

# ALL OR NOTHING

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

Suppose a person who is not at all observant would come with the following question. "I would like to begin keeping kosher. I don't want to do anything else, just keep kosher. Does the fact that I don't keep the other commandments affect my keeping kosher detrimentally?" The answer that he should receive is that he should go ahead and keep kosher, because he is obligated in every commandment of the Torah, and this will at least be one that he will fulfill. This is not a hypocritical approach for such a person, because this is a step in a growing process. Even though the commandments of the Torah are a package deal, so to speak, on one level the observance of each commandment is independent as there is a separate obligation to perform each one.

The truth is that for so many who have little knowledge of what the Torah expects from us, the approach of observing Mitzvos piecemeal is valid, and even recommended.

There is, however, one exception. That exception regards belief in G-d. The Yalkut Lekach Tov discusses this topic, and he relates the following point. When Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik attended a rabbinical convention in Peterborg not long after the turn of the century, he spoke about faith in G-d. He related the story which took place with Eliyahu the Prophet when he disproved the power of an idol which many of the Jewish people were worshiping at that time. Eliyahu said to them "Why are you straddling both sides of the fence? If Hashem is G-d, then go after Him, and if the Baal is G-d then go after it." Rabbi Soleveitchik questioned the need to repeat "if Baal is G-d then go after it." It could have been left out, and it would have been understood that if they are not going after Hashem, then they are going after the Baal-idol. From this the Yalkut Lekach Tov concludes that when it comes to faith in G-d there is no room for compromise. If they believe in the Baal, even if they believe in Hashem as well, then that is a belief which destroys the foundations of faith in Hashem. Regarding faith it is "If Hashem is G-d then go after him." All or nothing. Anything less is not considered faith in Hashem at all. G-d's existence precludes the existence of other powers independent of His jurisdiction.

The Jewish faith is based on the event of the Torah having been given to us on Mount Sinai. At that great event the entire Jewish Nation heard G-d say "You shall have no other gods before Me." The basis of our religion is that G-d is one in the fullest sense of what "one" means. We passionately believe that G-d is the epitome of oneness. Any doctrine which makes claims to the contrary is a distortion of the truth as far as the Torah is concerned. Every Jew must know this as there are many other doctrines contrary to this basic belief. Unfortunately, too many of us have been led to believe

in these doctrines which even our recent predecessors have died for rather than accept. Our society and schools are permeated with the subtle perspectives born out of these doctrines, and they are not foreign to us. They have sadly won credibility in our hearts.

We live in a world where the order of the day is "live and let live." There is certainly great merit to that approach. However, perhaps we place too much emphasis on the "let live" without giving enough thought to the "live" aspect of that saying. Many people today also straddle the fence. I believe this is because every lifestyle has become a valid option. Everything is called acceptable. As a result, no way of life is solidly founded. Nothing is based on truth. All lifestyle choices are based on "what works for you." The Torah teaches us that there is one truth, and it is not based on "what works for you". It is the truth of G-d's existence and G-d's expectations. "You shall have no other gods before me", the second commandment, is the basis for this very important lesson. Not all choices are good choices.

Good Shabbos!

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