

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Good and Evil Can't Coexist



Following biblical commandments is an opportunity to demonstrate our love of God. It is also the only way finite beings can connect with an infinite Creator.

According to Jewish thought, the commandments are the will and wisdom of God; therefore, when we fulfill a commandment, we connect to God's essence.

This is one of the reasons the Hebrew word *mitzvah*, or commandment, also means a "connection."

Even if we don't understand the reason for a particular commandment, when we observe the commandment, we still benefit from the spiritual connection it provides.

Most of the 613 biblical commandments make sense because they are testimonial or legalistic. However, some commandments do not provide a rational reason. For example, the Torah offers no explanation as to why Jews are instructed to "*not wear a garment woven of wool and linen together*" (Deuteronomy 22:11). Nevertheless, our sages provide an amazing insight into this commandment.

In the book of Genesis, Adam's two sons bring offerings to God. Cain brings flax, which is the basis of linen, and Abel brought a sheep, which is the source of wool. A careful reading of Genesis 4:3-7 teaches that Cain's offering of "*fruits of the ground*" was not accepted because he did not bring the best of his produce.

However, Abel's sheep offering was accepted because it was from the "best of his flock." This reading refutes the missionary claim that this story proves that God prefers animal sacrifices. Abel's offering was accepted because he gave the best of what he possessed rather than because it was an animal.

The story of Cain and Abel's offerings provides another lesson. Because of their actions, linen represents evil, and wool represents good. Therefore, the Torah prohibits mixing these two materials together so we will remember to distinguish between good and evil.

Abel's offering was accepted because he gave the best of what he possessed.

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On a deeper level, Judaism believes everything has a spiritual source, which is from holiness. However, when it descends into the physical world, this spiritual source can manifest itself as evil. Despite its holy source, we must deal with it as it is expressed in this world. Therefore, we do not mix wool and linen together.

We must transform and infuse the world with the holiness that will ultimately be revealed in the messianic age.

However, in this week's Torah portion *Pekudei*, (Exodus 38:21–40:38) we see an exception. In the *Miskan*, known as the Sanctuary, and the Temple, wool and linen could coexist

Specifically, mixing wool and linen was permitted in the garments of the high priest as it says “*They made the ephod of gold, and of blue and purple and scarlet wool, and of finely twisted linen* (Exodus 39:2).

This exception was possible because in the Sanctuary and Temple the revelation of godliness was so apparent only the good and holy source of material objects was revealed.

Therefore, there was no co-existence of good and evil there, rather only good was revealed.

One goal of Judaism is to connect to the spiritual source of everything and transform it all into good. In the same way that we transform a mundane day into a holy Sabbath, we must transform and infuse the world with the holiness that will ultimately be revealed in the messianic age.

Shabbat Shalom,

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