

Orthodox Jews, Jimmy Kimmel, SpongeBob and Biblical Values

Did you hear the one about the Orthodox Jewish students who rescued a TV cartoon character? Seriously, some things simply can't be made up.

Recently, late night TV host Jimmy Kimmel set up a "social experiment" on the sidewalk outside the theater from which his show is broadcast. He had a person dressed up as SpongeBob lying down and crying out for help to get up. Watching the video is telling and shows that maybe we all could use a refresher course in basic values as Kimmel notes, it's "important to assist people in need wherever you can."

Watch the video for yourself, but it won't surprise anyone that the people who came to SpongeBob's rescue was a group of Orthodox Jewish boys, people who study and internalize the Torah laws and values that Jews aspire to implement in every facet of our lives.

Among Jews, the video went viral. It's funny, almost in an embarrassing way, to see the blatant disregard by so many: running, stepping over and taking pictures of the fallen SpongeBob as if he were a bag of garbage. It's hard not to laugh at people doing so. It says a lot about so many people blatantly ignoring cries for help, even from a TV cartoon character however, which is not funny at all.

The week the video went viral, Jews in synagogues around the world read the Torah portion from Deuteronomy 12:10-25:19, which is rich with many laws and values we need to apply in our lives today. In fact, this is the one weekly portion that has the single largest number of commandments, 74 out of 613. I've read it dozens of times, but each time, something new jumps out. That week it was verse 22:4, "*When you see your*

neighbor's donkey or ox fallen along the road, do not ignore it; you must be sure to help him get the animal on its feet again."

Of course. That's nice and something we shouldn't have to be told, but a valuable lesson all the same, even today when few of us actually know people who own donkeys, much less use them for work.

And maybe, or especially, if we don't know people with donkeys, we should apply that Scripture to other aspects of our lives, even helping a person dressed up as a TV cartoon character. Therefore, when confronted by Jimmy Kimmel's experiment, these young men who have studied this Scripture, and all the Torah, and live by it in every facet of life, did what they thought was the only option.

Over the years, I have been blessed to be the recipient of so much warmth, solidarity and unconditional love from Christian friends throughout the world. As much as I have been blessed personally with genuine friendships that have enriched my life, I always find it interesting when I am introduced as an Orthodox Jew from Israel. Almost always, whether one on one or speaking to a whole congregation or conference, there's an instant affinity, interest and respect, but clearly not a full understanding of what it means to be an Orthodox Jew in Israel or anywhere else. Similarly, there's a lack of understanding of the difference between someone like myself, modern orthodox as compared to someone who is ultra-orthodox and more readily identified by his attire. That's not a fault of course, just an observation. I'm certainly no expert of Christianity.

However, I am surprised that more Christians don't know more about Judaism, both given that we share so much in terms of Scripture in the Torah and other biblical texts, values from these, and of course that Jesus was an Orthodox Jew in Israel as well. While there's been an evolution of Jewish practice in the past 2,000 years of diaspora, and only a restoration and

return to Israel in the last 100 plus years, if Jesus were to return today, He'd find Himself very comfortable and familiar with the worship in my synagogue, perhaps even more so than in most churches, as Christian tradition rooted in the New Testament did not thrive until after His death.

Of course, one thing that's missing in my life today that Jesus had in his life is the opportunity to worship, teach and bring offerings in the Temple. Sadly, if He were to return to the same Temple Mount today, where He preached and worshipped some 2,000 years ago, he'd be met by hostile chants and threats by Muslim extremists, if not have rocks and Molotov cocktails thrown at him. That's for a much longer article on its own.

Anytime I am confronted with questions about what it means to be an Orthodox Jew, I try to explain honestly and clearly how we live our lives through the prism of the Torah. It's not only authentic Jewish tradition, but also the foundation of Christianity. More and more Christians seek me out because of this, not that I am an expert, but as a practicing Orthodox Jew, they recognize a piece of at least early Christianity that's missing from their lives that people like myself have lived and maintained for thousands of years.

The Torah is full of lessons, values and laws by which Jews today continue to live, by which Jesus lived, and which was the foundation for his ministry. It's noteworthy that in the same Torah portion also teaches in verse 24:17 that we need to be considerate of the widow and orphan, an injunction of course that's reiterated in James, John and Mathew.

These and many other such values are central to Judaism and Christianity. For us, the addition of rabbinic teachings over the past 2000 years helps us understand and apply these values to modern life.

Surely in Biblical times nobody could imagine that there ever

would be a SpongeBob. But today, when we might be more likely to come across a cartoon character in distress than a donkey fallen under its burden, the same value applies.

I relish the opportunity to share aspects of my life, doing my best to be an Orthodox Jew not just in the State of Israel, but the Land of Israel where so many of the specific laws apply uniquely. While large sections of the Torah may not seem relevant today, and are not taught in many churches, living in the Land as an Orthodox Jew, you'd be surprised as to how these are relevant and we apply these in a way that's modern, always being sure to sanctify God. Our tradition is that no single letter of the Torah is extraneous, and we have the benefit of tens of generations of rabbinic teaching to understand this all and apply it in our lives.

Since we never know when we will be tested, or by whom, whether under the eye of a Jimmy Kimmel experiment, or the much more important Eye of Eyes, living and applying biblical values throughout our lives is not just a good idea to avoid embarrassment on TV, but to do what's right in the eye of God. That's how Orthodox Jews live, by applying the Torah to our everyday lives.

So when you read your Bible and something doesn't make sense, or is culturally part of a time past, don't brush over it and think it's irrelevant. If we believe in the divinity of Scripture, all the Scripture, every Hebrew letter, every verse is relevant, even if we don't yet understand how or why.

That's what it means to be an Orthodox Jew, and watching the video of these young men helping SpongeBob off the sidewalk is what we call a *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of God's name.

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel

and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for 's Standing With Israel. He can be reached at FirstPersonIsrael@.