

Torah Morality in Medicine and Science

In the coming week, on the 27th of *Nissan*, we will commemorate “*Yom HaShoah*”. The day is dedicated to contemplating the atrocities that our people experienced during one of the darkest periods in history when millions of Jews were taken like sheep to the slaughter solely because they were Jews.

We do not pretend to understand the causes of these terrible events that defy human comprehension. Rather, as believing Jews, we approach these days with humility, recognizing our insignificance in relation to Hashem’s calculations. We trust that this was a frightening Heavenly decree; an “operation” that our people had to undergo to bring us a step closer to the long-awaited redemption.

As such, it is precisely the magnitude of the horrendous events that strengthens our *Emuna*. For we realize that just as these terrible events occurred in accordance with the prophecies of the *Nevi'im*, so too will the good tidings of the future redemption, may it come speedily.

At any rate, we must plumb the depths of the evil mind so that we may appreciate “*how great is our portion and how wonderful our inheritance.*” This will highlight the distinctions between the Jewish and non-Jewish moral codes and the essence of Jewish *Mussar* in contrast to the ethics of the rest of the world.

As usual, we will discuss this through the lens of *Sugyos* related to medicine. One of the more sinister actions of the Nazis was scientific and medical “research”. Thousands of German scientists and doctors were partners in this heinous crime performed in the name of science and medicine. Various unbelievably cruel acts were performed to gain new knowledge and advance in technology. The Nazis also wanted to promote the racist theory of Aryan superiority. Thus, the German doctors did not refrain from monstrous experiments upon people, including chemical poisoning, castration, and other such atrocities.

Nazi ideology based itself upon the principles of evolution and eugenics. Their interpretation of these theories advocated upholding a superior man and exterminating weaker life forms, such as individuals with disabilities or mental illnesses. Since these weaker life forms inhibit humanity’s development, they must be destroyed and their numbers minimized.

We are accustomed to thinking that this unspeakable mentality was only held by the Nazis. However, this isn’t true in reality. A significant number of ideas attributed to the Nazis stemmed from liberal Western countries, including the United States of

America and Britain. Sir Francis Galton, a famous British scientist, founded the theory of eugenics. At the start of the 20th century, forced sterilization had already been implemented in America and was even upheld by a majority ruling in the Supreme Court. Granted, Nazi Germany took this to extremes in a concentrated murder of the invalids (Euthanasia Program T4 and others), but the principles already existed. In fact, they were widespread in the century preceding the Second World War in the "advanced and enlightened" world of that day.

These events reached their climax with the liquidation of "inferior races", such as the Jewish nation and, *l'Havdil*, the gypsies. What are the principles that enabled such a horrific ideology to materialize?

Professor Ya'akov Talmon¹ explains:

Darwinism destroyed the uniqueness of man in creation. [According to its principles,] man was not born with a Neshama that elevates him above all other creations. All of creation is not his footstool nor does he have a direct and special relationship with his Father in Heaven who spreads His tabernacle of peace over him and accompanies him in all of his ways. According to Darwinism, everything is different. No providence rules man and we cannot speak of organized nature through a creator of Heaven and Earth. Existence has no order, conformance, or harmony at all, which would prove a Creator's care. Rather, what rules is nothingness, contradiction, opposition, and waste; all are at war with all. All the conformance and wisdom that grab the eye and cause amazement and feelings of gratitude that they enable life, advancement, and pleasure – they are simply the result of the warring existence, life experience acquired through blood, suffering, limitless wrongdoing, and despairing battles whereby the mighty, zealous, talented, and successful remain the masters of battle while the weak, unsuccessful, and ineffective perish or become vassals to the greater power. We cannot speak of universal, eternal, and objective morality for the entire content of ethics in maintaining existence is to be only a means for a race to attack its competitors and enemies in its battle. We should not classify Darwinism as racist but we cannot describe racism without Darwin. We speak of not a circular link but a direct bond.

In other words, when one denies man's uniqueness that distinguishes him from animals and fails to recognize the soul's existence and its connection to its Creator, even morality becomes superficial and secondary. It acts merely as a vessel to actualize one's survival instincts. If one race believes that they must liquidate another ethnic group by

¹ Ya'akov Talmon (1916-1980) was an Israeli political scientist and historian, and a leading scholar in the study of political theory and philosophy, particularly in the areas of nationalism, totalitarianism, and democracy. Although he was not a religiously learned person, his words are valid and powerful.

unethical means for their own to flourish, they will cast aside morality in the face of this evolutionary concern.

The connection between the perception of humans as *Tzelem Elokim* and the significance of morality exists on two levels:

- 1) The existence of every person on earth as a *Tzelem Elokim*. With this perception, human morality has true significance, provided it has not been destroyed through various means.
- 2) The existence of a Jew as someone with a higher level of connection with his Creator and whose morals are based upon God's word, in other words, the commandments and values of Torah handed down to each generation that guide him on the true path.

This brings us to the famous Mishna in *Avos* (3:14):

[R' Akiva] would say: Man is precious for he was created in [God's] image. More precious is that he is informed that he was created in the image, as it states: "In the image of God He created man" (Bereishis 9). Yisrael are precious for they are called Hashem's children. More precious is that they are informed that they are called Hashem's children, as it states: "You are children to Hashem your God" (Devarim 14). Yisrael are precious for they were given a precious vessel. More precious is that they are informed that they were given a precious vessel through which the world was created, as it states: "For I have given you a good teaching; do not forsake my Torah (Mishlei 4).

Each person is created in Hashem's image; his very existence actualizes the will of God. Even a person with disabilities or mental illness is significant and has a right to exist as a child of Hashem. Nowadays, there are more opportunities for differently-abled people to be involved in the world and we must be grateful for all the development and research that led to this. It gives radiance to the souls of those who cannot express their inner light by usual means.

The Nazi ideology wage war on what it called, "Jewish morality" for nothing. In fact, they were correct: the Jews provided the world with the most basic moral virtues. Before *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, there were no laws in the world regarding murder, adultery, and weekly rest, nor were there any obligations toward slaves or a wife. After the revelation, these matters became natural even among the nations and religions that sprung up later. Hashem's revelation at *Matan Torah* profoundly influenced the world. Many are unaware that this morality was one of the core principles that the Nazi ideology fought against.

The Nazis battled against anything that contained a hint of Jewish morality and values. This included not only the burning of sacred Sefarim and shuls but even banning of Jewish philosophical works. They also defamed Christian principles that were drawn from Judaism and they even proclaimed war upon "Jewish physics". All of this was done so that the Aryan race would be purified and refined according to its tribal history without any link to Biblical or, *l'Havdil*, Christian ancestry.

When we plumb the depths of the matter we find that it was this very principle that was the basis of Nazi ideology: They perceived man as an elaborate animal, not as a separate and elevated creation. This is the only way they could justify their animalistic behavior.

This also presents a warning for all who believe that human morality is sufficient without a need for the Torah's view. It would be a mistake to think that the Nazis were fools. On the contrary, the main perpetrators and leaders of their ideologies were intellectuals, from the finest universities in Germany.

The name Oliver Holmes Jr. may not mean much to most people. He was one of the most important jurists in the 20th century; his ideas have immense influence until this day. Yet, in 1927, as a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, he ruled in favor of sterilization of those who had given birth to "mentally disturbed" children. He stated the following in his opinion:

It is better for all the world if, instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

This ruling led to the forced sterilization of tens of thousands of Americans in the following years.

To the sensitive ears of today's generation, these words sound intolerable. But this is exactly the *Mussar* that we must take: human morality, though it may have importance, is not objective. It is subject to change, fashion, and generational differences. Hence, we must cling to our Torah's *Mussar*, a sacred and eternal morality as expressed in the words of our holy Rabbis throughout the generations.