

## CHAPTER 3, LAW 11(A) - PROVING WE'RE RIGHT

*by Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld*

***One who separates from the ways of the [Jewish] community, even though he did not transgress any sins, but has separated himself from the congregation of Israel, not fulfilling mitzvos (commandments) together with them. nor being a part of their tribulations, nor fasting on their [declared] fast days, but rather he goes about his way as one of the Gentiles of the land as if he is not one of them -- [such a person] has no share in the World to Come.***

***One who sins brazenly (lit., 'with a high hand') as Yehoyakim (Jehoiakim), whether he transgresses minor or major sins, is granted no share [in the World to Come]. Such a person is called one who 'bares his face' against the Torah because he is brazen-faced and 'reveals his face,' not being ashamed on account of the words of the Torah.***

The Rambam is continuing his list of people so sinful they merit no share in the World to Come, some of the very rare exceptions to an almost universal rule.

The first type of sinner the Rambam lists is a curious one -- a person who is perfectly observant yet who entirely disassociates himself from the Jewish community. He does no sins per se, yet he does not in the slightest identify with his coreligionists. He neither takes part in their joys nor their suffering. He merely goes his own way minding his own business, taking no part in the lives or affairs of his fellow Jews.

Our first reaction to such a person is that his sinfulness is in his terrible callousness. How could any self-respecting Jew care so little about the fate of the rest of his nation? How could he not be moved by the suffering of his coreligionists? Doesn't the Talmud state that among the national traits of the Jewish people are to be merciful and doers of kindness (Yevamos 79a)? This person is lacking in one of the fundamental and defining characteristics of the Children of Israel.

On one level, it is true that such behavior is terrible and fundamentally anti-Torah. As I often put it, it would be difficult to come up with a more UN-Jewish statement than "It's not my problem" -- regarding virtually all of the suffering and injustice going on in the world today (even if on a practical level there is virtually nothing we can do about most of the world's problems -- although we most certainly can and should pray). Yet I'd be surprised if such an attitude, no matter how anti-Jewish, would cause a person to lose his entire share in the World to Come. Sinful such behavior certainly is, but I don't know if it's worse than incest, idolatry or any other terrible sin which a person is punished for yet most certainly receives a share in the World to Come after.

Rather, the idea behind this is deeper. When Israel was gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai immediately before the Revelation, the Torah states, "And Israel camped ('va'yichan') there, opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2). I realize this is entirely lost in the translation, but the word "nation" is normally referred to in the plural in Hebrew. Here however, the nation of Israel is referred to in the singular, stating that "**he** camped" rather than "**they** camped." The commentator Rashi quotes the famous comment of the Midrash on the singular tense: "As one man with one heart." We were a 'singular' because we merged into a single entity. And only then were we granted the Torah.

The Torah was never given to the individual members of the Children of Israel. It was given to a nation. The reason for this is because the mission we were granted was not one of being good individuals, of being nice guys lost in a crowd. We were granted a national, cosmic mission to the world. We were to be a "light unto the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). G-d chose us to be the instructors and role models to the world, to show the world the truth of G-d's existence and the beauty of His Torah. And such can only be performed by an entire nation, by a people united in service of G-d, creating a nation in the image of G-d. G-d's Torah could never be fulfilled by a collection of individuals, no matter how numerous, each serving G-d on his or her own.

Because of this, a Jew who disassociates himself from Israel loses his share in the hereafter. It is not only the sinfulness of ignoring the needs of others. It is because a Jew who separates himself from Israel is not a part of the Chosen Nation at all, and so loses his share in the Torah. G-d never gave the Torah to individuals, no matter how great. He gave it to a nation -- for only as a nation can we truly fulfill G-d's mission. Only as a nation can we be a light unto the other nations of the world. One who rejects his share in the Jewish people can no longer be a part of this mission, neither bearing the burden nor reaping the reward.

This point is valid on a very simple level, yet on an extremely profound one as well. In a simple sense, there is no way a single Jew can possibly perform all the commandments of the Torah. Some apply only to priests (serving in the Temple, consuming sacrificial meat and tithes), some apply only to non-priests (serving in the army, burying the dead). Some apply only to men, some only to women (family purity). There is no possible way one Jew can do it all. Clearly, the mitzvos (commandments) of the Torah were intended to be observed on a national scope, not merely by the individual. Only as a nation can we truly fulfill G-d's will.

But the concept is far more profound -- and it is one the world's great religions have grappled with over the centuries. Let's say the practitioners of a religion "know" they are right and that the world over must embrace their one true religion. How do they go about proselytizing the world? Should they do it through the sword -- accept our god or die? Should they torture, oppress and discriminate until their opponents just happen to come over to seeing the truth of their ways? Or perhaps they should debate, convincing the wise men of the competing faith that their religion of the past 2000 years was all along a sham?

As should be obvious to us, none of these tactics are very good; most in fact are hopelessly counterproductive. Unless your enemy's devotion to his present religion is exceedingly empty and shallow (which perhaps has been the case with many of the world's pagans), attempting to ram your beliefs down your enemy's throat is sure to do more harm than good. At most you'll make some terrified or opportunistic but entirely half-hearted converts who will do little more than lower the bar of piety and devotion for the masses overall.

Judaism takes a very different approach to this. How do we spread the faith, causing the world to recognize the truth of a single, all-good and all-powerful G-d? We do not force, argue, or even go about proclaiming our credo. We simply live as G-d's nation. We demonstrate the existence of G-d and man's divinity by creating a godly society, one which lives and reflects Torah ideals and values. And such a society will be so wholesome, beautiful and awe-inspiring, that the nations of the world will naturally recognize this and be drawn towards it. They will see G-d through His emissaries and respond.

Deuteronomy likewise states as follows. "You shall be careful and perform [the commandments] for that is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations who will hear all of these statutes and say, 'What a wise and understanding people is this great nation.' For which great nation has G-d close to it as the L-rd our G-d whenever we call to Him? And which great nation has such righteous statutes and laws as this entire Torah which I place before you today?" (Deut. 4:6-8).

In simple reading, the above verses confirm our thesis of this week. By observing the Torah as a nation, the nations of the world will recognize the beauty of the L-rd's ways. There is, however, one very curious thing about the verses. They state that the nations will see us observing our "statutes" ("chukim") and recognize our wisdom. The term used is not a generic one for commandments but according to the Sages refers more specifically to laws without readily-apparent reasons -- e.g., not to eat pork, wear clothes containing mixtures of wool and linen, eat mixtures of milk and meat, shave off one's sideburns, etc. (Talmud Yoma 67b). If so, why would the nations see such aberrant, inexplicable behavior and conclude that we are a wise nation close to G-d?

The answer is that when a nation is doing it **right**: when they're keeping it and everything jells, people will see it. It's not the specific details or the rigorous logic. It's that they see everything works, everything fits into place and comes together. The practitioners of the religion are happy and fulfilled. They're pious, they're spiritual -- and they're normal. They are close to G-d but at the same time do not isolate themselves from the world. Religion turns them into not only ascetics, but individuals who are affable, likable, and concerned with mankind as a whole. They have built a healthy, thriving society for all to see, neither fleeing from the rest of the world nor compromising their values in the slightest. They're happy with their lives and their role in the world and it shows.

And people will naturally be drawn to such a society. The details may well be beyond them: What reasonable human being would be so presumptuous as to expect to understand the logic behind an

infinite G-d's commandments? But the system simply works -- and it clearly emanates from a source beyond the world of man.

For this reason Judaism is not a proselytizing religion. Apart from the fact that one does not have to be Jewish to believe in G-d, "convincing" someone that we're right rarely gets anywhere. There are few among us intellectually honest enough to admit it even when he's **patently** wrong -- even if theoretically we could walk all over our opponents in debate. But man **is** attracted to beauty. If people see truth, if they see goodness, if they see harmony, they will respond. We don't have to run after them, provided we do not hide from them. They will come to us. As the Prophets foretell, they will ask to follow in our ways and for the **privilege** of serving us (see e.g. the end of Zechariah 8).

This in a word is why the Torah was given only to Israel as a nation. We have a national mission to the world -- to show the nations that G-d exists and that He has values for us to uphold. And this cannot be done by individuals. It requires a society molded in the Torah's image, one which can act as a role model for all the nations to see. Thus, one who disassociates himself from the community is not a part of Israel. Only as a community, a society united in service of G-d, can Israel truly serve as a reflection of G-d for all mankind to behold.

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