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Being a Man by Rabbi Eliot Malomet

The following was a d'var Torah given at the occasion of a Regional Man of

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Dear Men,

Dear Men and Women, but especially, dear men,

There comes a moment in the Jewish education of every man, where he encounters a text from Pirke Avot which on its surface seems simple, but in our time has become very complicated.

It is a statement of Hillel: U-VEMAKOM SHE'EIN ANASHIM, HISHTADEL LIHYOT ISH. (2:6)

It means literally, “in a place where there are no men, be a man.”

But it’s a complicated text for us. Because it is such a strongly gendered statement, many translators have neutered it. Even our Sim Shalom siddur falls into the trap and says, “Where there are no worthy *persons*, strive to be a worthy *person*.”

But that’s not what it is saying. It’s not about being a worthy *person*; we have plenty of texts for that. This is about being a **man**. And it is from a great man who understood what it meant to be a man, and was unashamed and unapologetic about the masculine gender in his statement: “Where there are no *men*, strive to be a *man*.” As men, we need our tradition to remind us that we have to strive to be **men**. Especially when more and more men, especially young men, have become confused and puzzled by what it means to be a man.

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What does it mean to be a man?

What does it mean to be a real Jewish man?

Let me present five ways to be a real Jewish man.

1. To be a real Jewish man, means to participate in TEFILAH. It means that your membership in a *minyan-tefilah* is mandatory. Repeat after me:

Minyan membership is mandatory for men.

There are men in this room who understand this and who are present day in and day out at minyan. They are backbone of our shuls. They are the finest men in our shuls, and everyone here knows it.

Being a man means you show up. Being a man means you are present and accounted for. For too many men egalitarianism has become a convenient excuse for them to stay home. Being a man means showing up before you are asked. Being a man means that you put the needs of the community above yourself. Real men go to minyan. Real men make minyan a mandatory part of their lives. If there is one thing that you can do to enhance your life and the life of your shul it is to go to minyan.

2. Real men study Torah. Study stimulates strength of character. Study stirs empathy. Study stresses self-awareness. And study stimulates connection to others. Study of Torah is essential for our lives as Jewish men. If there is one thing that you can do to enhance your life as a Jewish man, it should be the

study of Torah.

3. Real men do Mitzvot. It's not "the suit that makes the man," or "the hat that makes the man," it's "the mitzvah that makes the man." Be a man who is committed to mitzvah. Choose your mitzvah and specialize in it. Be proud of it and model your mitzvah to others.

Okay, so far we have:

1. Real men go to Minyan.
2. Real men study Torah.
3. Real men do Mitzvot.

Here are two more.

4. Real Men do Tzedakah. Real men don't wait to be asked to give. And real men give generously. Real men share. Real men work for tzedakah projects. They see people hurting they mobilize. They see someone in need, they come to the rescue. Real men work for justice. They are POALIM. Poalei Tzedek. Real men stand up for Israel especially when they see Israel under attack and when they see the hypocrisy of the world that could care less about the thousands massacred in Syria, and the intolerable rain of terror rockets in Southern Israel, and yet condemns Israel for self-defense.

5. Lastly, real men have a SHEM, a name. A SHEM TOV, a good name.

Honesty, integrity, kindness. Being a great husband, a great father, a great mentor, a great friend. All the things that give you a good name in life.

How do you become a real Jewish man?

TEFILLAH, TORAH, MITZVAH, POEL TZEDEK and SHEM.

Let me make it easy for you to remember:

TAF, TAF, MEM, PEH, SHIN. Scramble those letters and what do you get?

MISHTATEF. MEM, SHIN, TAF, TAF, PEH.

Which means a participant.

Participate in TEFILA, in minyan.

Participate in Torah. Study.

Participate in mitzvah through the Men's Club projects.

Participate in Tzedakh by giving generously and speaking out for Israel.

And if you do all of that, and have a SHEM TOV, a reputation of living your life with integrity, then you'll be a man.

UVEMAKOM SHE'IN ANASHIM, And in a place where there are no men, you won't have a problem being a man. You'll know exactly what it means.

Rabbi Eliot Malomet Highland Park Conservative Temple – Congregation

Anshe Emeth, Highland Park, NJ.

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7 Responses to *Being a Man* by Rabbi Eliot Malomet

Jeff Schulman

January 29, 2013 at 9:27 pm



I had the opportunity to hear Rabbi Malomet deliver this d'var torah at one of the NNJR Man of the Year dinners. It is a powerful message and one that has resonated with me personally. I have taken this message to heart and I have adopted the phrase “In a place where there are no men, be a man” as a personal mission statement.

If anyone would like to discuss this further with me, please contact me at jlschul@optonline.net

[Reply](#)

Al Davis

January 30, 2013 at 9:46 am



A hearty yasher ko-ach to my rabbi, Eliot Malomet, for hitting a grand slam homer with these words. As we strive to live up to our FJMC mission — to involve Jewish men in Jewish life, what better way to do this than to be a role model for what such involvement means. We have taken on the motto:

Leadership – Innovation – Community. The five steps Rabbi outlines put us square in line with all three concepts. May we merit to be considered true (Jewish) MEN!

[Reply](#)

Bob Braitman

January 30, 2013 at 9:51 am



I was moved and inspired by the Rabbi's speech. To be a full "man" we need to have a spiritual life and be there for our communities.

Yet it left me wondering-is this ALL there is to being a Jewish man today? I've been thinking long and hard about this issue as we prepare for the FJMC convention.

As fathers we are "men" when we mentor our sons. Indeed, as men generally, we need to step up and be mentors to other younger men. Whether this is in the workplace or in social settings, our behavior, our ethics, our model is essential to ensuring that the next generation will indeed be "men".

To be a "man" we need to take care of our bodies. We need to do what is right by eating and diet to maintain our health-for ourselves, for our families and our communities.

To be a “man” we need to be productive. Whether that is on a job that supports our family financially or as a volunteer that supports our community (or both). We need to stand up and be men.

I am grateful to Rabbi Malomet for throwing down the gauntlet. I hope that other readers will chime in and help us flesh out the many aspects of what it takes “to be a man”

[Reply](#)

Orin Rotman

January 30, 2013 at 2:12 pm



I think the Hebrew of this quote from Pirke Avot lends itself to another lesson:

It says “Ein Anashim”, not “ein ish” at the front end. “Anashim” here might be referring to a situation where there is already one “man”, one person or even maybe one small group doing the work, taking the responsibility, but only one. Don’t leave that man alone to do it all, to burn out, because then there will truly be “ain ish” no man left.

[Reply](#)

Al Davis

January 30, 2013 at 11:57 pm



Interesting take, Rotman. Leave it to an attorney! Yasher Ko-ach.

[Reply](#)

Larry Eisenstadt, Ritual Coordinator, Temple of Aaron, St. Paul, Minnesota



January 30, 2013 at 6:19 pm

Yasher Koach!!! Excellent

Larry Eisenstadt
Ritual Coordinator
Temple of Aaron
St. Paul, Minnesota

[Reply](#)

Craig Artel

May 5, 2013 at 2:53 pm



I'm very proud, indeed, not only to be a Co-President of the Men's Club of the Highland Park Conservative Temple – Congregation Anshe Emeth, but to be a member of the Temple under the spiritual leadership of our rabbi, Eliot Malomet. Yasher koach!

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