Jewish Guilt, or The Voice Inside

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**#1**

**What's So Bad About Guilt? Learning to Live With it Since We Can't Live Without it, Wechsler H. J.**

Deep in the Jewish tradition, deep in the Jewish Psyche of the Bible, is a human being who can experience guilt … More than guilt's being a problem is that it is second nature to Jews.

**Questions:**

* **Have you ever heard of Jewish guilt?**
* **Is it good? Is it bad?**
* **And what is so Jewish about it?**

**#2**

**Questions:**

* **Have you ever had a really nagging moral dilemma? Where you really wanted to do something but knew it was wrong? Not clearly wrong in the sense of a crime, more of something that we would call a white lie, something almost innocent sounding, but not quite. Could you describe “the arguing voices inside”?**
* **Where is consciousness located?**

**Based on The Shmuz, Rabbi Shafier**

Mother to a 3 year old daughter: “Sarah, did you take a cookie from the cabinet?”  
“No mommy, I didn’t.  
“Sarah, now look at me, and tell me, did you take a cookie?”  
Sarah looked down, a look of embarrassment would come over her, a small smile would come across her face, and she would say, “Yes Mommy I did.”

**Questions:**

* **Why can't little children lie when asked to look in their parent’s eyes?**
* **When the child gets older, he or she is able to lie looking straight into your face. What happens to the child's innocence?**

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**Alternative Views of Bashore and Rapp's (1993) alternatives to traditional polygraphy: a critique. J P Rosenfeld (1995).**

A polygraph, popularly referred to as a lie detector test, is a device or procedure that measures and records several physiological indicators such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, and skin conductivity while a person is asked and answers a series of questions.

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**Question: A hardened criminal who spent years making his living by lying, cheating, stealing, and living a life of crime is caught with incriminating evidence, but not quite enough to make a case. So they bring him into a room, hook him up to some monitors, and begin asking him a series of questions. When he answers certain question about the crime that he is accused for, there is a noticeable, physiological reaction. Why can’t he just lie without displaying any emotions as he used to?**

**#3**

**The Shmuz, Rabbi Shafier**

Henry Ford used to brag that he never did anything for anyone. He even prided himself on his consistency. The story is told that while walking with a friend, they heard yelps coming from a nearby field. A dog had gotten caught in a barbed wire fence and couldn’t get itself out. Henry Ford walked over to the fence, gently pulled on the wire and freed the dog. When he returned to the road, his friend turned to him and said, ‘I thought you were the guy who never did anything for anyone but himself.’ Henry Ford responded, ‘That was for me. The dog’s cries were hurting me.’

**Question: Does listening to your consciousness cause you to act morally and make you into a better person?**

**#4**

**TODAY’S LEARNING MATERIAL**

**Torah Bereishis 6:3**

*And G-d said: My spirit within man will not remain the judge forever, since he is also flesh; therefore his days shall be 120 years.*

**Ibid 6:5-8**

*And G-d saw that the evil of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of his heart was only evil all the time.*

*And G-d regretted that He had made man upon the earth, and He became grieved in His heart.*

*And G-d said, “I will blot out man, whom I created, from upon the face of the earth, from man to cattle to creeping thing, to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I made them.”*

*But Noah found favor in the eyes of G-d.*

**Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch on Torah** **Bereishis 6:3**

*The Divine spirit which I breathed into man was intended to be the voice of G-d that judges man from within man himself. “The soul of man is the lamp of G-d, searching all his innermost secrets.” (Mishlei 20:27); the Divine spirit within man not only sees a man's actions, but also judges them…*

*However, this “judge” within man is corruptible and can be lulled to sleep; its voice is silenced in the course of time, the sensual element within man becomes increasingly animated, and the judging spirit within man abdicates its authority entirely…*

*G-d said that it would surely end in this manner, if the present trend were allowed to continue indefinitely. He therefore granted an extension of 120 years. That was the time He allotted for the test of this struggle.*

**Jewish Guilt, Rabbi Dovid Green**

Dr. Abraham J. Twersky writes in “Let Us Make Man” that guilt is to the emotions what pain is to the physical body. Physical pain is very useful and beneficial. Without pain we would not know that we have touched a flame, or dropped something heavy on our foot, etc. Pain alerts us to stop whatever it is that we are doing which is inflicting damage on us. When a person is whole emotionally, doing things which we know are wrong causes us guilt. The pain we call guilt lets us know that there is something we ought to stop doing. There is guilt which is founded in morals and conscience. That is healthy guilt. Guilt which lacks a foundation is not healthy and needs to be dealt with.

**Shevet Musar**

*Evil people are full of regrets.*

**Question: While most of us are not entirely evil (always doing the wrong thing) we are not fully righteous either – we act wrongly from time to time. Why do people do the wrong thing, regret doing it either during the act or after it, and later keep on doing the same thing?**

**#5**

**Adolf Hitler’s Statements to His People and Close Friends**

* Providence has ordained that I should be the greatest liberator of humanity. I am freeing man from the restraints of an intelligence that has taken charge, from the dirty and degrading self-mortifications of a false vision known as conscience and morality, and from the demands of a freedom and personal independence which only a very few can bear.
* The Ten Commandments have lost their vitality. Conscience is a Jewish invention; it is a blemish, like circumcision.
* If only one country, for whatever reason, tolerates a Jewish family in it, that family will become the germ center for fresh sedition. If one little Jewish boy survives without any Jewish education, with no synagogue and no Hebrew school, it [Judaism] is in his soul.
* Even had there never existed a synagogue or a Jewish school or the Old Testament, the Jewish spirit would still exist and would exert its influence. It has been there from the beginning, and there is no Jew - not a single one - who does not personify it.

**Anne Frank’s diary, April 11, 1944**  
Who has made us Jews different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly until now? It is G-d Who has made us as we are, but it will be G-d, too, Who will raise us up again.

Who knows - it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and that reason alone do we now suffer. We can never become just Netherlanders, or just English, or representatives of any other country for that matter. We will always remain Jews.

**Questions:**

* **Is it possible to desensitize yourself and get rid of your conscience?**
* **Is there a way to know that your conscience is right and moral?**
* **What are the ways to train yourself to listen to the voice inside?**

**#6**

**What have you gained from today’s discussion?**