

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET
ON PARSHAS ACHREI KEDOSHIM - 5756

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Subject: Torah Weekly - Acharei Mos/Kedoshim

Summary

Hashem instructs the Kohanim to exercise extreme care when they enter the Mishkan. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol is to approach the holiest part of the Mishkan after special preparations and in special clothing. He brings offerings that are unique for Yom Kippur including the two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for Hashem," and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel" in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations. Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a women's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited. The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught: Prohibitions: Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone's property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one's parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; and tattooing. Positive: Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating fruits from a tree's 4th year in Jerusalem; awe for the Temple; respect for Rabbis, the blind and the deaf. Family life must be holy. We are warned again not to imitate gentile behavior, lest we lose the Land of Israel. We must observe kashrus and

Commentaries
CLIFFHANGER

"Do not imitate the practices of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled..." (18:3) A group of people live on a mountain-top which ends in a sheer cliff and a drop of several thousand feet. One civic-minded fellow, on his own initiative, builds a safety fence to prevent anyone from venturing too close to the edge of the cliff and inadvertently falling off. Would anyone complain that the fence limited his freedom of movement by making it less likely that he plummeted off the mountain to his death?

Often we hear those who do not understand the true nature of rabbinic legislation complain that the Rabbis restricted our lives with unnecessary and complicated extra laws and prohibitions, but one who appreciates the seriousness of transgressing a Torah law - the devastating effects that such transgressions have on the neshama, one's eternal life, and the world in general - feels much more secure knowing that safety fences have been erected to prevent him from plummeting into a spiritual oblivion.

(Adapted from Rabbi Zev Leff's Outlooks and Insights)

FROM THE INSIDE OUT

"And he (Aaron) will place the incense on the fire in front of Hashem." (16:13) In the first part of the service of Yom Kippur in the Beis Hamikdash, the Kohen Gadol would burn incense in the Holy-of-Holies. The Tzedukim (Sadducees), who denied the authority of the Oral Torah, claimed that the incense should first be placed on the fire in a fire-pan outside the Holy-of-Holies, and only then the Kohen Gadol should carry it inside. The Talmud (Yoma 53) cites the above verse as a proof to the contrary: that the incense should only be placed on the fire "in front of Hashem". In every generation, the Jewish People has its `Tzedukim' - those who wish to introduce novelty into Judaism from what they have seen `outside'. To ape the secular world and introduce `improvements' `adjustments' and `modernizations' into the sanctity of Yisrael. The Torah sages of every generation fight a constant and bitter battle against these `improvements'. Which is not to say that the Torah is stuck in a bygone age. On the contrary, the Torah speaks to each generation on every aspect of life; sometimes involving itself in the finest minutiae of science, in order to express how the Halacha views all that pertains to the modern world. But that view is extrapolated from the inward essence of the Torah outward, not grafted on from the outside. The Torah addresses the modern world, not in terms of compromise or appeasement, not through pandering to the ideology of the hour, nor to the dictates of the fashions of the world at large. Rather it views the world through intrinsic principles enshrined in immutable criteria. (Based on Hadrash V'Ha'Iyun)

FACES OF HOLINESS

"Speak to all of the congregation of the Children of Israel and tell them - You must be Holy." (19:2)

We often think of holiness as something that only a few exceptional individuals can aspire to. However, the fact that Hashem gave this mitzvah to Moshe Rabeinu in the form of `Speak to all the congregation...' teaches us that not only the exceptional among us is capable of holiness, but every one of us is commanded to be Holy. When the Torah was given on Har Sinai, the Midrash, commenting on the verse "And all the people saw the voices" tells us "The Voice came out and was divided into many many different voices, and everyone heard according to his strength." In other words, when one person heard "You shall not kill," he understood it to mean - "Don't pick up your ax and murder!" While another understood "You shall not kill" to mean that if a dead body is found close to the outskirts of your town, you will be held responsible for not giving him sufficient protection, food and escort, as though you'd killed him. To yet another it meant, don't embarrass someone in public, because when the blood drains from his face and he turns white, it is as though you had killed him. Each person heard the Voice according to his own strength and unique talents, and similarly every Jew is expected to be holy on his level because he is an individual spark of the holiness of G-d. (Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

YOU AND ME

"Love your neighbor as yourself - I am Hashem." (19:18)

Rabbi Akiva states that this is the fundamental principal of all the Torah.

But, in truth, how is it possible to love another person as one loves oneself? A person's whole view of the world tends to be ego-centric, and even when he behaves altruistically it is usually based on the desire to feel good about himself - that's not loving as yourself, that's called loving yourself! The answer is at the end of the verse "I am Hashem."

When a person puts himself at the center of the universe instead of Hashem, then necessarily every other creation is light-years away from him because he feels himself to be unique, being the center of all things. But when he acknowledges that he is not G-d but "I am Hashem" - Hashem is G-d - then as a creation of Hashem he sees himself as linked to his fellow man. In essence there becomes no difference between 'me' and 'you'. As we are all expressions of the will of the Creator, as much as I can love myself, I can love my neighbor. (Heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman)

Haftorah: Amos 9: 7-15

DOWN ON THE FARM

"Behold - days are coming - the words of Hashem - when the plow will encounter the reaper..." (9:13)

A "townie", who had never been out of the city, once found himself in the country, watching a farmer plowing up the earth and sowing seed in the furrows. He thought to himself that here was certainly someone who needed urgent psychiatric help: Someone burying perfectly good grain in the earth so that it would rot! He left, and went back to town shortly afterward. Had the "townie" stayed in the country longer, he would have witnessed how each rotting seed had given bloom to many heavy sheaves of wheat which had

been harvested and its grain gathered in sufficiency for the whole year. Had he stayed, he would certainly have understood that the plowing and sowing were only to achieve this end, and there would have been no question in his mind that the farmer was a lunatic. However, since he returned to the city, he had no idea as to the true purpose of the farmer.

In our days, we look around us at the world, and we see the wicked prosper and the righteous in dire adversity. However, we only see the beginning of the process, not its purpose and completion. In the time-to-come, when there will be a complete revelation of Hashem's providential guidance in the world, we will understand the purpose of every single event, however seemingly illogical or unfair: The "ploughing" will be seen through the perspective of the "harvesting" - "when the plow will encounter the reaper..." (Based on the Dubner Maggid)

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations. Kah Ribon - "G-d, the Master..."

We will sing to You songs and praises in Yerushalayim, the city of beauty. vizamrun lach...birushlaym karta d'shufraya

When the sage Rabbi Yochanan, a man of extraordinary beauty who said of himself that he was the last remnant of the beautiful residents of Yerushalayim, visited his sick colleague Rabbi Elazar, the dark room he lay in was illuminated by the radiance emanating from the skin of the distinguished visitor and Rabbi Elazar burst into tears. Rabbi Yochanan masterfully proved to him that there was no reason to weep over any disappointments he may have experienced in regard to spiritual, material or family achievements but Rabbi Elazar surprised him by explaining that he was weeping at the thought that such extraordinary beauty is destined to wither in the dust. At this both sages wept in unison. (Berachos 5b) Maharsha explains that these sages reflected on the fact that Rabbi Yochanan's eventual passing would mean the climax of the beauty of Jerusalem as reflected in its residents and they wept in anticipation of this next stage of the decline of the Holy City.

The restored Yerushalayim will regain all of its beauty in people and everything else, and it is there that we shall sing the songs of praise we now sing at our Shabbos meal.

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

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"Mordechai Kamenetzky <ateres@pppmail.nyser.net>" drasha@torah.org
Subject: DRASHA PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS - KEDOSHIM --
UNCALCULATED LOVE

The combined portions of Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are replete with the widest array of mitzvos in the Torah. In fact, there is a choice of more than 100 commandments to discuss. But there is one commandment that transcends all the others in terms of its acceptance by every culture and civilization: Leviticus 19:18, "love your neighbor as yourself."

Confucius explained it in a way that I believe is quite impractical and quite prohibitive. It is not cost effective to "do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Hillel, in Tractate Shabbos, was both economical and practical: "What is disdainful to you, do not do unto you friend." Regardless of the implications, this week's command -- "Love your neighbor as yourself", merits scrutiny.

Rabbi Akiva, the legendary sage, was known for espousing this tenet by adding, "this is a great rule in the Torah."

The question is, in which way is it a great rule? Second, the Torah, by placing "yourself" as the object of comparison, seems to promote self-love. Shouldn't self-love be discouraged if not decried? Last, why doesn't the Torah talk about loving a neighbor with blanket love or perhaps with the same passion as it demands for the Al-mighty Himself?

Rav Sholom Schwadron, the Magid of Jerusalem, was studying on his porch one summer day when a shrill cry shattered the blistering heat. Reb Sholom

jumped to his feet, only to see his neighbor's son, young Meirka, who had just fallen. He was bleeding profusely from his head. Reb Sholom wet a towel, rushed to the boy, and scooped him up. He wrapped the towel around the wound, thus concealing the boy's face from view. All that could be seen was a little boy and a tremendous red stain oozing through the towel. He was both carrying and consoling the youngster when he spotted the boy's grandmother returning from the grocery store, basket in hand.

Not realizing that her grandson was the bleeding child, she surveyed the scene. With a confident and motherly smile she calmly declared, "don't worry, Hashem will take care! The boy's cut will be fine!"

As she was about to proceed on her merry way, the towel slipped from the boy's face, revealing it to his smiling grandmother. Immediately the calm was shattered.

"Meirka!" She shrieked in an uncontrollable panic. "Oy! Help! Somebody do something for my Meirka! Quick get a doctor! What is going to be? Get an ambulance!"

The panic-driven call to arms was heard throughout the Jerusalem apartments overlooking the scene. And from all of the windows heads appeared, and sweet motherly voices were heard saying, "Don't worry, Hashem will take care! I'm sure the little cut will be fine!"

The Alter of Slobodka, Rav Nosson Zvi Finkel, explained. The Torah understood that many of our mitzvos are done with great calculation. We constantly think and debate, "how much should I spend for an esrog? How do I appropriate my charities?" It is only fitting to spend great thought and time in doing a complex act of service to Hashem. But there is also another type of mitzvah -- love your neighbor. That mitzvah is different. It should be performed naturally. Love your neighbor the same way that you love yourself. Totally uncalculated, and unmitigated, just like loving yourself. Like a grandmother's love to little Meirka. That love should not be demonstrated in the sermonic sing-song of a reassuring preacher. It should come as natural as the piercing cry of a concerned Bubby. "That," says Rabbi Akiva, "is a great rule in the Torah."

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Dedicated by The Teren Family in memory of our Mother & Bubbie, Miriam

(Gertz) Kossoff - Miryam bas Leizer Isaac ob"m, who passed away Erev Pesach at the age of 98 Drasha is the E-mail edition of FaxHomily a weekly Torah Facsimile which is a project of the Henry & Myrtle Hirsch Foundation.

Dear Friends,

I have received many comments and questions via fax and e-mail (ateres@ppmail.nyser.net) I will try to answer every question and comment personally. I am extremely appreciative of all input, especially from the many people that I know personally, but I was unaware that they receive the "drasha", fax-homily or homil-e-mail (which ever format you receive it in!) Please do not hesitate to write! Warmest regards, ateres@ppmail.nyser.net Mordechai Kamenetzky Drasha, Copyright (c) 1996 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

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"Mordecai Kornfeld <kornfeld@netmedia.co.il>" Intriguing glimpses into the weekly T...: Parashat Acharei Mot - "Keeping one's distance"

The Weekly Internet

P * A * R * A * S * H * A - P * A * G * E

by Mordecai Kornfeld
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This week's publication is dedicated to the memory of Leah bat Michel Mordechai, the mother of Mr. Avi Berger of Queens, N.Y. who has generously sponsored this Parasha-Page. Her Yahrzeit is 27 Nisan.

Parashat Acharei Mot, 5756

KEEPING ONE'S DISTANCE

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon, who had died when they approached before Hashem. (Vayikra 16:1)

The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took their shovel, put incense in it and brought a fire that was not sanctified before Hashem -- which He had not commanded them to bring. A fire went forth from before Hashem and devoured them.

"A fire went forth" -- Rabbi Eliezer explained: The sons of Aharon died because they made a halachic decision [to bring their own fire to the altar] without first asking their master, Moshe.

Rebbi Yishmael said: [They were killed] because they entered the Mishkan while under the influence of alcohol.

((Vayikra 10:1-3, and Rashi)

The sons of Aharon the Cohen were dramatically killed in an episode which took place during the Mishkan's inauguration ceremony. A heavenly fire flashed out of the Holy of Holies, claiming their lives while leaving their bodies intact (Sanhedrin 52a). The verse clearly reveals to us the sin of Nadav and Avihu. They were punished for bringing an unsolicited fire to the Mishkan upon which they offered an incense offering (either in the Holy of Holies or on the altar of the courtyard, see Tosafot Erubin 63a).

In the Midrash (see Vayikra Rabba, 20:6-10, Sanhedrin 52a), however, we unexpectedly find a long list of purported causes for the death of Aharon's children. Even more confusing is that many of the reasons listed in the Midrash seem to be entirely unrelated to the verse's explicit description of their sin! Aside from Rashi's comment (that they either made a halachic decision on their own, or entered the Mishkan in a drunken state) we are also told that Nadav and Avihu refused to marry and bear children. Furthermore, they were heard to comment, "When will these old men

[= Moshe and Aharon] pass on, so that we may be the new leaders of the nation!" Another Midrash tells us that they sinned by entering the Mishkan without donning a Me'il (the high-priestly robe) -- an altogether cryptic

suggestion considering that they were not high-priests.

Tosafot (Yoma 53a) notes the confusion raised by the Midrash on this issue, but he does not offer any insights for resolving the various Midrashim. What do all of these sins have to do with bringing an unsolicited fire to the altar? Also, is there any common thread running between the various suggestions of the Midrash? Let us attempt to attain at least a partial understanding of these peculiar Midrashim.

II

Firstly, let us analyze yet another comment made by the Midrash (ibid.) involving the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. At the end of Parashat Mishpatim (Shemot 24:9-11) we are told that when we were given the Torah, Moshe and Aharon took Nadav, Avihu and seventy elders up to Mt. Sinai. There, they "beheld Hashem and ate and drank." Rashi (loc. cit.), based on the Midrash, explains that Nadav and Avihu beheld Hashem haughtily, while satiated with food and drink. Rashi tells us further:

[Nadav and Avihu and the elders] beheld Hashem and gazed at Him more than was permitted to them. A punishment of death was decreed upon them [and they ought to have died right then and there], but Hashem did not want to dampen the joy of the Giving of the Torah. On the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Nadav and Avihu finally received their punishment....

(Rashi ibid.)f

Why did Hashem choose the inauguration of the Mishkan for Nadav and

Avihu's retribution? Perhaps Rashi is teaching us that the sin of Nadav and Avihu at the inauguration ceremony brought to mind their former sin. The two sins were rooted in the same basic misconduct. How is that so?

The sin of Nadav and Avihu at Mt. Sinai is described quite clearly. Hashem revealed Himself on Mt. Sinai to an extent that He had not done at any other point in history. He appeared in His awesome majesty in order to give His chosen nation the Torah and reveal to them His Divine Will. It was to this display of the Divine Presence that Moshe brought Nadav and Avihu and the seventy elders at the end of Parashat Mishpatim. However, the sons of Aharon were not prepared for the encounter. When Moshe "went to the heavens" to encounter the Presence of Hashem and receive the two Tablets of the Law, he abstained from food and drink for forty days (Shemot 34:28). Nadav and Avihu, however, did not display the requisite awe for so momentous an occasion. Perhaps they themselves believed that they *were* spiritually prepared to behold the Divine Presence. But the Torah reveals that in truth, they were still entrenched, to a certain degree, in the physical world of eating and drinking. "Their hearts were dense with food and drink (Rashi)." They did not realize how stringently one must separate himself from the world of material pleasure in order to approach Hashem in such an intimate manner. They "peered" at the Divine Presence a bit too intensely for their particular level of spirituality.

It was this very attitude that brought Nadav and Avihu to enter the Mishkan with their fire at the inauguration of the Mishkan. Nadav and Avihu, according to the Midrash, offered incense on their own in the Holy of Holies on the day that Hashem first rested His Presence there. Since they were chosen to serve in the Mishkan as Cohanim, they thought themselves to be on a high enough spiritual level to enter the Holy of Holies and behold the Divine Presence uninvited. They repeated the mistake that they had made at Mt. Sinai -- and this time they suffered the grievous consequences.

III

Armed with this insight, we may begin to make sense of the confusion in the Midrashim that discuss the sin of Nadav and Avihu.

As we quoted in section I, one Midrash states that Nadav and Avihu died because they would comment, "When will Moshe and Aharon pass away, so that we may become the new leaders of the nation?" Nadav and Avihu weren't power hungry. Rather, as is clear from their behavior at Mt. Sinai, they considered themselves to be spiritually on par with -- or perhaps even greater than -- Moshe and Aharon. Just as Moshe was granted "unlimited access" to the Holy of Holies (Torat Kohanim, Acharei, Parsheta 1:6) and was in a constant state of preparedness to prophesy (Rashi Bamidbar 12:4) so, too, the sons of Aharon felt that they were fit to serve before Hashem

with similar "familiarity." They felt that since they were Cohanim (and since they were not involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, as Aharon was), they would be more appropriate leaders. Moshe was the one chosen to take the Jews out of Egypt. But in the era of the Mishkan, they believed that the Cohanim who served in the Temple would make better leaders. If Moshe still remained at the helm, they felt, it was only in recognition of his past accomplishments.

This is also the message of the Midrashim which tell us that Nadav and Avihu refused to marry and bear offspring. Moshe, because he had to constantly be in a state of readiness to receive the word of Hashem, separated from his wife Tziporah (see Rashi Bamidbar 12:4). Nadav and Avihu felt that they had attained similar spiritual heights. They, too, abstained from marriage.

This is also why they decided the halacha (about bringing fire to the altar) without first asking their master, Moshe. They felt that they were as competent as Moshe in matters regarding Temple decorum.

This is what the verse that starts this week's Parasha is telling us. Nadav and Avihu died simply because they *approached* -- too closely -- before Hashem. They did not hold themselves at an appropriate distance from the Divine Presence. And this, too, is why the verse refers to their offering as an "Eish Zarah," or a non-sanctified fire, -- a fire that was inappropriate for the holiness of the environment. It truly may have been appropriate to bring a fire to the altar on this occasion (see Sukkah 21b). Nevertheless, coming from Nadav and Avihu who were not spiritually prepared

to bring it, this fire was deemed a "strange fire."

IV

The Midrash told us further that Nadav and Avihu entered the Mishkan while under the influence of intoxicating drinks. The mind is the most spiritual part of a man. We can become spiritual beings while still in this world, if we but allow our intellect and our reason to dominate our physical, worldly desires -- not vice versa. Full control of one's physical desires is the goal of the servant of Hashem. Nadav and Avihu did not yet fully attain this lofty goal. They entered the Mishkan while in a mindless, drunken state -- i.e. their reason did not yet retain full control over their worldly impulses.

Finally, the Midrash criticized Nadav and Avihu for entering the Mishkan without the high-priestly Me'il. The Me'il had woven bells dangling from its hem that tinkled gently as the high-priest walked. The Torah tells us that the purpose of the bells was "that their sound may be heard as [the high-priest] enters the Holy before Hashem... that he may not die" (Shemot 28:35). As the Ramban (ibid.) explains, the bells were meant to announce the high-priest's arrival. One who enters the king's chamber suddenly, without prior invitation, is liable to punishment by death. The bells of the Me'il denoted that the high-priest was entering his Master's presence, as it were, after having been granted permission. We may add that it is meant to remind its wearer, as well, to prepare himself for the service of the King.

The sin of Nadav and Avihu was that they did not wait for permission to enter the Mishkan. They entered the Mishkan to bring their incense offering before reaching the spiritual level demanded by such a service. They did not first request "permission" to enter. This is what the Midrash means by asserting that they were not wearing the Me'il -- they did not learn the lesson that can be gleaned from the high-priest's Me'il (your spelling.)

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Parshas Acharei Mos contains the very famous pasuk [verse] "And you shall keep my laws and my commandments that a person shall do, and you shall live by them, I am HASHEM" [Vayikra 18:5]. As we have said many times, from this verse we learn that with the exception of the three cardinal sins of Idolatry, Murder, and Sexual Immorality, whenever life would be threatened by the observance of a commandment, we are not supposed to observe the commandment. One should violate the laws of Shabbos, eat chazir [pork], or eat Chametz on Pesach, rather than die. The verse teaches us that we are to live by the commandments, not die by them.

A cursory understanding of this verse would seem to indicate that if one has a question of human life versus doing the mitzvos, the Torah is telling us here that in the final analysis human life is more precious than the performance of mitzvos.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, in Igros Moshe, says that this is not the correct interpretation of the pasuk. Targum Onkelos translates this verse "... that you may live IN THE WORLD TO COME". The verse is telling us, on the contrary, that the most precious thing in life is keeping mitzvos, so that one can get to Olam Haba [The World To Come]. If I have an option whether to keep Shabbos or die, the Torah, in fact, tells us -- live. But why? Not because life for its own sake is more precious, but life is precious because one can do mitzvos. Therefore, desecrate this Shabbos so that you can keep so many more Sabbaths. Eat chometz on Pesach, because then you will be able to go on and do so many more mitzvos and thereby merit Olam Haba.

This is an entirely different perspective. Life is not valuable per se, just to go and take things to the dry cleaners and go to the ballgame. That is not what makes life worth living. What makes life worth living is Eternal Life (Chayei Olam) which can be gained through doing mitzvos in this life.

As the Rabbis tell us, "Desecrate one Sabbath so that you can fulfill many Sabbaths".

Chassidic "Teitch:" Get Your "Life" Out of Doing Mitzvos

One of the Gerrer Rebbes interprets the above mentioned pasuk in a classic Chassidic 'teitch'.

There is an expression in Yiddish, or in the language of the Yeshivas, "From what does a person get his 'chiyus' [life]?" Meaning, what brightens his life? Why does he get out of bed in the morning? One may respond, a particular bachur gets his 'chiyus' from learning quickly (b'kiyus) or a certain man gets his 'chiyus' from Jewish outreach.

The Gerrer Rebbe interprets the verse, saying: You should do the commandments, and you should live -- i.e. get your 'chiyus', your joy in life -- by doing these mitzvos. Your raison d'etra in this world should not be making money or doing other things. What should be your 'chiyus'? What should keep you going? What should make you tick? The practice and fulfillment of mitzvos.

The reason that a person should, perhaps, try to accumulate money is not for money's sake, per se, but for what he can do with it. A person may have to work for eight or ten hours a day. The person should think "that's what I have to do to make a livelihood". His 'life,' however, should be his children, his family, his community. His 'life' (chiyus) should be his involvement in the needs of the community; his 'life' should be his learning; his 'life' should be his chessed [acts of kindness].

My 'chiyus' should be "the mitzvos that a person should do so that he shall LIVE by them". That is what the Torah is saying -- not mitzvos by rote, but mitzvos that give one his excitement in life.

"Lo Sissa Alav Chet" -- "Chassidic" and Simple Interpretation

In Parshas Kedoshim we have a very difficult mitzvah. The Torah says "...You shall surely rebuke your fellow man, and you shall not bear a sin because of him." [Vayikra 19:17]

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- "RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Acharei Mos - Kedoshim -

Onkelos Gives Us a New Perspective on "You Shall Live By Them"

When one sees a person doing wrong, he should give him mussar [chastisement, rebuke]. The pasuk tells us concerning this command, "we should not bear a sin because of him".

Rav Gedaliah Schorr once interpreted this expression (lo sissa alav chet) as: Don't magnify the sin ("Sissa" from "Nosea", to lift it up. Don't lift, don't magnify it). To take a classic example: your child does something wrong, and it is necessary to reprimand him. There are two approaches. One can say, "You did THAT?", "You did that TERRIBLE sin?". That would be in violation of "lo sissa alav chet." That would be making the sin big. How does the child feel? The child feels about two inches tall.

The other approach is "YOU did that?", "How could YOU do that?", "That's beneath you, how could YOU come to that?". That is magnifying the person. Not that the sin is a travesty, but a person of the nature of the one who is being chastised is too distinguished to sully himself with such action.

Do not make the sin big, make the person big. Rather than making the child feel like a nothing, destroying his whole self-image, one can make the child feel, "Yes I did something wrong, but I am important and more is expected of me". The latter is proper rebuke.

The simple interpretation of this verse, as Rash"i explains, is that a person should not do a sin himself by chastising another. One should not embarrass a person publicly while giving mussar, but should do it privately and discreetly.

One can give mussar and push the person away, or one can give mussar and bring the person closer. You can yell "SHABBOS! SHABBOS!" at a person and make him hate the Shabbos, or you can say "Shabbos, Shabbos" and make him love the Shabbos.

The Key Ingredient of Rebuke

Did you ever wonder how one can rebuke a person for violating a commandment, and yet make him love the Mitzvah? The following is an amazing, true story.

A certain American Rabbi was a guest speaker in a town and told over a story about a young student, who was caught smoking on Shabbos in the Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim in Radin. The speaker mentioned that the Chofetz Chaim took this student into his room for two minutes and gave him mussar. The student came out, and carefully observed the Shabbos for the rest of his life. The Rabbi said, "if only I could know what went on in that room for those two minutes!" As he was telling the story, the Rabbi noticed that there was a person in the crowd who was crying. After the speech, the person who was crying came over and told the Rabbi, "I was that young student".

The Rabbi was ecstatic. He now had the opportunity to find the "key" to draw people near. He would finally be able to find out what the Chofetz Chaim told his student in this famous episode.

The student told the Rabbi what happened. He was caught smoking on Shabbos. He was notified that the Chofetz Chaim wanted to see him in his house. He walked into the Chofetz Chaim's house, trembling. The Chofetz Chaim, who by then was in his eighties and was extremely short (coming up to the boy's chest), walked over to the student, took his hands and said softly "Shabbos..." and started crying. The Chofetz Chaim repeated "Shabbos..." and the hot tears dripped onto the boy's hands. From those two words, the boy became dedicated to observing the Shabbos the rest of his life.

When someone yells "SHABBOS! SHABBOS! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?", you feel holier-than-thou-ness, you feel distance. However, when you see that a person is so moved that he is brought to tears, when he is broken by "Nebech, how could you desecrate the Sabbath? What will be with your neshama [soul]?" -- then you are moved to change.

That is the way to give mussar -- out of sincerity and nearness and concern. It works for any mitzvah. Sincerity draws people near. One can yell and create distance, or speak softly and draw near.

Personalities and Sources

(Targum) Onkelos -- Interpretive Aramaic translation of Chumash; written by Onkelos (c. 90) the proselyte.

Rav Moshe Feinstein -- (1895-1986) The foremost posek of the latter half of the 20th century; Rosh Yeshiva Tiferes Jerusalem; New York City.

Gerrer (Chassidic) Rebbes:

R. Yitzchak Meri Alter (Chidushei Harym) (1799-1866)

R. Avraham Mordechai Alter (died at an early age)

R. Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (Sefas Emes) (1847-1905)

R. Avraham Mordechai Alter (Imrei Emes) (1866-1948)

R. Gedaliah Schorr (1910-1979) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn (one does not have to be a Chassidic Rebbe to give a "Chassidic" interpretation).

Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933), Rav Yisroel Meir HaKohen of Radin; author of basic works in halacha, hashkafa, and mussar.

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SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO ACHREI-MOS - KEDOSHIM

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you should reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him (19:17).
Avoiding Hatred Between Jews

QUESTION: Why does the Torah combine in one Pasuk the prohibition of hating another Jew with the command to reprove him?

DISCUSSION: There are two basic approaches in the interpretation of the verse cited above. Some commentators(1) explain the verse as relating to matters which are Bein Adam L'makom, between man and Hashem. If a Jew observes another Jew transgressing any one of the Mitzvos, it is incumbent upon the observer to reprove the sinner in regard to his sin. Failure to do so will ultimately result in hating the sinner, since it is permitted [under certain circumstances(2)] to hate a Jew who purposefully and deliberately disregards the commands of the Torah. Rebuke, therefore, is the means through which hatred of another Jew can be avoided, since rebuke may be the impetus for the potential transgressor to change his ways. [The Halachos concerning the proper method of rebuke are intricate(3) and not the subject of this week's discussion.]

Many other commentators(4), however, suggest a different approach in explaining this verse. The command "to reprove your fellow" is written in regard to matters which are Bein Adam L'chavero, matters which concern the relationship between man and his fellow man. The Torah, which prohibits a Jew from hating another Jew, is teaching us why hatred may develop and how to avoid it. Often, ill will is a result of miscommunication or misunderstanding. When not resolved immediately and in a straightforward manner, minor run-ins or disagreements can grow into major conflicts, leading to friction and hostility among Jews. To prevent this from happening, the Torah commands "You should reprove your fellow," meaning, you should approach the person whom you feel has wronged you and question him as to why he did so, whether he can justify his actions, etc.

Most of the time, one of the following four conclusions will result from the questioning: a) The alleged incident never took place; it was either completely fabricated or greatly exaggerated. b) The incident did happen but it was not the intention or fault of the accused. c) The offender will sincerely apologize for his misdeed, the incident will be forgotten, and peace will be restored. d) The offender will justify his actions to the satisfaction of the injured party.

Any of the above outcomes will usually resolve the dispute and relieve the tension. Thus by questioning and reproving the person who [in your opinion] hurt you, one can allay much of the hatred that is unfortunately prevalent among some Jews.

The notion of avoiding hatred by reproving one's friend is not merely a "nice idea" based upon an explanation of a Pasuk in this week's Parsha. It is actually a Halacha L'masse which is agreed upon by all of the Poskim, from the Rambam(5) down to the Mishnah Berura(6).

Of course, one who can bring himself to forgive his fellow man without rebuking him, may do so. [The Rambam refers to this conduct as Middas Chasidus(7), exemplary behavior]. The requirement to confront the offender applies only when otherwise, hatred will result between the parties.

When rebuking a fellow Jew, the rebuke must be delivered in a gentle, conciliatory manner and in private(8).

If, after properly rebuking the offender, the latter remains antagonistic and refuses to apologize, it is then permitted for the injured party to hate the person who did him harm(9).

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FOOTNOTES:

1 See commentary of Tosfos (Hadar Zkeinim), Tur and Chezkuni (second opinion). This is also the simple explanation of the Gemara (Erchin 16b).

2 See Biur Halacha 1:1; Ahavas Chesed (Marganisa Tova #17); Dibros Moshe Bava Metzria pg. 356.

3 See OC 606 & 608.

4 Rashbam, Ramban and Chezkuni (first opinion), Ohr Hachaim and R' S.R. Hirsch.

5 Hilchos Dayos 6:6. See Lechem Mishne who quotes the Talmudic source, and Kiryas Melech who quotes a source from the Midrash.

6 OC 156:4, quoting the Sefer Hamitzvos. This Halacha is also quoted by the Magen Avraham and S.A. Harav, ibid.

7 Although the Rambam mentions such conduct only in regard to an offender who is unable to repent, many other Poskim do not differentiate and allow one to act with Middas Chasidus towards any offender. They opine that since the Torah's main concern is the possibility of hatred developing, if the offended person will forgive the offender wholeheartedly, no rebuke is necessary - see Lechem Mishne, S.A. Harav and R. S. R. Hirsch, ibid. 8 Mishna Berura, ibid.

9 The Steipler (Kehillos Yaakov 10:54; Birchas Peretz - Kedoshim), based on the opinion of the Yeriim.

SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT" A

The entire vbm staff wishes a warm mazal tov to the translator of the sichot series, kaeren fish, and her husband moshe, on the birth of their son yigal david.

"You Shall Keep All My Statutes And All My Judgments"
Summarized by Danny Orenbuch

Near the end of Parashat Kedoshim, we are commanded as follows: "And you shall keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and do them, that the land not expel you..." (Vayikra 20:22). This pasuk is in fact a repetition of what we learned at the end of the last parasha: "And you shall keep My statutes and My judgments which, if a man do, he shall live by them..." (ibid. 18:5).

The Or HaChayyim comments on this repetition in our parasha: "The reason that God had to repeat this pasuk - although He had already said it in Parashat Acharei-Mot - is in order to teach that the mitzvot must be fastidiously observed, lest we neglect them and the land expel us. From here we learn that if the mitzvot are not fulfilled, the land will expel even those who observe them - because they did not admonish those who did not observe."

But beyond this explanation, we can notice a difference between the two pesukim in these parshiot. In our parasha the word "kol" (all) appears: "...all My statutes and all My judgments...". Furthermore, if we examine the two parshiot closely and compare them, we see that their content differs. Parashat Acharei-Mot provides a minimalist explanation of the mitzvot and issurim: the commandments as brought in this parasha aim to bring the nation to an average level, and no more.

One example of this relates to slaughtering outside of the Beit Ha-Mikdash. While Parashat Re'eh prohibits shechita outside of the Beit Ha-Mikdash because the holy and elevated nature of the place requires that anything connected with it be carried out within its precincts, in Parashat Acharei-Mot a different reason is brought. There it says, "And they shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the demons after which they have gone astray" (ibid. 17:7). In other words, the reason here is avoidance of similarity to pagan practices. This avoidance is a negative motivation, as opposed to the positive reason full of sublime significance which we find in Parashat Re'eh.

Another example relates to the subject of arayot (sexual immorality). In Parashat Acharei-Mot this is defined as an abomination and as being similar to the practices of Egypt; hence its prohibition. In other words, this is another negative reason, based on avoidance - to prevent us from adopting the practices and actions of the Egyptians. In contrast, Parashat Kedoshim provides a different reason: We have to imitate God and to strive to be holy as He is, in order to achieve perfection. This is a completely different motivation.

The Torah has must be fulfilled as one all-encompassing entity, with all its parts and nuances. When a person chooses to fulfil certain parts and leaves out others, his observance is qualitatively impaired. If a person attains perfection in his observance of the laws of arayot, for example, but has no self-control when it comes to forbidden foods, then even though formally he has committed no sin in the first area, nevertheless the entirety of his Divine service is tainted; his whole religious aspect is damaged.

This, then, is the message the Torah is conveying in our parasha. "You shall keep ALL My statutes and ALL My judgments" - this is not merely a quantitative requirement but rather a demand for all-encompassing quality. The Torah must be

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PARASHAT KEDOSHIM

fulfilled as a single unity, on all its levels.

Let us examine the significance of this view in relation to one of the mitzvot mentioned in our parasha: "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not respect the poor person, nor honor the mighty; you shall judge your neighbor in righteousness" (ibid. 19:15).

Rashi examines each clause separately and enumerates three separate prohibitions and one positive commandment. However, we may analyze the structure of the pasuk differently - in terms of a general principle, an example of it, and another general principle. "You shall do no injustice in judgment" - this is a general principle; "You shall judge your neighbor in righteousness" is another. And in between them we find two examples: "You shall not respect the poor person, nor honor the mighty." Do not judge in favor of the poor person because you have mercy on him, nor in favor of someone who is powerful for fear of his ability to harm you.

In this case it is clear that if a person fulfils only one part, such as not favoring the poor, but neglects the other, i.e. not favoring the wealthy, then the encompassing in all its aspects and details.

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"Yeshivat Har Etzion - Office <office@etzion.org.il>"Chumash shiur...

PARSHAT HASHAVUA
PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT - KDOSHIM
by Menachem Leibtag

Up until Parshat Kedoshim, Sefer Vayikra deals exclusively with laws pertaining to the Mishkan. 'Finally,' in Parshat Kedoshim, we find a Parsha which deals with topics applicable to our daily lives. Why the sudden change? Is the inclusion of these laws in Sefer Vayikra incidental, or is it possible to find an overall theme that ties all the parshiot of the Sefer together?

In this week's shiur we analyze the overall structure of the Sefer in search of an answer to these questions.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Up until the middle of Parshat Acharei Mot, Sefer Vayikra deals exclusively with laws and narratives concerning the Mishkan. An abrupt change takes place in chapter 18, as Sefer Vayikra begins to discuss a variety of topics, many of which are totally unrelated to the Mishkan. This is illustrated by the following summary table:

GENERALCHAPTERSSPECIFIC TOPIC

MISHKAN1 - 5Korban Yachid (individual)/ ndava and chova "6 - 7Torot HaKorbanot, (for the Kohanim) "8 - 10Dedication Ceremony of the Mishkan (narrative) " 11 - 15Tumah & Tahara (who can enter the Mishkan etc.) " 16Special avoda (service) of Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur " 17Prohibition of offering Korban outside Mishkan ARAYOT18Prohibited marriage relationships etc. MISC.19-20"kdoshim tiyihu..." ("be holy"), a variety of general laws KOHANIM21-22Special laws regarding Kohanim and 'zarim' (non-Kohanim) HOLIDAYS23Complete list of chagim with focus on agricultural aspect MISHKAN24Menora & Lechem ha'panim (showbread) + misc. laws LAND25Shmita (Sabbatical year) and Yovel (Jubilee year), and related laws TOCHACHA26Reward and Punishment for keeping the laws MISHKAN27Donation of certain values to the Mishkan

Although the second half of the Sefer does include many 'Mishkan related' mitzvot, the Mishkan is no longer the focus as it was in the first half. Should the second half of Vayikra simply be considered an 'assortment' of mitzvot?

The above table indicates that chapter 18 marks the beginning of a new section. Let's take a closer look at the psukim which begin Chapter 18, as they will help us determine the overall theme of this new section. Note the wording of the first five psukim:

"And God told Moshe: Speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them

principle of "in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" is damaged, and even the part which he fulfils cannot be complete.

So it is with the entire Torah. Even if a person is "perfect" in one area but not in another - or even within a single area of observance, if he fulfils one part but not another - then, even if the two areas seem unconnected, this affects and reflects on everything. If a part is impaired, then the whole cannot be complete.

True, "there is no righteous person on the earth who does only good and sins not;" certainly no one is capable of fulfilling the Torah in its entirety, in all its detail and aspects. However, a person must realize and understand that his task and his aim are to strive towards this goal.

This is the reason why Chazal rule that we do not accept a would-be convert who states that he is prepared to accept the whole Torah except for one detail. The acceptance of Torah cannot be partial. It must be based on a commitment to and striving towards the fulfillment of the Torah in its entirety,

- 'ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM' [I am the Lord Your God]. Do not act as the Egyptians did, and do not act as the Canaanites... Do not follow their laws. [Instead] KEEP MY LAWS... 'ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM.' Keep My laws and commandments which man must do and live by keeping them 'ANI HASHEM.'" (18:1-5)

All mitzvot that are mentioned from this chapter until the end of Sefer Vayikra can be incorporated into the theme of these five psukim. For these psukim can serve as an introduction, an all-encompassing statement of duty for Bnei Yisrael. They are commanded to maintain a special way of life: not a lifestyle like the Egyptians or Canaanites, rather a lifestyle that is dictated by God. What is the meaning of this introduction?

Note that the phrase "Ani Hashem..." is not only repeated three times in these opening psukim, but also some fifty times in the second half of Sefer Vayikra! In contrast, this phrase is found only once in the first half of the Sefer (see 11:44- 45 / compare to e.g. 19:1-18). At first glance, this seems rather absurd. While describing the Mishkan - the site where the "shchina" is present, the phrase 'Ani Hashem' is barely repeated. While dealing with mitzvot which must be kept OUTSIDE the Mishkan, the phrase is emphasized over and over again! One could suggest that this is precisely the theme of Sefer Vayikra. The Mishkan does not LIMIT the "shchina" to its confines, rather, it channels God's presence from heaven to earth IN ORDER that it can emanate. BECAUSE God's presence dwells in the Mishkan, His presence can be felt in the entire land (affecting even the laws of shmita etc.). The second half of Sefer Vayikra TRANSLATES the 'intense' level of shchina found in the Mishkan into the daily walks of life. The internal structure of the second half of Vayikra and its relation to the first half emphasizes this concept. The second half of the Sefer can be divided into three distinct sections:

CHAPTERCATEGORY 18-22Kedushat Ha'Adam (Sanctity of Man) - "arayot," "kdoshim tiyihu," emor, etc. 23-24Kedushat Zman (Sanctity of Time) - the "mo'adim" (the Jewish holidays). 25-26Kedushat Makom (Sanctity of Place) - the laws of Shmita and Yovel. The first half of the Sefer climaxes with the concentration of these three realms of kedusha on Yom Kippur: Kedushat Ha'Adam - Kohen Gadol Kedushat Zman - "shabbat shabbaton" Kedushat Makom - "kodesh ko'doshim" The internalization of the concept of God's presence which is symbolized by the Mishkan must leave a profound affect upon daily life. Therefore, in Parshat Kedoshim, we find numerous mitzvot which reflect a very high moral standard. We must be "kadosh" (holy) for God is "kadosh." Note that in the beginning of Parshat Kedoshim, one can find a law similar to each of the ten commandments. However, these laws reflect a much higher level of spiritual behavior: Ani Hashem asher hotzeiticha / Kdoshim tiyihu - ki kadosh Ani Hashem (I am God who took you out of Egypt / Be holy, for I, God am holy.)

Lo yi'iyeh... / Al tifnu el ha'elilim (19:4) (Do not have idols / Do not turn to false gods) Lo tisa... / The laws of the Mizbayach and pigul - (19:5-8) Do not take God's name in vain / [Recall the mizbayach is where man calls

out in God's NAME.] Shabbat / Shabbat (19:3) Kibud Horim / Kibud Horim (19:3) (Honoring Parents) Lo tizrach / "Lo ta'amod al Dam rey'echa" ... (19:15) (Do not murder / Do not passively watch your fellow die) Lo tinaf / Laws of shifcha charufa and/or "arayot" (19:20-22) (Do not commit adultery) Lo tignov / "Lo tignovu..." (19:11) (Do not steal) Lo ta'aneh / "Lo tishavu be-shmi la'shaker" (19:12) (Do not give false testimony / Do not swear falsely with God's name) Lo tachmod / "Lo tisneh et achicha b'lvavchah..." (19:17-18) (Do not covet / Do not hate your fellow) This concept of Ani Hashem can be recognized by one's visit to the Mishkan. Its internalization, however, must be reflected in the manner by which one conducts one's daily life.

At Matan Torah, prior to receiving the "Aseret ha'Dibrot," Bnei Yisrael entered into a covenant in which they accepted God's proposal that they become a "mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh." ("A kingdom of priests and a holy nation.") By keeping the laws of Sefer Vayikra, that covenant can be fulfilled.

shabbat shalom, menachem

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Enayim LaTorah

Parshat Acharei-Mot - K'doshim

Publication of Student Organization of Yeshiva University

K'doshim V'Hitkadashtem

The Rose and the Lily

by Rabbi Zevulun Charlop

The Torah commands us, "K'doshim Tihyu" (19:2), "you shall be holy." It also calls upon us to "V'hitkadashtem" (20:7), "and make yourselves holy." These are really not the same commandment. Sometimes martyrdom, the hallowing of G-d's name, is thrust upon us. The six million of the Holocaust are all justly called K'doshim. However, without gainsaying the magnitude of their martyrdom, they did not take this martyrdom upon themselves. Unfortunately, they had no alternative. This is K'doshim Tihyu

At other times, however, inner conscience and devotion to Hashem and His Torah compel us without prodding, and oftentimes against the powerful currents of the mainstream, to sanctify His name. This is V'hitkadashtem.

The word K'doshim comes from a root which means "apartness." A Kadosh is one who differentiates himself from others. What he is, how he conducts himself, and the sacrifices he is prepared to make to maintain the integrity of his distinctiveness determine the measure of his K'dushah.

The separation can be total, as may not be uncommon, when one practices Judaism in insulated, albeit gilded ghettos. However, there is an apartness where one maintains the uniqueness of his practice and being even while in the midst of an alien and uncongenial environment. This is V'hitkadashtem. It is not happenstance sanctification, but Kidush Hashem evoked through one's own initiative. The Yalkut Shimoni cites a parable:

A king hired several of his subjects to guard his wine cellar. Some were teetotalers and some drunkards. In the morning, the king found his cellar intact. He gave the drunkards double the pay he gave the teetotalers, and the latter group was consternated: Why were they so shortchanged, when they did the same job of watching as the first group? The king replied, "They, who find it difficult to resist drink, and yet, because of their devotion to me, were able to contain their imbibing proclivities, deserve twice the normal wage." So, too, in the heavens where there is no evil inclination there is one K'dushah but on the earth where the evil inclination is present hopefully two K'dushot will be enough. (Yalkut Shimoni)

In V'hitkadashtem, where one on his own, in difficult and unsupportive surroundings, remains steadfastly committed to G-d and His Torah, twofold recompense is deserved.

The Rabbis give still another telling metaphor to describe this challenge and predicament of the Jew (VaYikra Rabbah 23:5). Shir HaShirim likens Bnei Yisrael to Chavatzelet HaSharon; Shoshanat Ha'Amakim (Song of Songs 2:1). There is wide disparity among the M'farshei HaMikra as to exactly what Chavatzelet is and what Shoshanat is. Professor Yehuda Feliks in Olam HaTzomeach HaMikrai explains that Shoshanat Ha'Amakim is a lily that grows wild in the valleys and stands out with its beauty among the thistles of the field. The lily grows among thorns, but they are separate from the flower itself. It differs from the Chavatzelet which most commentators identify with the rose (see Feliks, ibid. p. 242 and see Rash"i there) which, of course, is noted for the barbs and thorns which are intrinsic to the flower.

The Jew must be able to be like the rose and hold firm against temptations from within that strain to turn him from the proper path. He also must be like the lily, protecting himself from the blandishments and dangers from without.

"K'doshim Tihyu V'hitkadashtem"

Subj: Torah Studies - Achrei-Kedoshim

Date: 96-04-21 13:46:15 EDT

From: listserv@lubavitch.chabad.org (W-2 LIST Chabad-Lubavitch)

B"H

Torah Studies

Adaptation of Likutei Sichos

by

Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

Acharei

The Parsha of Acharei begins by mentioning the death of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron. Their death, related in the Sidra of Shemini, is something of a mystery, for on the one hand they seemed to be punished for their faults, while on the other, a Midrashic comment suggests that their merits were extraordinary, excelling even those of Moses and Aaron.

Can we reconcile these two analyses of their character?

A Chassidic explanation does so by saying that they died because of a religious ecstasy so intense that their souls literally left their bodies.

Was there anything wrong in this?

There was.

What was mistaken was the pursuit of ecstasy at the price of life in the world. They ran towards the higher realms without thought of returning. And yet the Jew must always return, for his task lies within the world, sanctifying, not forsaking, his earthly situation. The rhythm of withdrawal and return, of experience and action, is fundamental to Judaism.

THE DEATH OF NADAV AND AVIHU

Our Sidra begins with the verse: "And the L-rd spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near to the L-rd and they died."

The final words, however present a difficulty. Why does the Torah add

"and they died" when it has already said, "after the death of the two sons of Aaron?"

The Midrash, in giving an explanation of their death, cites the following explanations: They entered the Holy of Holies; they did not wear the priestly garments necessary for their service; they did not have children; and they did not marry.

Our second question now arises: What is the source of the Midrashic account? Where, in the Torah, are these four faults alluded to?

Further: How can we suppose that Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, were guilty of a sin?

Our sages say that Moses said to Aaron, "Aaron, my brother, I knew that the Sanctuary would be sanctified by those who were beloved and close to G-d. Now I see that they - Nadav and Avihu - are greater than both of us." If this was so, how could they have sinned?

A FATAL ECSTASY

There is a Chassidic explanation that Aaron's two sons did not "sin" literally. Their "sin" was to allow their desire to cleave to G-d to mount to such an intensity that they died. Their bodies could no longer contain their souls. Thus the Torah says "when they drew near to the L-rd (with such passion that) they died." And this was counted as a sin!

For although a Jew must divest himself of material concerns, at the moment when he stands poised at the ultimate ecstasy of the soul, he must turn again to the work that the soul must do within a physical existence.

It is written in the Pirkei Avot, "Against your will you live." Set against the desire of the soul to rise beyond the world, is its task of creating a dwelling-place for G-d within the world.

Nadav and Avihu achieved the ecstasy but not the return. This was their sin and the reason for their death. They "drew near to the L-rd and they died." They let their spiritual passion override their this-worldly task. They went beyond the world and beyond life itself.

This act lies at the heart of each of the four faults which the Midrash ascribes to them.

They "entered the Holy of Holies," the innermost reaches of the spirit, without thinking of their return to the outer world.

They "did not wear the (priestly) garments." Their concern was to divest themselves of the world and to become purely spiritual.

They forsook the necessary "garments" in which the word of G-d is clothed, the Mitzvot, the physical actions that sanctify a physical environment.

They "had no children" and "did not marry." That is, they did not fulfill G-d's command to "be fruitful and multiply" and to bring new souls into the world. They did the opposite. They withdrew their own souls from the world.

All their faults stemmed from a single misconception, that the Jew draws close to G-d by withdrawal instead of involvement. In fact, both are necessary. And that is why, at the point of the year when we are most powerfully taken out of the world - Yom Kippur - we begin the reading of the Torah from these verses, as a reminder of our ultimate task.

ENTRANCE AND EXIT

Rashi explains that the command, "that he (Aaron) come not at all times into the holy place . . . (but) with this shall Aaron come into the holy place," comes immediately after the statement of the death of his sons, to warn that his (and our) service should not be like that of Nadav and Avihu.

A question arises here.

Can we really demand of a person at the point of ecstasy, that he return to his mundane role? If his experience is genuine, if he has reached the love of G-d "with all your might" and has broken through all barriers of separation between man and G-d, can he hold himself back at the very point of union, and reimmerse himself in all the constraints of the human situation?

Is there not an emotional incompatibility between the absolute abandonment of a person to G-d and a constant vigilance not to go too far?

The answer lies in how a person begins his spiritual journey. If he sets out with the intention of satisfying his own desires, however exalted they are, he will not wish to turn back from his private ecstasy to the needs of the world. But if he sets out in obedience to G-d's command, knowing that though "You shall love the L-rd your G-d ... with all your might," nonetheless "He created (the world) not to be empty, he formed it to be inhabited," then within his ecstatic approach to G-d, the desire ultimately to return and sanctify the world will always be implicit.

There is a famous story in the Talmud.

Four men entered the "Grove" (the mystical secrets of the Torah): Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher and Rabbi Akiva. Ben Azzai looked and died. Ben Zoma looked and was stricken (with madness). Acher mutilated the shoots (i.e., became an apostate). Rabbi Akiva "entered in peace and came out in peace."

On the face of it, the important difference between Rabbi Akiva and the other three was in how he came out of the "Grove." Why does the Talmud emphasize that he "entered in peace?" But the truth is that how each of the four entered, determined how they emerged.

Ben Azzai entered seeking ecstasy, not return; therefore he "looked and died." (It is interesting to note that his Divine service was generally characterized by aspects of withdrawal.)

But Rabbi Akiva entered "in peace," in obedience to the Divine will and seeking to unite the higher and lower worlds. That is why he came out in peace. His intention of returning was implicit at the outset of his path to religious ecstasy.

This, too, was how Aaron was to enter the Holy of Holies, in fear, obedience and self-abnegation. And in this way he was able to "make atonement for himself and for his house" and to say a prayer for the sustenance of Israel, each of them acts of concern for the world.

Experience Into Action

All the Torah's narratives have a teaching which is applicable to every Jew, not simply to the outstanding few. What, then, is the universal significance of the story of Nadav and Avihu? Surely not everyone can reach a level of ecstasy where one's life is in danger. A few need the warning; but what of the many?

But every Jew is sometimes awakened to an intense religious experience, especially on Shabbat and the Festivals, more particularly during the Ten Days of Repentance, and above all on Yom Kippur. He is for a while taken out of his daily routine, his normal anxieties, and inwardly rises beyond his usual mental confines. It is at these times that he must remember that whatever he experiences when he enters this holy domain must be carried with him when he returns to his everyday world. He must not seek ecstasy for its own sake, but for the sake of the subsequent return. A religious experience must not be left as a memory; it must remain active in animating the whole of his life. Like Rabbi Akiva, he must enter and come out "in peace," that is, bringing G-d and the world closer together in harmony.

THE BLESSING OF G-D

This connection between the manner of entering and of leaving the realm of holiness, applies not only to the service of the Jew, but also to the material world itself. For all the Jew's needs, material as well as spiritual, come to him directly from G-d: "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her produce...."

Only through his bond with G-d does the Jew receive his material needs. He who says "It will be well with me for I will walk in the stubbornness of my heart" is always in the last analysis proved mistaken.

And this is intimated in our Sidra, describing the procedure of the High Priest's service. It was only after he had entered the Holy of

Holies that he was able to pray for and secure the sustenance of the people.

So it is that the public world that the Jew inhabits, and the private world of his religious experience, are intrinsically related. For if he draws his experience into the world, the world is thereby sanctified by man and blessed by G-d.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. III pp. 987-993)

KEDOSHIM

In the famous 19th chapter of Vayikra, which is a summary of many essential principles of the Torah, the laws about fruit-trees are stated.

The produce of the first three years of the tree's life (orlah) is forbidden. The fourth year produce (neta revai) is set aside as holy, and is to be eaten in Jerusalem or redeemed. But the fruit of the fifth year may be eaten ordinarily, and the Torah tells us that it will be particularly prolific, as a reward for observing the law for the previous four years.

The Sicha begins with a problem: If the fifth year's fruit is the reward and purpose of the laws, why is it the fourth year fruit which is called "holy, for giving praise to the L-rd?"

It resolves this by drawing an analogy between the five years of fruit and the five levels of spirituality, and by showing that there is a level beyond even that of holiness.

This is a fundamental emphasis of Chassidut: That beyond holiness, which implies withdrawal from the world, is a domain of unity with G-d in the very midst of a world-affirming life.

THE FRUIT OF THE FIFTH YEAR

"And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield more richly to you its increase: I am the L-rd your G-d."

This verse refers to the reward for not eating the produce of fruit-trees for the first three years, and for bringing fourth-year fruit to be eaten in Jerusalem.

The phrase which the Torah uses, "that it may yield more richly to you its increase," indicates that the purpose of the commandments about the first four years' fruit is so that the fifth year should see a particularly prolific crop.

Rashi offers a straightforward explanation, quoting the Midrash: "Rabbi Akiva used to say, the Torah says this because it has man's evil inclination in mind: That one should not say, 'Behold, for four years I must take trouble with it for nothing.' The Torah therefore states that (because of your obedience) the land will give you produce in larger quantities."

We can, however, understand the passage at a deeper level.

The five years of fruit correspond to the five "universes" or dimensions of spirituality. The first three, which are forbidden for consumption, stand for the three lower levels (asiyah, yetzirah and beriah, or the dimensions of "action," "formation" and "Creation"), where there is a sufficient concealment of G-d for the possibility of sin, division and forbidden action to exist.

The fourth year stands for the dimension of atzilut ("emanation") where everything is in a state of holiness, and nothing is separated from G-d. Therefore its fruit is called "holy, for giving praise to the L-rd." But the fifth is the highest level, called keter, the "Crown."

The fruit of the fifth year is correspondingly the most precious, as we saw when we understood that the whole purpose of the commandments of the first four years was for the sake of the fifth.

Why then do we find the fruit of the fourth year called "holy?" Why is it to be eaten only in Jerusalem, and only by a person who is not ritually unclean? Why do none of these things apply to the fifth-year produce, which may be eaten anywhere by anyone?

THE BAAL SHEM TOV AND THE SAGE

To understand this, we must begin with a story told about the Baal

Shem Tov.

It was at a time when he had not yet emerged publicly as the leader of the Chassidic movement. He still wore the cloak of anonymity as he traveled through the towns and villages of the Carpathians. It was one of his holy practices to ask every Jew he met - man and woman, the aged and the children - how they were, how business was, and so on. One of his greatest pleasures was to listen to the answers that each of them would give - answers that came from the heart. For they would reply with words of praise and thanks to G-d. Every answer would contain a "Thank G-d" or a "The L-rd be blessed."

Once he reached a small township and began in his normal way to inquire after the welfare of the Jews he met, to get them to say words of praise and gratitude to G-d, to demonstrate their faith and merit. In the town there was a very old man, a great scholar, who lived in isolation from the affairs of the world. For more than fifty years he had sat and studied Torah day and night, detached and holy. He would sit and learn every day, wrapped in his Tallit and Tefillin until the afternoon service, and would not eat anything all day, until he had said the evening prayers, when he would have a little bread and water. When the Baal Shem Tov entered his study, a room in one of the corners of the synagogue, he asked the old man about his health and his welfare, but the man did not look up at the Baal Shem Tov, who was dressed in the clothes of a peasant. He repeated his question several times, until the sage became angry and gestured that he should leave the room.

The Baal Shem Tov said: "Rabbi, why (as it were) do you not give G-d his livelihood?" When he heard this, the old man was completely confused.

A peasant was standing in front of him and talking about G-d and the need to provide Him with a living! The Baal Shem Tov read his thoughts and said: The Jewish people is sustained by the livelihood which G-d provides for them. But what sustains G-d, that he may continue, as it were, to "inhabit" the world?

This is what King David meant when he wrote in Psalm 22, "You are Holy, who inhabits the praises of Israel." "You" - that is, the Master of the Universe, "are Holy" - that is, You are apart from the world. What then is Your livelihood, that you are able to "inhabit" it? It is "the praises of Israel." He is sustained by the praise and the gratitude to which the Jews give voice, for their health and their sustenance with which He provides them. And because of these praises, He gives them children, health and food, in plenty.

THE DWELLING-PLACE

The Baal Shem Tov's remark is not easy to understand. It is true that the G-d of whom we say "You are Holy" (that is transcending the world) is brought to "inhabit" the world only by the service of the Jewish people. But surely learning Torah is part of that service? Surely it brings the presence of G-d into the world? And, the old sage had learnt Torah day and night for more than fifty years. Even at the very moment when the Baal Shem Tov spoke to him, he was preoccupied with study!

How, then, could he have said: "Why (as it were) do you not give G-d His livelihood?" And even if it is the "praises of Israel" and not the sound of their studies that causes G-d to "inhabit" the world, the Baal Shem Tov could surely have tried to elicit words of thanksgiving from the sage for being allowed by G-d to study in serenity and seclusion.

Why did he need to ask him about matters of physical concern, like his health?

The answer is that the whole purpose of creation was to make for G-d a "dwelling-place in the lower world." This world was to be transformed into a habitation for G-d.

How is this dwelling-place built? Not, primarily, through learning or through thanks to G-d for the opportunity to learn. Study involves the "G-dly soul" of the Jew, the highest part of his nature. But

thanksgiving for food, for money, for health - these involve a sanctification of the body, of natural desires and physical needs. When a Jew recognizes even these as the gift of G-d then he has truly admitted G-d into the "lower world." That is why when the Baal Shem Tov saw the sage, sitting in seclusion, disengaged from the world, unconcerned with the state of his body, eating only to survive, not to sanctify the physical, he said: "Why (as it were) do you not give G-d His livelihood?" For the Divine intention was to have a dwelling-place precisely in the lower world that the sage had forsaken. And this is why he said that G-d is made to "inhabit" the world "by the praise and the gratitude to which the Jews give voice, for their health and their sustenance with which He provides them."

This justified his interrupting him even in the middle of learning, which is the greatest of the commandments. For without this praise, his learning was defective. For, "Anyone who says, I have nothing but (the study of) Torah, even Torah is denied to him."

Fruit and Thanksgiving

In the light of this story we can see why the most precious fruit is not that of the fourth year - even though it is called "holy" (that is, set aside, withdrawn) and it is to be eaten only within the walls of Jerusalem; and why it is the fifth year fruit, which could be eaten anywhere by anyone.

When a Jew recognizes that even fruit which is not "holy" depends on the blessing of G-d; when he sees with his own eyes that the land "yields more richly its increase" because of G-d; and when he offers praises for these things, then he brings the "You," the essence of G-d, which is "holy" and beyond all finitude, to "inhabit" the world as His dwelling-place, thus bringing the entire creation to its true fulfillment, thus bringing the entire creation to its true fulfillment.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VII, pp. 134-138)

"Bircas Hatorah <bircas@jer1.co.il Weekly Words of Torah from Bircas H... Acharei Mos - Kedoshim

Selected, translated and arranged by Rabbi Dov Rabinowitz
"With this Aharon shall come into the Holy Sanctuary ..." (16,3)
Rash"i notes that the gematria (numerical value of its letters) of Be'zos (with this) is 410, hinting at (the number of years which) the First Temple endured.
Rav Yehonasan Eibeshitz (Tiferes Yehonasan) raises the objection that for the duration of the Second Temple as well, the Cohanim Gedolim performed the service of Yom Kippur.
He answers that throughout the existence of the First Temple, the Cohanim Gedolim were righteous, but during the period of the Second Temple, there were many Cohanim Gedolim who were wicked, and thus the name of Aharon could not be associated with them.
For had they been devout and pious, the spirit of Aharon would have accompanied them (on this auspicious occasion). (This is a Kabbalistic concept, depending on the fact that they, as Cohanim, were Aharon's direct descendants, and that they were succeeding him in filling his appointed position, and were following him in his ways DR). However during the period of the Second Temple, they were wicked, and so this did not occur. Thus only the the First Temple is hinted to.

"And you shall be sanctified to me, For I HaShem am Sanctified, and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine" (20,26)

Rash"i quotes: Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaria says "From where do we learn that a person should not say 'I find the meat of pigs disgusting, I do not want to wear shaatnez (wool and linen mixed together)' rather he should say 'I want to, but my Father in Heaven has decreed upon me'? We learn it from the

verse 'I have separated you from the nations to be Mine' so that your separation from them must be for My sake; endistance yourself from transgression and accept upon yourself the Yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." The Kotsker Rebbe inquires why this should be the case. What is wrong with considering forbidden things repugnant? Does it not say "Those who love HaShem hate evil" (Tehillim 97,10)? (And it's forbidden status necessarily results in a status of evil DR).

He answers that if a person deems that he does not want something because it is repulsive, there is a possibility that a time will come when his passion will be aroused (and his sense of revulsion will evaporate). Thus the Torah directs that he must reject it as a decree from HaShem, and he should consider it as such, so that he will always reject it; even if his desire is provoked, he will not succumb.

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Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

A big thank you to the authors of the Parsha Bulletin of the Jersey Shore, who begin this week to contribute to the "pages" of "Dvar Torah". Those who wish to subscribe to their newsletter can find the address below, preceding the two Divrei Torah from that bulletin.

Holier Than Thou?

When asked to depict a holy person, I believe many people would describe someone who has completely disconnected himself from physicality and materialism. The Siddartha, who found peace, joy, and meaning through his contemplation of a flowing river; who arrived at his completion only through rejecting the excesses of his former lifestyle and going to the opposite extreme. Many societies have lauded the celibate as the most exalted, and those who marry do so as the lesser of two evils. This is an attitude which is foisted on us by the society in which we live, but strays far from the ideal and purpose of life which the Torah teaches us.

The Torah states (Leviticus 19:2) ...Be holy, for I am holy, G-d your L-rd. Immediately after and throughout, the parsha lists directives to show respect to parents, be charitable, deal honestly in business, judge fairly, and many more such things. It appears that the Torah defines holiness not by being disconnected from community, and the daily temptations which it involves, but rather by being involved in all of the nitty gritty of life with direction and purpose.

Logic dictates that we were placed in physical surroundings for a reason. The Torah teaches us that we are here to use the world in the service of G-d. This is the meaning of true holiness.

Let's use eating as an example. Some allow their appetite for food to rule over them. Their thoughts are dominated by their ravenous appetites. They eat way beyond the dictates of their physical needs. Such people are slaves to the physical world. Needless to say, this is far from holiness. On the other extreme are people who avoid the fulfillment of their physical desires even to their own detriment (such as not continuing their own generations). They are running away from the physical world. One who is running away from something is equally as connected to it as someone who is running after it. There is little difference.

Holiness falls in the middle between these two extremes. One can eat for one's health, and even enjoy his food, and have seconds, without becoming a slave to it. It goes along with a thought process. The attitude is to partake in the world keeping in mind that it is to contribute to one's service of G-d. Needless to say, one must be sincere. The litmus test is whether one follows the rest of the dictates, such as honesty in business, etc. A person whose daily efforts are directed toward serving G-d, can be involved in the world on a physical level and actually elevate the physical activities through performing them with the correct attitude.

A chassidic rebbe (spiritual leader) was once in a particular town

for the Sabbath. He was invited to stay at the home of a very wealthy man in town, and he accepted. At the evening meal he noticed that there was an orphaned girl living in the house as a family member, having been taken in by the wealthy man. The rebbe noticed that the girl's benefactor was unduly harsh with her. The next day at the meal following morning prayers, the rebbe did a very unusual thing. As the cholent (traditional Sabbath stew) was being served, he asked for a taste. Then he asked for a portion. Before anyone knew it he had consumed all of the cholent on the table. "Delicious! Do you have any more?" he asked. All that remained was brought in and promptly consumed by the rebbe, to the utter amazement of all.

The next morning as the rebbe set out on his way, his students could barely contain themselves. They knew their teacher well, and understood that he could not possibly have been so inconsiderate without good reason. "Rebbe, what happened yesterday? Please, we must know." They begged. "Well, began the rebbe, I noticed a subtle but peculiar odor in the cholent. After tasting it I realized that the orphan girl had accidentally put kerosene in the cholent instead of oil. Judging from the way the wealthy man was treating her, I knew if he found out what she had done she would be out on the street. I had to dispose of the evidence before anyone had a chance to taste it."

The Torah teaches us that one can only achieve true holiness through participating in the material world. The spiritual and the physical can exist in harmony, depending on ones attitude. This can be achieved when one allows his intellect to dominate, and acts with forethought and direction.

The following comes to you from the weekly Parsha Bulletin of the Jersey Shore. You can subscribe directly to this bulletin by sending a message to majordomo@sitt.com, with the subject containing anything, and the body of the message containing only the words "subscribe jersey-shore" (without the quotes).

Speak Softly

by Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

"You should not curse the deaf." (Vayikra 19:14)

The Rabbis tell us that although the exact prohibition is not to curse the one who can't hear, this is to teach us that if we are not permitted to curse someone who won't be hurt by it, how much more so should we be careful not to hurt someone with our words. However, an additional lesson from this is that the laws of the Torah are coming mainly for our benefit, not only to protect others. When a person utters a curse of someone who is deaf, although he did not harm the other person, he himself becomes affected with his own words. We become spiteful when we talk in a nasty way. When we cheat or lie or insult, the main victim is the one who uttered the words. Therefore, the Torah teaches us that even cursing a deaf person does some damage to the one who said the curse. We can infer from this that when we speak nicely to others, giving compliments, praise and the like, not only are we causing pleasure to others, but we ourselves become better people. When we do something good for others or say words which inspire and encourage, we feel good about it because we just became better through it, besides the benefit that others had from our words or deeds. Let's keep that in mind the next time we have a opportunity to say something nice to others. Shabbat Shalom.

He's Your Brother

by Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Do not hate your brother in your heart; you shall rebuke, repeatedly rebuke your neighbor." (Vayikra 19:17)

Allow me to quote the beautiful words of Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch on this verse. The Torah assumes that, left to ourselves, the behavior of our fellow man towards us might have allowed the feeling and conception of hate to arise in our hearts. Such a feeling...we are not to allow to arise

within us. However badly our fellow man may behave towards us, one name he can never lose is "your brother." We remain brothers, children of the same paternal house, for the sake of this common Father who still recognizes him as His child.

The Torah sees fit to put two concepts together in the same verse. We must not hate, and we must rebuke. This is telling us the simple idea that all rebuke must come from a pure heart, with a real desire to do good to our brother. If there is a small feeling of hate, even deep inside, his rebuke will not achieve its goal of bringing him back to the right path. Shabbat Shalom.

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PARSHAS ACHREI MOS - KEDOSHIM Amos 9:7

This week's haftorah presents the Jewish nation in a unique manner. In his last words of prophecy the prophet Amos addresses the Jewish people and describes them in most peculiar words. Amos says in the name of Hashem, "Aren't you likened to the Kushites, to be My people?" Who are the Kushites and in what way are the Jewish people compared to them? Chazal in the Yalkut Shimoni explain that the term Kushites refers to the Ethiopian community whose skin color is distinctly noticeable amongst all other nations. This physical trait renders it virtually impossible for the Kushites to intermingle with other nations and lose their national identity. Chazal continue that in this same manner Hashem regards the Jewish people a distinct and significant nation which rises above all other nations. The moral and ethical code of the Jewish people renders it an elevated and distinct identity and inhibits it from intermingling with the nations of the world. The dramatic contrast in skin color of the Ethiopians serves as an analogy to the contrast between the ethical behavior of the Jewish people and other nations.

The prophet continues and reminds the Jewish people that it is their distinct ethical conduct which renders them Hashem's chosen people. After likening the Jewish people to the Kushites, Amos concludes his analogy with the profound words "to be Mine." As the Metzudos Dovid (ad loc.) understands, we were established as Hashem's people because of our distinguished ethical conduct, and will remain His special nation as long as we maintain our elevated ethical standards. The prophet then draws our attention to our earliest origins and says, "Didn't Hashem bring you up from the land of Egypt?" The Malbim explains that these words refer to the distinguished qualities of the Jewish people in whose merit they were liberated from Egypt. Although they lived amongst the Egyptians for two hundred years in a corrupt and immoral environment, the Jewish people remained a distinct and distinguished entity. Their moral code of dress and speech reflected their pure attitudes upon life and rendered it virtually impossible for them to intermingle with the Egyptians. For the most part, the Jewish people's values were not polluted or distorted and even under such adverse conditions they remained a distinguished and elevated people.

The prophet concludes that in this same merit we will finally be redeemed from our extended painful exile. Amos says, "On that day I will erect the kingdom of Dovid.... so that you, upon whom My name rests, will inherit Edom

and all nations." Our identity as Hashem's people will play a significant role in our final redemption. The Jewish people will inherit their archenemy Edom because Hashem's name rests upon us. Our distinguished standards of morality truly identify us as His people and in their merit we will finally be liberated from the nations and removed from their corrupt influence and environment.

This special lesson reflects this week's sidra of KEdoshim, with the highest call for spiritual elevation found in the entire Torah. We are commanded with the mitzva of K'doshim, as the Torah states, "Be holy for I, Hashem, am Holy." (Vayikra 19:2) The Ramban (ad loc.) shares with us his classic insight into this mitzva. "Be holy," says the Ramban, refers to our obligation of introducing sanctity and spirituality into every dimension of our life. Even our physical and mundane activities should be performed for the sake of Hashem. We are forbidden from excessively indulging in worldly pleasures and are expected to curb our passions and limit our pleasures to productive and accomplishing ones. Morality and spirituality should encompass our entire being and our every action should be directed towards the service of Hashem.

This philosophy is diametrically opposed to that of the nations of the world. To them physical pleasure and enjoyment have no restrictions or limitations, and religion and morality do not apply to their passions and desires. Our standards of morality are truly unique and it is they which elevate us and distinguish us amongst the nations of the world.

Our sidra concludes with this same message and says, "And you shall be holy unto Me for I am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine."

As stated above, we merit to be Hashem's people specifically because of our holiness. We are truly separated from the nations of the world through our elevated moral and ethical standards. It is this distinguished level which establishes us as His people and it is through these elevated standards that we will soon merit our final redemption and be privileged to permanently dwell in the presence of Hashem.

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YOM HA-ATZMA'UT

SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Adapted from a sicha delivered on Yom HaAtzma'ut 5754 (1994)

Summarized by Aviad Hacohen

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"This Day God Has Made - Let Us Rejoice and Be Glad in It"

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand because of his old age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Thus says the Lord of hosts: If it will be wondrous in the eyes of the remnant of this nation in those days, it will also be wondrous in my eyes, says the Lord of hosts." [Zekharia 8:4-6]

In this description by the prophet Zekharia, no exceptional or supernatural phenomenon is mentioned. There is no unique event, nor any description of awesome strength. All we have here, in effect, is a simple, pastoral description of normal life. The grandfather and grandmother are sitting in Jerusalem, walking-sticks in hand, and the grandchildren are playing in the streets. Can it be that it is this very scene that, according to the prophet, will be "wondrous in the eyes of the remnant of this nation?" Is it possible that such a natural scene prompts God to add, "it will also be wondrous in my eyes?"

Zekharia prophesied great and inspiring events, but it is specifically here that "wondrousness" is mentioned. Moreover, Rabbi Akiva, the great Tanna, was able to look clearly, to smile and to laugh at the very destruction of the Temple when he was reminded of this prophecy. The gemara (Makkot 24b) recounts the story of Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya and Rabbi Yehoshua who were walking towards Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple:

"When they reached Mt. Scopus they tore their clothes. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox coming out of the place of the Holy of Holies. They began to cry, and Rabbi Akiva began to laugh. They said to him, 'Why do you laugh?' He answered, 'Why do you cry?' They said to him, 'The place of which it is said [Bamidbar 1], 'And the stranger who comes near will die' now has foxes walking in it; shall we not cry?"

He said to them, 'For that reason I laugh. For it is written [Yeshayahu 8], 'I appoint for Myself faithful witnesses - Uriah Ha-Kohen and Zekharia ben Yevarekhyahu.'" What connection can there be between Uriah and Zekharia? After all, Uriah lived during the time of the First Temple, while Zekharia lived during the Second. But God made Zekharia's prophecy dependent on that of Uriah. Of Uriah it is written [Mikha 3], "Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed like a field," while in Zekharia we learn, "Old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem." Until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled, I was afraid that Zekharia's prophecy would never come true. Now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, Zekharia's prophecy will certainly be fulfilled as well.'

With that they said to him, 'Akiva, you have comforted us; Akiva, you have comforted us.'"

But why did Rabbi Akiva mention specifically this prophecy of Zekharia? Was this all that he prophesied? Did he not prophesy greater things than this? Was it not Zekharia who said, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for I come and I will dwell in the midst of you... and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you" [ibid. 2:14-15]? Why is this prophecy not mentioned? Did Zekharia's prophecies involve only boys and girls, old men and women? Did he not speak [ibid. 12:7-8] of God "giving victory to the tents of Yehuda first... On that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the feeblest among them shall be like David; and the house of David shall be like a divine being, like the angel of the Lord at their head?" We could bring many other examples. What is it, then, that makes this prophecy of "old men and women in Jerusalem, their sticks in their hands" and of "boys and girls playing in the streets," so special? Why is it this prophecy that brings comfort?

Prophecies concerning supernatural events that will take place in the future are understandable. The suffering was extraordinary, exile was extraordinary - the entire country was emptied of its inhabitants, all being led away into

captivity, young and old alike. An extraordinary phenomenon. But the prophet announces publicly: Life will return to its usual path, life will be normal again! "Old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem..."

A profound idea is contained herein. Someone who lacks a historical awareness, someone who sees only the present and is cut off from the past, is incapable of seeing the future, and perceives even the present in a distorted way. Rabbi Akiva was someone with historical perspective.

"Remember the days of old, understand the years of ages past. Ask your father and he shall expound to you, your elders - and they shall tell you" [Devarim 32:7]. Very recently, on the Seder night, we discussed the story of the Exodus from Egypt. We started with "Originally our fathers were idol-worshippers, and now God has brought us near to His service, as it is written: 'And Joshua said to the nation: Your forefathers dwelt on the other side of the Jordan; Terach, the father of Avraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods. And I took your father, Avraham, and I led him throughout the land of Canaan....'" How is this connected to the exodus from Egypt? The answer is that one event cannot be analyzed in isolation. The background to any event is broad. The exodus from Egypt cannot be understood without first understanding "Terach, the father of Avraham...."

Someone who does not understand the meaning of an entire nation being exiled from its land, cannot understand the historical significance of its return. Eretz Yisrael was entirely emptied of all her inhabitants. Has such a thing ever happened in history? A nation that was exiled from its land, and returns to it?

The prophet says, "Old men and old women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem." Once again there will be "boys and girls playing in its streets." Simple, normal life. Only someone with a deep historical awareness can understand the significance of such a scene. Miracles are one-time events. But Jews living a normal life in Eretz Yisrael, after seventy years (of the Babylonian exile) during which the country was empty and desolate - someone looking with historical perspective can only be astonished. Of him the prophet says, "If it will be wondrous in the eyes of the remnant of this nation in those days, it will also be wondrous in my eyes, says the Lord of hosts."

Normal life, that which other nations accept as a natural phenomenon, is perceived by us as a meta-historical one, a manifestation of the Divine. For them everything is "smooth" - "And Esav continued on his way to Se'ir;" such is the way of the world. But "Yaakov and his sons went down to Egypt." For us, every natural phenomenon becomes a supernatural one. For us, everything is always different.

After two thousand years, children play in the streets of Israel, in the squares of Jerusalem! Can this be a natural phenomenon, after two thousand years? For us, everything is always different.

The connection between the nation of Israel and their land was created differently from that of any other nation. In the natural course of events, the connection between a nation and its land is created after people have lived in a certain area for a long time, have fought for it, have lived through shared experiences and troubles. For us, everything is different. Our connection to our land was created before the first Jew had set foot on it! "And God said to Avram, 'Go out of your country, from your birthplace, from your father's house, to the land which I shall show you" [Bereishit 12:1].

It was then that the connection was formed. "The covenant which He made with Avraham, and His oath to Yitzchak, and confirmed it to Yaakov as a law, and to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying: To you I will give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance; when they were few in number, a mere handful sojourning there..." [Tehillim 105:9-12]. This was a unique event; it has no parallel in history.

Just as the connection between the nation of Israel and its land did not follow the natural order, so the connection between the nation and the State was formed before the Jewish nation was in the land. Along came a Jew from an assimilated household, lacking any background in Judaism, lacking any familiarity with Jewish culture, and - using "Jewish intuition" alone - revealed what Chazal had long before understood: that Zion is the birthplace of all Jews, "both those actually born there as well as those who yearn to see it." Herzl understood, purely through intuition, that although there were almost no Jews living in Eretz Yisrael, nevertheless this would become the Jewish State. Is it generally acceptable for a nation to choose a place, go there, and create a state? Isn't a state usually created for people who already live there, and not for the sake of those who will flock to it after it is created?

At the time of the Balfour Declaration, in 1917, how many Jews were there in this country? A few tens of thousands? Nevertheless, the Declaration stated that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." A strange phenomenon. So too later, when Britain betrayed the Jewish nation by refusing to allow the survivors of Auschwitz and Majdanek entry into the land. The mighty Britain closed the doors. Certain of her policy, Britain made every effort to prevent the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz Yisrael, and transferred the decision into the hands of the United Nations, fully confident that this body would leave control of the region in Britain's hands.

And then the unbelievable happened. A committee was formed and its recommendation was to create two states in Eretz Yisrael; a Jewish state and an Arab state. In order for such a resolution to be passed, a two-thirds majority of the UN was required. And the UN was clearly divided, with a cold war between East and West. Whatever one side supported, the other would reject. And even if the countries of the East and West would agree, what would be the position of Uruguay, Paraguay, and all the other little countries - how would they vote?

The family history of every ambassador from Uruguay and Paraguay was carefully investigated in the hope of finding a grandmother, a third-cousin, anyone who served as a connection to Judaism. One of the delegates, Dr. Leo Cohen, told me that throughout the day of the UN vote he walked around with a book of Tehillim in his hand. "Only a miracle could save us." To obtain a two-thirds majority...!

I remember it well. On the 29th of November I was at Kibbutz Be'erot Yitzchak. We all listened intently to the voting on the radio: "Yes. No. Yes. No." And the miracle happened: two thirds! An unprecedented event.

But what happened after that? Today we live in a "now" generation: Peace now, Mashiach now, Terrorism now, Quiet now - everything must be now. We are incapable of imagining what tomorrow might bring. Everything is measured by the yardstick of what is happening today. Today is quiet - tomorrow will be too. Today there is terrorism - tomorrow it will continue. Today there is peace - tomorrow there will be peace. It is a

generation with an impaired sense of history. There is no awareness of the past, and none of the future. Only a sense of today, of now.

In 1948, it was a different generation, one with historical perspective. Recently we have suffered terrible terrorist attacks. Let me tell you something: During those few months, between the UN vote on the 29th of November and the Declaration of Statehood on the 5th of Iyyar, there were seven car bombs here. One of them, on Ben-Yehuda Street, killed fifty Jews. And this in addition to the victims killed by marauders on the roads and by snipers in the yishuvim. I won't mention too much, I won't detail everything that happened here in Gush Etzion. All within five months. The Convoy of 35 fell, the Nebi Daniel force lost fifteen victims, an attack on the high ground here brought another twelve to their deaths, and an attack on another convoy making its way to the Gush cost another ten lives.

And do you know how many victims fell here in Gush Etzion on the 3rd and 4th of Iyyar, 5708? More than a hundred and fifty. Just two days before the declaration of the State!

Two hundred and forty victims fell during those five months. And despite it all, the establishment of the State was declared, and the next day everyone recited Hallel with great excitement. People danced in the streets. Had they gone mad?

It was the strong sense of history that prompted this. That generation knew and understood the significance of Jewish independence in Eretz Yisrael after two thousand years. A State meant not for the six hundred thousand Jews living there then, but for millions of Jews. Each person understood that he was fighting for the millions who would come.

What were the borders of that State? They did not include the Kotel. Nahariya was not ours, nor were Nazareth, Lod, Ramle, Ashkelon, Be'er Sheva. Jerusalem was an international city. What were they saying Hallel for?

They said Hallel for the sovereignty that had returned to Israel. They remembered the words of the Rambam in Hilkhot Channuka'im, "Sovereignty returned to Israel for two hundred years." They understood the significance of that sovereignty. There was a strong belief that "It was not by their sword that they took the land, nor their might that saved them, but rather Your right hand and Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, for You favored them" [Tehillim 44:4]. Without "You favored them," there is nothing.

I'm not even discussing the fact that the next day I had to rush to finish reciting Hallel because I had been drafted. They began to invade from all sides: from Egypt, from Syria, from Jordan, from Lebanon. Units from Iraq. How were we supposed to stand up to them, after the British had forbidden us to stockpile arms? All in all we were six hundred thousand Jews.

If, in Zekharia's time, normal life in Israel after seventy years was considered wondrous, should we consider it natural after two thousand years?

Three books of Nevi'im - Chagai, Zekharia and Mal'akhi - and two from Ketuvim - Ezra and Nechemia - deal with a total of forty thousand Jews in Eretz Yisrael. Those were all that remained. Forty thousand. And today, thanks to the grace of God, we have merited to see over four million Jews in Israel!

Someone who cannot see the past will also be incapable of seeing the future, and of perceiving God's hand, "when God redeems the captivity of His nation." Can a nation rising out of the ashes of the Sho'ah allow itself to ignore this?

True, you are all young. You never saw all of this. You were born, as it were, to a life of freedom. You never experienced Jews living in bunkers, longing for any type of freedom, praying for the day when they could walk in the streets and look around without fear. Only someone who looks at the entire two thousand years and sees Jews being led into exile by Titus, sees the Crusades and pogroms - only someone who sees all of this understands the meaning of Jewish independence after two thousand years.

And "it is not by their sword that they took the land." No such thing ever happened before. It is no wonder that the Arabs cannot understand it - along come the Jews after two thousand years and claim their ownership of Eretz Yisrael. "What are you doing here? How long did you live in Eretz Yisrael, anyway?" If you do the calculations, you'll see that Jews lived in Yemen for longer.

Is it possible not to see the great hand of God?

Someone who sees only today, now, is disturbed by problems and questions. But someone with a feel for history knows, like Rabbi Akiva who saw a fox coming out of the place of the Kodesh Kodashim, that "old men and women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem."

The prophet Yirmiyahu [33:10-12] says, "Thus says the Lord: Again there shall be heard in this place - which you say is desolate, empty of man and of beast; in the cities of Yehuda and in the streets of Jerusalem which are deserted and without man, without inhabitant, and without animal - the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say, 'Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His kindness is forever' when they bring thanksgiving offerings to God's house. For I shall return the captivity of the land as in former times, says the Lord." For our many sins, we have yet to merit seeing the "bringing of thanksgiving offerings to God's house." But the Anshei Knesset Ha-Gedola, when they composed the blessing recited at weddings, left out the end of the verse and changed it to read: "Again there shall be heard in the cities of Yehuda and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the joyous voice of bridegrooms emanating from the chuppa and that of the young men coming from their celebration." What are the "young men" here celebrating? Are they holding a "siyum?" Or simply wasting time?

They are, in fact, the representatives of "normal life." A normal state of affairs involves young people coming out of parties, and it was them to whom the Anshei Knesset Ha-Gedola referred. Are we blind to the fulfillment of this prophecy? Have we not participated in the joy of bridegrooms and brides in Jerusalem? Have we not danced in its streets? Have we not been witness to the joyous sounds of wedding parties emanating from the chuppa?

I have much in my heart that is waiting to be said. But for now let me just note three matters which require special emphasis in light of current events:

1. The need for a striving towards unity. God does not punish the community so long as it functions as a "community." A midrash aggada in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pe'a 1:1, folio 16a) asks: "How is it possible that in the generation of King David, where everyone - even the children - knew Torah, when they went out to war there were casualties, while in the days of King Achav, a generation of idol-worshippers, when they went out to war they were always victorious?" The gemara explains, "In the days of King David there was causeless

hatred and informing. In the days of Achav, despite the fact that they were idol-worshippers, they were united among themselves, and hence they were victorious in war." Unity is the first basic requirement, and we must guard it carefully.

2. The need to strengthen our appreciation of Jewish sovereignty.

3. The need to strengthen the moral foundation of our nation, to fight materialism, and to raise the moral, religious, Torah and cultural level of the nation. We cannot focus all our energies on the fight for land and ignore these issues.

We have prevailed in worse times and we shall prevail now. But we have to know that without a strong sense of history we shall not be able to understand what is happening here. If we fail to take our past into account, we will not understand the future, and even our appreciation of the present will be perverted.

Today let us all say, "I have faith in your loving-kindness, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I shall sing to the Lord for He has rendered me good" [Tehillim 13:6], and "God has given me suffering - but has not left me to die!" [118:18].

"Open for me the gates of righteousness, I shall enter them and praise God... I praise You for You have answered me, and have been my salvation. The stone which the builders despised has become the chief cornerstone. This is God's doing - it is wondrous in our eyes."

"This day God has made - let us be joyful and glad in it!" [Tehillim 118:19-24]
