



IS IT THE  
**THOUGHT**  
THAT COUNTS?

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# ACTIONS OR THOUGHTS?

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*What matters more, our thoughts or our actions? Efforts or results? Intentions or conclusions? In this session we'll discuss Judaism's perspective on the question: Is It The Thought That Counts?*

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## GETTING STARTED

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### 'Cannibal Cop' Trial

NEW YORK — A New York police officer charged with conspiring to kill and eat women does not plan to testify at his Manhattan trial, making it likely that the trial is nearing its end.

Defense lawyers for Officer Gilberto Valle notified the judge that the 28-year-old Queens resident will not be testifying.

Sergey Merenkov, 34, testified on Feb. 19 that he and partners started the website in 2010 to create a Facebook-like environment for people with kinky fantasies. Prosecutors say Valle met co-conspirators interested in capturing, raping, killing, cooking and eating women on the site.

He testified that the majority of the website's 4,500 active users – 25 percent of which he estimates to be women – are in the United States or Europe.

A prosecutor asked him if some subjects discussed on the website would be illegal if they were carried out, such as sex with dead bodies, one of the site's more popular subjects.

"Yes, but reality is one thing and fantasy is completely a different thing," he responded.

Merenkov's testimony was aimed at supporting defense arguments that Valle was role-playing when he spoke in dramatic details with others on the Internet about killing and cooking at least six women he knew, including his wife.

After prosecutors finished showing their evidence Monday, defense attorney Edward Vas argued Valle should be exonerated by the judge because the government failed to show there was "a true second participant" in the supposed conspiracy, only fellow role-playing Internet friends.

The judge did not immediately rule. The government has conceded that Valle never met the purported Internet co-conspirators and that no women were harmed.

Valle was arrested in October after his wife discovered the chats on his computer and fled their home, turning a computer over to the FBI in Reno, Nev. He was charged with conspiring to kidnap,



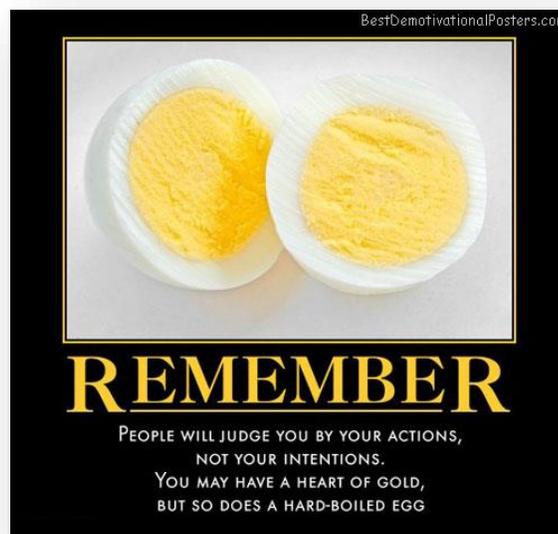
kill and eat women, which carries the potential for a life sentence. He also faces a lesser charge that he illegally accessed a national crime database to research kidnap targets.

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- ❖ DO YOU THINK INTENTION WITHOUT ACTION IS PUNISHABLE?
  - ❖ WOULD YOU FIND OFFICER VALLE GUILTY?
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## SETTING THE STAGE

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- *Everything in life has two components- intent and action.*
- *Sometimes there are good actions without good intention and sometimes there are good intentions that do not follow through with an action- or even follow through with a negative action.*
- *This session will explore the relationship between the two.*



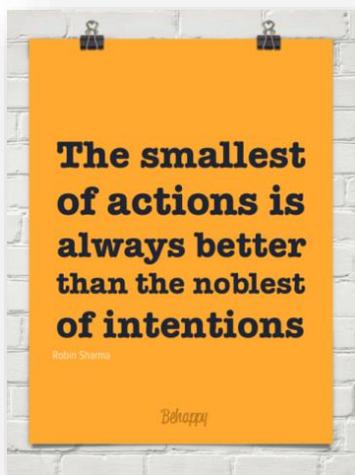
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- ❖ DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS POSTER?
  - ❖ IS IT POSSIBLE FOR PERFORM AN ACTION WITH THE RIGHT INTENTIONS, BUT CAUSE A NEGATIVE OUTCOME INSTEAD?
  - ❖ IN YOUR OPINION – WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT- INTENTION OR OUTCOME?
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## MITZVOT AND INTENTION

<b>Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 60</b>	<b>שולחן ערוך אורח חיים ס: ד</b>
Some say that mitzvot do not need intention and some say that mitzvot do need intention at the time of the action of the mitzvah and this is the law.	י"א שאין מצות צריכות כוונה, וי"א שצריכות כוונה לצאת בעשיית אותה מצוה, וכן הלכה.
<b>Mishna Berurah 60</b>	<b>משנה ברורה סימן ס</b>
"This Is The Law" - This is particularly with mitzvot from the Torah but with regard to mitzvot from the rabbis do not need intention.	וכן הלכה - כתב המ"א בשם הרדב"ז דזה דוקא במצוה דאורייתא אבל במצוה דרבנן אין צריכות כוונה

❖ ARE THERE MITZVOT THAT WOULD BE MEANINGLESS IF YOU DIDN'T INTEND TO PERFORM A MITZVAH?

❖ WHY DO YOU THINK JEWISH LAW PRIORITIZES INTENTION?



- ❖ Do you agree with this poster?
- ❖ Can you think of any examples to argue your point?

### CRUEL INTENTIONS?

*The Talmud appears to share two ideas in different places that completely contradict!*

<b>Talmud Bavli: Pesachim 50b</b>	<b>תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים נ עמוד ב</b>
Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: A person should always involve himself in Torah and Mitzvot even if it is not for its own sake- <b>because that which is not for the sake of heaven becomes for the sake of heaven.</b>	אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצות אף על פי שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה - בא לשמה.

- ❖ HOW COULD REPEATING POSITIVE ACTIONS EVENTUALLY CHANGE A PERSON IF THEIR INTENTIONS ARE NEGATIVE?
- ❖ HAS THIS EVER HAPPENED TO YOU?

Talmud Bavli Berachot 17a	תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות יז עמוד א
And whoever does something not for the sake of heaven it is as if he shouldn't have been created.	וכל העושה שלא לשמה נוח לו שלא נברא.

### HOW CAN WE RECONCILE THESE TWO CONTRADICTIONARY SOURCES?!

#### FINDING THE ANSWER IN TOSFOT

Tosfot on Berachot 17a	תוספות מסכת ברכות יז עמוד א
The source in Berachot says that a person is considered as if he shouldn't have been created because this type of person uses his learning to antagonize others. In contrast, the source from Pesachim discusses a person who learns to honor himself.	וא"ת האמר רב יהודה אמר רב פרק מקום שנהגו (פסחים נ:) לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצות אפי' שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה וי"ל דהכא מיירי שאינו לומד אלא לקנתר חבירו והתם מיירי שלומד ע"מ שיכבדוהו:

### SINNING WITH GOOD INTENTION



<b>Talmud Bavli Nazir 23b</b>	<b>תלמוד בבלי מסכת נזיר כג עמוד ב</b>
An aveira (sin) performed for the sake of Heaven is better than a mitzvah performed not for the sake of Heaven	גדולה עבירה לשמה ממצוה שלא לשמה

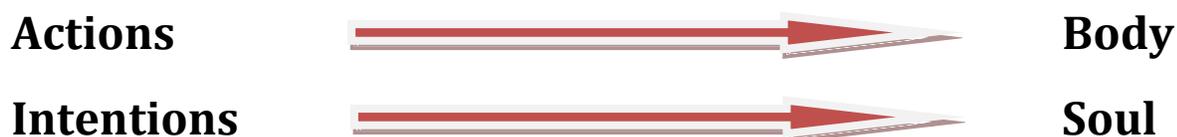
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- ❖ WHAT DOES THIS SOURCE SUGGEST IS MORE IMPORTANT- ACTIONS OR INTENTIONS?
  - ❖ DO YOU AGREE? DOES THIS MAKE SENSE WITH EVERYTHING ELSE WE HAVE DISCUSSED?
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### **The Einei Shmuel explains:**

When a mitzvah is performed an angel is created (metaphorically). From the action of the mitzvah- we create a “body” for an angel. With our good intention, we create the “soul” of that angel. When a sin is performed for the sake of Heaven, only the soul of the angel is created and not the body. This explains why a sin for the sake of heaven is greater than a mitzvah not for the sake of heaven. For it is better to have a soul without a body than a body without a soul.



### **BODY AND SOUL**



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## AN EXAMPLE

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**Live Aid** was a dual-venue concert held on 13 July 1985. The event was organized by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure to raise funds for relief of the ongoing Ethiopian famine.

Bob Geldof intended for money to go to the starving but most of it ended up being used for corrupt reasons, e.g. buying weapons.

Although a professed admirer of Geldof's generosity and concern, Fox News Channel television host Bill O'Reilly has been critical of the Live Aid producer's oversight of the money raised for starving Ethiopian people, claiming (in June 2005) that much of the funds were siphoned off by Mengistu Haile

Mariam and his army. O'Reilly believes that charity

organizations, operating in aid-receiving countries, should control donations, rather than possibly corrupt governments.

Bono responded that corruption, not disease or famine, was the greatest threat to Africa, agreeing with the belief that foreign relief organizations should decide how the money is spent. On the other hand, Bono said that it was better to spill some funds into nefarious quarters for the sake of those who needed it, than to stifle aid because of possible theft

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❖ DO YOU THINK THAT THE ENDS JUSTIFY THE MEANS?

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## WRAPPING UP

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- ❖ Both intention and action are very important.
- ❖ For some mitzvot – intention is key but at the same time, even actions with impure intentions will eventually develop into pure intentions.
- ❖ It is important to recognize that whilst intentions are important – actions without intentions are still valid.
- ❖ Good intentions are ultimately more important with Mitzvot between Man and God.

*Do you ever struggle with the difference between action and intention?*