
*Being Holy: The
State of Israel
and Morality*

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

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Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, your God, am holy. - **Vayikra 19:2¹** Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."- **Shemot 19:6²** And the matter is [that] the Torah prohibited sexual transgressions and forbidden foods, and permitted sexual relations between husband and wife and the eating of meat and [the drinking of] wine. If so, a desirous person will find a place to be lecherous with his wife or his many wives, or to be among the guzzlers of wine and the gluttons of meat. He will speak as he pleases about all the vulgarities, the prohibition of which is not mentioned in the Torah. And behold, he would be a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah. Therefore, Scripture came, after it specified the prohibitions that it completely forbade, and commanded a more general [rule] - that we should be

separated from [indulgence of] those things that are permissible... - **Ramban on Vayikra 19:2³** The IDF serviceman will use force of arms only for the purpose of subduing the enemy to the necessary extent and will limit his use of force so as to prevent unnecessary harm to human life and limb, dignity and property. - **IDF Code of Conduct⁴** Ben Zoma said:... Who is mighty? He who subdues his [evil] inclination, as it is said: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city" - **Pirkei Avot 4:1⁵** This is my problem with the state of Israel, the whole history of the Jewish people will be interpreted by what Israel does in the next 50 years. If the state of Israel does not live up to the concept of Judaic ethics, then people will reinterpret Jewish history. So the Jews were mites? It is just because they didn't have the opportunity to be wicked, but as soon as they had the opportunity, they proved to the world they're not better than anyone else. Wickedness always, is an expression, it is interdependent with power. If a person has no power, they cannot be wicked... that's why the Jewish people,

as a persecuted people, felt compassion for the weak. But if the Jews should be come not the persecuted but an equal to others, how will he act? I don't know, I hope we are different. - **Rav Soloveitchik, My Problem with Israel⁶** The Jewish people is not just a faith community; it is not merely a collection of individuals, each longing to connect himself or herself spiritually with God. Rather, Judaism is a way of life of a people chosen by God to be a medium of His vision of holiness and justice. **R. David Hartman, from "An Open Letter to A Reform Rabbi," in A Heart of Many Rooms (1999)⁷** Human beings bear God's image: we bow down in devotion, but we stand up in mission. To carry God's word and will into this world is not a trivial task and cannot be accomplished remaining on our

knees. Those who jeer at humanity betray the most important thing about us: the sacredness of our obligation to ourselves, to each other, and to God. Though we are not always noble, our purpose is, and only by

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קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי...
Vayikra 19:2

a combination of ego and effacement can we fulfill the proclamation of the prophet: "None shall hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain. And the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9) - **Do we have a mission? Rabbi David J. Wolpe, Why Be Jewish? (1995)⁸**

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