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Not always, however, does the *שולחן* follow the *הלכות* closely. There are times when they are in apparent conflict, when the intention is one thing, and the performance something quite different. Bilaam, about whom we have read so much in today's reading of the Torah, was one of those ^{whose} ~~practice~~ differed from his purpose. He came to Israel, our Rabbis tell us, intending to curse ^{her} ~~them~~, saying: *אני אקלל את ישראל*. "May you never have any study-halls and synagogues". His performance, however, was not that of cursing but of blessing, ^{instead} for he said: *אשר יאמרו בני ישראל ליהוה אלהינו*, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel". And this, as we all know, refers to the Houses of G-d, the study-halls and the synagogues. Here, the intention and the act not only differed, they were antithetic. The act was diametrically opposed to the intention.

Our thought today, then, centers about this problem of the discrepancy between intention and act, between what you want to do and what you actually do. And our main concern is not with those whose intention, is evil (and whose act, is good) but rather with the great majority of people, those who find that their intentions are good but who are troubled by the fact that these good intentions are short-circuited and often wind up as improper and sometimes harmful deeds.

And let us keep this in mind: behind a great deal of our modern immoralism is not so much downright badness as sincere confusion in transforming a good intention into a good performance.

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, that great multi-~~colored~~^{faceted} medieval personality, prefaces his philosophic treatise, "The Kuzari", with the following story, which is the frame into which he fits the philosophic content of the book. In ~~tenth~~^{eighth}-century Crimea there lived a pagan tribe called the פ'זזיז, the Khazars. The King of the Khazars was a man endowed with a very profound personality, who had a genuine desire to discover the Truth and do only Good. ~~As a result~~^{and so}, he devoted himself, with all his heart and with all the sincerity at his command, to worshipping the pagan idols in his temples. But at night, when he was in bed, his sleep would be disturbed by a dream in which an angel appeared to him, saying פ'זזיז קדושים פ'ע פ'ע, א'זזיז ק'א'זזיז "Your intentions are indeed worthy and accepted; but not your deeds". The King then turned to living according to the principles of Greek wisdom, and then according to the dictates of Christianity and then Islam, but until he embraced Judaism, that same angel would reappear saying: פ'זזיז קדושים פ'ע פ'ע, א'זזיז ק'א'זזיז "Your intentions are virtuous; your actions are not."

Consider the contemporary Jewish scene. Oh how distorted and deteriorated it has become because of Jews who think that good intentions are sufficient. If any of you have attempted to convince people to join a synagogue, or work in behalf of a worthy Jewish cause, or live a life guided by the principles of the Torah, you know that you can expect the usual stereotyped answer: "Oh, but I'm a good Jew at heart". As if the heart alone were equipped to do the work of the hands and the feet and the mind! As if a good heart alone built this synagogue! As if wonderful intentions by themselves resurrected the State of Israel! And what is this gimmick which short-circuits the current which runs from the good intention to the good performance? It is ^a lack of understanding as to what makes this world of ours tick; it is a lack of insight into

Indeed, our irreligious Jewish brethren do not mean badly. They mean well. But they are conspicuous failures in ^{the business of} doing what they mean to do. The upshot of all this is that conscience alone is not enough; it never has been enough. Shakespeare writes:

"Lillies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

Anyone who reads the daily papers with sympathetic understanding will realize that at the heart of the Iranian situation lies this gap between good intentions and good results, engineered by stupidity. No one will doubt that the aging Premier of Iran is a man with a tremendous capacity for love of his country. He is universally regarded as Persia's Number One patriot. His only ambition is to free his people from the shackles of economic subordination. What noble intentions! But what terrible consequences are in store for that unfortunate country because of the good intentions of its citizenry and leadership. Economic catastrophe, a Russian invasion, a World War with blood flowing more freely than oil - what a horrible price to pay for misguided good intentions. And how foolish!

But let us not stop with history or with contemporaneous public life. This road leads straight into a man's own soul. Let a man in some hour of honest *lejon i världen*, in a moment of sincere penitence, face those things about which he is most sorry and most ashamed, and of what does he accuse himself? Is it not of foolishness? Is it not a lack of common sense which twists his good *dygd* into a vile *öfver*?

Indeed, if our American democracy as a whole should go to pieces, sin would not be the chief guilty conspirator. That wouldn't be half the story. Nothing can destroy our well-intentioned American democracy except our own stupidity. Just this Wednesday the N.Y. Times reported that a poll was conducted among over 500 N.Y. High School students. They were asked what they thought were the most important elements of citizenship. And the great majority of them, and all had taken courses in American History, the greatest majority reported that the chief prerequisite for good citizenship was "being a good fellow" ^{being a "good Joe" -} having the best intentions. You may do as you wish ^{sit by idly while your friend burns a cross on the lawn of some poor negro's home while your friend joins a lynching party, contribute passively to the corruption of our big cities,} - just mean well! What a sinister foreboding for the future of our country. Oh, how one wishes that we would behold an angel in the visions of the night who would admonish and remind us:

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְרֵם וְיִשְׁמְרֵם וְיִשְׁמְרֵם

The painful aspects of our problem are perhaps even more apparent in the realm of family-life and within the confines of one's private relationships with his friends. Most parents are not bad - but ~~they~~ many of them are foolish. Ask the psychiatrists what ruins children, twists their plastic lives, imposes on them inner handicaps which torture their personalities, and they will say it is not so much bad parents as stupid parents. Here is a woman, for example, who in her girlhood dreamed of being a singer and, balked by circumstance, is now a clerk instead. To her daughter she transfers the thwarted ambition of her youth. Her daughter shall be the singer. Upon her daughter falls the mantle of her early hopes; yes, and upon her daughter fall also the terrible hands of a devoted mother pressing a child into a mold, so that the girl grows up trying desperately to be not herself but somebody else. Of course the psychiatrists' offices are ^{-full} full of such products of good intentions!

Certainly our friends too harm us with good-will. Only a few days ago I experienced deep embarrassment because a friend wanted to express his good wishes, and his own lack of good taste and common sense transformed a noble intention into a clumsy mistake.

Samuel Alexander, the British philosopher, points to the heart of the problem when he says:

"Evil is not always wholly evil; it is often misplaced good."

And D.W. Thompson says, with typical acumen:

"Against a foe I can myself defend,
"But Heaven protect me from a blundering friend."

Undoubtedly, a good intention is the starting point for a good deed. But the catalyst which ^{+ accelerates} accomplishes this reaction of good intention to good deed is common sense. Without this common sense and understanding and foresight and good taste, we can expect to hear the sharp reproach that the King of the Khazars heard: פ'נ'יך זענען גוט און די מעש'עס זענען שוין

"Your intentions are thoroughly acceptable; but your deeds are all wrong".

The Sages of the Talmud tell an interesting story. If you recall, one of the Rabbis of the Mishna, Elisha ben Abuya, proved a defection in the ranks, and despite his great learning and uncontested sincerity, he became an apostate and betrayed ^{Judaism} ~~the Jewish faith~~ and Jewish practices. One day '27, R. Judah the Prince, saw the daughter of Elisha, and '27 remarked, זענען מיר און זיין פאטער, "Does indeed that vile sinner, that scoundrel, have a daughter?" And she, defending her father, answered, ווער איז דאס און ווער איז דאס, "Rabbi, consider his Torah, his sincerity, his great will to do good!" and do not consider his deeds". And, relates the Aggadah, '27 was so enraged and mortified by the singular un-Jewishness of this statement, that he was unable to speak. Instead, '27 נאך, he wept aloud at the tragedy he had witnessed. Even in his own generation, so replete with ^{which was beginning to form} great men, wise scholars and nobly pious Jews, he already noticed the crack in Jewish life, the terrible distinction people were already making and justifying between good ^{ווייניג} and good ^{און גוט}.

How '27 would weep if he were to witness not one individual but thousands of individuals who foolishly make the same mistake. O how we are in need of an angel ^{all right} to remind us: פ'נ'יך זענען גוט און די מעש'עס זענען שוין "Your intentions are ~~acceptable~~, your deeds- all wrong".

Benedict:

who would inscribe in blazing letters on the tablets of our hearts the reminder:

BENEDICTION:

וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

"How great are your works, O Lord; your thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knows it not; neither does a fool understand it".

O Omniscient G-d, true indeed are the hallowed verses of your singer, David. For no fool can understand the greatness of your thoughts and your works, and no simpleton can appreciate the consistency between your intentions and your deeds. Bless us with wisdom, G-d our Father, so that we your children might also be able to transform our good thoughts into good works.

וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וְהַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

this

Planted in ~~the~~ house of the Lord, may you blossom in the courts of our G-d; may you grow proudly in your old age, full of strength and vigor, to declare that the Lord is upright. He is our Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. Amen