

## Absolute Morality *By Abraham J. Twerski*

**W**hen our children enter this world, we are given a blessing that “we may raise them to Torah, marriage and good deeds.” This is the fervent hope of every parent, but in today’s world of ever-changing mores, the challenge to realize this wish is greater than ever.

As always, we should look to the Torah for guidance. “Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you, and do not follow their traditions. Carry out My laws and safeguard My decrees to follow them; I am your God. You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live—I am God” (Leviticus 18:3-5). In what way should we be different from the Egyptian or the

*The founder and medical director of Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, Rabbi Twerski, M.D., is one of the country’s leading experts on drug and alcohol rehabilitation. He is the author of numerous books and his column is regularly featured in Jewish Action. His most recent books are The Zeide Reb Motele (New York, 2002) and Light at the End of the Tunnel (New York, 2003).*

Canaanite, above what the Torah has already instructed us?

There are various categories of *mitzvot*. Some are completely beyond understanding, such as the prohibition of combining linen with wool or the intermixing of meat and milk. There are other *mitzvot*, however, that are perfectly understandable, such as the prohibition against stealing, murdering and lying. Obviously one who observes *shatnes* and *kashrut* is doing so because these are Divine commandments. However, one may abstain from stealing, killing or other obviously immoral acts not because the Torah prohibits them but because of the awareness that these acts are wrong.

The problem with the latter is that standards of morality based on human logic are precarious. The human mind is capable of modifying morality to meet one’s needs or desires.

Degenerative sexual behavior is an example of how human intelligence can modify anything to comply with one’s desires. The problem of teenage pregnancies is dealt with not by advocating restraint but by providing high school students with methods to avoid it.

In a similar vein, there was a time when human life was sacrosanct and

every effort was made to preserve it. But things are different nowadays. With the fear that Social Security will go broke and the realization that the greater part of Medicare is spent in the

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last six months of people’s lives, the state of Oregon, for example, has stopped funding certain medical procedures for people over eighty. “Death

with dignity” is a euphemism for the increasing pressure to discontinue life-support. When the first incident of physician-assisted suicide occurred, there was an outpouring of outrage. Now, several states have legalized it.

Similarly, several decades ago, abortion was looked upon as being tantamount to murder. Today, abortion is not only permissible in this country but it is funded by taxpayers’ money. In a relatively brief period of time, the pendulum has swung—what was once considered criminal is now regarded as every woman’s right.

One might think that these changes are due to the country becoming more “enlightened,” but I believe that there is another reason.

There have been unprecedented medical and technological advances in the past several decades. Prior to widespread use of immunization, antibiotics, corticosteroids and other “wonder drugs,” along with prenatal care and revolutionary surgical procedures, the average lifespan in the United States was in the forties.

Infant mortality was high. There could be no consideration of “zero population growth” because human beings were of great value to the country. Before the proliferation of countless labor-saving devices, human energy was needed to produce whatever was needed. Losing a potential resource was detrimental to society.

However, immunization essentially eradicated epidemic childhood diseases. Antibiotics brought the great killer, pneumonia, under control and closed every tuberculosis hospital in the country. More people began surviving into adulthood and living much longer. Suddenly, overpopulation became a concern. A bill was introduced into Congress to eliminate the tax exemption for more than two children.

The human being is no longer a vital commodity; and while destroying a vital commodity is bad, destroying a non-vital commodity may not be so bad.

To someone who believes in the

inherent sanctity of human life and that it is not merely a commodity to be evaluated according to the laws of supply and demand, terminating a human life today represents the same evil that it did one hundred years ago.

Man’s tampering with morality threatens to destroy humanity. Hence, “Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you.” The Torah states this because in these countries, morality was dictated by human intelligence. Then, as is tragically true today, legislatures and courts set moral values. Rather, “You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and *by which he shall live*—I am God.” This is the only assurance of life.

We cannot escape the fact that our children are subject to environmental influences. However, we must teach them that the standards of ethics and morals we live by are eternal and immutable. **JA**