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Replenishing The Soul

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

11 Iyyar 5781 – April 22, 2021 0

“Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled...”
(Vayikra 18:3)

The Ramban writes that since the Egyptians were deeply immersed in various forms of immoral behavior, the Torah strongly cautions us against following their practices. Although it's difficult to believe anyone would consider engaging in these abominable forms of depravity, Hashem, the creator of man, knows his inclinations and frailties.

(Thus, the Talmud tells us [Sotah 2a] that one who sees a sotah in her disgrace should vow to abstain from wine for it leads to immorality.)

HaRav Elazar Menachem Man Shach asks: Can an intelligent person who is devoted to Hashem sink so low that he can be compared to a child who doesn't know to flee from fire? Wouldn't he be acutely aware of the danger of following the Egyptians' abhorrent behaviors?

Rav Shach answers these questions by noting that the human body always needs nourishment and sleep. Some people can go without sleep for a night or two, others can subsist on less food, but eventually every person reaches a point at which he needs to replenish his body with food or sleep. The same is true of one's soul, Rav Shach says. Every person, without exception, needs to constantly fill his soul with inspiration and encouragement.

On the words, “If you listen to My commandments that I command you today” (Devarim 11:13), Rashi writes that “the commandments should be new to you as though you just heard them today.” Every day, the soul needs new spiritual nourishment to maintain its devotion to Torah and mitzvos.

Every day, we recite Krias Shema and accept anew the rule of Heaven (ol malchus Shamayim) even though we already did so the day before. And although we accepted the rule of Heaven in the morning, we do so again in the evening.

The Torah, too, provides an infinite resource of spiritual sustenance for man, as Iyov 11:9 states: “Its measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea.”

Rav Saadya Gaon writes that a person who has achieved a level of perfection gains a better grasp of the greatness of Hashem each day and consequently does teshuvah every day as he realizes that his appreciation of Hashem the previous day was inadequate.

A young man who grew up in a religious family developed an interest in the world of art. Unfortunately, the people with whom he shared this interest, and with whom he associated, were of low moral character, and many would consider some of their activities depraved. Certainly, their values were antithetical to what he had learned in yeshiva.

The young man's personal conduct slowly began to deteriorate as practices that had at one time been abhorrent to him became acceptable. Eventually he was at the point of marrying a woman out of the faith.

His mother, a very upright person deeply committed to Torah and mitzvos, was distraught. Her world was destroyed and she walked around in a daze. All her efforts to change the situation were to no avail.

The great tzaddik of Kapishnitz was still living at that time, and the mother felt that perhaps he would be able to help her. After many attempts, she finally found herself in the study of the Kapishnitzer Rebbe. As soon as she opened her mouth to speak, she choked up and began to cry bitterly.

The Kapishnitzer Rebbe, known for his great ahavas Yisrael, listened to the mother pouring out her heart and was deeply moved. He was unable to calm her down until he promised her that her son would abandon his current lifestyle and return to the fold very soon.

And so it was. Within a short amount of time, the son unexpectedly came home. He related that he had been overwhelmed by thoughts of teshuvah and had a sudden desire to return to his roots. Everyone who heard about this startling development was amazed and believed the Rebbe had wrought a great miracle.

But when someone attributed ruach hakodesh to the Rebbe for seeing the future, the Kapishnitzer saod, “It was not me, and not even a part of me. I had no idea or any inkling that the son would do teshuvah. But when I saw the mother's deep pain, I decided that I would make this promise just to calm her down so that she wouldn't grieve so strongly.

“However, later I realized that a chillul Hashem would result if my promise didn't prove true. I therefore pulled myself together and spent time every day praying, begging and crying to Hashem to have mercy on the young man and place thoughts of teshuvah in his mind so that the Name of Heaven shouldn't be desecrated. Hashem, in His great mercy and compassion, heard my prayers.”

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Apr 22, 2021, 1:49 PM subject: Rav Frand - Worse Than Lack of Mutual Respect

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Parshas Acharei Mos Worse Than Lack of Mutual Respect

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1158 – "I Don't Want You Spending Time with So-and-so"-Must a child listen? Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Akiva's Students Were Punished for Something Worse Than Lack of Mutual Respect

Parshas Kedoshim contains the famous pasuk "You should love your neighbor as yourself." [Vayikra 19:18], about which Rabbi Akiva stated: Zeh Klal Gadol b'Torah (This is the fundamental principle of Torah). This pasuk teaches the positive Biblical command of loving every Jew, or as the Ramban explains it more precisely, treating every Jew as though you love him. (Whether this mitzvah obligates an emotional feeling is not so clear, but at the very least, a person must treat his fellow Jew with the same love and concern that he would treat himself). Do unto him as you would want to be done to you, and don't do to him what you would not want to be done to you.

As we all know, we are now in the days of Sefiras HaOmer, in which we commemorate the death of the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva. One of the great ironies of Jewish history is that Rabbi Akiva, who used to preach V'Ahavta L'Reyacha Ka'mocha, had 24,000 disciples who, Chazal say, died because lo nohagu kavod zeh b'zeh (they did not treat each another with proper respect).

Imagine this tragedy—24,000 Torah students dying in a relatively short timeframe. We cannot even imagine it! There are large Yeshivas in the world today. There are six or seven thousand talmidim in Lakewood. There are an equal number in the Mir Yeshiva in Yerushalayim. Chas v'Shalom, can we imagine one of those Yeshivas suddenly not being here? It would be a tragedy of major proportions! And as a punishment for what sin? Because they did not have proper respect for one another! That is something we cannot fathom!

There are different theories advanced as to why Rabbi Akiva's students were punished so severely for something which is certainly not a capital offense. One classic answer is that their high spiritual level magnified the significance of their actions inasmuch as HaKadosh Baruch Hu has a higher standard for tzadikim. "He weighs out retribution for them according to a thin strand of hair." [Bava Kama 50a]

I saw an interesting explanation from the Chofetz Chaim, who asks this question: What crime or sin did they commit that they should be subject to death? He advances a novel idea: They were not punished for the sin of disrespecting their fellow man, but for the sin of Chilul HaShem (Desecration of the Name of G-d). The lack of mutual respect manifested by Rabbi Akiva's disciples spread the impression in the world at large that Talmidei Chachomim fight with one another.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that the "lack of respect" stemmed from terrible machlokes and divisiveness that existed among Rabbi Akiva's students. For Talmidei Chachomim to be arguing with one another, said the Chofetz Chaim, is a Chilul HaShem. Chilul HaShem is a sin that can in fact be punishable by death!

The Almighty Should Give You the Benefit of the "Doubt"

Just a few pesukim earlier in the parsha, the pasuk says "You shall not commit a perversion of justice; you shall not favor the poor and you shall not honor the great; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow man." [Vayikra 19:15] Even though this pasuk is ostensibly referring to Beis Din—how judges are supposed to act, Chazal say that the last words of the pasuk—b'tzedek tishpot amisecha—also imply that a person should give his friend the benefit of the doubt (havey dan l'kaf zechus).

When you see someone doing something that on the face of it seems to be a very bad thing, give him the benefit of the doubt. Try to be melamed zechus! Many times things are not as they appear.

There is a famous Gemara in Masseches Shabbos [127b] which provides three different examples. I will only quote one briefly. The Gemara illustrates how far a person must go to give someone the benefit of the doubt:

The Rabbis taught: One who judges his fellow man favorably is himself judged favorably. There was an incident involving a certain man who went down from Upper Galilee and entered the employ of a certain homeowner in the south for three years. On Erev Yom Kippur, the worker said to the employer: "Give me my wages and I will go and provide for my wife and children." The employer replied, "I have no money." The worker said "Then give me my wages in the form of produce." The employer said "I have none." The worker suggested: "Give me land." "I have none." "Then give me livestock" "I have none." "Then give me pillows and cushions" "I have none." Unable to obtain any of the wages due him, the worker slung his belongings over his back and returned home dejectedly.

After the Festival, the employer took the worker's wages in his hand along with three donkey-loads of goods—one donkey-load of food, one of drink, and one of various sweet delicacies—and traveled to his former worker's house in the Upper Galilee. After they had eaten and drunk, he paid the worker his wages. He said to the worker: "When you said to me, 'Give me my wages' and I said 'I have no money,' of what did you suspect me?" The worker replied, "I said to myself that perhaps underpriced merchandise came your way and you bought it with the monies that you would have otherwise used to pay my wages."

The Gemara goes through each of the "excuses" that the employer advanced to his worker, and explains how the worker gave him the benefit of the doubt and assumed—in every one of the cases—a scenario which would have legally justified such a response. When the employer told him "I have absolutely nothing to give you" the employer hypothesized "Perhaps he sanctified all his possessions to the Beis HaMikdash."

The employer took an oath "By the Divine Service! So it was! I had vowed all my possessions to Heaven because of my son Hurkonos who did not occupy himself in Torah study, so I did not wish him to benefit from them. And when I came to my colleagues in the South, they annulled for me all my vows. And as for you—just as you have judged me favorably, so may the Omnipresent judge you favorably as well!"

That is the synopsis of the Gemara in Shabbos. But, let us ask a simple question: If you see a religious Jew driving down Park Heights Ave in Baltimore on Shabbos, you can think one of two things: You can think "Well, this fellow suddenly threw religion all away" or you can think "He has a medical emergency and he needs to get to the hospital and he can't get a cab so he is driving down Park Heights Avenue on Shabbos.

Now, human beings can have that doubt because we do not know why he is driving on Shabbos, even though until now we knew him to be a religious Jew. But with the Ribono shel Olam, what sense does it make to speak about "doubt"? What does it mean "Just like you judged me favorably, the Ribono shel Olam should judge you favorably"? The Ribono shel Olam knows exactly what is going on. He knows exactly why you are driving down Park Heights Avenue. He knows it is because your wife is pregnant and she is having a baby in the back seat. There is no safek (doubt) to Him about the matter!

There is a famous vort from the Baal Shem Tov. The expression of the Mishna in Avos [1:6] is "Havey dan es KOL ha'Adam l'kaf Zechus." It should have said Havey dan es ha'Adam l'Kaf Zechus—judge man favorably. What does the adjective KOL (all) come to add?

The Baal Shem Tov explains: When judging people, the person needs to know their WHOLE history. A person needs to know where he has been, what he is currently going through, and what he will be going through. A person cannot merely judge based on what he witnesses right then in front of his eyes. The person's whole life experiences must be taken into account

before rendering a fair judgement. This is the meaning of KOL ha'Adam: It includes his history, his parents, his siblings, where he has been, what he has gone through, and everything about him!

That is the bracha mentioned in the Talmud. Of course, the Ribono shel Olam knows what you are doing right now. But the blessing is that the Almighty should take into account all the factors that brought you to this current action. He should generously temper any harsh judgement by taking all extenuating circumstances which are in your favor into account: "Listen, the person has been through X, Y, and Z – I need to give him a break!

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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.

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter Be Careful!

The concluding passuk in Parshas Acharei Mos warns us to be careful not to violate any of the instructions of the Torah. The Gemara (Yevamos 21b) understood this passuk with an additional level of interpretation: we should add a "protective fence" around the Torah laws in order see to it that we do not violate any Torah prohibitions. The opening Mishna in Pirkei Avos quotes that this was one of the three mottos of the Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah.

It is well known that most of the rabbinical gezeiros were introduced during the period of the Second Temple. The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 29b) originally raised the possibility that not blowing the shofar when Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbos might be a Biblical law. Rosh Hashana is sometimes described in the Chumash as a day of blowing shofar, and sometimes is described as "zichron teruah - a day on which we speak about the shofar." The Gemara originally thought that when Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbos we only speak about shofar without actually blowing it. Then the Gemara backs out and concludes that the halacha of not blowing the shofar on Shabbos is rabbinic. (We are concerned that perhaps someone will forget and carry his shofar into the street on Shabbos.) Once the gemara comes to the conclusion that this din is only derabanan, how do we deal with the apparent discrepancy between the two pesukim describing Rosh Hashana as both a day of blowing shofar as well as a day of merely speaking about the shofar? The gemara never gives an alternate explanation to this apparent contradiction. One of the earlier achronim suggested that although this din is only rabbinic in origin, the Chumash is alluding to it because this gezeira d'rabanen existed already at the time the Chumash was written; Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who initiated it!

The Ba'al Hatanya in his collection of droshos for Rosh Hashana rejects this idea. He writes that it is well known that most of the gezeiros d'rabanen were instituted during the period of the second Beis Hamikdash. Based on kaballah sources he develops the idea that when the Jewish people have an independent Jewish government we are less concerned about the soton getting us to sin. During the period of the first Beis Hamikdash there was always a Jewish government. The Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah was a body that consisted of one hundred and twenty talmidei chachomim which was founded at the beginning of the second Beis Hamikdash. Because for several centuries (until the rebellion of the chashmonaim) there was no independent

Jewish government, they felt it was imperative to introduce many seyagim and harchokas.

Many have the attitude that it is not necessary, and perhaps even improper, to introduce additional gezeiros today. They reason that whatever the rabbis of the Talmud did not prohibit is permitted and ought to remain so. The Mesilas Yescharim does not agree with this position. He assumes that this concluding passuk in parshas Acharei Mos is not directed only to the beis din hagadol or the rabbis of the Talmud, rather it is addressing each and every Jew! Whoever senses that he runs the risk of violating a Torah prohibition ought to accept upon himself a seyag to distance himself from the potential violation. The gezeiros recorded in the Talmud were intended for all Jews in all generations and in all societies. But if one senses that due to his profession, his society, etc. he particularly is at risk of violating some prohibition, he is instructed by the Torah to introduce some personal harchoka.

The rishonim point out that there was no concern of bal tosif in introducing all of the seyagim d'rabanen since the Torah itself encouraged us to do so. However, if the chachomim would add a gezeira l'gezeira, being concerned for the risk that someone may mistakenly violate a rabbinic law, since this was not warranted by the Torah, this would pose a problem of bal tosif (Pri Megadim.) To introduce a gezeira you must sense a significant need. If the risk of violating a Biblical prohibition is far-fetched, we assume that the rabanen have no right to introduce a gezeira because of a milsa d'lo she'chi'ach. Similarly, the concern that someone may violate a rabbinic prohibition is considered insufficient cause to introduce a gezeira. Even if there is concern that one will fail to fulfill a Biblical mitzvah, but not that he will violate a Biblical prohibition, the Pri Megadim quotes Tosafos' interpretation (Menachos 68b s.v. v'ha kesiv) that this too is insufficient cause to introduce a gezeira, and such a gezeira would constitute a violation of bal tosif.

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Schachter

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from: The **Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust** <info@rabbisacks.org> date: Apr 21, 2021, 3:18 PM subject: Sprints and Marathons (Acharei Mot – Kedoshim 5781)

Sprints and Marathons (Acharei Mot – Kedoshim 5781)

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

It was a unique, unrepeatable moment of leadership at its highest height. For forty days Moses had been communing with God, receiving from Him the Law written on tablets of stone. Then God informed him that the people had just made a Golden Calf. He would have to destroy them. It was the worst crisis of the wilderness years, and it called for every one of Moses' gifts as a leader.

First, he prayed to God not to destroy the people. God agreed. Then he went down the mountain and saw the people cavorting around the Calf.

Immediately, he smashed the tablets. He burned the Calf, mixed its ashes with water and made the people drink. Then he called for people to join him. The Levites heeded the call and carried out a bloody punishment in which three thousand people died. Then Moses went back up the mountain and prayed for forty days and nights. Then for a further forty days he stayed with God while a new set of tablets was engraved. Finally, he came down the mountain on the tenth of Tishri, carrying the new tablets with him as a visible sign that God's covenant with Israel remained.

This was an extraordinary show of leadership, at times bold and decisive, at others slow and persistent. Moses had to contend with both sides, inducing the Israelites to do teshuvah and God to exercise forgiveness. At that moment he was the greatest ever embodiment of the name Israel, meaning one who wrestles with God and with people and prevails.

The good news is: there once was a Moses. Because of him, the people survived. The bad news is: what happens when there is no Moses? The Torah itself says: "No other Prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). What do you do in the absence of heroic leadership? That is the problem faced by every nation, corporation, community and family. It is easy to think, "What would Moses do?" But Moses did what he did because he was what he was. We are not Moses. That is why every human group that was once touched by greatness faces a problem of continuity. How does it avoid a slow decline?

The answer is given in this week's parsha. The day Moses descended the mountain with the second tablets was to be immortalised when its anniversary became the holiest of days, Yom Kippur. On this day, the drama of teshuvah and kapparah, repentance and atonement, was to be repeated annually. This time, though, the key figure would not be Moses but Aaron, not the Prophet but the High Priest.

That is how you perpetuate a transformative event: by turning it into a ritual. Max Weber called this the routinisation of charisma.[1] A once-and-never-again moment becomes a once-and-ever-again ceremony. As James MacGregor Burns puts it in his classic work, *Leadership*: "The most lasting tangible act of leadership is the creation of an institution – a nation, a social movement, a political party, a bureaucracy – that continues to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone." [2]

There is a remarkable Midrash in which various Sages put forward their idea of *klal gadol ba-Torah*, "the great principle of the Torah." Ben Azzai says it is the verse, "This is the book of the chronicles of man: On the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God" (Gen. 5:1). Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle, "Listen, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Ben Nannas says there is a yet more embracing principle: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still: "The first sheep shall be offered in the morning, and the second sheep in the afternoon" (Exodus 29:39) – or, as we might say today, *Shacharit*, *Mincha* and *Maariv*. In a word: "routine". The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi.[3]

The meaning of Ben Pazzi's statement is clear: all the high ideals in the world – the human person as God's image, belief in God's unity, and the love of neighbours – count for little until they are turned into habits of action that become habits of the heart. We can all recall moments of insight or epiphany when we suddenly understood what life is about, what greatness is, and how we would like to live. A day, a week, or at most a year later the inspiration fades and becomes a distant memory and we are left as we were before, unchanged.

Judaism's greatness is that it gave space to both Prophet and Priest, to inspirational figures on the one hand, and on the other, daily routines – the *halachah* – that take exalted visions and turn them into patterns of behaviour that reconfigure the brain and change how we feel and who we are.

One of the most unusual passages I have ever read about Judaism written by a non-Jew occurs in William Rees-Mogg's book on macro-economics, *The Reigning Error*. [4] Rees-Mogg (1928-2012) was a financial journalist who became editor of *The Times*, chairman of the Arts Council and vice-chairman of the BBC. Religiously he was a committed Catholic.

He begins the book with a completely unexpected paean of praise for halachic Judaism. He explains his reason for doing so. Inflation, he says, is a disease of inordinacy, a failure of discipline, in this case in relation to money. What makes Judaism unique, he continues, is its legal system. This has been wrongly criticised by Christians as drily legalistic. In fact, Jewish law was essential for Jewish survival because it "provided a standard by which action could be tested, a law for the regulation of conduct, a focus for loyalty and a boundary for the energy of human nature."

All sources of energy, most notably nuclear energy, need some form of containment. Without this, they become dangerous. Jewish law has always acted as a container for the spiritual and intellectual energy of the Jewish

people. That energy "has not merely exploded or been dispersed; it has been harnessed as a continuous power." What Jews have, he argues, modern economies lack: a system of self-control that allows economies to flourish without booms and crashes, inflation and recession.

The same applies to leadership. In *Good to Great*, management theorist Jim Collins argues that what the great companies have in common is a culture of discipline. In *Great By Choice*, he uses the phrase "the 20-Mile March" meaning that outstanding organisations plan for the marathon, not the sprint. Confidence, he says, "comes not from motivational speeches, charismatic inspiration, wild pep rallies, unfounded optimism, or blind hope." [5] It comes from doing the deed, day after day, year after year. Great companies use disciplines that are specific, methodical and consistent. They encourage their people to be self-disciplined and responsible. They do not over-react to change, be it for good or bad. They keep their eye on the far horizon. Above all, they do not depend on heroic, charismatic leaders who at best lift the company for a while but do not provide it with the strength-in-depth they need to flourish in the long run.

The classic instance of the principles articulated by Burns, Rees-Mogg and Collins is the transformation that occurred between Ki Tissa and *Acharei Mot*, between the first Yom Kippur and the second, between Moses' heroic leadership and the quiet, understated priestly discipline of an annual day of repentance and atonement.

Turning ideals into codes of action that shape habits of the heart is what Judaism and leadership are about. Never lose the inspiration of the Prophets, but never lose, either, the routines that turn ideals into acts and dreams into achieved reality.

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/998070/rabbi-moshe-taragin/thoughts-for-kedoshim-the-decline-of-loyalty/>

Thoughts for Kedoshim: The Decline of Loyalty

Speaker: Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Date: Apr 19, 2021

Acharei Mot/ Kedoshim

The Decline of Loyalty Moshe Taragin It is literally impossible to reduce Judaism to one saying or one quick maxim. The study of G-d's will is too intricate, while *mitzvot* are too sweeping to be condensed into one proverb. Yet, Hillel the scholar found a way to summarize all religion within one succinct statement. He was visited by a Gentile who desired an "express conversion". As the gemara in *Shabbat* (31) describes, he sought a "drive-thru" conversion lasting no longer than the duration he could stand on one foot (presumably he wasn't even a yoga master). He had been previously rebuffed by Shammai who dismissed this offensive and ridiculous proposal. Embracing this potential Jew, Hillel condensed all of religion into one famous line: "don't treat others in a manner in which you, yourself, would not want to be treated". Effectively reworking the Torah's dictum of "Love your neighbor like yourself", Hillel instructed this potential convert that excellence in interpersonal relationships can serve as a portal to overall religious success. This well-known story reminds us that moral life should be very simple. If we treat people with respect and afford them the dignity we sense in ourselves, ethical behavior should feel natural. You can divide the world into two groups: those who respect others and those who disrespect others. Those who respect others generally enjoy deeper relationships and greater emotional well-being. Hillel pivoted the entire Torah upon this rather simple ability to treat others with dignity and worthiness. As comprehensive as this doctrine may be, it only covers half of Judaism. Treating others with respect certainly enables the broader world of relationships and interpersonal duties known as *bein adam lachaveiro*. What is unclear is how, exactly, this value facilitates the ritual aspects of religion or *bein adam la'Makom*. How was this convert expected to expand Hillel's one-sentence program about respecting others into *tefillin*, Temple ceremony or the dietary laws? Hillel's convert was searching for one unitary idea which would encompass the entirety of religion. Hillel only provided partial

coverage. Rashi (in his comments to the Talmud) already sensed this problem and quoted a source from Mishlei 27 which refers to G-d as a friend. By implication, if G-d isn't merely a Creator or a Redeemer but also a friend, excellence at friendship should inspire both interpersonal sensitivity but also obedience to Divine will. Excelling at friendship will encourage greater subservience to the desires of our "Heavenly friend". In what way is G-d considered our friend and how does this propel religious experience? So many aspects of friendship are uniquely human and have little bearing upon our religious compliance. Viewing G-d as a friend certainly expands our expectations from Him: friends empathize, are generally good listeners, are honest with us, and support us unconditionally during difficult times. It is reassuring to expect these benefits from G-d as a friend. However, how can our friendship with G-d drive our own religious behavior? How does this relationship of friendship with G-d serve as a portal for our own religious expression? At the core of human friendship lies the trait of loyalty. Friends are loyal to one another based on past allegiances and past shared experiences. Interacting with, or even assisting those with whom we share common interest isn't an expression of loyalty. It is natural and reasonable to share experiences and resources with people whose interests overlap with our own. Loyalty compels dedication to people whose interests are discrepant with our own. We may not share common interests or similar lifestyles, but do share past experiences and a previous relationship. Though we may no longer share interests, loyalty demands commitment to one another and dedication to each other's needs. Ideally, religious experience should not be based principally upon loyalty, but primarily upon passion, enthusiasm and inspiration. Ideally, our own interest to serve G-d should overlap with His interest in us serving Him. This overlapping of "wills" represents the high point of religion. However, everyone experiences barren moments of spiritual emptiness during which it is difficult to generate an inner religious spark. During those blank moments we serve out of loyalty rather than out of passion. We may not feel inspired to serve G-d, but we can certainly feel loyal to a G-d who has breathed life into us and supported us since we entered this world. Though we feel spiritually hollow, we can feel morally obligated to the G-d of our fathers who has shielded Jews throughout our tumultuous history. In the absence of passion, we can fall back upon friendship and loyalty. Loyalty doesn't only brace our religious experience, it also enriches us as human beings. Loyal people conduct noble lives of commitment, duty and responsibility. Loyalty helps us live beyond the moment and its immediate conveniences. It bridges us to our past, to the relationships which shaped us, and to the people with whom we have shared the voyage of our life. Loyalty showers our otherwise momentary lives with the dignity of purpose, past and of shared journey. Sadly, loyalty is in steep decline in the modern world. Institutions which, in past generations fostered loyalty, are themselves undergoing rapid transformations. Loyalty to the workplace is vanishing in a world in which workers change their jobs, upon average, once every four years. Loyalty to political policies has become extinct in the modern circus of "personality politics". Democracies which showcase personalities rather than policies, render party loyalty pointless. In the past, adults were loyal to their "backgrounds"- the communities and local institutions of their youth. Our modern world is too portable for these loyalties. We move too quickly and too far away to maintain "local loyalties". Ideally, marriage and family are each founded upon loyalty, but each of these institutions has become dismembered in a world of reconfigured spousal and family identities. Traditional institutions of loyalty have become modern turnstiles of transience. Modern Man inhabits a world of constantly shifting quicksand. In place of actual loyalties, society offers us counterfeit loyalties- the type of loyalty which doesn't carry genuine commitment or constant obligation. Some people are loyal to sports teams which they have followed for years. This mock loyalty is purely recreational and doesn't carry any substantive obligation or responsibility. Consumer loyalty entices customers to repeatedly purchase similar brands. This bogus form of loyalty isn't moral

but transactional- we continue to purchase a brand because we sense greater value or even greater psychological benefit. In a world of vanishing loyalty, society has substituted hoaxes for actual loyalty. We all stand in the shoes of that original convert. We know more about religion than he did, and have performed mitzvot more routinely than he did. However, regarding Hillel's lesson of loyalty, we are all converts who require education in the values of trust and loyalty. In a world of dwindling faith, loyalty can teach us trust. In a spiritually hollow society loyalty to G-d offers religious durability. In a world of loneliness, loyalty to G d can germinate into loyalty to people and to past. Loyalty can provide connectedness.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/torah/why-do-people-fast-on-bhab/2021/04/22/>

Why Do People Fast On BHA”B?

By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

11 Iyar 5781 – April 22, 2021

In two locations (Kiddushin 81a and Bava Kama 82a), Tosafos mentions the minhag of fasting on the first Monday, Thursday, and following Monday of the months of Cheshvan and Iyar. These fasts, which are also mentioned several times in Shulchan Aruch, are commonly known as BHA”B.

Although most of Klal Yisrael do not observe these fasts, it behooves us to understand the reasons for them so that we can take them to heart and give tzedakah with them in mind.

One reason given by the Elya Rabbah (siman 492, se'if 3) is: They atone for the sin of doing work on Chol HaMoed. The Gemara tells us, “Kol hamvazeh es hamoados, ein lo cheilek l'Olam Habo – All who ignore the moeds have no portion in the World to Come.” Rashi explains that “moed” means Chol HaMoed. We therefore beg forgiveness if we miscalculated during these holy days and did work we weren't allowed to do.

Another reason can be found in Sefer Matamim (p. 131), Taamei Minhagim (p. 250), and Mateh Moshe (p. 747). They explain that we fast because after Succos and Pesach, the weather changes suddenly, which tends to cause people to get sick. We anticipate this development by fasting and praying for the welfare of Klal Yisrael.

To illustrate how relevant the Gemara's comment is to contemporary times: Years ago, I was trying to get a hospital room for someone in the emergency room of a New York hospital. The person had already been there for over 30 hours, but the nurse explained to me that there were no ICU or CCU beds available. When asked why the hospital was so congested, she explained that at the change of seasons the hospital is always full because many elderly people just can't cope with the sudden change in weather. Similarly, a druggist once told me that his briskest business comes at the change in seasons.

The BHA”B fasts after Sukkos are thus an opportune time for rabbanim to remind people to inquire about their elderly parents getting the annual flu shot. Even a “regular” flu – which is a nuisance for younger people – can be, chas v'shalom, fatal to elderly people. Offering a simple preventive flu shot to one's parents (with the advise of their physician) can be a marvelous fulfillment of kibud av v'eim.

In BHA”B season, the age-old argument on whether to open or close the shul's windows tends to rear its ugly head. The fact that such disputes occur in shuls is not coincidental. It seems to be a test to see if we have absorbed the divrei mussar and hanhagas tovot that we regularly see in shul. Can we focus more on giving and caring for the other person than taking for ourselves?

Yet another reason for these fasts can be found in the Mordechai on Masechtas Taanis (number 629) and Sefer Chassidim (227). They explain that at the onset of Cheshvan, we begin to expect the yearly rainfall on which our livelihood once depended. And, in the month of Iyar, we are concerned that the fresh crops should not be ruined by devastating natural disasters such as crop jaundice. Hence, these fasts are, in essence, prayers for parnassah, which is definitely a major source of concern in any era.

Finally, Tosafos (on Kiddushin and Bava Kama) explain that we fast because, during Yom Tov, both men and women go to hear a drasha from great sages, and the men were exposed to many women dressed in their Yom Tov finery. To atone for any sinful thoughts they might have had, Chazal enacted a period of fasting and Selichos.

When we learn this Tosafos, we should reflect with fright on how far we've deteriorated. In the olden days, the gathering of men and women merely to listen to Torah from the mouths of gedolim prompted a series of fast days. Imagine at how the chachmei Chazal would blanch at the exposure to arayos pervasive among so many today via cinema, television, and digital media.

These fasts remind us how high our standards should really be. (As an aside, we see that it was definitely the practice of women, not just men, to go hear divrei hisorerus.)

In the zechnus of our praying for Klal Yisrael's health and wealth, may we merit these great blessings until the arrival of Moshiach, speedily and in our days.

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<http://www.ravaviner.com/> Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim **From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit" a**

Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Rulings of Our Sages Q: Why did our Sages establish specific laws for extreme cases? A: Before our Sages established laws they were very careful. Their intention was to add purity and to prevent eccentricity.

Mashiach's Arrival Q: Is there a contradiction between the belief in Mashiach's arrival and our political endeavors? A: No. We anticipate Mashiach's miraculous arrival every single day. We believe in miracles but we don't depend on miracles.

Speak to Hashem Q: Is the statement "Speak to Hashem and everything will materialize" heretical? A: No, but it's incorrect. Ridiculous Views Q: How can we remain calm and collected when we hear illogical and ridiculous viewpoints? A: Even though it's aggravating we shouldn't react rashly.

Avraham Q: Is Avraham a good recommended name? A: Definitely. We'll be fortunate if we manage to attain a small fraction of the enormity of our first patriarch Avraham Avinu.

Wife Beater Q: May a violent husband serve as a representative of the congregation in public prayers? A: Absolutely not, unless he repents.

Honoring Parents Q: In order to avoid friction with my parents may I perform certain Mitzvot leniently? A: Yes, and in extremely difficult situations this is permitted as a first resort.

Wedding Chuppah Q: When a wedding Chuppah is in progress should the guests concentrate on particular thoughts? A: The blessings recited under the Chuppah pertain essentially to the bride and groom who are obligated to listen intently without distraction. The guests are not bound by those blessings. Some people pray for the success and welfare of the couple but they may think general thoughts.

Disrespectful Child Q: How should parents deal with a very disrespectful child? A: 1. Set boundaries. 2. Try to determine what's troubling him and causing his extreme behaviour. 3. Display an abundance of love and affection.

Hashem Decides Q: Does Hashem plan all my life experiences? A: Of course, but along with Hashem's plan we have free choice. Although this seems to be a contradiction we know that Hashem governs over everything including logic and reason. Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from **Rabbi Berel Wein**

Weekly Parsha ACHAREI MOT – KEDOSHIM 5781 Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah reading for this week is a double portion, which together contains the largest number of commandments that appears in any one section of the holy Torah. One question which has challenged Judaism throughout the ages is why do we need so many commandments to fulfill our obligation to be good, kind, and faithful? Is it not sufficient that we understand the general principles as outlined in the Ten Commandments, which permeate all Jewish life and scholarship? Since we are aware of the goal – namely that of being a good, honest, and compassionate human being – shouldn't that realization suffice and not require all of the particular details that make up the bulk of this week's Torah reading. Even though we understand, as any lawyer will tell you, that the devil is in the details, at first glance and even with a superficial understanding, it seems completely superfluous to have these many instructions hurled upon us, to achieve the goal that we are all aware of. By the way, this has always been the contention of some factions in Jewish life through history - that the details of the commandments were not really that important, but as a Jew, it was crucial to be a good person at heart. This was the contention of the ancient Sadducees in second Temple times and continues to be the philosophy of all those groups that deviated from Jewish tradition and observance of the Torah Commandments throughout the ages. It remains, even today, the banner of the non-Orthodox groups that loudly proclaim and justify their essential non-Jewish Jewishness. To them, the details are unnecessary, burdensome and of little value. Just be a good person, they proclaim, and that alone is the essence of Judaism. But human history teaches us differently. As has been famously articulated: the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and good intentions often lead to tyranny over others, and even to murder and genocide. Without the details, how are good intentions to be fulfilled. We cannot rely upon human judgment to guarantee that those good intentions will ever be realized. The worst dictators and murders of the past few centuries such as Napoleon, the Kaiser, and even Hitler and Stalin always proclaimed that they had good intentions for their country, and, in fact, for all of mankind. They maintained that to achieve those good intentions they were entitled to use force and coercion against millions of others, to actualize their good objectives. In our current world society, good intentions alone, without the restraint of the commandments and details, led to the murder of millions of unborn but living fetuses, concentration camps, gulags, the cancel culture, and the tyranny of the majority over the minority, no matter how slight the margin of majority in terms of numbers and popularity. Good intentions without the restraint of details and commandments are, in fact, a danger, and not a boon to human society. Through the Torah commandments, Judaism offers instructions as how to become a good person and maintain a moral life. It teaches us that oftentimes it is the minority, not the majority, that is correct. Even though the goal of being a good and holy person should never be forgotten – for otherwise the observance of the details would be of little value, as is noted by Ramban, that one can be a wicked person while believing oneself to be within the purview of the Torah. It is the balance between the great ultimate goals and the details of how to achieve that, which makes Judaism unique, vibrant, and eternal. This balancing act is the secret of the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people throughout the ages. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim
פרשת אחרי מות - קדושים - תשפ"א

Acharei Mos

בזאת יבוא אהרן אל הקדש בכפר בן בקר לחטאת ואיל לעולה ... ומאת עדת בני ישראל יקח שני שעירי עזים.

With this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary: with a young bull for a sin-offering and a ram for an elevation offering... from the assembly of Bnei Yisrael he shall take two he-goats. (16:3,5)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra* 21:11) state that the three *korbanos*, offerings, that were brought on Yom Kippur represented the three *Avos*, Patriarchs. The young bull that served as a *korban chatas*, sin-offering, represented Avraham *Avinu*. The ram that was used as a *korban olah*, elevation-offering, symbolized Yitzchak *Avinu*. The two he-goats denoted Yaakov *Avinu*. When the *Kohen Gadol* entered the Sanctuary, he did so *b'z'chus*, in the merit of, the three *korbanos* that he brought.

Avraham *Avinu* sacrificed himself, manifesting extreme devotion, for the purpose of bringing a pagan world closer to Hashem. His love for people and his constant acts of *chesed*, lovingkindness, distinguished him in a world that spawned paganism and immorality, a society in which people were devoted to themselves. Yitzchak *Avinu* exemplified *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, for Hashem and His honor. Yaakov *Avinu's* *korban* was different. It demonstrated that one is able to forgo and defer his personal proclivities, to overcome his sense of self, in order to fulfill Hashem's commands or that of the greater good. Yaakov was the epitome of *emes*, truth. He could not tolerate any vestige of falsehood. Yet, when his mother instructed him to act in a less than honest manner in his pursuit of Yitzchak's blessings, he listened to her. Some people would sooner throw themselves into fiery cauldrons than to carry out parental requests, than happily and lovingly accept what their parents have to say and execute what they have asked of them.

Horav Yechiel Weinberg, zl, posits that Yaakov's *korban* is critical to the atonement *Klal Yisrael* seeks on *Yom Kippur*. The first two *korbanos* represent the *middos*, attributes, evinced by Avraham and Yitzchak and are insufficient to effect atonement. To sacrifice oneself for the Creator or for people is important, but inadequate. Avraham's *middah* was *ahavah*, intense love of Hashem. Yitzchak's *middah* was *yirah*, intense fear and awe of Hashem. Thus, what Avraham and Yitzchak did, their ability to sacrifice, was actually intrinsic to who/what they were. Avraham loved; Yitzchak feared. They acted in accordance with their *middos*, their standards of living, their values. They always were afraid, however, that when they had to live outside the box, when Hashem would demand that they exit their comfort zones, so that they were compelled to fear or love not in consonance with their natural tendencies, they would not be able to continue to serve Hashem with such devotion. Avraham and Yitzchak each acted within the parameters of his inherent character. Yaakov was called upon to act out of character.

Nonetheless, notes the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Yaakov's *korban* is third in sequence, because this is not the correct progression of service. A child is not taught to walk backwards, because he will surely stumble and fall. He must follow a sequence that prioritizes what is habitual and conventional and, only then, focus on the iconoclastic. The *Kohen Gadol* enters the *Kodesh Hakodoshim*, Holy of Holies, facing forward. Once the chamber is filled with smoke from the *Ketores*, Incense, he backs out, never turning his face from the *Aron HaKodesh*.

Acting against deep-rooted character requires strength; the more innate the character, the greater the need for inner strength to overcome one's inveterate predilection towards acting in a specific manner. We are confronted with a situation to which we, based upon our nature, would respond in what is probably an acceptable manner. Yet, we go against our grain and act in an unexpected manner, just because "something" told us it was the right thing to do. That one decision can forever alter our approach to life and living. Yaakov *Avinu* was the essence of *emes*; yet, when it was necessary (based upon his mother's instructions), he acted out of character. He did not prevaricate. He did what had to be done, but this is not the way in which he usually acted. The following story is about a man who acted out of character. It is not an "out of this world" dynamite story, but it imparts a powerful lesson which might (should) cause us to think twice when we must

make a decision to do something which we consider irregular or even idiosyncratic, but, if it makes a difference in someone's life, we will do it.

The author of the story used to drive a taxi for a living. He had a pickup at 2:30 A.M. in an area not known for its security. He pulled up to a building that was entirely dark except for one light in the window on the first floor. Under such circumstances, most cabbies would honk once and give the fare two minutes to acknowledge his presence, then drive away. This driver was different. Many of his regular fares were very poor and relied on taxis as their only means of transportation. Therefore, he always got out of the taxi and walked to the door. The passenger might be a person in need. He went to the door of the apartment, knocked, and heard, "Just a minute," expressed by someone with a frail voice. He heard something being dragged across the floor.

The cabbie waited for a few minutes until the door opened. A small woman in her mid-80's stood there, dressed in a simple print dress, wearing a pill box hat on her head with a veil over her eyes, like someone from the 1940's. She had a small, nylon suitcase by her side. Her apartment did not appear lived in, as all the furniture was covered in sheets. No clocks, pictures, mirrors or knick-knacks were on the walls. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.

The woman looked up at the driver and asked, "Would you be so kind as to carry my bag out to the car?" The cabbie took the bag and returned to assist the woman. During this entire time, she kept on thanking him for assisting her. "It is nothing," he said. "I always help my passengers. I like to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother to be treated."

Once they entered the cab, she gave him the address. She then asked, "Can you drive me through downtown?" "Sure," he said, "but it is not the shortest route. I can make it much quicker if I take the regular route."

The elderly woman said, "I am not in a rush. I am on my way to a hospice." She continued speaking. Meanwhile, the cabbie looked in the rearview mirror and noticed that her eyes were glistening. "I no longer have any family left. The doctor says I do not have much longer to live."

At that moment, the cabbie reached over, shut the meter, and asked, "What route would you like me to take?" For the next two hours, they drove all over the city as she reminisced about growing up, getting married, all the while pointing to the various neighborhoods in which she had once lived. Then she said, "I am tired. It is time. Let us go to the hospice." He pulled up at the door and two orderlies greeted her. She was expected.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked. "Nothing," he answered. "If anything, I owe you."

"You gave an old woman a moment of joy. Thank you."

Now: Had that woman been picked up by an angry driver, one who wanted to hurry and pick up another fare, it would have ended much differently for her. The driver was within his rights to pick her up, drive her to her destination via the shortest route and move on. He did not, because he overcame his natural tendency. It was probably one of the most important decisions he had ever made in his life, because he gave an old woman the opportunity to feel some comfort and joy during one of the most difficult times of her life. It is not necessary to underscore the need for each of us to mull over the story and ask what we would have done, how we would have acted. Hashem grants us challenges which are actually opportunities for improving ourselves. The next time such an opportunity arises, remember this story.

Kedoshim

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְבְּךָ

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. (19:17)

The Torah alludes to one reason why one should not hate a fellow Jew: he is your brother; brothers do not hate. Clearly, this is a prohibitive *mitzvah* which, for "some reason," people have difficulty observing. *Chazal (Talmud Yoma* 9:B) teach that Hashem destroyed the *Bais HaMikdash Rishon*, First Temple, because people transgressed the three cardinal sins of murder,

adultery and idol worship. During the period of the Second Temple, the generation studied Torah diligently, observed *mitzvos*, and performed *gemilus chasadim*, acts of loving kindness; yet, because they fell short in their interpersonal relationships, due to *sinaas chinam*, baseless hatred, Hashem destroyed the Temple. In his commentary to *Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:1, the *Pnei Moshe* adds: *Kol middah tovah hayah lahem*, “They possessed every good character trait.” They exemplified character refinement, but they loved money, and, as a result, hated anyone who infringed upon them. This idea that *sinaas chinam* is possible, even in the best of people, is underscored by the *Maharsha* (commentary to *Yoma* 9b).

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that even one who has achieved *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, status, possesses refined character traits and is involved in acts of *chesed* is not spared from the sin of baseless hatred. We think that one who studies Torah is protected from such a sin, that a person who devotes himself to *gemilus chasadim* could never be a victim of such egregious sin, but, we see from here, that it is not true. The only way to save oneself from falling into the abyss of hatred is awareness that no one is protected from this sin. Therefore, one must always be on guard to see to it that he does not become one of the victims of this sin.

While the above is apparently true, we still require (some form of) a rationale to make sense of this anomaly. Why do Torah and *chesed* not transform and protect a person from this scourge? I think the answer lies in the invariable response when one is questioned about why he hates: “I do not hate, and anyone whom I hate really deserves being hated.” In other words, we deny hating. It is always the other fellow who hates – for a reason which he cannot fathom. So, two people refuse to speak to one another. Why? Because the other fellow hates him. He has no problem with him. The other fellow seems to have the problem. When we ask the same question of the “antagonist,” the response will invariably be the same: “I do not hate him. He hates me.”

We justify our personal animus towards others whom we feel are deserving of this ignominious “honor.” For many, the sin of *sinaas chinam* is the “other guy’s” fault. “If you want to end *sinaas chinam* – agree with me!” has become the clarion call of all the purveyors of hate. We are quick to point out the flaws of others whom we blame for the needless, baseless, unwarranted strife, but, until we are willing to accept or share in the blame, the reason that Hashem destroyed the Second *Bais HaMikdash* will sadly prevail.

We find another form of *chinam* in *Midrashic* literature: *bechiyah shel chinam*. *Klal Yisrael* wept the night the *meraglim* returned with a slanted report concerning *Eretz Yisrael*. *Klal Yisrael* became stricken with fear and cried their hearts out. Hashem said, “You cried a *bechiyah shel chinam*, unwarranted weeping; I will give you a *bechiyah l’doros*, weeping for generations.” Hashem was alluding to *Tisha B’Av*, our national day of mourning, when we cry over the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash* and all of the grief that resulted from it. Why were their tears considered a *bechiyah shel chinam*? They certainly thought they were crying for a valid reason. This was their mistake. Hashem had promised to protect them. He had “proven” Himself time and again – and now they had the temerity to cry? This is what is meant by *chinam*. Just because you think it is bad – does not mean that it is bad. Likewise, just because I think that someone deserves my hatred does not justify my actions. Hashem determines everything that occurs in our lives. If someone hurt us – it is because Hashem used him as His agent. That is all he is: Hashem’s agent. If you have an issue, take it up with Hashem. To blame a person is baseless and unwarranted.

ואהבת לרעך כמוך

You shall love your fellow as yourself. (19:18)

To love a fellow Jew as one loves himself is the fundamental rule of the Torah. According to *Ramban*, this *mitzvah* enjoins us to want others to have the same measure of success and prosperity that we want for ourselves. Obviously, this is not in consonance with human nature, whereby one’s ego

always wants a little more or a little better for himself. He does not begrudge his fellow’s success – as long as he has more. How do we define love? How do we understand loving our fellow on the same level as we love ourselves? We find the word love used in describing Yitzchak *Avinu*’s love for Rivkah *Imeinu*. The Torah writes: “And Yitzchak brought her (Rivkah) into his mother, Sarah’s, tent, and he took Rivkah, and she became his wife, and he loved her” (*Bereishis* 24:67). The Torah narrative makes it clear: their love was the result of their relationship – not the precursor. Yitzchak *Avinu* beheld Rivkah’s character, her sanctity, her ability to bring back what had been lost when his mother had passed away. Once he understood her greatness, he loved her. Cognition led to love.

To love one’s fellow as one loves himself means: Just as I love myself, ie, I find every reason to rationalize my behavior and ameliorate it positively, so, too, should I act toward my fellow. One does not find fault in oneself, because one always finds a way to make sense out of his own behavior. Do the same for your fellow. Understand him as you understand yourself – that is love.

The love that one should maintain towards his fellow Jew is crucial to one’s ability to positively influence a brother who has strayed from religious observance. In other words, outreach is not only about a deep-rooted love and sense of responsibility for Judaism, but rather, about innate brotherly love for each and every Jew. In his commentary to *Parashas Chukas*, the *Me’Or Einayim* (cited by *Imrei Shammat*) writes: “Even if one observes an evil trait or activity committed by his fellow, he should hate only the evil within him, but the portion of him which still retains his *kedushah*, holiness, he should love with his entire heart and soul. Our Master, the holy *Baal Shem Tov*, teaches: ‘A true *tzaddik gamur*, complete, perfectly righteous Jew, who does not possess evil within himself, will not see/perceive any evil within any man. However, one who notices evil within others is looking at a mirror. If his face is filthy, he sees a filthy face; if his face is pristine, he sees only clean.’” Likewise, when we look at our fellow – *kamocho* – as yourself. Your brother is the mirror image of yourself. What you see in him is actually a reflection of yourself. One does not hate himself (unless he has deeper issues which he refuses to acknowledge), likewise, he should find every reason to love his brother. This is how we reach out to our estranged brothers and sisters: with pure love for them.

The *Seret-Vishnitzer Rebbe, zl*, the *Mekor Baruch*, was known for his extraordinary *ahavas Yisrael*, welcoming each and every Jew as if he were his own son. He showed the greatest care and concern for his *chassidim*, sharing in their moments of joy, and grieving with them during their times of pain. The *Rebbe* reached out to the unaffiliated and estranged as a friend, as a brother, never condescendingly, never demanding, only with genuine love. A wealth of stories abound which demonstrate his passion for Jews and Judaism. I have selected one that demonstrates his unique method of outreach: non-judgmental, brotherly love.

The following signature story was related by a distinguished Israeli physician, who, as a youth, was an orphan taken in by the Diskin orphanage, which was the only religiously observant facility of its kind. Unfortunately, this orphan, as so many others, carried so much pathological baggage on his shoulders that many of them could not sustain the demands that come with religious observance. As a result, he went out into the world as a secular-oriented Jew. This physician hailed from a family which was attached to the Karlin-Stolin *Chassidic* community, but, when one is an orphan with little to no direction, history means very little. At the age of eighteen, he left the orphanage and returned to Haifa from where his family had originated and soon became a totally secular Jew. He did not hate, he just did not care; he had interest in neither Judaism nor its people. His free-fall to complete secularism was quick – descending into the abyss is much quicker than climbing out of it.

One Friday night he was bored, which is not novel when one’s life has no spiritual purpose, such that materialism and fun become one’s mainstay and focus. He heard that a *Rebbe* was in town – the *Seret-Vishnitz Rebbe*. He got

into his car and drove to where the *Rebbe* was conducting his Friday night *tish*, meal. When he arrived at the *shul* and saw the many *chassidim* crowding around the *Rebbe*, he began to have pangs of guilt. After all, he did hail from a fine *Chassidic* family, and here he was coming to the *Rebbe* by car – desecrating *Shabbos* without shame, without impunity. He was extremely upset and decided to work his way up to the *Rebbe* and share his guilt with him.

“*Rebbe*, I am miserable. I came here by car. I was blatantly *mechalel Shabbos*, desecrated *Shabbos*. I cannot stop myself.”

The *Rebbe* embraced him with both hands and declared loudly, “My child, come when you want and how you want. You are always welcome here.”

The doctor remembered those words. The *Rebbe* told him that he could come whenever and however. This meant that he accepted him, even as a *mechalel Shabbos*. The *Rebbe* was doing exactly what the doctor least expected him to do. He thought that the *Rebbe* would reject him and curse him for desecrating *Shabbos*. Instead, he embraced him and invited him to return. How did the *Rebbe* prevent his continued *chillul Shabbos*? He hugged him. He treated him like his child. *Kamocha*. Love each Jew as yourself. Today, the doctor and all of the doctor’s descendants are fully observant, wholly committed to *Yiddishkeit*, as a result of his being treated not as a subject, but as family.

Va’ani Tefillah

כי באור פניך נתת לנו – *Ki b’Or Panecha nasata lanu*. For with the light of Your Countenance You gave us...

Salvation, redemption, is meaningful only if one has the intellectual capacity to understand its meaning and purpose and the role that he plays in it. Redemption that just passes over one’s head is not lasting and obviously not meaningful. Peace filled with confusion has little effect. Life, for that matter, without direction, goals and purpose is mere existence. We pray that Hashem enlighten us and allow for us to recognize what He wants from us and the role we individually play in the larger scheme. Intellectual enlightenment can be achieved only through intense Torah study, an endeavor that expands one’s mind. Through Torah, Hashem illuminates our mind and gives us the means to see through life’s ambiguities and maintain clarity amid confusion. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, explains that when Hashem “shines the light of His countenance upon us,” He endows us with the ability to understand His ways and to recognize our personal mission in achieving His goals for the world.

לזכר נשמת חיים יששכר בן יהואל זאדל דוב ז"ל נפטר ג' אייר

Feigenbaum, Richman and Finkelstein Families

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Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

Rav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Sima Mindel bas Yitzchak Gershon Woolf. “May her Neshama have an Aliya!”

The Essential Torah

You should not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you should love your fellow as yourself; I am Hashem (19:18).

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the well-known statement of the Tanna R’ Akiva regarding the end of this verse (“you should love your fellow as yourself”); “This is a great rule of the Torah” (See *Toras Kohanim* 4:12). The implication of R’ Akiva’s statement is that this *posuk* somehow encapsulates the very essence of the message of the Torah. R’ Shimon Ben Azzai, one of R’ Akiva’s students, poses a stunning question to R’ Akiva’s teaching: What if one does not like himself?

Meaning, if one allows himself to be embarrassed and treated poorly by

others is he now permitted to treat others in the same manner? Ben Azzai therefore uses another verse in the Torah (that of Hashem creating man) as his “great rule of the Torah” (See *Bereishis Rabba* 24:7).

Before we enter into a discussion of these two philosophic principles of Torah, let us digress for a moment and marvel at the breathtaking analysis of human psychology of our great Torah scholars from two thousand years ago. While many continents were filled with depraved and downright disgusting cultures of human behavior (cannibalism, for example, springs to mind), our ancestors were carefully considering the effects of low self-esteem on societal behavior. It is truly remarkable.

In order to begin to approach a suitable answer to Ben Azzai’s question on R’ Akiva, we must first examine a very enigmatic statement of Hillel. The Talmud (*Shabbos* 31a) relates the well-known story of the gentile who came to Hillel and asked that he be converted to Judaism with the sole caveat that Hillel teaches him the entire Torah while he stands on one foot. Hillel taught him the now famous statement, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow” and then converted him.

On the surface, Hillel’s statement is quite problematic; clearly, Hillel is basing his teaching on the verse in this week’s parsha: “You should love your fellow as yourself.” But why did Hillel feel obligated to restate the Torah’s clear instruction of how we must treat someone? Furthermore, (and quite incredibly) he chose to make it a negative mandate! In other words, reinterpreting this obligation of how to treat a fellow Jew as what one may not do seems to be extremely limiting. What compelled Hillel to make this modification on “a great principle of the Torah”?

Not surprisingly, Hillel’s interpretation is actually quite brilliant. Anytime we do something for someone else, for example, an act of kindness or compassion, we have an innate feeling of satisfaction. Thus, doing something for someone makes us feel good. On the other hand, if we have a juicy piece of gossip about someone that we want to share or if we wish to insult someone who has hurt us, exercising self-restraint doesn’t give us any pleasure — quite the opposite, in these cases holding our tongue makes us feel like we want to explode.

Hillel is telling us that the true barometer for loving your friend isn’t what we are willing to do for him, because usually doing something for him is also doing something for ourselves. The true barometer of “loving your fellow” is treating him as we would want to be treated (e.g. just as we don’t want people saying gossip about us we shouldn’t gossip about others). That is a much harder plateau to achieve.

This insight also answers Ben Azzai’s question on R’ Akiva – “what if a person has low self-esteem?” The essence of low self-esteem is a person’s perception of themselves vis-a-vis others. This *posuk*’s obligation of doing for others is based on the principle of being God like. This is why the end of the verse states, “I am Hashem.”

Hashem’s purpose in the creation of the world was to do kindness for mankind by creating the world and giving mankind a reality of existence. The key to resolving one’s own issues of low self-esteem is in becoming God like and doing for others – solely for their sake. Recognizing that one has the ability to give a sense of reality to others by helping them, innately gives one a sense of fulfillment and establishes self worth. This *posuk* is precisely the antidote to low self-esteem!

Cold or Compassionate?

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon’s two sons... Speak to Aharon your brother – he may not always come into the Kodesh within the Paroches...and he will not die... (16:1-2).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem is likened to a doctor that is giving advice to his patient: “Do not eat cold food, sleep in a damp chilly place, so that you will not die like so and so perished.” This is the reason the Torah gives the context of Hashem speaking to Moshe “after the death of Aharon’s two sons.”

In other words, Hashem asks Moshe to instruct Aharon that he must carefully abide by the rules of entry into the Kodesh or else he will die in the

same manner that his sons died.

This is difficult to comprehend. Losing a child is among the most traumatic experiences a person can ever endure. Aharon lost not one, but two children; men who were the incoming leaders of the generation (they were considered greater than Moshe and Aharon – see Midrash Tanchuma, beginning of Parshas Shemini).

Aharon's loss was obviously profound. It hardly seems necessary to remind Aharon to be careful not to perish in the same manner that his children died. This would be akin to telling a person who lost his children to a drunk driver to be mindful of drunk drivers. In fact, it seems rather heartless to bring it up at all. What message is Hashem trying to convey?

A careful reading of the verses and Chazal statements gives us the answers. Hashem doesn't tell Moshe to tell Aharon that if he doesn't obey the rules of entering the Kodesh he is going to die. Rather, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct Aharon his brother not to enter the Kodesh improperly so that he doesn't die.

Therefore, Hashem isn't telling him that if he doesn't obey Him he's going to die; rather, Hashem is almost pleadingly with Aharon not to go in there at the wrong time so that he doesn't die. Hashem is expressing compassion for Aharon, and essentially telling him not to do something that is harmful to himself.

This is why Chazal compare Hashem to a doctor. This seems rather unusual as Hashem is our king, and if we don't obey him he has every right to punish us. Practically speaking, it makes more sense to compare Hashem to a king. So why do Chazal compare Hashem to a doctor?

Chazal are teaching us that Hashem is telling us what is good for us, just as a doctor who cares about his patient would advise him. This isn't about disobeying Hashem's commandments, this is about Hashem showing us that he cares about us. So too, by Aharon, Hashem is asking him to behave properly so that he won't die. He isn't telling Aharon not to behave like his sons, Hashem is telling Aharon, "I care about you and I don't want you to die."

Did You Know...

In this week's (double) parsha, we are forbidden from crossbreeding two types of animals, as well as seeds (Vayikra 19:19). Ramban (ad loc) writes that there is a simple explanation for these restrictions. When a person mixes animals or plants he indicates that the species that Hashem created isn't sufficient, and wants to create a new species. He further explains that Hashem created a certain number of species, and when a person tampers with that number, he has tampered with the order of the universe. However, Ramban brings a counterpoint (Bereishis 1:28) when he says that this passuk allows man to perform invasive acts in Hashem's world, such as removing metals from the ground, on the basis that it's "conquering the world."

So we began to wonder about modern ways of tampering with the world, and the halachic ramifications thereof. Naturally, this led us to superficially examine the discussion on cloning. In other words, is cloning more similar to invasive acts that are permitted under "conquering the world," or is it considered "tampering with the order in the universe" and should be prohibited?

Cloning is a complicated scientific process, through which researchers remove a mature somatic cell, such as a skin cell, from an animal that they wish to copy. They then transfer the DNA of the animal into an egg cell, which has had its own DNA removed. The egg is then allowed to develop into an early-stage embryo in a test-tube and is then implanted into the womb of an adult female animal. Ultimately, the adult female gives birth to an animal that has the same genetic make up as the animal that donated the cell. This young animal is referred to as a clone.

(Just as an aside, the hashkafic questions about human cloning is a huge topic that is beyond the scope of this article and, frankly, we don't understand it anyway.) The argument against animal cloning, articulated by Rav Yosef Sholom Eliashiv (quoted in Torah U'madda journal 9:195) and Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Teshuvos Tzitz Eliezer 15:45:4) is that it violates

the spirit of the Torah, and both strongly object to it. This would seem to make sense, as it would certainly seem to be defying the natural order of Hashem's universe.

However, Rabbi J. David Bleich points out that that the halacha could potentially approve of some products of cloning if governments throughout the world strictly monitor and control cloning procedures to ensure that it is used only for moral purposes. This also seems to be supported by Meiri (on Sanhedrin 67b) who says that anything done naturally, even making animals asexual, is permitted and not sorcery.

Something to consider: R' Chanina and R' Oshaya (Sanhedrin 65b), using the Sefer Yetzirah, would create a young calf every Erev Shabbos and eat it. Obviously, this seems to be a legit way of creating an animal, albeit not exactly typical, and perhaps sounds similar to cloning in that it wasn't created "naturally." In addition, the preceding Gemara (ad loc) states that Rava created a Golem (also using Sefer Yetzirah), which may or may not have a bearing on cloning humans.