

## Do Jews Believe in Sin?

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Say the word "sin" and you'll evoke different things in the minds of different people.

To the fire-and-brimstone types, the word smells of shame and scorched flesh. To the hedonist it sounds like fun. Some think it's a wholly Christian concept, while others ascribe it to the ancient Hebrews. To the sages of the Talmud, sin is, above all, an act of stupidity.

"A person does not sin," they wrote, "unless a spirit of folly has entered into him."

Before I got this job I used to write manuals for various household items -- those 30-page booklets that come in the box together with electric drills, microwaves, and the like. It was pretty boring work, but it paid well and it was the kind of writing you could do with two kids on your lap. The best part was that you didn't have to put your name on it.

Anyway, one day the consumer department of one of the companies I wrote for forwarded me a letter which, since it was the first response I had ever gotten from a reader of my work, I read with interest. "Sir," the letter began. "I have in hand a booklet you wrote which came in the box with my new video camera. I must say that I am outraged by your presumptuousness and audacity. This is my camera, for which I paid my own hard-earned money. It has lots of buttons, switches and indicator lights -- and these are all *my* buttons, switches and indicator lights. How dare you instruct me on what to do with them! I shall press each of my buttons and flip each of my switches as I please. As for the indicator lights, I, not you, shall decide for myself what they indicate; indeed, if I so choose, I shall ignore them altogether. Yours truly, a very stupid customer."

He did not, of course, sign off that way, but he might as well have. Needless to say, I didn't bother replying.

The sages of the Talmud didn't see much difference between my stupid customer and your standard sinner. As they saw it, when a person acts contrary to his Creator's instructions on how life is to be lived, he may be doing something bad, evil, selfish, destructive, enjoyable, defiant, cowardly -- as the case may be. But above all, he is doing something profoundly stupid.

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3 June | 1 Sivan

**Naso**

Shabbat Begins: 8:56 pm

Shabbat Ends: 10:15 pm