

PARDES PROJECT

One Thousand
Homes of Dialogue

CAN MAN CHANGE?

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 6



The Orthodox Union

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1800-4-CHAVER

Materials for the Pardes Project have been prepared by the
Department of Jewish Education of the Orthodox Union.
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CAN MAN

CHANGE?

How would you respond?

Many of the topics included in the Pardes curriculum are far-reaching and have broad ramifications. The intent of Pardes is to promote sensitivity and spiritual growth through exposure to a variety of Torah sources. It is not within the purview of Pardes to arrive at conclusions relevant to decisions of Halacha. Please consult your Rabbi for personal decisions.

1 THE JURY ON WHICH YOU ARE SERVING IS DEAD-locked. The defendant, accused of selling drugs, faces a long jail term. He says he's been clean for a long time, that he was framed by other dealers in the neighborhood. Witnesses for the prosecution say an addict never truly shakes an addiction. Your vote will set the defendant free or send him to jail. The evidence is inconclusive. Your decision depends on one factor — whether a onetime junkie can truly change. Do you believe he can? How do you vote?

2 YOU ARE ABOUT TO ENTER A BUSINESS DEAL requiring a major financial investment, with a prominent businessman whom you have known for several years. You also know, which the newcomer doesn't, that the prominent businessman was convicted for fraud early in his career and was sentenced to a prison term. The prominent businessman has worked hard to clear his name since then, keeping a spotless record, contributing to many worthy causes, claiming that he has been rehabilitated since his foolish, youthful mistake. What advice do you give the newcomer? Do you

mention the conviction? Do you consider that information confidential? Do you believe that the businessman has truly learned his lesson?

3 AFTER THREE MONTHS OF DATING THE PERSON you consider your bashert, you are about to become officially engaged. Your personalities click. You share common interests. But there is one problem. Your temper. You tend to fly off the handle and yell when you are under pressure. "That's me," you say. "My family is yellers." Your "bashert" will agree to the engagement only on condition that you curb your temper. You want to do this, but don't know if you can. Is it possible to change a lifelong trait?

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and
the wisdom to know the difference.



It is customary to recite the following prayer before entering into a Torah discussion:

(Shulchan Aruch O.H.110)

May it be Your will, Hashem my G-d and G-d of my fathers, that You illuminate my eyes with the light of your Torah and that You save me from all stumbling blocks and errors, whether it be in discussions of what is prohibited and what is permitted or in monetary matters, whether it be in any other Halachic decisions or just in theoretical study. I pray that I do not make any mistakes, and if I do, my study partners should not take delight in them. I pray that I should not proclaim the impure pure or the pure impure, the permitted forbidden or the forbidden permitted. I pray that I should not derive joy from the errors of my study partner. Open my eyes and allow me to see the wonders of Your Torah because it is from G-d that all wisdom comes forth, it is from His mouth that I will acquire wisdom and understanding. Amen.

זה רצון מלפנייך ה' אלקי
ואלקי אבותינו שלא יארע
דבר תקללה על ידי ולא
אכשל בדבר הלמה וישמחו
ב' חבריו ולא אופר על
טמא טהור ולא על טהור
טמא ולא על מזער אסור
ולא על אסור מזער ולא
ינטלו חבריו בדבר הלמה
וישמחו בהם. כי ה' ירע
חכמה מפי דעתו ולבונתו.
אל עוני ואבירות נפלאות
פתורוך.

Points for Study

1 Free will as it is traditionally conceived - the freedom to make uncoerced and unpredictable choices among alternative possible courses of action - simply does not exist.... There is no way that the evolutionary process as currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make choices.

Professor William Provine of Cornell University in "Evolution and the Foundation of Ethics", MBL Science, a publication of the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass., vol. 3, no. 1, pg. 25 - 29. Also in The Scientist, Sept. 5, 1988.

2 Don't even consider that which the fools of the nations say along with the non-thinking Jews that God decrees on a person from creation whether he will be righteous or wicked. This is not so. Every person has the potential to be as righteous as Moses, as wicked as Yeravam, wise, foolish, merciful, cruel, miserly, noble, or any other trait... God does not decree that a person will be good or bad. Accordingly, the sinner himself is at fault. He should weep and lament regarding his sins and the corruption he has brought to his soul... Being that the choice is in our hands and we have willingly done bad, it is upon us to repent and

abandon our wickedness for this too is in our hands.

This is an important principle and is the foundation of the Torah and the mitzvos as it is written "Behold, I have presented before you today - life" meaning - the choice is in your hands, and you have the ability to perform any acts that are humanly possible, good or bad.

Mishnah Torah of the Rambam,
Laws of Teshuva, ch. 5; 2-3

Source, pg. 17

3 He [the penitent] should change his name as if to say 'I'm a different person, I'm no longer the man who has committed that sin'.

Mishnah Torah of the Rambam,
Laws of Teshuva, ch. 2;4
Source, pg. 18

4 Even though man has free choice, nevertheless he is not capable of changing his inner roots or being; as the Talmud says (Sanhedrin 44) a Jew even after he sins remains a Jew because his roots and very essence are holy. The Talmud also says in the name of Abaye, "we have been taught that a good person can never become evil." Similarly an evil person can not become a good person. This however does not preclude change because through repentance and prayer one can invoke mercy from

above and become an entirely new person. This becomes a new creation ex nihilo.

Rav Tzadok HaCohen, Tzidkas Hatzadik, 130

Source, pg. 24

5 One should not say: that which God has created is unchangeable, nor should one say that if He has planted within me bad character, how can I hope to uproot it. This is not so. The character traits of a person can be conquered and even changed. We find that animals can be tamed, their nature changed and their evil roots uprooted. So too, man himself has the strength to conquer his evil nature and even change it to good through study and habit.

Rav Yisroel Salanter, Birurei HaMidos
Source, pg. 19

6 What is Teshuva? One should abandon his sin, erase it from his mind, and commit himself never to repeat it...His repentance should reach such depth that even He who can testify on the most hidden aspects of man will declare that he will never again return to this sin....

Mishnah Torah of the Rambam,
Laws of Teshuva, ch. 2; 2
Source, pg. 20

7 A prerequisite of Teshuva is to acquire for oneself new qualities by removing bad character traits even if they are not actual sins, and by acquiring good character traits even if they are not actual mitzvos...

Meiri, Tehilim, 15

Source, pg. 21

8 In essence there is only one good trait and one evil one. The bad trait is to allow ones life to take its natural course. Without any effort one will excel in his evil traits. He will excel in anger, revenge, haughtiness etc. The good trait is the absolute decision to overpower ones natural desires with ones ethical yearnings. From this vantage point one battles all his evil traits.

Rabbi Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz in the Chazon Ish - Emuna vebitochon chap. 4; 1

Source, pg. 21

9 Rabbi Chanina said to his disciples He who is born under the constellation of the sun will be distinguished..... He who is born under Mars will be a shedder of blood. Rav Ashi observed: Either a surgeon, a thief, a slaughterer or a circumciser. Rabbah said: I was born under Mars. Abaye retorted: You too inflict punishment and kill.

Talmud Shabbos 156

Source, pg. 22

10 Even one whose nature is evil should not go against his nature completely for he will not succeed. He should rather channel his nature to a straight path. For example if one was born under the constellation of Mars and his nature drives him to spill blood he can channel his energy to the good. Instead of being a murderer he can become either a ritual slaughterer or a ritual circumciser. As the verse says "Educate a child according to his traits; even when he is old he will not turn astray from it." (Proverbs 22; 6)

Vilna Gaon, Even Shelama, chap. 1; 7

Source, pg. 23

11 Rabbah went against his nature and became a pious man. Once when he was intoxicated on Purim he inflicted harm on Reb Zaira. When he wasn't in control his natural tendency returned.

Eitz Yosef Shabbos 156

Source, pg. 24

Source Biography

The Rambam (1135-1204)

Moses Maimonides is known as the greatest Jewish philosopher and codifier of Jewish law in history. Born in Cordova, Spain, he was forced to flee from fanatical Moslems at the age of thirteen, where he traveled with his family to North Africa, and ten years later to Palestine. As a result of the devastation left by the Crusaders, Palestine was virtually uninhabitable, forcing the family to move to Fostat (current day Cairo). Throughout these journeys, the young Maimonides had concentrated on Torah studies under the guidance of his father, and by the time he reached Fostat had become a famous scholar. Supported by his merchant brother, the Rambam was able to write copiously, gaining international acclaim in both Jewish and secular fields of knowledge. After the tragic death of his brother, the responsibility of supporting his family fell on the Rambam's shoulders, and through his fame he was appointed chief physician of the Sultan. Despite the immense workload that was required, not only with his responsibilities to the royal family, but to the entire Egyptian community as the official Nagid (royally appointed leader), and to the halachic questions of world

Jewry known as responsa, the Rambam was remarkably able to complete some of his greatest Jewish works, including his introduction and commentary on the Mishna, his philosophical work The Guide for the Perplexed, and his magnum opus the Mishna Torah - the great codification of all Jewish law. While he was considered an undisputed leader of world Jewry at the time, there was bitter opposition to much of his works because they incorporated much of Aristotelian philosophy that went against the traditional purist ideology of much of Ashkenazic Jewry, and others believed his codifications would make much of the role of the rabbi and the oral tradition obsolete.

Rabbi Menachem ben Solomon Meiri (1249-1316)

Rabbi Menachem ben Solomon Meiri was a Provincial scholar and commentator of the Talmud. He summarized the teachings of his predecessors of the previous three centuries. His literary activity covered halachic rulings, talmudic exposition, biblical thought, customs, ethics, and philosophy. Meiri summarized the subject matter of the Talmud giving both the meaning and the halacha derived from it. He utilized all the rabbinic literature available to him, so that his work may be considered a digest which gives a synoptic

and comprehensive presentation of the whole expository and halachic activity up to his own time.

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797)

Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, also known as Ha-Gra, was the foremost scholar-sage of Lithuanian Jewry in the eighteenth-century, and has become the spiritual forefather for much of the non-Chassidic yeshiva world. Known for his greatness in Talmudic and Kabbalistic study, he likewise mastered astronomy, mathematics and music. His system of Talmudic study focused on trying to find the true meaning intended by the sages in the text. The Gra was a fiercely outspoken opponent of Chassidism, fearing the movement would erode the centrality of Torah learning in Judaism, and was pivotal in galvanizing the split between the Chassidic and non-Chassidic world.

Rav Tzadok HaCohen (1823-1900)

Rav Tzaddok as he is known amongst Chasidim was one of the most prolific authors in the history of the Chasidic movement. Born into a non-Chassidic rabbinic family Rav Tzadok became famous as a child prodigy authoring articles and books which later became classics. Later in life Rav Tzadok became Chassidic and became a Chasid of the Izbitzer Rebbe. Having excelled in both the

Chasidic and non Chasidic world Rav Tzadok's writings became a synthesis of analytical logic and mysticism. Eventually Rav Tzadok became the Rebbe of Lublin. His writings are treasured by scholars everywhere.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883)

Rabbi Yisrael Ben Ze'ev Wolf Lipkin (of Salanter) was the founder and spiritual father of the Musar movement. The movement taught techniques for spiritual and character growth. He held positions as the "mashgiach" (spiritual mentor) in a yeshiva, and as the head of a Yeshiva in Vilna. He went on to establish his own Yeshiva. There he began to spread the doctrine of Mussar, a moral movement based on the study of traditional ethical literature. Rav Lipkin founded a Musar Yeshiva in Kovno as well as a Kollel for young married students. Salanter moved to Germany and then to France in order to disseminate Judaism and Torah. Some of his revolutionary ideas included the compilation of an Aramaic-Hebrew Dictionary - for better understanding of the Talmud, translating the Talmud into Hebrew, and the teaching of Talmud in universities. Rav Lipkin's most well known work is "Iggeret ha-Musar", the Ethical Letter.

Rabbi Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz (1878-1953)

The "Chazon Ish" devoted his life to the study of Torah, although he also learned sciences such as astronomy, anatomy and mathematics, since he felt that a knowledge of these subjects was necessary for a full understanding of Jewish law and practice. In Vilna in 1911, Rav Karelitz published the work for which he is best known, the "Chazon Ish." In 1933 he moved to Eretz Yisrael where he held no official positions and yet he became known as a worldwide authority on all matters relating to Jewish law and life. He considered man's duty in life to be the constant study of Jewish law, aiming at the attainment of a maximum degree of perfection in religious observance.

Sources

2 Mishnah Torah of the Rambam, Laws of Teshuva, ch. 5; 2-3

פרק חמיש

תבש נ

זענאות וצער

3 Mishnah Torah of the Rambam, Laws of Teshuva, ch. 2; 4

5 Rav Yisroel Salanter, Birurei HaMidos

ענאים

טרופם תחילת לסתות רוח פגמי במאמר נס אם לא כיוונו לה' דרכן שורות אלי' במישור יונשן' וביערנ' בעיטות אופר ודריט' בבלט הפטון ורבי' בניינ'אים כי' נסדים המה. יש אשר הכוונו מיזוחו בטבע דצויות. ויש להזכיר. בן גב' באדם פרט' טופומים פותחות ונשוו כל ילבו במצדך שווה. איזה חם יצערו באנ' מושן' ומונגן' באורת' נבותה. ואיה גאנ' ילבו דורך עקל'.

6 Mishnah Torah of the Rambam, Laws of Teshuva, ch. 2; 2

מ"ע, החלטת נשובה פ"ב כמ"ג מלהר

7 Meiri, Tehilim, 15

ספר המזות בין אדם למקום להמאירי כנג

8 Rabbi Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz in the Chazon Ish - Emuna Vebitochon, chap. 4;

איך פודק ד חזון ג'ן

פרק ד

1

9 | Talmud Shabbos 156

10 Vilna Gaon, Even Shelama chap. 1; 7

2 אָבִי פֶּרֶק ז שְׁלֹמֹה

ה יושם מ"י שנפלו מוכה בטבע בטוריה ואעפ"כ הוא רשות. ולו
נוthin לו כל שברז בעה"ז שלא י"ה לו תלך לעזה"ב.
טפנוי שח"י נקל לו מאור לעשות טוב ולא רצח ווליז נאסר או
לנשפטם כי גטלו להם רעה (קיטיש נ'). אבל מ"י שנפלו רעה ויש
לו תחץ מלחת החזר. או לפטם צעריא אוניה. ואך אם לפעמים
נכשל בעביה חז"ז אין הקב"ה נבנム עמו לפנים משורת הדין כמ"ש
(ברלטה י") נדולח הכתה שותבתיה לנשים יותר מן האגושים כי
טפנוי שחן מסבאות רשותא לא הרקום להטמא וכטב"ש (מעינה י") משל
למלך שאבד לעבדין כי למי משבח יותר כי (כינולו נכלכת סס) (ט):

ונעמדו יוחל מתקד בעמ'ו. וכן קבצי עכו"ם מילוי ממולין במלול (ב' מ' ג' ו' מ' ג') וכמ"ז
קדושים קד' מ"ז) נפי מילון פמלון עט' י' מ' גאנט'ו'ו'. וכן ית' מילוי הלה מושב
כעט'ו. וכן נג' גודג בעט מלך קון ומ' ט' וט' ס' געם טו'ו'ו' מילוי מילויים וכמ"ל
(ו) וכן גאנט' מילוי מילויים קמיי מילוי מילויים מילויי מילויים וכמ"ל
ס' ג' (ג) ומאקד' גאנט' כמי' מילוי בעט מל' מילוי גאנט' מילוי ב' מ' ג' כמ"ל כ' י' מ'
ונעט'ו מ' מילוי צו'ו'ו' מילוי ועט'ו'ו' דוד פוקה' ג' נ' ג' מילויים מילויים כמ"ג (ו'ו'

צדקה הצדיק

11 Eitz Yosef Shabbos 156

...תְּלִיכְמֹרֶת כֹּה מִמְּנָה. וְרַגְלָה צְמַח דְּכַרְנוֹת...
כְּכָךְ יָמָם (מִרְאַת נָעָנָה צִינָקִיט) : סְלִיקָא לְהָמְסָה עַבְּדָה