

Crazy Jews

How Judaism deals with Jewish extremists. We will explore this topic through Biblical texts and rabbinic and other commentaries, with a special focus on biblical figures like Pinchas, Aaron and the Nazerite.

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THE FIGURE OF AARON

- 1) "Be one of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace." (*Avot* 1:12.)
- 2) There were thousands in Israel who were called by the name of Aaron, for if not for Aaron, they would not have come into the world. Aaron made peace between husband and wife so that they came together, and they named the child that was born after him. (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan*)
- 3) "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes" (Psalm 133:1-2)
- 4) Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz has compared the leadership styles of Moses and Aaron. He called Aaron "the People's prophet": "Moses and Aaron represent two kinds of leaders. The difference between them only re-enforced the bond, cemented an alliance and a lasting friendship. At the same time, Moses never could descend altogether from the higher sphere; he did not even try to be liked or understood by his people. His whole essence, from the start of his career, was one of aloofness, almost that of the stranger or the one who comes from above. As the Torah commentator Ibn Ezra put it 'It was decreed in heaven that Moses should grow up in the royal household so that he could appear to the people as king.'

Aaron, however, was not only the assistant or the translator. True, he did provide Moses with help and support but was also a leader in his own right. As it is apparent

from any scrupulous reading of the text, he was the popular chief, one of the tribe, a Levite and a spokesman. Because he understood the people and sympathized with their shortcomings, he could guide them toward a goal that Moses had reached in a different way. Moses operated from the higher to the lower: he was the authority figure, giving orders and hardly explaining or educating. Aaron, on the other hand, functioned from the lower to the higher, trying to lead the people carefully, teaching and guiding them.

-From Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *Biblical Images*. Koren, Jerusalem, 2010

- 5) according to Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Aaron as a *Rodeph Shalom*, a pursuer of peace, Aaron's method was not just dialogue but also included "going to listen to other people's pain and trying to soothe it." (From a lecture by Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth at a conference at Bar Ilan University in January 2015)
- 6) The ideas ascribed to Aaron are the ideals by which Hillel lived and which he taught others....Hillel deliberately chose Aaron rather than Moses because he wanted to the sages of Israel, his own disciples, to be followers of Aaron who used love and persuasion, and not Moses who spoke in the name of God and exalted justice"

-Rabbi Reuven Hammer, "The Apotheosis of Aaron", *Conservative Judaism*, 2000, pp. 22-33

THE FIGURE OF PINCHAS

וַיַּעַמֵּד פִּינְחָס, וַיִּפְּלֵל
וַתַּעֲצֹר, הַמִּגֶּפֶה

Psalm 106:30 Then stood up Phinehas, and wrought judgment, and so the plague was stayed.

"We need to refine the attribute of zeal, so that when it enters the realm of the holy, it should be a pure zeal for God. Since zealotry often contains some slight influence of human failings, our powers of self-examination must determine its primary motive. We must ensure that it is not based on personal jealousy, which rots one's very bones, but rather a zeal for God, which provides a covenant of peace." Rav Abraham Isaac Kook

PINHAS

פינחס

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
¹¹"Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion. ¹²Say, therefore, 'I grant

¹⁰ וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: ¹¹ פינחס בן-אלעזר בן-אהרן הכהן השיב את-חמתי מעל בני-ישראל בקנאו את-קנאתי בתוכם ולא-כליתי את-בני-ישראל בקנאתי: ¹² לכן אמר הנני נתן

IDOLATRY AND EXPIATION AT BAAL-PEOR (continued)

THE PACT WITH PHINEHAS (25:10-18)

11. passion Hebrew: *kin-ah*, a feature of God (*el kanna*; Exod. 20:5) that is shared by zealous advocates like Phinehas and Elijah (1 Kings 19:14). The passion displayed by Phinehas

matched God's in that he alone obeyed God's command to kill the leaders (25:4).

wipe out the Israelite people Once released, God's anger destroys everything in its path without making moral distinctions.

12. Say Tell the people in the form of an oath.

25:11. Phinehas killed an Israelite man and Moabite woman because their flagrant immorality profaned God's name. The Torah seems to approve of Phinehas's extreme act; some modern as well as ancient commentators follow suit. Thus Hirsch, for example: "Anyone who wages war on the enemies of what is good and true is a champion of the Covenant of Peace on earth even while engaged in war." The Hatam Sofer praises Phinehas for showing the same zeal and energy to do right that the sinning Israelites displayed in doing wrong.

Most postbiblical commentators, however, tend to be uncomfortable with the zealous vigilantism of Phinehas, criticizing his fanaticism as a dangerous precedent. The Talmud claims that, had Phinehas asked the rabbinical court if it was permitted to kill Zimri and Cozbi, citing *halakhah* to justify his request, the court would have told him: "The law may permit it but we do not follow that law!" (BT Sanh. 82a). Moses of Coucy notes that although the previous *parashah* ends with Phinehas's deed and the death of 24,000 Israelites (it is unusual for a *parashah* to end on such a negative note), Phinehas's reward is not proclaimed until the beginning of this *parashah*. This teaches us to never rush to reward extremism. We are to wait until later events clarify whether the zealot's intention was indeed pure.

In the text of the Torah scroll, the letter *yod* in Phinehas's name in the second verse (v. 11) is written smaller than the other letters. When we commit violence, even if justifiable, the *yod* in us (standing for the name of God and for

y'hudi, "Jew") is diminished thereby. In verse 12, the letter *vav* in *shalom* in the Torah scroll is written with a break in its stem. This is interpreted homiletically to suggest that the sort of peace one achieves by destroying one's opponent will inevitably be a flawed, incomplete peace.

Several commentators understand God's granting the priesthood to Phinehas and his descendants, not as a reward for his extremism but as an antidote for it. "He will have to cure himself of his violent temper if he is to function as a *kohen*" (*K'tav Sofer*). "This will protect Phinehas from the destructive impulse within him" (*Ha-amek Davar*). Perhaps serving as a *kohen* will give him ways of atoning for having taken two lives. A person is never the same after he has shed blood, no matter how justifiable the cause.

One of the few commentators who sees Phinehas in as favorable a light as the Torah seems to, deems his replacing Aaron as part of a generational shift in leadership. Just as the stern and demanding Moses was balanced by Aaron, who avoided quarrels and confrontations, the more moderate Joshua will be balanced by the fervor of Phinehas as high priest.

The tradition generally considers moral threats to be more dangerous for national survival than physical threats. Although the Egyptians and the Edomites threatened Israel's physical existence, we are commanded not to hate them. We are told to wipe out the Midianites, however, for they tried to undermine Israel's moral standing.

him My pact of friendship. ¹³It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time, because he took impassioned action for his God, thus making expiation for the Israelites.”

¹⁴The name of the Israelite who was killed, the one who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri son of Salu, chieftain of a Simeonite ancestral house. ¹⁵The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi daughter of Zur; he was the tribal head of an ancestral house in Midian.

¹⁶The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁷“Assail the Midianites and defeat them—¹⁸for they assailed you by the trickery they practiced against you—because of the affair of Peor and because of the affair of their kinswoman Cozbi, daughter of the Midianite chieftain, who was killed at the time of the plague on account of Peor.”

My pact of friendship God's covenant meant that Phinehas received divine protection against the revenge that would be sought by Zimri's clan.

13. a pact of priesthood for all time Phinehas is awarded the high priesthood for suppressing apostasy, just as the Levites were awarded the priesthood (Exod. 32:29). God promises that his line, later called the Zadokites (see Ezek. 44:15–16), will be the exclusive officiants in the Temple (see 1 Chron. 5:30–34).

making expiation By means of his passion, Phinehas assuaged God's wrath.

14–15. A postscript stating the names and pedigrees of the culprits.

ancestral house That is, a household, the basic unit of the clan.

17. Why are the Midianites assailed, because it was Moabite women who seduced the Israelites?

18. for they assailed you At first, the nations of the world resented and hated the Israelites because their ways of worship were different from those of the nations and at a higher moral level. Even when the people Israel tried to imitate gentile practices, though, their enemies continued to resent them. According to the Talmud (BT Sanh. 106a), Balaam was im-

לו את-בריתי שלום: ¹³ והיתה לו ולזרעו
אחריו ברית כהנת עולם תחת אשר
קנא לאלהיו ויכפר על-בני ישראל:
¹⁴ ושם איש ישראל המכה אשר הכה
את-המדינית זמרי בן-סלוא נשיא בית-
אב לשמעני: ¹⁵ ושם האשה המכה
המדינית כזבי בת-צור ראש אמות בית-
אב במדין הוא: פ
¹⁶ וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: ¹⁷ צרור
את-המדינים והכיתם אותם: ¹⁸ כי
צריים הם לכם בנבליהם אשר-נבלו
לכם על-דבר-פגור ועל-דבר כזבי בת-
נשיא מדין אחותם המכה ביום-ההוא
על-דבר-פגור:

This may simply reflect different sources or traditions. Alternatively, this episode may reflect the period when Moab was part of a Midianite confederation that embraced all of Transjordan as its protectorate (see Josh. 13:21). When Israel conquered Sihon's territory, it severed the king's highway (Num. 21:22) and thereby threatened the Midianites' hold on the vital spice trade. Thus Midian, Israel's erstwhile ally (10:29–32), now became its implacable foe.

18. Both Israel's apostasy at Baal-peor and the act of Zimri are attributed to the scheming of the Midianites.

for they assailed you Alternatively, “they are hostile,” indicating both past and continuing hostility.

their kinswoman Thus the Midianites now felt obligated to avenge her death.

pressed by Israel's moral purity and realized that the only way to defeat them would be to compromise their moral excellence. It was his idea to lure the Israelites into participating in the orgiastic Midianite cult (Num. 31:16). The Midianites were so desperate to defeat Israel that they encouraged their daughters to engage in sexual orgies to lead the Israelites astray.

PINHAS

¹⁰The LORD spoke
¹¹“Phinehas, son of El
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IDOLATRY

THE PACT WITH PHINEHAS

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Extremism and Zealotry: The Case of Pinchas

Steven Bayme, National Director, Contemporary Jewish Life Department, AJC

In accepting the Republican Party presidential nomination in 1964, Senator Barry Goldwater proclaimed, "Extremism in the defense of freedom is no vice; moderation in the pursuit of liberty is no virtue." Whatever chance Goldwater had of capturing the presidency was probably forfeited through that statement. Americans prefer moderation and abhor extremism.

What about Judaism and Jewish tradition? Jewish history or, for that matter, contemporary Jewish life unfortunately, does not lack for examples of extremist behavior. Generally, these actions have proven destructive and elicited broad condemnation. For example, rabbinic Judaism pronounced the day following Rosh Ha-shanah to be a fast day commemorating the assassination of Gedaliah, a Jewish governor who paid with his life for his moderation in the years following the destruction of the Solomonic temple in 586 B.C.E. Similarly, both Josephus and the rabbis of the Talmud bitterly attacked Jewish extremism underlying the rebellion against Rome that culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple.

Conversely, however, the episode of Pinchas in the Book of Numbers provides us with an apparently positive appraisal of Jewish extremism and zealotry:

When the Israelites were in Shittim, the people began to have intercourse with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices offered to their gods; and they ate the sacrificial food and prostrated themselves before the gods of Moab. The Israelites joined in the worship of the Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry with them. He said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hurl them down to their death before the Lord in the full light of day, that the fury of his anger may turn away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Put to death, each one of you, those of his tribe who have joined in the worship of the Baal of Peor."

One of the Israelites brought a Midianite woman into his family in open defiance of Moses and all the community of Israel, while they were weeping by the entrance of the Tent of the Presence. Pinchas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw him. He stepped out from the crowd and took up a spear, and he went into the inner room after the Israelite and transfixing the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, pinning them together. Thus the plague which had attacked the Israelites was brought to a stop; but twenty-four thousand had already died.

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "Pinchas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned my wrath away from the Israelites; he displayed among them the same jealous

anger that moved me, and therefore in my jealousy I did not exterminate the Israelites. Tell him that I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. He and his descendants after him shall enjoy the priesthood under a covenant for all time, because he showed his zeal for his God and made expiation for the Israelites." Numbers 25: 1-13

At initial glance, this text appears to validate extremist ideology and behavior. An Israelite male and a Midianite female are engaged in publicly lewd behavior. God is angry and sends a plague. Moses appears to be incapacitated, possibly on account to his own marriage to a Midianite woman. So Aaron's grandson, Pinchas, decides to act on his own, grabs a spear, kills the offending couple, and the plague is stopped. Subsequently, God confers his "covenant of peace" upon Pinchas as a reward for his "zealotry." Latter-day zealots in fact have modeled themselves upon the case of Pinchas.

Clearly this story offends modern-day sensibilities. While few would give sanction to mixed marriage, much less public lewdness, even fewer would argue that the offending parties ought to be publicly flogged, much less assassinated. Moreover, society and civic order collapse when individuals feel free to take the law into their own hands in defense of public morality or justice. Witness, for example, the widespread rioting and looting that took place in Los Angeles some years back shortly after the announcement of the Rodney King verdict.

Interestingly, already in ancient times, Jewish leaders expressed discomfort with Pinchas as a role model for individual behavior. The Psalmist quietly transformed the word for Pinchas's zeal into one connoting **prayer (Psalms 106:30)**. The Talmud went much further in recognizing that Pinchas set a most dangerous precedent that needed to be combated. As a result, the Talmud declares that the "covenant of peace" was given Pinchas to "calm his mind and restore his sanity." Even more strikingly, the Talmud declares that Moses wished actually to excommunicate Pinchas on account of his zealotry. Finally, the Talmud notes that had the offending party, Zimri of the tribe of Simeon, resisted Pinchas, he would have been cleared of charges on the grounds of self-defense (Sanhedrin 82a).

What, then, does this narrative and the accompanying rabbinic interpretations teach us? On the historical plane, we are, in all likelihood, dealing with the decline of the southern tribe of Simeon. The narrative explains the weakening of the tribe and thereby foreshadows its eventual absorption by the larger tribe of Judah. Conversely, the otherwise landless tribe of Levi lays claim to the high priesthood. The Pinchas narrative validates the permanent grant of high priestly status awarded to the family of Aaron of the tribe of Levi.

On the existential plane, the narrative signals the first encounter of the Jews with Canaanite culture. Promiscuous sexuality is rampant, the family structure is undermined, and intermarriage threatens Jewish well-being. Significantly, the Book of Psalms suggests that the pagan deity who is the object of this worship stands at the center of a funerary cult or worship of the dead. Judaism rejected such practices in its worldly emphasis and in its

absolute monotheism, insisting that there are no heavenly powers or deceased souls who might be invoked beyond the reach of the Almighty. In effect, mixed marriage with a Midianite foreshadowed a larger and longer conflict between Israelite and pagan culture.

Although these historical and cultural contexts are real, and probably comprise the intended meaning of the biblical narrative, I find most compelling the willingness of rabbinic Judaism to depart from the intended meaning so as to deprive the narrative of the blessing that it bestows upon zealotry. The rabbis of the Talmud recognized that they could not abide a society in which individuals justified violence in the name of Torah. The rabbinic mode of exegesis and commentary sensitizes us to the complexity of the moral choices Pinchas confronted and normalizes the experience by suggesting that Moses as moral arbiter of Israelite society really did not support Pinchas's actions. Thereby rabbinic exegesis criticized zealotry even when done for the sake of good intentions. By suggesting that the "covenant of peace" was meant to restore Pinchas's sanity, the Talmudic rabbis in effect sacrificed the literal meaning of the text so as to marginalize Pinchas's actions and deprive him of his status as role model.

Unfortunately, Jewish history has indeed known its share of Pinchas types. The Zealots and Sicarii in first-century Palestine led the rebellion against Rome, resorting to extremist actions, including terrorism and political assassination. In more recent times the late Meir Kahane raised the banner of zealotry exposing an ugly racism and hatred of non-Jews (and some Jews as well for that matter). Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir during the Oslo years shared the view that extremism in the defense of Torah by no means constituted a vice. These types exist; they compose a small but by no means unimportant aspect of Jewish historical experience. Rabbinic Judaism, to its credit, enjoins us to temper these models, restrain them and, when necessary, combat them.

Questions for discussion:

Is political assassination always immoral? How would we evaluate attempts to assassinate Stalin or Hitler?

Do we distinguish between terrorist actions against Israelis and attacks by Jews in the pre-State period upon British installations, e.g. the King David Hotel?

Sicarii

Sicarii (Modern Hebrew: סִיקָרִיִּים *siqari'im*) were a splinter group of the Jewish Zealots who, in the decades preceding Jerusalem's destruction in 70 CE, heavily opposed the Roman occupation of Judea and attempted to expel them and their sympathizers from the area. The Sicarii carried sicae, or small daggers, concealed in their cloaks. At public gatherings, they pulled out these daggers to attack Romans and Hebrew Roman sympathizers alike, blending into the crowd after the

deed to escape detection. The Sicarii were likely one of the earliest forms of an organized assassination unit of cloak and daggers, predating the Islamic Hashishin and Japanese ninjas by centuries

Menachem Ben Yair – Masada – 73 CE

Brave and loyal followers!

Long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone other than God... The time has now come that bids us prove our determination by our deeds. At such a time we must not disgrace ourselves. Hitherto we have never submitted to slavery... We must not choose slavery now... For we were the first to revolt, and shall be the last to break off the struggle. And I think it is God who has given us this privilege, that we can die nobly and as free men... In our case it is evident that daybreak will end our resistance, but we are free to choose an honorable death with our loved ones. This our enemies cannot prevent, however earnestly they may pray to take us alive; nor can we defeat them in battle.

Let our wives die unabused, our children without knowledge of slavery. After that let us do each other an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious winding-sheet. But first, let our possessions and the whole fortress go up in flames. It will be a bitter blow to the Roman, that I know, to find our persons beyond their reach and nothing left for them to loot. One thing only let us spare--our store of food: it will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished, not through want but because...we chose death rather than slavery....

Come! While our hands are free and can hold a sword, let them do a noble service! Let us die unenslaved by our enemies, and leave this world as free men in company with our wives and children.

Josephus Flavius, The Jewish War. The translation into modern English is from the brochure distributed by the Israeli National Parks Authority.

Torat Hamelech: Rabbinic text or Call to Terror?

From <http://forward.com/news/123925/rabbinic-text-or-call-to-terror/> - 2010

The marble-patterned, hardcover book embossed with gold Hebrew letters looks like any other religious commentary you'd find in an Orthodox Judaica bookstore — but reads like a rabbinic instruction manual outlining acceptable scenarios for killing non-Jewish babies, children and adults.

“The prohibition ‘Thou Shalt Not Murder’” applies only “to a Jew who kills a Jew,” write Rabbis Yitzhak Shapira and Yosef Elitzur of the West Bank settlement of Yitzhar. Non-Jews are “uncompassionate by nature” and attacks on them “curb their evil inclination,” while babies and children of Israel’s enemies may be killed since “it is clear that they will grow to harm us.”

“The King’s Torah (*Torat Hamelech*), Part One: Laws of Life and Death between Israel and the Nations,” a 230-page compendium of Halacha, or Jewish religious law, published by the Od Yosef Chai yeshiva in Yitzhar, garnered a front-page exposé in the Israeli tabloid Ma’ariv, which called it the stuff of “Jewish terror.”

Now, the yeshiva is in the news again, with a January 18 raid on Yitzhar by more than 100 Israeli security officials who forcibly entered Od Yosef Chai and arrested 10 Jewish settlers. The Shin Bet, Israel’s domestic security agency, suspects five of those arrested were involved in the torching and vandalizing of a Palestinian mosque last month in the neighboring Palestinian village of Yasuf. The arson provoked an international outcry and condemnation by Israeli religious figures, including Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger, who visited the village to personally voice his regret.

Yet, both Metzger and his Sephardic counterpart, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, have declined to comment on the book, which debuted in November, while other prominent rabbis have endorsed it — among them, the son of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Sephardic Jewry’s preeminent leader. Also, despite the precedent set by previous Israeli attorneys general in the last decade and a half to file criminal charges against settler rabbis who publish commentaries supporting violence against non-Jews, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz has so far remained mum about “The King’s Torah.”

“Sometimes the public arena deals with the phenomenon and things become settled by themselves,” Justice Ministry spokesman Moshe Cohen told the Forward.

A coalition of religious Zionist groups, the “Twelfth of Heshvan,” — named after the Hebrew date of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, has asked Israel’s Supreme Court to order Mazuz to confiscate the books and arrest its authors.

“You open the book, and you feel that you read a halachic book. And it’s a trap,” said Gadi Gvaryahu, a religious Jewish educator who heads the coalition. It was, in fact, “a guidebook [on] how to kill,” he charged.

Family members who answered phone calls placed to the homes of both authors said they did not wish to comment.

In 2008, author Shapira was suspected of involvement in a crude rocket attack directed at a Palestinian village. Israeli police investigated but made no arrests.

Co-author Elitzur wrote an article in a religious bulletin a month after the book's release saying that "the Jews will win with violence against the Arabs."

In 2003, the head of the Od Yosef Chai yeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, was charged by then-Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein with incitement to racism for authoring a book calling Arabs a "cancer."

In 2006-2007, the Israeli Ministry of Education gave about a quarter of a million dollars to the yeshiva, and in 2007-2008 the yeshiva received about \$28,000 from the American nonprofit Central Fund of Israel.

"The King's Torah" reflects a fringe viewpoint held by a minority of rabbis in the West Bank, said Avinoam Rosenak, a Hebrew University professor specializing in settler theology. Asher Cohen, a Bar Ilan University political science professor, thought its influence would be "zero" because it appeals only to extreme ideologues.

But the book's wide dissemination and the enthusiastic endorsements of prominent rabbis have spotlighted what might have otherwise remained an isolated commentary.

At the entrance to Moriah, a large Jewish bookstore steps from the Western Wall, copies of "The King's Torah" were displayed with children's books and other halachic commentaries. The store manager, who identified himself only as Motti, said the tome has sold "excellently."

Other stores carrying the book include Robinson Books, a well-known, mostly secular bookshop in a hip Tel Aviv shopping district; Pomeranz Bookseller, a major Jewish book emporium near the Ben Yehuda mall in downtown Jerusalem; and Felhendler, a Judaica store on the main artery of secular Rehovot, home of the Weizmann Institute.

The yeshiva declined to comment on publication statistics. But Itzik, a Tel Aviv-area book distributor hired by the yeshiva who declined to give his last name because of the book's nature, said the yeshiva had sold 1,000 copies to individuals and bookstores countrywide. He said an additional 1,000 copies were now being printed.

Mendy Feldheim, owner of Feldheim Publishers, Israel's largest Judaica publishing house, said he considered this a "nice" sales figure for a tome of rabbinic Halacha in Israel. He said his own company, which distributes to 200 bookstores nationwide, is not distributing "The King's Torah" because the book's publishers did not approach the company.

Prominent religious figures wrote letters of endorsement that preface the book. Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, son of former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, blessed the authors and wrote that many "disciples of Torah are unfamiliar with these laws." The elder Yosef has not commented on his son's statement.

Dov Lior, chief rabbi of Kiryat Arba and a respected figure among many mainstream religious Zionists, noted that the book is “very relevant especially in this time.”

Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg, one of the country’s most respected rabbinic commentators, initially endorsed the book, but rescinded his approval a month after its release, saying that the book includes statements that “have no place in human intelligence.”

A handful of settler rabbis echoed Goldberg’s censure, including Shlomo Aviner, chief rabbi of Beit El and head of Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim, who said he had “no patience” to read the book, and spoke out against it to his students.

Previously, Israel has arrested settler rabbis who publish commentaries supporting the killing of non-Jews. In addition to Ginsburgh, the Od Yosef Chai yeshiva head, in 1994, the government jailed Rabbi Ido Elba of Hebron for writing a 26-page article proclaiming it a “mitzva to kill every non-Jew from the nation that is fighting the Jew, even women and children.”

“The atmosphere has changed,” said Yair Sheleg, senior researcher at the Israel Democracy Institute, who specializes in issues of religion and state. Previous governments took a tougher stance against such publications, he said, but “paradoxically, because the tension between the general settler population and the Israeli judicial system...is high now, the attorney general is careful not to heighten the tension.”

It is not uncommon for some settler rabbis, in the unique conditions of West Bank settlement life, to issue religious decrees, or *psakim*, that diverge from normative Jewish practice. In 2008, Avi Gisser, considered a moderate rabbi from the settlement of Ofra, ruled that Jews may violate Sabbath laws and hire non-Jews to build hilltop settlements. And In 2002, Yediot Aharanot reported that former Israeli Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu sanctioned Jewish harvesting of Palestinian-owned olive trees.

Contact Daniel Estrin at feedback@forward.com

EXCERPTS FROM THE KING’S TORAH

I. Thou Shalt Not Commit Murder

Maimonides wrote in the Halachas of Murder, Chapter A, Halacha A:

He who kills one soul of Israel violates a prohibition, as it is said “thou shalt not commit murder, and if he committed murder maliciously, in front of witnesses, his death shall be by the sword...”

It is therefore made explicit that the “thou shalt not commit murder” prohibition refers only to a Jew who kills a Jew, and not to a Jew who kills a gentile, even if that gentile is one of the righteous among the nations... we have derived that from the verse “thou shalt not commit murder”, one cannot learn that there is a prohibition on killing a gentile. (Pp 17-18)

VIII. Conclusion

I. A gentile must not kill his friend, and if he has killed, he must die.

II. The prohibition “thou shalt not commit murder” refers to a Jew who kills another Jew.

III. A Jew who kills a gentile is not required to die.

IV. The prohibition on a Jew killing a gentile derives from the fact that a gentile is not allowed to kill a gentile. (Page 27)

I. A gentile is killed for one death, and with one judge

A gentile who violates one of the seven rules [of Noah] must be killed, and he is killed based on the word of one witness and with one judge and with no warning.

II. A witness becomes a judge

For the Sons of Noah [gentiles] the witness can himself be a judge. This mean: if one person saw the other committing a crime – he can judge him and kill him for this, as he is the witness and he is the judge... Moses [moshe rabbenu] saw the Egyptian hitting a man of Israel, and killed him for that. So there Moses is the witness and is the judge, and this does not delay the carrying out of the law upon the Egyptian. (Pp. 49-50)

What transpires from these matters is that when you judge a gentile for crimes that he has committed – you must also consider the question of whether he has repented, and if he has – he must not be killed... moreover: it is better that the gentile repent than that we kill him. If we come upon a gentile who does not abide by the Seven Laws [of Noah], and the importance of abiding by them can be explain to him, so he will repent – we would prefer to choose that path, and not judge an kill him. (page 70)

It is explained in Yerushalmi [codex] that when a [child of] Israel [a Jew] is in danger of his life, as people tell him ‘kill this particular gentile or you will be killed’ – is permitted to kill the gentile to save himself... and the [interpreters of the law] Rashi and Maimonides say that the law of requiring to die rather than commit the crime is only valid in case of a Jew against another Jew, not in the case of a Jew against a stranger living among them... It is clear from these statements that when the choice is between losing the life of a stranger living among them and losing the life of a child of Israel [a Jew] – the simple decision is to permit [the killing]. (Pp. 157-158)

When the question is of a life of a gentile weighed against the life of a child of Israel [Jew], the initial proposal returns, which is that a Jew can violate law in order to save himself, as what is at stake is the soul [life] of a Jew – which supersedes the entire Torah [code of law] - in contrast with the life of a stranger living among us, which does not permit any Torah prohibition to be superseded.(page 162)

To save the life of a gentile, one does not violate the Sabbath rules, and it is clear from this that his life is not like the value of the life of a child of Israel, so it may be used for the purpose of saving the life of a child of Israel.(page 167)

An enemy soldier in the corps of intelligence, logistics, and so forth aids the army that fights against us. A soldier in the enemy's medical corps is also considered a "rodef" [villain who is actively chasing a Jew], as without the medical corps the army will be weaker., and the medical corps also encourages and strengthens the fighters, and helps them kill us.

A civilian who supports fighters is also consider *Rodef*, and may be killed... anyone who helps the army of the evil people in any way, strengthens the murderers and is considered to be *Rodef*. (page 184)

III. Support and encouragement

A civilian who encourages the war - gives the king and the soldiers the strength to continue with it. Therefore, every citizen in the kingdom that is against us, who encourages the warriors or expresses satisfaction about their actions, is considered Rodef and his killing is permissible. Also considered Rodef is any person who weakens our kingdom by speech and so forth. (p. 185)

We are permitted to save ourselves from the Rodef people. It is not important who we start with, as long as we kill the Rodef people, and save ourselves from the danger they pose. And see for yourself: if you say that the fact that there are many of them brings up the question of whom to start with, and that that question is supposed to delay us from saving for ourselves - why it stands to reason: the existence of any one of them postpones the salvation, and this is the reason to treat each and every one as a complete Rodef, and to kill him, so he will not cause this 'life-threatening' question...

Whoever is in a situation where it is clear that he will chase and danger us in the future - it is not necessary to give it fine consideration as to whether at this moment, exactly, he is actively helping the chasing [harassment?] of us. (Pp. 186-187)

X. People who were forced to partner with the enemy

We have dealt, so far, with gentiles whose evil means that there is a reason to kill them. We will now turn to discuss those who are not interested in war and object to it with all force...

We will start with a soldier, who is party to fighting against us, but is doing so only because he has been forced by threats to take part in the war.

If he was threatened with loss of money and such things - he is completely evil. There is no permission to take part in chasing and killing due to fear of loss of money, and if he does so -he is a Rodef in every definition thereof.

And if he was threatened that if he would not participate in the war, he would be killed - according to the MAHARAL [rabbi]... just as he is permitted to kill others - so, too, can others (even gentiles) kill him, so we will not die. And for this reason, according to the MAHARAL, it is simply evident that such a soldier may be killed.

And according to the Parashat Drachim [rabbi? Or possibly book of law?] - he must not participate in the murdering even if he must give his life due to this. And if he does so [participates] - he is evil and may be killed, like any other Rodef.

We will remind, again, that this discusses all types of participation in the war: a fighter, a support soldier, civilian assistance, or various types of encouragement and support.(P. 196)

XVI. Infants

When discussing the killing of babies and children - why on the one hand, we see them as complete innocents, as they have no knowledge, and therefore are not to be sentenced for having violated the Seven Laws, and they are not to be ascribed evil intent. But on the other side, there is great fear of their actions when they grow up... in any event, we learn that there is an opinion that it is right to hurt infants if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us, and in such a situation the damage will be directed specifically at them. (Pp. 205-200)

IV. Killing the enemy like killing our own men

If the king is permitted to kill his own men for the purpose of war - that same opinion also holds with regard to people who belong to the evil kingdom. In a war of righteous people against evil people, we assume that the evil will eventually hurt us all, if we let it raise its head, and the people of the evil kingdom will also suffer from it.

We are, in fact, arguing to any person from the evil kingdom: if you belong to the evil king - you are liable to be killed for helping murderers; and if you do not help him - you should help us, and it is permissible to kill you as we kill our own people (as we are all in trouble together, and in such a situation it is permissible to kill the few in order to save the many.)

This theory also permits intentional hurting of babies and of innocent people, if this is necessary for the war against the evil people. For example: If hurting the children of an evil king will put great pressure on him that would prevent him from acting in an evil manner -

they can be hurt (even without the theory that it is evident that they will be evil when they grow up.) (P. 215)

VII. Revenge

One of the needs which exists, in the hurting of [Evil people?] is the revenge. In order to beat [win the war against] the evil people, we must act with them in a manner of revenge, as tit versus tat...

In other words, revenge is a necessary need in order to turn the evil-doing into something that does not pay off, and make righteousness grow stronger; and as great as the evil is - so is the greatness of the action needed against it.

(Pp. 216-217)

Sometimes, one does evil deeds that are meant to create a correct balance of fear, and a situation in which evil actions do not pay off... and in accordance with this calculus, the infants are not killed for their evil, but due to the fact that there is a general need of everyone to take revenge on the evil people, and the infants are the ones whose killing will satisfy this need; and they can also be viewed as the ones who are set aside from among a faction, as reality has chosen them to be the ones whose killing will save all of them [the others from that faction?] and prevent evildoing later on. (And it does indeed turn out that to this consideration, the consideration that we brought forth at the end of the prior chapter also definitely is added - which is, that they are in any event suspected of being evil when they grow up.)

Parshat Naso: Nezirut - An Ideal?

Source Sheet by Rabbi Joshua Koperwas

1.

Source for Nezirut

במדבר ו':א'-ד'

א.

(א) וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר. (ב) דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם איש או אשה כי יפלא לנדר נדר נזיר להזיר ליהוה. (ג) מינו ושכר הזיר חמץ יין וחמץ שכר לא ישותה וכל משרת ענבים לא ישותה וענבים לחים ויבשים לא יאכל. (ד) כל ימי נזרו מכל אשר יעשה מגפן היין מתרצנים ועד זג לא יאכל. (ה) כל ימי נדר נזרו תער לא יעבר על ראשו עד מלאת הזמם אשר יזיר ליהוה קדש יהיה גדל פרע שער ראשו. (ו) כל ימי הזירו ליהוה על נפש מת לא יבא. (ז) לאביו ולאמו ולאחיו ולאחותו לא יטמא להם במתם כי נזר אלהיו על ראשו.

Numbers 6:1-7

(1) And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: (2) Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to consecrate himself unto the LORD, (3) he shall abstain from wine and strong drink: he shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried. (4) All the days of his Naziriteship shall he eat nothing that is made of the grape-vine, from the pressed grapes even to the grapestone. (5) All the days of his vow of Naziriteship there shall no razor come upon his head; until the days be fulfilled, in which he consecrateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long. (6) All the days that he consecrateth himself unto the LORD he shall not come near to a dead body. (7) He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die; because his consecration unto God is upon his head.

2.

Nezirut as an Ideal

במדבר ו':ח'

ב.

(ח) כל ימי נזרו קדש הוא ליהוה.

Numbers 6:8

(8) All the days of his Naziriteship he is holy unto the LORD.

3.

The Nazir Portrayed in a Negative Light

ג.

במדבר ו': י"ג-י"ד

(ט) וְזֹאת תֹּרַת הַנָּזִיר בְּיוֹם מְלֹאת יָמָיו נָזְרוּ יָבִיא אֹתוֹ אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד. (י) וְהִקְרִיב אֶת קָרְבָּנוֹ לַיהוָה כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן שָׁנָתוֹ תָּמִים אֶחָד לְעֹלָה וְכִבְשָׂה אֶחָת בֵּית שָׁנָתָהּ תָּמִימָה לַחֲטָאֹת וְאַיִל אֶחָד תָּמִים לְשִׁלְמִים.

Numbers 6:13-14

(13) And this is the law of the Nazirite, when the days of his consecration are fulfilled: he shall abring it unto the door of the tent of meeting; (14) and he shall present his offering unto the LORD, one he-lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt-offering, and one ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin-offering, and one ram without blemish for peace-offerings,

4. Ramban, Bamidbar 6:14: Nezirut as a Mitzvah

ד.

וטעם החטאת שיקריב הנזיר ביום מלאת ימי נזרו, לא נתפרש. ועל דרך הפשט כי האיש הזה חוטא בפשו במלאת הנזירות, כי הוא עתה נזור מקדושתו ועבודת השם, וראוי היה לו שיזיר לעולם ויעמוד כל ימיו נזיר וקדוש לאלהיו, כענין שאמר (עמוס ב יא) ואקים מבניכם לנביאים ומבחרים לנזירים, השווה אותו הכתוב לנביא, וכדכתיב (לעיל פסוק ח) כל ימי נזרו קדוש הוא לה' והנה הוא צריך כפרה בשוכו להטמא בתאוות העולם

Until now he was separated in sanctity and the service of G-d, and he should therefore have remained separated for ever, continuing all his life to be consecrated and sanctified to G-d, as it is said, I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and your young men for nazirites (Amos 2: 11). Thus Scripture compares the nazirite to a prophet . . . Accordingly, [when he completes the period of his vow and returns to ordinary life] he requires atonement, since he goes back to being defiled by the [material] desires of the world

5.

Nezirut as a Sin

ה.

תענית יא.

אמר שמואל כל היושב בתענית נקרא חוטא סבר כי האי תנא דתניא ר' אלעזר הקפר ברבי אומר מה תלמוד לומר (במדבר ו, יא) וכפר עליו מאשר חטא על הנפש וכי באיזה נפש חטא זה אלא שציער עצמו מן היין והלא דברים קל וחומר ומה זה שלא ציער עצמו אלא מן היין נקרא חוטא המצער עצמו מכל דבר ודבר על אחת כמה וכמה ר' אלעזר אומר נקרא קדוש שנאמר (במדבר ו, ה) קדוש יהיה גדל פרע שער ראשו ומה זה שלא ציער עצמו אלא מדבר אחד נקרא קדוש המצער עצמו מכל דבר על אחת כמה וכמה

Taanit 11a

Samuel said: whoever indulges in [voluntary] fasting is called a sinner. This is in accordance with the view of Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar Berebi, who stated: What is the meaning of the phrase (Num. 6: 11), and make atonement for him, because he sinned against the soul (usually translated as "by coming into contact with the dead"). Against which soul did he sin? We must conclude that it refers to denying himself the enjoyment of wine. From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life. It follows that one who keeps fasting is called a sinner.

6. Is There a Contradiction In the Rambam?

7. Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 3:1 - Do Not be Overly Righteous

שמא יאמר אדם הואיל והקנאה והתאוה והכבוד וכיוצא בהם דרך רעה הן ומוציאין את האדם מן העולם, אפרוש מהן ביותר ואתרחק לצד האחרון, עד שלא יאכל בשר ולא ישתה יין ולא ישא אשה ולא ישב בדירה נאה ולא ילבש מלבוש נאה אלא השק והצמר הקשה וכיוצא בהן כגון כהני העובדי כוכבים, גם זה דרך רעה היא ואסור לילך בה, **המהלך בדרך זו נקרא חוטא**, שהרי הוא אומר בנזיר וכפר עליו מאשר חטא על הנפש, אמרו חכמים ומה אם נזיר שלא פירש אלא מן היין צריך כפרה המונע עצמו מכל דבר ודבר על אחת כמה וכמה, **לפיכך צוו חכמים שלא ימנע אדם עצמו אלא מדברים שמנעתו התורה בלבד, ולא יהא אוסר עצמו בנדירים ובשבועות על דברים המותרים**, כך אמרו חכמים לא דייק מה שאסרה תורה אלא שאתה אוסר עליך דברים אחרים, ובכלל הזה אלו שמתעניין תמיד אינן בדרך טובה, ואסרו חכמים שיהא אדם מסגף עצמו בתענית, ועל כל הדברים האלו וכיוצא בהן צוה שלמה ואמר אל תהי צדיק הרבה ואל תתחכם יותר למה תשומם

A person may say: "Desire, honour and the like are bad paths to follow and remove a person from the world, therefore I will completely separate myself from them and go to the other extreme." As a result, he does not eat meat or drink wine or take a wife or live in a decent house or wear decent clothing . . . This too is bad, and it is forbidden to choose this way. Whoever does so is called a sinner. Indeed G-d says about the nazirite: "He [the priest] shall make atonement for him because he sinned against the soul." The sages said: If the nazirite, who only abstained from wine, needs atonement, how much more does one who abstains from all [legitimate pleasures] need atonement. Therefore the sages commanded that a person only abstain from things forbidden by the Torah alone . . . Concerning these things and others like them, Solomon commanded, saying: "Do not be overly righteous or over-wise. Why should you destroy yourself?" (Eccles. 7: 16)

8. Rambam, Hilchot Nezirut, 10:14 - Nezirut as a Mitzvah

האומר הריני נזיר אם אעשה כך וכך או אם לא אעשה וכיוצא בזה הרי זה רשע ונזירות כזו מנזירות רשעים הוא, **אבל הנזיר לה' דרך קדושה הרי זה נאה ומשובת** ועל זה נאמר נזיר אלהיו על ראשו קדש הוא לה', ושקלו הכתוב כנביא (שנאמר) ואקים מבניכם לנביאים ומבחוריהם לנזירים

Whoever vows to G-d [to become a nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy. Of such a person, Scriptures says, His consecration to G-d is upon his head . . . he is holy to the Lord. Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet, for it says I raised up some of your sons for prophets and your young men for nazirites.

9. **How Do We Settle This Seeming Contradiction?**

10. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Covenant & Conversation**

Moral life is not always simple: a matter of black and white, good and evil, right and wrong. It usually is, but not always. Viewed from the perspective of personal perfection, the nazirite is good and holy. But from the perspective of Jewish faith as a whole, such a life is not an ideal. Judaism wants us to celebrate life, not retreat from it... It is holy to retreat from the world and its challenges – but holier still to engage with them

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Each and every man possesses many character traits. Each trait is very different and distant from the others.

One type of man is wrathful; he is constantly angry. [In contrast,] there is the calm individual who is never moved to anger, or, if at all, he will be slightly angry, [perhaps once] during a period of several years.

There is the prideful man and the one who is exceptionally humble. There is the man ruled by his appetites - he will never be satisfied from pursuing his desires, and [conversely,] the very pure of heart, who does not desire even the little that the body needs.

There is the greedy man, who cannot be satisfied with all the money in the world, as [Ecclesiastes 5:9] states: "A lover of money never

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Commentary, Halachah 1

Each and every man possesses many character traits. Each trait is very different and distant from the others. - Many commentaries assume that the Rambam means that there are many personality types, which he proceeds to describe: e.g., the angry man, the calm man, etc. They quote various sources in support of this viewpoint, among them *Berachot* 58a: "Whoever sees a multitude of Jews recites the blessing: 'Blessed is...the wise who knows the hidden secrets,' because just as their natures are not similar, neither are their faces."

However, by stating that the many character traits are possessed by "each and every man," the Rambam is implying more than that there are people with different traits. Though in *Moreh Nevuchim* (The Guide to the Perplexed) 2:40 the Rambam himself elaborates upon that idea, here his intent is different. He is emphasizing the degree to which each individual's personality is a combination of different traits, which may be unrelated and even distant from each other. Anger, generosity, and modesty, for example, can be found together in the same person, much in the same way that tenants of all sorts - unrelated to each other - can be housed in a common building.

To illustrate these traits, the Rambam employs concrete examples of extreme personalities, so that the contrasts can be appreciated more easily.

One type of man is wrathful; he is constantly angry. [In contrast,] there is the calm individual who is never moved to anger - Obviously, anger or passivity are not these individuals' only traits. Surely, they share the full spectrum of human emotions. However, in these individuals, these traits are most prominent.

See Halachah 2:3 for a further discussion of anger.
or, if at all, he will be slightly angry, [perhaps once] during a period of several years.

פרק ראשון

א רעות נרופה יש לך לא אחר ואחר מפני-אדם, וזו קשורה מאו, ורחוקה מקנה ביותר.

יש אדם, שהוא בעל חמה, פועל תמיד; ויש אדם, שרעותו מושכת עליו ואינו כועס כלל; ואם יקעס, יקעס פעם קצת בכמה שנים.

והיש אדם, שהוא גבול-לך ביותר, ויש שהוא שפל-רוע ביותר.
והיש שהוא בעל תאוה, לא תשבע נפשו מכולל בתאוה; ויש שהוא בעל לב טהור קאד, ולא יתאוה אפילו לזכרים מעטים שתגמור צורך ליהן.

והיש בעל נפש רחבה, שלא תשבע נפשו מכל קמון העולם, כענין שפאמר:

There is the prideful man and the one who is exceptionally humble. - Chapter 2, Halachah 3, also deals at length with the contrasts between pride and humility.

There is the man ruled by his appetites, who will never be satisfied from pursuing his desires - *Kohetel Rabban* 1:34 states: "No person will die having accomplished [even] half of what he desires." This statement is difficult to comprehend since there appear to be many successful individuals who achieve their desires. Nevertheless, their accomplishments do not necessitate that their desires will be satisfied. As the Midrash continues: "A person who possesses 100 silver pieces desires 200. One who possesses 200 desires 400."

Desire itself is never satisfied. Instead, it puts the person on a constantly moving treadmill, with ever-increasing aims. As soon as one reaches one goal, he instinctively begins the pursuit of another.

and [conversely,] the very pure of heart, who does not desire even the little that the body needs. - This pair of contrasting personality types deal with a person's appetites which can be satisfied by sensual experience. For example, gluttony is stimulated and satisfied by taste. In contrast, the traits mentioned below - the desire for money or the lack of desire for it - do not involve the senses.

There is the greedy man, who cannot be satisfied - Literally, "whose soul is not satisfied." Perhaps the Rambam uses "soul," both here and with regard to the man ruled by his sensual appetites, because it is the desire that characterizes the man, not the performance of an action as such. A man may never indulge his passion for food, or actually amass money and yet, be gluttonous or greedy. Though, in practice, his ability to gratify his ambitions may be limited by external factors, the desires of his soul are, nonetheless, unlimited.

with all the money in the world, as [Ecclesiastes 5:9] states: "A lover of money

has his fill of money." [In contrast,] there is the man who puts a check on himself; he is satisfied with even a little, which is not enough for his needs, and he does not bother to pursue and attain what he lacks.

There is [the miser,] who torments himself with hunger, gathering [his possessions] close to himself. Whenever he spends a penny of his own, he does so with great pain. [Conversely,] there is [the spendthrift,] who consciously wastes his entire fortune.

All other traits follow the same pattern [of contrast]. For example: the overly elated and the depressed; the stingy and the frehanded; the cruel and the softhearted; the coward and the rash. and the like.

2. Between each trait and the [contrasting] trait at the other extreme, there are intermediate points, each distant from the other.

never has his fill of money." - Here, the Rambam describes an example where the desire for money becomes a goal in itself. In contrast, a man who gathers money so that he can buy things or achieve power is not interested in money per se. Although he may be faulted for different reasons, he is not greedy for money. On the other hand, for the "lover of money," money itself becomes his *raison d'être*.

[In contrast,] there is the man who puts a check on himself; - literally, he “cuts himself short.” II Kings 19:26 employs a similar usage of the root, עָצַר: “And the inhabitants are broken, with shortened (i.e., weakened or useless) arms.”

he is satisfied with even a little, which is not enough for his needs, and he does not bother to pursue and attain what he lacks. - This is the lazy man, who will not bestir himself even for that which is necessary. In Chapter 2, Halachah 7, this type is described clearly as: “lazy and an idler.” This is the description, too, in the Rambam’s Introduction to *Avot* - *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4.

There is [the miser,] - In contrast to the "lover of money," mentioned above, the miser is not as bent on acquiring new wealth as much as hoarding the money and possessions he has.

who torments himself with hunger, gathering [his possessions] close to himself. - The terminology the Rambam uses emphasizes the miser's need to be close to his money and possessions. Similar, but not exactly correspondent, expressions are found in the Bible (Proverbs 13:11) and the Talmud (*Bava Kama* 80a).

Whenver he spends a penny of his own, he does so with great pain. [Conversely,] there is [the spendthrift,] who consciously wastes his entire fortune. - *Chullin* 84b gives examples of such behavior: wearing linen clothing, using glass utensils, and hiring workers without supervising them.

All other traits follow the same pattern [of contrast]. For example: the overly elated and the depressed; - The Rambam is not referring to an average optimist and a pessimist. Rather, he describes personalities who do not have a grip on reality. *אנון* is the term used for the bereaved who has not yet buried his dead. *מוריל*, the other

יִסְפִּיק לִי. וְלֹא יִדְוֶה לְהַשִּׁיג כָּל צָרָתִי.

אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת מֹשֶׁה לְעָרֹךְ לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמָיו אֲשֶׁר יָצָא מִן־מִצְרָיִם מִיַּד פַּרְעֹה וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת מֹשֶׁה לְעָרֹךְ לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמָיו אֲשֶׁר יָצָא מִן־מִצְרָיִם מִיַּד פַּרְעֹה וְעַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

[illegible]

ב יִישׁ בֵּין כָּל הַדְּעָה הַחֲרוּקָה לַמֶּנֶּה פֶּאֱצָה הָאַתָּר הַעוֹת בִּינוֹנוֹת, זֶה רְחוּקָה מִזֶּה.

extreme, is used by Jeremiah 51:7 to refer to a state of intoxication and delirious drunkenness.

the stingy and the freehanded - Our translation of **נַחֲשׁ** is clearly evident from *Hilchot Mamot Ani'im* 7:11. It follows that **נָחֵשׁ** represents the opposite extreme. (See also Ibn Ezra, Isaiah 32:5.)

The difference between this pair of traits and the miser-spendthrift pair mentioned above is that the latter refers to a person's conduct toward himself, while the former refers to his conduct with regard to others. The stingy man, unlike the miser, may spend money for his own needs, but is tightfisted when others are concerned. By the same token, a freehanded man need not necessarily indulge himself, though he is generous when giving charity. Though this may sound praiseworthy, when taken to extremes it can also prove dangerous, because a person may hurt himself in the process of giving excessively to another. (See *Lechem Mishneh*.)

the cruel and the softhearted; the coward and the rash,...and the like. - We find a longer treatment of personal characteristics in the Rambam's *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4.

Commentary, Halachah 2

Between each trait and the [contrasting] trait at the other extreme, there are intermediate points, each distant from the other. - The *Lechem Mishneh* understands this as follows: Let us imagine a line drawn from one extreme to another - between the stingy and the freehanded, for example. All who are neither stingy nor freehanded stand between them. They are all intermediate, whether they tend towards stinginess or freehandedness. Each point along this imaginary line stands apart - "is distant" - from the others on that line. In a diagram, this idea might be depicted as follows:

X---*---*---*---*---*---X
stingy intermediate points freeha

However, it is highly unlikely that all the Rambam wishes to teach us is that there

With regard to all the traits: a man has some from the beginning of his conception, in accordance with his bodily nature. Some are appropriate to a person's nature and will [therefore] be acquired more easily than other traits. Some traits he does not have from birth. He may have learned them from others, or turned to them on his own. This may have come as a result of his own thoughts, or because he heard that this was a proper trait for him, which he ought to attain. [Therefore,] he accustomed himself to it until it became a part of himself.

3. The two extremes of each trait, which are at a distance from one another, do not reflect a proper path. It is not fitting that a man should behave in accordance with these extremes or teach them to himself.

are many intermediate points of temperament between the extremes. After-all, that is self-evident. Furthermore, in each set of associated temperaments - for example, stinginess and frehandedness - only three points on the line are of importance to the Rambam in clarifying his view of personality development: the two extremes and the midpoint. Why should he mention all the other intermediate possibilities?

Thus, it appears that the Rambam is telling us that there is a midpoint temperament between each pair of contrasting extremes. Given the entire range of human temperaments, there are a number of midpoints which are not necessarily related to each other. For example, the midpoint for generosity may be very different from the midpoint for humility. Thus, in Halachah 1, the Rambam stated that our personality traits are "different and distant;" in this halachah, he makes a parallel statement about the midpoints.

With regard to all the traits: a man has some from the beginning of his conception - i.e., the Rambam distinguishes between genetic traits and those that are acquired.

in accordance with his bodily nature. - Here, we see an interrelation between body and soul. Certain temperaments are produced by or relate to particular physical characteristics.

[In *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4, the Rambam states: "From the outset of a person's [life], he has neither virtues nor vices..." However, there is not necessarily a contradiction between *Shemonah Perakim* and this halachah. The possession of certain character traits does not determine whether one will use them for a vice or a virtue.]

Some are appropriate to a person's nature and [therefore,] will be acquired more easily than other traits. - i.e., these traits are not transferred genetically. However, a person is born with a tendency towards them.

In *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4, the Rambam elaborates on this issue at length. He explains that some people are born with a brain whose internal chemistry is prone to intellectual achievement. However, if this person does not develop this tendency, he will not automatically become a thinker.

Similarly, others have leanings towards courage or cowardice. Nevertheless, these are merely tendencies, and they will not manifest themselves unless consciously developed.

וְכָל הַדְּעוּת, לֹשׁ מִדָּוָה דְּעוּת שֶׁהוּא לְאֹדָם מִתְחַלֵּט בְּרִיתוֹ לְפִי טָבַע גּוֹפוֹ; וְלֹשׁ מִדָּוָה דְּעוּת, שֶׁשֶּׁבַעוּ שָׁל אִדָּם זֶה מִבְּנוֹ וְעַתִּיד לְקַבֵּל אוֹתָם מִמֶּהֱרָה יוֹתֵר מִשְׁאֵר הַדְּעוּת.

וְלֹשׁ מִדָּוָה, שֶׁאֵינָן מִתְחַלֵּט בְּרִיתוֹ, אֲלֵא לְמַד אוֹתָם מֵאַחֲרֵי, אוֹ שֶׁנִּפְתָּה לָהֶן מַעֲצָמוֹ לְפִי מִתְשַׁבֵּה שְׁעִלְתָּה בְּלִבּוֹ; אוֹ שֶׁשֶּׁבַעוּ, שֶׁאֵל הַדְּעָה טוֹבָה לֹא וְכֵה רָאוּי לְיָלֶה, וְהִנְהִיג עֲצָמוֹ בָּה עַד שֶׁנִּקְבְּעָה בְּלִבּוֹ.

ג שֶׁהֵי קְצוֹת הַרְחֻקוֹת זֶה מִזֶּה שֶׁבִּכְל דְּעָה וְדְעָה אֵינָן דִּרְךָ טוֹבָה, וְאֵינָן רָאוּי לֹא לְאֹדָם לְלַמֶּדָה בָּהֶן וְלֹא לְלַמֶּדָה לְעֲצָמוֹ.

Also, these tendencies are, at all times, subject to man's control. We are granted free will, and choose our course of behavior.

Some traits he does not have from birth. He may have learned them from others - In *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4, the Rambam writes: "From his youth, one becomes accustomed to acting in accordance with the accepted behavior of one's family and locale." In these few words, the Rambam includes all the people who might influence a person's character development: his parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and others. Also, note Chapter 6, Halachah 1.

or turned to them on his own. - There are two ways of acquiring such traits

a) This may have come as a result of his own thoughts - i.e., an intuitive realization of the correctness of a certain course of behavior stemming from one's own creative thought.

b) or because he heard that this was a proper trait for him, which he ought to attain. - i.e., through study a person understands the value of a certain character trait and sets out to acquire it.

[Therefore,] he accustomed himself to it until it became a part of himself. - Unlike the inborn or easily acquired traits, these qualities must first be accepted intellectually. Then, through habitual actions, they become part of the personality. (See Halachah 7 for a detailed explanation of such a process of behavioral modification.)

Commentary, Halachah 3

The two extremes of each trait, which are at a distance from one another, do not reflect a proper path - i.e., the path described in this and the following halachot. It is not fitting - except in certain cases, as explained in Chapter 2, Halachah 3. that a man should behave in accordance with these extremes - if that his nature or teach them to himself - and modify his behavior in this direction.

In *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4, the Rambam elaborates on this concept, contrasting hedonism with asceticism, and pointing out how neither represents a healthy and mature approach to life.

If he finds that his nature leans towards one of the extremes or adapts itself easily to it, or, if he has learned one of the extremes and acts accordingly, he should bring himself back to what is proper and walk in the path of the good [men]. This is the straight path.

4. The straight path: This [involves discovering] the midpoint temperament of each and every trait that man possesses [within his personality.] This refers to the trait which is equidistant from either of the extremes, without being close to either of them.

Therefore, the early Sages instructed a man to evaluate his traits, to calculate them and to direct them along the middle path, so that he will be sound {of body}.

For example: he should not be wrathful, easily angered; nor be like the dead, without feeling, rather he should [adopt] an intermediate

If he finds that his nature leans towards one of the extremes - i.e., a genetic trait, as mentioned in the previous halachah

or adapts itself easily to it - a trait which is easily acquired because of the individual's natural tendencies, as mentioned in the previous halachah.

or, if he has learned one of the extremes - the third type of trait mentioned in the previous halachah.

and acts accordingly, he should bring himself back to what is proper - See Chapter 2, Halachah 2, for an extensive description of the process of correcting one's excesses of temperament.

and walk in the path of the good [men]. - i.e., the path that good men follow. This translation is based on the fact that the word "path" is in the singular, while the modifier "good" is in the plural.

That is the straight path. - Perhaps the Rambam is borrowing a biblical phrase here: "That you walk in the path of the good, and guard the way of the righteous" (Proverbs 2:20).

The nature of "the straight path" is explained in detail in the following halachah.

Commentary, Halachah 4

The straight path - This expression is also used in Avot 2:1. In his commentary on that Mishnah, the Rambam cites his explanation of the middle path in the fourth chapter of *Shemonah Perakim*.

This [involves discovering] the midpoint temperament of each and every trait that man possesses [within his personality.] - i.e., a path develops out of a series of midpoints.

This refers to the trait which is equidistant from either of the extremes, without

ואם מצא טבעו נוטה לאחת מהן או מוכן לאחת מהן, או שקבר למד אחת מהן ונהג בה - יחזיר עצמו למוטב וילך בדרך הטובים, והיא הדרך הישרה.

ד הדרך הישרה היא מדה בינונית שכל דעה נדעה מכל הדעות שיש לו לאדם, והיא הדעה, שהיא רחוקה משהי הקצוות רחוק שנה, ואינה קרובה, לא לזו ולא לזו.

לפיכך צוו חכמים הראשונים, שיהא אדם שם דעותיו תמיד ומשער אותם ומכונן אותם בדרך האמצעית, כדי שיהא שלם בגופו.

ביצד? לא יהא פעל חמה נוח לכעס, ולא כמות שאינו מרגיש, אלא בינוני.

being close to either of them. - These statements echo the opening remarks of the fourth chapter of *Shemonah Perakim*:

The good acts are those balanced ones midway between two extremes. Both of the extremes are bad - one reflects excess and the other, want. The virtues [good traits] are temperaments and habits which are midway between these two bad tendencies.

These actions [good actions] are produced as a result of these [the good] traits.

Despite the similarity between the Rambam's statements here and those quoted, there is a slight difference. Here, the Rambam focuses on good traits, while in *Shemonah Perakim*, he emphasizes good actions.

Therefore, the early Sages instructed a man to evaluate his traits - The Rambam appears to be referring to *Sotah* 5b: "Whoever evaluates his paths in this world will merit and witness God's salvation."

to calculate them and to direct them along the middle path - At the conclusion of Chapter 4 of *Shemonah Perakim*, the Rambam writes:

When a man weighs his actions constantly and directs them towards their midpoints, he will be on the most elevated human plane possible. He will thereby approach God and grasp His will. This is the most perfect path in the service of God.

Constant introspection is a necessary element in any program of personal and spiritual growth. Even when a person has the highest goals, unless he frequently looks himself squarely in the mirror and examines his behavior, he may make gross errors.

so that he will be sound {of body}. - We have enclosed the words "of body" with brackets because they are not found in authoritative manuscripts of the *Mishneh Torah* and are problematic. Though a properly balanced temperament may also lead to physical health, this does not appear to be the Rambam's intent.

If the Hebrew בננו is omitted as suggested, the meaning of שם would be altered from "sound" to "complete" or "perfect."

For example: he should not be wrathful, easily angered; nor be like the dead, without

course; i.e., he should display anger only when the matter is serious enough to warrant it, in order to prevent the matter from recurring. Similarly, he should not desire anything other than that which the body needs and cannot exist without, as [Proverbs 13:25] states: "The righteous man eats to satisfy his soul."

Also, he shall not labor in his business except to gain what he needs for immediate use, as [Psalms 37:16] states: "A little is good for the righteous man."

He should not be overly stingy nor spread his money about, but he

feeling, rather he should [adopt] an intermediate course; i.e., he should display anger - Our translation is based on Chapter 2, Halachah 3. (Note also the commentary of the *Knesset HaGedolah*.)

only when the matter is serious enough to warrant it - The Rambam appears to be referring to matters which evoke personal feelings. Nevertheless, the *Misrai Moshe* interprets this passage as referring to an instance in which Torah law would require a display of anger - e.g., a colleague's transgression of Torah law.

in order to prevent the matter from recurring.

Similarly, he should not desire - This refers to physical desire.

anything other than that which the body needs and cannot exist without, as [Proverbs 13:25] states - The Rambam quotes supporting verses for only two of the "intermediate traits"; perhaps, because his description of the middle-of-the-road position for these traits might appear to veer toward one extreme. We might expect the intermediate point between gluttony and its opposite extreme to be eating to one's satisfaction. However, here we are told that we should desire only what is sufficient in order to exist.

However, the Rambam is not telling us to deny ourselves satisfaction. Deuteronomy 8:10 teaches: "You shall eat and be satisfied, and bless God, your Lord." Based on that verse, *Berachot* 48b explains that we are obligated to recite grace only when we feel physically satisfied. (The Rambam quotes this concept in *Hilchot Berachot* 1:1.) In Chapter 3, Halachah 1, and in *Shemoneh Perakim*, Chapter 4, he elaborates on the negative aspects of asceticism.

Thus, his intent cannot be that we deny our desires, but rather that we school ourselves to desire and feel satisfied with what we need, without excess. This is a dominant theme in the sections on diet in Chapter 4, and those describing the conduct of a Torah sage in Chapter 5.

"The righteous man eats to satisfy his soul." - The verse continues: "But the belly of the wicked will want." The commentaries note that the contrast between the two does not center on the quantity of food they eat, but on the attitude with which they eat it. Because the righteous are not given over to pursuit of gratification, they can be satisfied. Conversely, it is the gluttony of the wicked which actually causes their want.

Note also the Midrashic interpretations of this verse:

"The righteous..." This refers to Eliezer, who said to Rebecca: "Let me sip a little water" (Genesis 24:17) - a single sip.

פראק א

HILCHOT DEOT

רַבֵּעַם, אֱלֹא עַל דְּבַר גְּדוּל פְּרוּל שְׁרָאָרִי לְכַעַס עֲלֵי, פְּרִי שְׂלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה פִּי־אֵצֶה פֶּעַם אַחֲרִי.

לֹא יִתְאַוֶּה אֱלֹא לְדַבְּרִים שֶׁהֵגוֹן צָרִיךְ לָהֶן וְאִי אִפְשָׁר לְהוֹלֵת פּוֹזֵלָתָן, יֵד שְׂנֵאָמָר: "צָרִיךְ אֵכֶל לְשַׂבֵּעַ נַפְשִׁי."

לֹא יִהְיֶה עֹמֵל פְּעֻסָּתוֹ, אֱלֹא לְהַשִּׁיג דְּבַר שְׂעָרִיךְ לוֹ לְהַיִּי־שְׂעִי, פְּעֻרָן אֲמַר: "טוֹב מַעֲט לְצָרִיךְ."

וְיִקְפֹּץ יָדוֹ בְּיוֹתֵר, וְלֹא יַפְזֹר מְנוֹנוֹ; אֱלֹא נוֹתֵן צְדָקָה כִּפְרִי מַעֲט יָדוֹ, וְיִרְאֵי פְרָאָרִי לְמִי שְׂעָרִיךְ.

"And the belly of the wicked will want." This refers to Esau, who said Jacob: "Stuff me..." (Genesis 25:30). Rabbi Yitzchak ben Zera said: he opened his mouth agape like a camel and said: "I will open my mouth and you it in" (*Tanchumah*; *Pinchas* 13; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:18).

Also, he shall not labor in his business except to gain what he needs for immediate use, as [Psalms 37:16] states: - Here again, the Rambam quotes a Biblical verse, because his definition of an intermediate path may seem extreme. The verse also clarifies that the Rambam is not denigrating the idea of work, but excessive preoccupation with one's profession as a means of acquiring possessions.

It is highly unlikely that the Rambam would criticize work per se. Note *Prove* 6:6: "Sluggard, go to the ant, see its ways and become wise," and *Berachot* 8a: He who enjoys the toil of his hands is greater than one who fears God...

it is stated: "If you eat of the work of your hands, you are fortunate and possess the good" (Psalms 128:2).

"You are fortunate" - in this life, and "will possess the good" - in the world come.

The Rambam, himself, quotes the latter passage in *Hilchot Tahmud Torah* 3:11. The Rambam is not criticizing a person for working hard, but rather teaching us to work and its profits should not be our greatest priorities.

"A little is good for the righteous man." - The verse in its entirety expresses contrast: "A little is better for the righteous man than the great wealth that many [the] wicked possess." Note the commentary of Ibn Ezra: "The righteous man will happier with his small lot than the wicked with their great wealth."

He should not be overly stingy - The printed editions of the *Mishneh Torah* in *par* (close his hand). However, most manuscripts use the term: *par* (gather).

par recalls Deuteronomy 15:7: "Do not close your hand from your needy brother. Thus, the contrasting extreme would be friendliness. *par*, like *par* in Halachah 1, reflects miserly behavior, the opposite of which is being a spendthrift. The various texts might reflect a difference of opinion as to which opposing extremes the Rambam had in mind.

nor spread his money about, but he should give charity according to his capacity - See *Hilchot Erachin* 8:12-13, which places restrictions on the extent of one's generosity.

should give charity according to his capacity and lend to the needy as is fitting. He should not be overly elated and laugh [excessively], nor be sad and depressed in spirit. Rather, he should be quietly happy at all times, with a friendly countenance. The same applies with regard to his other traits.

This path is the path of the wise. Every man whose traits are intermediate and equally balanced can be called a "wise man."

5. A person who carefully [examines] his [behavior], and therefore deviates slightly from the mean to either side is called pious.

What is implied? One who shuns pride and turns to the other

and lend to the needy as is fitting - Lending is also a form of charity. In *Hilchot Mamot Ani'im* 10:7, the Rambam lists eight degrees of charity. The highest is the support of a fellow Jew who has become poor by giving him loans or the like.

He should not be overly elated and laugh [excessively] - Such expressive "happiness" is often a sign of inner discontent and suffering.

nor be sad and depressed in spirit. Rather, he should be quietly happy at all times - his joy should be a composed sense of satisfaction.

[In this context, see the Ramah's conclusion of his notes to *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* (697:1) in which he quotes Proverbs 15:15: "A good-hearted person is always celebrating."]

with a friendly countenance. - In his commentary on *Avot* 1:14, the Rambam defines "a friendly countenance" as "a spirit of will and gentility."

The same applies with regard to his other traits. - In *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4, the Rambam mentions many other "intermediate traits." Among them:

Courage is the midpoint between arrogance and fear. Humility is the intermediate between pride and meekness. Earnestness is the intermediate between boasting and lowliness....Patience is the intermediate between rashness and insensitivity...

This path is the path of the wise. - i.e., those whose behavior is controlled by their intellect

Every man whose traits are intermediate and equally balanced can be called a "wise man." - Note the contrast to the "pious" of the following halachah. Though the published editions of the *Mishneh Torah* include this line as the final concept in our halachah, many of the authoritative manuscripts place it as the beginning of Halachah 5.

Commentary, Halachah 5

A person who carefully [examines] his [behavior] - in an effort to achieve the desired intermediate path
and therefore, deviates slightly from the mean - to compensate for a possible error in calculating that mean.

to either side is called pious. - In *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4, the Rambam

ולא יהא מהולל ושועה, ולא עצב ואונן, אלא שמח כל ימיו בנחת, בסבר פנים יפות. וכן שאר דעותיו.

ודרך זו היא דרך הרכמים. כל אדם שדעותיו דעות בינוניות, קמצעות, נקרא חכם.

ה ומי שהוא מדיק על עצמו ביותר, ויתרחק מדעה בינונית מעט לצד זה או לצד זה - נקרא חסיד.

כיצד? מי שיתרחק מגבה הלב עד הקצה האחרון ויהיה שפל-רוח ביותר, נקרא חסיד, וזו היא מידת חסידות.

explains that one can refine and correct his behavior by balancing a tendency for excess in one direction by intentionally forcing oneself to adopt the opposite extreme. (See Chapter 2, Halachah 2.) He continues:

Therefore, the pious did not allow themselves to fix their traits at the midpoint, but would bend slightly to the side of excess or want as a hedge and a guard.

He goes on to explain that, even for the pious, these extremes are not ends in themselves, but means to help them overcome natural tendencies. Thus, both the pious and a person of underdeveloped character may act in an extreme manner. However, the difference between them is that the behavior of the pious is carefully calculated with the intent of refining his personality, while the underdeveloped person does so without thought, as a natural response to his whims and fancies.

What is implied? - i.e., how is this concept exemplified?

One who shuns pride - At first glance, the choice of pride as an example is rather problematic, because in Chapter 2, Halachah 3, the Rambam states:

There are traits for which it is forbidden for a person to follow an intermediate path.... Such a trait is pride...

The proper path is not that a person should merely be humble, but rather hold himself very lowly...

Therefore, our Sages commanded: "Be very, very humble of spirit."

It is possible to explain that because of the negative aspects of the quality of pride, the middle path that one should follow in regard to it does not resemble the middle paths of the other traits and may appear as an extreme. Pride represents one extreme, its converse being absolute lack of concern for self to the extent that one walks around in rags. Between these extremes are a number of intermediate points: modesty - which might normally be considered as the intermediate level; humility - which the Rambam considers as the true middle path; and extreme humility - which is pious behavior (*Lechem Mishneh*). See also the commentary on the halachah cited above.

Possibly, it is the exaggerated contrasts in this set of traits that make it the most fitting example to demonstrate the principle of the middle path that the Rambam espouses. These gross differences allow for the possibility of clear distinctions.

and turns to the other extreme - The *Lechem Mishneh* emphasizes that one need

extreme and carries himself lowly is called pious. This is the quality of piety. However, if he separates himself [from pride] only to the extent that he reaches the mean and displays humility, he is called wise. This is the quality of wisdom. The same applies with regard to other character traits.

The pious of the early generations would bend their temperaments from the intermediate path towards [either of] the two extremes. For some traits they would veer towards the final extreme, for others, towards the first extreme. This is referred to as [behavior] beyond the measure of the law.

We are commanded to walk in these intermediate paths - and they

not actually adopt the other extreme, but rather, he should tend his behavior in that direction.

and carries himself lowly is called pious. This is the quality of piety - which represents a deviation from the mean.

However, if he separates himself [from pride] only to the extent that he reaches the mean and displays humility, he is called wise. This is the quality of wisdom. - In his commentary on Avot 5:6, the Rambam contrasts the wise and the pious:

A boor is one who lacks both intellectual and ethical development...

A wise man possesses both these qualities in a complete way, as is fitting.

A pious man is a wise man who increases his piety - i.e., his emotional development - until he tends toward one extreme, as explained in Chapter 4 [of *Shemonah Perakim*], and his deeds exceed his wisdom.

Thus, the wise man is one whose ethical behavior has been developed to the point at which it reflects his intellectual sophistication. He is able to appreciate the mean of each trait and express it within the context of his daily life. The pious man also possesses this quality, but due to his desire for ultimate self-refinement, he is willing to sacrifice himself and tend slightly to the extreme in certain instances.

Although in this halachah, the Rambam differentiates between the middle path - the path of the wise - and "beyond the measure of the law" - the path of the pious, in *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 5:11 he describes how, "according to the greatness of the Sage, should be the care he takes to go beyond the measure of the law." Thus, it appears that a truly wise man will ultimately seek pious ways.

The same applies with regard to other character traits - i.e., there is a mean which is the path of wisdom, and a deviation from that course with a positive intent, which is the path of piety.

The pious of the early generations - This expression is borrowed - out of context - from the Mishnah, *Berachot* 5:1.

would bend their temperaments from the intermediate path towards [either of] the two extremes. For some traits, they would veer towards the final extreme - excess (*Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4)

for others, towards the first extreme - lack (ibid.). Depending on the circumstances involved, deviation to either extreme can produce positive results.

This is referred to - by our Sages...

וְאִם נִתְחַתֵּק עַד הָאֲמִצָּה בְּלִבֵּי וְיִהְיֶה עָנִי — נִקְרָא חָכָם, וְזוֹ הִיא מִדַּת חֲכָמָה.

וְעַל דִּבְרֵי זֶה שָׁאֵר כָּל הַהֲלָכוֹת.

וְהַסְתָּרוֹת הַרְשָׁאוֹנוֹת הֵיזְרָה מִשְׁטֵין דַּעוֹת שְׁלֵטֹן מַדְרֵךְ הָאֲמִצָּעִית בְּגִמְרָ שְׁטֵין אוֹתָהּ פְּנִיָּה

לֹשׁ דַּעוֹת שְׁטֵין אוֹתָהּ פְּנִיָּה הַקְצָה הָאֲחֵרָה, וְלֹשׁ דַּעוֹת שְׁטֵין אוֹתָהּ פְּנִיָּה הַקְצָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה, וְזוֹהִי לִפְנֵים כְּשֶׁנִּתְחַתֵּק.

וְהַקְצָצוֹן אֵינוֹ לְלִקְחַת בְּדוֹרָכִים אֶלָּא הַבְּרִיאוֹת, וְהֵם הַדּוֹרָכִים הַשְּׂוֹכִים וְהַיְשָׁרִים, מִצְוָהּ: "וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדוֹרָכֶיךָ."

as [behavior] beyond the measure of the law. - We find this expression used in a number of Talmudic passages. For example, *Bava Metzia* 30b relates that Rabbi Yishmael, Rabbi Yossi's son, was on a journey. A porter traveling the same road asked him to help lift a load of wood. Rabbi Yishmael was a distinguished scholar, and, therefore, this base task would have been demeaning for him. Nevertheless, rather than refuse the porter entirely, Rabbi Yishmael purchased his entire load from him. This was considered as behavior beyond the measure of the law.

See also *Berachot* 7a and 45b, *Bava Kama* 100a, *Bava Metzia* 24b. However, in these and other Talmudic passages where the term is used, the emphasis appears to be on the ethical or legal imperative involved, without stressing the aspect of character development. [Note *Hilchot Aveidah* 11:7, the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 259:3 and 263:3, and *Sefer Mitzvot Kavon* (Positive Commandment 49), which mention our obligation to go beyond the measure of the law.]

Thus, the Rambam appears merely to be borrowing the term used by the Sages without referring to any specific instance. The path of behavior prescribed by one's intellect corresponds to law, and an intentional deviation from that course for the sake of piety is "beyond the measure of the law."

We are commanded - The *Sifre* (on Deuteronomy 13:5) states: "'You shall walk after God, your Lord' - this is a positive commandment." The *Zohar* (*Ki Teitze*, p. 270) also makes a similar statement. However, neither source elaborates.

Among the *Geonim*, the *Ba'al Halachot Gedolot* does list it as a commandment. Rav Sa'adiah Gaon does not include it as a specific commandment.

Sefer Hamitzvot (positive mitzvah 8) and *Sefer HaChinuch* (mitzvah 610) include this as one of the Torah's 613 mitzvot. However, the Rambam's inclusion of this commandment as one of the 613 mitzvot is somewhat problematic. In *Shoresh* 4 of his introduction to *Sefer Hamitzvot*, he states that he does not include any "general mitzvah" which does not involve a specific activity in his reckoning of the 613 mitzvot. For this reason, "Observe My statutes" (Leviticus 19:19) or "Be holy" (Leviticus 19:2) are not included in the 613 mitzvot. On the surface, the command the Rambam mentions here also seems to be an all encompassing charge to develop ourselves spiritually without any specific activity.

are good and straight paths - as [Deuteronomy 28:9] states: "And you shall walk in His ways."

6. [Our Sages] taught [the following] explanation of this mitzvah:

Just as He is called "Gracious," you shall be gracious;

Just as He is called "Merciful," you shall be merciful;

Just as He is called "Holy," you shall be holy;

In a similar manner, the prophets called God by other titles: "Slow to anger," "Abundant in kindness," "Righteous," "Just," "Perfect,"

Rav Avraham, the Rambam's son, was asked this question, and he explained that here the specific activity implied by this commandment is the development of our emotions and character traits. A somewhat deeper perspective can be gained from the Rambam's own description of the mitzvah. When listing the mitzvot at the beginning of these halachot, he states that the mitzvah is "to imitate God's ways," and in *Sefer HaMitzvot*, he defines the mitzvah as "to imitate Him, blessed be He, according to our potential."

The implication of these statements is that man has a constant obligation to carry out all of his deeds and guide the progress of his emotional development with the intent of imitating God. (See *Likkutei Sichot*, *Tavo* 5748, and note the commentary on the following halachah.)

to walk in these intermediate paths - Despite the Rambam's praise of piety, his very description of it as "beyond the measure of the law" implies that, though it is desirable, it cannot be considered as obligatory.

and they are good and straight paths - as [Deuteronomy 28:9] states: "And you shall walk in His ways." - The Rambam describes this mitzvah in the following halachah. Indeed, the authoritative manuscripts of the *Mishneh Torah* include the paragraph we have just explained as the beginning of Halachah 6.

Commentary, Halachah 6

As emphasized in the introduction to this text, the Rambam has structured the *Mishneh Torah* with the intent of "revealing all the laws to the great and to the small with regard to each and every mitzvah." He does not mention philosophical and ethical concepts unless they are halachot - i.e., practical directives for our behavior.

In this context, we can understand the structure of this chapter. The Rambam set out to describe the mitzvah of following God's ways. As stated in this halachah, he perceives this to mean developing our personalities by emulating the qualities which the Creator reveals. As he states in the following halachah, those qualities are identical with the middle path of human behavior. Therefore, in the initial halachot of this chapter, the Rambam sets out to describe the nature of human personality and the ideal temperaments - the middle path - that man should seek to achieve. Having laid down this foundation, he is able to define that mitzvah in this halachah and begin offering directives for its fulfillment in Halachah 7.

[Our Sages] taught [the following] explanation of this mitzvah - The Rambam appears

ו כף למדו בפרוש מצוה זו:

מה הוא נקרא חנון, אף אהיה חנון;

מה הוא נקרא רחום, אף אהיה רחום;

מה הוא נקרא קדוש, אף אהיה קדוש.

ועל דרך זו קראו הנביאים לכל אותן הפניות: 'אך אפים ורכ מסר',

to be referring to the *Sifre*, *Ekev* 11:22, which he quotes in *Sefer HaMitzvot* (ibid.). That explanation is also paralleled in the *Mechilatah* (Exodus 14:2) and *Shabbat* 133b.

It must be noted that other Talmudic and Midrashic sources interpret the commandment to imitate God in a different light. Note *Sotah* 14a:

[Deuteronomy 13:5 states]: "You shall walk after God, your Lord." Is it possible for man to walk after the Divine Presence? Has it not been stated: "Behold, God, your Lord, is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24)?

Rather, [it means] one should follow the qualities of God.

Just as He dresses the naked..., you, too, should dress the naked;

God visited the sick...; you, too, should visit the sick;

God comforted the bereaved...; you, too, should comfort the bereaved;

God buried the dead...; you, too, should bury the dead.

In *Sefer HaMitzvot*, the Rambam mentions emulating both God's deeds and His qualities. Similarly, *Sefer HaChinuch*, in its description of this mitzvah, and the *Kiryat Sefer* in his commentary - both here in *Hilchot De'ot* and also in *Hilchot Eivel* - mention both deeds and qualities.

There is not necessarily a contradiction between these two emphases. As mentioned above, our actions reflect our personalities. Therefore, it follows that developing our characters in the manner outlined by the Rambam in this halachah will ultimately produce the good deeds mentioned by our Sages in the passage from *Sotah*.

Nevertheless, deed is often not a reflection of character. A person with many severe character faults may still do good deeds. Hence, for the "resemblance of God" to be complete, it is not sufficient merely to perform positive deeds. Rather, a person must undergo internal change by developing his character. Therefore, the Rambam focuses more on this aspect of the commandment.

Just as He is called "Gracious," you shall be gracious; Just as He is called "Merciful," you shall be merciful; Just as He is called "Holy," you shall be holy; - Neither the *Sifre* nor the other sources quoted above mention the trait of holiness. Rather, the third trait mentioned is "piety." Perhaps, since the Rambam gave a specific definition for piety in the previous halachah within his conception of personality development, he does not mention it in the present context to prevent any possible confusion.

In a similar manner, the prophets - The Rambam's choice of words is somewhat surprising since many of these expressions are also found in the Torah as well as in the prophetic works. However, in the Torah these titles are mentioned by Moses or the other prophets. Perhaps this is the Rambam's intent.

called God by other titles: "Slow to anger," "Abundant in kindness," "Righteous," "Just," "Perfect," "Almighty," "Powerful," and the like. - In *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:11-12 and in detail in *Moreh Nevuchim* (Guide to the Perplexed), Vol.

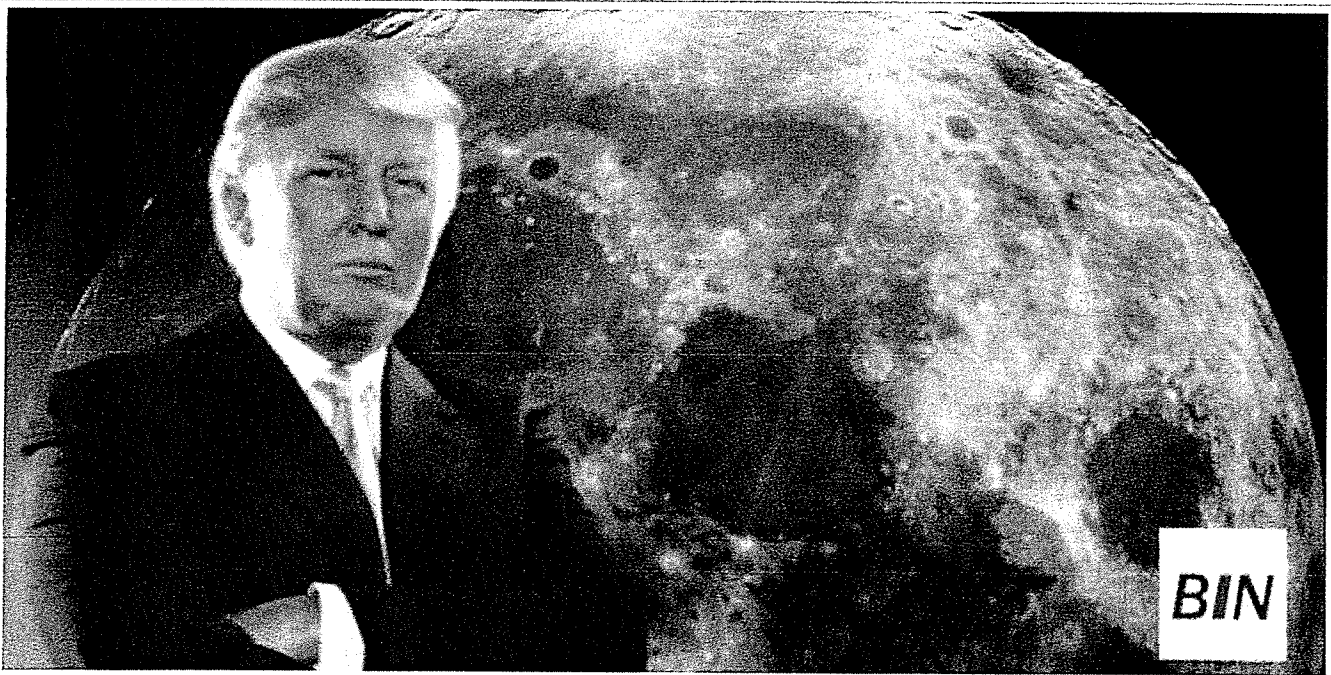
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Latest News Biblical Perspective

SUPERMOON, TRUMP'S WIN AND THE CLASH OF MORAL VALUES AT THE END OF DAYS

By Dr. Rivkah Lambert Adler November 18, 2016 , 8:00 am

"This is Hashem's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." Psalms 118:23 (The Israel Bible™)



(Breaking Israel News)

The recent supermoon phenomenon within a week of Donald Trump's election could signal a divine and fundamental shift in moral values which will bring the Final Redemption closer, End of Days expert Rabbi Pinchas Winston told *Breaking Israel News*.

Rabbi Winston believes that there is a culture war going on between liberal and conservative values, that God is orchestrating the ascension of conservative values and that the appearance of the

supermoon may be an acknowledgement of this.

The rabbi was careful to warn that, though his ideas are based on his deep Torah scholarship, they are still speculative. "We're always guessing, because without prophecy we can't know for sure."

Nevertheless, he said, it is important to pay attention to the bigger picture of recent events, including the election of Trump and the supermoon. "We've been watching a counter-intuitive trend," he noted. "We saw it first in Israel when Netanyahu won" in 2015, despite polls which predicted victory for the left. More recently, Brexit also revealed a surprising lean towards more conservative values.

Rabbi Winston believes that "the election of Trump represents a new ascendancy of conservative, religious values and a rejection of what the liberal left has been building for many years. That's why [the leftists] are so concerned and lashing back."

Rabbi Winston asserted that a primary goal of the liberal movement is to break away from the obligations that come with living a God-centered life. According to his viewpoint, as history draws to a close, God is forcing each person to make a decision about where they stand morally. Are they aligned with conservative or with liberal values?

He indicated that this moment in history parallels the moment in the desert, during the incident of the Golden Calf, when Moses demanded that people pick a side.

Then Moshe stood in the gate of the camp, and said: 'Whoso is on Hashem's side, let him come unto me.' And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. Exodus 32:26

Where does the supermoon come in? In Talmudic thought, a lunar eclipse is a bad omen, whereas a full moon reflects the strength of the Jewish people, who represent God's Word in the world. According to Rabbi Winston, the Jewish people received the Torah and have an obligation to tell the world what God wants and how both Jews and righteous non-Jews can earn a place in the World to Come.

"The supermoon coming out at this time could be a Divine confirmation of sorts that God is behind all this," suggested Rabbi Winston. The very fact that Trump was elected, despite all the scandalous reports of his behavior during the campaign, could be intended to make it clear that God is behind his win, he explained.

"It's very significant that the last supermoon was in 1948," said Rabbi Winston. It was a prelude to the Jewish people prevailing over the Nazi effort to destroy them and the establishment of the State of Israel.

According to him, the supermoon of 1948 was a signal of the conservative triumph over liberal values and the strength of the Jewish people at that time. It was a reflection of "the next stage of *geula* (redemption)," he said.

As was true in 1948, with the surprising election of Trump, we are witnessing a global shift. Nevertheless, Rabbi Winston warns, "That doesn't mean it's permanent. God has done His part and the question is: 'What does man do with it now?'"

Rabbi Winston urged people not to get distracted by the smokescreen caused by current events, but to keep an eye on the essential issue. "You as an individual have to make a decision about what your values are. When *Hashem* (God) steps into history to end *galut* (the exile of the Jewish people), polarization is necessary for people to decide who they are and which side of history they're on. This makes everyone personally responsible for their decision and its consequences. No one will be able to say, 'If only I knew...' This period of history is really about choosing to be with Hashem."

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