeying. Only G-d can know whether we put a stumbling block before the blind. We can claim we did not do it on purpose. We did not know the person was blind, etc., but G-d knows in our hearts whether we meant to do what we did. I am reminded of the time that one of my friends felt that another one of my friends, a second friend, had stolen his girlfriend and had even married her, and he was itching to get revenge. My second friend who married the girl went to my first friend, who was a stockbroker, and

asked him if he could manage some money he received as an inheritance. The stockbroker friend immediately thought he could get his revenge by giving my second friend the worst advice he could think of, but the stock market is unpredictable and my friend made a million dollars. He was so grateful that he gave my first friend a cadillac. My first friend was filled with guilt and came to me pouring his heart out. We do not know, many times, whether the advice we are going to give is good or bad, but we do know our intentions, and G-d knows our intentions, too. Usually every time it says "I am the Lord your G-d it is to teach us that we are to have pure intentions, but, here, in this case, why does it say "I am the Lord your G-d"? We are not talking about any laws in which only G-d can know whether we have implied with them or not. And why does it say, "Like the deeds of the land of Egypt that you lived in you should not do, and like the deeds of the land of Canaan that I am bringing you there you should not do," and why does it say, "My laws you should do and My statutes you should observe"? Laws really have to do with the moral life. Laws we all understand. These are things which are good for society. Chukosai are statutes. They are things which really have to do the ritual life, with our relationship to G-d and not our relationship to society.

It seems to me that the reason why we have here "I am the Lord your G-d" is to teach us that G-d is our G-d both in the ritual sense, in our relationship to Him, and in the societal sense. It is G-d Who created us, and it is also G-d Who also demands that we be merciful. Many times people can err by stressing too much the relationship to G-d or stressing too much the relationship to society. The ancient Egyptians stressed their relationship to G-d too much. They were only concerned with death, with things that

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we really cannot prove. That is what Chukosai, My statutes, mean. These are things we must accept on faith. When it comes to death and what happens after death, etc., this is something that none of us can be 100% sure of because none of us have come back from there to tell us what happened. The Egyptians were obsessed with ritual. What they did was make their whole society dependent upon a future which none of them could really predict with certainty. That is why they built the pyramids to entomb their kings. Not only did they put the kings in the pyramids but they also put goats and objects of worth and all sorts of things they thought the king would need when he was resurrected. Therefore, their whole society revolved around these faith principles.

On the other hand, the society of Canaan was based on the here and now. The society of Canaan worshipped Baal and performed licentious rites not because they wanted to be immoral, not because they were playboys or wanted to emulate what is in Playboy or Hustler magazine, but they did it because they felt that society demanded it. In order for them to have crops they had to have child sacrifices. They had to emulate their children and sacrifice them otherwise the rains would not come and society would suffer. They were only thinking of the good of their own people. When they had licentious rites they thought they had to spill sperm in order to make the ground fertile, and just as the rain drops to the ground and fertilizes is, so, in their rites, they would cause this to happen. That is why Baal worship was the way it was. They were concerned about society, about the here and now.

Even today we make the same mistake. Even today, for the sake of society, Stalin was willing for 6,000,000 Ukrainians to starve to death. For the sake of a good society Atturk expelled the Armenians. He did not kill

them. He just let them die. He expelled them and they died from the elements and from thirst and starvation. The same holds true today where we have the homeless in our cities, where we have people who are hungry, and we say, "Well, we cannot help them because it will hurt our economy. What is better for us is to make sure our economy is good and strong and that will help more people than the helpless and homeless that are on the streets." This is, of course, what said. "It is good that we sacrifice our eldest son and entomb him in a building so, therefore, we will be blessed with rain and agricultural produce, and so forth. Some suffer, but it is good for the majority. It is good for society." That is actually what morality is, things that are good for society, but G-d tells us this is not so. He says, "I am G-d the Creator. I am the One Who establishes the rules for which you relate to Me, and I am compassionate. I do not want a society which is ruled by cruelty, which demands cruelty in order to exist."

That is, of course, why in this Torah portion we have the rules of morality and ritual intertwined because man needs both these elements. We need to have a society, but we also need to have the inner strength to overcome our problems, to know that G-d loves us and cares for us. That is why it is so very important that we feel this way: Even the pioneers who went to Israel, even though they defined G-d in Marxist terms, felt that what they were doing would make this a better world, that they were fulfilling the laws and dictates of history, but their children and grandchildren, many of them, have gotten away from this. They are involved in all sorts of other things, because life has no meaning for them. They have no relationship to G-d for a driving force, for a purpose in life, for a meaning in life. We all need to have a ritual attachment to G-d, to meaning, to purpose.

That we cannot have unless we also, according to Jewish life, reach out and help others and are compassionate concerned with others, too, but we have to make sure that in our zeal for making a just society that we do not trample over the individual and destroy him and say, "Well, it is good for society, and what do I care if Mao Tsetung killed 20 million Chinese? What difference does it make?" It makes a big difference. Therefore, we learn that we need to have the strength to overcome our problems, and this we get through our relationship with G-d.

That is why we learn at the beginning of this Torah portion it says, "We learn about the laws of Yom Kippur after the death of the two sons of Aaron." Why do we learn about this after the death of the two sons of Aaron? Because life is hard. Life is unpredictable. We have to know that the sacrifices we make are right and just and good. Many times we are going to be confronted by problems, and we have to find the strength within ourselves to overcome problems. G-d never promised us that if we live a decent and righteous life we will not have problems. He only promised that He will give us the strength to overcome the problems.

That is what the Jewish ritual is meant to teach us. That is what Shabbos is meant to teach us, kashruth is meant to teach us. The whole Jewish system is meant to teach us that we have a relationship to G-d and that if we use our brains and our native abilities and try our best G-d will help us, too, and will allow us to overcome any problems that we may have. There are so many negative factors in life. There are so many young people now who are prey to drugs and alcohol because they have no purpose in life. They do not feel they have the strength to overcome their problems because they are going nowhere. The ritual laws give a person a goal and, therefore, they are important, but they cannot be exclusive like they were in Egypt. You have to also be concerned about your fellow human

being. G-d says you cannot be ritually observant and have a relationship with Me unless you are also good to your fellow human being. Morality is a prerequisite in your relationship with G-d. Let us hope and pray that in our day and age none of us will ever feel that our life is so meaningless that we have to resort to drugs and alcohol in order to fill it. The AA will tell you, those who deal with addicts and alcoholics, that the first thing they have to teach a person is that G-d loves them and cares about them and is concerned about them. This gives them the strength to overcome their addiction, to know that they are important, that they are needed, that they are wanted. That is why ritual is important. We can only have this ritual if we realize that we must also still extend ourselves and be compassionate to others.

I am reminded of the story of a American businessman, American critic, a Russian, and a Cuban who are in a railroad car crossing Europe. The Russian took out a bottle of vodka and gave everyone a drink. Afterwards he threw the bottle out the window. They said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "Well, we have lots of vodka in Russia and I really do not need it." Later the Cuban opened a box of cigars and gave everyone a cigar. Then he threw the box out the window. The American asked, "What are you doing?" The Cuban said, "Well, we have a lot of cigars in Cuba. I really don't need it," at which point the American business man grabbed the American critic and threw him out the window. In life too often in America today we have too many critics who want to destroy our relationship with G-d, who want to tell young people that there is no meaning and purpose in life. They are wrong. G-d is the creator. "I am the Lord your G-d." I am the Creator of you and I need a relationship with you. I am the G-d Who is compassionate and merciful. In order to have a relationship with Me you must be merciful and kind to your fellow human being. May

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we all be kind and merciful to our fellow human beings so that we will
merit a relationship with G-d.