

Wellsprings of Torah: An Anthology of Biblical Commentaries by Alexander Zusia Friedman Quotes

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) "In the beginning" — the first thing a Jew must know is that God created heaven and earth. —Rabbi Moses Leib of Sassov¹

"And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." (Genesis 5:24) Enoch was a righteous man, but his mind was easily induced to turn from the righteous ways and to become wicked. He was therefore taken quickly, before his time. —Rashi

Enoch kept aloof from his fellow-men and, consequently, he did not instill any of his own righteousness into his generation. God therefore feared that he might be corrupted by his contemporaries and become wicked, for "whoever leads the people to righteousness, no sin shall occur through him" {Sayings of the Fathers 5:21) but he who does not do so, preferring to keep to himself, may be influenced by those around him to become evil. It was because "Enoch walked with God", keeping aloof from other men to serve God by himself, that "he was not, for God took him." God took him before his time for fear that he might be corrupted by the evil of the generation in which he lived. —Attributed to Rabbi Moses Schreiber (Hatham Safer)²

"And the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven ..." (Genesis 22:11) Why was the order not to slaughter Isaac given by a mere angel, when the command to sacrifice him had been pronounced by God Himself? To teach us that we must not obey anyone who commands us to harm a person, not even an angel, except the Lord alone. But when the command is to desist from doing harm, the word of an angel is sufficient. —Devash HaSadeh³

"... be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them." (Jeremiah 1:17) If you remain strong and steadfast in the presence of an evil man, he will come to respect you. But if you should show dismay, if you should bend the knee and grovel before him, he will cease to respect you and tread upon you with his feet. —Anon.⁴

¹ 3

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⁴ 115

"And He has put in his heart that he may teach . . . (Exod. 35:34) Some scholars have a great deal of wisdom but keep it to themselves because they are either unwilling or unable to impart it to others. Hence the Torah found it necessary to stress that Bezalel and Oholiab had been endowed with both the ability and the will "to teach" and communicate their skill and knowledge to those willing to learn.⁵

According to the Sages a man who marries a "woman of goodly form", one who has no other merit than physical beauty, will have a refractory and rebellious son by her (see Rashi's comment to Deut. 21:11). The only way in which to raise a child successfully is not to attach importance to outer beauty but only to inner quality. The important thing is not the appearance of the place where one studies but the kind of learning one acquires. No matter how nice the classrooms, how elegant the teachers, and how fine the uniforms the students wear, if the content of what is taught is alien to the spirit and the law of Judaism, the product will not be a good Jew but a "refractory and rebellious son." Likewise, a man who is so taken by a woman's physical beauty that he marries her despite her heathen origin is obviously one who attaches more importance to superficial glamor than to inner virtue, and it is only natural that a man with such an attitude should beget a son who is "refractory and rebellious." —Avnei Ezel⁶

Ben Azai said: "He who does not fulfill the commandment to procreate is as if he had shed blood" (Yebamot 63:72) If a man has an opportunity to make a change for the better somewhere and fails to do so, it is as if he had destroyed the thing he had left unchanged. For instance, if someone sees an open pit and does not close it, it is as if he had dug it himself. {Baba Kamma 48} Therefore it follows that if it is incumbent on man to increase the population of the world and he fails to do so, it is as if he had actually reduced the world's population by committing murder. —Rabbi Abraham Bornstein⁷

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⁵ 190

⁶ 406

⁷ 461