

*Think Before Acting:*  
A godlike life requires discipline  
and unrelenting thoughtfulness

**O**ne of the major goals of education is to enhance the self-control of the students. There can be no enduring family society or nation unless individuals exercise some measure of restraint in that which they do or even say.

In Judaism this function of education is of paramount importance. Committed Jews are expected to control themselves in such matters as food and sex, their occupations and their speech, their resort to violence and war, even their thoughts - virtually impossible for most of us.

Perhaps no aspect of Judaism has alienated more from the faith and its legal tradition than this self-control in one's personal performance as a Jew. Yet, Orthodox Jews will not abandon their focus on the law. They are not always successful in inducing the control that the law mandates, and often self-control in one area does not necessarily make for self-control in others. But no one has yet suggested a better way.

One celebrated author on traditional Judaism, Aron Barth, has suggested that what Jewish law forces a religiously observant Jew to do is always to ask - before he acts - is the act permissible or is it prohibited? Is the food he is about to eat a permitted food? Is the sexual urge one that he is allowed to gratify with the person in mind, and when and how? In short, impulsive action is to be replaced with disciplined, oftentimes inhibited behavior.

Leo Baeck was even more emphatic. He wrote that the real godlessness on the part of a human being is "thoughtlessness" - to act without forethought. And thus a godlike life requires unrelenting thoughtfulness.

What a wonderful world this would be if we could count on all human beings to be in control of what they do or say in every situation confronting them.

One related item I found recently in Talmudic literature warrants celebration. At the beginning of a meal, one is expected to seize the bread on which the blessing (the Motzi) is about to be pronounced with all 10 fingers and then recite the well-known words. Why? This is to suggest to the one about to give thanks to God for the food before him that he must ponder whether or not he fulfilled the Ten commandments which the Torah requires of him before he partakes of God's bounty. (*Jerusalem Talmud Chatlah* Chapter 1)

This point is made in the Jerusalem Talmud. There is a difference of opinion as to what these Ten commandments are. One version of the text lists Ten commandments that begin with the planting of the grain. Was the plough pulled by two animals that should not have been joined together? Did the seed contain a forbidden mixture? Did the farmer leave the required amount for the poor to harvest for themselves? Did the priests, Levites and poor get their share?

Another version finds all Ten commandments involved in the distribution to the needy that the owner must make. In any event, the point is simple and clear. You may not eat or pronounce a blessing if the food was produced in sin and the product was not duly shared with those whom the Torah has made partial beneficiaries of God's goodness.

Is this not thoughtfulness to an extreme degree? Imagine how blessed mankind would be if every time one spent money on himself or his loved ones he would pause to ask simple questions.

Did I acquire the money lawfully? Did I hurt anyone in the process of acquiring it? Did the poor get the share to which they are entitled? Am I mindful of the waste of mother earth that the acquisition involves? Will I use the property without causing suffering to anyone?

Most people to whom I would make these suggestions probably would reply, "Stop it. You are making me as neurotic as you are. You are taking the joy out of life."

Perhaps the law does go too far. Yet how wonderful is the message it conveys: Don't utter God's name when making a blessing

if you have not made Him happy with what you are presently doing.

Now, I turn to Washington.

Messrs. Bush and Baker: How much advance thought do you give to what you are about to say before you say it? And how carefully do you control your pique with Israel when you act on matters involving Israel? And how much thought do you give to people for whose welfare you are responsible even if they may not have voted for you?

The one person for whom you do exercise restraint is Mr. Buchanan. Can it be his ideas and your ideas have so much in common?