Kosher Katch 2023 - Text Study

What Does it Really Mean to be a Mensch?

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Become a Man

When the time of David's passing was nearing, he instructed his son Solomon: "I am going the way of all the earth, and you should strengthen yourself and become a man (ish).

I Kings 2:2

The Management of Desires

Rabbi Yudan said in the name of Rabbi Aibu: No man departs from the world with even half his desires gratified. If he has one hundred, he wants to turn it into two hundred, and if he has two hundred, he wants to turn it into four hundred.

Midrash, Kohelet Rabbah 1:13

Living in Community

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said: Go into the world and observe the right course a man should steadfastly follow.

Rabbi Eliezer said: Be generous with your means.
Rabbi Joshua said: Be a good friend.
Rabbi Yose said: Be a good neighbor.
Rabbi Simeon said: Consider the consequences of your actions.
Rabbi Eleazar said: Cultivate an unselfish heart. (Mishnah, Avot 2:10-11, 13)
Passing The Tests of Manhood
By three things is a man tested:
By the way he does business
By the amount of wine he drinks
By the length of his talk.

Midrash, Avot deRabbi Nathan 31

Strive to be a man

[Rabbi Hillel] was accustomed to say: A boor cannot fear sin. An ignorant person cannot be pious. A person prone to being ashamed cannot learn. An impatient person cannot teach. Not all who engage in a lot of business become wise. In a place where there is no man, strive to be a man.

Pirkei Avot 2:5

Seeing no man

Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about (literally, "seeing no man"), he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

Exodus 2:11-12

Vidui Rabbah — The Long Confession
For these sins, our God, we ask forgiveness:

The ways we have wronged You under duress and by choice;
and harm we have caused in Your world consciously and unconsciously.

The ways we have wronged You through our thoughtlessness;
and harm we have caused in Your world through impulsive acts of malice.

The ways we have wronged You by abusing our power;
and harm we have caused in Your world through disrespect to parents and teachers.

The ways we have wronged You by giving in to our hostile impulses; and harm we have caused in Your world through inflexibility and stubbornness.

The ways we have wronged You through lies and deceit;
and harm we have caused in Your world by making light of serious matters.

The ways we have wronged You in our routine conversations;
and harm we have caused in Your world through envy.

The ways we have wronged You openly and secretly;
and harm we have caused in Your world by hating without cause.

The ways we have wronged You by losing self-control;
and harm we have caused in Your world through consumption of food and drink.

The ways we have wronged You through sexual immorality;
and harm we have caused in Your world by hardening our hearts.

The ways we have wronged You through greed and exploitation;
and harm we have caused in Your world through dishonesty in business.

The ways we have wronged You through our innermost thoughts;
and harm we have caused in Your world through gossip and rumor.

The ways we have wronged You by offering or accepting bribes;
and harm we have caused in Your world by profaning Your name in public.

Gender is a social construct
“Gender is not, in this sense, invented solely as an individual act of will. Nor does it change instantaneously...Gender is a social construct, but it is nevertheless very socially real, durable, and powerful. Gender norms...seem to be simultaneously ideals and expectations.”

Sarah Imhoff, Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 6-7

Male Dominance

"Gender, in short, in rabbinic culture and thus gender domination are forged via the construction of the ideal male as Torah scholar. Torah study is the functional modality by which male dominance over women is secured in rabbinic discourse, thus fulfilling the functions that physical domination secures in various other cultural formations. Male power remains secure, insofar, at least, as the Rabbis, an all-male group, held power over women."

Daniel Boyarin, Unheroic Conduct, p. 156

Muscle Judaism

"in the twilight of sunless houses, our eyes adjusted to a shy wink; In the constant fear of persecution, the power of our voice vanished into a fearful whisper...Let us rejoin our oldest traditions: let us again become deep-seated, stout-minded, bold-looking men."

Max Nordau

Zionism, Our Manhood

"…Note also, do not fail to note,
In that dark corner, and behind that cask
Crouched husbands, bridegrooms, brothers, peering from the cracks,
Watching the sacred bodies struggling underneath
The bestial breath,
Stifled in filth, and swallowing their blood!
Watching from the darkness and its mesh
The lecherous rabble portioning for booty
Their kindred and their flesh!
Crushed in their shame, they saw it all;
They did not stir nor move;
They did not pluck their eyes out; they
Beat not their brains against the wall!
Perhaps, perhaps, each watcher had it in his heart to pray:
'A miracle, O Lord – and spare my skin this day!'…
The kohanim sallied forth, to the Rabbi's house they flitted:
'Tell me, O Rabbi, tell, is my own wife permitted?'
The heirs of Hasmoneans lay, with trembling knees,
Concealed and cowering – the sons of the Maccabees!...
It was the flight of mice they fled,
The scurrying of roaches was their flight…"

"City of Slaughter," Hayim Nachman Bialik