

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
Founder and Dean, Isralight
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God Wants You to be Happy

When Rules Become Delicious Recipes for Your Soul

“And these are the judgments that you shall place before them.” — Exodus 21:1

"You shall place before them, that is, like a table that is set and ready for eating." — Rashi

“Taste and see that G-d is good.” — Psalms 34

LAWS YOU CAN EAT, ENJOY AND SAVOUR

The job of a teacher of Torah is not to be a philosopher, ethical guide or law giver but rather a gourmet chef. A gourmet chef has the ability to bring the taste out of every ordinary cabbage, every simple bean sprout, as well as present it all in a delicious tantalizing way.

Once, I went to someone's home to raise funds for my institute. I thought we would have about a ten minute discussion. Instead, we were talking for five or six hours. I hadn't eaten all day, and I was starving. Finally I decided that instead of asking for a contribution, I would just ask for something to eat. So I said, "Could I just have an apple?"

She replied, "Oh, you must be starving. I'm so sorry!"

My hostess ran to her kitchen and made me a Salad Nicoise — exquisitely arranged. Now, I'm not a big salad eater, but that's what she chose to prepare for me. Well, I took one forkful, and I have to admit I had never tasted a salad like that in my life. Because this woman was able to bring out its' true beauty and taste, suddenly I had a whole new appreciation for the vegetable kingdom.

Once I tasted this woman's Salad Nicoise, I could never be satisfied with lettuce and tomato alone. The job of a Torah teacher is to present the Torah in an appetizing way; to reveal the beauty and flavour of G- d's laws for all to see and taste.

THE TASTE OF LIFE

The Zohar, which is the Jewish mystical classic, written two thousand years ago, cautions us not to perform G-d's commandments like cows eating grass. Doing so brings ruins upon us. Let's try to understand what this means.

Essentially, the cow chews its food, stores it and then chews its cud, thereby re-chewing the food, over and over again. The Zohar is using this metaphor as a symbol for something that is done mindlessly without intention or taste. In Torah tradition there is a concept called taamei mitzvos, which can be described as the "reason for the commandments." But taamei mitzvos can also mean the "taste of the commandments." In Hebrew, taam means

both "taste" and "reason" — and there is definitely a connection between the two. Without understanding the reason behind Torah living it can become mindless and tasteless.

Imagine a person who observes Sabbath, but it has no meaning to him — no taste. The only thing that keeps him doing it is guilt, or respect for the tradition, or simply habit. Without his understanding the meaning behind the observance, it will eventually stop sooner or later, in this generation or the next.

We can perform the commandments and the traditions like cows eating grass. They chewed before, they chew now, and they'll chew later because they chewed before — and that's when it all starts breaking down. That's when children say to their parents, "Why should I do this? This is not interesting. This is restrictive and meaningless." And that's when some parents respond, "You should. You must. You have to." Rarely do people respond positively to empty demands; instead, they rebel against them. People respond to what they find clear, fascinating, relevant, inspirational and meaningful. Most people do what they want, not what they should.

When the meaning and the taste of G-d's commandments are lost, then there is no love for it and no joy in it.

When a person whom you don't like asks you for a favor, it can be the hardest thing in the world because there are no good feelings surrounding it. When a person whom you love asks you for a favor, it is easy to do it, it's a pleasure.

The Talmud says that when people embraces the commandments with joy and happiness, these feelings are guaranteed to be long lasting.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, Love is My Religion, and Tefilla Training