



**Derasha Parshas Re'eh (2003)
Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

There is a type of sinner in the parsha that is unparalleled in the Torah. A full six mitzvos in this morning's parsha alone are devoted to this individual. His treatment is the most severe in the entire Torah. Once convicted, he is subject to capital punishment by stoning. Additionally, he has a different set of rules than any other criminal in the Torah:

1. Usually, the testimony of witnesses who were planted without the knowledge of the criminal and were unseen by him is unacceptable. Normally, it is mandatory that the two witnesses warn the criminal of his crime and the exact punishment he will receive. The gemora in Sanhedrin says however, that when it comes to this individual the witnesses may be hidden and may testify without having given any warning.
2. In all other circumstances, if one is tried in a capital case and found to be innocent and someone later claims that they have new evidence to convict, the trial is not reopened to protect the defendant. However, in the case of this individual, he is returned to trial to see if a conviction is possible.
3. Conversely, if one is found guilty and someone comes forth claiming new evidence to exonerate, we return the condemned to the courtroom, even many times in an attempt to save his life. In the case of this individual however, once he is found guilty, we never reopen the case.
4. Finally, a Jew is required to love each and every Jew, even a criminal. This individual however, is an exception and in fact the Torah says of him, you shall not show any love or compassion towards him.

Who is this individual and what crime did he commit? What could possibly be so terrible that the Torah proscribes such an intolerant attitude and such a harsh punishment?

This person is none other than the maisis u'maidiach found in this morning's parsha. "Ki yesischa achicha ven imecha oh vincha oh vitecha oh eshes cheikecha oh rei'acha asher k'nafshecha ba'seiser leimor, nelcha v'naavda elohim echeirim asher lo yadata atah va'avotecha."

"If your brother, the son of your mother or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is like your own soul will entice you secretly saying 'let us go and worship the gods of other' that you did not know you or your forefathers."

The Torah instructs us in very strict and severe terms not to tolerate someone who attempts to entice us to go astray and to abandon the path of yiddishkeit.



In fact, in this morning's parsha, the maisis is just one of three separate influences which attempt to prevail upon a person to abandon Hashem and His Mitzvos and about which we are warned to be vigilant. The Avnei Ezel points out that they each find expression in contemporary society.

First, the Torah warns us of the Navi Sheker, the false prophet who produces signs or wonders that actually come about as predicted. In contemporary terms perhaps this refers to a convincing charismatic leader that emerges trying to seduce people that their lives will be filled with meaning and happiness if only they will give themselves and their money to their "center."

The second reading discusses the maisis, persuasion by "friends and family." In modern terms what we would call peer pressure.

Thirdly, the final influence discussed by the Torah is the ir nidachas, the idolatrous city otherwise known as "the street." Today, society and its influential views on religion, philosophy, and modesty may have the impact of the ir nidachas.

However, when you look at the way the Torah relates these three influences, it doesn't warn us with the same conviction of all three. When it refers to the influence of the false prophet, the Torah simply warns us, "Do not listen" or "do not follow your heart." However, when referring to the maisis u'maidiach the Torah offers a litany of variations on a theme of disregard – lo soveh lo, v'lo sishma eilav, v'lo sachos eincha alav, v'lo sachmol v'lo s'chaseh alav. "You shall not accede to him and not hearken to him; your eye shall not take pity on him, you shall not be compassionate nor conceal him."

Shouldn't the prophet who conjures awesome miracles warrant more expression of caution than our own friends and family?

I believe the Torah knows our vulnerability. The false prophet and the ir nidachas are powerful influences, but they are foreign to us. In order for them to have an impact we must go to them and subscribe to their persuasion.

The maisis u'maidiach, however, lives with us, knows our every move and is part of our inner sanctum. He understands how we think, how we behave. He is with us when we are exhausted, or depressed and therefore defenseless to his mighty pressure. He knows how to manipulate us and change our whole outlook or attitude even when it may be detrimental to ourselves.

The maisis u'maidiach is able to change us because he does so gradually, unsuspectingly, but progressively. He is there to lure us to sin, but moreover his mere presence influences us. His behavior and outlook are seductive to us and his values and lifestyle creep into our own. Even if we ourselves don't adopt his behavior, his presence in our midst makes us find it acceptable and makes us numb to it.

As we begin the month of Elul this week, it is incumbent upon each of us to recognize that we have a maisis u'maidiach in our homes. Some of us have only one; others have invited many of them to reside in different parts of our house.

I refer of course to television. I am not suggesting today that everyone who has a t.v. dispose of it. I don't think that is going to happen. (Although I believe it to be the ultimate goal) I am not suggesting that there aren't quality and valuable shows on television.

What I am suggesting is like with a maisis, when such a powerful influence is in our house, part of our lives and with us when we are passive and vulnerable, that we be vigilant and aware with great caution of the incredible damage it can achieve.



According to the Nielson Co. the average American watches more than 4 hours of TV each day. In a 65 year life, that person will have spent 9 years glued to the television. Even more shocking however, is the statistic, that by the time a child finishes high school, he or she has spent more time in front of television than they have in front of their teachers or in a classroom.

We scrutinize and interview our children's babysitters and nannies. We would never invite someone into our home to have direct interaction with our children if we thought they might project attitudes about alcohol, premarital and extramarital sex, and modesty that we disagree with. And yet, without an interview or scrutiny, our children have access to these values.

We spend tens of thousands of dollars and invest great thought to provide a Jewish education for our children because we believe it is fundamental to their proper upbringing and growth. And yet, that education occupies less time in our kid's lives than the television they watch. We must be more careful in monitoring their "other education."

What are the kinds of things being taught to kids on T.V.? A study from Stanford University recently found that "one extra hour of music video (MTV) viewing per day was associated with an average 31% increase in the risk of starting to drink alcohol over the next eighteen months. The 1982 report of the Surgeon General revealed that alcohol is the most consumed beverage on prime time television shows. Television characters drink alcohol twice as often as they drink tea or coffee, 14 times as frequently as soft drinks, and 15 times more often than water. Eighty percent of prime time programs showed alcohol consumption. Additionally, the average U.S. citizen sees 100,000 television advertisements for alcoholic beverages before age twenty one. It seems reasonable to suspect that TV exposure might affect our children's drinking habits.

The American Academy of Pediatrics writes that during the calendar year 1999 the average teenage viewer was exposed to more than 14,000 sexual references, innuendos, and jokes on broadcast television (not cable) many of which were explicit. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that "being sexy and having sex is portrayed as the norm, exciting, popular, risk free and glamorous." Not surprisingly, studies show that television watching affects children's attitudes towards sex and toward their own body image. Finally, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued this public warning "exposure to prime time programming that deals with premarital, extramarital, or nonmarital sex may desensitize young viewers to such improprieties."

Today, people are so careful about what they put in their bodies. We scrutinize the ingredients label on every food to see how much sodium, carbs, protein, etc. What about what we ingest spiritually, why aren't we checking which spiritual ingredients we are putting in our souls?

Adults can monitor what their children watch, but who is monitoring what we watch? When we see couples or relationships depicted in an unrealistic way, it creates an unfair expectation in our own marriage that can never be lived up to. The result is a relationship that suffers.

The miasma is so dangerous because he seems so normal and belongs he belongs in our home. The television is threatening for the same reason. Because there are quality shows, or because we are watching the news, we invite in a source of influence that in truth makes us insensitive to the moral and ethical decay in our culture. We watch shows about lawyers and doctors that we assume to be high class and intellectual. However they often include plots about affairs, drugs,



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homosexuality that dull our abhorance the Torah tells us to have towards these things. We laugh at jokes about these things and are held in suspense by plots revolving around these despicable themes and we therefore become desensitized to the abomination the Torah tells us they are.

To be clear, again, I am not suggesting that we rid ourselves of all of our televisions. I am suggesting that for the month of Elul we have a campaign to turn off the t.v. Let's limit the amount we and our children watch and be more selective of what we watch. We may just find the quality family time we spend and the other interests that arise more than fill the void and we may not want to turn it back on.

This morning's parsha tells us to be aware of those powerful negative influences in our lives, primary of which is the maisis u'maidiach. If we are cognizant of these dangers, we will have an easier time of what the pasuk tells us is the ultimate goal-devaikus b'Hashem. Clinging to our creator and not being swept away by the strong tide of the society in which we live.