Video Games; Household Chores; Introverts; Nationality: Rabbi Marc Angel Answers Questions from the Jewish Press

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Is there anything wrong with playing violent video games? Does the answer depend on whom the video game wishes you to fight or kill or how gory the violence is?

Experts debate whether or not playing violent video games induces people to commit acts of violence. But we must remember that violence existed in the world long before the invention of video games. Human history is drenched in the blood of wars, terrorism, and crime.

From an early age, children learn to "play out" acts of aggression. Games such as "cops and robbers" entail mock murdering of enemies. Even quiet games like checkers and chess involve destroying "men" on the other team. Do these activities induce violence…or are they merely pastimes that are substitutes for actual violence?

Tanakh is replete with incidents of violence and bloodshed. Nearly all humans drown to death in Noah's time; Sodom and Amorah are devastated by fire and brimstone; Moshe murders an Egyptian taskmaster; the Israelites are brutalized by Egyptian taskmasters; Egyptians suffer ten plagues etc. As we go on in the books of Tanakh, we confront wars, cruelty, murder. Do these narratives incite readers to acts of violence? Most of us would not think so.

It could be argued that playing violent video games is a harmless way to work out aggressive feelings. It could also be argued that playing such games is a waste of time, with possibly negative impact on one's psychology. Let people decide what's best for themselves and their children.

In a Jewish marriage, is cooking and cleaning primarily the woman's job?

Every good marriage, Jewish or otherwise, is characterized by love, mutual respect, and a sincere desire to live a happy, cooperative and meaningful life together. It often happens—based on pre-modern patterns—that women assume primary responsibility for household chores and men assume primary responsibility for earning a livelihood to support wife and family.

But it also happens that the pre-modern model does not work well in many marriages. Unlike earlier generations, many women today have full time employment and spend long hours at their jobs. In some cases, women are the main earners for their families. In such circumstances, it would be extremely unfair to expect that women also assume primary responsibility for cooking and cleaning. Husband and wife must come to a reasonable accommodation of sharing responsibilities, based on their own specific situation.

Sharing responsibilities is not only sensible and decent, it also sets a proper model for children. Boys and girls grow up seeing parents who work cooperatively for the benefit of the family. They learn by personal experience that men and women are not pigeonholed into stereotyped roles, and that fathers and mothers are loving people who care deeply about each other's wellbeing.

Is it important for an introvert "get out of his shell"?

The great 20th century thinker, Isaiah Berlin, wrote an essay ("Two Concepts of Liberty") in which he made the following point."Paternalism is despotic…because it is an insult to my conception of myself as a human being, determined to make my own life in accordance with my own… purposes, and , above all, entitled to be recognized as such by others." Each person has the right—and responsibility—to live according to his/her best judgment, without being treated "paternalistically" by people who think they know what's best for him/her.

Some people tend to be shy and introverted by nature. Others tend to be gregarious and extroverted. The important thing is for each person to live comfortably with who he/she is…and to be accepted as such. Some of the deepest thinking and kindest people are introverts "who don't get out of their shell." They don't pretend to be what they aren't.

If a person feels that his/her introversion and shyness are impediments to their proper functioning, they themselves should turn to trusted loved ones for advice and/or decide to seek psychological guidance.

Jewish tradition teaches of 36 "*tzadikim nistarim*," hidden righteous people upon whom the world depends. I suspect that since these *tzadikim* are so hidden and unrecognized, they probably are introverts!

What nationality should a Jew in America consider himself? Jewish? American? Both?

The question assumes that one actually must make an active choice as to how to consider his/her nationality. But this is generally not the case.

According to the Oxford English dictionary, nationality is "the status of belonging to a particular nation." Every American citizen, for example, is automatically of American nationality. A second dictionary definition is "an ethnic group forming a part of one or more political nations." Thus, people of American nationality also may belong simultaneously to "sub-nationality" groups i.e. Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, African-Americans…and Jewish-Americans.

By these definitions, then, American Jews are both American and Jewish by nationality.

Jewish nationality, though, differs from other nationalities that are based on lands of origin. The Torah describes us as *benei Yisrael*, children of Israel. Jewish nationhood, in principle, is the consciousness of being part of an extended family. We were still a nation for nearly 2000 years when we did not have sovereignty in our own land. Jewish nationality reflects the connection Jews have to their common origins, religion, culture, customs etc.

Each person has multiple dimensions of self-identification. For example, I am American, Seattle-born, New York resident, Jewish, Sephardic of Turkish/Rhodes background etc. I am a composite of all these things, just as every person is a composite of all the components that form his/her identity. It is not fruitful to try to dissect ourselves and to consider ourselves to be only one of the multiple components that constitute who we are.