

The law of (דברים כב:ט) כלאים prohibits grafting different species to create a new entity. Grafting misappropriates characteristics of each antecedent. Classical cases include grafting grape vines and other fruit, cross breeding animals and mixing wool and linen (שעטנז). In each case, the result disrupts the natural order of species consistency implanted by Gd in creation. The agricultural and zoological worlds must follow the laws of Gd. Man alone is unique in his ability to destroy that order and rebel against Gd's will. The prohibition against grafting enjoins man from such activities. In summary, Gd placed boundaries around His creations. By combining and synthesizing something new from Gd's creations, man tramples those boundaries and obscures them, turning perfection into abomination.

Inanimate objects such as heaven and earth are also enjoined from violating Gd's natural law. Gd told Moses to inform the people that their bond with Gd is eternal. Just as the sun never rises in the west or sets in the east, or a rock never violates the laws of gravity and always falls, their bond cannot be broken either. Ultimately, everything must obey the will of Gd.

We find another prohibition in the *Torah* that is similar to grafting in the lengthy description of the layout of the tribal encampment around the Tabernacle in the desert. Everyone had his place. The various tribes were segregated into five specific groups. Each individual had to know his place, whether he was part of the Levite camp or the Israelite camp. Each tribe had its marching position and flag that reflected its unique identity. Each Levite family had its assigned task in the Tabernacle.

Similar to nature, Gd ingrained in some individuals specific skills and talents while excluding or limiting others. For a harmonious society to exist, each person must learn to recognize and develop his capabilities while acknowledging his boundaries and limitations. Unfortunately, some people regard themselves as all-capable while others lack self-confidence to the point of self-negation.

Gd wants each member, each tribe, within the Jewish community to realize that he cannot be an expert in everything. To be successful, each individual and tribe must seek and develop their unique talent and special skill to its fullest capability. Conversely, those that focus on areas they are not qualified, are destined to fail. Chazal say that the difficult work the Egyptians forced the Jews to perform was that they compelled them to perform tasks they were not qualified or suited to. Such work breaks the individual's spirit, leading to depression and failure. The Torah says each man in his camp and each man with his flag, איש על מחנהו ואיש על

דגלו. The community can only begin their march into the Promised Land after they acknowledge the inherent boundaries to their abilities and proclaim their strengths by raising their flags. Only Gd is all-knowing and all-powerful.

בהנחל עליון גויים בהפרידו בני אדם (דברים לב:ח). Gd distinguished the nations of the world by giving each a unique talent as a birthright, an inheritance. Some nations display specific genius in math, science, arts or engineering. A deluded nation or individual that believes they are expert in all areas can cause a holocaust.

The Jewish Nation's unique talent is our ability to communicate with and find Gd. Our joint relationship manifests in Gd demanding His people follow a specific way of life. Rabbi Joseph Karo called part of the *אורח חיים* שולחן ערוך, path of life. The daily life of the Jew, his prayer, inter-personal and business interactions, must be different from the non-Jewish world. Our success as a people lies in our ability to appreciate our closeness to Gd and develop our talent to observe *Torah* and *Mitzvos*. If we develop our unique skills, we set the stage for other skills to shine as well and for us to flourish.

*Torah* never forbade Jews from learning from their surroundings. Betzalel presumably acquired artisan skills in Egypt that he used to build the Tabernacle. The Jews must have acquired agricultural techniques in Egypt, the most advanced technical and artistic society of the time. Jews have never been prohibited from studying math, medicine, or science from the non-Jewish world. Maimonides (הלכות קדוש החודש) writes that truth is acceptable and should be sought after no matter where it comes from, even the secular world.

However, when it comes to קדושה, sanctity, Jews must be very vigilant and circumspect to guard against allowing the growth of כלאים, grafting any secular ideas onto our Torah and sanctity. יניקה, drawing sustenance from ground containing a confluence of ideas in proximity, is acceptable as long as there is sufficient space separating קדושה from חול. We must maintain our distance so that we do not also imbibe the poisons that are part of that world and become כלאים. There is no shortage of vulgarity, egotism or impurity in our environment. The Jew must discriminate, מבדיל, to draw from the good and reject the filth and corruption from our environment.

When, with the help of Gd, we are victorious in war, something in the culture of the people we conquered will entice us, a יפת תואר, a beautiful woman. The *Torah* says that before you bring her into your house, you must distinguish between two cardinal situations. Sometimes the beautiful woman, יפיתו של יפת (beauty of

Yefes, son of Noah), presents some positive aspect that behooves us to emulate. However, we must also discern if beneath her pretty hair and painted nails lurks great corruption and moral perversion, and reject it. Before you bring her into your house remove her enticing exterior. You must be careful to discriminate and draw boundaries around her customs. You may benefit from her scholarship but you should be careful to quarantine and destroy her corruption and moral decadence. Remember that beneath the exterior of the beautiful captive woman lies an extremely vulgar person. Judaism never prevented us from learning positive things from the nations of the world. However the *Torah* demands we be vigilant and distinguish between the pure and the defiled.

Chazal say that one who accepts a beautiful woman captive will ultimately have a rebellious son, *בן סורר ומורה* (rebellious son). King David married a beautiful captive and had a rebellious son, Absalom. Had David thought clearly, he would have seen her vulgarity and realized that a *יפת תואר* cannot be the mother of a Jewish king. Yefes has a place in the tent of Shem. A *Torah* can be written in Greek as long as it is studied by those capable of distinguishing between the good and the vulgar, like Rambam and Rav Saadia Gaon. Others, who were not capable, attempted to rewrite the *Torah* in Greek and perverted the *Torah* by adopting their ways, resulting in grafting that corrupts everything. Secular knowledge alone is good and *Torah* alone is good. Mixing them produces an abominable hybrid.

Unfortunately many American Jews are incapable of distinguishing between the beauty of Yefes and his vulgarity. They gravitate to the vulgar aspects instead of absorbing the good basic qualities of America.

The *Torah* prohibits us from examining the religious customs of the nations that were expelled from Israel. Rashi says that this prohibition is related to idolatry. Ramban disagreed. A Jew may find some of the non-Jewish worship practices appealing, such as mixed seating, the priest facing the audience, an organ, a mixed choir. *לא תעשון כן* is a special prohibition against incorporating any of their religious practices in the Temple and in our synagogues. That is *כלאים* of the most horrible sort that destroys everything. No mixing of *קדושה* with the religious practices of the non-Jewish world is permitted.

If we allow a leper to enter the Temple we violate the commandment to guard the Temple, to prevent the mixing of the sanctified with the mundane, the pure with the defiled. The non-Jewish world combines the pure and the defiled. The greater the level of sanctity, the more susceptible it is to corruption and spoilage. The synagogue and religious life cannot tolerate *כלאים*.

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