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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the very well-known commandments that appears in this week's reading of the Torah is the injunction not to place a stumbling block in front of someone who cannot see. Interestingly enough, Rashi in commenting upon and in explaining this commandment, does not treat it literally.

The Torah does not deal with people who are so evil as to purposely and knowingly place a stumbling block before someone who is unable to see. Rather, the Rabbis interpreted the words to apply to situations where one's own bias, prejudice, financial interest or social status misleads someone who has approached him or her for advice on an issue.

If I am interested in buying a piece of real estate and I am in the real estate business, and someone approaches me for advice as to whether to purchase that exact piece of real estate, one is forbidden to advise him incorrectly to gain the financial advantage for himself. This is a rather blatant example of how the self-interest of one person can cause an unsuspecting other person who is unaware of the self-interests of the person from whom he is seeking advice. One seeking the advice is blind to the prejudice and self-interest of the person granting the advice and invokes the proverbial stumbling block placed before the person seeking direction. In the canons of ethics that exist in legal and related professions, such behavior is grounds for the accusation of malfeasance and intentional malpractice.

In our complicated and stressful society there have arisen numerous professions devoted to giving advice to others and receiving a fee for so doing. Such professions as financial planners, estate managers and programmers, therapists for both mental and physical wounds, marriage and divorce counselors and other areas in which current society is populated, if not even dominated by these advice givers. No one can expect perfection from another human being and many times the advice or planning that is suggested and adopted may turn out to be destructive. While the Torah does not expect perfection from those from whom we seek advice, it does expect honesty and transparency. There always is a tinge of self-interest on the part of the counselor or therapist involved. After all, this is the manner in which that person makes a living. Yet, as far as humanly possible, the Torah does demand objectivity, fairness, and intelligence when giving such advice, whether it be from a professional in the field or even from a friend or neighbor.

We are repeatedly warned not to volunteer advice to others in areas where we are not requested to, or if we are not expert in those fields. People tend to invest spiritual leaders with knowledge that they may not really possess. It is dangerous and an enormous responsibility to give advice to others. In biblical times, prophecy was available but in our

world it no longer exists. Both the person seeking advice and the one granting such advice should be very careful not to create the stumbling block that will cause the 'blind man' to fall.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL

KEDOSHIM • 5779, 5782

From Priest to People

Something fundamental happens at the beginning of this parsha and the story is one of the greatest, if rarely acknowledged, contributions of Judaism to the world.

Until now, Vayikra has been largely about sacrifices, purity, the Sanctuary, and the Priesthood. It has been, in short, about a holy place, holy offerings, and the elite and holy people – Aaron and his descendants – who minister there. Suddenly, in chapter 19, the text opens up to embrace the whole of the people and the whole of life:

The Lord spoke to Moses: "Speak to all the community of Israel. Say: 'Be holy, for I am holy; I, the Lord your God.'" Lev. 19:1–2

This is the first and only time in Leviticus that so inclusive an address is commanded. The Sages explained this to mean that the contents of the chapter were proclaimed by Moses to a formal gathering of the entire nation (hakhel). It is the people as a whole who are commanded to "be holy", not just an elite group of priests. It is life itself that is to be sanctified, as the chapter goes on to make clear. Holiness is to be made manifest in the way the nation makes its clothes and plants its fields, in the way justice is administered, workers are paid, and business conducted. The vulnerable – the deaf, the blind, the elderly, and the stranger – are to be afforded special protection. The whole society is to be governed by love, without resentments or revenge.

What we witness here, in other words, is the radical democratisation of holiness. All ancient societies had priests. We have encountered four instances in the Torah thus far of non-Israelite priests: Malchizedek, Abraham's contemporary, described as a Priest of God Most High; Potiphara, Joseph's father-in-law; the Egyptian Priests as a whole, whose land Joseph did not nationalise; and Yitro, Moses' father-in-law, a Midianite Priest. The priesthood was not unique to Israel, and everywhere it was an elite. Here for the first time, we find a code of holiness directed to the people as a whole. We are all called on to be holy.

In a strange way, though, this comes as no surprise. The idea, if not the details, had already been hinted at. The most explicit instance comes in the prelude to the great covenant-making ceremony at Mount Sinai when God tells Moses to say to the people:

“Now, if you faithfully heed My Voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasure among all the peoples, although the whole earth is Mine. A kingdom of priests and a holy nation you shall be to Me.”

Ex. 19:5–6

Meaning, a kingdom all of whose members are to be in some sense priests, and a nation that is in its entirety holy.

The first intimation is much earlier still, in the first chapter of Genesis, with its monumental assertion:

“Let Us make humankind in Our image, in Our likeness.”

So God created humankind in His own image: in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Gen. 1:26–27

What is revolutionary in this declaration is not that a human being could be in the image of God. That is precisely how kings of Mesopotamian city states and Pharaohs of Egypt were regarded. They were seen as the representatives, the living images, of the gods. That is how they derived their authority. The Torah’s revolution is the statement that not some but all humans share this dignity. Regardless of class, colour, culture, or creed, we are all in the image and likeness of God.

Thus was born the cluster of ideas that, though they took many millennia to be realised, led to the distinctive culture of the West: the non-negotiable dignity of the human person, the idea of human rights, and eventually, the political and economic expressions of these ideas – liberal democracy on the one hand, and the free market on the other.

The point is not that these ideas were fully formed in the minds of human beings during the period of biblical history. Manifestly, this is not so. The concept of human rights is a product of the seventeenth century. Democracy was not fully implemented until the twentieth. But already in Genesis 1 the seed was planted. That is what Jefferson meant when he wrote:

God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the Gift of God?[1]

The irony is that these three texts – Genesis 1, Exodus 19:6, and Leviticus 19 – are all spoken in the priestly voice Judaism calls *Torat Kohanim*. [2] On the face of it, Priests were not egalitarian. They all came from a single tribe, the Levites, and from a single family within the tribe – that of Aaron. To be sure, the Torah tells us that this was not God’s original intention. Initially it was to have been the firstborns – those who were saved from the last of the Ten Plagues – who were charged with special holiness as the ministers of God. It was only after the sin of the Golden Calf, in which only the tribe of Levi did not participate, that the change was made. Even so, the priesthood would have been an elite, a role reserved specifically for firstborn males. So deep is the concept of equality written into

monotheism that it emerges precisely from the priestly voice – from which we would least expect it.

The reason is this: religion in the ancient world was, not accidentally but essentially, a defence of hierarchy. With the development, first of agriculture, then of cities, what emerged were highly stratified societies with a ruler on top, surrounded by a royal court, beneath which was an administrative elite, and at the bottom an illiterate mass that was conscripted from time to time either as an army or as a *corvée*, a labour force used in the construction of monumental buildings.

What kept the structure in place was an elaborate doctrine of a heavenly hierarchy whose origins were told in myth, whose most familiar natural symbol was the sun, and whose architectural representation was the pyramid or ziggurat, a massive building broad at the base and narrow at the top. The gods had fought and established an order of dominance and submission. To rebel against the earthly hierarchy was to challenge reality itself. This belief was universal in the ancient world. Aristotle thought that some were born to rule, others to be ruled. Plato constructed a myth in his *Republic* in which class divisions existed because the gods had made some people with gold, some with silver, and others with bronze. This was the “noble lie” that had to be told if a society was to protect itself against dissent from within.

Monotheism removes the entire mythological basis of hierarchy. There is no order among the gods because there are no gods, there is only the one God, Creator of all. Some form of hierarchy will always exist: armies need commanders, films need directors, and orchestras, conductors. But these are functional, not ontological. They are not a matter of birth. So it is all the more impressive to find the most egalitarian sentiments coming from the world of the Priest, whose religious role was a matter of birth.

The concept of equality we find in the Torah specifically and in Judaism generally is not an equality of wealth: Judaism is not communism. Nor is it an equality of power: Judaism is not anarchy. It is fundamentally an equality of dignity. We are all equal citizens in the nation whose sovereign is God. Hence the elaborate political and economic structure set out in Leviticus, organised around the number seven, the sign of the holy. Every seventh day is free time. Every seventh year, the produce of the field belongs to all, Israelite slaves are to be liberated, and debts released. Every fiftieth year, ancestral land was to return to its original owners. Thus the inequalities that are the inevitable result of freedom are mitigated. The logic of all these provisions is the priestly insight that God, Creator of all, is the ultimate Owner of all:

“And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine. You are merely migrants and visitors to Me. Throughout the land that you possess, you must allow land to be redeemed.”

Lev. 25:23-24

God therefore has the right, not just the power, to set limits to inequality. No one should be robbed of dignity by total poverty, endless servitude, or unrelieved indebtedness.

What is truly remarkable, however, is what happened after the biblical era and the destruction of the Second Temple. Faced with the loss of the entire infrastructure of the holy, the Temple, its Priests, and sacrifices, Judaism translated the entire system of avodah, Divine service, into the everyday life of ordinary Jews. In prayer, every Jew became a Priest offering a sacrifice. In repentance, each became a High Priest, atoning for their sins and those of their people. Every synagogue, in Israel or elsewhere, became a fragment of the Temple in Jerusalem. Every table became an altar, every act of charity or hospitality, a kind of sacrifice.

Torah study, once the speciality of the priesthood, became the right and obligation of everyone. Not everyone could wear the crown of Priesthood, but everyone could wear the crown of Torah. A mamzer talmid chacham, a Torah scholar of illegitimate birth, say the Sages, is greater than an am ha'aretz Kohen Gadol, an ignorant High Priest. Out of the devastating tragedy of the loss of the Temple, the Sages created a religious and social order that came closer to the ideal of the people as "a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" than had ever previously been realized. The seed had been planted long before, in the opening of Leviticus 19:

"Speak to all the community of Israel. Say: 'Be holy, for I am holy; I, the Lord your God.'"

Holiness belongs to all of us when we turn our lives into the service of God, and society into a home for the Divine Presence. That is the moral life as lived by the kingdom of priests: a world where we aspire to come close to God by coming close, in justice and love, to our fellow humans.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:1-20:27)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "You shall love your friend as yourself – I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18)

These five Hebrew words – "You shall love your friend as yourself" – are designated by the renowned Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva as "the greatest rule of the Torah" (J.T. Nedarim 30b); the bedrock of our entire ethical system.

And 50 years after the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Akiva was considered one of the most illustrious of the rabbinical decisors, who led a major Talmudic academy which could boast a student body of tens of thousands.

Indeed, it became the first "yeshivat hesder" in history, whose students fought valiantly against the Roman conquerors, hoping to restore the Holy City of Jerusalem, to enthrone their General Bar Kokhba as King Messiah, to rebuild the Holy Temple and to usher in the time of Redemption.

Alas, the redemption was not to be; the kingdom of Bar Kokhba lasted only three and a half years; Bar Kokhba himself was killed and the aborted Judean rebellion ended in tragic failure.

The Talmud (B.T. Yevamot 62b) records that 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva lost their lives due to askera, an Aramaic term which Rashi explains as a plague of diphtheria; but Rav Hai Gaon maintains much more logically that they died by the sword (sicarii in Greek means "sword") in the Bar Kokhba wars as well as in the Hadrianic persecutions which followed the military defeat. The initial mourning period observed during these days of the counting of the Omer – from the end of Passover until Lag Ba'omer (the 33rd day of the barley offering, when the disciples of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying) – memorializes the death of these valiant young martyrs, so anxious to restore Jewish sovereignty in Judea.

And the Talmud, morally interested in discovering an ethical flaw that might justify the failure of this heroic attempt, maintained that it was "because the students of Rabbi Akiva did not honor each other properly, that they were involved in petty jealousies and rivalries causing them to face their Roman foes from a position of disunity and internal strife (Yevamot, *ibid*).

But how could this be? After all, Rabbi Akiva's major teaching was that "you shall love your friend as yourself – this is the greatest rule of the Torah." Could it be that the foremost Master – Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Akiva, did not succeed in inculcating within his disciples his most important maxim, the one teaching which he considered to be quintessential Torah?

Allow me to suggest a number of responses. First of all, one can say that it was only after the death of the 24,000, and the understanding that the tragedy occurred because of their "causeless animosity" amongst themselves (*sinat hinam*), that Rabbi Akiva began to emphasize loving one's fellow as the greatest rule of the Torah.

Secondly, the Talmud (B.T. Gittin 56b) has Rabbi Akiva apply a shockingly disparaging verse to Rav Yohanan ben Zakkai, who close to seven decades earlier had left the besieged Jerusalem at the 11th hour to stand before Vespasian and trade away sovereignty over Jerusalem and hegemony over the Holy Temple, for the city of Yavne and the Sanhedrin of 71 wise elders: "oft-times God moves wise men backwards and turns their wisdom into foolishness" (Isaiah 44:25).

You must remember that Yohanan ben Zakkai had been the teacher of the two teachers of Rabbi Akiva: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol) and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya. And Rabbi Akiva was not attacking ben Zakkai's ideology but he was rather disparaging his persona, very much *ad hominem*: "God had moved ben Zakkai backwards and transformed his wisdom into foolishness!" No matter how many times Rabbi Akiva might have emphasized "Love your neighbor as yourself,"

this one-time “put-down” of a Torah scholar by Rabbi Akiva unfortunately may have caused his disciples to overlook his general teaching and learn from his harsh words.

Herein lies a crucial lesson for every educator: our students learn not from what we tell them during our formal lessons, but rather from what they see us do and hear us say, even, and especially if, we are speaking off the record.

And finally, when Hillel, a disciple of Rabbi Akiva, is approached by a would-be convert and challenged to teach him the entire Torah “while he stands on one leg,” Hillel responds by rephrasing Rabbi Akiva’s Golden Rule in more practical terms by teaching you what not to do: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. This is the entire Torah; all the rest is commentary; go out and study it...” (B.T. Shabbat 31a) And similarly, the same sage Hillel teaches, “Do not judge your friend until you actually stand in his place” (Mishna Avot 2:5), which is another way of saying that you must not judge your brother unless you had been faced by the same trial he had to face – and had responded differently.

You must love your friend by seeing him and judging him as though you were truly standing in his place.

Perhaps when Rabbi Akiva initially judged Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai’s “deal” with Vespasian, he (Rabbi Akiva) was not in the midst of a brutal and losing battle against Rome; at that earlier time it was comparatively easy for him to criticize ben Zakkai as having given up too much too soon. However, once he himself became involved in what eventually was the tragic debacle of Bar Kokhba against Rome, he very well might have taken back his critical attribution of Isaiah’s verse to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who was certainly vindicated by subsequent Jewish history.

Yes, we must love our friends as we love ourselves, and one of the ways to fulfill this command is by refraining from judging our “friends” until we actually stand in their place.

Shabbat Shalom!

Do You Ever "Slaughter" Another Jew?

Rabbi YY Jacobson

A Strange Talmudic Insight into a Biblical Verse Captures the Sense of Jewish Unity

No Gashes

There is a fascinating verse in this week's Torah portion, Reah:

You are children of the Lord, your G-d. You shall neither cut yourselves nor make any baldness between your eyes, for the dead. (Deut. 14:1)

The custom of many pagans was to cut themselves in demonstration of grief over the death of a loved one. To vent their agony, they would make incisions in their flesh, pull out their hair, and flay their skin. The Torah prohibits this behavior. [1] There must be limits to grief. This is the

meaning of the Hebrew word "sisgodedu," to scrape off the flesh.

The Talmud, however, adds a second meaning to this commandment:

לא תעשו אגודות אגודות-יבמות יג, ב: לא תתגודדו

The Torah is saying: Do not splinter yourself into separate groups. [2] ("Sisgodedu," from the root word "agud" or "agudah," means groups.)

This is a prohibition against the Jewish people becoming divided. Practically, this is a prohibition against one Jewish court dividing into two and guiding the community in a conflicting fashion, [3] creating division and conflict. [4]

One practical example would be this. If a synagogue has a certain tradition of how to pray, one may not come and begin praying in a different tradition without the consent of the community. [5]

But there is something strange here, and the question was first pointed out by the 16th century Jewish sage and leader, Rabbi Yehuda Leow (1512-1607), known as the Maharal, [6] chief Rabbi of Prague (who one of the most influential Jewish personalities of his time, and author of major works on Jewish thought.) The Talmud and the Midrash often present various interpretations for one biblical term or verse; but nowhere do we find two interpretations that are completely disconnected. On the simple level, "sisgodedu" means scraping off your skin. Now the Talmud tells us that it also means, "don't split up into separate groups." How do these two divergent instructions come together in a single word? Why would the Torah communicate such two disparate ideas in one word-lacerating your body and dividing a community?

Or to put it more poignantly and humorously, the sages, it seems, by imposing this second meaning are "violating" the very injunction they are trying to convey. They take a simple word in the verse and they "splinter" its meaning to connote divergent interpretations that seem to lack any common streak?

In words of the Maharal: [7] "Every man of wisdom and understanding will be amazed at the relationship of their [the sages] words with the simple meaning of the text, at a depth that is truly awesome. Yet, the man who is a stranger to this wisdom, will wonder at their unlikely reading of the verse, their words seeming implausible to him."

One Organism

Yet it is here that we can once again gain insight into the depth of Torah wisdom. [8]

The truth is, that the two interpretations are not only not divergent, they are actually one and the same. They both represent the same truth—one on a concrete, physical level; the other on a deeper, spiritual level.

The Torah prohibits us from cutting our skin as a sign of bereavement. Our bodies are sacred; our organism is integrated, precious and holy; we must never harm it. We must not separate even a bit of skin from our flesh. Even difficult moments of grief don't allow us to give up on our

life and on the sacredness and beauty [9] of our bodies. [10]

But that is exactly what we are doing when we allow our people to become splintered. The entire Jewish nation is essentially one single organism. [11] We may number 15 million people, and come from different walks of life, profess extremely different opinions, and behave in opposite ways, but we are essentially like one "super organism." When I cut off a certain Jew from my life, when I cut myself off from a certain Jewish community, I am in truth cutting off part of my own flesh.

When I cut my skin, I am lacerating my body. When I cut you off from me, I am lacerating my soul. Because our souls are one.

Only G-d

I once read the following powerful story.

In the late 18th century, in Eastern Europe, there was a terrible conflict between the Chassidim and their opponents, the Misnagdim, who suspected the Chassidim in heresy and blasphemy. The chief opponent was the Vilna Gaon, the famed Rabbi Elijah (1720-1797), from the Lithuanian city Vilnius, who issued a ban (cherem) against Chassidim. He excommunicated them from the Jewish community. It was a terrible division which continued for decades.

The Misnagdim came to one of the greatest students of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Refael Hakohen Katz, the Rabbi of Hamburg and author of *Toras Yekusiel* (1722-1803), and asked him to sign the ban. He refused. They said: "But your own Rebbe, the Vilna Gaon, signed it, and your Rebbe is like an angel of G-d!" [12]

This was his response:

There is a famous question on the story of the Akeida, the binding of Isaac, in Genesis. G-d instructs Abraham to bring up his son Isaac as an offering. Abraham complies. At the last moment, as he is about to slaughter Isaac, The Torah states: "And a heavenly angel of G-d called out to him, and said: Abraham! Abraham!... And he said: 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, nor do anything to him.'" At the last moment, Isaac is saved.

There is something strange about this story. The instruction to bring Isaac as an offering came directly from G-d. [13] G-d Himself told Abraham to offer his son to Him. Why did the reverse stop-order come from an angel and not from G-d?

The answer, said Reb Refael, is this. If G-d wants to tell you not to touch a Jewish child, sending an angel will suffice. But if He wants you to "slaughter" another Jew, an angel can't suffice! G-d Himself needs to come and tell you to do it. If you are going to "slaughter" another Jew, make sure you hear it from G-d Himself.

To let Isaac live, the instruction could be communicated via an angel. To let Isaac die, G-d needed to show up Himself.

"My Rebbe is an angel of G-d," Reb Refael said. "But I will not sign a ban against another Jew," even when an angel tells me to do so. To "slaughter" a Jew I need to hear it from G-d Himself.

[The source of the above story is *Toras Yechiel* by Rabbi Schlezinger Parshas Vayeira. *Chut Hameshulah*, a biography of the Chasam Sofer, page 27. In the latter the name of the student of the Vilna Gaon is given as Reb Zalman of Valazhin, who was one of the most beloved students of the Vilna Gaon. There he also adds that when the Vilna Gaon heard this response, he himself abstained from any further action against the Chassidim!

It is also interesting to note, that according to many sources, the famed Chafetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, who dedicated his life to increasing Jewish unity, and his works spread among all Jews, was a grandson of Reb Refael of Hamburg.]

Be Careful

Sometimes we get in to fights with people over idealistic reasons. We "slaughter" people-with our words or actions-and we feel that we are acting on behalf of an angel. We feel angelic about our actions.

Be wary, says the Torah! If you are going to cut someone off from your life, you want to hear it from G-d Himself. If not, let it go.

[1] What is the connection between the opening of the verse about our being the children of G-d and the prohibition of gouging ourselves over the death of a loved one?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah is teaching us that death has another dimension to it. It can be compared to a person who sent his son to a faraway land in order to start a business there. The son settled in that place and over time became very close to many fine people there. After many years, the father summoned the son to return home and the son acceded to his wishes. The son is not lost. Those who had grown to know and love him are no longer able to see him, but the son is not lost. On the contrary, the son is returning home to his father. The thought of those friends going ahead and gouging themselves over the agony of the son's departure is unjust. Sadness and a melancholy feeling are in order. Gouging is definitely out. Because "Banim a'tem laHashem Elokaichem," You are children of Hashem your G-d." At death, the person is returning to the Father. The duration of that person's visit to this transient world has come to a close. The time has come to return home. Therefore, "Lo tisgo'd'du," do not gouge yourselves over a death. Reacting in such a way really contradicts our beliefs.

The Chizkuni explains that the basis for the command not to gouge ourselves is that we are the children of Hashem--we are mere children. Do we have an understanding of why we live and why we die? Can we fathom the Divine decisions which determine these occurrences? Do we appreciate the meaning of life? Do we comprehend why a

person is born or why they die? A child does not comprehend the decisions that a mature father makes-and we too are children. Thus, "Lo tisgo'ddu {do not gouge yourselves}." Cf. Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Daas Zekenim, Seforno and Klei Yakar for their explanations in the juxtaposition.

[2] Yevamos 13b

[3] יד: גדידה ושריטה, אחת היא... על-רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה יב, יג המת, בין שרט בידו בין שרט בכלי, לוקה... ובכלל אזהרה זו, שלא יהו שני בתי דינין בעיר אחת, זה נוהג במנהג, וזה נוהג במנהג אחר, שדבר זה גורם למחלוקת גדולה, וכתוב לא תתגודדו, לא תיעשו אגודות אגודות.

[4] The Talmud in Yevamos 13b and 14a discusses the nature of this prohibition. Abaye maintains that Lo Sisgodedu applies when two different batei dinim (courts) in one city issue conflicting rulings. This makes the one Torah that was received at Sinai appear as "two Torahs" (Rashi ibid.) and causes confusion and discord (Rambam). Rava, however, does not object to different batei dinim, even in the same city, issuing contradictory rulings, since it is within the very nature of the Torah that different rulings will be rendered by different schools of thought, as Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel did for many years. In Rava's opinion, the prohibition of Lo Sisgodedu is meant to discourage one beis din from rendering a split decision.

See Kesef Mishnah to Rambam ibid who amends the text so that the Rambam agrees with Rava not Abaya, as is usually the standard in Halacha,

It is interesting to note, that Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef maintains that regarding any halachic issue about which it is well known that there is a difference of opinion, there is no problem of "lo sisgodedu." However, many halachik authorities disagree. A case in point: Everyone knows that many Jews wear tefillin on Chol ha-Moed and many do not. Nevertheless, the Mishnah Berurah quotes from the Artsos HaChaim that you should not allow these two groups to pray together in the same shul; they should pray in different rooms. Otherwise, he notes, it looks like there are "shtei Toros" (two Torahs).

[5] See here for the entire discussion: <http://olamot.net/sites/default/files/pdf/68.pdf>

[6] In his commentary of Gur Aryeh to this verse Deut. 14:1

[7] Beer HaGolah p. 44

[8] I heard this insight from Rabbi Yosef Cheser (Montreal), who heard it from Rabbi Schneur Kotler, the famed dean of the Lakewood Yeshiva, when he once visited Montreal. It was during a Friday night gathering and on the table was the question if Ashkenazic Jews should support a struggling Sephardic school in Montreal.

[9] That is how Rashi explains the reason for the prohibition. Rashi Deut. 14:1

[10] Symbolically, perhaps, scraping of the skin demonstrates a lack of sensitivity that our flesh is part of "us," it is part of our soul. We may not separate the body from its internal soul. When we realize the body is part of

the soul, and that the soul never dies, it alters our perception of death. When we gash our bodies after death, it demonstrates a lack of this awareness.

[11] See Talmud Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4. Cf. Tanya chapter 32. Derech Mitzvosecha Mitzvas Ahavas Yisroel and references noted there.

[12] See Talmud Chagigah 13b that a real Rebbe is like an angel.

[13] Genesis 22:2.

Cutting Corners

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Idolatrous shavers

What does my style of haircut have to do with idolatry?

Question #2: Women shaving

Are women included in the prohibition of shaving?

Question #3: Tweezing my beard

May I tweeze out my facial hairs?

Question #4: Am I square-headed?

Where are my head's corners? My head is round!

Introduction

In two places in the Torah, the mitzvos not to shave the "corners" or "edges" of one's head and beard are discussed. In parshas Kedoshim, the Torah states, "Lo sakifu pe'as roshechem velo sashchis eis pe'as zekanecha, "Do not round the corners of your head, and do not destroy the corners of your beard" (Vayikra 19:27). We should note that the first part of the posuk states sakifu and roshechem, both plural, whereas the latter part of the posuk states tashchis and zekanecha, which are both singular and masculine. This observation will be significant in our forthcoming discussion.

The other place where the Torah discusses the prohibition not to shave is in parshas Emor, where the Torah states, "They should not shave the corners of their beard" (Vayikra 21:5). Just reading these two pesukim already raises questions: What does the Torah mean in referring to the "corners" of your head and beard. I, like most people, have an oval-shaped head that has no straight lines or corners! My barber tells me that my beard is roundish also, so, pray tell, where are the corners of my beard?

Even should we explain the posuk to mean "edges" rather than "corners," it is still unclear. Where are the "edges" of my head, or those of my beard? We will return to these questions shortly.

Shaving and avodah zarah

The Rambam discusses these laws in a place that we might find somewhat unusual -- at the end of Hilchos Avodah Zarah, the laws of idol worship. As he explains himself: "It is prohibited to shave the edges of the head, as the idol worshippers and their priests used to do." Clearly, he understands that this prohibition is linked to the general laws prohibiting idol worship, notwithstanding that these laws apply only to Jews and not to non-Jews, whose

responsibility not to worship idols is the same as that of a Jew.

Similarly, when the Rambam introduces the *lo saaseh* not to shave, he states as follows: “The approach of the priests of idolatry was to shave their beards. Therefore, the Torah forbade shaving the beard.” It is also interesting to note that, although I translated the Rambam as “shaving,” he actually here uses the word *hashchasah*, which, as in the translation of the *posuk* in *parshas Kedoshim* above, means “destroying” the beard.

Both of these statements of the Rambam are unusual. Although he often quotes reasons for *mitzvos* before concluding the laws of that *mitzvah*, he rarely introduces a *mitzvah* with an explanation of the reason for the *mitzvah*. Here, he obviously felt that there was a reason to do so, which provoked other *rishonim* to take issue with him, as we will soon see. It is fascinating to note that today there are idolatrous practices that involve shaving the sides of the head in a way somewhat reminiscent of the Rambam’s description. It is also interesting to note that the Yiddish word for a priest, “*galach*,” is derived from the word *giluach*, shaving.

Women and hair corners

The two *mitzvos*, “rounding” the head and “destroying” the edges of the beard, apply only to men and not to women, but where does the Torah teach this? The question is even stronger, since neither of these *mitzvos* is timebound, and they are both *mitzvos lo saaseh*, prohibitions of the Torah. The general rule is that women are exempt only from timebound positive *mitzvos* (*mitzvos aseih*) and not from *mitzvos lo saaseh*, nor from *mitzvos* that are not timebound!

To answer this last question, let us quote the Mishnah, which states, “Men are obligated and women are exempt from positive timebound *mitzvos* (*mitzvas aseih shehazeman grama*). Men and women are equally obligated to observe positive *mitzvos* that are not timebound (*mitzvas aseih shelo hazeman grama*). Men and women are equally obligated to observe all prohibitions (*lo saaseh*), except for “Don’t round (*bal takif*),” “Don’t destroy (*bal tashchis*),” and “Don’t become *tamei* to the dead (*bal tetamei lameisim*)” (*Kiddushin* 29a).

Thus, we are taught that there are three *mitzvos lo saaseh* that are discriminatory – they apply only to men, but not to women. In other words, male *kohanim* may not become *tamei* to a human corpse, but women who are wives or daughters of a *kohein* (called *kohanos* in numerous places) may become *tamei*. Male Jews are prohibited from “rounding out” the “edges” of their heads, but women are exempt from any prohibition of “rounding out” the “edges” of their heads. And male Jews are prohibited from “destroying” the “edges” of their beards, whereas women are exempt from any prohibition of “destroying” the “edges” of their unwanted facial hairs.

We do not yet know why these *mitzvos* should be exceptions and not apply to women. The Gemara asks (*Kiddushin* 35b), “What is the hermeneutic basis for these rulings?” In other words, how do we see in the Written Torah that this is true, based on the thirteen *midos* of Rabbi Yishmael.

I will note that the Gemara is not questioning why these three *mitzvos* are exceptions. This we know via our *mesorah*, the Torah *she’be’al peh*. The Gemara’s question is how are these laws derived from the Torah *shebiksav* (see Rambam, Introduction to Commentary on the Mishnah).

The relevant passage of Gemara explains that the law that a *kohein* may not become *tamei* through contact with the dead applies only to men and not to women is clearly implied in the *posuk* (in *parshas Emor*), where it states: “Speak to the *kohanim* who are the sons of Aharon,” implying that the prohibition applies only to the male descendants of Aharon, but not to his female progeny. However, from where in the verse would we know that the two prohibitions of rounding the head and destroying the beard apply only to men? The Gemara first explains how we know that the prohibition against destroying the beard applies only to men. The proof for this returns us to the observation we made above: When the Torah states, *Lo sakifu pe’as roshechem velo tashchis eis pe’as zekanecha*, “Do not round the corners of your head, and do not destroy the corners of your beard,” the beginning of the *posuk* is plural, whereas the latter part is masculine singular. This change and emphasis implies that *lo tashchis eis pe’as zekanecha*, which translates, “You (male, singular) are not to destroy the corners of your beard” applies only to men. (This is not the only approach mentioned in the Gemara, but it is the clearest.) The Gemara also demonstrates the hermeneutic source why the *lo saaseh* of *Lo sakifu pe’as roshechem*, “Do not round the corners of your head,” also applies only to men, but not to women.

Tweezing my beard

At this point, let us examine one of our opening questions: “May I tweeze out my facial hairs?” We have already learned that a woman is permitted to do this, but we do not know what the *halacha* is regarding a man. In this context, we should study the Mishnah in *Makkos* (20a), in which the *tanna kamma* rules that the prohibition is violated *min haTorah* only by shaving with a razor, whereas Rabbi Eliezer prohibits *min haTorah* using either a *malkeit* or a *rehitni*. What are these two instruments? According to many *rishonim*, a *malkeit* is a pair of tweezers, and the word’s root *lelakeit* indeed can be translated as “to tweeze” (*Bartenura*, *Makkos* 3:5; however, cf. Rashi, *Shabbos* 97a). *Rehitni* is understood by most *rishonim* to mean a plane or similar implement, which has a single blade as sharp as a razor, but is meant for purposes other than shaving (Rashi, *Shabbos* 48b, 58b, 97a; Rambam Commentary and *Bartenura*, *Makkos* 3:5). Notwithstanding that the *rishonim*

differ regarding the correct identification of malkeit and rehitni, they appear to agree regarding the halachic issues that result.

At the beginning of this article, we noted that there are two pesukim banning shaving, one in parshas Kedoshim, which prohibits “destroying” your beard, and the other in parshas Emor, which prohibits shaving. The Gemara (Makkos 21a) explains the tanna kamma to mean that the two pesukim, together, mean that the lo saaseh applies only when someone uses an implement that is both a normal way of shaving and destroys. Although both tweezers and planes will “destroy” the beard, the Gemara explains that neither is commonly used to shave, and, therefore, they are excluded from this prohibition, at least min haTorah. Rabbi Eliezer contends that although they are not the most common shaving instruments, it is still called shaving when they are used and, therefore, it is forbidden min haTorah to shave with them (Rivan ad loc.). Although Rabbi Eliezer disagrees with the tanna kamma, since the majority opinion rules that these two instruments are permitted, this is the halachic conclusion.

The Gemara then makes a distinction between scissors, on the one hand, and tweezers and planes on the other, explaining that even Rabbi Eliezer rules that this prohibition of the Torah does not include cutting the beard with scissors, since this does not “destroy” your beard. Since Rabbi Eliezer rules that scissors do not violate the prohibition of shaving the beard, certainly the tanna kamma agrees. Therefore, this lo saaseh is not violated when cutting beard hairs with tweezers, planes or scissors. We should note that many authorities, nevertheless, prohibit shaving using these items, for a variety of different reasons, which we will explain in a future article.=

One blade

Even when using scissors or a beard trimmer, one must be extremely careful not to shave the beard only with the lower blade of the scissors, since this is halachically the same as cutting with a razor and prohibited min haTorah (Rema, Yoreh Deah 181:10). In other words, scissors’ action is not a razor only because the cutting uses both blades. Should one blade of the scissors be used by itself, it is functioning as a razor – the upper blade may be hanging on for the ride, but the lower blade is shaving as a razor does.

Similarly, it is prohibited min haTorah to shave using a flintstone (which was apparently common at one time in history), since this is equivalent to shaving with a razor (Shu’t Noda Biyehudah, Yoreh Deah 2:81).

Powders and Creams

Several halachic authorities rule that, just as a scissors may be used to shave the beard, so can depilatory powders and creams be used to remove the beard (Shu’t Noda Biyehudah, Yoreh Deah 2:81; Shu’t Shemesh Tzedakah Yoreh Deah #61; Birkei Yosef, to Yoreh Deah 181:10; Tiferes Yisroel, Makkos 3:5 #34). They caution against

using a knife or other sharp implement to scrape off the powder or cream, since this may result in using a razor-type instrument to remove the hair, if the powder or cream did not yet separate the hair from the face. Instead, they recommend using an implement made of wood or a smooth piece of bone to wipe off the powder or cream. We will continue this topic in a future article.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Kedoshim

Burden of Reproof

This week, the Torah not only teaches us the basics of getting along with one’s neighbor, it also codifies the elementary rules of behavior that set a moral standard for social etiquette. You shall not be a gossipmonger; you shall not stand idly by your brother’s blood; you shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall not take revenge. (Leviticus 19:16-18). In one matter, however, the Torah also exhorts us to act in a way that many may believe would lead our neighbors to distance themselves from us. The Torah tells us to reprove our fellow-Jew. Obviously, the concept of “live and let live” is foreign to Judaism. In fact, the mitzvah of reproof is put right next to the verse, “you shall not stand idly by your brother’s blood.” Spiritual distress in the Torah’s view is equivalent to physical distress. Just as we cannot stand idly by when someone is drowning, so, too, when someone is drowning spiritually we must also act. But the Torah does more than just tell us to admonish – it tells us how.

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart; reprove you shall surely reprove him and do not bear a sin upon him.” The last part of the charge is difficult to understand. What does the Torah mean, “and do not bear a sin upon him”?

Rashi explains that the Torah does not want you to sin while reproofing your fellow – “do not embarrass him publicly.”

The actual text, however, seems to read to not bear a sin upon him, the sinner. How can we understand that?

As the Chofetz Chaim traveled around Poland and Russia to sell his works, he entered an inn in Vilna and beheld a disturbing sight. A burly young man was about to devour a hen that lay on his plate roasted and stuffed. A tall stein stood next to the succulent fowl, its rim flowing with cold brew. All of a sudden the man picked up the entire hen and stuffed it into his mouth. He washed down his meal with a giant gulp of beer, leaving the stein nearly empty. The Chofetz Chaim had never seen a Jewish person eat like that, let alone with out a bracha (blessing before food)!

He turned to the innkeeper and inquired, “Tell me a little about this man, I’d like to talk to him.”

“Oh!” smirked the host while waving his hand in disgust. “There’s nobody to talk to. This young man never learned a day in his life. The cantonists captured him when he was eleven and he served in the Russian army for 15 years. He

hardly observes any mitzvos. It's amazing that he even eats kosher!" Then he smiled. "But I'm sure I can count on him for a three-course meal every Thursday night!"

The Chofetz Chaim was neither shocked nor amused. He simply walked over to the former soldier and shook, his greasy hand warmly. After a warm greeting the Chofetz Chaim introduced himself and spoke. "I heard that you actually survived the cruel Russian army of Czar Nikolai and you never were raised amongst your people. I am sure that many times the terrible officers tried to convert you or at least force you to eat non-kosher. Yet you remained a steadfast Jew!" Tears welled in the Chofetz Chaim's eyes as he continued talking.

"I only wish that I that I would be guaranteed a place in the World-to-Come as you will be. What strength! What fortitude! You have withstood harsher tests than sages of old."

The soldier looked up from his plate and tears welled in his eyes too. He leaned over and kissed the hand of the elderly sage. Then the Chofetz Chaim continued. "I am sure that if you get yourself a teacher and continue your life as a true Torah-observant Jew, there will be no one in this world who is as fortunate as you!"

According to the biographer of the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi M. M. Yasher, the soldier became a pupil of the Chofetz Chaim, and eventually became an outstanding tzadik (righteous Jew).

Perhaps with the words, "do not bear on him the sin," the verse is telling us much more. It tells us not to focus on the action of sin alone when admonishing someone. The Torah wants us to find a positive aspect that will raise the holy soul from murky depths.

It is easy to enumerate your friend's misdeeds – and perhaps even easier to tell him off. But, that is not the goal. The Book of Mishlei tells us: "He who acclaims evildoers as righteous, will be cursed. But those who admonish will be blessed." (Proverbs:24:24-25) Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (c.1505 – c.1584) of Sefad explains that the two verses work in tandem. They teach us that though false flattery is abhorrent, when used to admonish by finding the good in those who have strayed, it is to be commended. The Torah wants us to build a person, and elevate him instead of thrusting the burden of his sins upon him. In that manner, you won't bully him, you will build him.

For when finding faults in others, we bear a great responsibility. Not only do we bear the difficult and sensitive burden of proof, we bear an equally difficult and sensitive burden of reproof.

Good Shabbos

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 30 April 2022 / 29 Nissan 5782

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Kedoshim - Being Holy

"You shall be holy..." (19:2)

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschütz was born in Cracow (Poland) in the year 5450 (1690). Apart from being a genius in Torah, he was also greatly esteemed by prominent non-Jewish scholars, among them the Jesuit bishop Hasselbauer. Rabbi Eybeschütz used his good offices to obtain permission from the bishop to print the Talmud which had been forbidden by the Church who charged that the Talmud had anti-Christian references. One of these references was the Gemara in Yevamot (60b) that says that the Jewish People "are called 'man' and the nations of the world are not called 'man.'"

The bishop took deep and dangerous offence to this Gemara and accused Reb Yonatan that the Jews were racist and hated non-Jews.

Rabbi Yonatan replied that there were four Hebrew expressions for man: Enosh, gever, ish, and adam. The plural of enosh is anashim. The plural of gever is gevarim, the plural of ish is ishim. The word adam has no plural. There is no such word as adam-im. When the Gemara says that we are called adam and the nations of the world are not called adam, it is not because they are less human than us. Rather, the Jewish People are, in essence, one. We all come from the same soul root.

I am writing this after just returning from the funeral of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, zatzal, a person who embodied what it means to be adam.

I had the merit to meet Reb Chaim only once. I guess I'm something of what is known as, in Yeshiva circles, "a cold Lithuanian Jew." I am not impressed by stories of miracle-working and near supernatural powers. But to me it seemed that Reb Chaim's face radiated light. No exaggeration. "You shall be holy."

Reb Chaim showed us what it meant to be adam.

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Kedoshim: I Get No Respect!

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

I love visiting residences for senior citizens. For one thing, being around truly older people invariably helps me feel young by comparison.

Recently, I was a weekend guest scholar at such a residence. I dispensed with my prepared lectures and instead tried to engage the residents of the facility, not one of whom was less than ninety years old, in a group discussion. This proved to be a very wise move on my part, because I learned a great deal about the experience of getting old. Or, as one wise man insisted, "You don't get 'old'—you get 'older.'"

The question that I raised to provoke discussion was this: "What made you first realize that you were getting 'older?'"

I was taken aback by the reactions of the group, because there were clearly two very different sets of responses.

One member of the group responded, “I knew I was getting older when people started to ignore me. I was no more than a piece of furniture to them. Worse, they no longer noticed me at all.”

About half of the group expressed their agreement with this person’s experience. They proceeded to describe various experiences that they had in being ignored. Some of those stories were quite poignant and powerful. One woman even described how she was present at the outbreak of a fire in a hotel lobby, and the rescue workers “simply did not see me sitting there. That is, until I started to scream!”

But then some of the others spoke up expressing quite different experiences. One gentleman said it for the rest of this second group: “I knew that I was getting older when passengers on the subway or bus stood up for me and gave me their seat.” That basic gesture of respect conveyed to the members of this group of senior citizens that they had indeed reached the age when they were not ignored, but rather the beneficiaries of acts of deference.

The discussion then entered another phase, as both groups agreed that, while they certainly did not want to be ignored, they also were resentful of these gestures of respect. The group unanimously supported the position articulated by the oldest person there, who said: “We don’t want gestures of respect. We want genuine respect.”

It seems that the entire group, although appreciative of those who relinquished seats on the subway for them, wanted something more. They wanted their opinions to be heard, their life experience to be appreciated, and their accumulated wisdom to be acknowledged. Symbolic gestures were insufficient, and sometimes were even experienced as demeaning.

This week’s Torah portion, Parshat Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:1-20:27), contains the basic biblical commandment regarding treatment of the elderly: “You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.” (ibid. 19:32)

Rashi’s comments on this verse indicate how sensitive he was to the subtle reactions expressed by the members of my little group. Here is what he says, paraphrasing the Talmudic Sages: “What is deference? It is refraining from sitting in his place, and not interrupting his words. Whereas one might think to simply close his eyes and pretend not to even see the old person, the verse cautions us to fear your God, for after all, he knows what is in the heart of man...”

Interestingly, not sitting in -his seat means much more than just giving him a seat on the bus. It means recognizes that the elderly person has his own seat, his own well-earned place in society, which you, the younger person, dare not usurp. It is more than just a gesture. It is an acknowledgement of the valued place the elder has in society, a place which is his and his alone.

Similarly, not interrupting the older person’s conversation is much more than an act of courtesy. It is awareness that

this older person has something valuable to say, a message to which one must listen attentively.

How well our Torah knows the deviousness of which we are all capable. We can easily pretend not to notice the older person. But He who reads our minds and knows what is in our hearts will be the judge of that. We must fear Him and not resort to self-justification and excuses. We must deal with the older person as a real person, whose presence cannot be ignored but must be taken into full account in our conversation.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, in his commentary on this verse, refers us to a passage in the Midrash Rabbah on the weekly portion of Beha’alotecha in the Book of Numbers, which understands the phrase “you shall fear your God” as being the consequence of your showing deference to the elderly. Thus, if you treat the elderly well you will attain the spiritual level of the God-fearing person. But if you refrain from showing the elderly that deference, you can never aspire to the title “God-fearing person” no matter how pious you are in other respects.

There is another entirely different perspective on our verse which provides a practical motive for honoring the elderly. It is to be found in the commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra, who explains the phrase “You shall fear your God” in the following way:

“The time will come when you will be old and frail and lonely. You will long for proper treatment at the hands of the young. But if you showed disrespect for the elderly when you were young, and did not “fear God,” God will not reward you with the treatment you desire in your own old age.”

As each of us strives to show genuine respect to our elders, we help construct a society in which the elderly have their proper place. That society will hopefully still be there when we become older, and then we will reap the benefits of our own youthful behavior.

Our Torah portion is entitled Kedoshim, which means “holy.” One of the major components of the holy society is the treatment it accords to every one of its members, especially those who are vulnerable. Treating the elderly with genuine respect, truly listening to them and valuing their contributions, is an essential part of what it means to be a “holy people.”

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Kedoshim – How Can a Person Be Holy?

This week’s Torah portion opens with the call, “You shall be holy!” This commandment obligates us to examine what holiness is. Is it a feeling? An experience? The explanation for this commandment to be holy is, “for I, the Lord, your G-d, am holy.” If holiness is a divine trait, we must figure out how a person can become holy like G-d.

Many definitions have been given for the term “holy.” Among the most famous of those who researched this was Rudolf Otto, a German philosopher and theologian, who wrote a famous book called “The Idea of the Holy” where he tried to define the term and the manner in which holiness is experienced by man. In his opinion, holiness is a combination of two forces: fear of the sublime, expressed at a low level simply as fear and a higher level as a sense of glory and splendor, and the longing to get closer to the thing because of its wondrous charm. Others described holiness as an other-worldly, lofty and sublime facet. There could be truth in these definitions, but it is hard to connect them with the commandment “You shall be holy!” How can a person not only be exposed to holiness, and not only yearn for it, but become holy himself?

The key to grasping the concept of holiness in Judaism is the understanding that holiness is indeed a divine trait, and therefore, devotion to G-d is the means to attaining holiness. In Chazal literature, we find several ways in which devotion to G-d can be actualized and thus make a person holy.

In the Babylonian Talmud, the sages wondered about man’s ability to be devoted to G-d:

But is it possible to cleave to the Divine Presence? Isn’t it written: For the Lord your G-d is a devouring fire!

G-d is compared to fire. Can someone cleave to fire without getting burned? How can a physical man be close to G-d?

And the sages answer:

Rather, this verse teaches that anyone who marries his daughter to a Torah scholar, and one who conducts business [perakmatya] on behalf of Torah scholars, and one who utilizes his wealth to benefit Torah scholars with his property in some other way, the verse ascribes him credit as though he is cleaving to the Divine Presence. (Tractate Ketubot 111)

Elsewhere, the sages ask a similar question and give a different answer:

But is it actually possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? ...Rather, the meaning is that one should follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Just as He clothes the naked...so too, should you clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, visits the sick...so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, consoles mourners...so too, should you console mourners. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead...so too, should you bury the dead. (Sota 14)

The sages of the midrash propose a third way of being devoted to G-d:

But is it possible for flesh and blood to go up to the Heavens and to cling to the Divine Presence?... But rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, from the very beginning of the creation of the world, only occupied Himself with plantation first... You also, when you enter into the land,

only occupy yourselves with plantation first. (Vayikra Rabbah 25)

We have, therefore, three means of devotion to G-d: connection to the Torah, acts of gemilut chassadim (loving-kindness), and being occupied with developing the world. These are all different expressions of divine holiness. The Torah is the word of G-d to humanity – the manner in which man is exposed to the eternal values of the Creator of the Universe; Gemilut Chassadim, thinking of others and assisting the weak, is walking the path of G-d; and developing the world, what the sages of the midrash demonstrate through the example of planting fruit trees, makes man a partner of G-d’s in the existence of the world. It is therefore no surprise that under the title of “You shall be holy” in this week’s parasha, we find a very varied list of commandments: respect for parents, keeping Shabbat, the prohibition of idolatry, various commandments to assist the poor, the commandment to judge fairly and favorably, the prohibition to hate others, to respect one’s elders, etc... Indeed, there are many ways to attain holiness. In every commandment a person fulfills, whether it is between the person and G-d, between one person and another, or a commandment in which the person partners with G-d in developing the world – in each of these ways the person is being devoted to G-d and thus becoming holy.

In Judaism, holiness is not an experience; it is an action – says Jewish researcher Steven Kepnes. A person can be holy when he follows G-d’s ways, connects to the Torah, performs acts of loving-kindness with others, and acts on behalf of the world’s existence.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Israel Independence Day: The Balfour Declaration Rabbi Chanan Morrison

In 1916, after being stranded in Switzerland for nearly two years due to the outbreak of World War I, Rav Kook was invited to occupy the rabbinic post of the Machzikei HaDat congregation in London. He accepted the position, but on condition that after the war he be allowed to return unhindered to Eretz Yisrael.

“Not many days passed,” noted Rabbi Shimon Glitzenstein, his personal secretary in London, “when already an atmosphere of influence on all circles of Jewish life in this large and important community was formed. All recognized his extraordinary concern for the entire Jewish people.”

While Rav Kook certainly did not plan to spend three years in London, he would later describe the momentous events of this period — events in which he took an active role — as a “revelation of the hand of God” (Igrot HaRe’iyah vol. III, p. 100).

National Treachery

Soon after his arrival, Rav Kook was forced to battle Jews who were working to undermine the Jewish people’s hopes

of national rebirth in the land of Israel. Certain assimilated leaders of the British Jewish community, who considered themselves “Englishmen of the Mosaic faith,” openly opposed the Zionist front. This powerful group, which included the staunchly anti-Zionist Lord Montagu, had great influence on the British government due to their socio-economic and political standing. They publicly declared to the British government that the Jewish religion has no connection to Jewish nationalism, and that they opposed all plans to designate Palestine as the Jewish homeland.

In a public notice “in response to this national treachery,” Rav Kook harshly condemned all those “who tear apart the Jewish soul,” seeking to shatter the wondrous unity of Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism.

“The entire debate whether it is our national or our religious heritage that preserves and sustains us [as Jews] is a bitter mockery. The perfection of “You are one and Your Name is one, and who is like Your nation, Israel, one nation in the land” is indivisible.”

Rav Kook’s statement described the cruel injustice perpetrated by the nations over the centuries, and demanded that they atone for their terrible crimes by returning Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people and help establish an independent Jewish state. The letter was read in all British synagogues after the Shabbat Torah reading and made a deep impression. He then sent an additional letter urging the members of all British synagogues to immediately request that the British government “aid us in our demand to return to our holy land, as our eternal national home” (Igrot HaRe’iyah vol. III, pp. 107-114).

Rav Kook’s efforts succeeded, and the spiteful letter written by the influential Jewish leaders was disregarded. The major British newspapers noted the spontaneous protest, thus repairing the negative impression caused by the assimilationists.

During the parliamentary debates over authorizing a national Jewish home in Palestine, several parliament members raised the claims advanced by the Jewish assimilationists. Such a mandate, they insisted, is contrary to the spirit of Judaism.

Then Mr. Kiley, a proponent of the declaration, stood up and asked:

“Upon whom shall we rely to decide the religious aspect of this issue — upon Lord Montagu, or upon Rabbi Kook, the rabbi of Machzikei HaDat?”

Congratulating the British Nation

After the Balfour Declaration was passed in 1917, the Jewish leaders held a large celebratory banquet in London, to which they invited lords, dignitaries, and members of Parliament. Speech after speech by Jewish communal and Zionist leaders thanked the British for their historic act. When Rav Kook was given the honor of speaking, he announced:

“I have come not only to thank the British nation, but even more, to congratulate it for the privilege of making this declaration. The Jewish nation is the “scholar” among the nations, the “people of the Book,” a nation of prophets; and it is a great honor for any nation to aid it. I bless the British nation for having extended such honorable aid to the people of the Torah, so that they may return to their land and renew their homeland.”

A Wondrous Chain of Events

Rav Kook saw in the national return of the Jewish people an overt revelation of the hand of God. How could one be blind to the Divine nature of this historical process? He later wrote:

“An imperviousness to God’s intervention in history plagues our generation. A series of wondrous events has, and continues to take place before us. Yet blind eyes fail to see the hand of God, and deaf ears fail to hear the Divine call guiding history.

This sequence of events began with the immigration of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon to Eretz Yisrael. They were followed by the awakening of the Chibat Zion movement and the establishment of the first settlements. The Zionism founded by Herzl, the settling of the land by the pioneers of the Second Aliyah, the Balfour Declaration, and the affirmation of the mandate in San Remo by the League of Nations - these are the latest developments.

Taken individually, each event may be explained in a rational manner. But when they are viewed together, we may discern a wondrous chain of complementary links created and guided by a Divine hand. As the prophet of redemption cried out: ‘Hear, O deaf, and look! O blind, that you may see!’ (Isaiah 42:18).”

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 181-184. Adapted from Mo’adei HaRe’iyah, pp. 391-393. Background material from Encyclopedia of Religious Zionism vol. 5, pp. 179-190.)

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Kedoshim

תשפ"ב פרשת קדושים

איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתותי תשמרו אני ד'

Every man shall fear his mother and father, and you shall keep My Shabbosos; I am Hashem. (19:3)

Shemiras Shabbos, Kibbud Av V'eim: Shabbos observance is juxtaposed upon the mitzvah to honor one’s parents, concluding with Hashem reminding the people that He is G-d and everyone - he and his father and mother – must obey Hashem. We are to honor and even fear our parents, but they do not supplant the Almighty. Thus, if a parent’s command is contrary to a mitzvah in the Torah, the son/daughter should respectfully refuse, because Hashem’s command supersedes everything else. Three imperatives of such import in one pasuk (Shemiras

Shabbos, Kibbud Av V'eim, and fear of Hashem and adherence to His command) comprise a considerable amount to digest. Indeed, each of these three requires its own thesis. Apparently, the fact that the Torah presents them all in one pasuk indicates a common bond with one another. Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl, offers an innovative exegesis which sheds light on this unique relationship. He connects the above pasuk to a well-known statement in Pirkei Avos (3:1).

Akavya ben Mahallel omer, Histakeil b'sheloshah devarim v'ein atah ba l'yidei aveirah; "Look (stare/concentrate) at three things, and you will not come to sin: Where are you coming from (your source)? Where are you (ultimately) going to? (What will be your end?) Before Whom will you stand in judgment?" We come from a tipah seruch, drop/nothing; we will end up in the ground (decomposing in the earth). We will have to review our lives before Hashem. This Mishnah is meant to frighten us into confronting our mortality – before we consider sin. It should change the trajectory of our intentions and actions. It will certainly cause us to think twice before destroying our lives.

The Mishnah presents these three questions as negatives which are intended to prevent us from acting out our fantasies, committing a sin, transgressing a prohibitive command. If we truly concentrate on the message, we will not sin – unless, of course, we are foolish enough to say, "I do not care." The Mishnah does not speak to those who do not care; on the contrary, it addresses the individual who cares, but occasionally loses control in his battle with the yetzer hora, evil inclination. Rav Kornitzer suggests that these same questions/observations can focus on the positive. Rather than underscore the lowliness of man, let us concentrate on his ability to achieve greatness, on the gadlus ha'adam.

Mei'ayin basa; From where do you come? We are all descendants of the Avos and Imahos, Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Let us take a moment to think about our roots, our rich, glorious heritage. Let us take a cognitive journey through our tumultuous – but incredible – history. Let us meet the gedolim, Torah giants, and the simple Jews who served Hashem amid self-sacrifice. This "glance" should hearten and encourage us. How can one sin when he is the repository of such yichus, illustrious lineage? This corresponds with Ish imo v'aviv tirau; Respect your parents: We come from awesome parents. Our forebears are impressive. They deserve our appreciation and respect. How can we turn our back on them by acting inappropriately and committing a sin in the context of our relationship with Hashem?

A person should think about from where he hails. He descends from the holy Patriarchs and Matriarchs. They forged the path which we should follow. They lived lives of dedication, to the point of self-sacrifice in order to serve Hashem to the best of their capabilities. These are our

ancestors. Looking back at the adversity that accompanied us throughout our history and our forebears who sacrificed for their beliefs, our roots should encourage us to scale the highest peaks of spirituality. After all, it is intrinsic to our DNA.

Next, we should focus on where we are destined to go: Olam Habba, the World-to-Come, the World of Truth and eternity. The reward for living a life committed to the spirit, to Hashem, is beyond extraordinary. We yearn to live in a perfect world, replete with spiritual pleasure and satisfaction-- without worry and pain. Our world is a prozdor, vestibule, to Olam Habba.

Last, before Whom we will stand in judgment. The mere thought of Hashem's greatness evokes awe and joy. Knowing that we can in some way, on some level, connect with the Creator of the Universe, Who views us as His children, evokes emotion that defies description.

Gadlus ha'Adam, the greatness of man, was the catchphrase of the Alter, zl, m'Slabodka, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel. It was the lodestar by which he navigated his yeshivah and guided his students. This concept was transported to America and Eretz Yisrael as his premier talmidim, students, became the pioneering Roshei Yeshiva who established Torah in these countries pre and post Holocaust. The story goes that Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, father of the Mussar, character refinement, Movement, met the Alter. The future Slabodka Rosh Yeshivah asked Rav Yisrael what should be his avodah, function/service to the Almighty. Rav Yisrael's famous words were: L'hachayos ruach shefalim u'l'hachayos lev nidkaim; "To revive the hearts of the aggrieved and despondent." In other words, return their lives to them.

It is critical to be aware of the cultural backdrop in Europe when the Rosh Yeshivah established and guided Slabodka. The contemptible Haskalah, Enlightenment, movement with its vitriolic animus for Torah and all that it stood for, was rampant. Its adherents were bent on destroying the Torah Jew. They did this by destroying his self-esteem. What better victim than the yeshivah student who was about to start his life of devotion to Torah? They referred to him as a parasite, a free-loader, a ne'er-do-well who would amount to nothing. When you call a person a loser enough times, he will begin to believe it. Rav Nosson Tzvi taught his students to broaden the horizons of their minds – not to think small, but to think globally. This was the only way the community at large would learn to respect them and what they stood for. The appearance and dress of the yeshivah students, often the result of living lives of extreme poverty and neglect, certainly did very little to change people's perception of them.

The Alter demanded that his students be scrupulous in their behavior, both within the environs of the yeshivah and in their interaction with the outside world. He insisted that they dress properly, neatly and respectfully – indeed, l'kavod u'letiferes, "for the dignity and beauty of the

Torah.” He understood that one’s external appearance affects his self-image. The attire upon which he insisted included a short-coated suit and a hat, no beard, and hair to be cut in a manner considered respectable by conventional norms. Slowly, the townspeople’s attitude toward the yeshivah bachurim transformed. Even more important, the students’ self-image also changed. The yeshivah bachur learned to view himself as a person of stature, a ben Torah, a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who exemplified the embodiment of Torah – not an am ha’aretz, one unschooled in Torah erudition. In other words, the world saw where he excelled, over and above the characterization of the proponents of the Enlightenment.

To develop a better perspective of gadlus ha’adam, I relate a well-known incident which occurred concerning Horav Meir Chodosh, zl, who was asked by a student to explain to him the philosophy of gadlus ha’adam as it was manifest in Slabodka. The Mashgiach answered, “All that I can explain to you will be theoretical and worthless until you see the behavior of Horav Zevullun Graz, zl, Rav of Rechovos. I suggest that you take a trip to Rechovos and spend a day with the Rav.”

The avreich, young man, traveled to Rechovos and presented himself at the house of Rav Graz. “Does the Rav have a place for me to spend the night?” he asked. The Rav asked no questions. Here was a young man, properly dressed, from a good family – Why not? The Rav immediately prepared a bed for him to sleep.

The young man was excited about his good fortune. He went to bed and feigned sleep. Perhaps he would notice something during the night that would validate what he felt were the strange instructions of the Mashgiach.

The night went by, and, after a few hours of learning, Rav Zevullun retired to bed. The young man figured that it was all a waste. One does not go to Slabodka to learn how to sleep, but the Mashgiach did say that it would all be explained. So, he was determined to remain awake all night. Something was going to happen that would enable him to make sense of it all.

At two o’clock in the morning, Rav Zevullun arose from his bed to use the facilities. The young man figured that this was it. He might as well get a few hours of sleep and return to the Mashgiach with a “mission not accomplished.” Then, the most unusual thing took place. Rav Zevullun went over to the closet, removed his kapote, frock, and homburg, hat, and then, when he was clothed in his rabbinic garb, he recited the Asher Yotzar blessing with great kavanah, concentration and intention.

It now all made sense. The “greatness of man” is not measured by how he acts in public. The barometer for gadlus ha’adam is determined by how he acts in middle of the night, in the privacy of his own home. When he makes the Bircas Asher Yotzar upon leaving the bathroom, does he spend a few minutes to realize that he – the crown of

Creation – is about to speak to the Creator, so that he dresses accordingly?

I conclude with an inspiring thought from the Baal HaTanya. Our self-esteem is dependent upon our perception of our purpose in life. Simply put, when one realizes that his purpose in life is noble and significant, his self-esteem is elevated. Conversely, when one’s perspective of his purpose in life is short-sighted, he will have a similarly myopic sense of himself. Reb Zalmen Senders was a close chassid, follower, of the Baal HaTanya. He had been one of the wealthiest Jews in Russia until his fortunes were reversed, leaving him indigent. In complete surrender, he turned to his Rebbe with a kvitel, petition, in which he described his downfall from wealth to destitution. He begged the Rebbe to intercede on his behalf. The Rebbe closed his eyes and thought for a few moments until he looked up and said, “Zalmen, apparently you have given serious thought to your perceived needs. Have you taken a moment to think why you are needed?” The Rebbe implied that we are all here for a purpose, as part of a Divine Plan. All too often we are so obsessed with our own needs that we do not realize that Hashem created us for a purpose, which is to serve Him at all times, under all circumstances. Each one of us has a unique purpose for which Hashem specifically created that person. Fulfilling that purpose should engender self-esteem within us, because we are here to do what no one else can do.

וכי תזבח זבח שלמים לרצונכם תזבחהו

When you slaughter a feast peace-offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it to find favor for yourselves. (19:5)

Ramban explains that when one offers a korban, sacrifice, to Hashem, the intention behind and accompanying it “shall be to find favor for oneself... like a servant ingratiating himself to his master... without any service for the purpose of receiving reward, but only to carry out the ratzon, will, of Hashem, for it is His simple will that constitutes what is appropriate and obligatory.” In other words, the kavanah, intention, of the individual who is slaughtering the animal is not for the shechitah, ritual, but simply to serve Hashem by carrying out His will. This is how a Jew should live his life – to fulfill the ratzon Hashem.

Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl, would quote Horav Avraham Tzvi Kamai, zl, who related in the name of his father, Horav Eliyahu Baruch Kamai, zl, that: Ich darf nisht haben di baalei kisharon; ich zuch dem guteh freint, “For my shiur, Talmudic lecture, I do not require (nor do I seek out) those who are brilliant. I look for a ‘good friend’ (one who cares), who is interested in listening to what I have to say and wants to understand it.” A good student is one who is interested in what his rebbe has to say, not in showcasing what he personally knows. It is all about wanting to fulfill the ratzon, will, of the rebbe.

Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, zl, the Tchebiner Rav, related that a Torah scholar once commented to Horav

Yehoshua, zl, m'Kutna (author of Yeshuos Malko) that he was proficient in all of Seder Nezikin (the order of Talmud that deals extensively with laws of damages, Jewish criminal and civil law and the Jewish court system). Rav Yehoshua sought to temper his inflated ego by explaining to him that the barometer for success was not erudition (which this scholar claimed he had mastered), but rather hismasrus l'Torah, complete devotion/attachment to Torah. He asked the scholar, "Do you know the meaning of shibuda d'Oraisa?" (Chazal record a dispute concerning a lien rendered verbally without the support of a shtar, written document, whether it is scripturally binding, i.e. maybe the lender will collect his money either from the borrower or his heirs.) The young man replied, "Of course!" (This is one of the basics in Torah law.) Rav Yehoshua countered, "This is not to what I was alluding. My intention with this question was concerning Targum Onkelos's translation of the pasuk, V'es ha'nefesh asher asu b'Charan, "And the souls they made in Charan" (Bereishis 12:5). (A reference to the pagans converted by Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu.) Onkelos explains it as, V'es nafshasa di shabidu l'Oraisa, "And the souls which they committed to Torah." (The only commitment of substance, the only obligation that has value and endurance, is a commitment to Torah.) "That is another form of shibuda d'Oraisa which you must remember."

Horav Baruch Shimon Schneerson, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Tchebin (son-in-law of the Tchebiner Rav) explains the concept of shibud/commitment/obligation. When one holds a lien on a parcel of land; this land is considered me'shibud, obligated to him. It may be sold numerous times, but, ultimately, the land remains meshubad to him. In other instances, one may own/have land rights to a piece of land, but said land is mortgaged to others. Owning land that is mortgaged to others does not constitute true ownership, since he is beholden to them. A similar concept applies to Torah study. One who is committed to Torah may, at times, be called away to address mundane issues which have nothing whatsoever to do with Torah. He is, however, essentially committed to Torah. What arises are simply diversions with which he must contend, but his primary shibud, commitment, remains to Torah. He also has a counterpart, whose "address" is the bais hamedrash where he is (supposedly) learning all day. At every possible juncture which calls him away from learning, however, he is the first one to be involved. Such a person may be ensconced in the bais hamedrash, but it is not where he has his shibud.

Horav Aharon Rokeach, zl, the Belzer Rebbe, was an unusual tzaddik, righteous person. His life was, indeed, a lesson in living to fulfill the ratzon Hashem. Throughout his life, he was sickly and physically frail. As a young man, he was so weak that one winter the doctor forbade him from immersing in the frigid mikvah waters. (The mikvaos had little to no heat. Poland winters are notoriously cold.)

To reinforce the doctor's orders, Horav Yissachar Dov, his father, the Belzer Rebbe, enjoined him to follow the doctor's orders and prohibited him from immersing himself in the mikvah.

One frigid night at 3:00 a.m., the snow was falling, the cold wind was howling; it was not a night for even a healthy man to leave the comfort of his home – let alone one as physically delicate as the young Rav Aharon. It was quiet throughout the Belzer community, except for Rav Aharon who was on his way to the mikvah. A family member was up learning, saw this and, concerned for Rav Aharon's health, decided to follow him covertly. At first, he did not believe that Rav Aharon would take such a chance and disobey both the doctor and his father, but he appeared bent on going to the mikvah. Rav Aharon quietly entered the mikvah. He did not turn on the lamps; rather, he maneuvered himself in the freezing room. He removed his clothes and descended the steps to the frigid water. When he reached the last step, he paused and, with a voice laden with emotion, he cried out, "Ribono Shel Olam! I hereby prepare myself to fulfill the mitzvas asei, positive commandment, of V'nishmartam me'od l'nafshoseichem, 'And you shall carefully guard your physical wellbeing,' as well as the mitzvah of Kibbud av, honoring my father, who told me not to immerse in the mikvah." Rav Aharon then ascended the steps, dressed and returned home.

When his father heard what had taken place in the mikvah, he wept tears of joy, and, with profound gratitude, he thanked the Almighty for granting him a son who had achieved shleimus, perfection, in his service to Hashem. He had fulfilled both the will of Hashem to be purified and the directives of his father and the doctor.

ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ד'

You shall love your fellow as yourself – I am Hashem. (19:18)

Rabbi Akiva teaches (Yerushalmi Nedarim 30b), V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho – Zeh klal gadol baTorah; "Love your fellow as yourself. This is the all-encompassing principle of Torah." In other words, an unbreakable bond exists between ahavas Yisrael, love of Jews, and ahavas Hashem, love of the Almighty. A general principle is one which contains all the detailed principles within it. Thus, ahavas Yisrael is the rubric under which all mitzvos fall. Loving a fellow Jew is an integral component of every mitzvah. Thus, when I shake the lulav; observe Shabbos, put on Tefillin, I am/should be enhancing my ahavas Yisrael. If we perform a mitzvah – yet our ahavas Yisrael seems lacking, we have a problem with our own observance. What is the connection between loving one's fellow and the mitzvah of Shabbos observance, or any other mitzvah for that matter?

The Tzemach Tzedek cites the Arizal (Taamei Ha'Mitzvos, Parashas Kedoshim) who explains that all Klal Yisrael comprises one entity, which is the neshamah, soul, of Adam HaRishon. Every Jew constitutes a limb of

Adam's soul. This is the basis of the arvus, mutual responsibility of our people, and the idea that one Jew is accountable for his fellow, if he sins. [This is why the Arizal would recite Viduy, Confessional, despite that he personally had not sinned.]

The Baal HaTanya teaches that to love another person means to find something in that other person which is similar to something in himself. Our individuality separates us from others, but one thing, one common bond, unites us. We, as Torah Jews, must focus upon this commonality. Our common thread is the Hashem component, the neshamah, which is a part of Hashem, within us. It has nothing to do with how observant one is, what his religious leanings are, or whether he is a good person or not. We all have that Hashem component within us that unites us. This is what we should love. We love the Hashem within all of us. How we view others depends upon how we view ourselves. If we focus on the human condition, then we are different from one another, which impedes our ability to truly love. If we concentrate, however, on the spiritual dimension which we all have, we will have no problem. Our greatest issue is that we are too preoccupied with self-love to transform it and direct this love towards others. Rather than focus on what divides us, we should concentrate on what unites us: our neshamos.

Horav Yisrael Abuchatzera, zl, the Baba Sali, was a tzaddik, holy and righteous, Torah leader, who loved all Jews. The Baba Sali's neighbor in Netivot was very sickly in his youth. He was stricken with excruciating leg pain. The various therapies and medications did nothing for him. When the Baba Sali heard of his neighbor's pain, he asked his aide to call the young man to his house. When the neighbor arrived, the Baba Sali asked to see the afflicted leg. He then went on to touch the painful area of the leg. Despite his gentle prodding, the young man screamed in pain. The Baba Sali blessed him that in the merit of his (the Baba Sali) ancestors, he should be granted a refuah sheleima, full recovery. Within the space of a few days, the young man was miraculously cured.

The next day, the Baba Sali's aide noticed a wound on his Rebbe's leg at about the same place where, only a few days earlier, the boy had been suffering from his affliction. The aide was certain that his saintly Rebbe was in extreme pain, and it was the result of his blessing of the boy. He asked for an explanation. The Baba Sali explained that when he saw the pain the boy was experiencing, he immediately wanted to pray on his behalf. How could he pray appropriately, if he himself were not suffering pain? "I asked Hashem to give me the pain, so that I could experience it sufficiently to pray."

A similar incident occurred during the Entebbe hostage crisis when terrorists took the passengers, some of whom were Jewish, hostage. The Baba Sali commented, "Heaven will attest that my personal pain over this crisis was greater than that experienced by the hostages."

As he lay on his death bed, the Baba Sali prayed that his death should serve as an atonement for Klal Yisrael. Yehi zichro baruch. May his name serve as a blessing.

Va'ani Tefillah

ביילע ב'ת אליעזר ע"ה knarF etaeB ע"ה

By her children and grandchildren, Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Shirley Berkowitz, Shaindel bas Harav Yosef. "May her Neshamas have an Aliya!"

Holier Than Thou?

And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to all the congregation of Bnei Yisroel, and say to them, become holy; for I Hashem your God, am holy. Everyone should revere their mother and father, and you should keep my Sabbaths, I am Hashem your God (19:1-3).

Parshas Kedoshim begins with Hashem exhorting Bnei Yisroel to become kadosh for Hashem is kadosh. The word kadosh is commonly translated as "holy." The meaning of the word holy is generally understood as "connected to God or religion." In other words, we generally measure holiness vis-à-vis a person's relationship with God.

A simple review of the verse shows that we cannot understand the word kadosh to mean "holy." After all, Hashem cannot be "connected" to Himself. So we are left with a fairly serious question; what is kedushah and how does one strive to achieve it? In addition, how is the next verse, which commands reverence for one's parents, connected to this idea of being kadosh?

The word kodesh actually means to set aside or separate. When a man designates a woman to be his wife, she is "mekudeshes" to him. We say in davening that Hashem was mekadesh the Shabbos, meaning that he designated a day for us to commune with Him. Similarly, Hashem was mekadesh the Jewish people – it doesn't mean that He made us holy; rather He separated us from all the other nations, to be His alone.

So what exactly does it mean that Hashem is kadosh? Perhaps it is easier to understand what kadosh means as it relates to something we, as humans, are striving for. A baby is born very self-centered; everything is about satisfying its own needs and desires. This is only natural as a baby only senses itself. As a child matures, hopefully, it begins to recognize the outside world and its place within a broader perspective. This process of becoming less and less self-centered is the process of removing yourself from your egocentricity.

In other words, Hashem is asking us to separate ourselves from our self-centered desires and to focus outwardly. The perfect example of such a separation is Hashem Himself. Hashem is perfect with no needs or desires. All of His

actions in creating the world had nothing to do with any perceived need; rather it is all a function of His wish to bestow the ultimate good on humanity. When it comes to Hashem, there are no self-serving actions, only actions directed for others. Therefore, Hashem is kadosh because His actions are separate from Himself.

We are therefore commanded to become kadosh like him. Rashi (ad loc) explains that this means separating from forbidden intimate relationships. As we explained last week, this is why this parsha follows the list of forbidden relationships. A person's strongest desire is in this area because it is so self-serving. Controlling ourselves is the key to separating from our egocentricity.

Many, if not most, children view their mother as their chef, chauffeur, butler, maid, and personal shopper, while their father is the ATM machine that makes it all possible. In other words, the world revolves around an "it's all about me" attitude. This is very dangerous to our children's emotional wellbeing and of course, to their future relationships in life. The most important lesson that we must teach our children is that we do everything for them out of love – not because the world revolves around them. The antidote, therefore, is to have great reverence for our parents. We owe our parents because nothing is "coming" to us. We have to break the sense of self and learn to focus outwardly, just like Hashem. Then we will be kadosh like Him.

Kindness is a Shame

And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a shameful thing [...] (20:17).

The Torah's description of this act is termed "chessed." Rashi (ad loc) explains that the Torah is using an Aramaic word here which means "shame." Remarkably, the same word in Hebrew is actually associated with only positive implications; the word "chessed" means "kindness." How is it possible that the same word can have two seemingly disparate meanings?

The explanation is fairly simple. Both of these words are describing the same act; that of giving to others. The difference in the meaning is based on one's perspective. The giver feels good in that he is doing an act of kindness. On the other hand, the person who is receiving is generally feeling some level of shame in that he is reliant on others to support himself.

Aramaic is the language of understanding another person's perspective. That is why the heavenly angels are unable to understand Aramaic, they are linear beings. It is also for this reason that the Talmud Bavli (written in Aramaic) was chosen over the Talmud Yerushalmi (written in Hebrew) and accepted as the authoritative source of halacha, for we can only properly understand what Hashem wants from us when we can accurately evaluate another person's view. This allows us to see beyond our own perspective and eventually reach the truth.

When Right is Wrong

You shall not take revenge [...] you shall love your friend as yourself [...] (19:18).

Rashi (ad loc) describes what the Torah's definition of revenge is (updated for a 21st century audience): Reuven asks his friend Shimon to borrow his lawnmower and Shimon refuses. The next day Shimon asks Reuven to borrow his hedge clippers and Reuven responds, "Just as you didn't lend me your lawnmower, I am refusing to lend you my hedge clippers." This is the definition of taking revenge.

Let us examine this. When Shimon refuses to lend his lawnmower to Reuven, he "only" transgresses a positive commandment – that of loving your friend as yourself. Yet when Reuven refuses to lend his clippers to Shimon, he is transgressing both a positive commandment and a negative commandment – that of "not taking revenge." This seems unfair. After all, on the face of it, Reuven seems perfectly justified in refusing to lend his clippers to Shimon; why shouldn't he treat him the same way and let Shimon learn how painful it feels to be refused? In fact, Reuven can even feel justified in that he is teaching Shimon a lesson in how to treat a fellow Jew. Why is Reuven now subject to an additional transgression?

Reuven gets an additional transgression for exactly this reason. In his mind, Reuven is justifying why it is right to do a wrong thing. Shimon is, at worst, an unkind person. On the other hand, Reuven is feeling justified in his mistreatment of Shimon, he is making his refusal to Shimon a "mitzvah." Justifying a wrong is far more severe than missing an opportunity to do something right.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>:

date: May 5, 2022, 11:43 PM subject: Rav Frand - The Mitzvah To 'Be Holy' Was Given in a Mass Gathering
Rav Frand By Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Kedoshim
The Mitzvah To 'Be Holy' Was Given in a Mass Gathering
This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #458 – Giving Tochacha: Private or Public? Good Shabbos!

Note: Readers in Eretz Yisroel, who are a parsha ahead, can access a shiur from a prior year by using the archives at <https://torah.org/series/ravfrand/>.

Parshas Kedoshim begins with the words "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel (kol adas bnei Yisrael) and say to them: 'Kedoshim tihyu (You shall be holy)'" [Vayikra 19:1-2]. Rashi points out that the uncommon inclusion of the phrase "the entire assembly of the Children of Israel" in the standard phrase "Speak to the Children of Israel..." teaches us that this mitzvah was specifically given in the presence of the entire assembly of Israel (b'hakhel).

There is a famous disagreement among the early commentaries as to exactly what is meant by the mitzvah

“You shall be holy.” Rashi interprets the mitzvah as one of abstinence—“You shall be removed from arayos (forbidden sexual union) and from sin.” The word “Kadosh” literally means “separate.” When we say “Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh” about Hashem, we are emphasizing his separateness and uniqueness. Thus, the meaning of “You shall be Kedoshim” is “You shall be separated – from forbidden sins.”

The Ramban, in a famous argument with Rashi, says that “You shall be Kedoshim” has nothing to do with illicit sexual acts. Rather, Kedoshim tihiyu refers to perfectly permissible activities. The concept is “sanctify yourself by withdrawing from that which is permissible to you” (kadesh atzmecha b’mutar lach). That Ramban declares that without such self-limitation, a person can be a ‘naval b’rshus haTorah’ (a glutton ‘sanctioned’ by the Torah). The level of sanctity required by this pasuk is that which is achieved by a person who even somewhat restrains himself from those physical pleasures that the Torah permits.

The Chasam Sofer points out that whether we accept Rashi’s interpretation or the Ramban’s approach, the message of this mitzvah is one of abstinence. A person could perhaps erroneously come to the conclusion that the only way to achieve this level of sanctity would be to lock himself on the top of a mountain in a monastery. We might think that a person should ideally have nothing to do with people; that a person should not get married and should have nothing to do with the opposite gender at all. The Torah therefore makes clear that the “holiness” of a monk is not desirable. This mitzva was specifically delivered “b’hakhel”. Everyone was present—the men, the women, and the children.

A person must be a Kadosh (a holy person), but must be a Kadosh in the context of the congregation and the community. A person must get married and must raise children. A person must play with his kids and spend time with his family and be a part of the community. The Torah wants the holiness of complete human beings.

The Kotzker Rebbe used to stress “MEN of holiness you shall be to Me” (Shemos 22:30). “G-d is not looking for more angels.” The Torah was not given to angels (Brachos 25b). It was given to human beings who have wants and desires and are social animals. It is in that context that we are commanded to develop holiness.

Therefore, specifically Kedoshim tihiyu, of all mitzvos, was relayed in a mass public gathering, to emphasize that

despite our obligation to achieve holiness through a certain degree of abstinence, it must be in the context of the community, our wives, our children, and our neighbors.

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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 listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Kedoshim is provided below:..

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