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Dvar Torah: Acharei Mot-Kedoshim
You can live forever.

This is the conclusion of Targum Unkalus, the Aramaic translation of the Torah. In its comment on an important verse in this week's Parshah of Achrei Mot, 'Asher ya'aseh otam adam, **vachai bahem**' – the mitzvot are given to us so that we 'perform them in order to live through them'. The Targum explains: 'Vachai bahem' – 'and live through them' means 'Vayaichei behon chaye alma' – 'you will enjoy an eternal existence'. The Targum wants us to know that this physical existence on earth is not our only life. If one lives a good and upright life then the neshama, the soul, continues to live on into 'chaye alma' – the world to come.

The Chidushei Harim gives a very different peirush. Says the Chidushei Harim: 'Vachai Bahem' – 'you should live through them' means you will get a life through the mitzvot. Such is the beauty of the performance of the mitzvah, such is the incredible nature of the experience, that through mitzvot, we will have added quality of life, added fulfillment joy and happiness. But the definitive peirush must be that of Chazal, our sages in the Gemara in Yoma Daf 85a explains 'vachai behem v'lo yamut bahem' – 'the mitzvot should not cause any death'. The Talmud wants us to know that, God forbid, the fulfillment of a mitzvah should never cause a threat to human life. We are of course familiar with the three cardinal sins, but apart from them, there is nothing that transcends the importance of the sacred nature of life. Not Shabbat, not Yom Tov, not kashrut and right now in an

extraordinary fashion we are finding that just about the entire Jewish world is fulfilling this mitzvah of 'V'chai Bahem'. Our shuls are closed, we're not gathering in numbers to perform the mitzvot that we should within a minyan because we value life, we don't want the carrying out of mitzvot to present a danger to life.

When a group of people gather together in a quorum in order to perform a mitzvah such as the celebration of a marriage or the staging of a Tefillah service in a minyan and it is a breach of law, they are in endangering their lives, they are endangering the lives of others and they are causing a terrible Chillul Hashem – a desecration of God's name. It is indefensible and it is disgraceful.

At this time we pray that the almighty will bless us all, that please God we will benefit from V'chaye alma – eternal life. May Hashem also bless us that we will have fulfillment and happiness always and at this very trying and troubling time, may Hashem bless us so that every human being on earth will enjoy good health, and that this challenging time will be over very soon.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Apr 30, 2020, 6:18 PM subject: Rav Frand - An Idolatrous Gimmick: Burn One; Get Five Trouble Free

Rav Frand

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Acharei Mos

An Idolatrous Gimmick: Burn One; Get Five Trouble Free print

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1116 – Eating Before Davening. Good Shabbos!

An Idolatrous Gimmick: Burn One; Get Five Trouble Free

The laws of Molech are found in Parshas Achrei Mos [Vayikra 18:21]. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah #208) records this Biblical prohibition that had been prevalent in Biblical times—the sacrificing of a person's offspring to an idolatrous deity known as Molech. This has to be one of the most difficult of all idolatrous rites to understand. The ritual consisted of parents handing over their child to the priests of Molech. The priest, the Chinuch suggests, would somehow wave or present the child before the idol and then light a big fire in front of the idol. The priests would return the child to the father and the father would pass the child through the fire which was in front of Molech.

The Chinuch cites a dispute between the early commentators about the fate of the child offered to Molech. Rashi and the Rambam understand that the child would merely be quickly passed through the fire, but would not be killed. The Ramban understands that the child is actually burned to death by the fire. This is a mind-boggling thought. How could a father take his own son and kill him in the service of Avodah Zarah?

The Chinuch points out that technically the prohibition applies to one who gives some of his sons to Molech (mi'zar-oh l'Molech). But theoretically if a person would offer all of his sons to Molech, he would not be deserving of the death penalty.

This is counter-intuitive. How could it be that someone becomes deserving of the death penalty by putting one (of many) sons through the ritual; but escapes the death penalty for putting all of his (other) sons through this ritual? What is the interpretation of this?

No less a personage than the Teshuvah haRashba deals with this question (Chelek 4 Siman 18). The Teshuvah haRashba explains that it is perhaps possible to excuse a person who offers one of his sons to Molech. He is not totally wicked and for him the Torah recommends the death penalty so that it should serve as his kapparah (atonement). But a person who sacrifices all his sons to Avodah Zarah is so bad that the Torah does not allow him to have

kapparah. A court executed punishment which provides atonement is too good for him. The Torah wants him to die at the Hand of Heaven and to suffer for all time.

The Chinuch offers his own explanation for this paradox, which simultaneously explains the irrationality of Molech worship in general.

He explains that the priests of Molech used to tell the parents: If you sacrifice one of your children to the Avodah Zarah, the other children will turn out good. It was all a ploy. Everybody wants to have good children. This was a great gimmick: Give us one son; put him through the fire (according to the Ramban – let him die); but the rest of your children will be great kids! This was the come-on, and it explains how people were led to involve themselves in this patently inhumane form of idolatrous worship: It is worth it to sacrifice one child for the sake and betterment of the other children. This is the Chinuch's very novel and unique rationale for this practice.

What does this have to do with us? Today we do not have Molech; we have never witnessed such a crazy idolatrous rite. More to the point, nowadays the Biblically present Yetzer HaRah (evil inclination) for Avodah Zarah has been removed. The Talmud says that the Men of the Great Assembly nullified the Yetzer HaRah for Avodah Zarah [Yoma 69b].

Some time back I read a very interesting article by a Rabbi Henoch Plotnik. He points out that Molech may be gone, and nobody puts his child through fire anymore, but unfortunately, we still sometimes practice Molech. How is that? Sometimes parents are willing to sacrifice one child for the sake of the other siblings.

There are no guarantees in life and we cannot pick our children. We all want each of our children to be a great Torah scholar and the next Godol HaDor. But not all children are cut out for that. Sometimes a child belongs in a school that is not a "Class A" yeshiva, not an "Ivy League Yeshiva," and not even a "University of Maryland State Yeshiva." He needs to go to a third or fourth rate yeshiva, because he is not cut out for heavy duty Talmudic study. Sometimes parents need to come to the realization that not every boy is cut out for intense Yeshiva study.

However, sometimes parents conclude, "No. Our son must get into THAT yeshiva." Because if I put him into that OTHER TYPE of Yeshiva, it will make it hard for his siblings to find desirable marriage partners ("it will shtet their shiduchim). Even though this yeshiva is not for him, and this kid is going to fall on his face and be miserable in this yeshiva, the parents feel it is worth it to sacrifice this child for the sake of the other children. "I need to make shiduchim. I have five daughters!"

His point was—is this not the modern version of Molech? Is this not the same crime of sacrificing one child because it is going to be good for the other children? Modern man looks at Molech and says "How can people be so crazy? "How could they fall for this? How could they sacrifice one child for the sake of the other children?" The more things change, the more they stay the same. Of course, we are not so primitive as to burn them, but we still sometimes sacrifice them nevertheless.

The illustration above is not the only example. There are many things that we will not do because of "What will they say?" and "How will this affect the rest of the family?" On the altar of "How will people look at us?" we sacrifice one or more children—for the good of the other children.

This is a difficult challenge and a difficult situation to be in, but Solomon's wise advice was "Educate a child according to his nature" [Mishlei 22:6]. Everybody quotes this rule of thumb (Chanoch l'naar al pi darko), but we do not always practice what we preach. It is a nice saying, but sometimes it comes at a price. Sometimes applying this principle means giving the child not what you had imagined for him or her, but giving what that particular child actually needs.

Had Darwin Seen the Chofetz Chaim, He Would Have Never Made Such a Claim

The pasuk states in the beginning of Parshas Kedoshim: "A man, his mother and his father he shall fear, and my Sabbaths you shall keep, I am Hashem your G-d." [Vayikra 19:3]. This is the positive Biblical command of treating one's parents with awe and respect. The Torah here links this mitzvah with the mitzvah to observe the Sabbath.

We are all familiar with the exposition the Talmud makes on this pasuk: If a father tells his son to desecrate the Sabbath or to violate any other prohibition, the mitzvah of honoring and revering his parents is suspended. In other words, the responsibility of honoring and respecting the wishes of the Almighty trumps the responsibility to honor and respect his parents.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in his Emes L'Yaakov offers a novel homiletic interpretation to this pasuk, providing a different insight as to why these two mitzvos are linked. Rav Yaakov says that there is a fundamental difference as to how we view parents (and elders in general for that matter) depending on a very fundamental philosophical question. People who believe that the world was created on its own (e.g., the "Big Bang Theory") and that there was always some kind of matter which developed into the world in which we live, are individuals who feel that this is a godless world. Coinciding with this non-Torah theory is the Theory of Evolution which claims that slowly but surely, over billions of years the world developed. First there was simple life until there developed various forms of animal life, and so forth. We are all familiar with the basics of this theory that man evolved from a primate—an ape or a monkey or whatever it may be. The theory is that slowly but surely these primitive creatures developed until the human beings that we have today came into existence.

According to the theory, modern man is much further along in development than primitive man. Consequently, the further someone moves away from the original "cave man," the more respect the specie deserves. Therefore, the young do not need to honor their elders, but rather vice versa: The elders—who are closer to primitive man—need to honor the young, who are more developed than the older generation.

However, if someone believes in Creation—that G-d created Heaven and Earth in six days and then rested on the seventh—then the most perfect of human beings was the first one—Adam—who was created directly by the Almighty, the handiwork of the Ribono shel Olam. With this approach, the further we get away from that first man, and certainly the further we get away from Sinai, we witness a gradual descent of generations. Therefore, in Judaism, it is the young who need to honor the older generation, who are one generation closer to the perfect creation—Adam haRishon.

Therefore, the pasuk states: "Man, his mother and his father shall he fear; and My Sabbaths he shall observe..." Because what does Shabbos testify? We say it every Friday night: "For in six days Hashem made the Heavens and Earth and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." [Shemos 31:17] Shabbos testifies that the Almighty created man (and created everything else in the world as well). Therefore, because of that, people must honor their elders. The elders are closer to perfection than the youth. That, says Rav Yaakov, explains the juxtaposition of the directives to fear parents and to observe the Shabbos.

Then Rav Yaakov adds what he once heard from Rav Elchonon Wasserman [1874-1941]: Had Darwin seen the Chofetz Chaim, he would never have said that man evolved from apes and monkeys. Darwin only saw his own kind of people, which led him to erroneously speculate that man descended from apes. Anyone who had ever seen the likes of the great sages of Israel would never have made such a mistake.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail

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Kedoshim (Leviticus 19-20)

The Ethic of Holiness

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Kedoshim contains the two great love commands of the Torah. The first is, “Love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18). Rabbi Akiva called this “the great principle of the Torah.” The second is no less challenging: “The stranger living among you must be treated as your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:34).

These are extraordinary commands. Many civilisations contain variants of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do to you,” or in the negative form attributed to Hillel (sometimes called the Silver Rule), “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary; go and learn.”¹ But these are rules of reciprocity, not love. We observe them because bad things will happen to us if we don’t. They are the basic ground-rules of life in a group.

Love is something altogether different and more demanding. That makes these two commandments a revolution in the moral life. Judaism was the first civilisation to put love at the heart of morality. As Harry Redner puts it in *Ethical Life*, “Morality is the ethic of love. The initial and most basic principle of morality is clearly stated in the Torah: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” He adds: “The biblical “love of one’s neighbour” is a very special form of love, a unique development of the Judaic religion and unlike any to be encountered outside it.”²

Much has been written about these commands. Who exactly is meant by “your neighbour”? Who by “the stranger”? And what is it to love someone else as oneself? Here though I want to ask a different question. Why is it specifically here, in Kedoshim, in a chapter dedicated to the concept of holiness, that the command appears?

Nowhere else in all Tanach are we commanded to love our neighbour. And only in one other place (Deut. 10:19) are we commanded to love the stranger. (The Sages famously said that the Torah commands us thirty-six times to love the stranger, but that is not quite accurate. Thirty-four of those commands have to do with not oppressing or afflicting the stranger and making sure that he or she has the same legal rights as the native born. These are commands of justice rather than love).

And why does the command to love your neighbour as yourself appear in a chapter containing such laws as “Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.” These are *chukim*, decrees, usually thought of as commands that have no reason, at any rate none that we can understand. What have they to do with the self-evidently moral commands of the love of neighbour and stranger? Is the chapter simply an assemblage of disconnected commands, or is there a single unifying strand to it?

The answer goes deep. Almost every ethical system ever devised has sought to reduce the moral life to a single principle or perspective. Some connect it to reason, others to emotion, yet others to consequences: do whatever creates the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Judaism is different. It is more complex and subtle. It contains not one perspective but three. There is the prophetic understanding of morality, the priestly perspective and the wisdom point of view.

Prophetic morality looks at the quality of relationships within a society, between us and God and between us and our fellow humans. Here are some of the key texts that define this morality. God says about Abraham, “For I

have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right [tzedakah] and just [mishpat].”³ God tells Hosea, “I will betroth you to Me in righteousness [tzedek] and justice [mishpat], in kindness [chesed] and compassion [rachamim].”⁴ He tells Jeremiah, “I am the Lord, who exercises kindness [chesed], justice [mishpat] and righteousness [tzedakah] on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.”⁵ Those are the key prophetic words: righteousness, justice, kindness and compassion – not love.

When the Prophets talk about love it is about God’s love for Israel and the love we should show for God. With only three exceptions, they do not speak about love in a moral context, that is, *vis-à-vis* our relationships with one another. The exceptions are Amos’ remark, “Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts” (Amos 5:15); Micah’s famous statement, “Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8) and Zechariah’s “Therefore love truth and peace” (Zech. 8:19). Note that all three are about loving abstractions – good, mercy and truth. They are not about people.

The prophetic voice is about how people conduct themselves in society. Are they faithful to God and to one another? Are they acting honestly, justly, and with due concern for the vulnerable in society? Do the political and religious leaders have integrity? Does society have the high morale that comes from people feeling that it treats its citizens well and calls forth the best in them? A moral society will succeed; an immoral or amoral one will fail. That is the key prophetic insight. The Prophets did not make the demand that people love another. That was beyond their remit. Society requires justice, not love.

The wisdom voice in Torah and Tanach looks at character and consequence. If you live virtuously, then by and large things will go well for you. A good example is Psalm 1. The person who occupies himself with Torah will be “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prosper.” That is the wisdom voice. Those who do well, fare well. They find happiness (*ashrei*). Good people love God, family, friends and virtue. But the wisdom literature does not speak of loving your neighbour or the stranger.

The moral vision of the Priest that makes him different from the Prophet and Sage lies in the key word *kadosh*, “holy.” Someone or something that is holy is set apart, distinctive, different. The Priests were set apart from the rest of the nation. They had no share in the land. They did not work as labourers in the field. Their sphere was the Tabernacle or Temple. They lived at the epicentre of the Divine Presence. As God’s ministers they had to keep themselves pure and avoid any form of defilement. They were holy.

Until now, holiness has been seen as a special attribute of the Priest. But there was a hint at the giving of the Torah that it concerned not just the children of Aaron but the people as a whole: “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Our chapter now spells this out for the first time. “The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:1-2). This tells us that the ethic of holiness applies not just to Priests but to the entire nation. It too is to be distinctive, set apart, held to a higher standard.

What in practice does this mean? A decisive clue is provided by another key word used throughout Tanach in relation to the Kohen, namely the verb *b-d-l*: to divide, set apart, separate, distinguish. That is what a Priest does. His task is “to distinguish between the sacred and the secular” (Lev. 10:10), and “to distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Lev. 11:47). This is what God does for His people: “You shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have distinguished you [*va-avdil*] from other peoples to be Mine.” (Lev. 20:26).

There is one other place in which *b-d-l* is a key word, namely the story of creation in Genesis 1, where it occurs five times. God separates light and dark, day and night, upper and lower waters. For three days God demarcates different domains, then for the next three days He places in each its appropriate objects or life-forms. God fashions order out of the *tohu va-vohu*

of chaos. As His last act of creation, He makes man after His “image and likeness.” This was clearly an act of love. “Beloved is man,” said Rabbi Akiva, “because he was created in [God’s] image.”⁶

Genesis 1 defines the priestly moral imagination. Unlike the Prophet, the Priest is not looking at society. He is not, like the wisdom figure, looking for happiness. He is looking at creation as the work of God. He knows that everything has its place: sacred and profane, permitted and forbidden. It is his task to make these distinctions and teach them to others. He knows that different life forms have their own niche in the environment. That is why the ethic of holiness includes rules like: Don’t mate with different kinds of animals, don’t plant a field with different kinds of seed, and don’t wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.

Above all the ethic of holiness tells us that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. God made each of us in love. Therefore, if we seek to imitate God – “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” – we too must love humanity, and not in the abstract but in the concrete form of the neighbour and the stranger. The ethic of holiness is based on the vision of creation-as-God’s-work-of-love. This vision sees all human beings – ourselves, our neighbour and the stranger – as in the image of God, and that is why we are to love our neighbour and the stranger as ourself.

I believe that there is something unique and contemporary about the ethic of holiness. It tells us that morality and ecology are closely related. They are both about creation: about the world as God’s work and humanity as God’s image. The integrity of humanity and the natural environment go together. The natural universe and humanity were both created by God, and we are charged to protect the first and love the second.

Shabbat Shalom

NOTES

1. Shabbat 31a. 2. Harry Redner, *Ethical Life: The Past and Present of Ethical Cultures*, Roman and Littlefield, 2001, 49-68. 3. Genesis 18:19. 4. Hosea 2:19. 5. Jeremiah 9:23. 6. Mishnah Avot 3:14.

from: Ohr Torah Stone <parsha@ots.org.il> date: Apr 30, 2020, 7:25 AM subject: OTS for YOU: Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 5780
Shabbat Shalom: Acharei Mot-Kedoshim (Leviticus 16:1-20:27)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “**And you shall observe My decrees and My laws which a human being shall perform and he shall live by them;** I am the Lord.” (Lev. 18:5)

It is fascinating that our Bible commands us to perform the laws and statutes of the Lord, and then it adds “and he shall live by them.” Would any moral individual think to perform laws that could cause him to die? Our Sages use this seemingly superfluous phrase to teach a most important lesson, one which distinguishes Judaism from some other religions: “You shall live by these My laws and not die by them. If someone says to you, ‘Desecrate the Sabbath or I’ll kill you,’ you must desecrate the Sabbath; desecrate one Sabbath so that you will live to observe many more Sabbaths” (BT, Yoma 85b).

Our religion revels in life. To be sure, there are instances when one must be ready to die for one’s faith, but this is limited to three most egregious crimes: murder, sexual immorality and idolatry. If one says to a Jew “kill X or I’ll kill you; rape Y or I’ll kill you,” the Jew must give up his or her life rather than commit these crimes. Similarly, in times of persecution, Jews must demonstrate that they will not give in to gentile pressure – even pressure unto death – to relinquish their faith or to relinquish their land in milchemet mitzva. But under ordinary conditions, no Jewish law overrides the preservation of human life – as we have recently experienced surrounding the Corona epidemic.

Even the famous test of Abraham, the apparent Divine command that Abraham sacrifice his son to Him, concludes with Abraham being forbidden to harm his son (Kierkegaard notwithstanding). The most classic

commentary, Rashi, even goes so far as to say that Abraham misunderstood the Divine command, that God never meant that he should slaughter his son, but rather dedicate him in life and not in death.

Unlike the Christian symbol of the cross, which eternalized the martyrdom of the founder of Christianity, and far from the glory some militant Islamic groups ascribe to the shahidim—the so-called martyrs who are urged (and handsomely paid) to blow themselves up together with innocent Israelis amid the promise of eternal bliss with 72 virgins—Judaism has never courted martyrdom.

Indeed, our priests-kohanim aren’t even allowed to come into contact with a dead body, so consistent are we in promoting Judaism as a life-fostering and this-world oriented religion.

What still remains strange and difficult to understand is that immediately following the biblical mandate to “live by God’s laws,” in our weekly portion of Acharei Mot comes a long list of prohibited sexual relationships which fall under the rubric of “one must die rather than transgress.” If living by God’s laws is so important, why follow that stricture with laws for which one must be willing to die rather than transgress?

I believe the answer is to be found in a difficult conundrum suggested by the Elders of the Negev. The Talmud (BT, Tamid 32b) records a discussion following Alexander the Great and the Elders of the Negev: Alexander asked, “What ought people do if they wish to keep on living?” The Elders answered, “They must slay themselves”. Asked Alexander: “What ought people do if they wish to die?” Answered the Elders. “They should try to stay alive!” Permit me to explain. Let us answer the second question first. If an individual lives only in order to keep on living, he is bound to fail, and he will die in the end; after all, I am not aware of any individual who got out of this world alive! Hence if a person wishes to die, let him continue to try to stay alive forever. He will surely die because he will surely fail.

And what ought someone do if he wants to keep on living? Let him slay himself, or at least let him find an ideal to live by and for which he is ready to give up his life. Then even if he dies in pursuit of that ideal, his life will have gained ultimate meaning, and he will thereby be linked to eternity.

Martin Luther King, Jr. put it very well in his Detroit speech in June 1963: “And I submit to you that if a man hasn’t discovered something that he will die for, he is not fit to live.”

The only life that is truly meaningful is a life dedicated to an idea which is greater than one individual’s life.

Hence it is specifically our portion which praised the value of life teaching that “You shall live by My laws,” which appears within the context of a group of laws for which one must be willing to give up his life!

Shabbat Shalom!

from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com>

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Extraordinary Times, Extraordinary People

Apr 30, 2020 | by Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Battle coronavirus by loving your neighbor like yourself.

While we might be starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel, it remains unclear when we will reach it. For now, we remain homebound, maximizing distancing and finding ourselves in roles and having responsibilities many of us are not used to. These are no ordinary times and yet, there are countless stories emerging of extraordinary people who, rather than focus on themselves and this challenging crisis, are performing spectacular acts of kindness for others.

Those on the front lines are risking their own well-being to treat those who are ill. Those who were previously sick, rather than hibernate in recovery are donating plasma to pay it forward. Some at great personal expense and pain have pledged to continue to pay workers. A group of Chasidic men delivered 1,000 tablets to coronavirus patients in New York City hospitals to let them connect to their families who are not allowed to visit. In our community, on Seder night a young family set up a table and hosted their Seder outside the

window of an elderly Holocaust survivor so he wouldn't be alone. All around us, there are ordinary people doing extraordinary things at this time.

In her recent article, *The Science of Helping Out*, Tara Parker-Pope writes: "At a time when we are all experiencing an extraordinary level of stress, science offers a simple and effective way to bolster our own emotional health. To help yourself, start by helping others. Much of the scientific research on resilience — which is our ability to bounce back from adversity — has shown that having a sense of purpose, and giving support to others, has a significant impact on our well-being."

What science is teaching now, the Torah has endorsed for us all along. "Do not hate your brother in your heart... you shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge, you must love your fellow as yourself, I am Hashem" (Lev. 19:17, 18).

This sentence contains one of the most famous commands in the entire Torah, and the Ramban is bothered by the same question as everyone else — is it really possible to love someone as much as you love yourself? We have been designed and programmed to naturally be inclined to take care of ourselves, look out for ourselves, and prioritize our well-being. We know ourselves better than anyone in the world, and we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, judge ourselves favorably, see the best in ourselves, and are quick to justify and explain any shortcomings in ourselves. Can we really meet that standard for others including mere acquaintances and even strangers?

The Ramban explains that in truth it is impossible to love someone as much as we love ourselves and, accordingly, this is not actually the threshold of the mitzvah. So how is this mitzvah fulfilled?

The Ramban says it is human nature to wish well for others but in reality want them to have less than us. We want someone to make a good living and be happy... as long as they earn less than we do. We want them to have a nice house... as long as it isn't as big as ours; or drive a nice car... as long as it isn't as fancy as the one we drive. The Torah commands us "to love your neighbor like yourself" — while you cannot truly love others as you love yourself, you can want others to have "like yourself", as much or more than you. You can be happy for them.

Another explanation of the mitzvah is to love your neighbor — because he or she is similar to you, "like yourself." You both possess the same spark of life, the same Godly soul, you both have strengths and weaknesses, you both have virtues and faults, you both have things to be proud of and areas to work on.

Love others, because if you can cut away their different type of kippah or their lack of a kippah altogether, if you ignore that they dress differently, act differently, think differently, if you cut away their idiosyncrasies and habits that drive you crazy you will find they are just like you.

Rabbi Akiva witnessed the failure of thousands of his students to learn this lesson. They focused on their differences rather than choosing to embrace their similarities and the result was that they couldn't see themselves in one another, they could not relate or identify. They saw their fellow student as different, the other, and this caused them to disrespect one another. Rabbi Akiva attended thousands of funerals and delivered thousands of eulogies as his students were cut down by a punitive plague and he turned around and taught, "Love your neighbor is the primary principle of the Torah."

It is not a coincidence that the same Rabbi Akiva is quoted in *Pirkei Avos* as teaching us "precious is every person because we were all created in the image of God." Knowing and internalizing that concept is the secret of loving everyone.

Genuine love means peeling back the layers of that which separates us from others until we find common ground and that which connects us.

But how do we express that love? Is loving a fellow Jew just about tolerating them?

R' Moshe Leib Sassover used to tell his chassidim that he learned what it means to love a fellow Jew from two Russian peasants. Once he came to an inn, where two thoroughly drunk Russian peasants were sitting at a table,

draining the last drops from a bottle of strong Ukrainian vodka. One of them yelled to his friend, "Do you love me?" The friend, somewhat surprised, answered, "Of course, of course I love you!" "No, no", insisted the first one, "Do you really love me, really?!" The friend assured him, "Of course I love you. You're my best friend!" "Tell me, do you know what I need? Do you know why I am in pain?" The friend said, "how could I possibly know what you need or why you are in pain?" The first peasant answered, "How then can you say you love me when you don't know what I need or why I am in pain."

R' Moshe Leib told his chassidim that truly loving someone means to know their needs and to feel their pain.

Real love is not lip service; it is not just tolerating one another. Love is noticing someone is having a bad day, it is feeling their pain, it is showing someone you care, even when that person is someone you barely know or don't know at all.

There are people around us hurting, lacking, or in pain. While this is unfortunately true year-round, it is especially true in this moment in time. If we claim to love these people then, we cannot fail to notice. While for many of us Shabbos these days is the happiest, most restful day of the week, for others, it is filled with stress, anxiety and pain. Imagine living alone and each week as Shabbos approaches finding yourself dreading the 25 hours away from the phone, the computer, any meaningful social interaction. With the days getting later, imagine the prospect of a long Shabbos day by yourself. How much of a nap and how much reading can you do before you feel lonely?

This is one example of many people and populations we claim to love, but we aren't doing a great job of showing it. If you love them you reach out during the week, maybe set up a time to check in with them on Shabbos consistent with social distancing policies and the guidelines we have previously sent out. If we love the people whose businesses or livelihoods are taking a significant hit from this crisis, let's creatively and sensitively find ways to help them, support them, or just let them know we are thinking about them.

This article can also be read at: <https://www.aish.com/sp/pg/Extraordinary-Times-Extraordinary-People.html>

from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org>

to: rabbizweig@torah.org

date: May 1, 2020, 12:25 AM

subject: **Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Understand The Warning**

Parshas Kedoshim

Understand The Warning

"...the two of them shall be put to death..." (20:11)

Parshas Kedoshim contains the consequences that befall a person who engages in the prohibited consanguineous relationships. In the previous parsha, *Acharei Mos*, the Torah enjoins Bnei Yisroel from engaging in these relationships.¹ This reflects the Talmudic dictum "ein onshim elah im kein mazhirim" — "A punitive action is not meted out for the transgression of a prohibition unless there is a prior scriptural warning."² Why does the Torah divide the warnings and the punishments into two separate parshios?

A legal system which expects its citizens to abide by its laws for fear of the consequences that occur if the laws are broken is doomed to fail. If the only restraint is punishment, man will risk the negative consequences to attain the perceived benefits. Only a system which instructs its adherents to abide by the laws because transgression of them is inherently wrong and damaging to the individual, can be successful. Therefore, the Torah separates the directives enjoining us from engaging in these illicit acts from the consequences that accompany them to illustrate that we should not adhere to these rules out of fear of punishment, but because they are inherently destructive.

1.18:6-22 2. See Makkos 17b

Stand Up For Yourself

“In the presence of an old person shall you rise...” (19:32)

The Torah instructs a person to rise in respect of the sagacity of a scholar. The verse concludes “veyareisa meilokecha ani Hashem” – “and you shall fear your G-d, I am Hashem”.¹ Citing the Talmud, Rashi explains that the Torah juxtaposes the two parts of the verse for a person may pretend not to see a scholar to avoid standing for him. Therefore, we are reminded to fear Hashem for He is aware of our thoughts.² If the sage is unaware that he was seen why is the person still obligated to stand?

The Talmud states that if a sage has the option of walking through an area that will require people to stand for him or take a circuitous route, he should opt for the second path. The Talmud cites a verse to uphold this ruling.³ The implication is that if there had been no verse concerning this issue, it would be preferable to walk through the area that requires others to rise. The message that the Torah is delivering is that the obligation to stand for a sage is not a “bein adam lechaveiro” – “between man and his fellow man” responsibility. Rather, it is a “bein adam l’atzmo” – “between man and himself” responsibility. This precept is aimed at sensitizing man to the awe and respect that he must have for the Torah and those who study it.

Consequently, one could have assumed that the sage is required to take the path that will require people to stand, not for his own benefit but to instill within the people the necessary sensitivities. Therefore, even if the scholar is unaware that a person is standing for him the individual is still obligated to stand.

1.19:32 2.Kidushin 33a 3.Ibid

The Friendly Teacher

“...you shall love your fellow as yourself...” (19:18)

There appears to be a contradiction between two Mishnayos in Pirkei Avos.¹ In the second chapter we are enjoined to afford our friends the same honor we afford ourselves. In the fourth chapter however, we discover that the honor that we must have for our friends equals that of the honor we afford our teachers.² To assume that this is a Tannaic dispute is a difficult position to maintain for if there were divergent opinions they would have been recorded side by side in the same Mishna. How do we reconcile the apparent contradiction?

The position requiring us to respect a friend with the same intensity as we would our teacher is apparently refuted by a verse in this week’s parsha. The Torah commands “v’ahavta l’reiyacha kamocha” – “you shall love your friend as yourself”.³ Clearly the emphasis is “as yourself” not greater than yourself. If so, why does the Mishna in the fourth chapter require that the honor afforded to a friend be equal to that of a teacher, which is presumably greater than the honor a person expects for himself?

The Rambam cites Aristotle who defines different levels of friendship. During his lifetime, a person may have many friends. The most common type are friends with whom a person shares experiences; although he may enjoy their company, a person still maintains a facade, unwilling to present his vulnerabilities to them for fear that they may use this information against him. This form of relationship is defined by the Rambam as “ahavas hato’eles” – “a friendship based upon shared convenience”. Very rarely do we find a friend in whom we place our complete trust and to whom we are willing to let down our guard and share our insecurities. This only occurs if we sense that this friend is completely dedicated to our growth and his actions are motivated by his concern for our best interests.⁴

There is no contradiction between the two Mishnayos. They are identifying different relationships. We must treat a friend with whom we share experiences with the same level of respect that we would afford ourselves. It is this form of friend whom we are commanded by the Torah to make an effort to love, to take the relationship to a higher level than one of convenience. The second Mishna is referring to the friend who is dedicated to our growth. This type of friend must be afforded the respect that one would a teacher.

1:2:15 2.4:15 3.19:18 4.Rambam’s commentary to Avos 1:6

From: Judah Diament <jdiament@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2020 9:53 AM

Subject: **7 more piskei halacha from Rav Schachter on Coronavirus**
27. Making Up Missed Weeks of Krias HaTorah Once Shuls Reopen (2020)

Due to the Coronavirus crisis we have missed many weeks of Torah reading in shul. There is no requirement to make up the missed parshiyos under these circumstances, but if a shul decides that they would like to make up the missed Torah readings from the previous weeks, there is value in doing so.

There are two possible approaches:

If the congregation wishes, they may read all of the missed parshiyos on the Shabbos they return to shul. After finishing the seven aliyos of that week’s laining, a second Torah should be used to read all of the missed laining in one session.

If this option is too burdensome for one Shabbos, the congregation can divide the missed parshiyos into multiple weeks. Each week after the return to shul, two Torahs can be taken out. The first Torah will be used for the seven aliyos of that week’s parshah and the second Torah will be used to read the entirety of a missed parshah in one single reading. When the “make up” parshah has been completed the Haftarah should be read from the “make up” parshah because the custom is to read the Haftarah based on the last Torah that was read from.

In the above cases, after the reading from the first Torah is complete the second Torah should be placed on the Shulchan and the Kaddish should be recited. Then the maftir aliyah should then be called up to read the “make up” parshah from the second Torah.

Additionally, if a bar mitzvah boy was unfortunately unable to read the parsha he prepared in advance, the situation can be rectified by allowing him to read the missed parshah and Haftarah on a later Shabbos. When the shul reopens, the congregation should take out two Sifrei Torah, and use the first Sefer Torah for the regular weekly parshah, and the second Sefer Torah for the missed parshah prepared by the bar mitzvah boy. Since the general practice is that the Haftarah follows that which was read in the last Sefer Torah, he will now be able to read the Haftarah that he prepared originally. This procedure is not obligatory and therefore may only be performed with the prior permission of the congregation.

28. Saying Birchas Ilanos, and Tearing Kriyah for Mourning the Beis Hamikdash, Based on Seign Things Over Zoom (2020)

A special bracha is recited by one who sees the blossoming of the trees in the month of Nisan. While it is clear that this bracha is recited only upon seeing an actual tree, and not a picture, it is possible that seeing a real tree live through the internet may qualify. However, since this matter is difficult to resolve conclusively, it should be treated as a safek, and in accordance with the general principle of safek brachos l’hakel, a bracha should not be recited when seeing a blooming tree on Zoom.

Similarly, the Gemarah rules that one who sees the Churban Beis Hamikdash for the first time in thirty days, is obligated to tear kriyah. In the area of kriyah, a safek is also treated leniently, and therefore, one would not rend his garments when seeing the Churban via Zoom. However, the policy of leniency would also mean that we acknowledge the possibility that the Zoom viewing was significant, and thus one who visits the churban in person within thirty days of that viewing would not rend his garments.

29. Saying Birchas Ha’gomel With a Minyan Assembled Over Zoom (2020)

Birchas Ha’gomel is meant to be recited in the presence of a minyan. It is best to recite this bracha within three days of recovering from a potentially life threatening situation, and it is improper to delay beyond thirty days. If it becomes clear that due to the danger it will be impossible to be in the presence of a minyan within thirty days, then one should recite the bracha over Zoom or phone conference with ten men watching or listening. This is

possible because the requirement for a minyan is not the same as for tefilah b'tzibur or krias haTorah, which are devarim shebikedushah and require a minyan gathered in one place. In the case of Birchas Ha'gomel, the purpose of the minyan is to publicize the miracle, and this can be accomplished even if the ten individuals are listening without being present in one room.

25. Listening to Music During Sefira (or Other Periods of Mourning) to Maintain Mental a Healthy State of Mind (2020)

In each of the three stages of mourning, Halacha mandates decreasing levels of stringency. During Shiva one refrains almost entirely from personal grooming and during Shloshim to a lesser extent. During the twelve months of mourning for a parent, one refrains from certain forms of pleasurable activities. Poskim explain that the respective guidelines of each period are suspended when they will cause undue pain or illness. For example, prohibitions against bathing or laundering must be suspended when a risk of contagious disease will ensue.

The custom to refrain from listening to music during the twelve months of mourning is based on the restrictions against pleasurable activities during this period. The laws of Sefira are patterned after these restrictions. The original minhag to avoid music only applied to dancing music. Later, it was extended to include even other forms of music as well.

During this time of global suffering, it would appear that for some individuals, refraining from listening or playing music may leave one in a state of sadness or emotional distress. This would appear to reach beyond the intent of this restriction. If the motivation to listen to music is not to put oneself in a cheerful mood but rather to ease the tension or pressure in one's home, and to help bring oneself back to a normal disposition, that would be permissible. One should still avoid listening to very cheerful music.

The same would even apply during Shiva, in rare instances when listening to music is necessary to avoid a depressed state of mind.

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Apr 30, 2020, 12:02 PM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 04/30/2020

Kri'at HaTorah in the Shadow of Corona by R. Daniel Mann

Question: When minyanim are taking place with the permission of health authorities under social distancing rules, what should be done to separate "functionaries"?

Answer:

Our general rule is that practices that are based on minhag, or even accepted halachot designed to embellish tefilla, while normally desired, should be dropped to be as "machmir" as possible regarding safety.

Since we want to avoid passing a sefer Torah or having more people than necessary touch it, the ba'al korei should multi-task. He can take the sefer Torah from the aron kodesh, bring it to the bima, and return it (Gadlu, Yehalelu etc. can be said by the chazan even when he is not holding the sefer Torah, as is done when the chazan cannot carry it). Ashkenazim, who use two interacting people for hagba and gelila, should use the Sephardi/Hassidic system of returning the sefer Torah to the bima after hagba, and have the ba'al korei both lift and dress it.

We usually have two (for Sephardim) or three people at the bima (see nice ideas behind it in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 141:4 and Mishna Berura 141:16). However, the basic halachot of kri'at haTorah do not depend on them.

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 139:11), based on venerable sources, instructs the oleh to hold the sefer Torah or handles (see Mishna Berura 139:35) with both hands during the berachot. Poskim add to hold one throughout the laining (see ibid.). However, this too is not a fundamental requirement.

The main problem is the oleh's position during the laining. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 139:3) rules that a blind person may not get an aliya because an oleh must read from the sefer Torah. If the oleh just listens, his berachot are l'vatala (Shulchan Aruch, OC 141:2), and reciting without reading it from

the sefer does not count. Therefore, getting an aliya from a distance is a serious halachic problem. Technically, people with good vision, using a large sefer Torah, can read from close to two meters, and with masks and the oleh facing the ba'al korei's back, this seems "relatively safe." It is even safer if, after seeing the place in the sefer Torah (Shulchan Aruch, OC 139:4) and checking the furthest possible distance, he takes another step back for during the beracha. (Droplet spreading increases when speaking out loud, and during the beracha one anyway does not look in the Torah). Rav Asher Weiss (Corona Teshuvot 23) recommended (before shul closures) an enhancement – make six very short aliya and give the ba'al korei a very long one. If health experts agree to this, this is optimal.

What if they do not agree and/or your shul lacks "eagle-eyes"? This leaves two possibilities. One is to have the oleh remain at a "mehadrin" distance without being able to read. (This is better (see Rav Asher Weiss, ibid. 19) than what many do in mirpeset minyanim in which olim read without seeing from a different domain.) This is based on the Rama (OC 139:3, arguing, based on the Maharil, on the aforementioned Shulchan Aruch), who allows a blind person to get an aliya. They posit that since the ba'al korei reads aloud, it is enough (and perhaps better – see Beit Yosef, OC 141, discussing the Zohar) for the oleh to listen without reading along. Rav Ovadia Yosef contemplated Sephardim relying on the Maharil when needed (Yalkut Yosef, OC 139:4).

The other possibility is to give the ba'al korei all the aliya. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 143:5) allows this when no one else is capable of doing an aliya properly. The Mishna Berura 143:33 says that Ashkenazim (Rav Shalom Cohen reportedly agreed for Sephardim) should prefer calling seven olim who stand two meters away (see Rav Asher Weiss ibid. 19, 21).

from: Chabad.org Magazine <inspiration@chabad.org> date: Apr 28, 2020, 7:21 PM

Why Is a Minyan Needed for Kaddish?

By Yehuda Shurpin

In this new era of COVID-19, when virtually all synagogues are closed and almost no one is able to pray with a minyan (quorum of 10 men), many are tempted to say the Kaddish (which is chanted in honor of loved ones who have passed on) even while alone. Why can't this be done?

The Importance of Kaddish Before we get to the minyan aspect, let's talk a bit about Kaddish.

I cannot overstate the importance and merit there is in both saying Kaddish and listening attentively and responding appropriately when it is said by another. This holds true for both for the Kaddeshim said by the chazzan (prayer leader) and the mourners.

In addition to bringing merit to the living, reciting Mourner's Kaddish does wonders for the souls of the deceased. It not only helps them as they face judgment in heaven and eases their passage to the World to Come, but also allows them to continue on to even higher spiritual planes (which is why it is said every year on the anniversary of passing).

Kaddish=Public Declaration of G-d's Holiness The underlying theme of the Kaddish prayer is the glorification, magnification and sanctification of G-d.

As you can read in Why Are 10 Men Needed for a Minyan?, anything that is a davar shebikedushah, a declaration of G-d's holiness such as Kaddish, Barechu or Kedushah, requires at least a minyan present.1

In fact, if you look at the very text of Kaddish, you can see that it is structured to be said in the presence of others. For example: "In your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon, and say, Amen." Thus, much of it doesn't make much sense if it is recited alone.

Furthermore, one of the very reasons why Kaddish is considered such a merit for the departed is because the one who chants it leads the entire group in prayer.

What to Do When Kaddish Is Impossible The greatest merit for the deceased is when one of their own sons recites the Kaddish. The next best

option is to arrange for a close relative (e.g., son-in-law) or sibling to recite it (on condition that their own parents are no longer alive).²

If this isn't feasible, then one can arrange for anyone who no longer has parents living to recite the Kaddish. In this case, it is preferable to pay for its recitation, rather than have the person do it as a favor. This way (a) the person saying it is considered even more of an emissary (bringing more merit to the deceased), and (b) there is greater assurance that it will in fact be recited. This is especially true when the payment for Kaddish recitation supports an orphan, the poor or a needy Torah scholar.³

In this vein, Chabad.org has partnered with Colel Chabad (the oldest continuously operating charity of its kind in Israel) to offer the recitation of Kaddish for the 11 months after the passing and/or annually on the anniversary of passing. Arrange Kaddish for a loved one.

In the Era of Coronavirus Due to the extraordinary situation in which we now find ourselves, Chabad.org has arranged a special (free) service in which Kaddish is said in a safe and government-approved environment for all those who cannot do it themselves.

Sign up for the service here.

Even More Important than Kaddish When the vast majority of us are precluded from saying Kaddish as usual, it's normal to feel distressed. Keep in mind that although saying Kaddish and leading the prayer services are a source of merit for the departed, it is even more important for the deceased that their children and descendants follow the path of righteousness they modeled.

The Zohar says that just as a son honors his parents with food, drink and clothing during their lifetimes, he must honor them even more after they pass away! If he walks a bad path, he brings them disgrace. But if he walks a righteous path, he honors them in This World and in the World to Come. When this happens, G-d has mercy on the deceased and seats them in a place of prominence.⁴

So in our current situation, mourners are encouraged to add in good deeds and Torah study (especially Mishnayot) in the merit of their loved ones. And when one can influence others to do the same, it has an even more powerful impact and merit for the deceased.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote a number of telling letters to a Jewish activist and educator who often traveled in order to strengthen Jewish education and would need to miss the recital of Kaddish from time to time. In one such letter, the Rebbe writes:

I already wrote to you about this situation a number of times. It is simple that the satisfaction and elevation of the soul cannot come at the expense of a decrease in Torah and mitzvahs. And after all, Jewish education is the foundation for this, and the merit of the public is dependent upon this (much more than Kaddish). From this it is understood that you should not decrease in your efforts for Jewish education, and on the contrary, you should add in it.

And in order that you should not miss (as much as possible) in what was discussed, there is room, in addition to you saying Kaddish when possible, to hire someone else to recite it . . .⁵

On the flip side, if possible, a person should endeavor to recite Kaddish himself rather than have someone else do it, as it is more meritorious if the descendants themselves recite it.⁶

May we merit the day when there will be no more death and we will once again be reunited with our loved ones, with the coming of the Moshiach and the resurrection of the dead!

FOOTNOTES

1. Talmud, Megillah 23b. To explain the derivation of the concept in the Talmud: Elsewhere it is written, "Separate yourselves from amidst the congregation" (Numbers 16:21). Noting that the same word appears in both verses, a verbal association transmitted by tradition [i.e., a *gezeirah shavah*] postulates that just as the latter verse speaks about a congregation so, too, does the former verse speak about a congregation. And a congregation comprises no fewer than ten people, as it is written,—"How long will this

evil congregation persist?" (Numbers 14:27). This verse refers to the spies, who numbered twelve; subtract two for Yehoshua and Calev (who were righteous), and ten remain.

2. See Nitei Gavriel, *Hilchot Aveilut*, vol. 2, ch. 49, regarding the parameters for when and for whom Kaddish is recited. There are some more complicated situations and a rabbi should be consulted.

3. See Bet Yosef, *Yoreh Deiah* 403; Magen Avraham, *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 132:2; and *Machatzit Hashekel ad loc.*

4. See *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 26:21, citing the Zohar.

5. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 19, p. 291; see also *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 19, p. 272.

6. The Rebbe himself writes about this at some length to one who wrote about hiring someone else to recite Kaddish; see *More Le'dor Navuch*, vol. 3, p. 106. Of course, this is not related to hiring an additional Kaddish-sayer as a backup in case the mourners accidentally forget to say it.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas

פרשת אחרי מות - קדושים תשפ

Parashas Acharei Mos

כמעשה ארץ מצרים אשר ישבתם בה לא תעשו וכמעשה ארץ כנען אשר אני מביא אתכם שמה לא תעשו

Like the practice of the Land of Egypt in which you dwelled do not do; and do not perform the practice of the Land of Canaan to which I will bring you. (18:3)

The *Toras Kohanim* derives from the words, *yishavtem bah*, "in which you dwelled," that Egypt was the most morally bankrupt nation (followed by the *Canaan*), specifically because the Jews lived there. Likewise, the moral turpitude of the *Canaanim* plunged even lower as a result of its Jewish conquerors/inhabitants. This statement begs elucidation. One would think that the moral standard which the Jews set should have served as an example for these pagans to emulate. Instead, *Chazal* indicate that they became worse. Why?

In his commentary to *Toras Kohanim*, the *Raavad* writes: "This means: as a result of the sin of enslaving the Jews, they came to committing these other sins (perverted morality) in order that they (descend to the nadir of depravity and) warrant the punishment of being destroyed. For *aveirah goreres aveirah*, 'sin causes sin.'" The *Raavad* seems to imply that the sins previously committed by the Egyptians [This idea also applies to the *Canaanim*, because the Jews were about to conquer and inhabit the land which had heretofore been their place of habitation. Now that the Jews were returning "home", the *Canaanim* had to leave.] would not have caused their ejection/destruction.) Since the Jews were about to live in Canaan, however, the pagans had to magnify their sins in order to warrant their punishment. Although this sheds some light, we still require an understanding of this concept: In order to make a nation/person "worthy" of punishment, he is "granted" the opportunity to sin. While this is part of the rule that "sin causes sin," Hashem seems to implement it in greater force when necessary. It is almost like suggesting that a sinner is given the opportunity to sin more and more, so that he can receive his duly deserved punishment.

Horav Gedalya Schorr, zl, contends that this is exactly what the *Raavad* means. He quotes the *Rambam* in his *Pirush HaMishnah to Talmud Berachos* where he explains the *pasuk*, *Eis laasos l'Hashem heifeiru Torasecha*, "For it is a time to act for Hashem, they have voided Your Torah" (*Tehillim* 119:126). Simply, this means that at a time when so many have abandoned the Torah, it is incumbent upon those who remain loyal to it to intensify their own knowledge and observance, so that they ensure its perpetuation. *Rambam*, however, offers an innovative exposition of this *pasuk*. When the *eis*, time, comes for the nations/person to be punished -- their stretch of sin has become too long -- Hashem "enables" them/him to

abandon/deny the Torah (descending their sins to a new low), warranting swift, intense punishment. *Rambam* implies a powerful principle concerning Heavenly punishment. A nation, or a person, can have committed a number of sins – none of which warrant ultimate punishment. When the time arrives, however, that they must be punished (for whatever reason, such as: in Egypt, the Jews had to leave; Canaan; the Jews were about to arrive – or, if a person’s evil has become a seriously bad example and harmful influence), Hashem intervenes and “arranges” ways for them to increase their sinful behavior, so that it warrants said punishment.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* exhorts us to be concerned about the “little breaches,” the ones that skirt impropriety, subtly border on moral turpitude, or act within the confines of halachah but denigrate tradition. This is how the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, ensnares a person and ultimately takes over his life. The *yetzer hora* does not openly tell a person to worship idols or to commit an act that is morally despicable. He begins with minor misdeeds and then leads up to the major violations. The Torah exhorts us, *Kedoshim tiheyu*, “Be holy!” Abstain from anything that is not holy. As long as one does not give in on the little, subtle trespasses, he does not have to worry that the *yetzer hora* will convince him to act reprehensibly. Once one falls into the *yetzer hora*’s web of deceit, however, he becomes ensnared in his net. Then, Hashem steps in with the punishment that he deserves.

In conclusion: No one escapes punishment. He might attempt to convince himself that a string of “light” sins does not have a detrimental effect on him – but he is wrong. Sin is sin, and every single one counts. When one’s behavior reaches a point that Hashem feels enough is enough – he will maneuver added “weight” to his sins or chart a course for the sinner whereby his earlier sins will cause greater, more egregious offenses that carry stronger punishment. At the end of the day – he will pay.

Parashas Kedoshim

הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא

You shall reprove your fellow and you shall not bear a sin because of him. (19:17)

The *Bialystoker Maggid*, *zl* (cited by *Horav Gedalya Schorr, zl*), posits that we have two forms of *tochachah*, rebuke. In one instance, the rebuker chastises his fellow, saying, “How could you commit such a sin?” Another scenario has the rebuker challenging his fellow, alleging, “Who are you (who do you think you are) to have the audacity to commit such a grave sin?” In both instances, the rebuker is magnifying the sin and making it greater/larger than the sinner. He is either too small or the sin is too large, but, in any event, the offense is greater than the offender.

The *Maggid* teaches us that neither approach is appropriate; rather, the rebuke should elevate the sinner above the sin. He should say: “How could an individual of your stature, someone as important and distinguished as you are, fall into the clutches of sin? You are so above such despicable behavior. *Es passt nicht*: ‘It does not become you.’” By preserving the offender’s esteem, one has a better chance of getting through to him and convincing him to repent his ways.

Horav Nachman, zl, m’Breslov teaches that reproof is not merely venting one’s anger, but rather, it is to “bring out the beautiful fragrance within your fellow Jew.” Every person has the potential either to rise to greatness or to descend to depravity – to be a *tzaddik*, righteous person, or a *rasha*, wicked person. Reproof serves as the lodestar to guide the person, to help him to reach - and stay on -- the correct path, to prevent him from going astray. It is appropriate (form of) reproof that will succeed in bringing out the beautiful fragrance, the inherent good, within each person.

ואהבת לרעך כמוך

Love your fellow as yourself. (19:18)

Rashi quotes the well-known dictum of Rabbi Akiva, “*Zeh klal gadol baTorah*: “This is a great principle of the Torah.” Why is the word “*baTorah*” added? It would be sufficient to have said simply, “This is a great

principle.” The *Chasam Sofer* explains that the principle of loving one’s fellow *kamocho*, like yourself, is specifically *baTorah*, concerning Torah study and other spiritual pursuits. Regarding physical pursuits, one’s personal needs precedes those of his fellow. There is a case in *Chazal* in which Rabbi Akiva seems to underscore the difference between spiritual pursuits and physical pursuits with regard to helping one’s fellow.

Two people are wandering in the wilderness, and only one of them has a cup of water. In order for one of them to survive the wilderness, he requires that cup of water. Who gets it? Does the one who has the water drink it and watch his friend perish before his eyes, or does he give the water to his friend, so that he dies? They have another option: They can share the cup of water and both die. Obviously, this option does not make anyone happy. Rabbi Akiva, who teaches that loving one’s fellow as he loves himself is a cardinal principle of the Torah, surprisingly is of the opinion that the one who has the water should drink it all, because this way at least he will live. What about the “principle” of *v’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho*? Veritably, Rabbi Akiva focuses on the *pasuk v’chai achecha imach*, “Your brother shall live with you” – only if you are alive. In other words, you/I come first. Rabbi Akiva’s words appear to be contradictory. Apparently, one’s love for his brother has limitations.

Based upon what we said earlier (*Chasam Sofer*), *Zeh klal gadol baTorah* – “This is a principle in the Torah.” Yes – when it involves Torah study, your friend comes first. You should reach out and teach even at your own expense. This is Torah; if you could have helped your friend learn, but you did not, due to your concern regarding your own Torah – then your Torah is of little value. You sacrifice your own growth for the sake of others. When it concerns your physical/material needs, however, your life precedes that of your fellow. The Torah’s principle concerns Torah/spiritual pursuits.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, teaches that just as it is incumbent upon every Jew to give *maaser*, one tenth of his earnings, to the Jewish poor, it is equally important that one give up one-tenth of his time to study Torah with those who are weaker than he is. Indeed, the *Bnei Yissachar* teaches that the greatest form of *tzedakah*, charity, is to teach Torah to one who is weaker than he is.

Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita, relates the story of a Holocaust survivor who came to a *yeshivah* in London (after the war) with a burning desire to learn Torah. The problem was that, as a result of his incarceration in the Nazi death camps, he had lost years of study. He was far behind the level of the other *yeshivah* students. What made things worse was the fact that the other *bachurim*, students, were themselves busy learning. They neither had the time nor the patience to learn with such a weak student. Two students, however, “found” the time and had the patience to learn with him. They were *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, the *Ravaad* of Yerushalayim, and *Horav Tuvia Weiss, Shlita*, the *Gaavad* of Yerushalayim. Apparently, the time they spent with him was not a detriment to their own learning. Perhaps the merit of helping a Holocaust survivor return to Torah stood by their side as they ascended the ladder of spiritual growth to become premier *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants.

During a recent trip, I was walking to my hotel from *shul* in the morning. A young man walking nearby was occupying himself with plugging in his earphones to listen to what I assumed was music. A third man, older than myself – and probably more religiously intense than I -- asked the young man to what type of music he was listening. (He assumed that with his sneakers and running pants, he was of the genre who would be listening to music – never assume.) The young man replied that this was the only time that he could learn the “*Daf*” (*Yomi*); he was listening to a *shiur* while he walked to his hotel room and would finish sometime during the day. The gentleman countered, as he looked at me, *Dos haist nisht gelerent*; This is not considered learning.” I replied that different forms of learning exist. For someone to listen to *Daf Yomi* while he is taking a half hour walk may not be the same as learning in the *bais hamedrash*, but he must be commended,

because he could be doing and listening to alternatives that are far from appropriate.

Veritably, many occupy their free time with various forms and venues of learning, but what about *Torah lishmah* – pure Torah study, to fulfill Hashem’s command? Does such study have value if it is of lower quality? Surely there is, considering the alternative, but at what point will a person say, “My learning is really not that valuable. Why bother?”

Rav Elimelech Biderman relates a lecture given by *Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl*, that disproves this theory. “I once presided over a *din* Torah, monetary litigation,” began *Rav Kreisworth*, “where the claim was for a thousandth of a percent. The diamond broker contended that he had been promised 005% for each sale that he concluded. The merchant for whom he worked argued that their agreement had been for 004%. Their discord was over a pittance (supposedly), one thousandth of a percent.” Indeed, the crowd attending *Rav Kreisworth’s* lecture thought this to be quite humorous. Why should people squabble over such an insignificant amount?

Rav Kreisworth said, “Do not laugh. There is nothing funny about one thousandth of a percent if the claim concerns the brokerage fee for one billion dollars of diamonds. In such a case, a thousandth of a percent equals one million dollars! This is not a small amount of money.”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concluded his *shiur*, explaining that sometimes people think that the Torah which they learn has little value, since it is not studied entirely *lishmah*. They should know that due to the eternal value of Torah, its worth is beyond comprehension. Thus, even a miniscule percentage of the reward one receives for studying Torah is far beyond our ability to grasp – beyond millions.”

איש איש מבני ישראל אשר יתן מזרעו למלך מות ימות עם הארץ ירגמהו באבן ואם
העלם יעלימו עם הארץ את עיניהם מן האיש ההוא בתתו מזכעו למלך לבלתי המית
אתו... ושמתי את פני באיש ההוא

Any man from *Bnei Yisrael*... who shall give of his seed to *Molech* (Idol) shall be put to death; the people of the land shall pelt him with stones. But if the people of the land avert their eyes from that man when he gives from his offspring to *molech*, not put him to death – then I shall concentrate My attention upon that man. (20:2,4,5)

Chazal identify a number of ambiguities concerning the *pshat*, explanation, of this *pasuk*. We will focus on two of them. The second *pasuk* states: “But if the people of the land avert their eyes... not to put him to death.” Why are the Jewish people referred to as *am ha’aretz*, “people of the land”? This vernacular suggests that their primary focus is to settle the land. Second; what is the meaning of the phrase “not to put him to death”? Why not simply say: “they will not kill him”? The *pesukim* concerning the *Molech* debacle are unusually redundant. The *Tevuos Ha’Sadeh*, *Horav Eliezer Deutch, zl*, cites the *Ramban* who quotes *Kadmonim* (earlier *Rishonim*) who contend that the *molech* rite consisted of total immolation of the child. The parents actually murdered their child by throwing him in as a sacrifice into the fires of *molech*. The *Ramban* disagrees, contending that the child was merely passed between the fires. He emerged alive – burnt, but alive. The *Tevuos HaSadeh* suggest that perhaps there were two forms of *molech*/two ways to worship *molech*: one in which the child was consumed; and one in which he was only passed through the flames. (In any event, the parents were depraved people. The question is with regard to their level of depravity.)

It goes without question that parents who would murder their child as part of a pagan sacrificial rite are cruel and evil people – individuals who do not belong in a sane society. We have no doubt that their actions bring shame upon a community, and no one would agree to have them as neighbors. Thus, people did not avert their eyes from the offender when witnessing the *molech* rite in which the child was immolated. They would swiftly deal with him on their own. It is the second *molech* rite which causes speculation. Since the child was not killed (what is a little burnt skin?), they might

hesitate to intervene, claiming that “we do not want to get involved.” Under such circumstances, Hashem intervenes with His punishment.

The *pesukim* are no longer ambiguous. In the instance that a person gives his child to the *molech*, under such circumstances that – *l’molech mos yumas*, the child will be delivered to the *molech* as a sacrifice, he will surely be executed by his community’s vigilantes. No decent human being will act indifferently to the murder of a child. When the *molech* rite consists of *l’bilti heimis oso*, not to put him to death, however, then Hashem will arbitrate and demand punishment from this man.

Members of a community often remain indifferent to the abuses some parents inflict upon their children. They justify their apathy, claiming that the parents are not inflicting serious bodily harm on their children. What about emotional abuse? Does anyone know the extent of damage that emotional abuse inflicts upon a child? The scars often accompany the child into adulthood. We must remember that when the community turns its collective heads away from one who passes his child through the fires of the *molech*, Hashem intervenes. He will do the same when a community ignores the cries of those who cannot help themselves. How can we ask Hashem to help our children if we are indifferent to the plight of others?

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