

# Bruchim Podcast – EPISODE 7

## **Episode 7-Ethics and Jewish Law Part II**

In the second part of this four-part series, Eli is joined by Bruchim's Director of education, Max DuBoff, and they look at an article by Rabbi Ethan Tucker that is directly relevant to the conversation about Ethics and Jewish law. After a brief introduction to Rabbi Tucker's place in the Jewish world, they look at the essay and see whether they can place Rabbi Tucker into one of the previously introduced categories. They conclude by discussing Tucker's comments in this essay on the topic of circumcision.

### **Show Notes**

Rabbi Ethan Tucker on Parshat Vaetchanan

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/ethical-norms-foundation-torah>

ELI UNGAR-SARGON:

This is the Bruchim Podcast, the only podcast in the world dedicated to Jews who think differently about circumcision.

♪ (THEME MUSIC PLAYS) ♪

Welcome back to the *Bruchim Podcast*. I'm your host, Eli Ungar-Sargon. And joining me again, for this second part of our conversation about ethics and halacha, is our Director of Education, Max Duboff in New Haven, Connecticut. Max, welcome back to the podcast.

MD:

Thank you so much. It's so great to be here.

EU-S:

So last time, and if our listeners haven't heard the first part of this conversation, I do recommend going back and listening to that part because this is a multi-part series that will make better sense if you listen to it in chronological order.

We talked about the four possible positions that one might take when thinking about the relationship between ethics and halacha.

And just as a brief recap, our first position was that halacha and ethics can conflict, and in situations where they do, halacha trumps.

Our second was that halacha and ethics can conflict, and when they do, ethics trumps.

Our third position was that halacha and ethics can conflict, and when they do, sometimes ethics trumps and sometimes halacha trumps, depending on the context and the situation.

And our final category, our esoteric category, our exotic Max Duboff category –

MD:

[laughter] Well, maybe not just me, as this episode might show.

EU-S:

– Our number four was halacha and ethics can't conflict. And so any apparent conflicts are at least resolvable in theory.

So those were our four positions. And today what we're going to do is we're going to look at one essay by Rabbi Ethan Tucker where he explicitly addresses our topic and stakes out a position.

So Max, tell us a little bit about who Rabbi Ethan Tucker is, what he is in the world, where he fits in the denominational map and how he came across your transom.

MD:

Well, so Rabbi Ethan Tucker is the president and Rosh Yeshiva of Hadar, which is an egalitarian yeshiva in New York, although they've also been expanding beyond in the U.S. and Israel.

And Rabbi Tucker is at the forefront of what's sometimes called halachic egalitarianism, which is basically the idea that halacha is binding – the idea being that Jews should follow halacha in some sense – and also a commitment to gender egalitarianism, ritual egalitarianism, the idea that halacha falls equally on people of all genders.

So the basic kind of halachic picture that Rabbi Tucker is working with is similar in a lot of ways to that of orthodoxy, but with some big differences as well and interest in and acceptance of halachic change in at least some cases.

The ways that Rabbi Tucker is asking us to engage with halacha on an individual level are really serious and certainly ask us to live Jewish lives in a stronger way than most American Jews do, and not saying that that's good or bad necessarily, right? You know, there's a lot we could say about that, but that's going to be really important context for the position we're outlining today.

EU-S:

Yeah. And I would say, you know, just broadly speaking in the denominational mapping, I would place Ethan Tucker somewhere in between right-wing conservative and left-wing orthodox, somewhere in that kind of place, right?

MD:

Yeah. That's right. And yeah, I mean, a lot of his thought looks pretty similar to things in that ballpark to left-wing orthodoxy.

EU-S:

Yeah. So tell me a little bit more about where this essay comes from. It's a project that he engaged in in 2015 and 2016. Is that right?

MD:

Yeah, that's right. So under the auspices of Hadar's Center for Jewish Law and Values, Rabbi Tucker wrote an essay on halacha for each parasha of the year, each Torah portion. And they're really fascinating, you know, lots to agree and disagree with, highly recommend them.

So the one that we'll be drawing on mostly today is entitled "Ethical Norms as the Foundation of Torah," and it was for Parashat Va'etchanan.

EU-S:

And we'll have links to all this in the show notes. So if listeners want to read for themselves this essay, they can. So let's get into it, Max. Tell me about this paper.

MD:

So the basic point here that Rabbi Tucker is arguing is that ethics and halacha shouldn't conflict and can't conflict. Right? Now, we'll get into maybe how tenable his arguments are for this position. We'll find a time to discuss that. But that's what he's trying to show here. And he's going to be drawing heavily on the thought of Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glasner, an early 20th century Hungarian rabbi who's also known as the Dor Revi'i.

And so we'll be talking about Rabbi Tucker's position rather than Rabbi Glasner's. But know that that's in the background, and I do recommend reading the full essay.

EU-S:

So just off the top right here, it seems that Rabbi Tucker is in your camp, in Camp 4. That seems to be what he's going for, right?

MD:

Right. Yeah. So I think, at first glance, when you're looking at his position, it will be the case that he's arguing that halacha and ethics can't conflict. So any apparent conflicts are resolvable, at least in theory. And then-

EU-S:

We found another one, Max. We found another one.

MD:

Right. Well, that's right. I mean, and I'm particularly interested in these positions. You were asking before, you know, sort of how I came across this. You know, I've been sort of mulling over this question for a while, as we discussed in our last episode.

And I've been interested by some of the different contexts in which Rabbi Tucker has been trying to reconcile ethics and halacha, and sort of trying to be authentic with both of those hats on.

And this essay is, I think, his most direct statement of his views on the topic. And he's taught some of the content of this essay in various forums over the years as well. I think it's something that he's returned to in his own thought and teaching.

So to try to summarize Rabbi Tucker's position, so he's arguing that the Torah has to be moral, right? The Torah can't possibly offend basic human decency. And so he classifies the different sorts of conflicts that we can have between ethics and halacha, or the Torah, into three.

So the first is when the Torah is silent about something, but there's a moral consensus against it. And in those sorts of cases, he thinks it's pretty clear, right? Go with the moral consensus. And that's even what the Torah would want. You know, the Torah doesn't say that outright, but that's sort of the ethos of the Torah to go along with the moral consensus there.

Okay, fair enough. And then the second category is when the Torah affirmatively commands a practice, but there's a moral consensus against it, right? And this is the case for circumcision. And this is what we'll spend the most time on, right? This case where the Torah says, "Do something," and the moral consensus says, "Don't do something."

All right. And then his third category is when the Torah forbids something, but there's a moral consensus not to forbid it, right? And so an example of this is a lot of approaches to queer folks, right? Gay sex.

And so there, there's going to have to be, you know, a sort of complicated balancing, and he has some ideas about that case specifically. But certainly we're not going to want to enforce a Torah prohibition in the end that there's a big moral consensus against. Good.

Well, so before we get to circumcision, Eli, what are your thoughts on some of the general framework that we've started to outline here for Rabbi Tucker?

EU-S:

So I, you know, I really liked the sort of setup that he does here. I think it's very rare to find someone in this part of the denominational map who's willing to sort of explicitly talk about the problem that we're talking about in this series, right? The problem of situations in which halacha, Jewish law, conflict with ethics, and to sort of try and think about it clearly. So at this stage of reading, I was super into this. I was totally on the hook. I was like, yes, let's do it.

You may sense in how I'm presenting this that that enthusiasm did not stick with me throughout the entire essay, but let's go on.

MD:

No, definitely. And I mean, I totally agree. I really identify with a lot of this project that we can both be ethically rigorous and halachically rigorous and take both really seriously. And so on circumcision, Rabbi Tucker dismisses a lot of the moral arguments against circumcision, but in particular, he has two arguments, right?

So the Torah says circumcise. There's moral consensus in at least some circles not to circumcise, especially if you care about bodily autonomy, right? And think that that's a broadly popular value in society today.

And so in response, Rabbi Tucker says that, and let's quote here, "The fact that the Torah is not silent in this case, nor in any case where it has affirmatively commanded a specific action, can and should be taken as a fundamental statement of the practice's morality."

So Rabbi Tucker is saying that the Torah's command for circumcision provides moral authority for circumcision, that we should circumcise and that circumcision is morally okay, right?

And this is a big claim, to say that not only is the Torah telling us to do something which is consistent with morality, but that the morality of the practice is actually justified by the Torah's command.

EU-S:

This is the part of the essay where I just lost my mind. So this is what he says.

First of all, the fact that the Torah is not silent in this case, in the case of circumcision, nor in any case where it has affirmatively commanded a specific action, can and should be taken as a fundamental statement of the practice's morality.

I was like, I had to read that sentence like five times. I could not believe that he had actually said that. Because at this point, I am totally out. I'm like, this is a, Max, this was a bait and switch of epic proportions. I was like, "Oh, we're not talking about the same thing anymore." So how did you feel when you read that sentence? Because to me, it was just like, "Oh, we are off the rails here."

MD:

I really sympathize with where you're coming from here, Eli. I read that sentence as aspirational, especially in the context of some of Rabbi Tucker's other thought.

And I'm not fully on board with this, but what I think he's asking us to do is to, when we get to something in the Torah that appears to be really morally on a different page than we are, to confront it with at least somewhat of an open mind and try to be charitable towards it and try to understand how that practice could fit into a morally good life. And that's a tough thing to do.

And then I don't think that Rabbi Tucker is asking us to then abandon our other sorts of values. So even if there's maybe a suspension of moral disbelief as we're looking at a commandment or a text, the end goal is not that that supersedes our ethical thought, but rather there's some sort of synthesis.

But so on one hand, I mean, I really appreciate this challenge, right? Because I think it's easy to shut down instead of fully engaging when we get to things that are morally challenging.

But on the other hand, I think you need a really strong sense of both that this is a divine text, and also that there's a sort of fully good God or something like that, in order to get this position that the Torah is a really authoritative source of morality rather than being sort of related to morality or consistent with morality or maybe even helpful for morality, which is something more like the view that I hold.

EU-S:

So Max, that's an incredibly charitable reading here.

I'm going to read the sentence again because it's just mind numbing. "First of all, the fact that the Torah is not silent in this case nor in any case where it has affirmatively commanded a specific action can and should be taken as a fundamental statement of the practice's morality."

Now, I'm reading it again because what I have ringing in my head is Christopher Hitchens: "It makes ordinary moral people, compels them, forces



them, in some cases orders them to do disgusting, wicked, unforgivable things.”

I have that ringing in my head right now because I mean, in spite of your charitable reading here, I don't see any other way of reading, can and should be taken as a fundamental statement of the practice's morality. So at this point, I feel like Rabbi Tucker is not taking ethics seriously anymore.

Because if you're axiomatically stating that this predetermined text, if it makes a statement in the affirmative that you should do something or behave in a certain way, in this case we're talking about a specific practice, we're talking about circumcision of infants, that just by fiat of the fact that it says you should do this is a fundamental statement of the practice's morality. As far as I'm concerned, we're not doing ethics anymore. We're in some other realm.

MD:

So why don't we say a little bit more maybe about his view?

So the second main thing that he says, and I think this might help explain the first, is that when there's a moral consensus against something which Jews support, then Jews need to participate in the moral conversation to try to change that consensus.

And on the one hand, that sounds like a sort of desperate attempt to defend something which is indefensible.

EU-S:

That sounds like apologetics or bad faith or something.

MD:

But I think what's really promising about that is that what's really important is that the conversation that needs to happen is a moral one. The sort of discourse that's required is a moral discourse and we can't just retreat to Torah discourse.

You might imagine that someone tries to engage in moral discourse with regard to the Torah, and fails, and then just kind of rests on their laurels and is like, "Well, we have the Torah and that's enough for us."

But I think what Rabbi Tucker is saying is that that can't be enough. And he thinks, I think wrongly, that circumcision is not a case where we need halachic change. And we'll say a bit more about that.

But he strongly defends that Jews should participate in the broader moral discourse of society about the practice.

EU-S:

Yeah, but what he's saying, Max, is that we should do it in bad faith. I can't. I can't. It's so horrible. It's basically like what you should do is go out there. It's kind of like the, I don't know, like the Hasbara of ethics or something. You should be going out there and doing Hasbara for "Jewish ethics."

So this is where I'm like, if we try and place Tucker now in our scheme of our four positions, so he presents as four, he's presenting as four that halakha and ethics can't conflict, so any apparent conflicts are at least resolvable in theory.

But I can't arrive at any other conclusion that he's disguising himself as four, but what he really is is one, which is halakha and ethics can conflict, but when they do, halacha trumps.

So he's pretending like they can't conflict, but if we find a situation of apparent conflict, it's always going to be Jewish law. It's always going to be halacha in this kind of, you know, I don't know what to call it. To me, it's – and I don't want to like impute bad faith to someone who isn't doing something intentionally in bad faith – but it feels very much like bad faith to me.

MD:

Yeah, no, I mean, and I see where you're coming from, and I have a somewhat different read on the situation. So when I read this article, I get the impression

that he legitimately thinks that moral discourse is called for when it comes to something like circumcision, and he happens to have what I think are bad arguments about circumcision, right? I think that he is not sufficiently critical with regard to some of the ethical concerns, specifically around things like bodily autonomy.

I think that his understanding of a lot of the evidence about the risks of circumcision is insufficiently thoughtful, but that doesn't mean that under all circumstances, he would defend what the Torah says in any sort of unthinking way. And so, you know, the question ultimately is going to be in the majority of cases, and you know, and what sorts of position is he going to take?

I mean, you know, it's maybe worth noting that Rabbi Tucker is an interesting figure in contemporary halacha for a lot of other ways, which we won't get into now. And I certainly appreciate his halachic thinking on a lot of issues and have some significant disagreements with him, especially when it comes to things like Jewish lineage and how that's passed on.

But the takeaway here, which I do still quite agree with, is that we have to engage with an issue like circumcision where there are serious concerns with morality and society from this sort of moral lens and not just a Torah lens.

And so what I take away most of all from this article is disagreeing with his application to circumcision, but feeling like I can go in a different direction.

EU-S:

Yeah. Let me just read a passage from this essay where he talks directly about circumcision. So he says, "In the case of circumcision, part of my own argument, very much driven by the Torah's embrace of this practice, would be that despite the protests in many Gentile quarters, there is really nothing all that horrible about the practice. In other words, even if a moral consensus began to emerge in the rest of the world around the barbarity of the practice, we are nowhere near that point today in any case. I would argue that that consensus was wrong, a mistaken moral judgment on its own terms. If there is no real danger in performing the practice, and there are no real damaging effects on a person long-term, as I and other circumcised men can attest, and

if we allow parents to make all sorts of decisions for their infant children that plausibly even put them in danger or expose them to various risks, then the moral critiques of the practice are not particularly compelling when standing against a millennia-old commandment that marks men as having a covenant with God sealed in their flesh."

So there's a lot going on in this particular passage. In the first part, again, he's reiterating the problem that I was just sort of dwelling on, which is that on its own terms, because the Torah tells us to do this, it must be moral, right? And again, I think this is just like a category error. You can't do ethics this way. You can't start with the Torah said to do it, therefore it must be moral. You're playing a different game at that point.

But he also, in this passage, he brings up a lot of things that people who think and read and write about circumcision are very familiar with, this idea that, "Oh, parents make all sorts of decisions for their children, and this is just one of them." These sorts of problematic arguments in favor of circumcision.

MD:

Yeah. I mean, I don't think this is good moral philosophy here, right? And so I'm not super interested in engaging with it because I think that he applies his own framework not as well as he could, right?

And the basic problem is that I don't think Rabbi Tucker is engaging with any kind of open-mindedness with critical perspectives on circumcision. And certainly what Bruchim is trying to do, some of what we're trying to do with this podcast, is helping showcase some of those perspectives in the Jewish world.

And so I hope that a lot of what we're doing here will help the sort of next generation of halachic scholarship of grappling with these issues be more serious about and sympathetic to those opting out of circumcision.

But I think the question for me is, is there a better way to look at the moral dimensions of circumcision and still try to be authentically a Torah-observant

Jew or a Jew who sees himself as governed by the mitzvot and also full ethical self?

EU-S:

Yeah, the thing that kind of perplexes me also is there's a point in this essay where he sort of says there are things that were once important in Jewish history that Jews did that we don't do anymore. He acknowledges that, but then is unable to apply that same thinking to circumcision.

And that's a part that I just don't really understand. I think the only conclusion I can arrive at is that he has a bit of a blind spot here, which in fairness, a lot of people have a blind spot when it comes to circumcision.

MD:

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that is really common still in the world of capital C Conservative halacha as well as reform halacha and in the sort of broadly observant world. And this is something that will take a while to change.

And especially for the sort of earlier generations of Jews who were skeptical about circumcision, the question is what sorts of views can be adapted in ways that are helpful. This is not a direct comparison, but I'm reminded of feminist reinterpretations of Kant, for instance, or applying a broadly Kantian framework and feminist interpretations of Freud or Marx.

So taking philosophers and philosophies that are themselves antithetical to your position, but sort of pulling out something that can really help advance your position. Does that make sense?

EU-S:

Yeah. So let's move away from my emotional reaction to Ethan Tucker.

MD:

Yeah, which is totally important. Yeah, no, I think that's totally important. It's an important to call out, right, when folks are saying things that are kind of wrong or unhelpful about circumcision, even though that's not the end of the conversation.

EU-S:

But let's move into like the Max DuBoff charitable reading here. What can we take away from this essay?

Which I think, you know, when I started reading, it was super promising.

And I think there, you know, in a lot of ways, Rabbi Tucker is thinking clearly about this. He just sort of goes off the rails too quickly for me. But what do you think we can take away from this that is helpful?

And I would particularly like it if you could sort of figure out a way to, like, is your view of halacha as meaning, right, that we talked about last time, is that in conversation with Rabbi Tucker's view here in some interesting way?

MD:

Yeah, it is. And something that's really interesting is that in some of his other essays, Rabbi Tucker sometimes I think subs in the word "meaning" for halacha. And so I think he doesn't have quite the view that I do, which sort of, you know, separates halacha from truth far more than he would like.

But I think he would agree that living a halachic life is, and is supposed to be, meaningful, and that something has gone horribly wrong. If someone who's living a halakhic life is not deriving meaning from it, right?

And I think that Rabbi Tucker would also say, and this is something that's really important to me, I think he would say that for someone who cares about ethics, a life can't be meaningful if it's not ethical, right? And that might be because of a reaction of your conscience, right? You know, but it creates a sort of dissonance if you're trying to seek meaning in ways that clash with your deeply held ethical convictions.

And something I appreciate about Rabbi Tucker's approach is that I think he wants us to have deeply held ethical convictions. You know, again, we might disagree with him about what exactly those should be, but it's not in question that we ought to have real values, which are going to have to participate in hard conversations with the halachic approaches, but which we shouldn't ever see ourselves as giving up.

So yeah, so I definitely do think that meaning is an important piece of Rabbi Tucker's approach here. And then when we're thinking about applying this approach to circumcision in a way that I support more, I think the big question is what sorts of compromises can the halachic practice of circumcision make, right? And this is not an easy question, right? This is something that will take a lot of thought and gets back to the point you were raising about change in halacha, right? And the fact that halacha looks very different than it used to.

And so, you know, some ways of creating a better circumcision practice might involve some of the physical practices that we have now, and some might not, you know. But the important thing is that we're trying to figure out a way that the practice does not run afoul of some of our important convictions.

And you know, and then there are important empirical claims that are going to have to be resolved here, right? So there are some facts about the world. So here's a big question, which I don't think Rabbi Tucker is critical enough about: is it the case that circumcision is a big connection to the commandments for many Jews who have been circumcised, right?

I think this is often taken as a given among many rabbinic authorities that it is. I'll just speak from my personal perspective. It's not, you know, I'm not someone who feels like really aggrieved about my circumcision, but I also don't find it to be a real source of connection to the commandments.

EU-S:

Yeah, it's just not how it functions in the world. I think you're absolutely right, right? And this is a point that I don't think a lot of people consider enough, which is the way circumcision as a, you know, as a sort of totalizing practice

that all, you know, Jewish males are to be circumcised and that a very high percentage of Jewish males are circumcised. The way it functions is you just don't think about it, right?

That's how it functions in the world, just for boring anthropological reasons. When something is that pervasive in the same way that, you know, in Jewish cultures, the foreskin just kind of disappears from the cultural imagination or when it appears, it's sort of distorted in some weird way, but it basically disappears. I think circumcision also kind of disappears except for those uncomfortable moments when it's being performed. And it's almost always being done to an infant who has no idea what's going on. And you just grow up sort of having an abstract idea. Someone will mention it every now and then.

You might go to a bris, but you're not thinking about your circumcision and it's not, you know, when you look at your penis, you're not thinking about the Torah. It's just not how it works.

MD:

Yeah, I want, and also, you know, a lot of folks who are more traditional would find it rather problematic if you're thinking about the Torah too much when you're looking at your penis.

EU-S:

Yeah.

MD:

No, indeed. Indeed. But, right. So, right. So, when we're doing this sort of moral conversation, there are going to be really important facts about the world. And that's a lot of what I also want us to continue to engage with, right? As we're trying to balance, you know, where the Torah is coming from and where our values lie.

And I think that this is something that Rabbi Tucker does very interestingly in his account of the Akedah of the binding and near sacrifice of Isaac, right? He



sort of starts with this premise that this story is really central in the Torah and that we can't just say that the Torah's own interpretation of Abraham as passing the test is wrong, right? So he really, Rabbi Tucker really tries to justify how Abraham could be by the Torah's own lights, doing something that God wants and also how it could be meaningful to us today. Right?

And, and, and so I'm not going to say I agree with exactly what he comes up with there, but I think this sort of question of how might the Torah have different moral values than we do, because Rabbi Tucker thinks that the Torah doesn't view child sacrifice as wrong in that story. So how could the Torah have very different values than we do and also still have a pull over us today?

So his interpretation is that a major lesson of the Akedah is that we need to make real sacrifices for our Jewish life. And that certainly seems right. And the types of sacrifices that we're making are very different from that which Abraham was asked to make. But it doesn't seem from his interpretation of that story, like he thinks that the Torah has one unchanging morality that it's imposing on us.

And so that's partly why I also am inclined to read him charitably when he talks about the Torah as having moral authority in this essay that we're discussing.

EU-S:

Yeah, Max, I don't know what to tell you. I feel like this is another instance in which circumcision kind of unmasks in a very enlightening way. I, you know, it's it really is where the rubber hits the road for a lot of people. And, you know, the values become clear. And like for him to say that no matter what the sort of general moral consensus about circumcision is, we should be arguing in its favor because we are commanded to do it. It just gives up the game for me. And again, that's why I feel like this was a bait and switch. I feel like he's presenting himself as part of your tribe, part of the four, you know, category four of people who think that, you know, morality and halacha can't conflict. And so any apparent conflicts, you know, have to be resolved.

But I really do feel like that's just sort of – and again, I'm not trying to suggest that he's doing this in bad faith – but he is promoting a bad faith approach to ethics. And that really bothers me.

MD:

Yeah, no, I mean, I want to validate what you're saying, Eli. I think that he would acknowledge that he could be convinced now. It might be rather difficult to convince him. Right. But, you know, he sort of leaves the door open in a way that I at least appreciate for our own moral values on this issue to change.

So he says, on page 18 of “Ethical Norms as the Foundation of Torah,” “It might be possible that in some circumstances, our human moral instincts would push us to discover internally articulated applications of Torah we had not previously considered and come to translate universal insights and critiques of mitzvot into the language of halacha.”

Right.

So he leaves the door open here to something that I think we need to do in circumcision on this topic. And he just doesn't apply it to this topic. Right. He doesn't think that this is what we're going to need to do on circumcision.

And so I want to take up his challenge and say, you know, look, like, I think you're wrong about circumcision, but this general idea, you know, this sort of way of operating is really powerful. And especially this phrase: “internally articulated applications of Torah we had not previously considered” is something that I find really exciting. Right. I don't think that the Torah is a document that's written according to moral norms that we would find at all intelligible today.

I think that the Torah is a human document and it's an ancient document. And that, you know, those are assumptions that one could disagree with. But I don't think we should expect to find the Torah stating anything like our morality.

But, but, even so, it's incredibly deep and incredibly rich. And there's so much for us to discover and to continually discover, even that past generations

haven't discovered that can inform our lives as Jews and in the world and be in dialogue with the ethical norms we really do care about.

EU-S:

Max, that's a great place to leave this. And thank you so much for joining me again.

MD:

Yeah, no, it's so great to do so, Eli, and I look forward to more.

Eli Ungar-Sargon:

Next time on the *Bruchim Podcast*.

Jeffrey Helmreich:

I made another mistake, which is I took Eli to be a rabbi and asked him the answer. And he said, leave the boy alone. Don't touch him.

EU-S:

I stand by my statement.

JH:

But that's that I just forgot to check Eli's credentials because he's not a rabbi. Thank God.

EU-S:

I stand by that ruling. And it's a shortcoming on your part, Jeff, that you didn't realize just how high of a level of a rabbi I actually am in the heavenly realm of halacha.

JH:

You have heavenly smicha.

EU-S:

That's right.

JH:

You've been ordained by the heavenly court. Wonderful.

EU-S:

I mean, not in the actual world, but in this heavenly realm that you're hypothesizing, I definitely have smicha.

JH:

And you're implying, of course, that I don't.

EU-S:

I'm implying that if a person comes to a person with heavenly smicha and asks them a question, they owe it to them. They are, nay, obligated to them to give them the truth.

JH:

And would you have advised Abraham to not be touched?

EU-S:

Would I have advised Abraham not to be touched? Abraham can do whatever he wants to his own body.

JH:

All right.

EU-S:

He was 99. It's all good.

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- music -