

Exemptions

Hi Rabbi,

I have some family friends who have children with some mental disabilities. How does Judaism view them? Are people who don't have 'regular' intelligence still considered part of the Jewish people? They are sweet, and wonderful people, but they can't really keep the mitzvos, can they?

Thanks,

Constance Cern



**stump the
rabbi**

Stump the Rabbi is a forum where kids can ask ANY Jewish question. Have a question? Please send it in to stump@nageelawest.org

Questions here are real. Names and some wording have been changed.

Dear Con Cern

The question you're asking shows a deep love and sensitivity toward people, which is exactly the Torah's view. Let me start by pointing out that no matter what 'rules' apply or don't apply, there's absolutely zero difference in how much God loves every soul, and how much we must do our best to love every soul. I also want to point out that these rules are **EXTREMELY** case specific and sensitive, which basically means, don't you dare make any decisions by reading this letter. A competent Rabbi who knows the case well, and is in contact with mental health professionals must be consulted to ensure a clear guideline. So I hope what I'm about to write is instructional, but please don't make decisions based on it.

Now comes the multiple choice test.

Question 1: Should you make life decisions based on reading this Stump The Rabbi publication?

- A. No.
- B. Not a Chance
- C. Please Don't
- D. Don't even think about it

All Jews, no matter what their capabilities

are (or their actions, for that matter) remain completely part of the Jewish nation, and enjoy any privileges that come along with that, such as long noses, and the requirement for another Jew to break Shabbat to save their lives. We are told of three categories of Jews who aren't commanded to keep the Mitzvos. Along with obligation to keep mitzvos comes certain other abilities, like blowing shofar for another, baking matzah, or acting as a halachic agent. Here are the categories:

1. **Cheresh**- Someone who can't hear or speak
2. **Shoteh**- Someone who is mentally unstable
3. **Katan**- Someone who is younger than Bar/ Bat Mitzvah

Now let's talk about each one. For most of history, people who could not hear or speak were severely limited in their ability to connect to the world, or learn. In the past couple of hundred years that has changed, but in Talmudic times, people who were deaf and mute were considered exempt from the commandments on the assumption that they couldn't properly learn about them. Now that things have changed, and there are hearing aids, better sign language, and much higher literacy, many Halachic authorities believe this rule has changed completely, and include this category of Jews as being obligated in the mitzvos. According to everyone (as far as I know), if a deaf person learns to speak (even if



their speech isn't perfectly pronounced), they are considered a fully functioning person and are obligated in all mitzvos. Almost everyone with hearing loss fits into this category in our generation,

The topic of Shoteh is also very complicated. According to most Halachic authorities that I've seen, this does NOT mean a person of limited intelligence or IQ. The Shoteh who the Tamud exempts from mitzvos is someone 'unstable.' I'm not an expert on mental illness so I can't tell you exactly what kinds of psychosis would be included, but basically it's someone who even if they might be super smart, makes decisions that don't make sense. That person is totally exempt from ALL mitzvos, even if they're a genius! However, a person who has mental disabilities that don't allow them to learn or process information well is different. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein rules that someone with limited intelligence is fully responsible for all mitzvos that are within their capabilities (unless they have extremely severe delays).

Let's look at it this way. Jewish men are supposed to put tefillin on their left arm (usually). If someone doesn't have a left arm, they put tefillin on their right arm. If they have no arms, they are exempt from THAT mitzvah. They still put on their head tefillin, pray, and keep Shabbat. If someone is limited by their understanding, then they may be exempt from that particular area of the Torah, but still do everything else.

Elderly people with Alzheimer's disease are another matter. It would seem that individuals

in early stages of dementia, when they are forgetful, would likely still be obligated in whatever mitzvos they're capable of. Sadly, in advanced stages, sometimes decision making functions are compromised, and they might fall into the category of exempt from all mitzvos. Again, this is something that should be discussed with a Rabbi who is knowledgeable of all the details.

The final category is a minor. I don't mean a minor category. It's a major category. The major category of minors. Sorry I couldn't resist. People younger than Bar and Bat Mitzvah are completely exempt from all mitzvos (there's a rabbinic obligation for parents to train them to do mitzvos). This is partially due to mental ability, as very young children might not be able to understand what's going on. But for the most part- I know some mighty smart 12 year olds- it's not about brains, but about decision making. Similar to a shoteh (sorry kids), children are not reliable or consistent decision makers. Like, right now, I'm looking at my son put ketchup on ice cream. Come on!

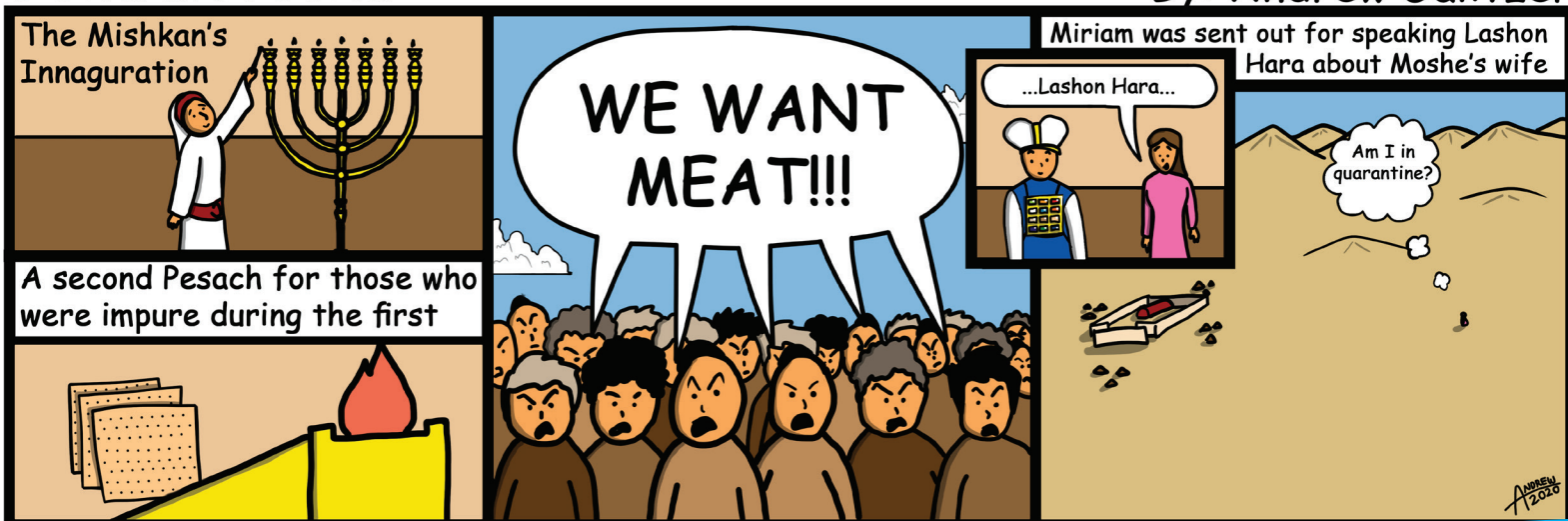
It bears repeating that no matter what the technical status of each person is, they must all be treated with dignity, respect and care. Even if they make ridiculous food choices.

Have a Nageela Shabbos,

the Rabbi.

Beha'alotecha

By: Andrew Galitzer



The first words of this week's Haftarah are "Rejoice and be happy, O Daughter of Zion (that's us) for I am coming (that means God)." This has been a really important strategy the Jewish people have used for thousands of years. At times we may look around and think things are terrible. There is so much trouble, so many people with real problems. There is disease and poverty, and too many other challenges to even mention. How are we supposed to be happy, as the Torah instructs us to? We learn the answer from Ryan.

Why are Ryan and Mrs. Ryan happy? After all, they're still in the same broken down shack, and they still have little food in the pantry? Her teeth still hurt because she hasn't been able

to afford the dentist, and Ryan's work clothes have a stain that's more than 6 years old. Why are they happy? 'Cuz they understand that if you KNOW that you've won the lottery, then temporary problems don't bother you. I guarantee you that those teeth did not hurt when they found out their good fortune.

We have won the lottery. We have a life filled with opportunities to do good and to grow. The mitzvos are winning lottery tickets, every one of them! They might not instantly erase all of our problems, but by thinking about how amazingly fortunate we are, the 'small' problems won't bother us any more. This is the super important trick to staying happy and positive during times of worry. We have God, and we have the incredible path He has given us to everlasting joy and life. Now let's dance!

DEEP THOUGHTS

WHY DO DOCTORS CALL WHAT THEY DO 'PRACTICE?'

Important COVID-19 information:
Please see the website at nageelwest.org for up-to-date information on our response to the pandemic, and CDC, ACA guidelines for running camp

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Happy Birthday to family members who have celebrated recently:

Elisabeth Kac
Ian Boyd
Joelle Shlasinger
Ian Boyd

Joelle Shlasinger
Zvi Sudranski
Timothy Wheeler
Ahnyela Williams



What do you call a moose with no name?

Anonymoose!

OUCH! GROAN!
got a better joke?
Email it to dlocker@nageelawest.org



DAYS TO CAMP NAGEELA WEST GIRLS SESSION | DAYS TO CAMP NAGEELA WEST BOYS SESSION

Find out about our summer 2020 and see photos from GT2019 at nageelawest.org



Nageela West breaks the mold of old school Jewish outreach by providing out-of-the-box social and educational programs for Jewish children across the west coast. Through

afterschool activities, weekend retreats and our signature summer camp, we engage elementary and middle school children in a fun and meaningful experience.

Our "questions encouraged" mindset makes Nageela a comfortable learning and growing environment for Jewish children of all backgrounds.