

The Laws of Moses

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Moses has been credited with writing or collating the first five books of the "Bible". In these writings we can find a mine of information about health and hygiene, as well as many other subjects, but I have chosen to limit this discussion to these two topics. Moses, it is written, gained the knowledge or inspiration about these subjects through communication with his God, who gave as identity the name ' I Am That I am ', or "Jehovah". Whatever your beliefs, it can be kept in mind that in these books is information which, if put into practical use could make you a happier and healthier person, assuming that you are not already practising these precepts.

It has often been said that cleanliness is next to godliness, and with all the following edicts on hygiene from the Pentateuch, it would seem that there is much truth in that saying.

Moses included in 'Laws' rules regarding the bathing of women to ensure hygiene was kept. In Leviticus 12, it is written: If women have conceived seed and born a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean ... and she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purifying be fulfilled. If she bear a female child then she shall be unclean two weeks as in her separation and shall continue in the blood of her purifying three score and six days (a total of 80 days).

That there is a difference between the treatment of women after the birth of a male or a female child is more likely to be attributable to the male chauvinism of the Hebrew people at the time than it was a direct revelation from God (Jehovah). Moses, being human, was as capable as others of interpreting the 'word of God' to suit his cultural prejudices. If we look at it from another point of view, it could be viewed that those women who gave birth to a male child were being given extra kudos, particularly as it is known from present day statistics, that more male children are miscarried than female, and although there are more male children born, by the age of adulthood there are more female children who have survived. In a nation who needed their male progeny for future soldiers in battle, males were seen to be needed, as protectors of the nation.

If we look at the 'purifying' period in terms of present medical knowledge, it seems that it takes about three months before women's hormonal balance returns to normal after a birth. During this time the sinews and tendons which stretched in preparation for the birth are still subject to the hormones flowing within the body. If she were to resume her womanly tasks, which would have included heavy lifting, for the first three months after a birth serious damage could be done to these parts of the body thus affecting the muscular and skeletal systems. Women who have damaged themselves through under-exercise and over-exercise at this point, tend to have more difficulty in future pregnancies as well as in their daily life. In both areas it benefits a community if women are not 'burnt out' early owing to childbearing. In the arduous life of the desert the women could easily have been forced back into work immediately, just as one hears stories of women just leaving the fields to give birth, and then returning later in the day. The women in these societies are unfortunate for they tend to have a lower life expectancy and suffer from crippling illnesses. Respect for them as women is also lacking.

At the end of her period, 'her issue in her flesh be blood' (Leviticus 16:19) and when bleeding has finished following a birth which is usually between 7 and 14 days, a woman needed to bathe herself, along with other rituals before she was considered to be 'clean'. If a man was to 'lie with her' during this period of separation he also was considered to be unclean. What is all this in the light of modern day knowledge? With recent statistical knowledge regarding cervical cancer, it appears that Jewish women, those brought up to keep the laws related to hygiene, rarely suffer from this scourge. This has been attributed by some to the fact that Jewish men practice circumcision. That may be part of it, for male hygiene is necessary not only for the man's health but also for his mate's. In land where water was scarce, these rules were even more important, but their essence remains important today. If a man is not circumcised he needs to be taught as a child how to keep the foreskin area clean. In France where bidets are common there is little incidence of urinary tract infections. Why? Perhaps the same reason for the Jewish woman being relatively free from cervical cancer.

Urologists explain to their patients that if the vaginal area is not kept clean with bathing (showers will not suffice) then this area which has no other outlet for the secretions of the womb and the vagina can become unhygienic and yeast infections such as thrush can flourish, particularly if the acid-alkali balance of the body is not functioning correctly. When sexual intercourse takes place and either party is suffering from an infection of the genitals and reproductive area, this infection can

be transmitted to the other person. Now that more is understood regarding the transmission of disease through blood, the sense of a prohibition against a woman having sexual intercourse during her period of menstruation becomes obvious. Unhygienic conditions in the vaginal area also effect the urethra if one is sexually active, or if the basic feminine hygiene is incorrect, such as in a woman not having taught as a child to wipe herself correctly after going to the toilet.

If women were separated for the duration of their 'period' they would have been tended to by the rest of the community. This would be unlikely to have happened for every woman each month, for once a girl started to menstruate, it was not long before she married, and not long after that, that if she and her husband were fertile she would give birth to a child. Then while she breast fed her children, she would have been unlikely to have menstruated for up to three years. It is theorized that one of the reasons for such a high incidence these days of womb trouble, is that women were not made to repeatedly shed the linings of their womb quite so often in their lives. Some illnesses such as endometritis - a thickening of the womb wall, has been dubbed the Career Woman's Disease. In ages gone by, women could count the number of menstruation's in their lifetime. A lowered food intake also limited the fertility of a nation, just as it does today. Women who were not married suffered in many ways, not the least of which being that they suffered from 'the curse' every month. Their society also demanded that they have a male protector if not in the form of a husband, then in the form of a son when the woman was an older widow.

If we look at various other cultures, including those of the indigenous people of New Zealand, they also had strict prohibitions on the behavior of women while menstruating. On first looking at this, it may appear to be restricting to the women, but on closer observation it appears to be very respectful of women, attempting to reduce stress in their lives and giving them a rest from everyday toils. Many women in our present society would be very appreciative if someone were to release them from the responsibilities of their children and their household duties when this time rolls around. In Europe, women singers are able to have it written into their contracts and thus cancel singing engagements when menstruating because it is recognized that the could strain their vocal chords at this time. The vocal cords swell during the few days before menstruation and for the first few days of this 'period'. These days are called 'respect days' and are often not observed in the U.S.A, and there seems to be an increased incidence of vocal chord damage in women singers.

The rules regarding the treatment of women who are menstruating are not just fairy tale superstitions, but are verifiable by modern medicine as sensible and also as being chivalrous towards women; seeing women as worthy of respect and preferential treatment on such occasions. I'm not sure though how western women would react to their father's throwing a party when they got their first period as the North American Indians did.

Moses seems to have given instructions regarding sacrifice of animals and birds as burnt offerings. It is interesting to note that although Moses wrote in (Exodus 13:2) 'Sanctify unto me all first-born, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both man and beast, it is mine', this appears to be a hangover from ancient practices when we look back to the time of Abraham. At that time sacrifices of the first-born child, who was regarded as the special property of the 'deity', occurred in Egypt. Abraham was shown that this was not what God (Jehovah) desired or needed from people and as part of the re-education process, for people are slow learners, a substitute was found for the child in the form of a sheep. This happened during the Age of Aries and with the residue from the Age of Taurus sometimes bullocks were sacrificed.

Jeremiah testifies to the fact that burn offerings and sacrifices were not ordered on the day Israel left Egypt. (Jeremiah 7:22) 'For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I bought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. To free the people from this bondage is the task of Amos, Isiah and Jeremiah'. (Amos 5:22) 'Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts'. (24) 'But let judgement run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream'. (25) 'Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years; Oh House of Israel?

This reminds me of one of the passages in the New Testament when Jesus Christ speaks of those who cry, 'Lord, Lord', but whose heart were never with him.

From looking at these passages, it shows that within the laws which had great sense and saved many lives, not just at the times of wandering through the desert but also throughout the centuries, which have followed, there were also the vestiges of practices which either the people found it difficult to relinquish or that Moses found it expedient to retain. You must remember that his group of people threatened to stone him when they were charged by him to try to break through into Canaan across

its southern border. For this they were condemned to wander in the wilderness and it would be their children who would see the Promised Lands. Moses was chastised by God (Jehovah) on several occasions for losing his temper and giving into their provocation, so it is possible that his was just one area of expediency and which of us could blame him really, for we put pressure on our leaders and fail to praise them when they do something which is for our own benefit but may be painful in the short term.

As there were no facilities for nursing sick people nor the medicines available, prevention was the emphasis of his edicts. The high priests were the religious and medical police. The Israelite population were largely illiterate so strict rules about health and hygiene had to be incorporated into their religion. The first and most important stressed cleanliness. It is also known that a similar emphasis can be found in the religious practice of the Arabic people. They also being descendants of Abraham, used the left hand for performing any ablutions and the right hand for any eating. This created extra problems for those who had their right hand removed (cut off) owing to an infringement of the law, particularly where eating was communal, these people had to wait until last, sometimes starving or being fed by others.

Moses was the first to insist on hand washing after coming into contact with or being near any unclean body or condition. The first duty of his people on rising was and is, to wash their hands. Think ahead many centuries past the time of Moses to the fighting men like Lister who had to get doctors to wash their hands in between treating patients and to change their clothes which were covered in filth and often blood. Some of the doctors who refused to listen would have claimed to be 'Christian' and yet they didn't know the very basics of their religious practice.

Strict rules were enforced regarding the disposal of sewage. 'You shall set off a place outside the camp, and when you go out to use it, you must carry a spade among your gear and dig a hole, have easement, and turn to cover the excrement'. Today our public lavatories usually have running water and hand basins but Moses was the first recorded as having insisted on hand washing after coming into contact with or being near any unclean body or condition.

All refuse from the slaughter of animals was burned outside the camp and the slaughter did not take place in the middle of everyday life. (Leviticus 1:4)

It is unlikely that Moses understood exactly how infectious diseases were

transmitted but his experience, particularly with the Egyptian army's, had taught him that when the healthy came into contact with the sick, they too often fell ill. He therefore instigated quarantine measures. The sick were segregated. In particular it is mentioned that those suffering from leprosy were so treated, and by this measure alone, the disease was eradicated from the Twelve Tribes. Later these people again came into contact with such contagious diseases when the governing bodies of the countries in which they lived did not follow the 'Laws of the Jewish people'.

The writings in Leviticus are quite specific that a person must be clear of their illness for a period of time before they were no longer considered to be unclean and were accepted back into society. In consideration of the wisdom herein, it is worth taking note of the opinion of a New Zealand doctor writing in 1986 about the 'Aids Epidemic'. He spoke out in concern particularly when school children are H.I.V positive. In view of the fact that much is still unknown concerning this scourge and considering that there are still cases for whom the manner of transmission of the infections are not known, he felt that these children should not be in schools but should be taught apart until more is known about this modern day plague. He felt that the psychological anguish for a few might outweigh the long-term mortality problems he foresaw, could happen in our schools.

Circumcision is mentioned as bring a surgical removal of the foreskin of a male child. This is required to be done after the eighth day. It is now known that the blood clotting element in a babies body does not form until between the fifth and seventh day after birth. Prior to this, a child may have bled to death. This practice of circumcision was instigated during the Age of Aries, the ruler of which is Mars, here indicated through a cutting instrument in connection with the genital area. Although circumcision of females is not mentioned in the Bible, this practice has been carried out over the centuries in various cultures, but is not

always practiced in conjunction with male circumcision, nor is there any hygienic reason for this practice. The emphasis behind female circumcision is control and subjugation of women by removing their likelihood of sexual pleasure. Many women who have had their labia and clitoris removed in this way have also suffered from scarring which hindered pain-free intercourse and caused difficulty in childbirth. Female circumcision is more likely to be performed at the onset of puberty than as a small child.

(Deuteronomy 10:16) 'Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and be no

more stiff necked'. There obviously were definite hygienic reasons for circumcision in the desert, particularly when considering the lack of water for cleansing. Moses still gave instructions regarding washing after sexual intercourse. The emphasis put on the physical act of this surgical operation tended to obscure the symbolic emphasis which is apparent behind much of the message Moses had to give to 'His People'.

The 'Circumcision', the control of the spiritual, the spirit, the heart of mankind was more important and this is also evident when we look at the cutting, the control of the sexual act and energy related to it. Moses was not indicating that no pleasure should be gained through sexual intercourse between loving partners, but the subservience to the desire nature of mankind, is the battle of 'undoing'. Later the N.T gives evidence that this over-emphasis on the physical act of circumcision obscured the view of the spiritual side of things when arguments arose about this as being a necessary part of accepting the Christian faith.

(Clossians 3:11) 'Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but Christ is all and in all'. Just as the symbolic meaning behind the sacrifices and burnt offerings which were to be discarded in later generations, had its place in the perpetuation of the message which God (Jehovah) gave for the way of mankind to find their way 'back to God'. So did the other acts which became part of religious ritual. The sacrifice of perfect first-born rams prepared the way for an understanding of the sacrifice of the Messiah, (The Lamb of God). There is now no need for any of us to continually sacrifice ourselves unnecessarily and when, God willing, the Age of Aquarius brings with it freedoms, it will also bring responsibilities, a time when we will have to accept our sins without a scapegoat. It is this scapegoat philosophy which is at the back of these ritual sacrifices. It is in keeping with the philosophy behind confession with its cathartic release of guilt and anxiety, complete with an absolution of sins. Fortunately or unfortunately, the ancient law of Karma - an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth is still in force as it has always been in the history of mankind, but the action - reaction process is likely to take more than one lifetime to resolve.

Much ridicule has been made over the centuries about the Jews not eating pork, but there are much more to the laws than just this one rule and quite a specific reason behind it. It is necessary here to look at Leviticus 11, to see which animals were approved for food and which were forbidden. The forbidden or 'unclean' beasts were those who 'divide not the hoof' and this included the camel, the rock badger and the

pig. Camels are known to be carriers of a disease very similar to syphilis. In order to get a camel onto a boat a man has the job of biting the camels upper lip thus immobilizing it. The man who does this job is scorned for he is considered a potential harbinger of disease to this day. Pigs have no sweat glands and roll in their own muck in order to cool down, if there is no water available. In tropical and semitropical countries, trichina and other parasites are apt to infect pigs and if the infected flesh is eaten, the eater may contract trichinosis - a disease in which the trichina spiralis, a tiny round worm, invade the voluntary muscles setting up inflammation. These trichina become encysted between the muscle fibers and remain alive for years. Even today there is no satisfactory cure. It is because of this that the Health Authorities advise the pork should be thoroughly boiled. Rather than accept risks, both Moses and Mohammed banned pork.

If we look at the animals which were approved for eating, those of cloved hoof and chew their cud, it is obvious that these are herbivores; cattle and sheep being notable. There appears here something of interest when we consider the societies which have been influenced by the Judeo-Christian practices that these animals are still the most common ones for food.

The 'unclean' animals were also scavengers and would eat any rubbish or offal left lying around. The fish in the water were also categorized. Those forbidden for eating had no fins and no scales. These included eels, whales, porpoises, shark, turtle and crab. The whale is an excessively oily beast but it is unlikely the Hebrew people would have needed to worry about this considering their climate and inland seas, but some whales may have become beached and people may have been tempted to eat them. These forbidden animals of the water are scavengers and the large rivers mentioned in the Biblical lands all had large cities built on their banks and these cities disposed of their effluent into the rivers. Shellfish, also forbidden food, are filtering agents. No-one in their right mind would take shellfish from Moa Point in Wellington/New Zealand, as this is one of the main sewerage outlets. There are large notices warning people against collecting shellfish in this area. But three thousand years ago there were no such warnings, nor was there the understanding of cause and effect concerning diet and health. Moses also insisted that everything had to be washed before before being cooked.

Birds forbidden to be eaten were the eagle, ossifrage, osprey, kite, falcon, vulture, raven, ostrich, seagull, hawk, white owl, cormorant, horned owl, swan, pelican, carrion eagle, stork, heron and lapwing. Each of these birds are scavengers. Snakes were also

considered to be unclean as were rodents, tortoises, chameleons, lizards, snails, bats and moles. When we look at the history of plague, especially the 'Black Death', rodents were considered to be responsible. It was at one time thought, that these animals spread the plague by biting people, but it seems that fleas or similar parasites which these rodents carried were actually responsible for the spread of such mayhem.

It was forbidden to eat any winged insects going on all fours, except locusts, beetles and grasshoppers. I cannot claim to know or appreciate the nutritional value or otherwise of these insects, but any insect which might carry venom or feed off the dead bodies of scavengers or suck blood would surely be suspect, particularly in the light of present day knowledge regarding the transfer of disease. It seems that the insects which are recommended for eating were herbivores like the animals.

(Leviticus 7:23) 'Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Ye shall eat no manner of fat, of ox, or of sheep, or of goat'. And the fat of the beast that dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn with beasts may be used in other use, but ye shall in no case eat it'.

It is now days know, that toxins such as Agent Orange, 245-T and Dioxin are stored in the fat cells of animals and human bodies. In humans it is known that when a weight loss occurs these toxins, if they are in the body, are released into the blood stream and lymphatic system. People who have suffered adverse exposure to these toxins either by inhaling, swallowing them with food and drink or by exposure to them on the skin, tend to maintain their health as long as they can keep their weight up with some fat in their bodies. Once their weight drops, so does their general health suffer. The tragedy here is that these people so exposed tend to suffer from debilitating illnesses which create severe weight loss by themselves. Moses unknowing about the scientific reasoning was taking extra precautions against slow and wasting illness among the people in his charge.